

Organizational Toxicity: A Painful Situations and Impacts that Occur to High-performing Sales Employee in the Workplace

Jirapong Ruanggoon*, Wittawin Khowlumlert** and Siripapun Leephajaroen***

Received: February 26, 2023 Revised: March 23, 2024 Accepted: June 25, 2024

Abstract

Organizational toxicity is the negative and harmful environment that exists within an organization. This toxic environment is characterized by a fear, mistrust, and competition that often leads to high levels of stress, burnout, and turnover among employees. Metha is a salesperson who is facing a toxic work environment and has been impacted to the point where he feels genuinely frustrated, disappointed, and wants to resign. The harmful toxicity that occurs in this workplace, if left unaddressed, could be a cause for the organization to lose good employees who have valuable skills, which is regrettable. To cope organizational toxicity, it is essential to identify the root causes of toxicity and implement strategies that foster a positive and supportive workplace culture. By creating a healthy and inclusive work environment, organizations can not only retain their talent but also attract new talent and enhance their performance.

Keywords: Organizational Toxicity, Organizational Climate, Human Resource Management

* Faculty of Management Science, Dhonburi Rajabhat University

172 Isaraphap Road, Wat Kanlaya Subdistrict, Thonburi District, Bangkok, THAILAND.

E-mail: jirapong.r@dru.ac.th

** Faculty of Management Science, Dhonburi Rajabhat University

172 Isaraphap Road, Wat Kanlaya Subdistrict, Thonburi District, Bangkok, THAILAND.

E-mail: wittawinmart246@gmail.com

*** Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University

2 Ratchathani Road, Nai Mueang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Ubon Ratchathani, THAILAND.

E-mail: siripapun.lee@hotmail.com

ความเป็นพิษในองค์การ: สถานการณ์อันเจ็บปวด และผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นในที่ทำงานของพนักงานขายดีเด่น

จิระพงค์ เรืองกุน* วิธิวนิท ขาวล้ำเลิศ** และ สิริภาพร ลีภัยเจริญ***

รับวันที่: 26 กุมภาพันธ์ 2566 ส่งแก้ไขวันที่: 23 มีนาคม 2567 ตอบรับตีพิมพ์วันที่: 25 มิถุนายน 2567

บทคัดย่อ

ความเป็นพิษในองค์การ คือ สภาพแวดล้อมที่เป็นลบและไม่เป็นมิตรที่เกิดขึ้นในที่ทำงาน สภาพแวดล้อมที่เป็นพิษนี้สะท้อนจากความวิตกกังวล ความไม่ไว้วางใจ และการแข่งขันของพนักงาน ส่งผลให้เกิดความเครียด ภาวะหมดไฟ และการลาออกจาก เมราเป็นพนักงานขายที่ต้องเผชิญกับ สภาพแวดล้อมการทำงานที่เป็นพิษ เป็นผู้ที่ได้รับผลกระทบจนถึงจุดที่เข้ารู้สึกผิดหวังและอยาก ที่จะลาออกจากองค์การ กล่าวได้ว่า หากพิษในที่ทำงานไม่ได้รับการแก้ไข ความเป็นพิษในองค์การ จะเป็นสาเหตุให้องค์การสูญเสียพนักงานที่ดีและมีความสามารถ ซึ่งเป็นเรื่องที่น่าเสียดาย การรับมือกับ ความเป็นพิษในองค์การจึงเป็นสิ่งจำเป็น โดยต้องตระหนักรถึงสาเหตุหลักของความพิษและนำกลยุทธ์ ที่ส่งเสริมวัฒนธรรมการทำงานที่เชิงบวกและสนับสนุนซึ่งกันและกันเข้ามาใช้ สร้างสภาพแวดล้อม การทำงานที่มีสุขภาวะเพื่อที่องค์การจะสามารถดึงดูดและรักษาพนักงานที่ผลการปฏิบัติงานโดดเด่น เพิ่มพูนผลการปฏิบัติงานขององค์การ

คำสำคัญ: ความเป็นพิษในองค์การ บรรยากาศในที่ทำงาน การจัดการทรัพยากรมนุษย์

* คณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏธนบุรี
เลขที่ 172 ถนนอิสรภาพ แขวงวัดกัลยาณ์ เขตธนบุรี กรุงเทพฯ 10600

E-mail: jirapong.r@dru.ac.th

** คณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏธนบุรี
เลขที่ 172 ถนนอิสรภาพ แขวงวัดกัลยาณ์ เขตธนบุรี กรุงเทพฯ 10600

E-mail: wittawinmart246@gmail.com

*** คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏอุบลราชธานี
เลขที่ 2 ถนนราชธานี ต.ในเมือง อ.เมือง จ.อุบลราชธานี 34000

E-mail: siripapun.lee@hotmail.com

Employees prefer to work in a workplace that is conducive to their physical and mental well-being, where management and productivity are given equal importance. However, there are several factors that can lead to a shift from a healthy organizational environment to a stressful one. One of these factors is the presence of a toxic in organization (Mir & Nastiezaie, 2022). Organizational toxicity is a concept that describes the negative impact that workplaces can have on their employees' health and well-being. It can manifest in a range of forms, including physical harm, such as exposure to hazardous chemicals or dangerous working conditions, psychological harm, such as chronic stress or anxiety, and emotional harm, such as discrimination, harassment, or bullying (Einarsen et al., 2018; Kasalak, 2019).

