Dysfunctional Leadership and its Effects

Erin Cornelius
St. John Fisher College

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Dysfunctional Leadership and its Effects

Abstract
This qualitative study investigated the different types of dysfunctional leadership and how each one affects both employees and organizations negatively. The study has been conducted to fill in some of the gaps in leadership research; such as the fact that there has not been much research to show why organizations tolerate or even reinforce dysfunctional leadership behaviors. This study included a review of relevant literature combined with subjective interpreted interviews with seven participants all of whom have had unique experiences with dysfunctional leadership styles.

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First Supervisor
Seth Silver

Second Supervisor
Timothy Franz

Third Supervisor
Jason Berman

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Dysfunctional Leadership and its Effects

By

Erin Cornelius

B.A. May 2002, St. John Fisher College

A final project submitted to
The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Human Resource Development
of St. John Fisher College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Chad Cornelius. Without his constant support and encouragement I would not have been able to accomplish everything that I set out to do at the onset of this program. With his help I have achieved more than I ever thought I could.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several individuals for their role in the completion of this thesis. First and foremost, Dr. Seth Silver, thank you for your guidance, patience, and knowledge as I worked through this project. I am very grateful that you continued to challenge me throughout this process. I also would like to thank all of the participants in my study; your participation has provided me with real life situations that have added value to this project and have made me realize what an important subject this is. I would also like to thank my current supervisors; you both have been wonderful with your ongoing support and understanding of the importance of my academic pursuits. You both are testaments to the fact that good leadership still exists. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their encouragement as well as their flexibility in letting school come first sometimes. Without you, none of this would have been possible.
Master Signature Page

Dr. Seth Silver, Advisor  
Signature: 

Dr. Timothy Franz, Faculty Reader  
Signature: 

Dr. Jason Berman, Faculty Reader  
Signature:
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Abstract

Dysfunctional Leadership and its Effects

This qualitative study investigated the different types of dysfunctional leadership and how each one affects both employees and organizations negatively. The study has been conducted to fill in some of the gaps in leadership research; such as the fact that there has not been much research to show why organizations tolerate or even reinforce dysfunctional leadership behaviors. This study included a review of relevant literature combined with subjective interpreted interviews with seven participants all of whom have had unique experiences with dysfunctional leadership styles.
Dysfunctional Leadership and its Effects

Chapter 1

Overview of the Topic

When it comes to leadership most scholars perceive it as something positive and transforming that can benefit a group or an organization. However, leadership at its worst can also wreak havoc (Kets de Vries, 2004).

Looking back through history there have been many dysfunctional leaders such as Napoleon, who led his people charismatically into disaster. Many attributed Napoleon’s tragic Russian campaign, the loss of life, and the horrible suffering of those on the march back from Moscow to poor planning, inclement weather, or just bad luck, however; his dysfunctional leadership style also contributed to his failure (Kroll, Toombs & Wright, 2000).

This type of charismatic yet dysfunctional leadership also happens within organizations. Donald Burr of People Express Airlines wanted to succeed no matter what. His overwhelming ambition to have his no-frills airline that served mostly commuters compete against larger international airlines became his undoing. Even with employee disenchantment growing and the company suffering a net income loss of $160 million, he still didn’t know when to stop. Burr’s airline was finally purchased putting an end to his blind ambition and tragic errors (Conger, 1989).

Conger (1989) defines dysfunctional charismatic leadership as leaders who control and distort the flow of information, create dysfunctional dependencies with followers for their own self-aggrandizement, dismiss the moral consequences of their
actions for their own personal agenda, manipulate followers through emotional rhetoric that appeals to their worst fears, and deal harshly with those who question authority.

Through a review of relevant literature as well as conducting qualitative interviews with a sampling of respondents who have been directly impacted by dysfunctional leadership this study examined different types of dysfunctional leadership and why dysfunctional leadership exists.

Problem Statement

There is a need for this study because there has not been much research on why organizations tolerate and sometimes even reinforce dysfunctional leadership behaviors. Businesses have been known to encourage these destructive behaviors; and training efforts often shy away from the difficult task of helping leaders control these negative traits, despite research on the damaging impact dysfunctional leadership can have on an organization (Dolezalek, 2006). If leaders are not aware that their behaviors are destructive, then they will have a hard time reacting to or correcting the damage they’ve done. This study attempts to fill in some of the gaps in this area of leadership research.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the types of dysfunctional leadership that exist. Additionally, this study explores how dysfunctional leadership can impact employees on many different levels and what types of consequences this can have for an organization. Finally, this study presents some recommendations as to how a leader can overcome his or her dark side as well as how organizations can prevent some of these behaviors before they become problematic.
Research Questions

1. What are the different types of dysfunctional leadership?
2. Why have organizations been known to reinforce dysfunctional leadership?
3. What is the impact on both the employee and the organization when dysfunctional leadership occurs?
4. What are some of the strategies that can be used to combat dysfunctional leadership?

Significance of Study

This study is important because it may benefit HRD practitioners and researchers by providing them with a better understanding of why there are dysfunctional leaders in the world and what motivates them to act in the ways they do. This study may also benefit organizations and employees as it provides them with strategies to identify and deal with different types of dysfunction. It suggests to organizations the impact dysfunctional leadership is having both psychologically and financially.

Conceptual Framework

Dysfunctional leadership occurs "when a leader’s behaviors become exaggerated, lose touch with reality, or become vehicles for purely personal gain," (Conger, 1990, p. 658). Historically, these types of behaviors have been cited as reasons why leadership fails. Yet few of these behaviors are truly the problem in and of themselves. These leadership traits become harmful because of the way a leader chooses to use them.

Some of the traits that are often equated with dysfunctional leadership include: "compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, codependent and passive aggressive" (McIntosh and Rima as cited in Dolezalek, 2006, p. 24).
“The dark side of leadership doesn’t necessarily equate to bad leadership, but it’s fair to suggest that a lot of bad leadership comes from leaders who aren’t controlling—or even aware of—their dark side” (Dolezalek, 2006, p. 25). It seems that despite the impact of the “dark side” of leadership, many leaders are unwilling to face it. “They hesitate to look inside themselves, and when they do, they refuse to acknowledge their weaknesses; they are unwilling to face up to how their defensive structures and character traits can negatively affect their organizations,” (Kets de Vries, 2004, p3). This lack of introspection can be the root of the problem. Additionally, organizations can reinforce these dysfunctional behaviors by rewarding the leader for displaying these traits. “For example, compulsives tend to be lauded for their ability to get a remarkable amount done,” (Dolezalek, 2006, p. 24).

Definition of Key Terms

The Dark Side of Leadership: “It is the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 22)

The Compulsive Leader: “the need to maintain absolute order. The compulsive leader pursues perfection to an extreme, both in personal and organizational life” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 87-88)

The Narcissistic Leader: “present various combinations of intense ambitiousness, grandiose fantasies, feelings of inferiority and overdependence on external admiration and acclaim. At the same time the self-absorbed leader is chronically uncertain of himself and experiences dissatisfaction with his accomplishments, which he tries to overcome by
exploiting others in ways that will help elevate his self-image” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 98).

The Paranoid Leader: “are desperately afraid of anything or anyone, whether real or imagined, they perceive to have even the remotest potential of undermining their leadership and stealing away the limelight. They are characteristically suspicious, hostile, and guarded with their relationships with others” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 108).

