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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Role of Leadership in Employee Turnover

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Abstract

This critical discourse analysis (CDA) study explores employee turnover through the lens of four senior executives who have recently resigned their positions and it examines the employee-manager relationship. The experience points to a complex and multifaceted picture of power in driving employee turnover, one that encompasses three C's; culture, control and conviction. This study points to a key role all senior leaders play in reducing turnover costs.

Key Words

Leadership, Toxic leadership, voluntary turnover, Culture, Work Environment

Introductory Background

People leave bosses, not companies is a popular adage, which in many ways is indicative of the connection between managers and employees, yet in reviewing 100 years of employee turnover theory and research, Hom et al., (2017) found little work on the role managers play the turnover aspect. Employee turnover is an expensive cost item, estimated to range between 100% of an employee's annual salary (Allen et al., 2010) to as high 2.5 times the salary of the open position (Cascio, 1991). In a recent Gallup poll, bad bosses and lack of recognition were ranked as the top two reasons employees quit, both directly related to leadership.

Loss of talent and intellectual property is also an often-hidden downside to turnover, especially senior-level positions. Hall, (1993) posited knowledge is one of the most important assets for an organization and as such must be protected. Such costs multiply when an employee departs only to join a competitor, risking loss of both trade secrets and intellectual property (Stovel & Bontis, 2002; Hom et al., 2017). Furthermore, when the departing employee is at a senior-level, there is the additional risk of them enticing some of their direct reports to defect and join them in the new organization, depriving companies of more human capital.

The employee turnover discourse has often focused on the antecedents of leaving a job while overlooking the causals, including the role of organizational leadership in driving employees to voluntarily quit their jobs. This paper describes and analyzes senior manager perspectives on turnover to draw connections between leader's behavior, particularly toxic behavior, and the decision of employees to quit, or their intent to quit.

Historical Context- Employee Turnover

Much of the existing academic research on employee turnover (e.g. Allen et al., 2010; Park & Shaw, 2013; Hom et al., 2017) concentrated on unpacking the reasons employees quit their jobs voluntarily and outlines strategies for managing this workplace dynamic. The ideas of managing this issue range from uncontended avoidability (Maertz and Campion, 2004) to suggesting companies could incentivize employees to stay via different tools (Younge & Marx, 2015). In fact, some companies do offer employees attractive bonuses or benefits as part of a retention strategy, although that's more the exception (Mathieu et al., 2015).

The decision to quit a job is a process that is complicated and materializes in phases. Porter et al., (1976) uncovered in their longitudinal study that voluntary resignation from a job is usually proceeded with certain signs and behavior that can be noticed months before the actual resignation is turned in. Such signs include

reduced output, disengagement, dissatisfaction, or declining commitment, all of which are indicative of the role workplace environment and leadership behavior have on turnover. Certain negative occurrences or shocks at work (Morrell, et al., 2004) may trigger the very first thoughts of an employee's intent to quit. Avoiding those negative occurrences requires leaderships and as such, managers can influence the employee turnover process by applying better management practices.

Leadership, at its core, is a positive force and an enabler of exceptional individual and group performance, or as (Yukl, 2010) framed it, the process of influencing others to help accomplish common objectives. As such, leadership is key to organizational effectiveness and success. There is evidence of the relationship between great leadership and employee turnover (Aryee and Chu, 2012; Top et al., 2013; Linstead et al., 2014) but what remains missing is understanding what happens when that leadership is toxic or bad, especially when those employees are the top echelon of the organizational pyramid.

It's safe to surmise good should be better than bad but (Baumeister et al., 2001) theorized bad is stronger than good as evident by the lasting effect of toxic behavior. Indeed, given the plethora of corporate scandals during the last two decades, toxic behavior of corporate leaders is detrimental and has often either gone unnoticed. At the lower levels of management, toxic behavior has been linked to excessive absenteeism and time lost to job hunting (Erickson et al. 2007; Boddy & Croft, 2016). However, at the higher levels of management the impact of toxicity remains less defined, although there is evidence of transformational leadership positive influence on top executives' normative commitment (Yucel et al., 2014) and their organizational performance (Colbert et al., 2008).

