Education in Business Ethics and the Prevention of Toxic Leadership:

A Phenomenological Qualitative Study

by

Ancica Roosa

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Ancica Roosa

Approved by:

Dissertation Chair: Matthew Smalley, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Tiffany Hamlett, Ph.D.

Abstract

Research has revealed the destructive impact of a toxic workplace on mental and physical health. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The study was necessary because the harmful effects of a toxic workplace might be preventable. Education in business ethics has the potential to develop ethical awareness and moral courage. The study explored the gap in research and established a connection between the incidence of toxic leadership and lack of education in business ethics. Kohlberg's theory of moral development recognized egocentrism and deficiencies in moral reasoning as the primary drivers of unethical behavior. The purposively selected participants, 18 Americans living in the United States and Germany, came from diverse backgrounds. The research findings revealed mixed feelings and perspectives. Contextual dynamics such as personal traits, level of power, and organizational culture were pointed out by a majority of participants as the deciding factors affecting the connection between the incidence of a toxic workplace and the lack of education in business ethics. The implications for leadership are evident as 17 out of 18 candidates described a failure in the implementation of the organizational codes of ethics or establishing the framework of legal protections and workplace justice. The problem of senior leadership and human resource managers falling victim to toxic individuals and a toxic workplace should be a separate topic for further research. The recommendations for preventing the development of a toxic workplace invite education with the potential to create a critical mass of individuals with moral courage to stand against unethical practices and generate a culture shift by raising the overall visibility and making toxic behavior socially unacceptable.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband Frank.

Words cannot express the gratitude for your kindness, support, and encouragement.

I am truly thankful for having you in my life.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Toxic leadership created a toxic workplace characterized by stress, depression, anxiety, anger, conflict, low morale, and diminished productivity (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh, Sengupta, & Dev, 2017; Williams, 2017). Research identified links between toxic behaviors and adverse effects on mental and physical health (suicide, stress-related illnesses, and posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD]), employee turnover, and the creation of an organizational culture tolerating other inappropriate behaviors (Williams, 2017). This phenomenological qualitative study was necessary because the destructive effects of a toxic workplace might be preventable. The consequences of toxic leadership, which include stress, depression, sleep deprivation, and emotional exhaustion, have a substantial impact on people's mental and physical health, career, and overall well-being (Han, Harms, & Bai, 2017). The costs of toxic leadership rose to billions of dollars in disability claims and lost productivity (Winn & Dykes, 2019).

The study explored the gap in existing research with the intent to establish a possible connection between the frequent incidence of toxic leadership and the lack of compulsory education in business ethics. The background of the study provided the context for further research. While many scholars recognized the need to explore potential links between education in business ethics and responsible management (Gottardello & Pàmies, 2019), the literature review did not reveal any empirical studies or peer-reviewed scholarly articles recognizing the connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of a toxic workplace. The lack of academic interest in exploring toxic leadership reflects the overall reluctance to recognize

the destructive, dark leadership traits and the harmfulness of the outcomes (Howell & Avolio, 1992).

The problem statement was followed by the purpose and significance of the study, with a brief introduction to the research design. The qualitative phenomenological method was recognized as the most appropriate research design for the study. The research questions focused on the effects of toxic leadership and education in business ethics, which might have the potential to prevent the occurrence of a toxic workplace. The theoretical framework supported the research topics, while the definitions of relevant terms, limitations, scope and delimitations, and assumptions provided additional insight into the context of exploration. The chapter ended with a summary and a transitory introduction to Chapter 2.

Background of the Study

Toxic leadership is one of the primary causes of stress and stress-related mental disorders. Job stress can cause psychological symptoms (e.g., emotional and mental problems, despair, worry, insufficient sensitivity, separation, mental illness), physical symptoms (increased heart rate and blood pressure, heart diseases, digestive disorders, headaches, issues with the immune system), and behavioral symptoms such as absenteeism and alcohol, drug, and tobacco use (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). The widespread problem of toxic behavior affects many fields, including military, politics, business, education, government, health care, or governance, and exists for a long time. The historical data comprised narratives on several companies in North America suffering damages of $200 billion each year due to the issues related to a toxic workplace (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007).

Toxic leadership is an undesirable behavior known for causing workplace ostracism, creating an unethical organizational culture, and supporting harmful practices (Sarwar, Khan, & Mujtaba, 2017). Extensive research recognized abusive supervision as the primary origin of wide-ranging interpersonal aggression (Richard, Boncoeur, Chen, & Ford, 2018). Existing research on the topic of toxic leadership supported the theory that recognized the lack of followers' maturity as one of the critical prerequisites for the development of toxic leaders and a toxic workplace (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). An organizational culture characterized by low maturity renders victims helpless and creates fertile ground for the rise of toxic leadership (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Padilla, & Lunsford, 2018). The growing body of evidence reinforced the observation of toxicity as a common byproduct of the modern organizational culture (Stoten, 2015).

The practice of abusive leadership has a high probability of trickling down and spreading through the entire organization, encouraging and inciting deviant behavior, which becomes the norm (Hon & Lu, 2016; Park et al., 2019). Mechanisms for surviving destructive consequences of toxic leadership require resilience, which is considered a behavioral capability (Tahir & Khan, 2019). Coping mechanisms help the victims of toxic leadership minimize negative emotions and tolerate or reduce the effects of stressful events. Education in business ethics has the potential to cultivate a higher ethical maturity, develop awareness, build resilience, and help students to develop the courage to act in the face of unethical and toxic leadership (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). By building on the existing body of knowledge, Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, and new research, the study explored the assumption of education in business ethics intended to prevent and alleviate the occurrence of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. The most harmful effect of toxic leadership is the formation of a toxic work environment where people suffer from stress-related psychological symptoms, damaging physical symptoms, and negative behavioral symptoms (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Han et al., 2017). While the rising visibility and frequent incidence of toxic leadership incited an extensive scope of research, existing scholarly literature has never explored the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. The effort of integrating the existing research and findings of the study facilitated a better understanding of the research problem, emphasized the significance of prevention, and identified gaps in the pertinent scholarly literature. The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge by bridging the gap in the scholarly literature regarding the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. Education in business ethics has a viable potential to develop an ethical organizational culture capable of reducing toxicity, exploitation, and abuse (Shete, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

Toxic leadership profoundly affects the individual experience and workplace dynamics (Bartlett, 2017). While the exploration of a toxic workplace and toxic leadership attracted increasing attention, the significance of the prevention efforts taken in the early stages of people's development (during the education process) is still an underexplored area. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the individual lived experience of toxic

leadership and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership.

The research included 18 purposively selected participants, Americans living in the United States and Germany. All participants came from diverse American academic, business, military, government, health care, and governance backgrounds and education levels. The research used a snowball sampling method where the purposively selected participants recommended potential candidates (associates and friends) suitable for and interested in research participation (Emmerson, 2015). The lived experience of a toxic workplace was the main prerequisite for participation in the research. Interviews consisted of five semi-structured open-ended questions and 12 follow-up interview questions designed to clarify details.

The qualitative phenomenological methodology was identified as the most appropriate research design for the study because of the viable potential to explore the subjective meanings attributed to a problem and the phenomenon in general (Creswell, 2017). Given the wealth of narratives and thick descriptions, the phenomenological design required an intellectual commitment to the interpretation (Qutoshi, 2018). The qualitative phenomenological method employed the proper instruments designed to facilitate a profound immersion into the depth and essence of narratives on experiences of toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, toxic behavior, and perception of education in business ethics.

The research design included the exploration of scholarly literature and data collection, followed by conducting interviews. The research revolved around the narratives depicting the experience and meanings of a toxic workplace, the specific details with the potential to identify relationships, and exploration of the possible avenues for creating the preventive and corrective

action (business ethics education). Data triangulation was established by using various data sources and providing an abundant amount of information leading to greater credibility of the research (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018). The phenomenological design provided the appropriate instruments required for analysis. The semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed all participants to share the details and meanings of the lived experience. Specific themes and patterns identified during the research were subjected to the interpretative process seeking a possible connection with the viable solution, which would prevent, resolve, or eliminate the research problem (Creswell, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The problem is significant because a toxic workplace causes depression, anxiety, conflict, aggression at work and home, low morale, and diminished productivity (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). The study was needed because the topic of toxic leadership has not been explored adequately. Exposure to education in business ethics has the potential to help students build the moral courage needed to carry out ethical decisions and prevent the occurrence of a toxic workplace. Moral judgment has limited value unless leading to a moral act (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). The study contributed to the knowledge base by establishing a connection between the manifestation of a toxic workplace and the lack of business ethics education. Education in ethics can create not only moral judgment but also the moral courage to act against toxic behavior.

The research was meaningful because exposure to business ethics education during students' formative years might create a mindset with an aptitude for moral judgment, moral courage, and moral action (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). Education in business ethics can nurture

the conviction capable of promoting ethical conduct and preventing the rise of toxic leaders. As a result of the study, institutions of higher education and organizations might decide to introduce compulsory education and training in business ethics with the potential to initiate tangible change and reduce the occurrence of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. Without the study, education in business ethics might remain only a marginal topic without any power to reduce the gap between rhetoric and practice in the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. The study findings will be shared with all participants, higher education institutions, and the broader public.

Research Questions

The qualitative phenomenological study explored the phenomenon of toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, and perceptions surrounding education in business ethics. The findings of the study established the conditional link between the prevention of a toxic workplace and education in business ethics. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the individual lived experiences of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany?

Research Question 2: What is the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

Theoretical Framework

Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development and the existing body of knowledge on the topic of a toxic workplace established the theoretical framework for the present research. The study explored the lived experiences of the toxic workplace and the possible impact of business

ethics education in preventing toxic behavior. Kohlberg's theory introduced the six stages of moral development, which reflect the development of the individual concept of right and wrong and the individual moral formation (Fang et al., 2017; Kohlberg, 1981; Yuping, Yuwei, Xi, & Xiaohong, 2018). Most people never reach higher stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) because many cannot move forward naturally. Change and shift to a higher level occur once an individual becomes aware of the inadequate way of coping with a moral dilemma.

People at the lower stages of moral development are willing to engage in unethical behavior in the name of authority or tend to act unethically driven by a self-centered and egotistical mindset. Education in business ethics could facilitate faster development through the stages and expand understanding of toxic behavior. Opposing destructive authority requires psychological and moral maturity because if people embrace the toxic leader's vision, most become colluders (Padilla et al., 2007). Education in business ethics can develop moral sensitivity and build resilience to group dynamics known for obstructing ethical behavior (Pritchard, 1999). The origins of an essential understanding of the moral and ethical context, which might protect individuals from the influence of the unethical organizational culture (Mizzoni, 2018), are attributed to business ethics education. Based on the theoretical framework and literature reviewed, the leading themes explored in phenomenological interviews included toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, toxic behavior, and the perception of education in business ethics from an academic and business standpoint, including the possible link between education in ethics and toxic behavior.

Definitions of Terms

Definitions of terms were provided to ensure a common understanding of key terms and major concepts essential for the context of the study. Terminology and descriptions were derived from peer-reviewed sources. The following terms were defined as they apply to the study.

Dark personality: Characterized by three aspects of the dark triad: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Schyns, 2015). Narcissism is characterized by vanity, exhibitionism, feeling of entitlement and superiority, authority, exploitation, self-admiration, and arrogance (Schyns, 2015). Machiavellianism is characterized by a manipulative personality motivated by selfishness and lack of guilt, conscience, or loyalty (Schyns, 2015). The symptoms of psychopathy are well hidden under apparent normalcy and include dishonesty, manipulativeness, egocentricity, superficial charm, risk-taking, and a lack of guilt (Schyns, 2015).

Education in business ethics: Create improved ethical awareness with an essential societal and personal impact (De Los Reyes, Tae Wan, & Weaver, 2017). A deeper and richer understanding developed by education in business ethics might help individuals to survive the impact of the unethical organizational culture (Mizzoni, 2018). In general, business education has to determine the significance of ethics in guiding managers to become responsible leaders. The curriculum design should integrate ethics and responsibility across all management-related topics (Smit, 2013).

Organizational culture: A configuration of elementary assumptions developed by a group where everyone learns to deal with external adaptation and internal integration (Glick, Berdahl, & Alonso, 2018). As a dynamic concept, organizational culture reflects the norms—the

correct way to perceive, think, respect, reward, and feel. Norms create structure, pressures, and social rules with a substantial influence (Glick et al., 2018).

Toxic followership: Demonstration of moral disengagement and frequent participation in organizational deviance behaviors (Valle, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Harting, 2019). Toxic followers' profiles include five categories: effective, survivors, sheep, alienated, and yes-people (Thomas, Gentzler, & Salvatorelli, 2016). Similar to toxic leaders, toxic followers cause damage by putting organizations at risk and driving away good people (Thomas et al., 2016). Toxic leadership often creates toxic empowerment for followers with the same mindset and protects toxic individuals from the negative consequences of unethical conduct (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017).

Toxic leadership: The broad array of destructive, socially unwanted behaviors aimed to achieve a leader's objectives by compromising the interests of individuals, teams, and organizations (Saqib & Arif, 2017). Toxic leaders' destructive actions usually affect the entire workplace, resulting in a dysfunctional and toxic organizational culture (Saqib & Arif, 2017). People perceive toxic leaders as authorities with unchallenged powers (Pritchard, 1999). The detrimental effects of toxic leadership are measured in billions of dollars worldwide in disability claims and lost productivity (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Toxic leadership often appears as abusive supervision and deliberate hostile behavior (Han et al., 2017).

Toxic workplace: A work environment characterized by stress-related psychological symptoms, damaging physical symptoms, and negative behavioral symptoms (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Han et al., 2017). The occurrence of a toxic workplace is usually a byproduct of toxic leadership, low ethical maturity of followers, and toxic followership. The adverse effects of a toxic workplace affect bystanders and family members as well (Chen & Liu, 2019; Williams,

2017). A toxic workplace culture encourages threatening, intimidating, and humiliating behaviors while isolating victims and undermining people's reputation and job performance (Bartlett, 2016).

Limitations

The qualitative phenomenological research design, which is not replicable, was the major limitation of the study. Transferability and dependability were limited as well, given the size of the sample consisting of participants purposively selected by the snowballing method and the specific nature of the research (exploration of the traumatic experience, which transpired in the past). While all participants were interviewed remotely, some conversations took place by phone, which impeded capturing the participants' body language, nonverbal cues, and expressions during the data collection process. In ideal circumstances, the study would involve a larger sample and a more diverse demographic cross-section.

In qualitative research, authenticity is shaped by personal observation and social interactions. The gathered narratives might reflect numerous "truths" (Arghode, 2012, p. 158), while participant values, motives, understandings, and subjective beliefs add to the formation of new knowledge with the potential to serve as the grounds for further theoretical accounts. Qualitative phenomenological design can create limitations through the presence of subjectivity, which might hinder reliability and validity. Different people might see the same development differently because having personal interpretations is in human nature (Beauchamp, 2016).

The role of the observer-participant, the primary instrument of data collection, interpretation, analysis, and presentation, implied a high level of involvement aiming to reach a profound understanding of the phenomenon and context under study (Takyi, 2015). The main

concern was the effect of prior experience of working under toxic leadership, which might affect the research course and outcomes. The integrity of the process was ensured by documenting personal reflections in the research journal and bracketing previous experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The restrictions concerning the necessity of conducting remote interviews were alleviated by using the audio-visual capabilities of online video conferencing platforms such as Skype, Zoom, and WebEx. The selection of the participants living in the continental United States and Americans living in Germany stemmed from the need to consider different perspectives, mentality, and sociocultural imprint. The study incorporated various participant demographics, providing valuable narratives that were eventually cross-referenced with the theoretical framework and the existing body of knowledge.

Previous research identified some positive effects of toxic leadership (Milosevic, Maric, & Loncar, 2019; Saqib & Arif, 2017), but the study's major delimitation revolved around the negative impact and destructive outcomes of a toxic workplace. The limited sample size inevitably affected the transferability of results. The research employed reliability (dependability) and validity (transferability) procedures by including data triangulation, using thick descriptions to convey findings, initiating member checking, and maintaining the self-reflection process to safeguard against bias (Creswell, 2017). Avoiding and reducing potential bias by bracketing out previous experience brought objectivity to the collecting, analyzing, and interpreting process (Creswell, 2017). The reliability of the instrument (interview questions) was tested by pursuing a review and feedback provided by five subject matter experts (SMEs) in the field of research (Appendix D).

Assumptions

The interviewing process established the participant experience context, concentrating on the reconstruction of the details, and prompting the participants to reflect on the meanings associated with personal matters (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participants had the liberty to choose what to disclose about themselves and the theme-related experiences. While the narratives describing the exposure to a toxic environment were often emotionally charged, the research assumption considered the accounts truthful. The assumption was necessary because there was no possible way to confirm if the narratives of lived experiences were accurate or participants presented a distorted version clouded by time, distance, and personal feelings.

While ethical concerns were the critical element in conducting research, qualitative design raised ethical considerations to the next level, where the researcher had to reflect carefully on personal beliefs, biases, and limitations (Creswell, 2017). The assumption established self-reflection on the researcher's personal experience, which increased awareness of the existing biases. Subjective beliefs were bracketed (temporarily set aside) to avoid contamination of the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Continuous bracketing brought impartiality to the process of gathering, exploring, and interpreting collected data while reducing possible bias with the potential to affect the course of research. The assumption was necessary to justify the trustworthiness, authenticity, integrity, accuracy, and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2017).

Chapter Summary

The introduction presented an overview of the research topic, followed by the background of the study, which outlined the phenomenon under exploration. The statement of the problem and purpose expanded the introduction of the central concepts. Further narrative

highlighted the significance of the study and charted the research design. Research questions were followed by the theoretical framework, which provided a sound scholarly foundation for the study. The definition of terms complemented the wealth of information presented in detail in the next chapter. Limitations, scope and delimitations, and assumptions provided a brief insight into the area of uncontrollable and controllable concerns encountered during the research process. The next chapter included the literature research strategy, theoretical framework, and literature review divided into four sections: (a) toxic leadership, (b) toxic followership, (c) the perception of education in business ethics from an academic standpoint, and (d) the perception of education in business ethics from a business standpoint. A broad array of scholarly resources supported Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which established a link between a lack of psychological maturity and unethical behavior. Education in business ethics had the potential to develop a mature mindset with the aptitude to create ethical safeguards and prevent the incidence of a toxic workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem was a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. The most damaging effect of toxic leadership is the creation of a toxic work environment where people suffer from stress-related psychological symptoms, damaging physical symptoms, and negative behavioral symptoms (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Han et al., 2017). The problem was significant because living in a toxic workplace ends in depression, anxiety, conflict, aggression at work and home, low morale, and diminished productivity (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). Toxic leadership profoundly affects the individual experience and workplace dynamics (Bartlett, 2017). The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The study was needed because past research has not explored the problem adequately.

High visibility and frequency of transgressions in the business setting prompted a continuous and extensive scope of research. The literature relevant to the topic of this study provided multilayered input from the academic and business standpoint, with discussions on the phenomenon of toxic leadership, toxic workplace, and education in business ethics. While the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace had been the topic of research for a long time, the existing scholarly literature had never placed emphasis on the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. The process of integrating the existing body of knowledge with

the present research helped with evaluating the depth and significance of the research problem and identifying gaps in the research literature.

An outline of the literature review included the introduction of the strategy used for discovering pertinent theoretical and experimental scholarly writing. Before focusing on the literature review, a further overview included a list of the sources, library databases, search engines, and key search terms used during the research process. The theoretical framework (Kohlberg's s theory of moral development) provided the baseline for a better understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon under study. The underlying context was extended to include the most applicable leadership theories and gene-culture coevolution theory aimed to address the additional behavioral aspects of the research problem.

Presenting the process of exploration, selection, collection, and organization of the relevant previous research continued by providing the theoretical framework designed to guide further research. A narrative synthesis of assumptions, propositions, and findings supported the topic and tentative theory of the present study. The literature review introduced the existing knowledge of peer-reviewed journals and seminal work theoretically, thematically, and practically relevant to the present research. Because of the continued criticisms concerning toxic leadership and toxic workplace, existing studies were selected to exemplify the concepts of interest and diverse perceptions that might support the opposite angle. The research design was not the deciding factor to guide the selection of the literature.

The literature review introduced and analyzed various and sometimes opposing approaches to the research problem and questions. The analysis started with the examination of the general framework and narrowed down to the specific concepts, selecting and identifying the

theories and conclusions most applicable and related to the present research. Selecting and synthesizing themes most suitable to support the exploration of the phenomenon under investigation presented distinct images of the recognized ideas, blurred areas, and concepts yet to be studied. The present research had the viable potential to address concerns and issues encountered by diverse audiences—business, academia, and governance. Further writing summarized Chapter 2 by briefly presenting the main themes highlighted in the literature and reiterating the potential of the present research to extend the body of knowledge by identifying a gap in the existing inquiry. The summary included a brief overview of Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search revolved around several areas: toxic leadership, toxic followership, toxic workplace, and education in business ethics seen through the lenses of academia and business. The literature search process was conducted by using the electronic library databases provided by the American College of Education and several noteworthy sources, library databases, and search engines such as EBSCO Discovery Service, ProQuest, MERLOT, Mendeley, ERIC, EconBiz, SAGE, ResearchGate, Academia, Microsoft Academic, and Google Scholar. All sources combined offered an extensive collection of dissertations, peer-reviewed articles, journals, periodicals, working papers, reports, e-books, newspapers, and data (primary and secondary source materials). All databases have powerful search engines operating with a quantity, quality, variety, and scope of information unparalleled in the history of research. The scholarship overall, and especially research, was fundamentally transformed during the last decade alone in terms of creating and sharing research data. The rapid and prevalent technological advancement initiated a substantial and visible change facilitating the cost-

effectiveness, openness, and reproducibility of the research, preventing scientific inquiry from being stagnant, uncritical, and biased (Curty, 2015).

The literature review included relevant peer-reviewed articles and other materials published in the last five years, from 2015 to 2020. Seminal work was used to emphasize the significance and historical value of the concepts reflecting the longevity of the research, regardless of the production year. All articles, e-books, and web content were downloaded as a full-text electronic copy. Research materials were imported and stored in Mendeley, the electronic reference manager designed to collect and organize research sources and references.

Key search words and combinations of key terms used during the research process reflected central themes and patterns subjected to the interpretative process in quest of a possible connection with the research problem (Creswell, 2017). Key search terms facilitated the identification of the literature with the potential to provide emerging themes. Gathering, analysis, and interpretation of the data stemming from the existing body of knowledge were directed by the framework of preselected themes or key terms. The keywords and combined keywords used in the present research included *abuse*, *aggression*, *anxiety*, *authoritarian*, *bias*, *bullying*, *burnout*, *conflict*, *coping*, *corruption*, *damage*, *depression*, *despotic*, *destructive*, *deviance*, *distress*, *dominance*, *dysfunctional*, *ethics*, *harmful*, *humiliation*, *immoral*, *injustice*, *leadership*, *manipulative*, *military*, *mobbing*, *slender*, *stress*, *toxic*, *trust*, *turnover*, *unscrupulous*, *unethical*, *violation*, and *values*. The key terms and phrases included *abusive supervision*, *business ethics*, *conflict management*, *dark leadership*, *dark traits*, *deviant behavior*, *ethical decision-making*, *leader's narcissism*, *low self-esteem*, *mental disorders*, *moral courage*, *moral judgment*, *moral*

reasoning, *toxic leadership*, *toxic workplace*, *unethical environment*, *unethical practice*, *work-related anxiety*, and *work-related stress*.

Theoretical Framework

Toxic leadership is characterized by the broad array of destructive behaviors driving leaders to achieve personal objectives by compromising the interests of individuals, teams, and organizations (Saqib & Arif, 2017). Toxicity in organizations is an interactional process perpetuated between leaders, followers, and the environment (Padilla et al., 2007; Stoten, 2015), characterized by unethical and dysfunctional organizational culture. The historical record of previous research supported the general theory of toxic leadership, which identified the low maturity of susceptible followers as one of the essential prerequisites for developing toxic leaders and a toxic workplace (Padilla et al., 2007). The organizational culture often shapes actual leader-follower relationships; hence, a low maturity culture may enable toxic leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Education in business ethics has the potential to create a higher ethical maturity and help students build the courage to act and carry out ethical decisions in the workplace (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). By blending Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development with the existing body of knowledge of a toxic workplace and the new research, this study explored the assumption of education in business ethics that might prevent the occurrence of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development established the framework explaining why people engage in immoral behavior in the name of the authority. People need psychological and moral maturity to oppose destructive authority because adopting a toxic leader's vision

creates the perception of collusion (Padilla et al., 2007). Kohlberg developed the six stages of moral development, which reflected a moral formation and creating the individual concept of right or wrong (Fang et al., 2017; Kohlberg, 1981; Yuping et al., 2018). The six stages represented three levels of advancement—pre-conventional moral development (Stages 1 & 2), conventional moral development (Stages 3 & 4), and post-conventional moral development (Stages 5 & 6; Kohlberg, 1981; Mizzoni, 2018; Payne, Pawlak, & Mahesh, 2018). *Figure 1* depicted the model of Kohlberg's theory of moral development.
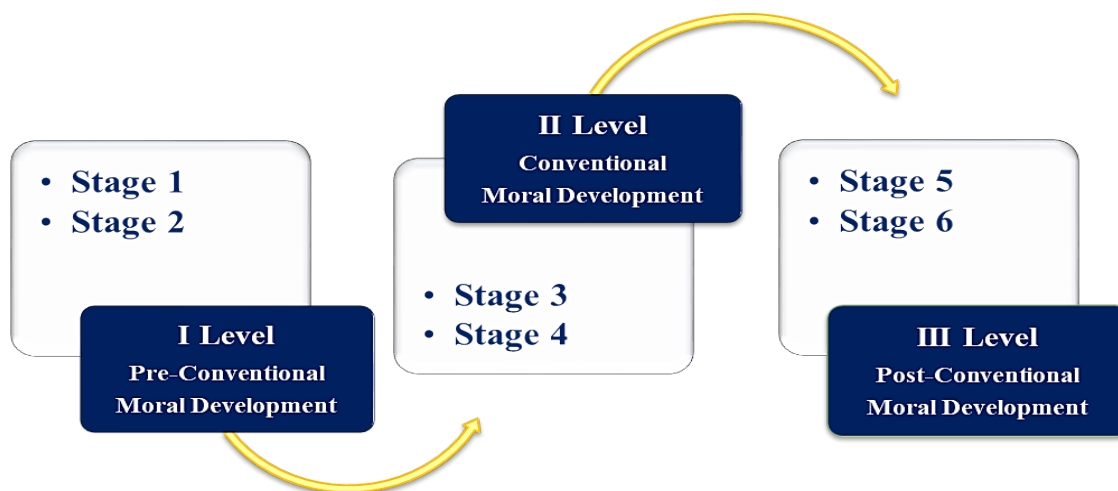
Figure 1: Kohlberg's theory of moral development

Stage 1 is typical for young children and adults coerced to unwilling action and includes the concept of obedience and punishment. Stage 1 individuals obey the rules to avoid punishment and develop a sense of right and wrong in response to being punished or not (Mizzoni, 2018). A sense of right and wrong is determined by the consequences and learning which actions are punishable. Stage 1 individuals are responsive to the rules, demonstrating absolute surrendering to superior authority (Kohlberg, 1981).