The Codependent Leader: “take personal responsibility for the actions and emotions of others, often blaming themselves for others’ inappropriate behavior, and they generally have a high tolerance for bizarre behavior in others. They will go to just about any length to avoid hurting a person’s feelings even if it means they hurt themselves in the process” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 122).

The Passive Aggressive Leader: “have a tendency to resist demands to adequately perform their tasks. Their resistance is most often expressed through behaviors such as procrastination, dawdling, stubbornness, forgetfulness, and intentional inefficiency” (McIntosh & Rima, 1997, p. 129-130).
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review touches upon a number of topics surrounding dysfunctional leadership. Included in the topics that will be discussed are the “Five Fatal Flaws” (Morano 1994) of leaders, Groupthink (Janis 1972), and real life examples of the many types of bad leaders.

Dysfunctional leadership is nothing new. For generations leaders have been behaving badly. Indeed, leaders have even been given advice or encouragement to do whatever is necessary to get the job done. Machiavelli suggested using cruelty and ruthlessness to achieve one’s goals, and that the ends justify the means. Recognizing the potential flaws of unrestrained leaders, America’s constitution was designed to constrain leaders by creating checks and balances. Alexander Hamilton suggested America had an aversion to monarchy and to leaders who inherit great power (Kellerman, 2004).

Yet, despite all we now know about dysfunctional leaders, these practices continue. Is it just a part of human nature to behave badly? According to Kellerman (2004), greed may play a big role in bad leadership as greed can equal hunger for power and the need to control. Additionally, employees and organizations still tend to go along with dysfunctional leadership. Perhaps that is because while we are growing up we are taught not to question authority, even if it is bad. Kellerman (2004) states “leaders, even bad ones can provide a sense of order and certainty in a disordered and uncertain world. Moreover, to resist leaders is to invite confusion and upset” (p. 22).

Other theories as to why we follow bad leaders include the fact that resisting leaders is demanding in a way that going along is not and that people tend to follow bad
leaders because we think they know what they are doing (Kellerman, 2004). This can be related to both the theory of Groupthink (Janis, 1972) and the Abilene Paradox (Harvey, 1974).

Some of the symptoms of Groupthink (Janis, 1972) include the group applying direct pressure on any dissenter in the group to get them to conform. Groupthink can also lead to self-censorship in which a member suppresses any deviation from the group consensus in order to minimize the importance of his or her doubts. Another symptom of Groupthink is a shared illusion of unanimity concerning decision making. Part of this illusion involves the idea that silence is a form of consent. The Abilene Paradox (Harvey, 1974) is very similar to the theory of Groupthink. The Abilene Paradox occurs because members of a group or organization take actions contrary to what they really want to do and as a result they defeat the very purpose they were trying to achieve. The Abilene Paradox happens when members of a group fail to communicate their desires and beliefs to one another. This inaccurate information is then used to make a decision resulting in group members being angry and frustrated with each other and the decision that was made (Harvey, 1974). Both of these theories seem to suggest that people give in too easily to the pressure from others and do not want to take the uncomfortable position of being the dissenter.

According to Richard Morano (1994) when people were asked to describe good leadership there was quite a disparity of opinions given; however, there was much more of a consensus as to what constitutes dysfunctional leadership. Based on his research, Morano came up with what he coined the “Five Fatal Flaws” of leaders. These flaws include intimidation, self-indulgence, inflexibility, favoritism, distrust.
Intimidation, Morano (1994) says, is when leaders mistake power for respect. These leaders intimidate workers who question or challenge them. Respect from employees must be earned, it cannot be decreed. Yet some managers think that by bullying their employees they are earning their deference. "It takes no great management skills to control people's behavior when you are seen as having considerable power over them" (Morano, 1994, p. 43). For these types of managers who intimidate their employees they are really gaining compliance rather than respect and their employees are not fully engaged and contributing as they ought to be.

According to Morano (1994), self-indulgent leaders are fixated on their own personal goals and upward mobility at any cost. These leaders will often manipulate situations to gain undeserved visibility with top management. A tactic these types of managers often use is magnifying the mistakes of their employees who are not like them to shake their confidence, which in turn makes the managers feel better about themselves. Managers need a broader outlook to advance their organizations.

Leaders that are inflexible feel safe and secure in their ways; they rest on their past successes. These leaders can't handle too many options or alternative ways of doing things. They like to be in control and are often described as rigid. This type of over-control can foster dependency in followers and rigidness can slow down progress. However, managers must be able to deal with ambiguity and shifting priorities; if they don't they will not be very efficient. "In this new global marketplace, managers will have to exhibit a more flexible management style in order to adjust to unforeseen conditions and a steady stream of changes" (Morano, 1994, p. 85-86).
The practice of favoritism is dangerous; “this kind of management practice is not likely to engender teamwork,” (Morano, 1994, p.133) which can be catastrophic for a department and the entire organization. Favoritism can be communicated in both non-verbal cues and body language and other employees are aware of those who are treated differently. Favoritism can create an environment where the employees who are favored are more likely to contribute and express their opinions then those who are not favored which can even lead to Groupthink if there are no dissenters. “Any kind of shabby treatment of employees engenders resentment, indignation and a reluctance to perform up to their capacities and potentialities” (p. 147). Employee performance can be influenced dramatically by the way bosses treat their employees. Extreme cases of poor treatment may even lead to employee sabotage or revenge.

The final flaw Morano (1994) discusses is distrust. Morano’s flaw of distrust can be related to McGregor’s Theory X managers that believe all employees are inherently lazy (Weisbord, 1987). These managers do not trust their employees to be productive without constant supervision, which is basically micromanaging in its most basic definition. Micromanagers are typically overly detail oriented and can display obsessive behaviors which create an environment of distrust. Morano believes that micromanagers tend to focus their energies on trivial issues because they have typically been promoted beyond their level of competencies.

Everyone has flaws, it’s just when reoccurring critical flaws show up there is monumental trouble on the horizon. Yet, many organizations reinforce these flaws. Organizations “may mistake lack of self-control for passion for work. They may mistake lack of imagination for certainty or decisiveness. They may mistake obsessive,
compulsive behavior for dedication” (Morano, 1994, p.7). Morano goes on to say “organizations may also misguidedly reward glibness for intelligence and mistake poor manners for assertiveness. They may unwisely give credit for mere process or gesture, without it leading to any real progress toward some meaningful organizational goals” (p. 8). When organizations encourage or turn a blind eye to these inappropriate management practices they are only hurting themselves. “It should be no surprise to us that really horrible managers and supervisors can hurt people and disrupt the organization. They can drive people to sickness or even violence” (p. 20).

Morano (1994) believes that there are some managers who purposely use management practices and behaviors that lead to abuse of power, mistreatment of employees and overall mismanagement of their organizations. He also feels that it is highly unlikely that these types of managers will change. “Their management style has been so inculcated into their personalities that they would need quite a bit of mentoring to unravel their tangled perspectives about managing” (p.17).