Several researchers (e.g. Shapiro et al., 2016; Winn & Dykes, 2019) pointed out organizations are burdened with billions of dollars in lost productivity due to leaders' destructive and bad behavior. Even the military is not immune to this organizational reality as some toxic leadership behavior have led soldiers to abruptly delist from the service they volunteered for (Bullis and Reed 2003).

Research Methods

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an ideal research methodology to study toxic leadership influence on turnover as this methodology is concerned with analyzing text with an aim to uncover some of the hidden thoughts or perspectives on the subject manner. While many academics agree there is no precise approach to conducting CDA, (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) described one approach to where power relations are negotiated and performed through discourse. Power is key in critical discourse analysis as it correlates with an individual's ability to control the discourse (Foucault, 1980).

Research Design

This qualitative study applied a monolithic approach to investigating the role of toxic leadership in driving employee turnover, as outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Research design

Interview Questions

Interview question (Table 1) were developed based on the literature and aim to uncover patterns across the difference experiences of senior-level executives' decision to voluntarily quit. The questions cover three main assumptions, a supportive organizational culture is collaborative and relationships-oriented, there are triggers at the work which seed the notion of quitting in employees' minds, and managers generally have a major impact on the workplace. Additionally, participants were asked to describe themselves and their respective managers to gauge their organizational role and scope of influence.

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1. Can you please describe your first line manager? How much interaction did you two have?
2. What type of support, if any did you get from your manager?
3. Can you talk to me about why you quit your job and what were the circumstances?
4. Let's talk about the first time you recall thinking about leaving your job? What triggered those thoughts? Was there a particular event that happened which caused this trigger?
5. Have you been searching for an alternate job or work, before the decision to quit was made? Did you have the alternative job offer in hand or accepted before actually quitting? What effect if any did the job offer have on your decision to quit?
6. What role if any did your manager have on your decision to quit?
7. What was your manager's reaction when you informed them of the decision to quit?
8. What could have your manager done to prevent you from quitting?

Table 1: Interview questions

Sampling and Recruitment

Study participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their recent decision to leave their full-time jobs. One of the main features of critical discourse analysis is the relatively small sample size requirement with the emphasis being placed on texts itself as opposed to the subject or their personal background. The sample of four included two females and two males, representing a diverse group and included one high school superintendent with 18 years of public education experience, a 20-year interior

design director who loved her work, a general manager of a leading restaurant chain who had a bipolar relationship with their boss the CEO, and a marketing executive of a global consumer packaged goods company. All participants had resigned from their respective jobs within two years from the interviews and all left on their own accord. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants before conducting the interviews. Additionally, ethics approval was obtained from the University of Bradford.

Data Collection

Data was collected between February and March 2017 and took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates where all the participants resided. To allow for better preparation and reflection, the interview questions were mailed to participants ahead of time. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by the lead researcher and held in public places that were convenient to participants. The average length of the interview was a little over 60 minutes with interviews recorded and transcribed via a digital mobile application. During the interview and while being recorded, hand written notes were taken to capture additional non-verbal communication.

Once all the interviews were transcribed and any hand- written notes added, analysis was carried out in April and May 2017. NVivo software was utilized to code and categorize interview material. All analysis was completed by one researcher for consistency purposes, but the authors reviewed the major themes and achieved consensus.

Analysis

In conducting our analysis, the authors followed Fairclough's recommendation (Cassell and Symon 2004) of applying a "three-dimensional analytical framework where discourse was analyzed as text, discursive practice and social practice". Analysis started with careful reading of all the transcripts, then breaking the paragraphs into sentences and breaking the sentences into chunks of words and phrases. Final stage was coding the interviews yielding a total of 51 codes that were subsequently clustered into 10 major themes. There was clear evidence of relationships existing between those major themes. Some of the major themes of our study included:

1. **Relationships**. The manager/subordinate dynamic strongly impacted the discourse.
2. **Egotism**: Managers' toxic leadership conduct played a role in the turnover narrative.
3. **Work Environment**. Worked atmosphere propagated the wrong social practices.
4. *Organizational Culture*. Both, overarching and sub cultures shaped organizations.