Stage 2 is naively egotistical and characteristic for older children and adults acting by the pragmatic rules of reciprocity intended to serve individual needs and interests (Kohlberg, 1981; Payne et al., 2018). The individuals residing at Stage 2 are self-absorbed and motivated by reciprocity and vengeance ("an eye for an eye" philosophy). People at Stage 2 of moral development believe in the outcomes where the end justifies the means (Kohlberg, 1981).

Stage 3 involves standards of morality and living up to social expectations and roles based on the norms of a group. At this stage, the moral judgment of action is measured by the standards of the group for which one feels empathy, friendliness, trust, and loyalty (Kohlberg, 1981; Payne et al., 2018). Stage 3 individuals consider peer approval as an essential factor in the formation of self-image, self-confidence, and behavioral patterns. The focus on conformity and being nice shape and influence relationships (Kohlberg, 1981).

Stage 4 of moral development includes the context of the law and social order. The individual understands the concept of a good citizen and lives by the recognized role. People residing at Stage 4 are rigid duty-doers who respect and obey authority without any questioning. Kohlberg's framework demonstrated that most people operate at Stage 4, never achieving the final, postconventional levels of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Payne et al., 2018).

Stage 5 involves the legalistic social contract where people care for different values and beliefs, seek consensus, and respect fundamental human rights. Stage 5 people respect the rights of minorities and individual rights. While Stage 5 of moral development involves belief in consensus rather than the majority rule, people are driven by a belief in the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people (Kohlberg, 1981).

In Stage 6, the individual understands what is morally right or wrong and has the ability to judge objectively based on independent reason (Kohlberg, 1981; Mizzoni, 2018). People residing at Stage 6 believe in the equitable principles of justice, even if the consequences of the moral actions conflict with laws, social rules, and collective customs (Kohlberg, 1981). The individual values develop in the context of abstract general principles concerning justice, society's well-being, equality, human rights, and respect for the dignity of every human being (Giammarco, 2016; Payne et al., 2018). Stage 6 thinkers do not fit conventional norms.

While Kohlberg's theory of moral development recognized an individual cognitive level as a foundation for advancing the moral level, it is evident that the development of morality might not progress naturally with the improvement of the cognitive level (Yuping et al., 2018). All people move through the stages without skipping or missing the lower stages; nobody regressed to an earlier stage. The structure of the stages is the same for all, but most people never reached higher stages (Stages 5 & 6; Kohlberg, 1981). People did not move through the stages naturally; movement transpired once a person recognized the present way of coping with a particular moral dilemma was not sufficient or adequate. People usually cannot understand moral reasoning more than one stage ahead (Giammarco, 2016; Kohlberg, 1981). Moral development requires more than the inclusion of reasoning and ethical judgment; the process needs to embrace sensitivity, motivation, and strength of character (Pritchard, 1999).

While Kohlberg's theory endured defensible critique regarding a masculine bias (Gilligan, 1982), both Kohlberg and Gilligan agreed on the importance of teaching business ethics with the robust context in terms of rights or virtues intersecting Kohlberg's higher stages of moral development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981; Mizzoni, 2018). Education in business

ethics develops a deeper and richer understanding that might protect individuals from the influence of the unethical organizational culture (Mizzoni, 2018). Critics of Kohlberg's theory pointed out the lack of a link between moral judgment and moral action (Koh, 2014). Understanding the context of morals and ethics creates grounds for moral behavior. Moral action stemming from moral understanding facilitates the development of individual reasoning and advancement to higher stages of moral development (Ellertson, Ingerson, & Williams, 2016).

Education in business ethics might be a viable avenue of developing the mature mindset able to establish ethical safeguards and prevent the occurrence of a toxic workplace characterized by stress, depression, anxiety, anger, conflict, low morale, and diminished productivity (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Padilla et al., 2007). Education in business ethics is the living and dynamic concept that might fill the gap in Kohlberg's (1981) framework in terms of the presence of both aspects (moral judgment and moral action). Creating a mindset capable of respecting individual rights can build an organizational culture with the potential to take business ethics seriously (Mizzoni, 2018).

Destructive actions of toxic leaders usually affect the entire workplace, resulting in a dysfunctional and toxic organizational culture (Saqib & Arif, 2017). Kohlberg's seminal theory is the most prominent and broadly researched theory of moral reasoning and moral development (Fang et al., 2017). The individuals most adversely affected by toxic leadership usually reside in the first three stages of moral development.

Overview of the Theoretical Framework

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review, the key themes explored throughout the phenomenological interviews related to toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, toxic

behavior, and the perception of education in business ethics from an academic and business standpoint. Toxic leaders cannot relate to another's distress; the phenomenon highlights the critical role of value-based reinforcement learning aimed to develop ethical reasoning in outcomes with the potential to hurt others (Fang et al., 2017). Toxic leaders are perceived as authorities with unchallenged powers (Pritchard, 1999). The phenomenological research focused on the lived experiences of the participants exposed to toxic leadership and a toxic workplace.

Education in business ethics has the potential to facilitate moral development through the stages, build resilience, improve understanding of toxic leadership, and prevent the incidence of a toxic workplace. Low maturity and a high level of susceptible followers' self-interest encountered at the first two stages of moral development are considered the essential prerequisites for the advancement of toxic leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). Business ethics education can develop moral perceptiveness, build resilience to group dynamics impeding responsible behavior, and help with learning how to deal with the wrongdoing of others (Pritchard, 1999).

The interview protocol was designed to explore the themes and solicit thick responses based on the participants' lived experiences. Based on the participants' feedback and the exploration of the existing research, the study aimed to establish a tentative theory and identify key themes with the potential to work toward establishing a connection between comprehensive education in business ethics and prevention of the toxic workplace. The key themes requiring additional research explored the perception of the possible connection between education in business ethics and the occurrence of toxic leadership and the toxic workplace. Figure 2 presented the theoretical framework designed to lead this research.

The study examined the gap in the scholarly literature concerning possible connection between the lack of education in business ethics and the occurrence of a toxic workplace. Phenomenological research explored the lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace, including the perception of education in business ethics.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Toxic Leadership

Toxic Workplace

Theoretical Framework and Existing Body of Research

Education in Business Ethics

Academic Standpoint

Education in Business Ethics

Business Standpoint

Perception about Education in Business Ethics

Phenomenological Research Examination of the Lived Experience of Toxic Leadership and a Toxic Workplace

Emergent themes and new concepts will develop through analysis of qualitative data.

Future research: further exploration of the possible link between the lack of education in business ethics and occurrence of toxic leadership and the toxic workplace.

Figure 2: Theoretical framework.

Research Literature Review

The problem is a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. The increasing scope of research on the topic of a toxic workplace causing depression, anxiety, conflict, anger, low morale, and diminished productivity (Saqib & Arif,

2017), reflected the significance of the problem because toxic behavior costs organizations

billions of dollars worldwide in disability claims and lost productivity (Winn & Dykes, 2019).

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the individual lived

experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible

connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership.

Exploration of the literature relevant to the topic outlined input from the academic and business

standpoint, with a discussion of the phenomenon of toxic leadership, the toxic workplace, and

education in business ethics.

The theoretical framework—Kohlberg's s theory of moral development—established the

baseline for a better understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon under study.

Identifying the gap in the scholarly literature supported the inquiry focused on a possible

connection between the lack of education in business ethics and the occurrence of toxic

leadership. The literature review outlined the context indicating a possible intersection between

toxic, unethical leadership and the absence of education in business ethics.

The present research used a qualitative phenomenology method, which provided the

instruments for exploring the subjective meanings individuals attribute to a problem or

phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). A qualitative design was the most suitable method for this

research because phenomenology is not only a simple gathering of narratives. The qualitative

phenomenological approach sought to reveal the essence of the subjective individual experience

and analyze the shared meanings (Qutoshi, 2018). Selecting a qualitative phenomenological

method stemmed from the need to build an inquiry designed to describe the experiences related

to toxic leadership, the toxic workplace, and the personal perception of education in business ethics.

As an example, Comer and Schwartz (2017) conducted qualitative phenomenological research and used personal reflections introduced in discussions and essays (open-ended scenario assignments). The study incorporated the questionnaire designed to assess individuals' propensity to do the right thing regardless of organizational pressures and personal consequences. This research used triangulation and built on the existing body of knowledge in the same manner Singh et al. (2017) used the content analysis by researching literature and conducting evidence-based research. Singh et al.'s synthesis study, based on 46 peer-reviewed articles, identified toxic leadership as a silent killer and an expensive anomaly with the power to debilitate individuals, groups, organizations, and even nations.

Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership is socially unwanted behavior, which results in negative core self-evaluation by employees, workplace ostracism, and a harmful process of hiding and hoarding knowledge (Sarwar et al., 2017). A costly toxic leadership phenomenon is continuously spreading, yet organizations do not have proper defense mechanisms (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Toxic leadership comes in various forms and has different dynamics—destructive, abusive, narcissistic, or even charismatic (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015)—but the common denominator is the same: the leaders who engage in dark behaviors harm the work environment (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

Dark personality is defined by the personality characteristics of the dark triad: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Narcissism has a multifaceted form that includes vanity,

exhibitionism, superiority, authority, entitlement, exploitation, and self-sufficiency, including self-absorption, self-admiration, and arrogance (Schyns, 2015). Machiavellianism resides in the context of a manipulative personality motivated by selfishness, lack of conscience, empathy, guilt, or loyalty to anyone (Schyns, 2015). Psychopathy is characterized by traits and behaviors that reflect the superficial charm, dishonesty, egocentricity, manipulativeness, risk-taking, and a lack of empathy and guilt well concealed under apparent normalcy (Schyns, 2015).

Toxic leaders might be ruthless, asocial (self-centered), irritable (malevolent), a loner (self-centered), egocentric, non-explicit (face-saver), non-cooperative (malevolent), or dictatorial (autocratic; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). While the terms dysfunctional leadership and toxic leadership are sometimes used interchangeably, they have different meanings. Dysfunctional leaders are incompetent in skills or behaviors; their toxic conduct might occur involuntarily or due to unforeseen circumstances. True toxic leaders are emotionally challenged and have a low level of emotional intelligence (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). The very definition of toxic leadership pertains to extreme, deliberate negative behaviors. Toxic leaders are willingly abusive; their behaviors range from undermining, demeaning, marginalizing, intimidating, demoralizing, disenfranchising, and incapacitating, to torturing and terrorizing (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013).

Extensive literature research did not reveal any classification of toxic leadership as a phenomenon belonging to the domain of impaired mental health or casual mismanagement. Toxic leadership is recognized as malicious behavior with the potential to destroy the efficiency and enthusiasm of helpless victims (Singh et al., 2017). Still, toxic leadership's underlying paradox reflects circumstances where most followers complain about toxic leaders but tolerate,

prefer, and sometimes even create toxic leaders in corporations, nonprofit organizations, government, educational settings, and religious institutions (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Toxic leaders obsessed with power and superiority usually have a dominant status (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Vreja, Balan, & Bosca, 2016). The organizations forced into submission to toxic authority often encourage employees' silence and nurture passivity in the face of unethical behavior (Sarwar et al., 2017). Despotic leadership results in employees' negative self-evaluation, workplace ostracism, and, ultimately, the harmful and costly process of knowledge hoarding by employees (Sarwar et al., 2017). Information hoarding, which transpires in response to authoritarian leadership, increases the employees' control over knowledge while building a stronghold of power and influence in the organization. If an employee's personality is proactive (mature personality), the adverse effects of toxic leadership, workplace ostracism, and knowledge hoarding are weaker (Sarwar et al., 2017).

Possible positive outcomes of toxic leadership. Some scholars did not perceive the connection between toxic leadership behaviors and organizational performance as nonconclusive and suggested further attention was needed to understand and evaluate the underlying processes and mechanisms (Saqib & Arif, 2017). Toxic leadership is a phenomenon that can yield positive and negative outcomes (Milosevic, Maric, & Loncar, 2019). While the anecdotal narratives reflected mixed results in terms of benefit to the organization, the prevailing body of research recognized harmful and adverse outcomes in the heart of the construct. Toxic leaders use positional power and authority to intimidate, coerce, and deceive, which is usually successful in the short term. Later on, toxic leaders usually fail due to an evident inability to develop high-performing teams (Pathak, 2017). While toxic leaders are ruthless, many are smart, resourceful,

competent, and capable of demonstrating charming and charismatic behavior with the potential

to inspire and motivate action (Grijalva et al., 2015; Howell & Avolio, 1992; Milosevic et al.,

2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Pathak, 2017).

The possible positive outcomes of dysfunctional leadership might include short-term

benefits, where some subordinates try hard and put forth the best efforts to fulfill the leaders'

demands (Saqib & Arif, 2017). The present scholarly writing revealed why the previous research

reflected a paradoxical mix of a positive and negative assessment of toxic leadership. The

existing body of knowledge identified the follower personality traits as the prime factor affecting

the awareness and conduct of narcissistic leaders. Despite harmful attributes such as

egocentrism, aggression, abuse, and lack of empathy, narcissistic leaders do not negatively affect

all people. Narcissistic leaders are more abusive toward followers with low self-esteem,

susceptible to victimization than toward followers with a mature personality. The perception of

the leader's abusiveness depends on the follower's personality. Individuals with low self-esteem

are more likely to be a target of toxic behavior and less able to cope with the abuse (Nevicka, De

Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2018).

The leader's angle on the outcomes of abusive supervision might be a primary motive for

abuse. As long as supervisors consider abuse a valid performance driver, the practice of toxic

behavior without concern for the damaging consequences will be tolerated (Watkins, Fehr, & He,

2019). The research findings complemented the traditional premise about abusive supervisors

motivated by a need to aggress. Leaders sometimes abuse followers in the pursuit of advancing

pro-organizational goals (Watkins et al., 2019). Leaders with a record of abusive behavior

sometimes articulate an inspiring vision with a high impact. The growing body of research

recognized the charismatic leader's vision as a means for mitigating the harmful effects of toxic leadership (Fiset, Robinson, & Saffie-Robertson, 2019).

Toxic leaders as role models. The existing research identified leadership as the central element in building and maintaining the toxic environment by facilitating unethical work behaviors (Milosevic et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Williams, 2017). Toxic leaders obsessed with power and superiority usually have dominant status. Research grounded in the gene-culture coevolution theory sees humans (as a species) to be status seekers because the trait is directly linked to evolutionary success (greater access to resources—food, security, or mates). Domineering behaviors are the primary origin of toxic leadership (Vreja, Balan, & Bosca, 2016). Leaders are usually models of imitation, so people often make a mistake and choose dominant-status holders obsessed with power and authority as leaders (Vreja et al., 2016). While both dominance-based and prestige-based status are specific to human society, the difference between dominant and prestigious leaders is substantial. Manipulative dominant leaders undervalue followers' merits and habitually sacrifice everybody to preserve the position of power (Vreja et al., 2016). Prestige-based leaders demonstrate a respectful and supportive demeanor while sharing the merits of achievement with subordinates and sacrificing themselves for the greater good (Vreja et al., 2016).

Ethical leadership is a critical source of environmental stabilization because people see leaders as models of the desired behavior (Kao & Cheng, 2017). Because leaders unavoidably serve as role models, toxic leaders' corrupt conduct creates an unethical environment conducive to the further development of toxic managers and a toxic workforce. Toxic leaders create toxic

organizations functioning in an endless state of chaos and emergency (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007).

Organizational culture is a configuration of elementary assumptions developed by a group where every person learns to deal with external adaptation and internal integration (Glick et al., 2018). As a valid, accepted, and dynamic concept, organizational culture reflects norms—the correct way to perceive, think, respect, reward, and feel. Norms propagate themselves by creating the structure, pressures, and social rules with a substantial influence (Glick et al., 2018). Toxic organizational culture often does not recognize the problem; toxic leaders and managers go unnoticed and get promoted quickly based on the results-driven attitude. In reality, toxic behavior causes an increased turnover, high absenteeism, and low productivity due to feelings of despair, anger, low morale, poor communication, and depression among employees (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007; Bhandarker & Rai, 2019).

The organizational culture often shapes leader-follower relationships where a low-maturity and low-self-esteem culture may allow and facilitate toxic behavior and toxic leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). The existing research established the connection between bottom-line-mentality managers and unethical and harmful organizational culture (Mesdaghinia, Rawat, & Nadavulakere, 2019). Supervisors with a high bottom-line mentality more often experienced a loss of self-control, which lead to the abuse of problematic subordinates (Mawritz, Greenbaum, Butts, & Graham, 2017).

Toxic leadership and values schizophrenia in the military. The military has a long history of toxic leadership (Box, 2012; Özer, Uğurluoğlu, Kahraman, & Avci, 2017; Williams, 2017). One in five individuals living and working in the military environment perceives

superiors as toxic or unethical (Box, 2012). Military toxic leaders demonstrate characteristic behaviors identified as the Micromanager, the Pretender, and the Egomaniac (Box, 2012). The Micromanager has a hidden agenda, the Pretender exhibits unethical behavior, and the Egomaniac manipulates people and things. Toxic leaders are highly competitive, get promoted quickly, and advance fast because service members fail to speak out about abuse (Box, 2012; Williams, 2017). Toxic individuals are experts in managing upward, simultaneously giving the appearance of high performance while abusing others (Williams, 2017). Military toxic leaders prone to impulsive and irrational decision making often try to avoid responsibility. Problem-solving practices rarely result in optimal solutions, leading to increased costs from poor decision-making practices (Box, 2012).

A growing body of evidence supported the notion of abusive supervision as a trigger of interpersonal aggression (Richard et al., 2018). Further research is needed to explore the organizational attributes shaping the manifestation, impact, and prevention of leader-caused workplace aggression (Sharma, 2018). Toxicity is already considered a normal phenomenon and a byproduct of the modern organizational culture (Stoten, 2015). Toxic individuals habitually demand obedience and ridicule principles of business ethics. Business professionals increasingly suffer from values schizophrenia due to the clash between the business world and the ethical world (Stoten, 2015).

Toxic leadership, sense of injustice, and deviant behavior. Toxic leadership is commonly associated with adverse outcomes producing personal and organizational problems. A common misconception involves the perception of a toxic person as verbally abusive and explosive, while most toxic behavior occurs out of sight (Williams, 2017). The trail of passive

toxic leadership can be recognized by wasted resources, sabotaged projects, and demoralized

employees (Williams, 2017). Toxicity provokes deviant behavior among employees, serving as a

coping strategy (Vveinhardt & Kuklytė, 2017). Harmful consequences include psychological

distress, diminished personal and family well-being, reduced feeling of self-worth, increased

turnover, and interpersonal aggression (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Han et al., 2017; Richard et al.,

2018; Williams, 2017).

Due to the sense of injustice, victims of toxic leadership tend to retaliate in the form of

negative behavior such as aggression, theft, and sabotage (Nevicka et al., 2018). The limitations

of leader-centric approaches perceive toxic leadership as not only a corrupt behavior or set of

behaviors but also a rather complex interaction involving flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders,

susceptible followers, and multifaceted conducive context (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). While

the genuine intent of inept toxic leaders might not be harmful (e.g., concealing lack of

competence or keeping control), the outcomes are still damaging for the organization. The

concept of destructive leadership receives widespread attention due to the adverse effects, but the

links between toxic leadership and followers' behaviors, such as organizational citizenship

behavior, workplace deviance, and job performance, are still underresearched (Han et al., 2017;

Mackey, McAllister, Maher, & Wang, 2019).

While leaders with low competence and low aptitude to lead are less likely to initiate

premeditated damaging actions, highly competent leaders with narcissism traits and the capacity

to pursue destructive objectives manifest the strongest intent to create harm (Krasikova, Green,

& LeBreton, 2013). Many narcissistic leaders have some positive characteristics, being

charismatic visionaries with resilience to failure, or thriving in crisis management (Nevicka et

al., 2018). Toxic leaders create uncertainty and confusion upward and downward, interfering with people's ability to work (Milosevic et al., 2019). The general perception of leadership failed to consider the paradox maintaining that leaders who are liked may be responsible for poor organizational performance and decline, while leaders who are generally disliked may be creating high-performing teams and organizational success (Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

Toxic Workplace Stressors

Organizations have to address the occurrence of destructive leadership, prevent exposure to toxic behavior, and provide support to targeted employees. Considerable research provided insight into the various means used by employees to manage workplace stressors, but few studies have explored how followers cope with the consequences of toxic leadership (Webster, Brough, & Daly, 2016). A better understanding would help identify the circumstances leading to aggression and contextual factors with the potential to facilitate or eliminate the effects of toxic behavior. The separate inquiry concerns the human resource (HR) managers' support, organizational culture, and internal dynamics shaped to prevent or reduce workplace aggression (Richard et al., 2018; Sharma, 2018). The leader's behavior is a primary factor in shaping followers' stress levels and the number one reason for quitting the job (Han et al., 2017). Communication styles and leadership reflecting abusive supervision are closely related to workplace stress and burnout (Han et al., 2017; Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017).

Toxic leadership often comes in the form of abusive supervision and perpetuating deliberate hostile behavior, which can be verbal and nonverbal, but without any physical contact (Han et al., 2017). Perceptions of abusive supervision include intimidating attribution styles, ridiculing, negative affectivity, anger, and entitlement (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Brees,

Martinko, & Harvey, 2016). The harmful effects of abusive supervision reached $23.8 billion per year, accounting for reduced productivity, absenteeism, and increased healthcare costs (Waldman, Wang, Hannah, Owens, & Balthazard, 2018). The topic of abusive supervision is a growing field of research. The subject of employee behaviors prompting supervisors' abuse is still an under-researched area (Tahir & Khan, 2019).

Abusive supervision leads to numerous emotional and organizational outcomes calling for further exploration (Han et al., 2017). Organizational factors such as organizational culture, individual and organizational norms, workplace justice, and situational constraints can combine to create an environment conducive to detrimental events (Hackney & Perrewé, 2018). Individual norms correspond with the organizational culture and evolve into institutional systems well known by organizational members (Mathur, Banerjee, Sharma, & Kaur, 2018). Abusive supervision violates ethical standards and creates fertile ground for the spread of other ethically questionable behaviors. The practice and effects of abusive supervision, which trickle down and spread through all organizational levels, often initiate subordinates' deviant reactions to supervisors' toxic behavior (Hon & Lu, 2016; Park et al., 2019).

Employees might be exposed to the open expressions of anger that considerably shape and affect leaders' effectiveness and relationships with followers. The traditional interpretations highlighting the destructive aspects of anger and their association with undesirable outcomes (follower frustration and perceived leader ineffectiveness) consider the expression of anger a toxic action (Wang, Restubog, Shao, Lu, & Van Kleef, 2018). On the contrary, researchers with the opposite angle consider anger an integrated and efficient management approach, which increases workplace effectiveness and brings transparency to the feedback process. Some

theorists described the leader's anger expression as an essential problem-solving tool for eliminating undesirable behaviors in the workplace. The experimental research identified the intentional display of anger as the demonstration of power with the potential to elevate the expresser's perceived status and ability to influence others (Wang et al., 2018).

Coping mechanisms and employee silence. Toxic leadership, unethical leader behavior, or evident illegal actions frequently prompt employees to remain silent (Saqib & Arif, 2017). When toxic leadership and stress drain employees' resources (time and energy), many try to protect themselves by staying silent (Wu, Peng, & Estay, 2018). While silence can be a strategic coping response to toxic leadership, voice can have functional value. The scholarly literature provided limited and mixed perspectives on the phenomenon of workplace silence (Stouten, Tripp, Bies, & De Cremer, 2019). Scholars perceive silence as a dysfunctional response and value proactive behavior and the ability to confront or resist destructive leadership. In reality, a voice should not always be the first response because of the possible repercussions (Stouten et al., 2019). Although associated with positive outcomes, using problem-solving coping responses is not common, mostly because of reliance on support seeking or avoidance strategies (Webster et al., 2014).

Mechanisms for coping with destructive leadership require resilience, which is an adaptation process, and the ability to recover from conflict (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Employee resilience is considered a behavioral capability (Tahir & Khan, 2019). The coping strategies, which are the behavioral response to the psychological, emotional, and physical consequences of toxic behavior, include aggressively challenging the leader, seeking social support, reflecting, taking leave, engaging in absenteeism, and leaving the organization (Webster et al., 2014).

Coping mechanisms are developed for mastering, tolerating, reducing, or minimizing the effects of stressful events and negative emotions. In the context of toxic leadership, employees try to cope by using three strategies: assertive coping, avoidance, or adaptive coping (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019). While the loss of self-worth is negatively related to assertive coping, avoidance coping, and adaptive coping, withdrawal is positively related to assertive coping and avoidance coping. Agitation is positively related to avoidance and adaptive coping (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019). Out of three coping strategies, adaptive coping is the most frequent strategy, followed by avoidance and, finally, assertive coping characterized by taking action against toxic leaders such as direct complaints to a higher authority (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019).

The feasible methods of dealing with toxic leaders include investigating the toxic leader's history, keeping a log documenting the leader's behavior, seeking advice from the senior staff, creating a coalition, or strategizing about confronting the toxic leader as a group. Ousting a toxic leader, briefing the board, whistleblowing, or alerting the media and appropriate regulatory bodies may be the only way to remove the toxic leader and stop the damage (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Organizational policies can prevent toxic leadership by instituting term limits, periodic 360-degree reviews of individual leaders, "respectable departure" options, open selection processes, enforcing protective mechanisms for whistle-blowers, and establishing regular accountability forums (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). A toxic leader would not last very long in a healthy organization. The most critical factor in prohibiting toxic individuals from being promoted and preventing the formation of a toxic workplace is the organizational culture influenced by "healthy" individuals (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007).