The increasing interest in organizational toxicity is driven by a growing recognition of its negative effects on individuals and organizations. Research has shown that toxic workplaces can lead to high levels of stress, burnout, and turnover, as well as reduced productivity and job satisfaction (Tepper, 2007; Abbas & Saad, 2020). Furthermore, toxic cultures can perpetuate harmful behaviors, such as bullying or discrimination, which can have lasting effects on employees' mental and physical health (Sull et al., 2022). To address organizational toxicity, researchers and practitioners are increasingly focusing on promoting positive organizational cultures and reducing the incidence of harmful behaviors. For example, some organizations are implementing anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies, providing mental health resources and support for employees, and promoting work-life balance and employee engagement (Sundt, 2016).

This case study presents the story of Meta, a student at a university who was subjected to toxicity from co-workers while working part-time as a sales employee in a small-sized decorative industry in Bangkok. The impact of toxicity in the organization on Meta led to a learning experience to cope, resolve issues, and prevent toxicity in the workplace.

Situation that Led to Toxicity in the Organization

Toxicity in an organization can arise due to various factors such as a lack of communication, poor leadership, favoritism, and unclear expectations. In some cases, it may also be due to unethical behavior or harassment. These situations can have a significant impact on employees and the overall functioning of the organization.

Mr. Metha, a student at a university, was working with a company that had seven salespeople, three operation/technician staff, two finance and accounting staff, and two work supervisors. The decorative car business emphasizes customer demand for car decoration to be beautiful, distinctive, and safe. The survival and growth of the business depend on increasing access to customers. Therefore, the company places importance on promoting sales, developing and proposing sales promotion plans for both current and future customers. The organization chart of the company as shown in Figure 1. In a small-sized decorative industry based in Bangkok, the organizational structure revolves around cohesive teamwork and relatively flat hierarchies. At the helm sits the owner, wielding ultimate authority and guiding the company's vision and strategic decisions. Steering the sales department is the head, overseeing a team of sales staff, including Mr. Metha and his colleagues, tasked with driving revenue through product promotion and sales. Mr. Metha, among the sales staff, plays a pivotal role in crafting sales strategies, identifying potential clientele, and sealing deals to ensure customer satisfaction and business growth.

Meanwhile, the operations/technician department manages the practical aspects of production and installation, ensuring that decorative products meet quality standards. Overseeing financial matters is the finance and accounting department, responsible for budgeting, accounting, and regulatory compliance. Work supervisors, scattered across departments, provide hands-on guidance and support to ensure smooth task execution aligned with company standards.

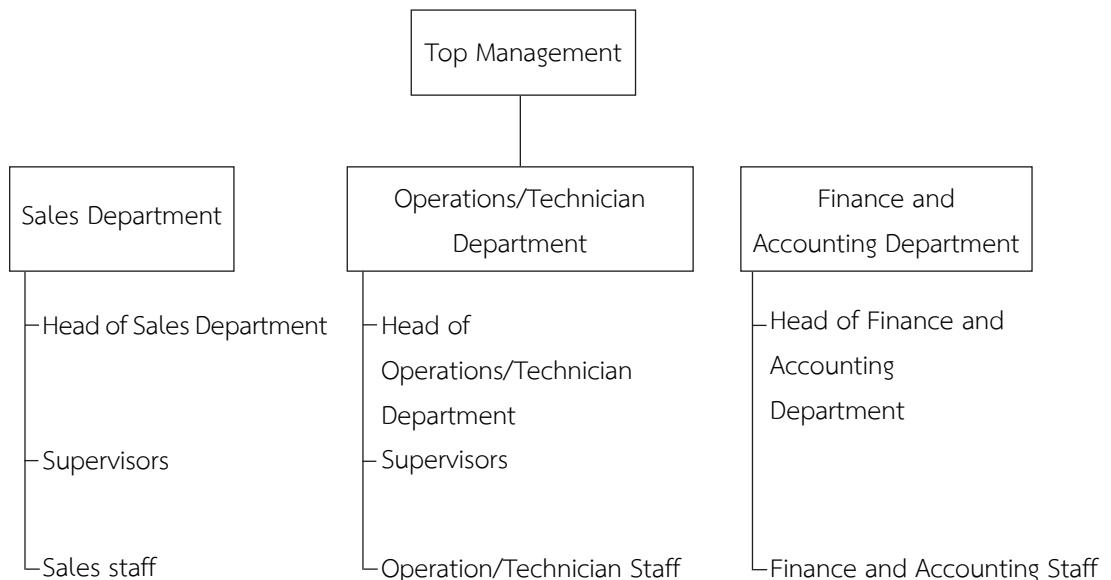


Figure 1: Organization Chart of the Company

Within this environment, collaboration thrives, with employees across departments frequently interacting and sharing ideas. Communication channels are informal, fostering open dialogue and teamwork. While ultimate authority rests with the owner, decision-making authority is decentralized, empowering department heads and supervisors for agility in daily operations.