There are ways to avoid these five fatal flaws. Morano (1994) advises that to stop intimidation managers should foster teamwork and remember that power is not respect. Employees need to be involved in order to feel empowered. To end self-indulgence supervisors need to keep in mind that self-esteem and self respect last longer than promotions. The cure for inflexibility: go with the flow, don’t be so uptight and support your workers. Treat everyone fairly and equitably and favoritism will disappear. Lastly, don’t spy on your employees, focus on the critical issues and never enforce a bad policy, never demean people or they’ll never forgive you or trust you again (Morano, 1994).
Much of the research on dysfunctional leaders ties itself in with the work done by Abraham Maslow (1943). One of the earliest and most well-known theories of individual motivation is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow stated that within each person exists a hierarchy of needs. These needs are: Physiological—basic survival needs; such as food, water and shelter. Safety—individuals strive to find or create an environment that is safe from dangers. Social—this is the need for affection and relationships. Esteem—this is a need for feelings of self-worth and individual importance. Finally, Self-actualization—at the top of the hierarchy, this need is a sense of fulfillment that allows the individual to maximize their own growth and make a contribution to that of others (Stum, 2001).

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Diagram](image)

Figure 1-Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

Once each one of these needs is satisfied the individual can focus on attaining the next level in the hierarchy. “The theory states that, although no need is ever fully gratified, a substantially satisfied need no longer motivates” (Stum, 2001, p. 6). Yet if certain needs are not met then the person or employee may become fixated on just trying to achieve the most basic of needs. For instance, “work groups experiencing
psychological safety factors such as harassment, intimidation or other interpersonal stress” may start to react to that and that is how dysfunctional leaders and followers can be created (p.8).

Kellerman (2004) says that leaders are looked on to provide safety and security. The basic needs for safety must be met first before employees can become self-actualizing. Bad leaders undermine this need and can threaten an employee’s security, preventing them from obtaining higher levels of the hierarchy.

“It seems clear that organizations must make the effort to at least meet employee expectations at each level in the hierarchy” (Stum, 2001, p. 8). However, this is not always the case.

According to McIntosh and Rima (1997) the dark side of leadership develops when “the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined” (p.22) come out and start to take control of our actions. Maslow’s hierarchy may also help explain how leaders can turn to the dark side. If a leader’s most basic needs are not met then perhaps they turn to dysfunction as an alternative method to achieving their needs.

McIntosh and Rima (1997) break their types of dysfunctional leaders into five categories: compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, codependent, and passive aggressive.

The Compulsive Leader who feels “the need to maintain absolute order. The compulsive leader pursues perfection to an extreme, both in personal and organizational life” (p. 87-88). The Narcissistic Leader can “present various combinations of intense ambitiousness, grandiose fantasies, feelings of inferiority and overdependence on external admiration and acclaim. At the same time the self-absorbed leader is chronically
uncertain of himself and experiences dissatisfaction with his accomplishments, which he tries to overcome by exploiting others in ways that will help elevate his self-image” (p. 98). Paranoid Leaders are those that “are desperately afraid of anything or anyone, whether real or imagined, they perceive to have even the remotest potential of undermining their leadership and stealing away the limelight. They are characteristically suspicious, hostile, and guarded with their relationships with others” (p. 108). The Codependent Leader can “take personal responsibility for the actions and emotions of others, often blaming themselves for others’ inappropriate behavior, and they generally have a high tolerance for bizarre behavior in others. They will go to just about any length to avoid hurting a person’s feelings even if it means they hurt themselves in the process” (p. 122). Finally, the Passive Aggressive Leaders “have a tendency to resist demands to adequately perform their tasks. Their resistance is most often expressed through behaviors such as procrastination, dawdling, stubbornness, forgetfulness, and intentional inefficiency” (p. 129-130).

Kellerman (2004) breaks bad leadership down into seven groups which mirror McIntosh and Rima’s (1997) theories: “Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil” (p. 38). She goes on to further break them down by categorizing the groups. She classifies Incompetent, Rigid and Intemperate as Ineffectual leaders; while Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil leaders she classifies as Unethical leaders (Kellerman, 2004).

Incompetence occurs in leadership when “the leader and at least some followers lack the will or skills (or both) to sustain effective action. With regard to at least one important leadership challenge, they do not create positive change” (Kellerman, 2004, p.
40). An example of an incompetent leader would be Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). At first Samaranch started out as a very active member of the IOC but as years went by and he became better known as lazy and careless. He began to take bribes and kick-backs from cities that wanted to host the Olympic Games. No one took the time to check or challenge how he was operating the IOC. “His failure to exercise the proper oversight was, finally, key to the incompetence that left a permanent stain on his presidency” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 67). Samaranch failed to realize what was more important than money, the legacy of the Olympic Games.

Rigidity in leadership takes place when “the leader and at least some followers are stiff and unyielding. Although they may be competent, they are unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times” (Kellerman, 2004, p.41) A case study in rigidity would be Mary Meeker, an opinion leader and financial analyst for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter and Company. Meeker was crowned the “Net Queen” as she convinced investors to buy stock in Internet based companies like America Online and Amazon. However, when she saw warning signs that the Internet market was starting to decline she did nothing and told investors to hold onto their stocks. The people who invested based on her advice ended up losing a lot of money.

Meeker didn’t advise her investors to sell their stocks when she should have because she was so rigid and unwilling to change her views. According to Kellerman (2004), “an early record of accomplishment gave her good reason to believe she was smarter than her colleagues and competitors” as well as “a mind so single-tracked and positively oriented that it did not easily admit new information that disconfirmed previously held opinions” (p.85). Meeker’s rigidity made her unable to carefully watch
and listen to what was really going on. When it comes to rigidness followers can also be blamed as typically they prefer to hear good news rather than bad, so followers tend to hear only what they want to rather than what’s actually going on.

Intemperate leaders lack self-control and are aided and abetted by followers who are unable or unwilling to effectively intervene (Kellerman, 2004). Marion Barry, Washington D.C.’s former mayor is a perfect example of an intemperate leader. He lived his life as two people, by day he was the mayor, but by night he indulged to excess on drugs and women. He was eventually arrested in a sting operation. “Barry’s well-known weakness for sex and drugs affected his capacity to govern effectively because the governed did not intervene” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 115).

Leaders that are callous “are uncaring or unkind. Ignored or discounted are the needs, wants, and wishes of most members of the group or organization, especially subordinates” (Kellerman, 2004, p.43). There is no better example of a callous leader than Al Dunlap, former CEO of Sunbeam. He was known for restructuring and reviving companies that were on the brink of failure, but with Sunbeam his approach was ruthless. His response to the declining situation at Sunbeam was to layoff 40 percent of the company’s workforce. Dunlap also lost or fired three of the top four operating executives after only one month at Sunbeam losing a combined total of 40 years of company experience. Also, these executives had been responsible for nearly 90 percent of Sunbeam’s revenue, but Dunlap never thought twice about this (Kellerman, 2004).

Dunlap was known as “Chainsaw Al”, he intimated those who reported to him and he passed that intimidation down the line. Yet people tolerated his bad behavior in hopes that the end result would create a profitable company (Kelleman, 2004).
Dunlap ended up driving Sunbeam into more debt and did nothing to revive the company. His actions only drove Sunbeam further into the ground. He ended up being fired over the phone during a conference call while board members read from a script because people were so intimidated by him. “In the end he failed to do the single thing he was hired to do: increase shareholder value” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 143).

Corrupt leaders are those leaders who lie, cheat, or steal. These leaders put self-interest ahead of public interest (Kellerman, 2004). Corrupt leaders are motivated by power or greed. One of the most famous and recent examples of a corrupt leader was Andrew Fastow, CFO of Enron. Fastow was charged with money laundering, conspiracy, and obstruction of justice after the Enron scandal was blown open. It was discovered that he created a series of fraudulent deals between Enron and numerous off balance-sheet partnerships to hide about one billion dollars in losses. Fastow was also accused of reaping 31 million dollars in illegal gains (Kellerman, 2004).