Dark triad. More research on the dark side of organizations has to include the impact of dark triad personalities (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) and counterproductive work behaviors. The scholarly literature already established the connection between the dark triad and counterproductive work behaviors, with organizational politics and perceived accountability as the mediators of this relationship (Cohen, 2016). Counterproductive work behavior is the set of activities responsible for harming legitimate organizational and stakeholder interests and causing financial, moral, and ethical damage. The problem can arise due to the stressful workplace environment, anger, workplace aggression, hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior, retaliatory behavior, moral ambiguity, destructive leadership, and personal traits (Brender-Ilan & Sheaffer, 2019; Han et al., 2017). Given that dark leaders frequently demonstrate abusive and hostile behaviors, the underlying causes of dark leadership became the subject of extensive research. The connection between corporate psychopathy, abusive supervision, lack of employees' job satisfaction, and employees' turnover intentions identified psychopathy as an underlying factor explaining abusive supervision (Mathieu & Babiak, 2016).

The dark core of personality. The concept of the dark core (D-factor) reflects an individual's inclination to pursue personal interests ruthlessly, even if the malicious behavior harms others, or sometimes with the expressed intent of harming others (Moshagen, Hilbig, & Zettler, 2018). Individuals with dark core personalities are experts in justifying unethical behaviors. D-individuals often perceive themselves as superior and others as inferior persons (Moshagen et al., 2018). D-factor emerges within the pre-established pattern of ethically, morally, and socially questionable behaviors. The D-factor traits include egoism,

Machiavellianism, moral disengagement, narcissism, psychological entitlement, psychopathy, sadism, self-interest, and spitefulness (Moshagen et al., 2018).

   Organizational politics and offensive behaviors. Toxic employees with a dark personality are usually not superior, but average or substandard performers who use advanced political skills to affect the outcomes. Dark personality employees' higher performance ratings usually result in higher salaries and faster promotion to leadership positions (Templer, 2018). Leaders' unethical conduct additionally elevates followers' deviance by increasing awareness of tolerated injustice and politics in organizations. Employee deviance is a source of nearly one-third of all business failures (Appelbaum & Girard,2007). The concept of organizational politics includes the conduct designed to pursue one's own self-interests by all means, without regard for the well-being of the organizational stakeholders (Asnakew & Mekonen, 2019).

   The contemporary workplace became an environment characterized by offensive and disrespectful behaviors. Incivility is one of the most prevalent forms of antisocial behavior in the business world (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Using abusive language belongs to the realm of unethical behavior (Park et al., 2019) because disparaging language can be upsetting. The adverse effects of toxic communication can target an individual's behavior, attitudes, or self-worth. Toxic leaders, directly and indirectly, shape organizational culture because employees see leaders as role models in learning about acceptable conduct (Harold & Holtz, 2015). The passive leadership that enables toxicity might transpire in the form of reluctance to act accordingly or in the form of publicly visible and evident failure to provide organizational leadership overall. Two main attributes distinguishing incivility from other forms of disruptive work behaviors are intent and intensity (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Incivility serves as a gateway for the creation of a toxic

workplace, including a critical environmental factor: passive leadership. The passive leader demonstrates damaging habits, which include neglecting problems, avoiding to make decisions, and failing to establish or reinforce the appropriate conduct (Harold & Holtz, 2015).

Masculinity contest cultures and toxic workplaces. Findings from recent research supported the association between the perceptions of toxic leadership and masculinity challenge cultures (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018, p. 450). The construct of masculinity includes norms, rituals, and conviction systems embracing social dominance, work above everything else, physical strength, toughness, endurance, and the avoidance of weakness (Matos, O'Neill, & Lei, 2018). In the best-case scenario, the organization thrives and advances driven by teamwork, healthy competition, resilience, and motivation. However, if the phenomenon expands to the extreme, the masculine behavior has the potential to morph into a masculinity contest culture and hypercompetitive work environment where people live by the "win-or-die" culture (Matos et al., 2018, p. 501). Leadership style is shaped by promoting one's ego and career success while sabotaging the autonomy and confidence of potential rivals. The existing body of knowledge designated masculinity contest culture as an environment with the considerable potential to create toxic leadership (Matos et al., 2018).

Mobbing and bullying. Workplace mobbing and bullying are defined as systematic, hostile, and unethical communication and harassment of a peer, subordinate, or superior (Pheko, 2018; Uysal & Yavuz, 2013). The continuous exposure to workplace mobbing and bullying usually causes severe psychological, psychosomatic, and social issues for the victim (Pheko, 2018). The incidence of mobbing and bullying can be recognized by repeated humiliating, offensive, abusive, intimidating, or insulting behaviors and abuse of power. The victims of

workplace mobbing and bullying are excessively monitored, ridiculed, ignored, excluded, or slandered (Pheko, 2018). Mobbing is generally described as the act of creating an intensive conflict and offensive atmosphere, forcing people to quit by malicious actions, allusions, mockery, and attacking a person's social reputation (Uysal & Yavuz, 2013).

Toxic Followership

While toxic leadership has high visibility, toxic followership is an ongoing yet not adequately explored problem that demands increased attention as well (Thomas et al., 2016). The literature on ethical leadership mostly revolved around the leader's impact on followers' moral judgment and behavior. However, followers' moral attentiveness serving as a moderator for the correlation between ethical leadership and unethical employee behavior is still an under-researched area (van Gils, van Quaquebeke, van Knippenberg, van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2015). Similar to toxic leaders, toxic followers have substantial potential to damage organizations (Thomas et al., 2016). Recent research expanded the scope of exploration related to the follower's role in the leadership process, but the emphasis is still on the follower's response to a leader's behavior rather than followers' active involvement (Schyns, Wisse, & Sanders, 2019). Many followers exposed to unethical behavior might perceive submission to a dominant leader as the best or only way to avoid punishment and survive in a toxic organizational environment (Johnson, Kidwell, Lowe, & Reckers, 2019).

Toxic empowerment and moral disengagement. The unethical leader's authority often creates toxic empowerment and protects the followers with the same mindset from the negative consequences of their misconduct (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017). Unethical leaders usually surround themselves with *yes-men* who often ingratiate themselves and feed the leader's ego.

The followers eager to accept and internalize an unethical leader's dark vision are willing collaborators in the process of formation of a toxic workplace (Johnson et al., 2019). The individuals who are not hesitant to engage in toxic behavior without concern for those affected by the adverse outcomes, suffer from moral disengagement. Followers who experience a higher level of leader–member exchange with toxic leaders demonstrate greater moral disengagement and frequently participate in organizational deviance behaviors (Valle et al., 2019).

The concept of moral disengagement concerns personal self-regulatory mechanisms that usually do not function unless activated (Cory, 2015). Unethical pro-leader behavior refers to followers' actions that support the corrupt leader's agenda and violate organizational values, ethical norms, and organizational standards (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019). Unethical leaders can motivate only followers with a weak moral identity to engage in unethical pro-leader behavior. Followers with a strong moral identity often leave the organization to avoid cognitive dissonance and psychological discomfort if forced to participate in unethical pro-leader behavior. Toxic leaders and toxic followers who promote unethical pro-leader behavior create an unpleasant environment that alienates ethical and moral employees (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019).

Upward or reverse mobbing and bullying. Upward or reverse bullying is subordinate-initiated bullying that targets the supervisor (Wallace, Johnston, & Trenberth, 2010). The consequences of upward bullying may be particularly severe, gradually degenerating into ongoing abuse. Upward mobbing is escalating more rapidly than other forms of workplace toxicity (Leymann, 1990). The individuals with a higher risk of exposure to upward mobbing and bullying are high achievers, the individuals resilient to groupthink and peer pressure, people with high integrity, supporters of human rights, and whistleblowers. The degree of conflict caused by

upward mobbing differs in accordance with the subordinate political trickery, gender, and educational background (Uysal & Yavuz, 2013). Upward bullying and mobbing are perpetuated on the imbalance of power because victims of the upward mobbing cannot establish a proper defense. The primary subordinate's goal is to win by intimidating the supervisor, tarnishing the supervisor's reputation, or targeting the supervisor's reliability and professional efficiency (Uysal & Yavuz, 2013).

Upward mobbing can transpire in the form of sabotage, noncompliance with directions, purposeful malfunctioning, spreading groundless rumors, discrediting, slandering, isolating, or addressing a higher rank superior to conduct regular business or file a grievance (Uysal & Yavuz, 2013). Subordinates can act alone or in groups. Continuous mobbing and negative criticism against the supervisor (among the staff members) create a humiliation syndrome and "affect the victim in a way that leads to skipping workday, [and expressing] violence, sensitiveness, [and] irritability"(Uysal & Yavuz, 2013, p. 2171). Due to the subordinate's negative modeling of the supervisor's social and professional image, the supervisor might go through severe behavior modification and become introverted, suffering from self-doubt, anxiety, and apprehension (Uysal & Yavuz, 2013).

Toxic followers' typology. Toxic followers' typology classified all followers into five categories: effective, survivors, alienated, sheep, and yes-people (Thomas et al., 2016). *Effective* followers not prone to toxic leadership are honest, competent, credible, and self-managing problem-solvers committed to the organization. *Survivors* are followers with a high level of adaptation and resilience to change, who became toxic by influencing a leader to unethical behavior (Thomas et al., 2016). *Alienated* followers are critical thinkers, independent but

disgruntled employees who lost faith in the system. *Alienated* followers brought toxicity and negative energy to the organization by seeking an audience and undermining or disrupting the leader's efforts (Thomas et al., 2016). *Sheep* are usually uncritical, self-serving employees with a lack of initiative, responsibility, and concern for others. *Sheep*, which are considered administrative evil, are usually found in large organizations. *Yes-men* are blind followers, similar to *sheep*, who become toxic by emulating the toxic leader (Thomas et al., 2016).

   Toxic followers and the dark triad. In an unethical and toxic environment, followers might demonstrate wrong values, lack a moral compass, an absence of compassion for others, and dark triad personality traits that include narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Schyns et al., 2019). While narcissism relates to counterproductive, arrogant, and antagonistic behavior, Machiavellians are deceptive, distrusting, and manipulative psychopaths who lack self-control and enjoy inflicting harm on others (Schyns et al., 2019). The dark triad-related behavior usually has destructive effects on other employees and the organization as a whole. However, in the rare circumstances when dark triad goals line up with organizational goals, toxic individuals' strategic behavior can be beneficial to the organization (Schyns et al., 2019). For example, if that suits their agenda, narcissists could resolve the organizational crisis, Machiavellians can form valuable coalitions, and psychopaths could make a bold decision benefiting the organizational goals.

   When Machiavellian followers coexist in the same environment with a Machiavellian leader, both demonstrate low levels of mutual trust and cooperation, regardless of sharing the same negative, immoral, and manipulative outlook. The reduced level of trust creates a higher level of stress and counterproductive, unethical behavior. A combination of a Machiavellian

leader and Machiavellian followers usually creates a toxic environment (Belschak, Muhammad, & Den Hartog, 2018). Organizations have to pay attention to the continuous development of moral reasoning in both dark triad leaders and dark triad followers. While education in business ethics might not change toxic individuals' deep, dark personality traits, the process of learning is critical for raising ethical awareness (Schyns et al., 2019).

Education in Business Ethics—Academic Standpoint

While higher education is considered responsible for facilitating individual moral development and helping students achieve moral autonomy (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977), there is a significant concern of higher education institutions drifting away from this responsibility (Hanson et al., 2017). The integration of normative and behavioral ethics and the viability of the conceptual placement into the business ethics education continued to be the subject of research. Business ethics has an essential societal and personal impact and should be treated the same as education in accounting or finance (De Los Reyes et al., 2017). Managers want business schools to eliminate the separation of business subjects such as accounting, finance, or operations from business ethics themes (Sigurjonsson, Arnardottir, Vaiman, & Rikhardsson, 2015). The process of integrating traditional business courses with topics in business ethics would significantly improve dealing with an ethical dilemma (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015).

The research recognized the power of business ethics education to develop ethical self-awareness, given that narrative pedagogy has the potential to harness the ability to shape social attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Michaelson, 2016). Appealing to moral identity can reinforce students' moral judgment more effectively than mere teaching of ethics based on rules (Neesham & Gu, 2015). The concept of intuitive–reflective teaching requires learning response, cultivates

students' moral self-concept, and increases individual moral judgment. Appealing to moral

identity supports moral self-regulation and promotes attitudinal change in response to ethical

issues (Neesham & Gu, 2015).

Education in business ethics still has not developed the aptitude for questioning the

system and cultivating morally responsible agents (Rozuel, 2016). The problem is not the lack of

competence; rather, the predicament stemmed from the general trend of education focused

primarily on economic development. Rozuel (2016) highlighted Jung's reflection: "The most

powerful organizations can be maintained only by the greatest ruthlessness of their leaders and

the cheapest of slogans" (p. 39). Jung's strong metaphor depicted the corpus of individuals

repeating irresponsible and self-destructive behaviors to stress the social importance of

understanding and accepting one's moral agency in society (Rozuel, 2016). Education in

business ethics is critical for future business agents who should have ethical self-awareness and a

moral compass because the leader's behavior (action or lack thereof) affects many lives.

The business ethics curriculum is often criticized for creating limited abilities, indicating

that students are capable of making an ethical judgment only. Educators have to purposely design

courses with the potential to develop the students' capacity to exercise moral courage to act

(Comer & Schwartz, 2017). The history of exploring the relationship between education in

business ethics and students' ethical awareness resulted in findings supporting the notion that

education in business ethics does matter (Lau, 2010). Without teaching the moral courage

required to narrow the gap between the virtue of moral judgment and beneficial moral behavior

in organizations, education in business ethics would not reach the full potential. The moral

courage to act against unethical practices might prevent the occurrence of toxic behavior and a toxic workplace (Comer & Schwartz, 2017).

Business schools tend to recruit an excessively high number of self-interested students who comply easily with negative patterns; if students perceive cheating as the standard behavior, they will cheat without remorse (Falkenberg, 2004). Conduct motivated by self-interest is the root of unethical behavior and the possible rise of toxic leadership. Because self-interest is considered learned behavior (students do not enter school with this mindset), education in business ethics can develop the maturity, resilience, and moral compass with the ability to prevent toxic behavior and formation of a toxic workplace (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015). Education in business ethics could help with fear and anxiety that make employees vulnerable to toxic leaders (Özer et al., 2017). Toxic leaders have a reputation as destructive, narcissistic, abusive, dysfunctional, tyrannical, bullying, psychopathic, Machiavellian, and stupid individuals (Burke, 2017; Grijalva et al., 2015). Toxic leadership creates a workplace characterized by more mediocre job performance, lower psychological health of employees, high turnover, and counterproductive behavior. Toxic leadership has to be discussed primarily in management development programs in Master of Business Administration (MBA) courses (Burke, 2017).

While the empirical evidence supported the concept of education in business ethics in terms of creating improved ethical awareness, the impact of business ethics education on students' actual behavior seems to be marginal (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). Rasche, Gilbert, and Scheidel (2013) discussed business ethics education in MBA programs and addressed oversights in the existing system. The main areas of concern were ethical conduct in decision making, business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and environmental sustainability. The authors

highlighted the main obstacles to integrating business ethics in the curricula: faculty resistance, lack of time, and lack of interest. Schools, in general, have to change the perspective and see the big picture. Many schools have not seen the lasting impact and effects of teaching business ethics, given the conflict between business education (which builds self-interest) and ethical principles. Business schools have an influence, essential societal relevance, and the responsibility to instill positive values in students during their formative years (Rasche et al., 2013).

Education designed to recognize and embrace ethical values may help students (future business people) act with integrity and avoid intentionally harming business stakeholders (Gottardello & Pàmies, 2019). The inclusion of ethics in education still highly depends on environmental factors (e.g., the availability of qualified faculty, work overload, lack of time, lack of interest). The perceived lack of value in teaching ethics transpires because educators have more confidence in the formation of the values embraced through culture or family rather than through education (Gottardello & Pàmies, 2019). Schools are not adequately preparing students for facing an ethical dilemma in the real world. Students' struggles transpire due to insufficient ability, insufficient opportunity, and insufficient motivation (Edwards & Gallagher, 2018). While some scholars question the effectiveness of education in business ethics, lack of conviction should not discourage schools from teaching ethics. Early recognition of the values and benefits that ethical behavior brings to a business can help students demonstrate ethical behavior sooner (Wang & Calvano, 2015).

Regardless of the obstacles and, sometimes, questionable effectiveness, education in business ethics still increases the likelihood of resisting toxic leaders through gaining ethical self-awareness and organizational resilience (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Millennials will comprise

75% of the U.S. workforce by 2025. Without education in business ethics and real-life scenarios covering the concept of ethical dilemma, employees with little or no work experience are vulnerable populations prone to fall victim to toxic leaders. Millennials may not be able to resist the damaging effects of a toxic environment unless educated and adequately trained in resilience methods (Winn & Dykes, 2019).

Education in Business Ethics—Business Standpoint

The demands for ethical behavior are stronger than ever because many businesses are powerful entities bearing responsibilities once considered the domain of the governments (Nunes-Barbosa, 2016). Enron executive Fastow stated that, in the past, even business schools were not teaching ethics; the topic of business ethics was not even mentioned (as cited in Seijts, 2016). Business entities blame educational institutions for the unscrupulous behavior of their graduates and see instruction in business ethics as an instrument for cultivating students' ethical awareness (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015). The substantial record of corporate wrongdoing instigated an evident lack of public trust in the effectiveness of education (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2017). Still, the existing research identified practical implications of leadership training programs as a viable means to inform and advise leaders and supervisors about the harmful consequences of abusive supervision (Chen & Liu, 2019).

Business entities highly value education on the subject of business ethics. Managers want to implement continued workplace training in ethics, which does not stop after graduation (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015). The business world wants to maintain a closer partnership with schools. Business schools have a substantial impact on the cultural and ethical norms of the business community and, consequently, the entire society (Rivera, 2019). Managers believe in

business ethics education designed to develop ethical values transferable to the personal and professional code of conduct, including understanding the concept of ethical dilemma and students' exposure to real-world issues (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015).

Meanwhile, in the environments already contaminated by toxic behavior, organizations readily adjust the policies and organizational culture to support virulent behavior (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). Although a broad consensus recognized toxic leaders as a destructive force affecting the entire organization, their detrimental conduct is often tolerated because of the ability to correct ineffective teams or resolve the issues of an incompatible culture (Özer et al., 2017). The business world suffers from a lack of consideration for the human side of business conduct. Humanistic management principles have to be part of the management education programs and education in business ethics (Rivera, 2019). Employees' ethical standards substantially affect individual performance and inclination to demonstrate a positive or negative approach and conduct. Ethical leaders tend to nurture ethical group norms characterized by recognizable moral values and, accordingly, pursue ethical behavior and avoid unethical behavior (Kao & Cheng, 2017).

Senior managers have to acknowledge the issue of toxicity and address the problem through sustained action and organizational culture based on an ethical view of the workplace (Stoten, 2015). Only one toxic leader in an organization can damage and bring down an entire organizational culture (Singh et al., 2017). Toxic leaders tend to shift employee efforts from efficient performance to self-protection and survival mode (Hitchcock, 2015). The organizations have to articulate checks and balances to identify toxic behavior and develop viable contingency plans for immediate action.

While many studies described the adverse effects of the dark-side traits, some researchers recognized that these dark-side traits could have bright-side consequences. Particular dysfunctional personality styles may be related to effective leadership behaviors and outcomes (Singh et al., 2017). Still, due to the high visibility, frequency, and gravity of corporate scandals, business entities, legislation, and the public expressed a demand for increased and improved teaching of business ethics to students enrolled in collegiate business programs (Flynn & Buchan, 2016). The existing body of research supported the necessity of business students' ethical development; instruction in ethics has the workable potential to increase the level of moral reasoning in business students and future business professionals (Flynn & Buchan, 2016).

Research identified multiple links between toxic behaviors and adverse effects on mental and physical health, increasing the burden on the healthcare system, and adversely affecting job satisfaction, individual and collective performance, employee turnover, and the development of an organizational culture capable of tolerating other inappropriate behaviors (Bartlett, 2017; Hitchcock, 2015; Williams, 2017). The toxic workplace contamination and damaging effects impact the victims of toxic behavior, bystanders, and family members (Chen & Liu, 2019; Williams, 2017). Still, organizational leaders might be willing to tolerate toxic behavior because of the status, professional benefits, or the toxic person's short-term (real or perceived) productivity and importance (Williams, 2017).

Toxic protectors in the ranks of senior leadership are often afraid of toxic leaders. The decision-makers with the actual power to prevent harassment and violations frequently practice a refined form of quid pro quo, failing to protect an organization from the high cost of toxicity (Williams, 2017). Ethical leaders recognized the importance of creating organizational policies,

procedures, and processes with the potential to increase the probability of ethical conduct and the prevention of a toxic workplace. The critical element in the process is education designed to encourage moral development (Howell & Avolio, 1992). Education in business ethics and ethics theory can play an essential role in developing the capacity to make informed, independent conclusions about the ethical consequences of business practice (Fryer, 2016).

Gap and Overview of the Problem

While the existing body of research explored the phenomenon of toxic leadership and numerous aspects of business ethics education, the possibility of the potential connection was still an under-researched area. A number of contemporary scholars recognized the need to explore possible relationships between education in business ethics and responsible management (Gottardello & Pàmies, 2019). However, the in-depth literature review did not identify any empirical studies or peer-reviewed scholarly articles to establish a connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of the toxic workplace. While the research about education in business ethics related to business schools, the military, medicine, law, or science schools reached high visibility, workplace toxicity has a much broader scope. The lack of interest in research on toxic leadership and prevention of a toxic workplace stems from the reluctance of leading scholars to examine and recognize dark leadership traits and the destructiveness of the hostile outcomes (Howell & Avolio, 1992). This study explored the gap in the scholarly literature regarding the perception of a potential link between the lack of education in business ethics and the incidence of toxic leadership. Selected participants were familiar with both concepts: toxic leadership and education in business ethics.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative phenomenological research explored the problem of a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. Chapter 2 included the literature research strategy, theoretical framework, and literature review divided into four sections: toxic leadership, toxic followership, the perception of education in business ethics from an academic standpoint, and the perception of business ethics education from a business perspective. The common denominator derived from diverse scholarly resources supported Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, which established the connection between unethical behavior and the lack of psychological maturity. Education in business ethics might shape a mature mindset capable of creating ethical safeguards and preventing the occurrence of a toxic workplace while helping in dealing with fear and anxiety, which made employees defenseless against toxic leaders (Özer et al., 2017).

This study was necessary because the damaging effects of a toxic workplace that affects people's mental and physical health, creativity, career, and overall well-being by causing stress, depression, sleep deprivation, and emotional exhaustion might be preventable (Han et al., 2017). Toxic leaders create a hostile, harmful, and dysfunctional environment with a detrimental impact on people's professional and personal lives. Toxic leadership cost organizations billions of dollars worldwide in disability claims and lost productivity (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Education in business ethics has a viable potential to facilitate positive business practices that can reduce exploitation and abuse (Shete, 2017). Business schools ought to be responsible for and sensible about the human side of the business, bringing attention to ethics, diversity, and personal well-being (Rivera, 2019).

The next chapter introduced the research problem and research questions, described a detailed overview of the research design and rationale, and defined the researcher's role. The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research method to explore the lived experiences related to toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, and the personal perception of business ethics education. Research procedures included an overview of the population and sample selection, as well as an approach to instrumentation, data collection, and data preparation. The narrative on data analysis was followed by reliability and validity. The research process met the applicable terms of ethical standards.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research has identified links between toxic behaviors and adverse effects on mental and physical health, employee turnover, and the creation of an organizational culture tolerating other inappropriate behaviors (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007; Box, 2012; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). Toxic leadership creates a toxic workplace characterized by job stress and underlying psychological symptoms (emotional and mental problems, despair, sensitivity, suicide, and mental illness), physical symptoms (increased heart rate and blood pressure, heart diseases, digestive disorders, headaches), and behavioral symptoms (absenteeism, alcohol use, drug or tobacco use; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The problem of toxic leadership was significant because a toxic workplace causes depression, anxiety, conflict, low morale, and reduced productivity (Williams, 2017). The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the individual lived experiences of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany?

Research Question 2: What is the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

An outline of the research methodology included strategies to establish reliability and validity, the research design and rationale, and the role of the researcher. Introducing the process of collection, organization, coding, and classification of the data continued by providing the

means of data analysis, presentation, and display. The research questions were followed by the research procedures, including the selection of the population and sample. A detailed description of the research instrument was provided in the instrumentation section, which included semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. The further discussion addressed the ethical procedures and summarized the content of Chapter 3. The summary also included a brief preview of Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study because of the depth and potential to identify shared meanings. A qualitative phenomenology research design provided methods for exploring the subjective meanings individuals attribute to a problem or phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). The rationale for choosing a qualitative phenomenological design stemmed from the need to describe experiences related to toxic leadership, a toxic workplace, and the personal perception of education in business ethics. Phenomenology is not an ordinary collection of accounts; the concept emphasizes subjectivity, seeks to reveal the essence of the individual experience, and requires an intellectual commitment to the interpretation (Qutoshi, 2018). The primary objective of phenomenology is an in-depth understanding of the wholeness of the lived experience rather than making conclusions of distinct aspects (Qutoshi, 2018). The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, described the phenomenology concept as a science of understanding human beings by "gazing" at the phenomenon (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 215). Husserl's followers used his model as the groundwork while enriching the concept and developing new independent theories (Miron, 2016).

The nature of the qualitative research design is holistic. The qualitative analysis explores various perspectives and tries to understand the whole meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). Qualitative phenomenological research necessitates the initial introduction and descriptive explanation of the studied phenomenon to the participant (McLeod, 2012). The multilayered meanings driving the exploration of the complexity embedded in the research problem need a comprehensive and structured investigation (Creswell, 2017). To establish the required standards, the Duquesne school of empirical phenomenology codified and systematized the phenomenological research method because the process of clarifying the essence of the phenomenon under study needed a replicable structure (McLeod, 2012).

The Duquesne school created the following protocols used in this research: (a) collecting verbal or written narratives of experience, (b) reading accounts describing the lived experience to get the sense of the whole, (c) extracting essential statements, (d) eliminating irrelevant repetitions, (e) identifying the central themes/meanings, and (f) integrating these meanings into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (McLeod, 2012). The lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace has a deep emotional background (Fuller, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Kendrick, 2018; Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Developing an empathic and patient approach helped explore the narratives (Kendrick, 2018; McLeod, 2012).

Quantitative research methods were not a suitable choice for the exploration of the research problem. The study did not attempt to test theories or examine relationships between variables (Creswell, 2017). The lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace cannot be quantified and measured in the terms used in quantitative research designs. While qualitative research design used a narrative approach, quantitative research followed a more

paradigmatic/causal model (McLeod, 2012). The primary objective of the phenomenological study was to explore a human lived experience with an emphasis on subjectivity, not on quantifying the narrative (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

The observer-participant who conducted the study was the primary instrument of data collection. The observer-participant's role offered a high degree of involvement and provided better opportunities for reaching a profound understanding of the phenomenon and context under study (Takyi, 2015). Phenomenology primarily operates with unstructured data subjected to continuous fine-tuning and interpretation later on; the main concern is avoiding bias by bracketing out previous experience. The researcher's prior experience of working under toxic leadership had the potential to bring bias to the study and shape the way of understanding and interpreting the data. Bracketing brought objectivity to the collecting, analyzing, and interpreting process and reduced potential bias with the potential to affect the course of the research (Creswell, 2017).