In this setting, Mr. Metha's role as a sales staff member is pivotal. His duties encompass a spectrum of tasks, from devising sales strategies to negotiating deals, all aimed at bolstering the company's revenue stream and client satisfaction. Despite his instrumental contributions, Mr. Metha faces challenges. His success has drawn envy and resentment from some colleagues, leading to toxic behaviors aimed at impeding his performance and reputation. Nevertheless, Mr. Metha remains resolute, navigating these obstacles with determination, striving for personal and organizational triumph despite adversity.

The problem that caused toxicity in the organization is related to job performance. Specifically, the head of the sales department assigned a task to the sales staff to propose a sales promotion plan for Kevlar stickers. (Figure 2)

to customers, with a goal to sell 10 sets of sticker wraps at a price of 6,500 baht per set, totaling 65,000 baht. The head of the department knew that selling 10 sets of sticker wraps, which were priced higher than the market, would be difficult. Therefore, the head of the sales department announced to the sales staff that whoever could succeed would receive a bonus as an incentive to work. It turned out that most of the sales staff were unable to present a sales promotion plan those customers would accept.

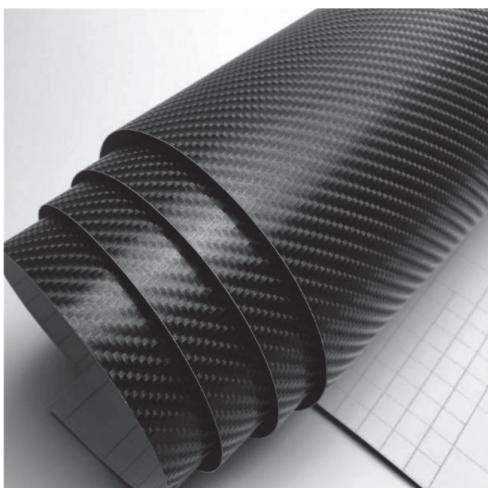


Figure 2: Kevlar stickers

In the context of selling Kevlar stickers within the small-sized decorative industry in Bangkok, the sales challenge posed by the head of the sales department carries significant weight. Kevlar stickers, known for their durability and strength, find utility in various industries such as automotive, aerospace, and sporting equipment. Their application in the automotive sector, particularly in car decoration, is pertinent to the company's line of business. Competing in a market where price sensitivity is paramount, the sales team faces the uphill task of convincing customers of the value proposition offered by the Kevlar stickers. Given their higher price point compared to alternatives available in the market, persuading customers to invest in these premium products requires a strategic approach.

It appeared that the majority of the sales department employees were unable to present sales promotion plans that would be accepted by customers. Some customers immediately rejected them because the Kevlar stickers were expensive. Customers saw that if they bought from other vendors, they could get them for a price of 4,000-5,000 baht per set, which is cheaper. There was only one vendor, Mr. Metha, who offered a sales promotion plan to customers, stating that one set would be priced at 6,500 baht. If they bought 10 sets, the price would be reduced to 60,000 baht. Additionally, the installation of Kevlar stickers was offered for free, which usually costs 1,500 baht. This made customers accept the offer and Mr. Metha was successful in making the sale.

In this situation, Mr. Metha's innovative sales promotion plan stands out as a beacon of success amidst the sales team's struggles. By offering a discounted price for bulk purchases and including complimentary installation services, Mr. Metha addresses customer concerns regarding the product's cost-effectiveness and value proposition. This tailored approach resonates with customers, ultimately leading to successful sales conversions. Within the selling system of the company, Mr. Metha's initiative highlights the importance of understanding customer needs and tailoring solutions to meet them effectively. While other sales staff may have faltered in presenting compelling sales promotion plans, Mr. Metha's ability to adapt and innovate underscores the significance of proactive and customer-centric selling strategies within the organization. His success serves as a testament to the effectiveness of personalized approaches in driving sales and fostering customer satisfaction in a competitive market landscape.

The head of the sales department was very pleased with Mr. Metha's work because the customers he proposed to sell to were important customers of the company. Mr. Metha succeeded and received a bonus, along with praise and a certificate of excellence. In addition, Mr. Metha was also praised at the sales staff meeting. The head of the sales department presented Mr. Metha's sales promotion plan for admiration and as an example for other employees to improve their own sales promotion plans. Since that meeting, Mr. Metha was disliked by his colleagues

and they did not talk to him like they used to. Before, they used to be close and went places together, but now the atmosphere was different.