Despite this corruption these types of leaders can remain popular with their constituents. According to Kellerman (2004) these corrupt leaders can hide their corruption by being “ingratiating and charming” (p.149). Also, it seems the general public as a whole feels corruption by itself is not bad enough to punish a person. Perhaps a leader must possess a multitude of bad qualities before any action is taken to reprimand that individual.

In addition to corrupt leaders remaining popular, often their corruption goes undiscovered for quite some time. This goes back to the theory of Groupthink (Janis 1972). According to Kellerman (2004) “nay-sayers and second guessers are frowned upon in most corporate cultures” (p. 154). There is a lot of pressure applied to people to
ignore wrong doing and not a lot of incentive for them to expose it. Becoming a whistleblower can threaten our need for safety because it is uncertain if this action will be retaliated against or not.

Insular leaders are those that “minimize or disregard the health and welfare of ‘the other’—that is those outside the group or organization for which they are directly responsible” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 45). Kellerman (2004) provides us with a few brief examples of insular leadership. The first example, James W. Johnston who was the CEO of R.J. Reynolds refuted the fact that smoking was addictive and that there was any link between smoking and cancer. Johnston was more interested in sales then the health of his consumers. The second example, former President Bill Clinton made little effort to stop the genocide that was taking place in Rwanda in the early nineties. He saw no clear and present danger to American security so he did not intervene. Clinton’s interest and intentions were almost exclusively domestic and it wasn’t until the worst of the conflict was over that he authorized emergency relief funds and dispatched troops to help refugees (Kellerman, 2004).

Evil leadership occurs when “the leader and at least some followers commit atrocities. They use pain as an instrument of power. The harm done to men, women, and children is severe rather than slight. The harm can be physical, psychological, or both” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 46). Based on this definition of evil leadership we may ask ourselves, why would anyone support an evil leader? According to Kellerman (2004) there are two reasons: “First, when leaders commit atrocities and still stay in and still stay in power for years on end, their followers are anesthetized, inflamed, or terrorized—or in
some way they are rewarded. Second, when leaders are evil, at least some of their followers are also evil” (p. 192).

Kellerman (2004) chose Radovan Karadzic former president of the Bosnian Serb Administration (BSA) as a primary example of evil leadership. Karadzic started out in life as a poet and a psychiatrist but ended up a criminal. During his term as president of the BSA Karadzic condoned the torture and killing of thousands of Muslims (Kellerman, 2004).

Karadzic felt that the Serbs had a right to dominate all of Yugoslavia. Bosnia being the most diverse of the Yugoslav republics made it very vulnerable to a Serb takeover. In order to remove any resistance to this takeover Karadzic made ethnic cleansing the “unofficial Serb policy” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 204).

Leaders are not solely to blame for dysfunctional leadership; bad followers can also play an important role. Kellerman (2004) breaks followers down into three types: bystanders, egoists, and evildoers. Bystanders are not involved and by definition they do nothing bad, but they are aware that evil is being perpetrated and do nothing to stop it. “It is the passivity of bystanders that enables evil to continue” (Kellerman, 2004, p. 210). Egoists follow evil leaders if they are promised some type of personal gain. They will ignore evil doing as long as it results in their own benefit. Finally, evildoers, much like evil leaders are not concerned with the well being of others and will go out of their way to facilitate evil acts (Kellerman, 2004).
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to define and explore the different types of dysfunctional leadership and the impact that it can have on individuals as well as entire organizations. This next chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the interview portion of the study. Sample, brief participant biographies, confidentiality, interview questions, and data analysis are all addressed.

Sample

Seven working professionals, two men and five women agreed to participate. These individuals were chosen as a convenience sample and because of their first hand experience with different types of dysfunctional leaders. Also, their stories can add insight into how damaging dysfunctional leadership can be not only to an organization as a whole but to individual employees as well. Respondents were not paid for their participation and were treated in accordance with the policies and procedures for “Protection of Human Subjects of Research,” (Institutional Review Board, 2002).

Participant Bios

The first participant in this study is Susan, a 39 year old female who works as a Human Resources Assistant for a large non-profit organization. She has been with this organization for over 10 years.

The second participant is Chad, a 29 year old male who works for a small biotech company. He’s a Senior Research Associate and has been with his current company for a little over two years.
The third participant is Michelle, a 39 year old female who works as an Administrative Assistant at a small college. She has been in this role for several years.

Andy is the fourth participant in this study. He is a 32 year old male and works at a small town junior high school as a reading teacher. He has held that position for almost five years.

Sarah, a 28 year old female is the fifth participant. She currently works for a large payroll company as a Human Resources Administrator. She has been with this company for over five years in varying capacities.

The sixth participant Lorraine is a 52 year old female who currently works as an Administrative Assistant for a trading and investment-holding organization. She has been there less than a year.

The final participant is a 54 year old female named Cindy who is in RN at a community hospital. She works in the Emergency department and has been there for approximately 15 years.

Measures

Eleven interview questions (Appendix A) were used to better understand the participants’ view on dysfunctional leadership and their experiences with it. Questions regarding how the dysfunctional leadership impacted the employee’s performance and relationships within the organization were asked. Additionally, the participants were asked to define the dysfunctional style they saw in their leader as well as indicate how their organization dealt with this type of behavior.

Design and Data Collection Procedure

A qualitative method was used to obtain personal perspectives on how
dysfunctional leadership can impact an organization. Interviews took place in one session either by telephone or in person. Before each interview the respondent was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B), which was provided to them either in person or via fax for their completion. Each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes either in person or over the phone.

Confidentiality and Security of Data

The identity of the individuals was kept confidential by assigning code names to each respondent. The names of their organizations also remain anonymous, as they were not recorded. Only the name of the industry is noted in the research. These results shed light on how dysfunctional leadership can impact individual employees in many different ways. All consent forms, interview questionnaires, and responses will be kept in a secure setting, in the researcher’s home for one year. After one year has passed the collected data will be destroyed.

Interview Questions

1. What is your age and gender?

2. Please describe the worst supervisor that you have worked for.

3. If you had to select one of the following terms to define the leadership style of your aforementioned supervisor, which would best apply? Why? (narcissistic/arrogant, suspicious, dramatic, detached, compulsive)

4. How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about yourself?

5. How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about your job performance?

6. How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about the organization in which you worked?

7. What is your assessment of how your organization handled your supervisor’s behavior? What if anything did your organization do?
8. If you had to select one of the following “flaws” which would you say your supervisor displayed most often? (intimidation, inflexibility, favoritism, self-indulgence, distrust)

9. During the time when you were reporting to this particular supervisor please describe your interactions you had with colleagues, customers, or vendors.

10. What was the end result of the relationship with this supervisor? Was there a tipping point, if so when and how did it occur? How has this impacted future career decisions?

11. Given hindsight what do you think your organization should’ve done to deal with your supervisor? What do you think you could’ve done differently to handle this situation?

Data Analysis

Content from the interviews was analyzed for common themes and recommendations. Data from these interviews is reported in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

Key Research Findings

The interviews summarized below were conducted via phone or in person. The identities of the participants remain confidential and they are only referred to by their first names or an alias if that is what the individual chose. These participants agreed to share their thoughts and experiences in order to benefit this research and offer their insight and advice for the future research related to this topic.