Documenting personal reflections helped with the early identification of possible effects on the research observations because self-reflection has a viable potential to help with creating a transparent and authentic narrative (Creswell, 2017). The existing body of research highlighted certain risks arising from the context of personal relationships with participants because the awareness of the participants' narratives' contextual dimensions may be of concern in future research (M. Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). The study did not include any conflict of interest, the context of direct superior–subordinate professional relationships, or the use of incentives.

Research Procedures

The qualitative phenomenological research design included collecting data through the exploration of scholarly literature and conducting interviews. The research procedures focused on the reflective richness of the data (toxic workplace experiences), findings which might create a possible connection (address the gap in research), and potential grounds for promising remedial action (mandatory education in the business ethics curriculum). Data triangulation was established by using various data sources and providing an abundant amount of information leading to greater credibility of the research (Bansal et al., 2018). The phenomenological design provided the appropriate instruments required for the analysis. All participants shared the details of the lived experience in response to the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Specific themes and patterns were subjected to the interpretative process seeking possible connection with the viable solution, which would prevent, resolve, or eliminate the research problem (Creswell, 2017).

The first step in the research process included exploring the existing body of knowledge and identifying emerging themes. Sending invitations and collecting informed consent forms were followed by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data analysis started with organizing all collected data and reading narratives, followed by breaking down and coding the data. Comparing and contrasting the accounts of lived experiences and searching for broader patterns helped with the interpretation and creation of a new narrative. The analysis of the research findings was followed by introducing limitations, discussion, conclusions, and proposals for future research (Wise, 2017). The applied concepts were transparent, credible, systematic, and partially reproducible.

Population and Sample Selection

While 61% of employees suffer from stress caused by a toxic workplace (Pfeiffer, 2018), and the problem is widespread, the study involved only 18 purposively selected participants: Americans living in the United States and Germany. The research was conducted by using a snowball sampling method where the purposively selected participants were asked to recommend potential candidates (associates, friends, or family) suitable and interested in participating in the research (Emmerson, 2015). The suitability of the purposively selected candidates was based on the nature and extent of the toxic workplace experience. All participants had a significant history of immersion and knowledge gained from lived experience related to the topic of research, which created the suitability to provide a valuable perspective.

The participation criteria included selected individuals of both genders; a variety of races, national origins, and lifestyles; different generational cohorts (baby boomers, Gen X, and millennials); various levels of education (high school, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral degree); and experience in diverse workplace settings (business, academia, military, government, health care, and governance) located in the United States and Germany. Participants living in Germany were selected from civilians providing services for the U.S. military communities.

Preliminary contacts with the prospective participants were conducted via Facebook, e-mail, or Skype. Potential candidates were briefly informed about the topic of research, expectations, and confidentiality procedures (Appendix E). All participants learned about the process of signing the informed consent, received the promise of secured privacy, and were assured the research would not involve any form of deception (Bryman, Bell, & Harley, 2019).

Once the final selection of participants was completed, every participant received a letter of

informed consent containing an acknowledgment of human rights protection (Appendix A). All

participants were informed about the ethical considerations and standards, including principles of

honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, and respect for intellectual property,

confidentiality, non-discrimination, competence, and legality (Resnik, 2015). Participants learned

about the protection of human subjects in research, which includes respect for persons,

beneficence, and justice (Resnik, 2015).

After the potential candidates agreed to participate in the research and signed the letter of

consent, the next step was to confirm the arrangements and determine the best date, time, and

channel/location for conducting the formal interview (Appendix F). The time allotted for each

interview was 60 minutes. The nature of the study (phenomenological qualitative research

design), snowball sampling, and avenues for conducting interviews did not require any formal

letters of permission to use a research site because there was no specified research site.

The sampling strategy and rationale were used to gather the cross-section of lived

experiences, which took place at various workplaces, industries, and cultural environments,

purposively selected to highlight the research problem from different angles and analyze the

narratives revolving around toxic leadership, toxic workplace, perception of education in

business ethics, and possible relationships between them. The inclusion of participants with

diverse backgrounds, attributes, and unique perspectives reflected the variety and depth of the

lived experiences. The integration of the existing body of knowledge had the purpose of

assessing the magnitude of the research problem, emphasizing significance, and identifying gaps

in the research literature.

Instrumentation

The research employed two data collection instruments: (a) document analysis and (b) five open-ended, semi-structured interview questions and 12 follow-up interview questions (Appendix C) designed to clarify responses to the research inquiry. A selective review of the research literature revolved around the specific topic of the present research. The primary purpose of the selective review was to refine preliminary views regarding the topic of study, method, and data source (Yin, 2016). The interview questions were designed to answer the research questions.

The ideas and concepts for the interview questions came from the literature review (Appelbaum & Girard, 2007; Box, 2012; Comer & Schwartz, 2017; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Sigurjonsson et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2017; Stoten, 2015; Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Vveinhardt & Kuklytė, 2017; Williams, 2017). A new instrument was developed to support the specific research inquiry related to lived experiences of toxic leadership and perception of education in business ethics. All questions were psychometrically sound and formatted in a manner designed to satisfy the requirements of reliability and validity (Tsang, Royse, & Terkawi, 2017). The initial draft was refined by using five SMEs' reviews and feedback (Appendix D). The research data were collected using a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. The primary interview questions were combined with follow-up, more in-depth interview questions presented during the same interview session (Crossman, 2017).

The content validity and adequacy of the interview questions were established by seeking the assistance of SMEs with in-depth knowledge about the research (Appendix D). SMEs reviewed the initial draft and proposed modifications and improvements to the research questions

and interview questions. All questions in the final version are the result of the SMEs' feedback. While the data collection was conducted via in-depth semi-structured interviews, the exploration of the scholarly literature established triangulation with the purpose to ensure validity and reliability. Methodological triangulation included more than one method of data gathering; the inferences from diverse methods (literature review and interviews) did not differ, and validity is established (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

Data Collection

A simplified six-step research process involved data collection, attentive reading, extracting of all noteworthy statements, eliminating insignificant repetitions, identifying central themes or meanings, and integrating these meanings into a single description of the phenomenon (McLeod, 2012). The research involved 18 purposively selected participants (a snowball sampling procedure) with previous knowledge and experience of a toxic workplace. The participants belonged to different generational cohorts and a variety of races, national origins, and lifestyles, including various levels of education and experience in diverse workplace settings in the United States and Germany. In-depth semi-structured interviews extended by the exploration of scholarly literature were the avenue for data collection. Inclusion of the existing body of knowledge had the purpose of assessing the magnitude of the research problem, emphasizing significance, and identifying gaps in the research literature.

A review of the scholarly literature, organizing the information, and identifying emerging themes was the first step in the process. While the literature review provided a wealth of data and created the required theoretical framework, the interviews were the primary method of data collection because of the viable potential to uncover the essence, structure, and meaning of the

lived experience (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Given the researcher's involvement associated with the topic of research, bracketing (setting aside personal experience) was a critical step for opening up to a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2017). The process of bracketing (*epoche*) took place before engaging in the interviewing process.

Exploration of the researcher's personal experiences increased awareness of the existing prejudices and assumptions. Personal attitudes and beliefs were bracketed to avoid influencing the process and enable learning about the essence of the phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Bracketing ensured the avoidance of contaminating the research process, particularly when the narratives were emotionally charged (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Epoche was performed continuously throughout the research process to reduce feelings related to the phenomenon, which may influence the process of data collection, evaluation, interpretation, and reporting (Haskins et al., 2016).

The purpose of the interviews was to establish the context of the participants' experience, focus on the reconstruction of the details within the background, and ask the participants to reflect on the meaning associated with the individual experience (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using five open-ended interview questions and 12 follow-up questions (Appendix C). The effectiveness of the Skype system for qualitative data collection has been well documented (Quartiroli, Knight, Etzel, & Monaghan, 2017). Other online video conferencing platforms used for the interviews (WebEx and Zoom) have similar properties.

The participants confirmed the arrangements and determined the best date, time, and location for conducting the formal interview. The interview protocol (Appendix B) described the

interview process. All participants gave express permission before the process of recording took place (Yin, 2016). Interviews were recorded using two audio-recording devices. Two recording devices were used to ensure the successful conclusion of the interviews and prevent issues such as equipment malfunction, distorted recording, or other interferences (Bailey, 2008).

Journaling helped with the process of capturing the participants' exact words, body language, and expressions during the data collection process. Journaling allowed time for reflection and denoting patterns (Janesick, 1999). The journaling process included developing a detailed set of symbols for coding participants' mannerisms, such as pauses, pacing, intonations, and interruptions (Yin, 2016). Capturing the additional behavioral nuances by using the written notes enriched the process and supplemented the audio-recorded data.

Each interview was expected to last 60 minutes (or longer if the participant needed more time to share the individual lived experience). Active listening, recording, and analysis produced a narrative closest as possible to the participant's angle (Noon, 2018). All recorded interviews were transcribed, sent to respective participants for authorization, and analyzed. The process of research included a disclosure about the researcher's role and affiliations having the potential to affect the outcomes of the study (Yin, 2016). Skype, Zoom, WebEx, e-mail, and phone interviews required fewer resources, streamlined the data collection, and simplified the analysis. Because the research involved complete disclosure (no deception), debriefing and follow-up procedures were simple. All participants were thanked for taking the time to participate in the research and informed about receiving the findings from the study.

All names and personally identifiable information, including all references leading to the possible recognition of the participants' identities, were substituted with a unique participant ID.

Personally identifiable information, contact information roster, and consent forms are saved in a

password-protected folder (Folder A) and stored separately from all other data (interviews)

located in Folder B. The audio files are held in Folder B with the transcripts. A crosswalk

document, which contains the link between the two sections, is stored in a separate location

(Folder C) to ensure confidentiality (O'Toole, Feeney, Heard, & Naimpally, 2018). The material

stored in Folder A and Folder C will never be printed. All collected information will be

adequately safeguarded (two separate password-protected external drives) and securely

destroyed by formatting the external storage disc once the research data retention time is passed

(at least three years).

Data Preparation

Initial data preparation required organizing and transferring the interviews and field notes

to a form prepared for reading, analyzing, and obtaining a general sense of the gathered data

(Belotto, 2018). While the interview data were recorded via digital audio-recording devices,

additional comments were captured in written notes. The interviews were transcribed in a way

suitable to convey the participants' voice quality and rhythm by using indicators of intonation

patterns (McLeod, 2012). The audio files were converted to Microsoft Word files using Otter.ai

software.

Taking notes, writing comments in margins, and highlighting the essential information

while summarizing field notes took place in the initial stage preceding data analysis (Cypress,

2018). The preliminary reading and rereading (Lofgren, 2013) of all gathered data helped in

creating proper structure and alignment while making sure no essential data are forgotten or

misinterpreted. All narratives were compiled with related journal remarks and prepared for

further analysis. The participants' accounts were organized in a meaningful order, compared and contrasted for similarities and differences while identifying the main research themes and insights (Ezzy, 2002). All information not related to the research was removed from the transcribed files; e.g., transcriptions of the chat moments and interruptions were stored separately using Microsoft Word. The transcribed files were e-mailed to respective participants for authorization and comments.

Preset (deductive) codes were extracted from the existing research literature given the nature of deductive coding designed to take place before data collection. Deductive coding is usually used while researching the existing field; the process included creating a codebook during the process of researching scholarly literature before data collection even started. Inductive codes emerge from the data as repetitive themes (University of Oklahoma, 2017). Code is the smallest unit of text conveying the same meaning and can be a word or short phrase reflecting a relevant, essential, and meaningful aspect for broader data. Different forms of codes include tags, codes, categories, or themes. The coding process ensured the appropriate organization of the collected data and preparation for analysis and interpretation. All identified themes and subthemes were reviewed for emerging patterns and frequency, organized into groups, and analyzed (Yi, 2018).

Coding is a process of identifying and organizing themes in qualitative data; descriptive codes are category labels, and analytic codes are thematic and theoretical markers emerging from the analysis (Cope, 2009). The primary purpose of coding is data reduction, organization, and gaining control over large amounts of information. Coding enables and facilitates data exploration and analysis. The process of building a codebook and identifying relationships

between codes minimizes the overlap and refines the analytical potential of the coding structure (Cope, 2009). The data analysis included identifying codes, reducing the output to the overall themes and patterns, connecting categories contextually and analytically with the framework in literature, creating a point of view, and reporting the data using visual representations (Cypress, 2018). The qualitative data analysis involved the interpretation and reinstatement of meanings, including the process of reading, rereading, and examining words and phrases tapping into the participants' emotions and experiences (Ivey, 2013).

Data Analysis

Qualitative research provided a large amount of data necessitating a standardized process of analysis (Ivey, 2013). The main prerequisite for successful data analysis was an understanding of how to make sense of collected data and extract answers to research questions. The research process required fluency in preparing and organizing data, exploring and coding the database, defining findings and creating themes, presenting results, validating the accuracy of the findings, and interpreting the meanings (Creswell, 2017). Words and sentences with similar meanings were identified and labeled using a coding system (Belotto, 2018). Data analysis started with coding previously structured gathered information.

Coding involved labeling relevant transcript items (words, phrases, sentences, and sections) and recognizing codes essential for creating categories. The initial open coding was followed by axial coding designed to find relationships and connections among coded data. Bringing similar codes together, combining them, and creating the new codes was necessary to refine the themes. All nonimportant codes were dismissed, while the essential codes were combined into categories labeled and ranked for relevancy and interconnectedness.

The established categories and emerging connections were briefly described, while the process of ranking established a hierarchy and singled out critical categories. The basic questions considered during the coding process were (a) What are people trying to accomplish by providing information? (b) How do individuals do this? (c) How do participants understand what is going on and talk about development? (d) What assumptions are the individuals making? (e) What can be learned from the notes? (f) Why were the particular notes included? (g) Were there any surprising moments? and (h) What intriguing or disturbing moments can be emphasized? (Patel, 2014). The interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed drawing the essential concepts out of the interview data to identify common themes (Noon, 2018).

All research data were coded using NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis program, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel. The coding process took three cycles. Coding in the first cycle extracted words and sentences, followed by categorization and structuring. The second cycle assigned essence-capturing meanings by using descriptive codes to condense the primary topics (Saldaña, 2015). Searching for contrasts, comparisons, subcategories, and connections between codes took place in the third cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2015). The research findings and results were displayed in the form of text and tables. The analysis and interpretation of the data stemming from the existing framework of preselected themes established during the literature review and in-depth interviews provided the depth necessary for insight into the topic of exploration.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability in qualitative research showed consistency across different settings, dependability, confirmability, and ability to support the stability of the concept (Bryman et al.,

2019; Creswell, 2017). The concept of *validity* in qualitative research referred to the capacity of capturing or reflecting aspects of objective reality (McLeod, 2012). Validity in qualitative research came in the form of trustworthiness, authenticity, integrity, accuracy, transferability, and credibility (Creswell, 2017). The study employed reliability (dependability) and validity methods, including data triangulation, thick descriptions to convey findings, member checking, and self-reflection of the bias the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2017). The reliability of the instrument was tested by pursuing a review of the interview questions and feedback from five SMEs in the research field (Appendix D).

Data triangulation was ensured through the exploration of existing research (document analysis) and interviews. Data triangulation was the method of building confidence in the findings by employing more than one source of data in a study (Bryman et al., 2019). The process of member checking transpired during the authorization process, which included sending interview transcripts to respective participants for verification. Member checking integrated the participants' interpretations of the collected data to ensure a better understanding of the meaning of the lived experience communicated in the interview (Doyle, 2007). The research process included disclosure about the researcher's role, experiences, and affiliations with the potential to affect the outcomes of the study (Yin, 2016). Confirmability was established by ensuring reflexivity (maintaining a journal). The self-reflection reinforced creating a transparent and authentic narrative (Creswell, 2017).

Ethical Procedures

The research process met applicable terms of ethical standards, including principles of honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property,

confidentiality, respect for colleagues and participants, social responsibility, nondiscrimination, competence, legality, and human subject's protection (Resnik, 2015). *The Belmont Report* established three basic ethical principles in research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). The study did not do any harm while maximizing the possible benefits of reducing and eradicating toxic leadership and toxic workplace. The principle of justice required the fair and equitable treatment of all participants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). All participants gave consent freely and voluntarily, demonstrated the decisional capacity and ability to understand the process, received the information provided for making an informed decision, and understood the right to withdraw from the research.

The research did not include any vulnerable populations, e.g., minors, victims, pregnant women, or mentally incompetent participants (Creswell, 2017). The informed consent form signed by all participants provided detailed information about the research, including (a) identification of the researcher, (b) identification of the purpose of the study, (c) identification of participation benefits, (d) identification of the type and level of participant involvement, (e) notation of potential risks associated with the study, (f) a guarantee of confidentiality to the participant, (g) assurance the participant could withdraw at any time; and (h) other provisional factors reflecting the integrity and confidentiality of the process (Creswell, 2017).

Participants had the freedom to decide what to disclose about themselves and under which circumstances. Participants were informed about the course of the research with the purpose to understand how the personal data will be used and what will happen with the audio recordings and interview transcripts (Smith, 2003). The process of data management, storing,

and transmission was subjected to strict privacy requirements. The entire research process complied with the protection of the participants' anonymity. All collected personal information will be adequately safeguarded and securely destroyed once the data retention time is passed. The failure to protect identifiable information might result in serious personal, business-related, financial, or legal consequences (Walton, 2016). The research did not create any physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal risk to participants (Creswell, 2017).

Research integrity has prime importance in qualitative research (Yin, 2016). All ethically questionable conditions with the potential to affect the participants and the course of the study were avoided. Disclosing the researcher's role in the workplace and power differentials in professional affiliations created safeguards against any perceived conflict of interest. The research process was not subjected to any exceptions aimed at excluding the data not supporting the study propositions (Yin, 2016).

Chapter Summary

The qualitative phenomenological research explored the problem of the destructive impact of toxic behavior. The study was designed to examine lived experiences and issues of a toxic workplace, explore the perception of business ethics education, and possibly establish the relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The qualitative phenomenological research design was identified as the most suitable methodology because of the depth of exploration of the lived experience and the reflective nature of the participant narratives. The research data were collected by interviewing 18 purposively selected participants and using a snowball sample method. Interviews consisted of five semi-structured, open-ended questions, and 12 follow-up interview questions designed to clarify the details.

Chapter 3 included a description of the researcher's role, introduced the process of collection, organization, coding, and classification of the data, outlined strategies for securing the trustworthiness of the research and addressed the ethical framework of the study. Chapter 4 included detailed information about the data analysis process and findings based on the material gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed with a focus on subjectivity (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis used phenomenological reduction (bracketing, horizonalizing, organizing themes, and creating the textural description) designed to reflect the meaning and essence of the experience (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

The phenomenon of toxic leadership created a toxic workplace characterized by stress, depression, anger, conflict, low morale, and reduced productivity (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). Toxic behaviors with destructive effects on mental and physical health frequently caused employee turnover and generated a corrupt organizational culture with leaders enabling other unethical practices (Williams, 2017). The cost of toxic leadership in lost productivity amounted to billions of dollars (Winn & Dykes, 2019). The growing body of research supported the observation about toxicity as a common side-effect of contemporary organizational culture (Stoten, 2015). The predicament of toxic leadership and toxic workplace intersects many industries (e.g., military, politics, business, education, health care), which reinforced the call for further research because the detrimental consequences of a toxic workplace might be preventable.

The problem was a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. While the increasing occurrence of toxic leadership prompted additional research, the possible connection between broader education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace was not adequately explored. The study identified a gap in the existing research and aimed to establish a link between the rise of toxic leadership and the lack of education in business ethics. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore lived experiences, issues, and meanings of a toxic workplace and the possible perceived relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership.

The research comprised the narratives describing the lived experience of a toxic workplace, identifying common themes and relationships, and exploring the prospective context of the preventive and corrective action (business ethics education). The major sections designed to present the process of data collection and analysis started with the account of the initial step: a public invitation for research participants. The clarification of the circumstances related to the feedback and collection of informed consent forms (Appendix A) was followed by a brief review of the response rate and introduction of the final selection of participants. The narrative on the duration and locations of data collection included the deviations from the initial plan and described a couple of unusual situations encountered in the process.

The section designed to introduce results opened with arranging the structure of significant findings, identifying themes, articulating subthemes, and presenting highlights and distinguishable moments of lived experience. The interpretation of collected data and the following inferences were supported by meaningful quotes extracted from the participants' narratives. The study results were organized by interview questions and themes.

Research findings supported the conclusions and answered the research questions. The presentation of tables and figures illustrated demographics, data collection channels, research results, prevailing trends, and general outcomes. The research credibility and dependability were established through the process of triangulation and member checks. A description of consistency strategies followed the narrative of reducing and eliminating bias. The summary included a brief review of the next stage of the research. The problem of toxic leadership was significant because a toxic workplace causes depression, anxiety, conflict, low morale, and reduced productivity (Williams, 2017). The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the individual lived experiences of toxic leadership and a

toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany?

Research Question 2: What is the perception of Americans living in the United States and

Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics

and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

Data Collection

The data collection plan was created in April 2020. The first step involved producing a

research participant invitation (Appendix E) and posting the call on Facebook groups with high

visibility in the United States and American communities in Germany. The invitation was sent by

e-mail to the individuals who already agreed to be participants. The follow-up e-mail to the

individuals who responded and agreed to be participants provided additional information about

the interview and an informed consent form in the attachment. All signed informed consent

forms were collected from April 5 through April 12, 2020. The participants were asked to

determine the best date, time, and channel (e.g., Skype, WebEx, Zoom, phone) for conducting

the interview.

The qualitative phenomenological research design, snowball sampling, and remote

communication channels for conducting interviews did not require any formal letters of

permission to use a research site because there was no specified research site. An Excel

spreadsheet was designed for maintenance of the participant information, status of the data

collection process, notes (Appendix F), and graphic representations (Appendix G). All updates

regarding the data collection progress were reported to the dissertation chair, including

submission of the incoming informed consent forms and updated Excel spreadsheet.

The initial conversations involved 27 individuals who expressed a desire to participate by responding to the invitation and initiating a chat via Facebook Messenger. After the initial dialogue, three prospective participants did not provide an e-mail address by the due date, which prevented further participation. Six potential participants who responded did not submit a signed informed consent form by the due date. One potential participant eventually did not feel confident to talk about her experience and withdrew from the process. Another was willing to participate but reacted too late, and one had no means to sign the electronic informed consent form. One participant sent only demographics and a brief narrative via Facebook (but no signed informed consent form), and two never continued the initial conversation.

While the research sample was supposed to include 17 participants, as outlined in the proposal, participation was eventually approved for one more individual who entered the research process via snowball sampling. The snowball sampling technique, which sourced additional participants based on referrals from the original sample, generated four interested participants. The interviewing process included the final selection of 18 participants.

Participant Demographics

The target population involved participants with previous knowledge and personal experience of a toxic workplace, Americans belonging to different generational cohorts, genders, races, national origins, sociocultural environments, levels of education, personal experiences, and professional ranks (Appendix G). The participants who work (or worked) in workplace environments in the United States and Germany (civilians providing services for American military communities in Germany) came from diverse academic, business, military, healthcare, and governance professional backgrounds (Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Profession/role	Location
1	M	48	Master's	Assistant director	Germany
2	M	38	Master's	Academic dean	Illinois
3	M	35	Master's	Contractor	Georgia
4	F	31	Master's	Administrator	Texas
5	M	44	Bachelor's	Assistant director	Germany
6	F	51	Doctorate	Faculty	Florida
7	F	49	Doctorate	Administrator	Indiana
8	F	48	Master's	Academic dean	Illinois
9	F	48	Master's	Manager	Germany
10	M	46	Master's	Program manager	Germany
11	F	34	Master's	Operations manager	Massachusetts
12	F	40	Doctorate	Project manager	Georgia
13	M	52	Associate's	HR manager	Alabama
14	F	68	Bachelor's	Retired	Germany
15	F	35	High school	Nurse	Germany
16	F	53	Master's	Nursing	Illinois
17	M	52	Master's	Faculty	Idaho
18	F	51	Master's	Project manager	California

The rationale for the purposeful selection of participants with diverse backgrounds, attributes, and unique perspectives created a framework capable of highlighting the research problem from different angles. Participants' narratives reflected the variety and depth of the lived experiences on the topic of toxic leadership and toxic workplace, which created a viable context for discussion on the subject and role of education in business ethics. The integration of new research with the existing body of knowledge supported the purpose of the study, assessed the magnitude and significance of the research problem, and identified gaps in the research literature.

Interviews

All of the interviews took place from April 8 to April 13, 2020. The interviews lasted 20 to 65 minutes. Every interview was prepared and conducted with the necessity of bracketing (setting aside personal experience) in mind. All participants provided permission for the conversation to be recorded. The interviews consisted of five semi-structured, open-ended questions. Some of the additional and follow-up interview questions designed to clarify the provided information were used as well.

The interviews established the rich context of the participants' lived experience, revolving around reflections, meanings, and the entirety of the context (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The practice of journaling facilitated the process of capturing the participants' trigger words, pauses, intonations, recognizable emotions, body language, nonverbal cues, denoting patterns, and common themes during the data collection process. The means of conducting the interview were selected by the participant and included e-mail (one interview), phone (five

interviews), and online video conferencing platforms Skype (six interviews), WebEx (two interviews), and Zoom (four interviews).

Upon completion of the interviews, participants were thanked for participating. Every participant was informed about receiving a transcript of the conversation via e-mail for final review and endorsement. The research involved complete disclosure (no deception), making debriefing and follow-up procedures brief and simple. All participants were thanked once again for taking the time to participate in the research. The findings from the study were disseminated to all participants.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded with two Sony recording devices with a retractable USB stick for the convenient and immediate transfer of data to the secured location and password-protected storage (vault). All names and references leading to the recognition of the participants' identities were substituted by a unique participant ID. The personal information, contact roster, and informed consent forms were saved in the password-protected Drive A, stored separately from all other data (interview audio files and transcripts) located in the password-protected Drive B. A crosswalk spreadsheet with the information containing a link between two sections was stored in a separate location: password-protected Drive C. The information stored on the password-protected drives will never be printed.