Following the sales staff meeting where Mr. Metha was praised for his exceptional performance, a noticeable shift in the dynamics of his relationships with colleagues occurred. Initially, Mr. Metha's success was celebrated by his peers, and they appreciated his contributions to the team. However, as time passed and the implications of Mr. Metha's achievements became more apparent, envy and resentment began to brew among certain colleagues. The atmosphere within the sales department gradually soured as some colleagues harbored feelings of inadequacy and jealousy towards Mr. Metha. His success highlighted their own shortcomings in securing sales and meeting targets, leading to feelings of frustration and self-doubt. Additionally, Mr. Metha's recognition by the head of the sales department served as a stark reminder of their own perceived underperformance in comparison.

As a result, subtle signs of animosity and exclusion began to surface within the team. Colleagues who were once amicable towards Mr. Metha now distanced themselves and refrained from engaging with him as they used to. Social interactions that were previously commonplace, such as going out together or engaging in casual conversations, dwindled, contributing to a palpable sense of isolation for Mr. Metha. The development of toxicity within this context can be attributed to a combination of factors, including personal insecurities, competition for recognition and rewards, and a lack of effective communication. Rather than channeling their feelings of dissatisfaction into constructive avenues for self-improvement, some colleagues resorted to negative behaviors aimed at undermining Mr. Metha's reputation and success.

This toxic dynamic may have been exacerbated by gossip, backbiting, and passive-aggressive behavior among colleagues, further fueling the atmosphere of resentment towards Mr. Metha. Over time, the festering animosity towards him culminated in overt acts of sabotage, such as spreading rumors, withholding crucial information, and undermining his efforts to maintain his high performance.

The disliking and toxic environment that developed around Mr. Metha stemmed from a combination of professional jealousy, perceived favoritism, and an inability to cope with his success. This breakdown in collegial relationships highlights the detrimental effects of unchecked envy and resentment within a team dynamic, ultimately undermining morale, collaboration, and productivity within the sales department.

The toxic environment in this organization surrounding Mr. Metha may be a result of his successful sales pitches. Mr. Metha is a highly praised employee and a good role model in his work, having received bonuses and praise from his supervisor. Being an outstanding performer at work has caused jealousy among his colleagues, and in the following period, there has been an occurrence of office politics within the company. Sales staff who dislike Mr. Metha have used every means possible to sabotage his work, such as placing anonymous negative notes and spreading rumors behind his back. Mr. Metha feels that if he cannot make a successful sales pitch that day, the problems with his colleagues today will not go away.

Each organization's employees are likely to encounter various problems that cause pain. Each workplace has different situations, whether it is caused by superiors, colleagues, or customers. In most cases, problems often arise from misunderstandings about work. Some bosses often use harsh words, speak loudly, and belittle the spirits of the listeners.

“I have to come in the morning and guess what’s going to happen. Is he in a good mood today? Being in this state of mind is not safe. However, this atmosphere is still acceptable, not too bad.”

Meanwhile, sometimes more serious toxicity problems occur within the organization, especially those involving colleagues, job competition, client grabbing, or work rejection. For example, as Metha was told,

“When we had good customers and a chance to make expensive sales, some colleagues often pulled them away, even though they had previously brought the customers to us. When this happened,

it hurt so much that I couldn't speak. But I managed to smile dryly and tell myself it was okay."

Toxicity in an organization has a significant impact on employees, causing them considerable pain and discomfort. Although some may think that these issues are not severe, the truth is that toxicity in an organization can cause exhaustion, frustration, and a desire to quit, often resulting from small, unaddressed issues that accumulate over time. These small problems can have a significant impact on the future, and if those responsible for the toxicity fail to recognize and address them, the toxicity they create can slowly erode the hearts of those who are affected, resulting in irreparable damage. As a result, the organization loses good, talented, and skilled employees, which is a shame.

The situation surrounding Metha's experience with toxicity in the organization is one that reflects a broader issue within the company's culture. At its core, the toxicity stems from interpersonal conflicts, jealousy, and resentment among colleagues, exacerbated by a lack of effective communication and conflict resolution mechanisms. Metha's exemplary performance and recognition by management served as a catalyst for envy and animosity among his peers within the sales department. As Metha continued to excel in his role, his colleagues' feelings of inadequacy and frustration intensified, leading to subtle acts of exclusion, sabotage, and passive-aggressive behavior aimed at undermining his success.

Despite facing constant obstacles and negativity from his coworkers, Metha remained resilient, striving to maintain his performance and professionalism in the face of adversity. However, the emotional toll of navigating a toxic work environment took its toll on Metha, leaving him feeling exhausted, defeated, and even contemplating resigning from his job. The profound impact of toxic behavior on Metha's well-being is evident in his reflections, where he candidly expresses feelings of worthlessness and disillusionment. Despite recognizing the severity of the situation, Metha also acknowledges the importance of support and understanding in overcoming adversity within the workplace.

Metha's story serves as a poignant reminder of the detrimental effects of unchecked toxicity in the workplace and underscores the urgent need for organizations to address underlying issues and foster a culture of respect, collaboration, and empathy. Metha reflects on the toxic situations he faces within the organization, expressing the challenges he encounters due to his colleagues' behavior. He shares,

“We are fighting for our lives, but life fights back. We feel exhausted, sometimes defeated, and secretly consider resigning.”