Qualitative Data Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview One</th>
<th>Susan-1/28/07</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question One (demographics)</td>
<td>Female, age 39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</td>
<td>Susan’s worst supervisor was the manager of the office in which Susan worked. Susan was her secretary. “She treated me as if I were a fixture and not a person. Her behavior and attitude toward me would change on a whim. She felt that her subordinates were inferior. She always got her way even if that meant hurting people’s feelings.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Three (leadership style)</td>
<td>Susan chose narcissistic and dramatic as her supervisor’s leadership style. “She would bully people until she got her way. She understood the politics of business and the way things got done. She was also dramatic and would always dish out underhanded jobs. She was constantly comparing me to her first secretary and saying that I wasn’t as good or as efficient. She would say things to purposely upset me and then act like she didn’t do anything and ask me what was wrong.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</td>
<td>“My manager actually empowered me with her bad treatment; she made me want to leave because I knew I didn’t deserve to be treated like that. I actually did end up leaving for awhile but then I came back to that office but worked in a different capacity reporting to a new supervisor.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Five (impact on job performance)</td>
<td>“When my supervisor’s first secretary left I think she felt used. She became very demanding but that just made me work harder to try and prove her wrong. I excelled at multi-tasking and became very detail oriented. I wanted to show her I could do the job just as well as her first secretary that she was always comparing me to.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</td>
<td>Susan did not have any ill will towards the organization in which she worked. She indicated that her supervisor’s poor treatment of her did not impact her overall feelings about the organization as a whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</td>
<td>“The organization did nothing to deal with my supervisor’s poor treatment of me. I went and talked to the Vice President about her and he did nothing, everything I said was swept under the rug. They didn’t want to get rid of her because she got things done. She had been there a very long time and even though her personality was flawed she was a good professional.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>“Her biggest flaw as a supervisor was the fact that she would intimidate people. She would rip your head off but in the end she would get what she wanted.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</td>
<td>“Everyone knew how she was, but my coworkers and I would just go out and complain about her. We all felt the same way so we would have a bitch session. It gave us something to bond together over.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>“When I went back to work in that same office we had both matured and the manager-secretary relationship was no longer there because I was in a different role. The change in role definitely helped improve the dynamics of our relationship.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eleven (hindsight)</td>
<td>When asked what the organization should’ve done differently to deal with her supervisor’s behavior Susan replied, “I think that if she had been talked to by her supervisor it would have validated me as a subordinate and it would’ve made a difference. I think that my working relationship with her at the time would...”</td>
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<td>have been smoothed over in that I was having very conflicting issues in trying to do my work and working for her in a professional manner.</td>
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<td>Interview Two</td>
<td>Chad-1/30/07</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question One (demographics)</strong></td>
<td>Chad, age 29</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</strong></td>
<td>Chad described the worst supervisor he ever worked for as “tyrannical, aggressive, a bad listener who couldn’t take input from anyone, and she was mean to everyone she came in contact with.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Three (leadership style)</strong></td>
<td>Chad chose suspicious as his supervisor’s main leadership style. “She would call people in individually to interrogate them about going above her with problems. She was compulsive about talking to people after an error was found. She would address these errors at great length with her subordinates.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</strong></td>
<td>“She made me feel very anxious to be at work. I didn’t want to be there, she made me feel incompetent. I knew no matter what I did I would get in trouble and that really hurt my morale.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Five (impact on job performance)</strong></td>
<td>Chad’s performance reviews at this job were excellent, but his supervisor made him feel that no matter how good his performance was, it wasn’t good enough because he was constantly getting in trouble for the most trivial things.</td>
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<td><strong>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</strong></td>
<td>“I didn’t want to be there, I didn’t want to be a part of it.” Chad indicated that he disliked his position and his supervisor so much that he wanted to leave the organization within the first week of being there; however, he ended up staying on for two years.</td>
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</table>
| **Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)** | Chad’s supervisor was eventually let go after the supervisor’s subordinates went to higher ups and complained and put a lot of pressure on them to do something about her behavior. The woman was given an ultimatum, either step down from the role of supervisor or leave, she chose to resign. “It really took a long time to get rid of her, the organization knew that her poor treatment of subordinates had been going on for years but they did nothing because her position was hard to fill. She had time
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</th>
<th>&quot;Her biggest flaw as a supervisor was intimidation. She would just stare at people or come out of her office to reprimand them for talking. She was very unapproachable and very strict.&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</td>
<td>Chad and his coworkers bonded together over their dislike for the supervisor. They would talk about her constantly to vent their feelings and support each other. Chad said that he did become very defensive when dealing with customers because he was afraid of committing any errors and the potential for punishment if those customers went to his supervisor with the error.</td>
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<td>Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>Chad’s supervisor was let go while he was there, but he still quit shortly after that. &quot;When I was interviewing to leave there I would always ask potential employers about how they viewed the supervisor-subordinate relationship to try and get a better feel about the organization. When I started my new job I had a small amount of distrust and apprehension about working with my new supervisor.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eleven (hindsight)</td>
<td>&quot;I knew my relationship with this supervisor was doomed from the very beginning. When I first met her she didn’t even say hello, she just said I hope you’re ready to work.&quot; Chad thinks that the organization should’ve let her go sooner. &quot;The organization knew what she was like and we lost a lot of good people on that shift because of her.&quot;</td>
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<td>Interview Three</td>
<td>Michelle-2/6/07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question One (demographics)</td>
<td>Female, age 39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</td>
<td>Michelle’s worst supervisor had the “good</td>
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<td>old boys club” mentality. He supervised a</td>
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<td>bunch of twenty somethings and wanted to</td>
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<td>be a part of the younger crowd. “He</td>
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<td>wanted to be the cool manager.” Michelle</td>
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<td></td>
<td>said that her manager was also chauvinistic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>towards women.</td>
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<td>Question Three (leadership style)</td>
<td>Michelle chose narcissistic and detached as</td>
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<td>her supervisor’s leadership style. “He was</td>
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<td></td>
<td>narcissistic in the way he presented</td>
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<td>himself; he puffed himself up and bragged</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a lot. He was promoted to supervisor</td>
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<td>because the company was growing quickly</td>
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<td>and didn’t have time to hire from the</td>
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<td>outside, but he had no management skills.”</td>
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<td>Michelle’s supervisor was detached</td>
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<td>because he never dealt with problems. “He</td>
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<td>lacked the skills to deal with conflict and</td>
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<td>certain situations so he would delegate that</td>
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<td>out to others to handle and called it a</td>
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<td>learning experience. Really he didn’t want</td>
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<td>to be bothered with it and didn’t want</td>
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<td>people to see through his exterior that he</td>
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<td></td>
<td>didn’t really know what he was doing.”</td>
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<td>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</td>
<td>“He didn’t impact how I felt about myself.</td>
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<td>I’m a fairly confident person so I didn’t</td>
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<td>let it get to me. I was able to separate my</td>