All collected information is safeguarded on three different password-protected external drives and will be securely destroyed by formatting the external storage once the retention time of the research data has passed (at least three years). All audio recordings were labeled Participant 1 to Participant 18. The audio files were supposed to be converted to Microsoft Word

files using FTW Transcriber, but the software did not work as advertised. Transcribing was processed using Otter.ai software, which did not provide sufficient accuracy in the output. All interviews were additionally transcribed manually. The transcribed files were cleaned of all information not related to the research. Chat moments not directly related to the interview questions were removed and saved in a separate Microsoft Word document. Transcripts were stored in the Otter.ai format and Microsoft Word with the corresponding audio files.

Initial data preparation included organizing and moving the interview records and journal notes to a form suitable for reading and highlighting the essential points. Preset (deductive) codes were extracted from the existing research literature before data collection began. The preliminary Excel codebook was created after the completion of the literature review. The primary purpose of coding is data reduction, organization, and gaining control over large amounts of information. The data analysis started with reading the interview transcripts and journal notes, highlighting the emerging patterns, and color-coding all the significant parts of the narratives. The purpose of the second reading was to identify the discrepant cases and analyze the underlying context of all accounts in general. Comparing and contrasting the accounts of lived experiences and searching for the common denominators helped with the interpretation of the existing narrative and creation of a new narrative. All identified themes and subthemes reviewed for emerging broader patterns and frequency were arranged into sets and analyzed in a structured context more suitable for the interpretation of meanings (Yi, 2018).

The imported transcripts and journal notes were coded using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 Pro. The procedure of data coding started with highlighting selected segments of the text and moving the information to thematic-constructed nodes. The interview questions

were entered into the Excel spreadsheets, and responses were thematically analyzed to identify

connections and repetitions. All matches were clustered together and classified as primary

themes and subthemes. The interview references with annotations were transferred to Microsoft

Word.

Results

Data analysis generated a structure of five primary themes and 20 subthemes aligned with

the central research questions and a previous review of the existing research literature.

Descriptive narratives of a toxic workplace (6 subthemes) captured a variety of common

elements, while feelings and experience of a toxic workplace (5 subthemes) aligned with the

concepts introduced in the literature review. The perception of education in business ethics (3

subthemes) was well explained because most participants have a proper education and a clear

understanding of the concept. The exploration of the theme related to mandatory education in

business ethics in all higher education institutions (3 subthemes) produced the additional

proposals describing the need for continued education in ethics beginning in early childhood.

Five participants envisioned education in business ethics as an annual workplace training.

Elaborating on the possible connection between education in business ethics and toxic workplace

produced mixed results with the prevailing belief, which reflected a possible connection, but

only under particular circumstances related to personal traits and position of power.

The study applied phenomenological analysis of qualitative data. Data collection yielded

results with partially related information and many intersecting points. Developing patterns

within the context of the central research questions flowed naturally. Data collection was

followed by reading the interview transcripts to get a sense of the information. The repeated

detailed reading provided the opportunity to cross-reference the information with the journal notes. Coding and code validation continued by defining themes and consolidating data into a variety of subthemes. The frequency of the primary themes spanned from 10% to 36% (Appendix H). The following overview includes the interpretation and synthesis of the participants' narratives and direct quotations extracted from the participant dialogues.

Theme 1: Toxic Workplace

A toxic workplace was perceived as an environment shaped by a toxic leader and toxic followers. Besides the presence of a toxic leader, the most visible attributes of a toxic workplace included malicious micromanagement, workplace injustice, targeted and intentional work overload, control issues, harassment, intimidation, yelling, bullying, humiliation, racism, sexual harassment, and lost productivity. A toxic workplace is a setting characterized by the decline of a professional standard where the breakdown of discipline, anger, lack of ethical behavior, lack of trust, divisiveness, retaliation, fear, and injustice flourishes. As several participants noted, and one participant explicitly emphasized, the core deterrent to resolving the problem of a toxic workplace is senior leadership's lack of courage and determination to remove the toxic leader, which stems from fear and the prospect of lawsuits. The participant stated,

> The toxic workplace is when the leadership sees problems but does not fix them out of fear of being sued by the [toxic] individual who should be corrected. I think you always will have a toxic environment. You can hope maybe to try to keep as low as possible, but there will always be one or two or three toxic individuals. The only way you can really stop it is by letting them go, I mean, removing them from your workforce. That is the only way you can [resolve the problem], in my opinion. A toxic person will not change.

The only way ...… let them go, and many [organizations] will not do that because they

fear repercussions and being sued. So that's why it is still tolerated and not dealt with.

Subtheme 1: Presence of a toxic leader. The frequently shared narrative depicted toxic

leaders as "blatantly open about their toxic behavior," as one participant described. The

participant perceived a toxic leader as "someone who berates, bullies, or intimidates employees,

discourages interactions between coworkers, discourages professional development, and

retaliates against those who disagree with their ideas." As one participant noted, the ultimate

irony transpires when toxic leaders play the role of the mentor: "And I still shake my head

because this person is out there training other people to be leaders. And she is a terrible, terrible

boss." Some toxic leaders build a supporting base of followers by granting favors, as described

by one of the participants:

Everybody has always come to her when they're in trouble. And if she likes you, she's

been making it [the trouble] go away. So, business ethics is out of the door. Because if

she's doing it, [people presume] "I can do it because she's going to take care of me." Her

networks, her inner crowd, inner circle. So, they do things that they shouldn't do, but they

trust that she's going to take care of them.

The accounts shared by five participants described cases of calculated targeting using real

or perceived weaknesses as a driving force behind creating hostile situations. One participant

described the workplace contaminated by aggression as a "space where people do not want to

collaborate and work towards a common goal." Narratives reflected the difference between

impulsive and deliberate abuse. Premeditated toxic targeting created a feeling of inferiority; the

participants felt humiliated and disrespected. Another participant described the feeling of fear and helplessness:

> "Today we're going to focus only on what you're doing wrong." Yeah, that was basically every time they [toxic leaders] walked in. Every time we heard the corporate was coming in, people were bending. They were just waiting for the hammer to fall.

Subtheme 2: Presence of toxic followers and yes-people. A toxic workplace could emerge without the presence of toxic leaders. Organizational Healleaders could be "only" the enablers willing to tolerate toxic individuals, but "that kind of a person would probably be a toxic leader by default because allowing something like this to happen is just as harmful." The presence of only a few toxic followers can disrupt the workplace to the point where employees sometimes become the worst enemies to each other just to survive the toxic organizational culture and avoid being targets:

> It wasn't just me. It was everybody. It was about everybody. And to me, it was a toxic work environment because we were all victims… It didn't matter who you were, how long you been married. If you were fat, skinny, short, tall, it didn't matter. Everybody was equally a victim of all of this. And when you try to step away, as I did, and say, "I am not going to be part of this, I'm going to pull myself out and you guys do what you do," then I became the outcast because I didn't want to participate in all of that.

One of the participants with substantial experience on the subject of a toxic workplace stated just one toxic and smart individual with a strong personality has the power to damage an entire healthy work environment beyond repair. Proper monitoring and action should take place at all times: "Three strikes, and you're [toxic person] out. Get them out fast. I like what Zig

Ziglar said: 'Hire slow and fire fast.'" The recurring problem with toxic followers is persistence

and skill in finding a fast track to be promoted, as suggested by one of the participants:

> Those that follow suit with toxic behavior, they get elevated, and then eventually they're
>
> the next person to step into a leadership role. And I have seen organizations where the
>
> toxicity starts from the top, all the way down to all members of leadership. And it's really
>
> because they recognize that same toxicity.

Once toxic followers take over the organizational culture, resolving the problem is

difficult. Toxic individuals are making sure to maintain the status quo. The participant described

the network created to sustain and protect the toxic leader and toxic followers, where "they [toxic

followers] force their toxic behavior on their peers or their subordinates and leave you without

any real backup." Another participant described a particular subset of toxic followers as

individuals without competence but loyal to the toxic leader, who "keeps rising in responsibility

level. And then that leader keeps hiring basically their friends and people that are in their clique."

One participant illustrated a scenario of the pack mentality, where the followers receive from the

leader full autonomy to bully and harass, building overall workplace toxicity in the process:

> So, when they see that leader is picking on a person, the peers start picking on that
>
> individual, too. You can find it most prevalent when you include the topic of race in it. It
>
> is a two-way street. It has nothing to do that one group [race] is making the ownership of
>
> being toxic. It goes both ways.

Subtheme 3: Toxic behavior. Various aspects of a toxic workplace include a broad array

of hostile behaviors, often with aggressive overtones—micromanagement, work overload,

control issues, intimidation, yelling, bullying, and lost productivity. Sometimes the problem of

toxicity, which is not adequately sanctioned by the senior leadership, emerges when individuals come forward with open aggression toward coworkers. Amplifiers of toxic behavior (Figure 3) are the circumstances with the potential to create an additional emotional charge (Table 2) and escalate the situation to the point of explosion (short term) or creating a new norm where abrasive and humiliating interactions become a way of living (long term).

Table 2

Amplifiers of Toxic Behavior

Amplifier of toxic behavior	Narrative
Race and gender	She had a very hateful tone, very condescending to me ...she would use profanity, she would scream at the top of her lungs. She would call me in her office and she would just tell me how bad of a job I was doing, all the things I was doing wrong… She would tell me how she has such bad experiences with first sergeants, and she didn't really like first sergeants. Our relationship just continued to degrade, to degrade, and to degrade.
Lack of [toxic leader] confidence	She'll call you in the office, and there she ...tear you up because you said something in a staff meeting.
Lack of [toxic person] competence	And he got really upset. He closed the door to our office ...and he said to me, "I don't like you, I don't respect you, I don't ever want to work with you, I don't want you to talk to me." ...I went to HR and I went to my boss, and they both told me that I should just ignore it and pretend like it didn't happen... I think they were absolutely afraid, they were. Someone said to me they were afraid he was going to sue for racial discrimination because he happened to be a Black man.
Gender and age	He started to yell at me. And I got up from a chair, headed to the door, and left the room. He followed me and raised his hand to hit me, but the colleague, coworker, jumped between us.

Lack of [toxic leader] confidence and education	We're all professionals. Especially if your team is made up of men and women who maybe have a higher education level than you [toxic leader], you cannot micromanage them like kids.
Sexual harassment	I was constantly being sexually harassed by my boss. And every time I said no, he gave me more work to do and to the point where I didn't want to say no anymore because I didn't want to keep dealing with the literally dirty work. And at the same time, I didn't want to say yes. And over time, it just made me angry, and until I could leave that job, I put up with it [increased workload].

Figure 3: Toxic Behavior Amplifiers.

Many toxic behavior amplifiers have an emotional background. Emotions can considerably affect the workplace dynamics and the communication process; consequently, the

effects and impact of emotional intelligence in the workplace have to be fully recognized. Emotional contagion is a natural phenomenon that occurs among people in a group, "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (Rempala, 2013, p. 1528). Organizational leaders have to understand the volatile nature of the emotional contagion and develop moral judgment and moral courage to prevent the adverse ripple effects of negative emotional contagion that facilitates the formation of a toxic workplace.

Many participants addressed the loss of productivity, which is a common attribute of toxic environments. The organization or departments do not stop operating, but dysfunction disrupts relationships, slows down production, and damages the operation in various visible and concealed aspects. While one of the participants stated, "It's almost like cancer," another suggested, "I think that if they have happy workers, they will have increased production. I don't understand why they don't see that." Many participants perceived the high financial and human cost of toxic leadership and its harmful impact on the bottom line should be a warning for all organizations: "I don't think the managers or owners and people who are in charge understand how bad toxic work environment is, or that they even have one. And it really does affect their bottom line."

Subtheme 4: Failure of HR and senior leadership to protect the victims. The organizations burdened by a toxic culture have a severe problem within: a failure of HR and senior leadership to protect the victims of toxic leadership. While the victims often voice concerns, the outcomes might be disappointing—unjust, calculated, and designed to protect the abuser under the premise of protecting the organization. Toxic individuals sometimes receive

only a verbal warning. The review of the participant narratives revealed the undesirable outcome:

Out of 18 cases, 14 victims of a toxic workplace experienced a lack of protection. In 13 cases,

the abusers were highly ranked leaders; some of the toxic leaders were promoted despite the

record of the misconduct. In three instances, HR and senior leadership did not dare to approach

the toxic individual at all based on the fear of personal retribution or substantial additional

damage to the organization. One participant stated,

> I was in a situation where I was being asked [by a toxic individual] to defend situations
>
> that had never happened. I actually had those meetings, with an HR representative in the
>
> same room. And I spoke to the HR person afterward one-on-one. And the response that I
>
> got from the HR person was, "I need to watch my own ass."

Following the proper channels to get the problem resolved in the organization often

made victims of a toxic workplace "feel helpless." While the manifestation of toxic leadership

mainly depends on the context, numerous narratives originating from the various work

environments had an unforeseen common denominator: Senior leadership and HR managers

failed to protect the victims of the workplace. The accounts of the similar experiences shared by

17 participants reflect the behavior described as cowardice, ignoring, negligence, the lack of

responsiveness, or intentional refusal of the senior leadership and HR departments (where

applicable) to make a sufficient effort in healing the toxic workplace by removing or correcting

the cause of toxicity. One participant stated,

> I see HR is complicit in all of this. I think it's a false sense that they're on our side. I
>
> think maybe in some cases they really are, but ...HR is getting paid by the institution. And
>
> ...at the end of the day, I think it's useless to go to HR.

Participants introduced examples where HR managers investigated the problem, but "that's all they did. It didn't go anywhere. And this particular leader, she was promoted. So, it made it difficult for others to go forward." According to the participant, people perceived seeking help from the HR department as too risky:

> When you go to HR and make a complaint, that [toxic] person is made aware of it, and then they know who did it. And it makes it worse for the person who puts the complaint in. So, there's the fear of retaliation. People are fearful.

Due to a lack of faith in HR departments and senior leadership, some participants decided to seek legal remedy, contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, union representatives, inspector general, or civil rights offices. In some cases, the participants experienced a severe financial loss in the process. Mobbing, which is a nonracial and nonsexual form of workplace toxicity, was difficult to document and prove due to the compartmentalized and elusive nature of the abuse. One participant stated,

> So, I think part of the problem and the way that our businesses operate is, they try to keep disgruntled people apart, right? So, if I go to HR, the first thing they do is try to remove every other person from the conversation as soon as possible so that they can address just my concerns. It's a way to diffuse, and I think that's what our HR departments do.

Subtheme 5: Adverse outcomes. The intimidating aspects of the toxic workplace often include hostile behaviors and adverse outcomes. Participants reported obstacles to a deserved and equitable promotion, direct or indirect retaliation, and termination. In some cases, the voluntary change of employment was the only chance to avoid the destructive aspects of exposure to a toxic workplace (Table 3).

Table 3

Adverse Outcomes of Toxic Workplace Developments

Adverse outcome	Narrative
Left employment	Because of that second example, I purposely left the hospital I was working in.
Changed the position	I start[ed] planning my way out of that toxic environment, whether that be a different role within the organization or a role outside of it.
Left the military	I had to send numerous requests to transfer out of the office. I left the military, there was a time for me to go, and I didn't want to risk dealing with that again.
Willing to decline promotion and retire	I have been promoted, and I was going to turn down my promotion and retire… I can't work in this environment anymore. Our relationship has degraded to the point it's just not working. I'm going to retire. I got 20 years [of employment]. I don't have to deal with this.
Termination of employment	And then I was not offered a position. I was not given a reason for my termination. I worked for the [organization] for a long time, and I had to sue them. I could not get promoted. I did work that was well above my paygrade. They would not promote me, and I sued them…I have already been financially drained in fighting the [organization] for EEO [equal employment opportunity], and then I was in that situation ...over 50% of the teachers left last year, through either being blindsided—like the other teacher who was going to be terminated without any explanation—or they just knew they had to move on.
Submitted complaint; possible departure from lucrative employment	So, it is your sanity. She needed, she felt she needed to file a complaint and [present] her proposed resolution. She wants to leave the organization and go to another one, as long as she doesn't have to work for this toxic leader anymore.
Left the military (loss of free health care and free education)	So, my clear answer to myself was, "Get out of here as soon as possible." And so, I left the military. Now that I'm older, I get angry because I realized there were resources out there

> available for me to use to put an end to this. And I could have stayed [in the military] and be retired by this point. I could have gone to school and had my school paid for by the military. There are so many other possibilities for how my life could have turned [out]. But instead, I was trying to get away from there as fast as possible. So, I just got out the first chance that I had.

One participant reflected on the circumstances where all employees were the voluntary agents of the toxic culture, perpetuating the problem out of fear: "It is not dark personality [at fault], it is really out of necessity, out of need, and out of fear." The behavior of the same people in a safe environment away from work was entirely different:

But everybody was afraid of losing their job. Everybody has something. Everyone was in the same boat: "Where am I going to go? I have two kids. My husband's out of work. I'm the main breadwinner. I'm the person that keeps us in this country [Germany]." ...And it was a matter of, "I hate it just as much as you do. But I can't afford to lose my job. I can't afford to not play the game."

Subtheme 6: Positive outcomes. Only three participants reported positive outcomes in dealing with toxic leadership, such as a short-term temporary improvement or removal of the toxic leader. In all cases, the leverage which helped the process to move forward was external interference: tangible financial damages as a direct consequence of harmful behavior or the voluntary and broader involvement of external power players:

I made a complaint ...I needed to stand up for myself. And I got to pull some of those guys up to my organization, and this one [toxic person] got fixed because of a lot of

higher level leadership guys, they did the same thing I did. We all went to IG [inspector

general], and the [toxic] guy was removed, he was sent out.

Financial consequences proved to be a good motivator for the change of toxic behavior. "And

until he [toxic leader] started hearing he was going to start losing money because of it, he didn't

change his actions. But once he heard he was going to lose money, he changed a little bit."

Theme 2: Feelings and Experience of Working in a Toxic Workplace

Theme 2 generated five rich subthemes exploring the inner world of a toxic workplace.

The average organizational culture frequently does not recognize the problem of toxicity in the

early stages. Toxic leaders and managers are often promoted based on a results-driven attitude. In

reality, toxic leaders' behavior caused an increased turnover, high absenteeism, and low

productivity due to feelings of despair, anger, low morale, poor communication, and depression

among employees.

Subtheme 1: Feelings. All narratives reflected anger, frustration, humiliation, despair,

anxiety, fear, disappointment, inferiority, helplessness, and uncertainty. Participants often

recollected feelings of bitterness and vulnerability. One participant admitted, "You have no say,

you have no power." Another participant reported high anxiety: "I was losing interest in things I

normally loved to do, and I felt sick in the pit of my stomach every day going to work."

Participants reflected on the experiences of toxic leadership and toxic workplaces in terms of

various levels of stress and depression. One participant described the destructive nature of

workplace toxicity, which made a deep and long-lasting cut:

You're always wrong, you're always angry. You start to feel really heavy, like life is just

very heavy. There was, like, a period of grief, a period of depression, and a period of

anger, and ...I think they're called the five stages of grief. And I did notice myself very

clearly going through all of these, where I spent several weeks just being angry for no

reason, several weeks, the bad several weeks feeling like I had no place, like I was

worthless, I had nothing to offer. I could literally feel my soul was dying, even though my

job was not. My job wasn't in any kind of danger that I was aware of. But I felt like my

soul was dying.

Victims of toxic leaders feel helpless, uncomfortable, disrespected, and underappreciated.

Feelings of despair, confusion, and burnout often are not recognized as the consequence of a

toxic environment. One participant recollected the mixed emotions: "I felt frustrated, sad. I felt

taken advantage of. I was very stressed all the time and unhappy. I was burnt out ...I was

definitely burnt out."

Subtheme 2: Self-doubt. Subtheme 2 explored feelings of insecurity. In several cases,

the victim of toxicity was portrayed by a toxic individual as the person at fault. Several

participants shared the same feeling as one participant who pondered, "Was it my fault? Have I

done something wrong to provoke the hostility?" One of the participants suggested being the

target of a toxic leader is not much different from being in an abusive relationship:

In the beginning, you feel like it is your fault, that maybe you did do something wrong.

And you scramble to try to pinpoint ...what it is that you want to or where you should fix

your actions. I think that in the earlier stages of my life, I felt like it was me. What did I

do wrong? But later on, when I was more confident ...it was very easy for me to see that

this was a very personal attack. And it had nothing to do with my level of competence

because my work itself was not ever really been questioned.

In addition to often being on the brink of emotional and physical exhaustion, several participants reported toxicity by focused targeting and providing conflicting information and selective training. The strategic toxicity was planned and executed with the intent to create specific and visible damage. One participant described the approach of a manipulative toxic leader:

> When someone is doing that [toxic behavior] for a long time to you, you start feeling you are really doing everything wrong. And you don't know what you're supposed to do. You don't know. So, you are receiving conflicting information, yet she's still keeping you accountable for the outcomes.

Another participant summarized the damaging effects of toxic leadership in terms of losing self-confidence: "It [toxic leadership] affected the quality of my work. It affected my relationships. It affected my trust in myself." The participant, with a strong internal locus of control, tried to reach a better understanding of the circumstances through self-evaluation:

> I was a super high-performing individual, number one ...and how could I go from that to just being horrible? And I really, really struggled with that: What am I doing that's not right? I guess I internalized it... What am I doing that's creating this problem in the relationship?

Subtheme 3: Threats and fear of losing a job. The practice of threatening an employee with job loss was a phenomenon frequently identified in the toxic workplace. One participant reflected on the circumstances of his experience while working in a workplace driven by toxic organizational culture and a toxic leader: "The understanding was, had the situation been reversed ...without a doubt, I would lose my job immediately. I would probably get death threats;

people would probably vandalize my car." Another participant described actual physical harm endured at the toxic workplace: "It was a hazardous place to work because it was not only about emotional safety; there was a physical safety component. And people would get worried ...and people were getting hurt."

One of the participants tried to rectify the effects of toxic behavior, only to be exposed to a direct threat: "She said simply, 'There's no room for you here. You don't fit.' And she said, '[U.S. state] is an at-will state, I don't have to give you a reason. You simply don't belong here anymore.'" One participant explained the core of fear to fight toxic leaders—people do not want to lose their jobs:

> People have no courage; this is a major piece of it; most people don't say anything. They are afraid for their jobs because they're only lower level. And they look at it like, "I need this job. So, I'm just going to sit back and take it."

One participant stated, "People don't want to rock the boat ...people are so afraid to talk to each other." Another participant summarized the disturbing reason prompting victims to endure toxicity and the risk to mental health: "The person working for a toxic leader is afraid to speak up out of fear of losing their job...'I can be dead right, but if I don't have a job, I can't feed my family.'" Another participant described, in similar terms, the vicious circle of quietly falling victim to a toxic individual:

> They're [victims] scared to lose their job. And they're not willing to say anything ...they are not capable of saying anything about it [toxic behavior]. So, the problems perpetuate because nobody knows that these problems exist in the first place. And nobody knows

that these problems exist because nobody's talking about it. Nobody's talking about it because they don't want to get in trouble, and the cycle goes on, and on, and on.

Subtheme 4: Fear or hatred of coming to work. Subtheme 4 explored the feeling of fear or loathing of coming to work and the constant wish to be somewhere else (Table 4). A few participants addressed the primary reasons for the avoidance of a toxic workplace. In addition to the apparent burden of broken relationships, people experienced actual difficulties in performing duties, feeling the constant fear of making mistakes, and gradually developing the habit of second-guessing everything. One participant reflected on the concerns of a toxic workplace and the feeling of reaching a breaking point:

> Especially if you're in a situation where you can't leave, where you need the money, when you need the job…The only way ...to find some sort of freedom ...was to get the courage to quit the job, to move away.

Table 4

Surrounding Issues of a Toxic Workplace

Feeling/state of mind	Narrative
Avoidance	And it just turned an environment into a very hostile place where someone just doesn't want to go ...while working in a toxic environment—no, you just don't want to go to work. You want to find every excuse to go and do something else.
	Currently, I'm in a situation with a toxic leader and a toxic follower ...you don't want to be in that environment, so you start to find excuses to not have to be put into that situation.
Anxiety	I lived for Fridays and loathed the thought of being at work.
Self-doubt and withdrawal	I really internalized a lot of it, but I noticed I really, really started to withdraw and did not engage like I should have.

| Fear and unease | Always being afraid of making a mistake, afraid of doing anything on my own accord, and feeling that I was being watched. Feeling that no matter what I did was wrong ...there was a constant fear, people on eggshells, people feeling very unsettled ...and so I just ...wanted to leave. |
| Unrest | Well, first of all, when you wake up in the morning, you don't want to go to work. So that's the beginning of the day. And when you get there, instead of your mission, you always wonder what's going to come at me today because I have to deal with these situations every day. I get to work and don't want to be here; I don't want to work for this guy, this woman, this person. |

Subtheme 5: Health and mental health issues. Subtheme 5 introduced narratives on health and mental health issues (depression, sadness, fear, insomnia, stress, headaches/migraines, PTSD, anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of confidence) taking place as a direct consequence of a toxic workplace. One participant described the feeling of being mentally and physically exhausted: "I used far more sick days in my year in four months of employment there than I had used in the four years prior while at another organization." Another participant experienced headaches, migraines, depression, and upsetting thoughts stemming from a recurring feeling of inferiority. One participant described a long-term ripple effect:

It was like posttraumatic stress disorder…When I left that place, it was like a burden lifted from my shoulders, like just a huge relief. When I went to my new job, I still had this stain of anxiety and fear.

Theme 3: Perception of Education in Business Ethics

Theme 3 employed three subthemes describing if education in business ethics matters. The concerns regarding the effect of circumstances (organizational culture), personal values, the

strength of character, and role of rank (possible abuse) played an important role in outlining the perception of education in business ethics. The lack of ethical values, abuse of power, and evident social disconnect between education and practice were perceived as the primary obstacles in establishing the value of education in business ethics.

Subtheme 1: Education in business ethics matters. Subtheme 1 established the notion of recognizing the significance of education in business ethics in higher education. One participant perceived education in business ethics as an essential asset not only for the reputation of a company but also for the individuals. Another participant remarked, "Ethics is one thing that's truly underrated and undervalued by many people until they're in a situation [of unethical behavior], and it is unfortunate." The participant recognized the ultimate value of education in business ethics in terms of providing critical information about the proper channels and avenues for assistance in cases of exposure to a toxic workplace.

Another participant perceived teaching in business ethics as a necessity for providing the appropriate background and frame of understanding to all leaders: "I think it's important to be aware of the existence of toxic leadership and toxic workplace. I don't think that people actually have a term for it." Many participants see education in business ethics as "very important," and some suggested implementation at all levels. A statement that stands out summarized the perception of education in business ethics: "It helps you to decide what's right and what's the wrong choice ...especially when you are a boss or supervisor; keep the integrity and respect the integrity of other people."