Finally, the 10 major themes were narrowed down to three overarching themes which reflect the main objective of this research study. The next section will detail our findings by exploring those three overarching themes and explicating the underpinnings of text, supported with verbatim quotes from participants. Following that will be a discussion of the implications for practitioners and organizational policy makers.

Research Findings

The analysis revealed three overarching themes (Figure 2) of the discourse on leadership's role in employee turnover and the authors call them, the 3 C's of employee turnover, Culture, Control, and Conviction. Culture encompass the organizational design and its values and beliefs, as well as the work environment and the people working at those organizations. Control includes the relationships people develop at their workplace, as well as managers' credibility and behavior, Meanwhile, conviction incorporates employees' mindset before and after deciding to quit and those events leading up to the final decision to resign.
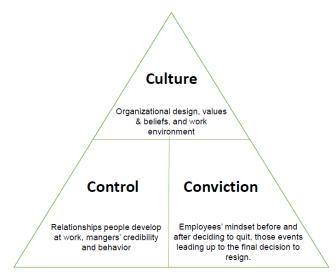

Figure 2: 3C's of employee turnover

Theme 1: Culture

Culture is the heartbeat of an organization and represents how work gets done and how people view the organizations they work for and changes taking place. Wallach, (1983) established three prevailing types of organizational culture, bureaucratic, innovating, and supportive, but culture is broad and encompasses both the individual culture of employees, as well as the collective culture of the workplace and organization. Study participants articulated the nature of their workplaces and the corporate culture as a foundational piece of the turnover dynamic. From hierarchal organizations to those lacking collaboration, participants linked much of the cultural connections to driving them toward leaving work.

> *"The two departments did not work well together, there was a big division between them, the architects felt in a sense they were better than the designers. They were on a different floor, it was hard for us to and get things done and upper management didn't do anything to change that culture. My boss didn't have much to do with the office stuff that were very important. He talked more about his cars than about office issues."* Participant no. 2

The participant is referencing two main points here, one is the lack of collaboration between their team (designers) and the architects, which to them is both a must and a common industry norm. The second

point is the lack of leadership in fostering the right work environment. But there is also an element of power influencing this particular discursive formation, which is the architects feeling or behaving in a superior manner to the interior designers, who themselves believe are equal in this working relationship. Moreover, it's the participant's boss (head of interior design) lacking the leadership to interfere and change how work gets done, especially cross-department projects. Bass & Avolio (1990) indicated laissez-faire leadership, as it appears the case here, is failing to provide individuals with the support needed to be more productive.

Participant no. 2 attributed part of their resignation decision to this apparent lack of teamwork and the siloed culture at work. While, the division between the two departments impacted all work and everyone on both teams, this participant outlined this as a key part of the decision to quit. However, the collaboration gap is further magnified by the lack of action on the part of senior management where power weighed in with both department heads assuming the more dominant role. The participant did reach out to their manager for interference and sought help from work colleagues, but no corrective action was ever taken, thus reiterating Bass & Avolio (1990) theory on Laissez Faire leadership adversely effecting employee morale and ability to be more productive.

> *"He was not really involved in our daily routines or our projects, yes we would send him emails once in a while, but he never really cared about the details."* Participant no. 2

Participant no. 2 felt their personal and company's success depended largely on the effectiveness of senior management in harnessing a more collaborative or equitable culture, one where teams worked seamlessly across departments and functions. Interestingly, they articulated that during inter-department struggles, the boss (head of interior design) remained silent and never confronted their counterpart (head of architecture) about a possible resolution.

> *"He didn't like people to question too many things, he preferred people to just do their work and not complain."* Participant no. 2

Another research subject (participant no. 1) described the cultural drift between themselves and their boss which was believed to have been caused by the open-door policy the participant created at work, something that apparently clashed with the boss's management style. The participant (high school superintendent) initiated this policy to both connect with students and parents, while also building a safe and trusting school culture. Meanwhile, the participant's boss (company CEO) perceived it as a personal threat to the overarching culture of the school which he believed should remain more hierarchal. In fact, both participants (no. 1 & no. 2) shared similar personal views on closed-door policies and perceived it as power-oriented and believed it negatively impacted organizational culture. While a closed-door policy in of itself may not be toxic behavior per se, when the outcome is negative, toxicity could emerge and if it lingers for too long, it could also have detrimental consequences.