Metha's words convey the emotional toll of facing constant obstacles and negativity from his coworkers. He further emphasizes,

“It can make our lives feel worthless, as if doing good does not matter. In fact, situations like this are not always bad.”

Metha acknowledges the severity of the toxicity he experiences while also recognizing the resilience needed to navigate such challenges. He concludes,

“We may not always be able to speak up, but we just need someone who understands and can encourage us. We shouldn't be insulted every day, even though we haven't done anything. Everyone hurts.”

Through these quotations, Metha articulates the profound impact of toxic behavior on his well-being and underscores the importance of support and understanding in overcoming adversity within the workplace.

In this toxic dynamic, Metha's colleagues actively work to impede his development and success within the company. This may manifest in various ways, including deliberately withholding crucial information about training programs, workshops, or promotions that could enhance Metha's skills and career prospects. By keeping him uninformed, they limit his ability to stay competitive and advance within the industry. Additionally, they may conspire to block his path to promotion by spreading rumors or providing negative feedback to supervisors, undermining Metha's credibility and suitability for higher-level positions.

Toxic colleagues might sabotage Metha's involvement in desirable projects or initiatives by withholding support, providing false information, or actively undermining his efforts to ensure project failure. This concerted effort to tarnish Metha's reputation and performance record serves to derail his career progression. Moreover, they may interfere with Metha's networking opportunities within the organization and industry by excluding him from important meetings, conferences, or industry events where valuable connections are made. Such isolation from key networks limits Metha's access to potential career opportunities and advancement prospects. Ultimately, exclusion from opportunities reflects a calculated strategy by toxic colleagues to maintain their own power and influence within the organization, perpetuating a toxic environment where personal agendas supersede collective success and collaboration.

Toxicity within organizations poses significant challenges for employees, impacting their well-being and overall productivity. Metha's case study highlights various toxic situations that he encountered while working in a decorative industry in Bangkok. Initially praised for his successful sales pitches, Metha became the target of jealousy and resentment from his colleagues. This manifested in subtle forms such as exclusion from social activities and escalated to more overt behaviors like sabotage and blame-shifting. As the toxicity grew, Metha found himself isolated and demoralized, facing gaslighting tactics and micromanagement from supervisors. The toxic environment ultimately led to detrimental consequences, including a significant mistake in sales calculations and subsequent salary deductions. Despite attempts to address the toxicity, Metha felt increasingly defeated and contemplated resigning from his job.

The Impact of Toxic Situations

Toxicity in organizations has negative impacts on individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole. In the case of Mr. Metha, it had a negative impact on him personally, such as the consecutive events that led to his making a mistake and causing damage. Mr. Metha miscalculated the sales figures, proposing a sale price of 4,500 baht for a set of Kevlar ropes when the actual price should have

been 90,000 baht for 20 sets. The accounting department suspected that something was wrong when the receipt showed a total of less than 90,000 baht. Upon investigation, they found out that Mr. Metha had miscalculated the net sales price but it was too late, as he had already proposed the sale and the customers had paid for the product, resulting in the mistake.

The mistake made by Mr. Metha is recognized by the employees in the sales department, which led to the issue being brought up to management and resulted in Mr. Metha having his salary deducted. Previously, the supervisor had negotiated with the customer for the correct price, but the customer refused and demanded a price of 85,000 baht, which was agreed upon. When the issue could not be resolved, the supervisor decided to deduct the salaries of all employees as a warning and to encourage them to be more careful in their work. Other employees whose salaries were deducted blamed Mr. Metha for the mistake, even though it was his fault alone. The situation continued to escalate, leading to Mr. Metha feeling extremely upset and considering resigning from his job.

The impact of a toxic situation is something that undermines the mentality of the person receiving the toxicity, causing genuine frustration in their work. Metha, said,

“We are fighting for our lives, but life fights back. We feel exhausted, sometimes defeated, and secretly consider resigning.”

These feelings have certainly occurred to employees in other companies as well. Therefore, Metha, said,

“It can make our lives feel worthless, as if doing good does not matter. In fact, situations like this are not always bad. The reality is that we will always encounter problems like this, but it is not something that should make us give up entirely. If we don’t give up, we can fly out of it, even if it hurts to encounter it frequently. We may not always be able to speak up, but we just need someone who understands and can encourage us. We shouldn’t be insulted every day, even though we haven’t done anything. Everyone hurts.”

The effects of organizational toxicity can be extremely damaging for both individuals and the organization as a whole. Toxic work environments can create elevated levels of stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction among employees, leading to increased rates of absenteeism and turnover, as well as lower productivity and overall organizational performance. Toxic behaviors within a company can cause communication and collaboration breakdowns between employees and teams, impeding creativity and innovation. Consequently, the organization may experience a lack of problem-solving ability and may be unable to adjust to market or industry changes, putting it at a significant disadvantage. Additionally, the impact of organizational toxicity can go beyond the workplace and harm individuals' personal lives, resulting in negative effects on their physical and mental well-being, also to broader to the social and economic consequences.