Subtheme 2: Education in business ethics does matter, but... Subtheme 2 outlined the evident value of education in business ethics, with one caveat: The actual behavior depends on

the given circumstances (organizational culture), personal values, integrity, strength of character, and rank. One participant did not see business ethics education as a necessary practice because some individuals will never treat people right and never make ethical decisions. The real value of education in business ethics remains developing the act of moral courage: "You can get all the education you want ...but you have to be willing to implement it and make changes," as outlined by one participant.

In terms of the value associated with education in business ethics, the personality type was the main reason for concern, as articulated by many participants; some people should never be allowed to be in a leadership position. One participant stated,

> I think the educational foundation is important. I think that folks need to be taught how to lead people, how to manage conflict, how to treat people as humans first. But I also think that's the theory side, but in practice, what I have seen play out, it really comes down to character, the character of the leader. I think, at the core, they practice based on who they are as a person, and who, what their morals are, and their integrity levels as a human.

Subtheme 3: Education in business ethics does not matter. Subtheme 3 generated data reflecting the premise that business ethics education does not matter because individual behavior depends on circumstances, personal values, character, and rank. One participant stated, "When it comes to how it [ethical behavior] impacts an organization within the workplace, it really gets missed. It's something that organizations have kind of worked into their handbook or their mission statements, but they never actually address it." Another participant highlighted the prevailing skeptical opinion of the majority that did not perceive education in business ethics as something "that we have identified as a necessity, as a trouble spot." Another participant

considered education in business ethics as something to be checked on a list. Everybody can have ethics class, but "you do not change people. People will be what they are." Another participant suggested,

> As long as the prevailing environment is not conducive to any action, education would not help really. It may be to make you aware, but in reality, I believe it will not be exercised because it is one thing to know what is right, but on the other hand, your survival instinct and your desire or your ambition to be successful will always prevail over the ethics, I believe.

Theme 4: Introducing Education in Business Ethics to All Higher Education Institutions

Theme 4 was supposed to address only mandatory education in business ethics offered to all higher education institutions (not only business schools, medical schools, or schools of law). Unexpectedly, the discussion generated three subthemes elaborating on various modalities of education in business ethics. Participants pointed out the necessity of continuous education in ethics, which should start in elementary school and continue throughout the entire course of education, including workplace training.

Subtheme 1: Education in business ethics should be established in all higher education institutions. Subtheme 1 generated opinions about education in business ethics being established in all higher education institutions. Despite some concerns regarding quantifiable benefits, participants envisioned business ethics education as a stand-alone course and requirement for all programs, "not just those programs preparing students for more corporate-style careers." Participants see education in business ethics as an essential foundation of a future career: "A lot of emphasis has been placed on diversity and inclusion. And I really think that

ethics should just be included. It should be diversity, ethics, and inclusion." Some participants

believed that empowering the education system by offering courses in business ethics would help

the future workforce to build a healthier work environment: "There's always going to be [the

thought] that education doesn't take, but I think ...if 50% of students walk away with the notion

that, maybe, when they're doing something [unethical], they might stop and question

themselves."

Subtheme 2: Education in ethics should be provided early. Subtheme 2 reflected the

notion of education in business ethics being provided much earlier in students' formative years.

Ethical values should be introduced and adopted in childhood or high school age. One participant

suggested,

> I would think any program should have ethics; it may not be called business ethics, right.
>
> And I would think that an ethics class should be part of ...what's called transferable skills.
>
> Students at the end of college have to have these skills ...that should be a predominant
>
> thing ...embedded through every class.

Education in business ethics needs to begin at the elementary school level. Children need

to know "what's right and wrong because, by the time we get them in college, they're pretty set

on what they think their ethics are. It's rather hard to get them to want to change." Another

participant would not call the education *business ethics* but rather something "more applicable to

life in general. And putting it into the curriculum that you learn before you're the age of 15 is

what we need."

The need for education in ethics was recognized as "something that needs to be started at

a much younger age ...when our children are in elementary school and high school and then

college. Long before they became a leader." The participant with a career in education emphasized the value of behavior modification training and reward-based reinforcement implemented in early childhood education and suggested,

> Teaching children discipline in a positive way creates a foundation for later behavior, creating social connections, and a sense of responsibility to one's work, to the one's environment, to relationships with the people…Education in business ethics should have embedded the foundations of child psychology. I think ...that would help out ...to understand, Why is it that they're angry in the first place? ...Why are the people bullying? What is it in their lives that is causing this problem? And then helping them ...through positive behavior modification [to fulfill their needs], not by hurting others but by helping others.

Subtheme 3: Education in business ethics should be provided as workplace training.
Subtheme 3 generated the concept of education in business ethics in the form of continuous workplace training, the ongoing process taking place on an annual basis. Some participants envisioned generic training in business ethics (the foundation) supplemented by organization-specific training tied to the company's values and training focused on leadership-specific ethics, which would create additional effectiveness. Education in business ethics should be a regular part of the onboarding process with every institution. One participant advocated,

> Proper training from the lowest level possible; you got to train the new leaders to be more aware of their actions, be more accountable for their actions, and be more understanding of what's going on around them in their work environment. Get that [education] in early.

Another participant emphasized the utmost importance of workplace training in business ethics. The continuous reinforcement of positive values and leading by example have the potential to prevent workplace toxicity. The organizational culture should nurture the principle of accountability, which proved to be one of the primary indicators of organizational health. One participant stated,

> Not everyone in all organizations has had the privilege of attaining higher education in the formal setting, which is why I believe that organizations should do more in their onboarding and ongoing staff development to introduce the topic, and then mirror good habits within the organization. Accountability is a huge factor in business ethics, and I believe that toxicity breeds best when no one is held accountable for their behavior.

Theme 5: Possible Connection Between Lack of Education in Business Ethics and Incidence of a Toxic Workplace

Theme 5 emerged as a blend of three equally valid subthemes: (a) the connection is evident, (b) the relationship is possible under particular circumstances, and (c) the connection does not exist (people behave in accordance with the character, nature, and rank). Differing opinions on nature versus nurture concept did not consider the relationships of trust, support, and loyalty, or intrinsic rewards.

Subtheme 1: The connection is evident. Some participants considered the relationship between the lack of education in business ethics and the occurrence of a toxic workplace evident. When people demonstrate responsible behavior, shared goals, mutual respect, and a high level of commitment, the likelihood of a toxic workplace is low. A mindset shaped by education in business ethics, or ethics in general, is reflected in the gradual culture shift as well:

I could definitely see a connection. And I think that what you're talking about is a culture shift. I think education is important ...[in] modeling the behavior of what an advocate would look like…I think it [education] could start chipping away at that [toxic] culture to make a culture change.

Subtheme 2: The connection is possible under particular circumstances. While many participants recognized the connection between education in business ethics and the occurrence of a toxic workplace, the link is considered weak and prone to diverse situational effects, personality (character), and level of convenience. The effectiveness of education was highlighted as a point of concern: "What people are taught does not always stick, and it's important to have these rules reinforced." One participant stressed the need for reinforcement and a real-life check:

I think it [education] would help. However, for adults to change their ways, they have to have a reason to change ...someone needs to be a watchdog and give them [toxic individuals] honest, valuable feedback if they're not doing something right. Because that's the only way to make that change.

Another participant suggested careful screening and selecting prospective employees (including background checks) as a potential reliable predictor of future behavior. The participant saw a carefully selected and mentored team led by example as the only chance to avoid a toxic environment, which is often not possible because of limited choices.

One participant with a depth of experience in resolving the problems of toxic leadership believed in education with the potential to empower people and help with making better decisions but sees the usefulness of education in business ethics only at the lower ranks. Education has the potential to help people build the courage to stand against unethical behavior,

understand available options, and recognize where and how to seek useful assistance and adequate protection. On the contrary, people with higher ranks often have education in business ethics but choose to ignore it: "'I know what right looks like, but that's not gonna get me to the top.' Higher educated guys, they know they're not stupid. They understand what they're doing at that point. They know how to manipulate." Similar reasoning prompted another participant to conclude, "In the [organization], we go to ethics training and leadership schools, right, but I think, at the end of the day, sometimes it comes down to the individual ...and who they are as people."

Subtheme 3: The connection does not exist. The participants who did not recognize any connection between lack of education in business ethics and the manifestation of a toxic workplace derived conclusions from real-world experience. They believed that education could not modify the negative power of personal traits, abuse of rank (real or perceived level of control), and the observable disconnect between education and social behaviors. One participant stressed the real-life failure of education in business ethics to make any actual change:

> You go to an ethics class. Every year. Part of the working for the [organization], you have to take an ethics class every year. And I don't think it is really substantial in addressing the toxic behavior of leadership; it is disconnected from the social behaviors.

Another participant elaborated on education in business ethics as a means for alleviating toxicity in the workplace and stated, "I understand, and that's what I would love to happen. But I feel like it probably won't. And the reason why, because once persons like that [toxic] are in those positions, they tend to hire people like them." Another participant summarized, "They [are]

just gonna do it. They're just gonna be bad anyway. They don't care." In conclusion, the participant who expressed doubts about the value of education in business ethics stressed,

> I ...personally do not believe that this [education] makes a difference. I believe that even if you did that, you will have a certain percentage that will acknowledge the ethics and will obey and will try their best, but when reality hits, I believe a large percentage of the ...workforce will forget about the ethics…When it comes to you directly and protecting your family or feeding your family, ethics don't put food on the table.

Reliability and Validity

This qualitative phenomenological research established the framework of reliability by demonstrating consistency, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman et al., 2019; Creswell, 2017). The context of validity reflected the capacity of capturing genuine aspects of objective reality (McLeod, 2012). Validity in qualitative research came in the form of trustworthiness, authenticity, integrity, accuracy, transferability, and credibility (Creswell, 2017).

The study employed an exploration of existing research and interviews in the process of building the construct of methodological triangulation (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). Methodological triangulation was the process of building confidence in the findings by employing more than one source of data in a study (Bryman et al., 2019). Data triangulation was established by using various sources of information and exploring the existing body of research, which provided an abundant amount of information leading to greater credibility of the research (Bansal et al., 2018). The study achieved integrity and consistency by using the same research instrument for all participants while bringing together all narratives of the lived experience.

Credible findings applicable to similar settings reflected actual outcomes in the process open to scrutiny and characterized by trustworthiness. The dependability of the instrument was tested by pursuing a review of the interview questions and feedback provided by five SMEs in the research field (Appendix D). The research process included full disclosure of the researcher's role and affiliations. Confirmability was established by ensuring reflexivity and maintaining a journal. Reflexivity was established by examining the assumptions and preconceptions, situating the research questions in a larger context, contextualizing the narratives, and situating the findings from the study in a larger conversation (Markham, 2017).

Adjustments to transferability strategies included the sampling strategy designed to explore a broader selection of narratives rich with lived experiences that transpired in different work environments, various industries, and diverse sociocultural environments. The threats to qualitative equivalents of reliability and validity were controlled by using thick descriptions and contextual details to convey findings, member checking, self-reflection of bias, and phenomenological reduction (Creswell, 2017). For some of the participants, the narratives of the lived experience and meanings of a toxic workplace were underlined by the strong emotional echo revealed through voice inflections, choice of words, repetitions, and body language. The process of member checking took place during the authorization process, which included sending interview transcripts to respective participants for verification. Member checking ensured the stability of the research instrument and the reliability of the process.

Phenomenological reduction included the process of bracketing, horizonalizing, organizing themes, and creating the textural description designed to reflect the meaning and essence of the experience (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). While the collected data were

analyzed with a particular focus on the subjectivity of the narratives, setting aside (bracketing) previous experience reduced potential bias and brought objectivity to the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The horizontalization identified relations among similar or the same coding sets emerging in separate narratives, linking the related themes to the whole.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative phenomenological research explored the problem of the destructive impact of a toxic workplace and the role of education in business ethics. The study examined lived experiences and issues of a toxic workplace, the perception of business ethics education, and the possible relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The research data were collected using a snowball sampling method and interviewing 18 purposively selected participants with experience of a toxic workplace and toxic leadership (Appendices F & G). The reflective nature of the participants' narratives indicated a depth of experience with the viable potential of guiding further discussions about education in business ethics.

All data were collected by conducting and recording interviews consisting of five semi-structured, open-ended questions, and additional follow-up questions, where applicable. Audio recordings were transcribed with Otter.ai software. Only one interview was provided in a written form via e-mail. The interview transcripts were coded using NVivo 11 Pro. The research revolved around five primary themes: (a) narrative definition of a toxic workplace, (b) feelings and experience of working in a toxic workplace, (c) perception of education in business ethics, (d) introducing mandatory education in business ethics at all higher education institutions, and

(e) possible connection between lack of education in business ethics and incidence of toxic leadership and toxic workplace. The emerging themes were related to the central research questions designed to explore two areas: (a) What are the individual lived experiences of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany? and (b) What is the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

The next chapter introduced the research findings, interpretations, and conclusions emerging from the framework of the qualitative phenomenological study. Analysis and interpretation of the research findings took place within the context of the central research questions. Recommendations for future research were derived from the output of the study and identified limitations. Possible implications for leadership, policymaking, and practice addressed consistency in organizational policies and conduct, the need for elevated awareness of codes of ethics, and organization-wide principles of accountability. Senior leadership and HR departments should address the problem of toxicity through sustained action and organizational culture based on the ethical view of the workplace.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Toxic leadership creates a toxic workplace characterized by stress, depression, anxiety, anger, conflict, low morale, and diminished productivity. Research identified links between toxic behaviors and adverse effects on mental and physical health (suicide, stress-related illnesses, and PTSD), employee turnover, and the creation of an organizational culture characterized by other inappropriate behaviors (Williams, 2017). The purpose of the study was to explore lived experiences, difficulties, and meanings of a toxic workplace and the possible perceived relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The problem was a destructive impact of toxic leadership characterized by creating a toxic workplace. A toxic workplace that gradually builds a culture of aggression at work and home became a significant problem (Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). The study was needed because the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of a toxic workplace was not explored adequately. By identifying the gap in the existing research, the study aimed to establish a possible link between the rise of toxic leadership and the lack of education in business ethics. While the outcomes cannot be predicted, the study was necessary because the destructive effects of a toxic workplace might be preventable.

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological method, which provided suitable instruments for exploring the essence of the subjective meanings individuals attribute to a problem and analyzing the shared narratives and inferences. The rationale for selecting a qualitative phenomenological method stemmed from the need to build an inquiry designed to describe the experiences of toxic leadership, the toxic workplace, and the personal perception of education in business ethics. The exploration of the existing body of knowledge revolved around

the preestablished themes: toxic leadership, toxic followership, toxic workplace, and education in business ethics seen through the lenses of academia and business (Comer & Schwartz, 2017; Gottardello & Pàmies, 2019; Nunes-Barbosa, 2016; Rasche et al., 2013; Rivera, 2019; Rozuel, 2016; Sigurjonsson et al., 2015; Williams, 2017).

Research Question 1 explored the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany. The circumstances, relationships, and developments presented in rich narratives outlined the nature and experience of a toxic workplace. A number of shared experiences included the practices of silencing the victims of a toxic workplace, forcing abused individuals to endure the hardship or leave the job, protecting the abusers and toxic leaders, and losing the sense of judgment between right and wrong. The common denominator identified in 17 of 18 cases was a lack of determination on the part of organizational leaders and HR managers to remove the toxic individual(s) and protect the victims. Some senior leaders were the architects of the toxic workplaces.

The findings from the study described toxic followership as a substantial issue. Toxic individuals and toxic networks have tangible power to create a toxic workplace even without the presence of a toxic leader. The researcher recognized the phenomenon of toxic behavior amplifiers, which can be defined as the events, circumstances, and conditions with the potential to create an additional emotional charge, trigger negative emotional contagion, and escalate the predicament. The amplifiers of toxic behavior include race, gender, age, various circumstances of sexual harassment, difficulties in controlling the feelings of anger and aggression, low level of self-confidence, low level of personal or professional competence, financial gain, burnout, and mental health issues in general.

Research Question 2 explored the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. While less than half of the participants perceived education in business ethics as a viable option for creating improved ethical awareness, some participants recognized the possible usefulness of education in business ethics but emphasized the real-life impact of education on actual individual behavior. One-third of the participants who did not see any usefulness of education in business ethics emphasized the conflict between egotism and ethical principles. While some participants recognized the potential value of education in business ethics in all higher education programs, the concept of much earlier exposure to ethical education or regular training in business ethics at the workplace was seen as a viable method of prevention against unethical behavior.

Toxicity in organizations is an interactional process perpetuated between leaders, followers, and the environment that eventually creates an unethical and dysfunctional organizational culture (Padilla et al., 2007; Stoten, 2015). The review of the existing research on the topic of a toxic workplace identified the general theory of toxic leadership, which recognized the low maturity of helpless followers as one of the essential prerequisites for the development of toxic leaders and a toxic workplace (Padilla et al., 2007). The descriptions of the organizational cultures explored in the study revealed a shared attribute: low maturity of the individuals residing at all levels. Peers, managers, and even senior leaders were equally afraid to stand up against toxicity and support or protect the victims. The organizational culture often shaped actual leader-follower relationships, while the synergy of all relationships reinforced the changing standards of organizational culture. Existing research already recognized the potential of education in

business ethics to create a higher ethical maturity and help individuals in building the courage to act and carry out ethical decisions in the workplace (Comer & Schwartz, 2017; Shete, 2017).
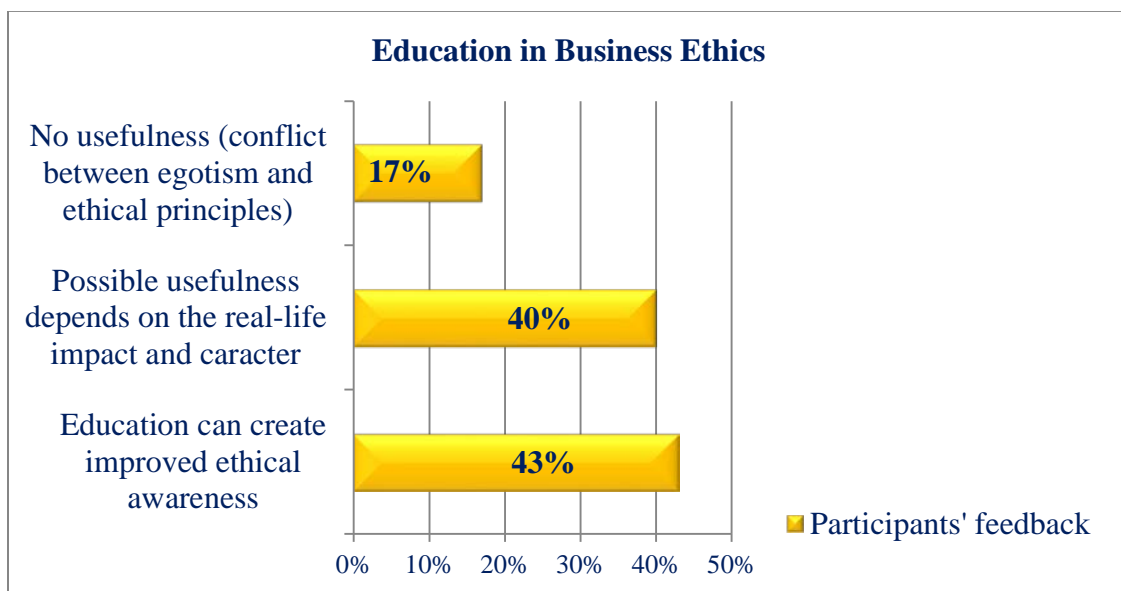
The toxic workplace was described as a setting characterized by a decline of a professional standard of conduct and the breakdown of discipline. The narratives shared by participants described broken relationships suffering from unethical behavior, distrust, divisiveness, retaliation, fear, anger, abuse, arrogance, professional jealousy, intimidation, threats, harassment, and injustice. All accounts highlighted shared feelings of frustration, humiliation, despair, anxiety, disappointment, and a sense of inferiority, helplessness, grief, and uncertainty (loss of employment). Participants often recollected feelings of bitterness and vulnerability. Feelings of self-doubt seemed to be a part of the experience as well because the victims of a toxic workplace questioned the past conduct, trying to recall any wrongdoing with the potential to provoke hostility.

One of the frequently described attributes of a toxic environment was the desire to avoid coming to work. The victims of a toxic workplace experienced difficulties in performing job duties, feeling the constant fear of making mistakes, and gradually developing the habit of second-guessing everything. The shared experience of physical and mental health issues as a direct consequence of working in a toxic workplace included constant fatigue, depression, sadness, fear, insomnia, stress, headaches/migraines, PTSD, anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence.

The problem of lost productivity, ignored by the organizational leadership, was identified as one of the main traits of a toxic workplace. In a majority of described cases, the senior leadership and HR managers chose to disregard the problem of toxicity based on fear of legal

action against the organization. One participant pondered if the cost of lost productivity might prove to be far higher than the possible damages of a lawsuit.

The research findings reflected mixed feelings and viewpoints about the usefulness of education in business ethics (Figure 4). Education in business ethics was outlined by 43% of the theme-related discussions as a valuable asset in personal and professional development and the missing link in the evolution to the harmonious, productive, and equitable workplace free of toxicity. Participants highlighted the problem of real-life implementation and actual behavior; 40% of the theme-related conversations reflected a conviction of the importance of behavioral patterns depending on the circumstances, personal values, character, and rank. Skepticism regarding the usefulness of education in business ethics occurred in 17% of the discussions; the opinion was justified by the absence of the overall affirmative environment, the power of survival instincts and ambition, and reservation about the ethics classes having the influence to change people.

Education in Business Ethics

- No usefulness (conflict between egotism and ethical principles): **17%**
- Possible usefulness depends on the real-life impact and caracter: **40%**
- Education can create improved ethical awareness: **43%**

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

■ Participants' feedback

Figure 4: Possible usefulness of education in business ethics.

Three different subthemes (Figure 5) elaborating various modalities of education in business ethics were generated while addressing the topic of mandatory education in business ethics offered to all higher education institutions (not just business schools, medical schools, or schools of law). Despite concerns regarding quantifiable or lasting benefits, the majority of participants suggested making business ethics education a stand-alone course and a requirement for all programs. While 49% of the discussions favored establishing education in ethics at the higher education level, 24% included valuable suggestions about introducing education in ethics in the early, formative stages of individual development (elementary, middle, and high school). The thematic discourse that transpired in 26% of the related conversations described in detail the benefit of regular annual training in business ethics, as well as making the training a mandatory part of the onboarding process in every organization.
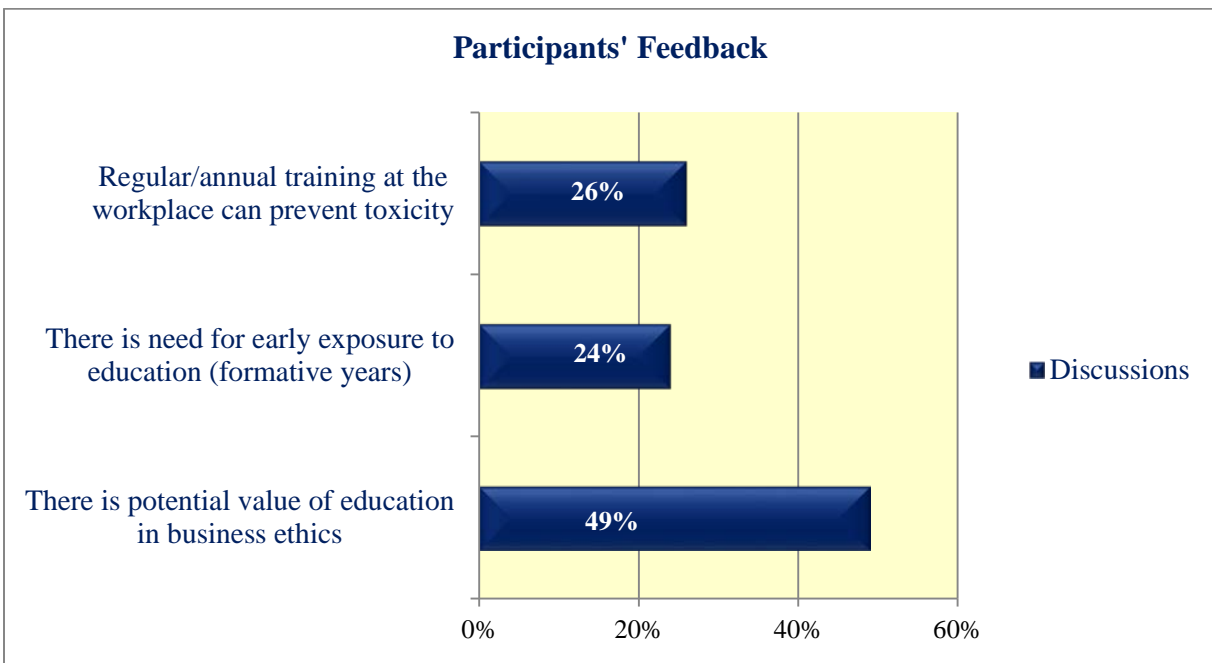
Figure 5: Participants' feedback on the topic of education in business ethics.

Participants' feedback on the inquiry related to the possible connection between the lack of education in business ethics and the incidence of a toxic workplace reflected three subthemes (Figure 6). While 34% of thematic discussions reflected a clear connection, 44% revealed a possible relationship, but only under particular circumstances (situational effects, personality/character, and level of convenience). One participant with a depth of experience recognized the real-life usefulness of education in business ethics, but only at the lower ranks. The training ought to build courage, instruct people to stand against unethical behavior, understand the viable options, and recognize where and how to seek useful assistance and adequate protections. People with higher ranks often had education in business ethics but choose to ignore moral principles and opt for unethical behavior leading to personal gain, promotion, and abuse of power.
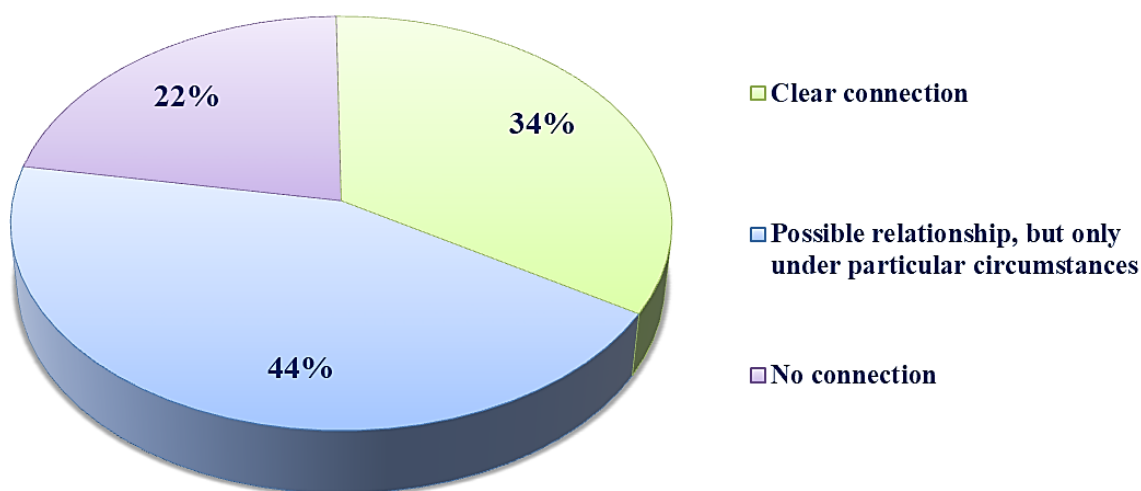
Figure 6: The lack of education in business ethics and the incidence of a toxic workplace.