Meanwhile, participant (no. 3) described their former manager as incompetent and lacking fundamental business skills. The boss, a division president no less, was threatened by the established work experience of their subordinate, despite the business needs for experience. Furthermore, the participant shared their own frustration, not only with the untrusting boss, but also with the organization that promoted the boss to

division president, the second most senior position in the company, despite their apparent business incompetence. This is consistent with (Erickson et al., 2007) who reported 65% of bad managers were either promoted or not reprimanded for their bad managerial behavior.

> *"If I want to be a bit critical, he is the first person I've met in my entire business life who underachieved consistently every single year and yet gets promoted. This I have never seen in the business world".* **Participant no. 3**

An interesting dimension of culture and how it impacts employee turnover is the frail organizational structure some participants described, one featuring confusing or multiple reporting lines. The participant described how they had multiple managers and often they were not on the same page. The multiplicity of reporting lines created confusion, especially when those reporting lines have opposite operating styles.

> *"It was sort of dual reporting; a direct one to the general manager in Saudi Arabia and to the GM in Spain. Of course, having to report to two different organizations, the culture also is totally different. One is based in basically a European culture while the other was mainly an Arab Saudi culture and there were huge differences over there. I would assume the main difference is the voicing your opinion, whereas in Madrid they welcome that, in Saudi, it is not welcomed for many reasons; mainly cultural."* **Participant no. 3**

> *"What may be awkward about the set-up is that as the superintendent I had to report to the central office part of the operating group. So, I kind of reported to all three of them indirectly and to one directly, the CEO. You're not responsible for implementing the vision and mission that you come with and then you hope that your vision and mission coincide with that of the school. You try to find common ground there and you're not allowed to have your own imprint in the school as a leader."* Participant no. 1

In both instances, lack of clarity on which of the two dual bosses provided supervisory authority resulted in participant confusion and unpreparedness to perform their jobs at a high level. Another participant (no. 3) drew parallels between the two organizations with special emphasis on "voicing your opinion" as an indicator of the democratization of workplace culture, asking "*how could you get anything done if you can't even speak up?*" Meanwhile, another participant (no. 1) highlighted his negative experience with multiple reporting lines by describing it as "awkward" and felt managers lose the power to truly influence people.

From a Foucauldian standpoint, power is a form of social control and there are clearly strong relationships between knowledge, power and humans. In the case of Participant no. 1, their 18-years of teaching tenure coupled with their position as school superintendent clashed directly with the power of the CEO, and the other multiple managers they were supposed to report into.

Culture as an overarching theme of this discourse analysis included people, the broader organization and work environment. It played an important role in the decision to quit work for study participants. Hayward, et al., (2016) in their study of turnover, uncovered that ineffective working relationships influenced the decision to quit. Senior management plays a key role in building an organizational culture that features clear reporting lines and encourages teams work such that work can be effective and employees can be satisfied, thus reducing the chances of losing knowledge and expertise.

Theme 2: Control

The second overarching theme of our study was control, which mostly related to the participants' respective superiors or senior management. Participants spoke of how their managers' own insecurity or egotism played a central role in driving them toward quitting. It's is difficult to understand why senior managers would feel insecure, especially towards their direct reports, given the power scale tilts in favor of superiors and not subordinates.

Study participants spoke of having little at work which made them ineffective at their respective jobs and led to dissatisfaction and resignation. They felt the injustice of their bosses as they had no power to make their own decisions independently, which they needed to be fulfill their job requirements and maximize their expertise at their places of employment.

> *"I don't think he was that bright to get to that level of strategic thinking. What he wanted to do it just that he was power hungry. He was very hungry for power and he wanted ultimate control of not only the three schools or academies that he oversaw but also the other companies in the group that he was also in charge of. He was just power-hungry, so he divided and conquered."* Participant no. 1

What the participant is attempting to convey here about their manager are three things, their lack of strategic thinking, the apparent insatiable hunger for power, and the manager's divisive management approach. Parker, (1992) defined discourse as the collection of statements and the participant laid out a series of meaningful statements that formed their opinion and description of their manager's toxic leadership style. They presented this as evidence of the hegemonic struggle they had with the boss as evident by the sharp contrasts drawn to the manager's skills set and personality. On the one hand, the interviewee is an 18-year school administrator with a proven track record, whereas their boss on the other hand is a former aeronautical engineer with no experience in school management.