Preventing & Resolving Organizational Toxicity

In any organization, toxicity can develop from a variety of factors including workplace bullying, toxic leadership, and unhealthy competition among employees. These factors can result in low morale, high turnover rates, and a decrease in productivity, among other negative outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to take proactive measures to prevent and resolve toxicity in the workplace.

In the case of Metha, he shared his own story of experiencing toxicity within the organization with his university classmates and discussed ways to prevent or address problems related to pain caused by toxins in the workplace. His classmates offered various suggestions, As shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Ways to Prevent or Address Problems Related to Pain Caused by Organizational Toxicity by Metha's University Classmates

Name	Suggestion
Krit	Metha should invite his colleagues to talk and explain the reasons and various causes of the problem. It should be acknowledged that the errors that occur in the workplace are not intentional, but when they do happen, it is important to find solutions and take responsibility as a team. In the future, the sales department should check data, account statements, proposals, and receipts together before closing each sale.
Jarunee	Metha shouldn't care and just continue working without concerning herself with others because we work to earn a living, not to care about others' feelings or pay attention to colleagues. Unintentional mistakes should not be kept and dwelled on to the point of self-deprecation. In the case of the toxicity within the organization, if Metha wasn't an outstanding employee, she wouldn't have encountered this toxicity.
Patama	Patama suggests a way that people in the same department of the organization could be invited to participate in activities together, such as going to the movies, traveling, or doing various activities together. This is like getting to know each other like family members, so that people in the organization and in the same department will think that our hearts and thoughts are not evil people and always care about our colleagues. Colleagues will not be jealous and understand the things that Metha does well or make mistakes.
Walapa	Walapa suggests that Metha may need to maintain a distance from coworkers and maintain a distance from the supervisor. She explains that maintaining distance means not standing out more than other employees. Walapa believes that the toxicity that arises is mainly due to Metha's success in completing important work assignments, which makes other employees jealous.

Table 1: The Ways to Prevent or Address Problems Related to Pain Caused by Organizational Toxicity by Metha's University Classmates (Cont.)

Name	Suggestion
Nipha	Nipha believes that the way to solve problems is to accept assigned tasks from the supervisor because our job responsibilities may involve the future and progress of the organization, which the supervisor may consider. We may see that we must complete the task because we cannot refuse, and doing the assigned work may lead to receiving praise as normal. However, we should talk to people in our organization about why the supervisor assigned us the task and have an open discussion. Then, we can explain that we did not have any intention to take the job, and the job needs to be done. We can also suggest that if the supervisor assigns us a job again, we will try to offer incentives to other staff members to increase their morale and reduce envy. The main cause of the toxicity in the organization is the misinterpretation of both parties without asking for reasons, which leads to resentment and suspicion.
Pathra	Pathra has to explain to all her colleagues that the employee has been assigned a task and he must complete it. She must discuss the reasons and principles of the work, not just her personal feelings and biases, in order to work together effectively as an organization. Therefore, in this case, Metha may find a new job where colleagues do not hold grudges against each other, which is suitable for himself, a job that he is good at and loves to do.

As the advice of Metha's friends in university, there is no one solution to a problem. Everyone has their reasons and different ways to solve the problem. In summary, the suggestions range from promoting teamwork and empathy to advocating for individual action or finding a new job. However, when Meta himself listens to the advice of his friends, he thinks that the problem can only be solved if people accept it, improve it, and review it, Metha, said,

"If we find that we are truly wrong and have made mistakes, we should correct them ourselves. But if we have corrected ourselves and they still don't change, there should be a discussion to agree on common principles to reduce these problems. However,

if the problem is too severe, Resign and find a better place. It is not necessarily about finding the best place but finding a place where we feel comfortable and at ease. When we work, we will be relaxed, full of new ideas, and may even encounter new opportunities. “

As for organization, one effective way to prevent toxicity is to create a positive work environment. This can be achieved through regular employee feedback, recognition programs, and a commitment to workplace wellness programs. As noted by Edmondson & Lei (2014),

“Leaders who create and sustain a positive work environment are able to foster greater employee engagement and commitment, which can help prevent the development of toxic behaviors” (p. 105).

Moreover, when addressing existing toxicity in the workplace, it is important to identify the root causes of the problem. This can involve conducting employee surveys, analyzing turnover rates, and assessing workplace culture. Based on this information, organizations can develop targeted interventions to address specific issues. These interventions may include targeted training programs, coaching for toxic employees, and restructuring of workplace policies and procedures.