The negation of any observable connection between education in business ethics and a toxic workplace occurred in 22% of the discussions. The main reason for skepticism was the perceived functional disconnect between the desired proper behavior learned during the education process and real-life complexities demanding the opposite action or rendering people helpless against the predators. Some participants demonstrated a pragmatic approach and addressed the naïveté of proposing education in business ethics as a solution to a toxic workplace. According to one participant, people will "always" behave in accordance with their personal (lack of) values, (corrupt) character traits, and extent of (ab)using the power of higher rank. The real-life context cannot be substantially changed or improved by education, as six participants (one third of the research sample) agreed.

Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

The findings reflected the description of the toxic workplace as an environment shaped by a toxic leader and toxic followers, who might be toxic individuals or voluntary members of the toxic leader's support network (Thomas et al., 2016). The study identified common attributes of a toxic environment, including lack of workplace justice, discrimination, expressed or concealed malicious micromanagement, control issues, trust issues, borderline criminal activities, and illegal conduct. Based on the sense of injustice, victims of toxic leadership sometimes retaliated and engaged in negative behaviors such as aggression, theft, and sabotage (Nevicka et al., 2018). Toxic leadership was considered not only a corrupt behavior but also a rather complex interaction involving flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders, susceptible followers, and a multifaceted encouraging environment (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Some toxic leaders relished in imposing unnecessary, meaningless, and heavy workloads on targeted employees.

Narratives described a toxic workplace characterized by the organizational culture enabling

harassment, intimidation, yelling, bullying, mobbing, humiliation, bidirectional racial prejudice

and racism, sexual harassment, gender- or age-based animosity, and lost productivity. The

occurrence of mobbing and bullying was characterized by humiliating, offensive, abusive,

intimidating, or insulting behaviors and abuse of power. The victims of workplace mobbing and

bullying were excessively monitored, ridiculed, ignored, excluded, or slandered (Pheko, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Kohlberg developed the six stages of moral development and created the holistic concept

which reflected a moral formation and an emerging individual perception of right or wrong

(Fang et al., 2017; Kohlberg, 1981; Yuping et al., 2018). Kohlberg's theory of moral

development established the stages of moral formation, with the ability of moral judgment

recognized as the universal standard of measure (Yuping et al., 2018). Kohlberg's (1981) theory

of moral development recognized unethical behavior conducted in the name of authority. The

narrative recurrently shared among the participants described toxic leaders as "blatantly open

about their toxic behavior." Toxic leaders were perceived as authorities with unchallenged

powers (Pritchard, 1999). Just one toxic leader can do extensive damage and poison an entire

organizational culture (Singh et al., 2017). One participant described the phenomenon as "her

[toxic leader's] networks, her inner crowd, inner circle."

People residing at the lower stages of moral development usually cannot understand

moral reasoning at the more advanced stages (Giammarco, 2016; Kohlberg, 1981). The study

findings reflected the prevailing view that described toxic individuals as people unable to

change. The structure of stages is the same for all, but most people never reached the higher

stages (Stages 5 & 6) of post-conventional moral development, which included a deeper understanding of the legalistic social contract, universal ethical principles, and abstract reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981). People residing at Stage 6 believed in the dignity of all people and equitable principles of justice, even if the consequences conflict with laws, social rules, and collective customs (Kohlberg, 1981). The individual values developed in the context of abstract general principles concerning justice, society's well-being, equality, human rights, and respect for the dignity of the individual (Giammarco, 2016; Payne et al., 2018).

Education in ethics is designed to develop individual moral reasoning, moral emotion, moral will, and moral behavior while nurturing moral awareness and forming moral habits (Kohlberg, 1981). One participant highlighted education as a significant factor in modeling behavior: "I think it [education] could start chipping away at that [toxic] culture to make a culture change." Education in business ethics has the potential to make a substantial change because "colleges and universities are the last place for many adults to receive ideological education before they enter society" (Yuping et al., 2018, p. 2572). Education in business ethics might be a viable avenue for developing the mature mindset able to establish ethical safeguards and prevent a toxic workplace occurrence. One participant stated, "People have no courage; this is a major piece of it; most people don't say anything." People need psychological and moral maturity to oppose toxicity, resist a destructive leader's vision, and avoid the role of colluders (Padilla et al., 2007). One participant emphasized, "I see HR is complicit in all of this [toxic workplace]."

Business ethics education has the potential to develop moral perceptiveness, build resilience to group dynamics impeding responsible behavior, and help with learning how to deal

with the wrongdoing of others (Pritchard, 1999). One participant described the benefit of education in business ethics: "It helps you to decide what's right and what's the wrong choice ...especially when you are a boss or supervisor, keep the integrity and respect the integrity of other people." The education in business ethics has a substantial societal and personal impact and ought to be treated the same as education in core courses. One participant stressed, "Students at the end of college have to have these [ethical] skills ...that should be a predominant thing ...embedded through every class." By blending Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development with the existing body of knowledge and new research, this study explored the assumption of education in business ethics as the possible and workable solution in preventing the occurrence of a toxic workplace.

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review, the leading themes explored in this study included the phenomenon of toxic leadership, toxic followership, a toxic workplace, perceptions surrounding education in business ethics, and the possible perceived connection between toxicity and lack of broader education in business ethics. Education in business ethics has a viable potential to develop ethical awareness and moral courage (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). One participant emphasized the value of education in business ethics in terms of learning about the proper channels and options for help in cases of exposure to a toxic workplace. The exploration of the possible link between the lack of education in business ethics and workplace toxicity was necessary because, although the outcomes are not predictable, the damaging effects of a toxic workplace might be preventable.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was designed to guide the study in addressing the individual lived experience of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany. The multilayered context of rich narratives revealed the disturbing experience of a toxic workplace. The existing research recognized a low maturity of organizational culture as an enabling driver of a toxic workplace.

The active attempts of silencing the victims of a toxic workplace were reported by four of the 18 participants. One participant working for a "large public interest agency" mentioned a $150,000 pay-off to the victim of toxic leadership, just to protect the organizational reputation and prevent the public from learning about hostilities. The toxic leader was not removed. The military environment had specific rules of engagement where people had limited options in dealing with the toxic environment. The system expected victims to endure the hardship no matter how difficult and move on or leave the job.

The usual outcomes involving the scenarios of individuals being threatened with job loss, being fired, or leaving employment willingly, had one common denominator: One of the fundamental underlying aspects of justice in a civilized society—the difference between right and wrong—was worthless in toxic environments. Toxic environments thrived on the common pragmatic concept of hopelessness where the individual can be "dead right" but lose the job anyway, and without a job, people cannot provide for their families.

The findings revealed the main obstacle in resolving the problem of a toxic workplace was the lack of determination to remove the toxic individual(s) and protect the victims. The premise of holding senior leadership and HR departments responsible for the cowardice,

negligence, and direct or indirect collaboration with the toxic individual(s) occurred in 24% of toxic workplace-related conversations. The common trait of careless or weak leaders was the practice to choose the line of least resistance or maintain the status quo. The rest of the participants reported mixed results in attempts of problem resolution, or experienced the misfortune of serving under senior leaders who were the driving force behind the formation of the toxic workplace. The perceived reasons for the lack of action on the part of HR managers and senior leaders include (a) fear of becoming the target of the toxic individual's retaliation, (b) the excuse of protecting the organization from the perceived threat of a lawsuit, (c) perception of relative inconsequence of the possibility of the legal action taken by the victim, and (d) colluding with the toxic individuals.

The findings from the study supported a common misconception identified in the existing body of knowledge, which includes the narrow definition of a toxic person as verbally abusive and explosive; a substantial scope of toxic behavior takes place "under the radar" (Williams, 2017, p. 58). The ripple effect of passive toxic leadership can be recognized by wasted resources, sabotaged projects, workplace division, decreased productivity, demoralized employees, and high turnover. While the problem of toxic leadership has high visibility, toxic followership is an ongoing issue that is not adequately explored. The narratives on toxic individuals or close-knit toxic networks described victims forced into silence and rendered helpless in a toxic workplace emerging without the actual presence of a toxic leader. In the reported cases of a toxic workplace run by toxic followers, the organizational leaders were perceived as enablers and held equally responsible due to the lack of action to prevent or resolve the problem.

The research process identified the phenomenon of toxic behavior amplifiers. The researcher defined *amplifiers* as the events, circumstances, and conditions with the potential to build an additional emotional charge, trigger negative emotional contagion, and escalate the situation to the point of explosion (short term), or create a new norm where various abrasive, threatening, and humiliating interactions become a way of living (long term). The amplifiers of toxic behavior include race, gender, age, various circumstances of sexual harassment, difficulties in controlling the feelings of anger and aggression, low level of self-confidence, low level of personal or professional competence, financial gain, burnout, or mental health issues in general.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 explored the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. While the empirical evidence and existing body of research supported the theory of education in business ethics with the viable potential to create improved ethical awareness, less than half of the participants agreed with the concept. Some participants recognized the possible usefulness of education of business ethics but emphasized the real-life impact of education on the actual individual behavior as (a) highly dependent on personality/character, (b) dependent on the circumstance and level of power, (c) or marginal in general. The concept of education in business ethics as an answer to the problem of a toxic workplace was still met with skepticism. Based on real-life experiences, some participants did not see any impact of education in business ethics, given the conflict between self-interest/position of power and ethical principles. In other words, education in business ethics does not matter.

With the caveat regarding the quantifiable benefits and monitoring, some participants recognized the potential value of introducing education in business ethics to all higher education programs. The concept of much earlier exposure, entertained by a few participants, reinforced the idea about education in ethics as necessary in contemporary society, something to be nurtured from early childhood through one's entire life. The model of establishing business ethics training as an annual workplace requirement in all organizations was seen as an effective prevention against a toxic workplace by creating an evolving knowledge base, transparency, and adequate protection. The association between mandatory training in business ethics, and sexual harassment and EEO training materialized a number of times during discussions.

Conclusions

The findings aligned with the theoretical framework and existing knowledge presented in the peer-reviewed literature. The interpretations, conclusions, and perceived implications of the findings did not exceed the scope of the study. The study of the lived experiences of a toxic workplace did not extend beyond the exploration of the phenomenon of toxic behavior and possible links between toxic behavior and lack of education in business ethics, as well as recommendations for improvement as envisioned by the victims of a toxic workplace.

The new concept emerging from the narratives was the phenomenon of amplifiers. The *Amplifier* is a common designation used for all the events, circumstances, and conditions with the potential to escalate the toxic emotional charge and negative emotional contagion or to create a new organizational standard with the power to form a toxic workplace. Conclusions were shaped on the intersection between the findings from the study and the existing body of knowledge on the topic of a toxic workplace and avoiding the researcher's biases and opinions.

The most critical details of importance not identified in the existing body of research were related to the controversial role of some HR managers and senior leaders in terms of ineffectiveness in resolving the problems of a toxic workplace.

Limitations

The qualitative phenomenological research design, which is not entirely replicable, was the major limitation of the study. Transferability was the degree to which the results of the qualitative study can be applied or generalized to other contexts (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Dependability was reflected in a detailed narrative of the study progression, with the purpose to allow future researchers to follow the same procedure, which might not result in the same findings (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The sample size of 18 participants produced limited transferability and dependability of the research.

The rich and detailed thick descriptions of the context provided a foundation for comparisons and judgments about similarity and transferability, supporting the results of this study to be recognized in other settings with other populations. Regardless of the environment and demographics, the unique nature of a toxic workplace remained the same, reflecting unethical behavior, broken relationships, lack of trust, divisiveness, retaliation, fear, anger, abuse, arrogance, professional jealousy, intimidation, threats, harassment, and injustice. Participants' reflections aligned with the existing body of knowledge, which described toxic leaders as destructive, narcissistic, abusive, dysfunctional, tyrannical, bullying, psychopathic, and Machiavellian individuals (Burke, 2017; Grijalva et al., 2015).

All narratives highlighted shared feelings of frustration, humiliation, despair, anxiety, disappointment, and a sense of inferiority, helplessness, grief, and uncertainty (fear of loss of

employment). Some additional aspects of the research would most likely be recognized in other settings with other populations. As an example, one third of participants did not see the benefit of education in business ethics to help in dealing with fear and anxiety, making the employees vulnerable against toxic leaders (Özer et al., 2017). Based on the widely recognizable findings from the study, the employees were not the sole victims of a toxic workplace; as one participant summarized, "The toxic workplace is when the leadership sees problems but does not fix them out of fear of being sued by the [toxic] individual."

Confirmability is the extent to which other researchers can confirm or support the findings from the study (Venkatesh et al., 2013). While the research sample reached satisfactory variation of demographics related to age, gender, race, rank, and industry, the ideal situation would reflect more diversity associated with the level of education, which would increase confirmability. Participants with diverse educational experiences would bring a wider variety of perspectives, experiences, and narratives. Bringing more diversity to the research sample would have the potential to generate better transferability of results.

The third limitation of the study occurred because all participants were interviewed remotely, some by phone, which affected the depth of the data collection process. Observing the body language, nonverbal cues, and facial expressions during the data collection process is essential. When the lack of congruence in verbal and nonverbal cues had the potential to affect credibility, the nonverbal cues were usually a trusted aspect of communication (Hynes, 2011).

Recommendations

Future research should further explore the impact of a toxic workplace and the role of education in business ethics in the process by the selection of a larger and more diverse

participation sample. The invitation for participation in the study posted on Facebook achieved a high response from participants with advanced higher education. Recommendations for future research, based on the limitations of the study, are to include better diversification of the research sample and to include participants with a diverse level of education to cover all aspects of the toxic workplace (e.g., blue-collar vs. white-collar). A heterogeneous purposive sample with increased variation should provide a broader insight into the problem from as many perspectives as possible. The future research should employ purposive sampling with a narrowed focus to lived experiences of a toxic workplace, with an emphasis on the affirmative outcomes.

Potential areas of exploration include the circumstances of success stories as well as the role of business ethics education in problem resolution. Future research should bring to the forefront of the exploration the best applicable practices in resolving toxic workplace issues, successful policymaking practices, and the intersecting points with the learning outcomes in business ethics courses. The problem of senior leadership and HR managers falling victim to toxic individuals and a toxic workplace ought to be a separate topic for further research.

Recommendations for practitioners build on the findings from the study, which generated considerable concerns regarding workplace justice, as outlined in the reflections of the lived experience. The majority of the narratives reflected highly disappointing experiences related to senior leadership and HR managers' behavior in terms of resolving issues of a toxic workplace. The narratives of the purposively selected participants (except one) did not reflect success stories where the organizational leadership or HR managers resolved the problem of a toxic workplace. Organizational executive leaders and HR managers feel the pressure of rationalization and trade-offs between ethical behavior and personal leadership shortcomings, including fear of ripple

effects and extended consequences of the decision-making process. A wide range of alternatives has the potential to ease the burden and create workplace transparency. A number of participants noted professional development and annual training have the potential to (a) raise the awareness of the problem, (b) discuss the experiences, (c) identify toxic behavior and toxic individuals, (d) reach out to entities with the power to provide help, (e) take shared action to heal the workplace, and (f) establish the transparent and equitable organizational culture with compliance to the code of ethics. Well equipped with knowledge and support networks, individuals working in a toxic workplace might have better odds at moving beyond the position of a victim, bystander, or enabler.

Recommendations for policymakers stem from the outcomes of the study, which indicated the substantial struggle with implementing legal protections. A considerable effort had been devoted to establishing legal and regulatory compliance with the potential to affect and govern the existence, purpose, and functions of the workplace and society in general. Federal laws in the United States do not allow a hostile work environment and discrimination based on race, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, but the findings from this study reflected the narratives where toxic behavior was tolerated and enabled. While tort law holds people legally responsible for the consequences of individual behavior when such actions result in harm to others, the research did not reveal any conclusive results about seeking remedies through lawsuits. Only one participant pursued legal action, which proved to be a substantial drain of the participant's financial resources, with mixed outcomes.

This study was designed to explore the practical implications of education in business ethics and the prevention of a toxic workplace. Exploring the phenomenon of toxic leadership

helped further the understanding of the numerous challenges presented to HR managers and

executive leadership with a lack of competence or moral courage to resolve the problem of a

toxic workplace. The challenges were evident because this study reflected unfortunate outcomes

where 17 of 18 participants experienced a lack of legal and regulatory protections. The research

outlined areas of opportunity for the prevention of a toxic workplace by establishing instruction

in ethics and business ethics through education and professional development. Policymakers

might approach the problem of toxicity in the workplace by introducing compulsory education in

business ethics to higher education institutions. Establishing instruction in business ethics as the

onboarding requirement and further annual training would outline the specifics of acceptable

conduct, raise awareness of the toxic workplace, and stipulate protective measures.

Implications for Leadership

This study was undertaken to explore the individual lived experience of toxic leadership

and a toxic workplace and the perception of the possible connection between education in

business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The existing research identified leadership

as the central element in building or maintaining a toxic environment by enabling unethical work

behaviors (Milosevic et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Williams, 2017). Ethical leadership is a

critical source of environmental stabilization because people see leaders as models of the desired

behavior (Kao & Cheng, 2017). The research findings indicated a separate problem related to

substandard HR support. HR has an essential role in building the ethical organizational culture

and shaping the internal dynamics designed to prevent or reduce workplace toxicity (Richard et

al., 2018; Sharma, 2018).

Exploring the probable link between the manifestation of a toxic workplace and lack of education in business ethics might help to promote the understanding of the numerous leadership challenges. This study supported the concept of toxic individuals as experts in managing upward, simultaneously giving the appearance of high performance while abusing others (Williams, 2017). The findings from the study revealed the phenomenon of senior leadership and HR managers falling victim to toxic individuals and toxic workplace. The challenges were evident because 17 of 18 participants described the struggle and failure in the implementation of the organizational codes of ethics or establishing the framework of legal protections and workplace justice.

The contextual description of the senior leadership's and HR managers' conduct reflected various alarming circumstances: (a) senior leaders or HR managers were afraid of the toxic individual, (b) senior leaders were toxic leaders, (c) senior leaders or HR managers were negligent and guilty by the lack of action, (d) senior leaders or HR managers advised victims to "move on" or "move out," (e) senior leaders or HR managers not personally affected by the occurrence of a toxic workplace chose to ignore the problem, or (f) senior leaders or HR managers collaborated with toxic individuals and silenced the victims. The implications of the research for leadership are substantial because the findings recognized the senior leaders as the hostages, enablers, or unwilling collaborators of the toxic individuals and a toxic workplace. Compliance with the toxic dynamics was the frequent by-product of a toxic workplace leading to the erosion of leadership.

The broader future research may explore the details and changing relationships of the toxic workplace dynamics. The problem was significant because the victims of a toxic workplace

suffered from (a) stress and related psychological symptoms (e.g., emotional and mental issues, despair, worry, depression, aggression, anxiety, anger); (b) physical symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate and blood pressure, heart diseases, digestive disorders, headaches, insomnia); and (c) behavioral symptoms such as absenteeism, alcohol use, drug use, and tobacco use (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Williams, 2017). Toxic leadership was recognized as malicious behavior that destroys the self-respect, self-confidence, productivity, and motivation of the helpless victims (Singh et al., 2017). Toxic developments of the contemporary workplace have the power to render helpless not only the direct victims of toxic leaders and other toxic individuals but the senior leaders as well.

The contextual factors such as personal traits, level of power, or organizational culture were pointed out by a majority of participants as the deciding attributes affecting the connection between the occurrence of a toxic workplace and lack of education in business ethics. Two of the three contingent factors (personal traits and organizational culture) belong to the domain of soft skills, which can be nurtured by consistent positive reinforcement through continued education. The participant with experience in education suggested the implementation of behavior modification training and a reward-based system with the potential to establish the new standard, provide direction, create positive social change, and bring lasting improvements.

Another participant stated, "They [leaders] practice based on who they are as a person, what their morals are, and their integrity levels as a human." Other participants used terms such as "character," "personal integrity," "personality," "[being] confident," "values," "[lack of] emotional intelligence [of the leader]," "[recognizing] a fine line [in behavior]," "[we are] powered by the organizational culture," "group mentality," "human decency," or "pride

problem." While the majority of the participants did not recognize the direct connection between lack of education in business ethics (or ethics in general) and the formation of a toxic workplace, bringing the mention of soft skills to the equation changed the perspective. Soft skills are teachable.

While Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development outlined the necessity of reasoning and ethical judgment, the process cannot move forward without the subset of soft skills—sensitivity and strength of character. Developing critical thinking skills was considered an essential part of education, and especially education in ethics. Critical thinking skills serve as the foundation for building mental and moral maturity, which are the vital parts of the construct perceived as strength of character. The social learning process transpires by observation and role modeling, which puts the role of the leaders and other influencers at the center of the organizational culture. The moral courage to stand up against unethical practices might prevent the occurrence of a toxic workplace (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). The existing body of knowledge identified leadership as the central element in building and sustaining the toxic environment by enabling and facilitating unethical work behaviors. In other words, education in ethics and business ethics might help to build the influential and ethical personality of leaders strong enough to resist the abuse of power and negative situational factors, oppose destructive personalities, and protect the integrity of the organizational culture.

Conclusion

A toxic workplace is one of the primary causes of stress and related psychological, physical, and behavioral disorders. The extent of the problem is wide-ranging, affecting diverse fields such as military, politics, government, business, education, and health care. The qualitative

phenomenological study examined the lived experiences and issues of a toxic workplace, the

perception of business ethics education, and the possible relationship between education in

business ethics and the prevention of a toxic workplace. People need psychological resilience,

ethical maturity, and moral courage to oppose the destructive patterns of a toxic environment.

Business ethics education has the potential to develop moral perceptiveness, critical thinking,

and soft skills, which are the building blocks of the strength of character, a construct identified as

the central attribute in the prevention of a toxic workplace.

The study was necessary because the destructive effects of a toxic workplace might be

preventable. The consequences of toxic behavior have a substantial impact on people's mental

and physical health, career, and overall well-being (Han et al., 2017). The costs of toxic

leadership rose to billions of dollars in lost productivity (Winn & Dykes, 2019). By blending the

existing body of knowledge on the subject of a toxic workplace, Kohlberg's theory of moral

development, and findings from the present research, this study presented the multifaceted

aspects of workplace toxicity and perception of education in business ethics. The problem of

senior leadership and HR managers falling victim to toxic individuals and a toxic workplace

should be a separate topic for further research.

The research findings introduced the narrative on a proposed paradigm shift in the

domain of a toxic workplace. Any substantial and lasting change requires an overall culture shift

with the momentum and potential to make workplace toxicity socially unacceptable. An example

of how toxic behavior should be treated was introduced by one participant describing the

problem of sexual harassment. The victims of sexual harassment were not believed or taken

seriously; many had to prove "they did not ask for it" or in any other way provoked the abuse.

While the victims were coping with the trauma in silence, afraid, humiliated, and ashamed to speak about the problem, the abusers used the position of power to continue violations without reproach, which ensured a cover-up to protect the abusers' personal and professional reputations.

Given the current changed societal perception, verifiable accusations of sexual harassment have high visibility and the substantial power to destroy people's career and status. The greater sociocultural shift where toxic behavior would reach high visibility and similar treatment has to come from within, through education and peer/managerial support. One individual or several individuals can be intimidated into submission to a toxic workplace, toxic individuals, and toxic organizational culture. However, the attempts of silencing the larger group of highly visible whistle-blowers in the era of weaponized social media would be more difficult and riskier for toxic individuals, leaders, and the organizations' reputation. The process of preventing the development of a toxic workplace requires creating a critical mass of individuals with high ethical maturity and the moral courage to stand against unethical practices without fear of retribution.

The research has considerable implications for leadership because the findings exposed (a) the unsustainable position of all participants in the process; (b) senior leaders unable or unwilling to end violations; and (c) HR professionals without ability or power to resolve the problems of a toxic workplace. The majority of the participants considered the relationship between education in business ethics (or ethics in general) and the prevention of a toxic workplace possible but highly dependent on the context. The effects of education in business ethics were seen through the lens of the leader's personality, integrity, and strength of character as well as the ethical compass of the organizational culture.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Title of Study: Education in Business Ethics and the Prevention of Toxic Leadership:

        A Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Researcher: Ancica Roosa

Contact: **Cell:** +49 (0) 151 5670 3867 or **Skype:** *Ancica_Roosa*

E-mail address: anciroosa@gmail.com

You are invited to participate in a research study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed phenomenological qualitative study is to examine lived experiences and issues of a toxic workplace, explore the perception of business ethics education, and establish a possible relationship with the prevention of toxic leadership. Toxic leadership is socially unwanted behavior associated with adverse outcomes producing personal and organizational problems and creating a toxic workplace characterized by stress, anxiety, conflict, and low morale. Toxic leaders create a hostile and dysfunctional environment, a toxic workplace which harmfully affects people's professional and personal life. The study is necessary because the damaging effects of a toxic workplace affecting people's mental health, overall wellbeing, and career might be preventable.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because the type of required data will need qualified input from an individual with previous exposure to toxic leadership and/or lived experience of working at the toxic workplace.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following: (a) review, sign the informed consent form, and agree to take part in the research study; (b) schedule an interview (30 to 60 minutes of length); (c) participate in a face-to-face or Skype interview consisting of five semi-structured interview questions focusing on the living experience of toxic leadership and toxic workplace; (d) allow the researcher to record the interview and keep hand-written notes for accuracy measures; (e) refer the researcher to another respondent who may possess the experience and knowledge appropriate for participation in the research study (snowball sampling method); (f) accept and review a written transcript of your interview for validity checking.