Another participant (no. 2) sharply criticized their former boss for changing their attitude and behavior towards them after the participant relentless effort to improve the working relationships within the team. She thought she was doing the right thing to improve cross-department relationships, while the manager expected them to mind their own business. Participant 2 contrasted that to their early days at work when the manager's approach was more positive and supportive. Some of the supportive behavior at the start of this working relationship included social activity (lunches0 as well as encouraging activity (introductions to the manager's own clients.) However, after the participant insistence which the manager labeled as nagging, the manager became more apprehensive and hierarchical. Ongori (2007) referred to this as personal agency, to indicate such concepts as sensing powerlessness, loss of control and personal control.

When our study's participants discussed control, they not only referenced their direct managers but also second line managers and a broader view on senior leadership. Three participants recounted the distanced relationship between them and second line management or senior leadership. Participant no. 2 did not ever meet any of the senior leaders of the company and neither did any of her counterparts.

> *"I think that the whole team from myself to other people who were working with me, my director, my boss I would say, they were also in a confusing environment working under a new leadership that was very aggressive and not giving them the power to empower their own choice." Participant no. 4*

The participant herewith was attempting to present social constructions as evidence of the social domain they operated within. The confusing work environment, the collective feeling of powerlessness, and the aggressive nature of the new leadership can all be damaging to work effectiveness, especially among highly skilled or experienced managers who expect a level of autonomy and authority with their respective jobs.

Other participants spoke of deception, divisiveness, interference, and inconsistency, all in the context of their respective managers attempting to control the working relationship.

> "*He even interfered in entrance exams and even interfered in recruitment, and so he intervened in lot of things*," said Participant no. 1

Naturally, personal relationships are better maintained and more effective when they are balanced and somewhat equalized, not favoring one part over the other. In the case of this study's subjects, those imbalanced relationships with their respective managers played into their decision to quit work. In three out of the four participants the power clearly lied with the manager. The one exception, Participant no. 4, who explained that both them and their first line managers were lost and powerless as the company's senior leadership have created so much confusion and stagnation in the workplace, leading both to feel ineffective and dissatisfied with their respective jobs.

Theme 3: Conviction

The third overarching theme of our study was conviction, i.e. the participants' personal beliefs that quitting those jobs was the right decision and that they have exhausted every effort to amend the situation prior to each submitting their resignation. They understood the magnitude of such a career-altering decision, but in many ways, it was the last resort. What may also be telling is that only one of the four participants (a working mother) waited to find an alternate job before resigning, while the others just resigned prior to even looking for alternative work. Whether it was their states of mind or their confidence in their skillset, they just couldn't wait any longer to get away from those toxic situations.

Indeed, participants connected their social and cultural behavior, before and after resigning their positions, to the values that underlie the entire turnover discourse. In fact, one participant communicated openly and transparently with their manager about their negative relationship and the impact it had on the organization.

> *"I could have gone like that for years. I wouldn't have left if it wasn't maybe for the unnecessary headache and the unnecessary pressure that I was having and the effect it had on my home. I had several talks with him in the three years and he just didn't get it. One thing I wished he had done was change his approach with people, to gain an understanding of how schools are run." You're dealing with people. Participant no. 1*

The social constructionism is evident here as the participant, who was a long tenured school superintendent, tried to make sense of their decision to resign after three years of service. The language this participant used not only described their convictions with the decision to quit, but also the ideological differences with their responsibilities as a parent. Foucault suggested that in society what constitutes knowledge is "created in language and not necessarily related to the discovery of the truth" and that is manifested here with this participant (Cassell and Symon, 2004 p.203).