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<td>personal self from my work.”</td>
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<td>Question Five (impact on job performance)</td>
<td>“I initially took my supervisor’s disregard</td>
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<td>for me as a challenge. I worked harder to</td>
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<td>prove a point about female workers, but it</td>
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<td>didn’t matter. No matter how hard I</td>
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<td>worked he would never recognize me, he</td>
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<td>would only give recognition to men. Finally,</td>
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<td>I was like screw this, why I am working so</td>
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<td>hard for no recognition?”</td>
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<td>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</td>
<td>Michelle worked hard to achieve all of her</td>
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<td>goals; she even trained new people in the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</td>
<td>“They didn’t do anything about it.</td>
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<td>However, structural changes were also</td>
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<td>occurring at this time so they really didn’t</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eight  (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>“His biggest flaw was favoritism or sexism. He always favored men.”</td>
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<td>Question Nine  (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</td>
<td>Michelle stated that there was more bonding with coworkers of the same sex because of the management style. “It became like a seventh grade dance where the boys were on one side and the girls were on the other side.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Ten  (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>Michelle ultimately left the position by transferring out of the department. When it comes to future career decisions she said that she is better about asking questions during an interview to get a better understanding of the organization and the people. She also said that she is a little more leery of working for male bosses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eleven  (hindsight)</td>
<td>“With age comes wisdom and experience. I should’ve gone to him and talked to him or gone to someone else and talked to them about it. I should’ve been more assertive. I do have some regret and remorse and wish that I handled it differently.”</td>
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<td>Interview Four</td>
<td>Andy-2/6/07</td>
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<td><strong>Question One (demographics)</strong></td>
<td>Male, age 32</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</strong></td>
<td>Andy’s worst supervisor is actually his current boss. “He makes decisions and then asks for opinions afterwards but then disregards your opinion saying he’s already made up his mind. His words don’t match his actions.” Andy described his boss as having professional words but a rude demeanor. “Either he doesn’t know or he doesn’t care that he is jerk.”</td>
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<td><strong>Question Three (leadership style)</strong></td>
<td>Andy selected narcissistic/arrogant as his supervisor’s leadership style. “He has an elitist attitude, he thinks he’s better than everyone and he thinks he knows everything. He’s always bragging about things he’s done and never gives credit to others.”</td>
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<td><strong>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</strong></td>
<td>Andy said that he typically looks to his supervisor for validation, but he doesn’t do that with this supervisor. Andy doesn’t trust his current supervisor. At one point Andy’s supervisor came into Andy’s classroom and was very demeaning towards him in front of his class. “My supervisor likes to come into your classroom and undermine your authority in front of all of your students. I don’t feel as motivated working for him, but I have to remind myself that I’m not here for my boss, but for my students.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Question Five (impact on job performance)** | Andy’s supervisor puts a great deal of weight on test scores which in turn puts a lot of pressure on Andy to get his students to produce results. “It’s more prestigious for him if the scores are improved.” To help obtain these improved scores Andy’s supervisor changed the Regents testing window to June from January despite data that showed the January exam period was better for students which put even more pressure on Andy to get his students to produce improved test scores. “It’s very distracting having to worry about what
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</th>
<th>Andy says that the staff is united and everyone thinks their boss is a jerk so they have a common enemy.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</td>
<td>“Individuals have tried to discuss with him how they feel, but he doesn’t listen, he blows people off and does what he wants to.” Andy says that the teacher’s union president has conversations with teachers everyday regarding their frustrations but none of this has taken effect on changing the supervisor’s behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>Andy said that inflexibility and distrust are his supervisor biggest flaws. “He’s unwilling to change or listen to others and he doesn’t trust others to make their own decisions.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</td>
<td>Andy says that the staff has a united front against their supervisor and they all pretty much stick together and try to stay away from him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>Andy is still working for this individual but Andy thinks that his boss is somewhat temporary. “I’m going to wait it out. Although he says he’s not going on where I think he’s just waiting until something better comes along and then he will move on.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eleven (hindsight)</td>
<td>“I think we need a school board meeting to address the situation.” Working with this particular supervisor has reaffirmed the fact that Andy has no interest in becoming an administrator.</td>
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<td>Interview Five</td>
<td>Lorraine-2/23/07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question One (demographics)</td>
<td>Female, age 52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</td>
<td>Lorraine’s company was growing at an unbelievable rate and required larger space. She said that after the company moved, “I felt the dynamics at the office slowly start to change. The President changed. He was so full of his success that I believe he thought he could treat people any way he wanted and because he was the President no one challenged him. I started to see a side of him that I did not like at all. He became a bully, would tear a strip off you in a loud booming voice. Once he finished yelling at you and dismissed you, you thought the incident was over. Not so. He was like a pit bull in that he felt compelled to berate you as often as he saw fit for the same incident. He was totally inflexible.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Three (leadership style)</td>
<td>Lorraine chose narcissistic/arrogant as her supervisor’s leadership style. “The more successful he became the more arrogant he became. From the get-go the President was always right. He said I must be perfect at all times if I wanted to continue working for him. How ridiculous is that – no one is perfect not even him. But that didn’t matter. He demanded it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</td>
<td>“I felt that I was his personal maid and I was no longer a key player on the team.” Lorraine said that her boss would verbally abuse her and anyone else whenever he felt the need. “I truly believed over the years he raped me of my self worth. I began to second-guess myself about decisions both at work and at home.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Five (impact on job performance)</td>
<td>“Finally, after several years of being belittled, yelled at and pretty much stepped on, my job performance began to slip. No wonder. How does one continue to care about their job and give top-notch performance? It's very difficult. In fact, I started having anxiety attacks and had to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</td>
<td>“I didn’t like the direction the president or the company was headed in. I started to look for another job. But again, how does one do that when you have been beat down so bad. I could not present myself as a confident person. There was so much negativity inside me that it showed in my voice, behavior, actions, etc. Therefore, I stopped pursuing other work. I felt trapped and didn’t know how to get out.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</td>
<td>“In my case, nothing could be done by the organization because I worked for the head honcho. He could and would act any way he chose to.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>Lorraine indicated that her supervisor had several fatal flaws, inflexibility, self-indulgence, and favoritism. For inflexibility she said “He was always right. He never apologized, even when proven wrong.” When describing his self-indulgence she stated “one year the entire company was told that there is no money in the budget for raises and that times were tough. The next week he drove to work in new car, a $350,000 Bentley to be seen by all in underground parking. All staff that park underground know his spot and see this beautiful car parked there. No money in the budget because he bought himself a hugely expensive car and drives it to work to flaunt it in everyone’s face.” For distrust Lorraine indicated that her boss “didn’t trust his executive team. No wonder it was difficult to work for him. He wanted me to spy on staff and I refused to do it. He constantly told me that he trusts no one. How does he expect to build an effective, lasting working relationship with no trust involved?”</td>
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</table>
| Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others) | “I loved interacting with my colleagues, customers and vendors. But through the years colleagues and vendors knew what