Benefits of Participation

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in the study. However, we hope to learn information with the potential to help in closing the gap in the body of knowledge related to the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The existing research has identified links between toxic behaviors and adverse effects on mental and physical health. Education in business ethics might create safeguards capable of preventing the occurrence of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace. This information may be useful in guiding higher education institutions to offer a mandatory curriculum in business ethics.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. The study is estimated to involve minimal risk. An example of the risk a participant may encounter is feeling uncomfortable sharing information about the stressful experience. To help participants feel more secure in volunteering to participate

in the study, the following ethical considerations will be used to ensure the participants will not be harmed in the process of conducting the research. The measures include: (a) participants will be reminded the conversation is recorded a few times during the interview; the recording will stop if another person enters the room at any period during the interview (b) the process of recording and journals account will not use a participant's name.

Cost/Compensation

Participation in the study will not expose you to any financial cost. The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes, and your review of the interview transcript will take an additional 20-30 minutes. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Ancica Roosa at anciroosa@gmail.com, Skype contact *Ancica_Roosa*, or call +49 (0) 151 5670 3867

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints, or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, you may contact the American College of Education, Dr. Matt Smalley (Dissertation Committee Chair) at matt.smalley@ace.edu.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the study or in any part of the study and withdraw at any time. You have the freedom to decide what you want to disclose about yourself and under which circumstances. You are encouraged to ask questions about the study at the beginning or at any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All participants in the study will receive confidentiality and anonymity for their participation. All names and Personally Identifiable Information (PII), including all references leading to the recognition of the participants' identity, will be substituted by the unique "Study ID." All PII, contact information roster, and consent forms will be saved in the password-protected location and stored separately from all other data. Once the recording devices have been used, the resulting audio files will be stored with the transcripts. All collected information will be securely transmitted via encrypted channels, properly safeguarded (two separate password-protected external drives), and securely destroyed by formatting the external storage disc once the research data retention time is due. The findings of the research will be presented in a way the sources of information cannot be identified.

Participant's Consent

I have read and understood the above information. I understand I can withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation. I am assured my information is confidential, and I will remain anonymous. The researcher did not request my signature on any other agreement; this is the only consent and confidentiality form. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions. I am at least 18 years of age. I understand the terms of my participation, and I give consent to voluntary participation in the research study. A copy of the form has been given to me.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Participant Name (Please Print)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The proposed research study will use the following interview protocol:

1. Prospective participants will be contacted by email and Skype and inquired about their willingness to participate in the research study. At this time, the researcher will inform the participants about requesting a referral of additional participants to contribute to the study (a snowball sampling method).

2. Once participants express their willingness to take part in the study, a formal face-to-face or Skype interview will be scheduled. Interviews will be scheduled based on the participants' convenience. At this time, participants will receive the informed consent form via email (see Appendix A).

3. Two days before the scheduled interview, participants will receive a phone or Skype call and email from the researcher, reminding them of their interview time and location. At this time, participants will have to send to the researcher via email signed an informed consent form.

4. Face-to-face interview: the researcher will prepare the room, ensure the participant is comfortable, and make all arrangements necessary to prevent interruptions. Both audio recording devices will be ready. Skype interview: the researcher will make all arrangements necessary to prevent interruptions. The backup audio recording device will be ready.

5. The researcher will begin the interview by describing the objectives of the research study. Participants will be encouraged to ask questions. The researcher will begin administering the five semi-structured interview questions. In addition to the interview questions, a number of additional exploratory questions will be prepared to stimulate elaboration and clarification.

6. Upon completion of the interview, participants will be thanked for their time and notified about receiving transcriptions of the interview via email for their final review and approval. All participants will be informed about the findings and receive the completed dissertation.

7. After the interview has concluded, audio recordings will be labeled, and all material will be transcribed. The audio files will be converted to MS Word files by using the FTW Transcriber.

8. The study will continue with validity checks, including data triangulation, thick descriptions, member checking, and self-reflection, which will include a literature review, a detailed review of the interview transcriptions, and cross-referencing collected material with the hand-written journal developed during the interview process.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

The objective of the qualitative phenomenological study will be to explore lived experiences, issues, and meanings of a toxic workplace and the possible perceived relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. The following research questions will guide the study:

Research Question 1: What are the individual lived experiences of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace for Americans living in the United States and Germany?

Research Question 2: What is the perception of Americans living in the United States and Germany about the possible connection between compulsory education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

The research data will be collected using a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions:

1. Please describe your perception of a toxic leader and/or a toxic workplace.

2. Please describe your feelings and experience of working at a toxic workplace.

3. What is your perception of education in business ethics?

4. What do you think about introducing mandatory education in business ethics at all higher education institutions?

5. Do you see any possible connection between the lack of education in business ethics and the incidence of toxic leadership and a toxic workplace?

Follow-up Interview Questions

Follow-up question 1: "Can you please clarify what you meant when you stated [***]?"

Follow-up question 2: "Can I please confirm if you meant [***] when you said [***]?"

Follow-up question 3: "Can you please describe what you felt when [***] happened?"

Follow-up question 4: "It sounds like you have a strong feeling about [***]. Can you please share more insight?"

Follow-up question 5: "Can you further describe your perception of the [***]?"

Follow-up question 6: "Can you be a bit more specific about the [***]?"

Follow-up question 7: "Can you further describe the nature of the [***]?"

Follow-up question 8: "[***] sounds very thought-provoking. Can you please describe your belief in a bit more detail?"

Follow-up question 9: "Can you describe your perception of improvement in the area of [***]"

Follow-up question 10: "You mentioned [***]; can you please provide more details on your specific experience and possible later consequences?"

Follow-up question 11: "You stated [***]. Can you tell me a bit more?"

Follow-up question 12: "You mentioned [***]; could you explain it a bit more?"

Appendix D: SME Correspondence

Mr. Brian Cambra, Ed.D. — Central Texas College Europe,

Child Development (CD) Program Manager and Faculty

Good day Dr. Cambra,

I am writing to ask for your assistance.

Currently, I am attending the course Research Methodology in the Ed.D. program and writing Chapter 3.

I am writing to you, as a subject matter expert, to seek assistance with one of my assignments; please see the requirements below.

> Instrumentation
>
> Identify and describe the data collection instruments, how they relate to study variables and research questions, who created them and how, how reliability and validity were established, and when and where they have been used. Describe pilot studies, reliability, and validity studies, if available, and your adaptations of a validated instrument. Include testing and validation of the instruments, for example, if the interview questions or questions in surveys or questionnaires are made by the researcher. Inform the reader how the instrument questions were developed. Were the questions modified from learning or professional standards? an assessment? inspired from an existing survey or questionnaire?
>
> Submit (email is sufficient) your instrument (questionnaire, interview, or survey questions) to subject matter experts (SME). Be sure approximately 5 SME review your questions. Include a statement in this section for the reviewer. Add a screenshot of your submission to the appendix.

We need to find the SME in the area of research methodology, rather than the particular topic of interest (toxic leadership).

I just need brief feedback regarding the design of my questions and their suitability to be an instrument for my qualitative research.

Please let me know if you can dedicate some of your valuable time to review my interview questions and send me your feedback.

I have attached my final Concept Paper for the background information.

Thank you in advance.

Thank you and have a nice day.

Ancica Roosa

Ms. Amanda Evans, Ph.D. — American College of Education, Faculty

From:	Ancica Roosa
To:	amanda.evans@ace.edu
Bcc:	"ancica.roosa@europe.ctcd.edu"
Subject:	Ancica Roosa - Request for SME assistance Dr. Evans
Date:	Thursday, July 25, 2019 12:45:00 PM
Attachments:	Ancica Roosa_Appendix B—Interview Questions.docx
	Ancica Roosa_Concept Paper – Final Version_6512.pdf

Good day Dr. Evans,

I was your student in the course RES6033_1901073.

Currently, I am attending the course RES6521_1907083 (Research Methodology) with Dr. Sarah Everts.

I am writing to you, as a subject matter expert, to seek assistance with one of my assignments; please see the requirements below.

> Instrumentation
>
> Identify and describe the data collection instruments, how they relate to study variables and research questions, who created them and how, how reliability and validity were established, and when and where they have been used. Describe pilot studies, reliability, and validity studies, if available, and your adaptations of a validated instrument.
>
> Include testing and validation of the instruments, for example, if the interview questions or questions in surveys or questionnaires are made by the researcher. Inform the reader how the instrument questions were developed. Were the questions modified from learning or professional standards? an assessment? inspired from an existing survey or questionnaire? ==Submit (email is sufficient) your instrument (questionnaire, interview, or survey questions) to subject matter experts (SME). Be sure approximately 5 SME review your questions. Include a statement in this section for the reviewer.== Add a screenshot of your submission to the appendix.

Please let me know if you can dedicate some of your valuable time to review my interview questions and send me your feedback.

I have attached my final Concept Paper for the background information.

Thank you in advance.

Ancica Roosa

Ms. Robin Garrett, Ph.D. — Central Texas College

Deputy Chancellor, Academic & Student Services

From: Ancica Roosa
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2019 4:19 AM
To: Garrett, Robin <rgarrett@ctcd.edu>
Subject: Ancica Roosa - Request for SME assistance

Good day Dr. Garrett,

I am writing to ask for your assistance.

Currently, I am attending the course Research Methodology in the Ed.D. program and writing Chapter 3.

I am writing to you, as a subject matter expert, to seek assistance with one of my assignments; please see the requirements below.

> Instrumentation
> Identify and describe the data collection instruments, how they relate to study variables and research questions, who created them and how, how reliability and validity were established, and when and where they have been used. Describe pilot studies, reliability, and validity studies, if available, and your adaptations of a validated instrument.
> Include testing and validation of the instruments, for example, if the interview questions or questions in surveys or questionnaires are made by the researcher. Inform the reader how the instrument questions were developed. Were the questions modified from learning or professional standards? an assessment? inspired from an existing survey or questionnaire? Submit (email is sufficient) your instrument (questionnaire, interview, or survey questions) to subject matter experts (SME). Be sure approximately 5 SME review your questions. Include a statement in this section for the reviewer. Add a screenshot of your submission to the appendix.

We need to find the SME in the area of research methodology, rather than the particular topic of interest (toxic leadership).

I just need brief feedback regarding the design of my questions and their suitability to be an instrument for my qualitative research.

Please let me know if you can dedicate some of your valuable time to review my interview questions and send me your feedback.

I have attached my final Concept Paper for the background information.

Thank you in advance.

Thank you and have a nice day.

Ancica Roosa

Ms. Zora Gaymon, Ph.D. — Central Texas College Europe

Child Development Program Manager and Faculty (retired in 2018)

From: Ancica Roosa
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2019 13:52
To: gaymonz@yahoo.com
Subject: Ancica Roosa - Request for SME assistance

Good day Dr. Gaymon,

I am writing to ask for your assistance.

Currently, I am attending the course *Research Methodology* in the Ed.D. program and writing Chapter 3.

I am writing to you, as a subject matter expert, to seek assistance with one of my assignments; please see the requirements below.

Instrumentation

Identify and describe the data collection instruments, how they relate to study variables and research questions, who created them and how, how reliability and validity were established, and when and where they have been used. Describe pilot studies, reliability, and validity studies, if available, and your adaptations of a validated instrument. Include testing and validation of the instruments, for example, if the interview questions or questions in surveys or questionnaires are made by the researcher. Inform the reader how the instrument questions were developed. Were the questions modified from learning or professional standards? an assessment? inspired from an existing survey or questionnaire?

Submit (email is sufficient) your instrument (questionnaire, interview, or survey questions) to subject matter experts (SME). Be sure approximately 5 SME review your questions. Include a statement in this section for the reviewer. Add a screenshot of your submission to the appendix.

We need to find the SME in the area of research methodology, rather than the particular topic of interest (toxic leadership).

I just need brief feedback regarding the design of my questions and their suitability to be an instrument for my qualitative research.

Please let me know if you can dedicate some of your valuable time to review my interview questions and send me your feedback.

I have attached my final Concept Paper for the background information.

Thank you in advance.

Thank you and have a nice day.

Ancica Roosa

Ms. Caroline Gulbrandsen, Ed.D.—American College of Education, Faculty

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Ancica Roosa, Caroline Gulbrand...
Ancica Roosa - Request for SME a...
Good evening Dr. Gulbrandsen, Thank y...

Ancica Roosa, Caroline Gulbrandsen
HE6113 - Resource Management in Higher Education

July 25, 2019 at 4:34pm

Good day Dr. Gulbrandsen

Currently, I am attending the course RES6521_1907083 (Research Methodology) with Dr. Sarah Everts.
I am writing to you, as a subject matter expert, to seek assistance with one of my assignments; please see the requirements below.

Instrumentation
Identify and describe the data collection instruments, how they relate to study variables and research questions, who created them and how, how reliability and validity were established, and when and where they have been used. Describe pilot studies, reliability, and validity studies, if available, and your adaptations of a validated instrument.
Include testing and validation of the instruments, for example, if the interview questions or questions in surveys or questionnaires are made by the researcher. Inform the reader how the instrument questions were developed. Were the questions modified from learning or professional standards? an assessment? inspired from an existing survey or questionnaire?
Submit (email is sufficient) your instrument (questionnaire, interview, or survey questions) to subject matter experts (SME). Be sure approximately 5 SME review your questions. Include a statement in this section for the reviewer. Add a screenshot of your submission to the appendix.

Please let me know if you can dedicate some of your valuable time to review my interview questions and send me your feedback.
I have attached my final Concept Paper for the background information.
Thank you in advance.

Anci

📎 Ancica Roosa_Concept Paper - Final Version_6512.pdf
📎 Ancica Roosa_Appendix B—Interview Questions-2.docx

Appendix E: Research Participant Invitation

Good day,

My name is Ancica Roosa. I am a doctoral candidate at the American College of

Education. I am conducting research for my dissertation, and I am looking for possible

participants. The purpose of the proposed study is to examine lived experiences and issues of a

toxic workplace, explore the perception of business ethics education, and establish a possible

relationship between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. Toxic

leadership is socially unwanted behavior associated with destructive outcomes and creating a

toxic workplace characterized by stress, anxiety, conflict, and low morale. Toxic leaders create a

hostile and dysfunctional environment—a toxic workplace, which harmfully affects people's

professional and personal life.

The study is necessary because the destructive effects of a toxic workplace might be

preventable. Education in business ethics has the potential to develop ethical awareness, moral

courage, resilience, and a mindset capable of preventing the creation of a toxic workplace. If you

have lived experience of exposure to toxic leadership and toxic workplace, I humbly hope you

will respond to this Invitation. If you accept, I will provide additional information about the

study and send you the Informed Consent form.

The research will use a snowball sampling method where (if possible) the purposively

selected participants will recommend potential candidates (associates, friends, family) suitable

and interested in the research participation. Participation involves an interview, which may last

between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews will consist of five semi-structured, open-ended

questions, and if needed, 12 follow-up interview questions designed to clarify the provided

information. The interview will take place next week (04/08/2020-04/11/2020) via the communication channel of your choice (Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or telephone), whenever convenient for you. Your participation in the study is voluntary; if you change your mind and do not wish to participate, you may withdraw at any time. All written notes (transcripts) will be sent to the participants (respectively) for review and authorization.

The research process grants the full protection of the participants' anonymity. All collected personal information and data will be adequately safeguarded, password-protected, and securely destroyed once the data retention time is due. The findings of the research will be presented in a way the sources of information cannot be identified. While there may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in the study, I hope to collect the data with the potential to help in closing the gap in the body of knowledge related to the possible connection between education in business ethics and the prevention of toxic leadership. Thank you in advance for considering this dissertation research opportunity.
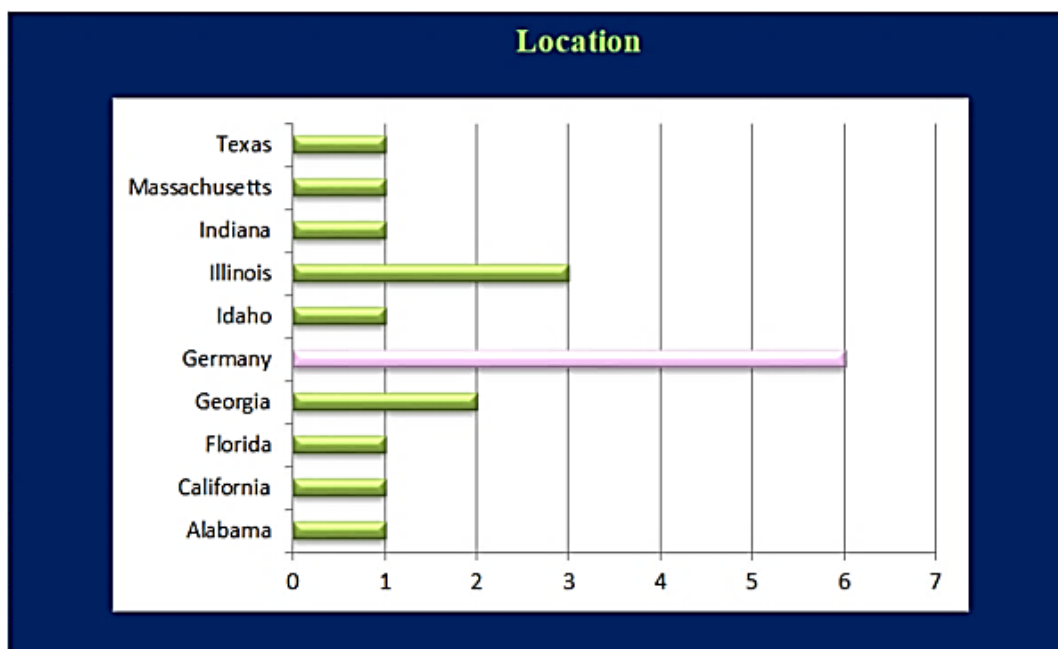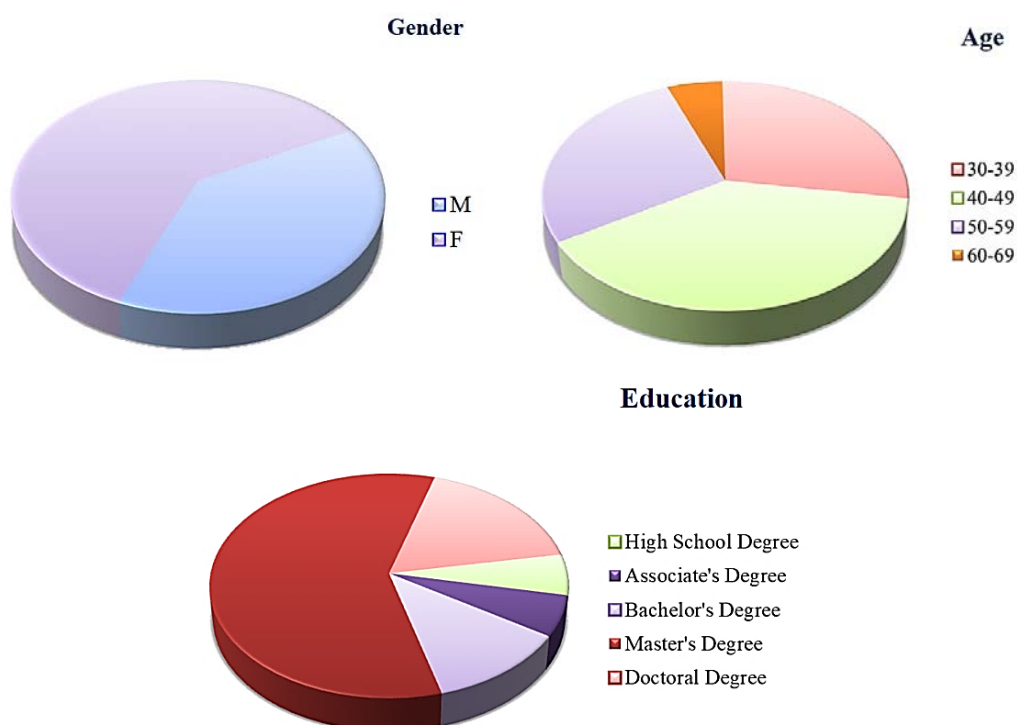
Respectfully

Ancica Roosa

Appendix F: Research Log

Participant Number	Participation Invitation	Informed Consent Sent	Informed Consent Received	Date of the Interview	Time of the Interview	Interview Channel	Gender	Age	Ed Level	Profession/Role	Location	Interview authorized
1	04/06/20	04/06/20	04/07/20	W 04/08/2020	10:30	Skype	M	48	Masters	Assistant Director	Germany	04/15/20
2	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/06/20	W 04/08/2020	16:00	WebEx	M	38	Masters	Academic Dean	Illinois	04/16/20
3	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	W 04/08/2020	17:00	phone	M	35	Masters	Contractor	Georgia	04/18/20
4	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/06/20	W 04/08/2020	16:00	email	F	31	Masters	Administrator	Texas	04/10/20
5	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/07/20	T 04/09/2020	14:00	Skype	M	44	Bachelors	Assistant Director	Germany	04/20/20
6	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	T 04/09/2020	15:00	Phone	F	51	Doctorate	Faculty	Florida	04/23/20
7	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	T 04/09/2020	16:00	Zoom	F	49	Doctorate	Administrator	Indiana	04/23/20
8	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	T 04/09/2020	17:00	WebEx	F	48	Masters	Academic Dean	Illinois	04/20/20
9	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/09/20	F 04/10/2020	11:45	Skype	F	48	Masters	Manager	Germany	04/19/20
10	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	F 04/10/2020	15:00	Zoom	M	46	Masters	Program Manager	Germany	04/23/20
11	04/05/20	04/05/20	04/05/20	F 04/10/2020	19:00	Zoom	F	34	Masters	Operations Manager	Massachusetts	04/23/20
12	04/08/20	04/08/20	04/09/20	F 04/10/2020	20:00	Zoom	F	40	Doctorate	Project Manager	Georgia	04/21/20
13	04/06/20	04/06/20	04/08/20	S 04/11/2020	17:00	Skype	M	52	Associates	HR Manager	Alabama	04/22/20
14	04/06/20	04/06/20	04/09/20	S 04/11/2020	10:30	Skype	F	68	Bachelors	Retired	Germany	04/25/20
15	04/11/20	04/11/20	04/11/20	S 04/12/2020	12:00	Skype	F	35	High School	Nurse	Germany	04/19/20
16	04/08/20	04/08/20	04/12/20	M 04/13/2020	17:00	phone	F	53	Masters	Nurse	Illinois	04/25/20
17	04/06/20	04/06/20	04/12/20	M 04/13/2020	12:30	phone	M	52	Masters	Faculty	Idaho	04/25/20
18	04/09/20	04/09/20	04/12/20	M 04/13/2020	23:00	phone	F	51	Masters	Project Manager	California	04/21/20

Appendix G: Participant Demographics

Gender

- M
- F

Age

- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69

Education

- High School Degree
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Location

Appendix H: Presentation of Data

Primary and Sub-Themes, Study Participants, Frequency of Discussion, and Percentage of

Themes

Primary & Sub-Themes	Study Participants who experienced the theme	Frequency (number of times each theme was mentioned during the interview)	Percentage (comparing frequency of discussed themes)
Theme 1: Toxic Workplace	**Primary Theme 1:** 18/18 participants	432	36%
Sub-Themes (6): A) Presence of toxic leader B) Presence of toxic followers and "yes" people	**Sub-Theme A:** P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	112	26%
C) Micromanagement, work overload, control issues, intimidation, yelling, bullying, and lost productivity	**Sub-Theme B:** P#3, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#16	49	11%
D) Failure of HR & senior leadership in protecting the victim	**Sub-Theme C:** P#1, P#2, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	87	20%
E) Negative outcomes (change of job, retiring, obstacles to deserved and equitable promotion, retaliation) F) Positive outcomes (removal of toxic leader, temporary improvement)	**Sub-Theme D:** P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	102	24%
	Sub-Theme E: P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	73	17%
	Sub-Theme F: P#13, P#15, P#17	9	2%
Theme 2: Feelings and Experience of Working at a Toxic Workplace	**Primary Theme 1:** 18/18 participants	330	28%
Sub-Themes (5): A) Feelings of anger, frustration, humiliation, despair, anxiety, fear, dissapointment, inferiority, helplessness, uncertainty	**Sub-Theme A:** P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	156	47.3%
B) Was it my fault? Have I done something wrong to provoke the hostility?	**Sub-Theme B:** P#5, P#9, P#11, P#15	21	6.4%
C) Fear of losing a job, threats D) Hate or fear of coming to work, wish to be somewhere	**Sub-Theme C:** P#5, P#6, P#9, P#10, P#14, P#15, P#17	49	14.8%
else, difficulties to work, second-guessing, fear of making mistakes	**Sub-Theme D:** P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#10, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#14, P#15, P#16, P#17, P#18	79	23.9%
E) Health and mental health issues (depression, sadness, fear, insomnia, stress, headaches/migraines, PTSD, anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of confidence)	**Sub-Theme E:** P#4, P#5, P#9, P#11, P#15, P#16, P#18	25	7.6%

Primary & Sub-Themes	Study Participants who experienced the theme	Frequency (number of times each theme was mentioned during the interview)	Percentage (comparing frequency of discussed themes)
Theme 3: Perception of Education in Business Ethics	**Primary Theme 1:** 18/18 participants	121	10%
Sub-Themes (3): A) Education in business ethics in higher education matters	**Sub-Theme A:** P#1, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#11, P#12, P#13, P#15	52	43%
B) Education in business ethics matters, but behavior depends on circumstances, personal values, character, and ranks	**Sub-Theme B:** P#3, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#18	48	40%
C) Education in business ethics does not matter (behavior depends on circumstances, personal values, character, and ranks)	**Sub-Theme C:** P#2, P#14	21	17%
Theme 4: Introducing Mandatory Education in Business Ethics at All Higher Education Institutions	**Primary Theme 1:** 18/18 participants	180	15%
Sub-Themes (3): A) Education in business ethics should be established in all higher education institutions	**Sub-Theme A:** P#1, P#2, P#3, P#4, P#5, P#6, P#7, P#8, P#9, P#11, P#15, P#17	89	49%
B) Education in business ethics should be provided much earlier in the students' formative years (values instilled in childhood and high school age)	**Sub-Theme B:** P#8, P#9, P#17, P#18	44	24%
C) Education in business ethics should be provided as the workplace training	**Sub-Theme C:** P#2, P#3, P#5, P#10, P#13	47	26%
Theme 5: Possible Connection Between the Lack of Education in Business Ethics and the Incidence of Toxic Leadership and Toxic Workplace	**Primary Theme 1:** 18/18 participants	131	11%
Sub-Themes (3): A) There is a connection	**Sub-Theme A:** P#2, P#4, P#6, P#7, P#13, P#15	45	34%
B) There could be a connection, under particular circumstances	**Sub-Theme B:** P#1, P#11, P#14, P#15, P#17, P#18	57	44%
C) There is no connection (people will behave in accordance with their nature and ranks)	**Sub-Theme C:** P#3, P#5, P#6, P#12, P#14, P#17	29	22%