> *"The other thing that I must say is I would have loved to stay and keep working with him, but he was also unhappy in his role, so I knew that he was not going to stay there, and I didn't want to go through another change." Participant no. 4*

Here the participant is using what may be construed as foregrounding by emphasizing the issue of their manager's support but also their own dissatisfaction with the job, and their own plans to resign from the company. So, through this discourse, the participant has formed an ideology that personally, they would have probably stayed on the job, had it not been for their own manager convincing them to search for a job outside the company because the manager himself was dissatisfied and looking elsewhere for alternative jobs. The manager complicated the relationship by being too close to this one subordinate to the point he shared his own job dissatisfaction and plans, which is not great leadership as it arguably influenced the participant's decision to quit. What ultimately impacted the decision to quit was the large degree to which the manager's behavior contributed to questioning the organizational commitment and sanity of senior leadership action.

Discussion

In this critical discourse analysis of the role of leadership on employee turnover, it is evident that several organizational factors influence the decision to quit. The findings suggest that managers play an important role and three themes emerge as drivers of that relationship, organizational culture, manager's control, and employee's conviction of the decision to leave. A hierarchal organizational culture did not provide the support senior-level subordinates sought, while a controlling manager created confusion and frustration prior to employee's resignation. Finally,

While related in some ways, the study's overarching themes represent three different discourses as culture and control relate to the workplace itself, whereas conviction involves the individual employees. Table 2 below outlines the linkage between the study's main findings and those three overarching themes.

THEMES	ISSUES	EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION
Culture	Collaboration	The ability to work across functions and leverage learnings to drive overall productivity.
	Lack of Leadership	Absence of leadership role and decision making when team needed it.
	Instability	An organization that changes too fast or too much, either way conveys job insecurity to employees.
	Leaders with no Credibility	Leaders who were not qualified to lead and struggled earning the respect of their direct reports.
	Confusing Reporting Lines	Multiple bosses within functions leading to duplicity and inter-team conflict, as well as disengagement.
Control	Leader Insecurity	The inability to trust direct reports and their skillset.
	Leader Egotism	Putting one's self-interest ahead of the team and company.
	Leader Indecisiveness	Lacking the ability to make well-thought out decisions.

	Deception	Leaders who lie, including overstating their accomplishments to enhance personal image.
	Leader Inconsistency	Contradictory leader behavior and decision making which confuse team members.
Conviction	Satisfaction with decision to quit and leave	The individual's ability to internalize their decision to leave a toxic work environment or a toxic leader.
	Sympathy	Employee's feeling bad for their previous employers and for allowing such talent to leave.
	Leader's own dissatisfaction	Employee's belief that leader was destructive due to their own dissatisfaction with their own jobs.
	Reaching point of no return	Employees' feeling they've exhausted all avenues to try and avert quitting.

Table 2: Study findings linkage to the 3C's of employee turnover

The fact of the matter, this study's participants reflected very negative attitudes towards their respective managers. While each of the participants had their own set of personal circumstances that fed into the construction of social issues, their attitudes appeared more negative toward toxic leadership behavior. One participant felt guilty about missing out on his own family time and the routines he had established with his children as a sacrifice for work. Another participant was the only working mother on her team at work and with two young school children, being there to see them off in the morning and afternoon when the children returned from school was a top priority for her. They both resented their respective managers for lacking a basic understanding of such important personal matters. In both instances, this supports Reed (2004) in asserting that a leader is deemed toxic due to the cumulative effect of demotivational behavior on team morale and climate, over time.

The first component of the turnover discourse was that culture within the organization and operating teams should support and reinforce the team work spirit such there is harmony and collaboration between people, which drives productivity commitment, and job satisfaction. Even organizational design is key as it needs to empower individuals which leads to better and more productive workplace. Moreover, design needs to streamline and simplify reporting lines, such that communication is transparent, and employees are clear on how works gets done around the organization. Stovel & Bontis, (2002) advised corporate leaders must utilize turnover contingency planning and knowledge management strategies to mitigate the employee turnover factor.

The second key takeaway from the employee turnover discourse was that control plays a role in the decision to remain or quit. Thus, managers' injustices (Tepper, 2000) are detrimental to organizational effectiveness and sometimes lead to the loss of experienced and talented personnel. Managers are expected to display better intrapersonal skills and behavior than average employees. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) identified interpersonal skills, the ability to control own emotions and behavior, as one of four major managerial competencies. Micromanaging or lack of empowerment is damaging to tam productivity and morale. Moreover, feeling threatened by talented and high achieving subordinates is not a positive leadership quality and reflects badly on people managers.