The case study of Mr. Metha’s experience in a toxic work environment highlights the urgent need for effective solutions grounded in various theories of conflict management, HRM/HRD, communication, and organizational psychology. Possible solutions based on these foundational theories can be provided, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Solutions for Resolving Organizational Toxicity Based on Conflict Management, HRM/HRD, Communication, and Organizational Psychology Theories

Theories	Possible solutions	
Conflict Management	Negotiation and mediation	Encourage open dialogue and facilitate mediation sessions between Mr. Metha and his colleagues to address misunderstandings and resolve conflicts constructively.
	Conflict resolution techniques	Train employees, including Mr. Metha and his colleagues, in conflict resolution techniques such as active listening, empathy, and problem-solving to manage interpersonal conflicts effectively.
HRM/HRD	Training and development programs	Implement training programs focused on enhancing interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution for all employees to promote a positive work environment.
	Performance management	Establish clear performance expectations and provide regular feedback to employees, including recognition for collaborative efforts and contributions to teamwork.
Communication	Effective communication channels	Establish clear channels of communication within the organization, including regular team meetings, one-on-one sessions with supervisors, and anonymous feedback mechanisms to address concerns.
	Active listening	Encourage active listening among employees to foster empathy and understanding, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected in the workplace.

Table 2: Solutions for Resolving Organizational Toxicity Based on Conflict Management, HRM/HRD, Communication, and Organizational Psychology Theories (Cont.)

Theories	Possible solutions	
Organizational Psychology	Psychological safety	Create a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions, sharing concerns, and seeking support without fear of retribution.
	Cultural change initiatives	Implement cultural change initiatives aimed at shifting the organizational culture towards one that values collaboration, respect, and inclusivity.

The case study of Mr. Metha's experience in a toxic work environment underscores the critical need for comprehensive solutions informed by foundational theories of conflict management, HRM/HRD, communication, and organizational psychology. Drawing on negotiation and mediation theories (Follett, 1940), one potential solution involves facilitating open dialogue and mediation sessions between Mr. Metha and his colleagues to address underlying conflicts constructively. Additionally, conflict resolution techniques such as active listening and problem-solving (Rahim et al., 2018) can be incorporated into training programs aimed at enhancing interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence among employees. From an HRM/HRD perspective, implementing training initiatives focused on conflict resolution and providing regular feedback through performance management systems (Levy et al., 2017) can contribute to a positive work environment. Effective communication channels (Men, 2014), including regular team meetings and anonymous feedback mechanisms, are essential for fostering transparent communication and addressing concerns promptly. Furthermore, creating a psychologically safe environment (Edmondson & Lei, 2014) where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of retribution is paramount. Cultural change initiatives (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015) can help shift organizational culture towards one that values collaboration, respect, and inclusivity. By integrating these multidimensional

solutions, organizations can effectively mitigate organizational toxicity and promote the well-being and productivity of their employees.

How about you? Have you ever encountered a toxic situation in an organization? How did the toxic situation unfold and what were the impacts? How can you prevent toxicity from happening in the organization again? Additionally, based on Metta's case study on toxicity in an organization, if you were in Metha's shoes and experienced toxicity in the organization, how would you handle it, solve the problem, or take action going forward?

Conclusion

The case study of Mr. Metha's experience in a toxic work environment sheds light on the detrimental effects of organizational toxicity on individuals and the organization as a whole. Mr. Metha's exemplary performance led to jealousy and resentment among his colleagues, resulting in sabotage, blame-shifting, and ultimately, a toxic work environment. The toxicity not only affected Mr. Metha's mental well-being but also resulted in tangible consequences such as a financial mistake and subsequent salary deduction. Moreover, the toxic environment hindered collaboration and communication within the sales department, impacting overall organizational performance. Organizational toxicity, as highlighted in the case study, encompasses various forms of negative behaviors and environments within a workplace. This includes factors such as toxic leadership, unhealthy competition, bullying, and harassment, which can lead to stress, burnout, decreased productivity, and high turnover rates among employees (Tepper, 2007; Abbas & Saad, 2020). The case study reflects the impact of toxic behaviors on individual employees, highlighting feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and even thoughts of resignation.

To address and prevent organizational toxicity, it is essential for organizations to cultivate a positive work environment and address root causes of toxicity. This involves promoting open communication, empathy, and teamwork, as well as implementing measures such as regular feedback mechanisms, recognition programs, and workplace wellness initiatives (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Additionally,

organizations should invest in interventions aimed at addressing specific issues contributing to toxicity, such as targeted training programs, coaching for toxic employees, and revising policies and procedures to foster a culture of respect and inclusivity. In Mr. Metha's case, addressing the toxicity would require a multi-faceted approach involving both individual and organizational actions. Mr. Metha could initiate dialogue with his colleagues to address misunderstandings and foster a more supportive work environment. Additionally, he could seek support from management to address toxic behaviors and implement measures to promote collaboration and mutual respect within the sales department. Ultimately, if the toxicity persists despite efforts to address it, Mr. Metha may consider seeking opportunities in organizations with healthier work cultures where his talents and contributions are valued. The conclusion drawn from Mr. Metha's case study underscores the critical importance of addressing organizational toxicity for both individual well-being and organizational success. It elucidates the urgent need for comprehensive solutions informed by various theories in conflict management, human resource management and development (HRM/HRD), communication, and organizational psychology.

Theoretical frameworks such as conflict management theories provide valuable insights into understanding the underlying causes of toxicity within organizations. By examining different conflict resolution strategies, organizations can identify effective approaches to mitigate toxic behaviors and promote constructive conflict resolution. For instance, integrating principles from Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) can help employees and managers navigate conflicts more effectively by encouraging collaboration, compromise, and problem-solving.