<p>| Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions) | “As a result of working for this man for as long as I did contributed in large way of my breakdown (as well as the breakup of my marriage). I went into therapy to help in getting control of and believing in myself once again. It was a long haul. When I was well enough to return to work, I was treated very poorly. This was not a conducive environment in which to work given what I had just gone through. Therefore, I went on stress leave again as the anxiety was building extremely fast. I decided then that I was not going to ever go back to work at that company.” It took Lorraine a whole year find another job. “I had to work really hard to re-build my self worth (through therapy) and confidence to go out and sell myself. It was quite a struggle and many disappointments.” |
| Question Eleven (hindsight) | “I truly believe there was nothing the organization or I could have done differently to handle the situation because he is the organization. He is the captain of the ship and he drives it in any direction that suits him.” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Six</th>
<th>Sarah-3/1/07</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question One (demographics)</strong></td>
<td>Female, age 28</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</strong></td>
<td>Sarah’s worst supervisor was an alcoholic and people referred to her as “the crazy drunk lady”. Sarah said “you never knew what was going to set her off from one day to the next. She had all of these crazy rules that changed daily, trivial things about what kind of font you should type your memos in and she would go off on you if you didn’t use the right font.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Three (leadership style)</strong></td>
<td>Sarah said her boss was completely narcissistic. “Everything revolved around her. She couldn’t see that her own business was failing.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</strong></td>
<td>“I was so stressed, even outside of work. It changed how I interacted with my family and friends.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Five (impact on job performance)</strong></td>
<td>“I was always second guessing myself. I felt very unsure. She treated me as if I were ancillary and the only way I could tell that I was doing a good job was if I was invited to the weekly staff meeting or not.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization)</strong></td>
<td>Sarah liked her coworkers, but she hated the organization. “I couldn’t hang out with people from work outside of work because it would just bring up bad feelings.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</strong></td>
<td>Sarah’s boss was the owner of the company so not much was done to deal with her dysfunctional behavior. “Our investors tried to get her less involved, they brought in a pseudo supervisor to field some issues, but not much was done because she owned the company.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</strong></td>
<td>“Intimidation was her biggest flaw. She would storm around the office or lock herself in her office and chain smoke. She would also just lay people off on a whim without telling anyone in the organization about it.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</strong></td>
<td>“My colleagues were great, we bonded together to create a united front and we worked together to create a secure network.” Sarah said her coworkers even</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>“I took everything at face value because this was my first job. Gradually things built up. I didn’t want to jump around but felt that I had no choice, I had to get out.” Sarah said that she is now much more probing when interviewing. She said that she also tries to do research on the organization prior to accepting a position to find out what other people know about working there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Eleven (hindsight)</td>
<td>Sarah said that she should’ve discussed the issues she was having with her boss but that she was so young she didn’t know how to handle the discussion professionally. “I think my boss had a strong mind for business but needed help with the personal aspects of the job. The organization should’ve redesigned the reporting structure to isolate my supervisor’s role to higher level tasks.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question One (demographics)</td>
<td>Cindy-3/3/07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Two (description of worst supervisor)</td>
<td>Cindy’s worst supervisor is her current nurse manager. Cindy said that her manager always focuses on the negative. On one occasion when a triple trauma came in and Cindy was the charge nurse she worked her hardest to try and save the patients but ended up losing all three of them. Instead of being recognized for her efforts during a stressful situation she was written up for not controlling the number of people in the ER, even though everyone who was in there was working on saving the patients. Cindy was written up for not “controlling the crowd” better. “My nurse manager is never around when these situations arise, but she is very quick to write people up instead of talking to them to find out what happened.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Three (leadership style)</td>
<td>Cindy chose narcissistic/arrogant as her supervisor’s leadership style. “She likes power and to be in control. She is self-seeking and you don’t question her.” Cindy said if you do question the nurse manager that you’ll be embarrassed and demeaned by her.</td>
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<td>Question Four (impact on self-worth)</td>
<td>“She’s chipped away at my self-esteem. She breaks you down and then goes after your vulnerabilities.” Cindy said that she often feels angry and frustrated with her nurse manager but that there is “no way to fight her because she always wins.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Five (impact on job performance)</td>
<td>“She makes me very apprehensive, scared, and sick to my stomach when I have to work with her.” Cindy said her manager looks for every little thing that you may do wrong and then lays people out for it. “I don’t perform well when she’s present. I try to stay away from her whenever possible. I’m much more relaxed and friendly on the days that she is not working.”</td>
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<td>Question Six (impact on feelings towards)</td>
<td>Cindy said that she is “waiting out” her</td>
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<td>Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor)</td>
<td>The organization hasn’t done anything to put a stop to the nurse manager’s behavior. In fact, they encourage it because they rehired her. Cindy speculates that the organization likes this nurse manager because she “requires a lot of certifications and training. Her expectations exceed the state mandate of the certifications required to work in an ER.”</td>
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<td>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>Cindy said that her manager’s biggest flaw is intimidation. When her nurse manager mandated trauma nurse core training Cindy and the union grieved it. During the meeting Cindy’s nurse manager put her down in front of everyone. “She embarrassed me in front of the staff.” Cindy also said that her manager’s response to any questions is always demeaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others)</td>
<td>“I can’t tell my coworkers anything in confidence because they go right back to my nurse manager and tell her what I said. I’ve had to keep people at an arm’s length and I’ve realized I can’t talk to my coworkers about work because they’ll just stab me in the back.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions)</td>
<td>Cindy is still working for this nurse manager. She feels that this woman will leave the organization again so she plans to wait her out and hopes that she leaves sooner rather than later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question Eleven (hindsight)</td>
<td>When asked how she thinks her organization ought to handle her nurse manager Cindy replied “she needs to be treated like everyone else and not shown favoritism. We need a level playing field and we need to open the lines of communication.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question One (demographics)</td>
<td>The majority of participants were female over the age of 30</td>
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| Question Two (description of worst supervisor) | Self-seeking  
   Tyrannical  
   Inflexible  
   Elitist  
   Chauvinistic  
   Self-absorbed  
   Aggressive |
| Question Three (leadership style) | The most common leadership style reported was narcissistic/arrogant |
| Question Four (impact on self-worth) | Most participants felt the following:  
   Low self-esteem  
   No self-worth  
   Angry  
   Frustrated  
   Stressed  
   Demeaned  
   Anxious  
   While two participants indicated:  
   No impact  
   Felt empowered |
| Question Five (impact on job performance) | Most participants felt the following:  
   Scared  
   Afraid to make a mistake  
   Performance slipped  
   Second guessing oneself  
   Unsure  
   While two participants indicated:  
   Worked harder to prove oneself  
   Took it as a challenge |
| Question Six (impact on feelings towards the organization) | Most participants felt the following:  
   Resentment  
   Negativity  
   Trapped  
   Bad feelings  
   Didn’t want to be there, wanted to leave  
   While two participants indicated:  
   Dislike of supervisor did not extend outside of the job to the organization |
| Question Seven (how did the organization deal with the supervisor) | For all but one participant:  
  - Nothing was done to deal with supervisor’s poor behavior  
The one exception:  
  - Supervisor was given an ultimatum to step down or leave, she chose to leave |
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<td>Question Eight (fatal flaws)</td>
<td>• Intimidation was named by participants as the most frequent fatal flaw that a supervisor possessed</td>
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</table>
| Question Nine (impact on interactions with coworkers and others) | For the majority of participants:  
  - Everyone disliked the supervisor  
  - Bonded together, united front, supported each other  
  - Complained about the supervisor to one another  
Two participants indicated:  
  - Can’t talk to co-workers about supervisor, they will just back stab you  
  - Co-workers segregated based on who the boss favored and who was not favored |
| Question Ten (end result and the impact on future decisions) | Most participants said:  
  - Ask more thorough questions when interviewing to try to get a better sense of the organization and the supervisor relationship  
  - Still have a small amount of apprehension when starting a new job  
  - Took some time for self-worth to rebound after dealing with bad leadership  
Two participants who are still working under this dysfunctional leader said:  
  - They plan on “waiting the leader out” in hopes that he or she will eventually leave |
| Question Eleven (hindsight) | All participants indicated the need for:  
  - Better communication  
  - Taking action sooner rather than later  
  - Bringing in higher ups to achieve results |
Chapter 5