The third component of the discourse was conviction of employees who tried to rectify the relationships with their managers, prior to finally deciding to resign. Some reached a point where they were incapable of withstanding the negative interaction with their respective superiors and used that as the impetus for the decision to quit. Miner et al., (2005) uncovered a relationship between employees' interactions with their

managers and their mood and found those with negative interactions (20% of participants) affected employees' mood five times more than the ones with positive interaction (80% of study participants.) Some study participants were fed up with the constant bad mood and sought work elsewhere within the same organization, before deciding to quit.

What it all means for practitioners and corporate policy makers is that managerial behavior influences employee's commitment to work and the organization, thus their willingness to stay on the job. Furthermore, for HR managers it's a wakeup call to invest resources in measuring the strength of the relationship between employees and their leaders. While many organizations, especially large ones, do implement employee engagement surveys, there is a need to specifically track the employees' satisfaction with their manager, the work they do and the places where they work. Specific questions on the survey could inquire about the employee/manager working relationship as well as commitment to the organization. It's been documented that the higher commitment employees have for their manager essentially predicated their commitment to their overall company, itself a predictor of employees' intention to quit (Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009). There is no doubt that managers play a key role in many aspects of business, but more so in reducing employee turnover or the antidote to that, increasing employee retention.

The discourse of the role of leadership in employee turnover acknowledged in this study is on the premise that organizations care about employee turnover and have a sincere interest to reduce the rate of job loss and knowledge exodus. In today's economic profit-driven business environment, employee loss may have become a reality but optimizing the value of investing in high-caliber staff, is critical and should not be threatened by the toxic leadership behavior of some people managers.

Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest that leaders are in a very strong position to influence the continuity of employment, especially at the senior level. The three main takeaways are:

- A supportive leader empowering their direct reports and reinforces a people-oriented organizational culture will positively impact the turnover discourse. Trusting senior-level executives to make sound business decisions can help improve the connection leaders have with their teams. Beyond engagement scores, leaders must be adept at recognizing signs of employee dissatisfaction offer corrective action to minimize turnover.
- The decision to quit for employees, even senior-level, is a metamorphosis and leaders have ample opportunities to get engaged and involved with employee's contemplation to resign. Resigning is a difficult decision and for some, like long-tenured executives, involves talking to trusted colleagues beforehand and usually includes a period when a final effort to stay is attempted.
- When leader behavior becomes habitually negative and the consequences of their behavior are detrimental to the organization, that is a toxic form of leadership. Limiting toxic practices at work can reduce or even prevent employee turnover. Tran et al., (2013 p. 595) specified "If a leader has effective traits and shows negative behavior, this might result in bad effect on not only the organization but to a large extent on subordinates."

Practical Contribution

Voluntary employee turnover is costly and detrimental to organization but sometimes it is controllable. We argue toxic leader behavior magnifies the problem and organizations are the ultimate losers when voluntary turnover rises. Talent, subject matter expertise, intellectual property, and maybe even trade secrets may vanish. Some of that intangible value is hard to quantify, making it even more concerning.

Therefore, we suggest organizations must track turnover rate trends by department to avoid the decrements (Call et al., 2015) and to be able to identify potential toxic leaders. In other words, people don't leave companies, they leave bosses. Additionally, human resources, as an organizational function, can create safe zone for employees to share their grievances before a decision to quit is finalized.

Limitations

This study has three main limitations. Firstly, it was conducted as part of a doctoral study program and as such is part of a bigger study that aims to investigate toxic leadership influence on employee commitment. A second limitation is the relatively small sample size which may have limited the ability to reach thematic saturation with four participants. Finally, the study's sample were among professional executives who also happen to be part professional network of one of the researchers. While their personal work experience and the discourse they shared in this study are real, there may have been some bias or sensationalization in recounting some of the events. Nonetheless, the findings of the study are generalizable and scalable to the broader population. Furthermore, our findings can be integrated into other discourses about employee turnover or destructive leadership.

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