HRM/HRD theories offer guidance on fostering a positive work environment and addressing toxic behaviors through strategic human resource interventions. Implementing performance management systems, mentorship programs, and leadership development initiatives can help cultivate a culture of respect, accountability, and continuous learning within the organization. Effective communication strategies, informed by communication theories such as Social

Penetration Theory and Transactional Model of Communication, are essential for promoting transparency, trust, and empathy in addressing organizational toxicity. Encouraging open dialogue, active listening, and feedback mechanisms can facilitate constructive conversations and conflict resolution, fostering a culture of mutual understanding and respect. Moreover, insights from organizational psychology shed light on the psychological mechanisms underlying toxic behaviors and their impact on employee well-being and organizational performance. By understanding factors such as power dynamics, group dynamics, and organizational culture, organizations can develop targeted interventions to address toxic behaviors and promote a positive work environment.

Resolving organizational toxicity requires a multifaceted approach informed by theoretical frameworks from conflict management, HRM/HRD, communication, and organizational psychology. By leveraging these theories to implement strategic interventions, organizations can create a workplace culture where employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. This case study underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing organizational toxicity to ensure the well-being of employees and the long-term success of the organization. By fostering a positive work environment and addressing toxic behaviors, organizations can create a culture where employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to contribute to their fullest potential.

Teaching Note

1. Learning objective

- 1.1 Understand the concept of organizational toxicity and its impacts on employees and organizations.
- 1.2 Identify signs and causes of toxic work environments.
- 1.3 Analyze strategies for preventing and addressing organizational toxicity.
- 1.4 Develop critical thinking skills in applying theoretical frameworks to real-world workplace situations.

2. Pedagogy

Case study discussion: Have students read and analyze the case of Mr. Metha, discussing key issues in small groups or as a class.

Role-playing exercises: Students can act out scenarios to practice conflict resolution techniques.

Theoretical application: Guide students in applying relevant theories (e.g. conflict management, HRM/HRD, communication) to the case.

Reflection papers: Students write about their own experiences with workplace toxicity and potential solutions.

3. Case Analysis

This case analysis is concentrated on:

3.1 The causes and manifestations of organizational toxicity in Mr. Metha's workplace, the impacts of toxic behaviors on individual employees and overall organizational performance.

3.2 Strategies for addressing and preventing organizational toxicity, drawing from multiple theoretical frameworks.

3.3 The role of leadership, communication, and organizational culture in fostering a positive work environment.

3.4 Ethical considerations in managing workplace conflicts and toxic behaviors.

3.5 Practical applications of conflict resolution and human resource management principles in real-world scenarios.

The analysis should encourage students to think critically about the complexities of workplace dynamics and develop actionable strategies for creating healthier organizational cultures.

References

Abbas, M., & Saad, G. B. (2020). An empirical investigation of toxic leadership traits impacts on workplace climate and harassment. *Talent Development & Excellence*, 12(3), 2317-2333.

Alvesson, M., & Svenningsson, S. (2015). *Changing organizational culture: Cultural change work in progress*. Routledge.

Edmondson, A., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 23-43.

Einarsen, S., Skogstad, A., Rørvik, E., Lande, Å. B., & Nielsen, M. B. (2018). Climate for conflict management, exposure to workplace bullying and work engagement: A moderated mediation analysis. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(5), 580-591.

Follett, M. P. (1940). Constructive conflict. In H. C. Metcalf & L. Urwick (Eds.), *Dynamic administration: The collected papers of Mary Parker Follett* (pp. 30-49). New York: Harper & Row.

Kasalak, G. (2019). Toxic behaviors in workplace: Examining the effects of the demographic factors on faculty members' perceptions of organizational toxicity. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science (IJRES)*, 5(1), 272-282.

Levy, P. E., Tseng, S. T., Rosen, C. C., & Lueke, S. B. (2017). Performance management: A marriage between practice and science—Just say “I do”. In *Research in personnel and human resources management* (pp. 155-213). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Men, L. R. (2014). Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction. *Management communication quarterly*, 28(2), 264-284.

Mir, H., Nastiezaie, N. (2022). The effect of organizational toxic climate on teachers' imaging management with the role of mediator probability of work. *Management and Educational Perspective*, 3(4), 37 -58.

Rahim, A., Civelek, I., & Liang, F. H. (2018). A process model of social intelligence and problem-solving style for conflict management. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 29(4), 487-499.

Sundt, J. L. (2016). The effect of administrative segregation on prison order and organizational culture. In M. Garcia (Ed.), *Restrictive housing in the U.S.* (pp. 297-330). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Sull, D., Sull, C., Cipolli, W. and Brightenti, C. (2022), Why every leader needs to worry about toxic culture. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Retrieved from: <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/why-everyleader-needs-to-worry-about-toxic-culture/>

Tepper, B. J. (2007). Abusive supervision in work organizations: Review, synthesis, and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 261-289.