Research Analysis

Several key research findings were discovered during this study. In this chapter these findings are discussed along with a brief review of this study, implications of this research on the practice of Human Resources Development, recommendations for future research, and advice to employees on to how to handle dysfunctional leadership.

From this research study and corresponding interviews, several key findings have emerged regarding dysfunctional leadership. Specially, this study discovered:

1. Organizations have been known to tolerate and even reinforce dysfunctional leadership.
2. The impact of dysfunctional leadership is great and it can affect people’s lives inside as well as outside of work.
3. There are many reasons people will continue to work in a bad environment for a dysfunctional leader.
4. There are some strategies a person can use to combat dysfunctional leadership.

Discussion of finding one: Tolerating and Reinforcing Dysfunctional Leadership

During the course of this researcher’s interviews she discovered that more often than not the organization did nothing when it was brought to their attention that dysfunctional leadership was occurring. Reasons given for this lack of action were that the dysfunctional individual owned the business, was a high level executive, had been in the job for a very long time, the position was not highly sought after and would be difficult to fill, and that the dysfunctional leader required a high level of performance and results from their subordinates.
It seems apparent that if the organization will have to suffer what they consider a hardship due to removing or replacing the dysfunctional leader, action will most likely not be taken. Also, if the individual has a high level of seniority or lengthy service with the organization it is even less likely that anything will be done to deal with the dysfunctional leader. Additionally, some organizations may be unaware of the dysfunctional behavior that is occurring because no one has spoken out against it. Even worse, some organizations may be in denial that dysfunctional leadership is occurring; they would rather ignore it then deal with a potentially difficult situation. Finally, even though the leader may be acting in a dysfunctional manner the organization will accept it as long as they are still producing results, such as higher test scores for students, or more nursing certifications than is state mandated. The organization will turn a blind eye to the negative part of the leader’s behavior and place more emphasis on the positive outcomes gained by the dysfunction.

Discussion of finding two: The Impact of Dysfunctional Leadership on Subordinates

According to Dr. Anne Roe of Harvard University, “In North America there is no other single activity that contributes as much to your self-esteem, self-concept, and sense of identity as your job.” Dysfunctional leadership doesn’t just impact people while they are at work, but it can permeate into their entire being and disrupt their lives outside of work as well.

Several participants indicated that they felt extremely stressed out while at work and also outside of work. One participant said that she couldn’t spend time with her coworkers outside of work because it would just bring up bad feelings. Other participants stated that just the thought of going into work made them feel extremely anxious.
Another participant said that dealing with all of the stress from her supervisor took its toll on her marriage and led to her eventual split from her husband. This same participant also took two stress leaves from work and finally resigned her position.

The impression that dysfunctional leaders leave behind is lasting. Some participants indicated that their self-confidence was so shaken after dealing with a dysfunctional leader that they had a difficult time finding a new position and moving on. After moving on from the dysfunctional relationship many participants said that they were cautious about starting a new job and apprehensive about how their relationship would be with their new supervisor.

Discussion of finding three: *Reasons People Continue to Work for Dysfunctional Leaders*

There are a number of reasons people continue to work in a bad environment for a dysfunctional leader. Often participants said that they enjoyed their coworkers and felt very bonded with them so even though the leadership was bad their network of colleagues was very supportive. For many of the participants in this study they liked the organization in which they worked, just not their supervisor. A couple of participants said that they were certain that their dysfunctional leader would leave and that it was just a matter of time so instead of seeking other employment they would rather wait it out.

On the other hand, some participants indicated that they stayed on with their dysfunctional leader because they felt they had no other alternative or that their self-esteem was so damaged they would have had great difficulty finding a different job because they couldn’t market themselves to a prospective employer. Some participants also felt that the job market, or their length of service with the organization played a role in their staying at the job.
For many employees ‘the devil known is the better than the devil unknown’ i.e. the fear of the unknown is what makes them stay at their jobs. It can be hard to take the chance and quit your job no matter how horrible it is because you don’t know when your next pay check will come. Also, people can learn to take comfort in the routine of things, so unless things become completely unbearable they will stay on because they know what to expect; they may even fear that no matter how bad things are currently, they could be worse at their next job.

Discussion of finding four: *Strategies One Can Use to Combat Dysfunctional Leadership*

Many of the participants in this study said that with hindsight they wished they had been more assertive with their supervisor and more forthcoming about the issues that they were experiencing. Participants also said that they should have gotten other people involved besides their coworkers. They also said that they should have gone to other executives or Human Resources and try to get them involved to put a stop to the dysfunctional behavior.

Kellerman (2004) states “leaders are likely to change only when they decide it is in their interest to do so” (p.232). Based on this theory it would make sense to involve a higher up if at all possible or Human Resources when dealing with a dysfunctional leader. Somehow it must be in the supervisor’s best interest to change so whether it be through punishment or incentive there must be some mechanism put in place to keep the leader’s behavior in check. Kellerman (2004) also offers a few pieces of advice to followers who find themselves working for a dysfunctional leader. She says “empower yourself, find allies, and develop your own sources of information, pay attention, and take collective action” (p. 239).
Collective action can be another effective strategy used to combat problems with management. This could even lead to unionizing at some organizations if the problem is pervasive. Typically, there is strength in numbers and the more people that are involved the more attention the issue will get which will help lead to resolution.

Implications for HRD practice

This study may be a helpful resource to leaders and followers alike to make them more aware of the different types of dysfunctional leadership and provide them with some advice on how to deal with it. This study may also be informative to the field of human resource development to help the field develop more strategies to deal with dysfunctional leaders in the workplace as well as create training initiatives to help newly appointed leaders to take the right path.

Certain checks and balances have been put in place at many organizations to put a stop to dysfunctional leadership such as whistleblower policies, audits, and 360 degree feedback.

In addition to these checks and balances this researcher recommends the following:

1. HRD should focus their training initiatives on helping leaders to be tolerant. As participants reported in this study their leaders were mostly narcissistic and arrogant and would demean or dismiss their followers. Leaders need to focus more on the performance of their employees and less on their personalities. There should not be favoritism with leaders while other employees are bullied or berated for whatever reason a leader chooses. Managers can avoid being labeled a “bad
boss" by learning how to adapt their leadership style to different employees with different needs and HRD can help them to do that (Scott 2006).

2. HRD should also focus training both employees and supervisors on how to be better communicators. Perhaps by providing mentors who are excellent communicators and have a history of good employee relations to leaders who struggle with those skills would help. Different strategies could be employed to help open the lines of communication between leaders and followers so that any concerns can be expressed openly and honestly without fear of retaliation. Team building exercises could also be used to foster a more supportive environment.

3. Finally, HRD practitioners should also offer neutral ground for both supervisors and employees to come and discuss their issues. HR professionals should be willing to listen to this information and be able to formulate a strategy or intervention to help solve the problems before they escalate. HRD practitioners must realize that when they help to improve worker satisfaction they are not only helping improve the quality of the work but they are also helping the workers improve the quality of their lives.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study also raises a few possible suggestions for future research:

1. A qualitative study examining the reasons people stay in dysfunctional work environments, working for bad leaders would be interesting. Such a study would explore more thoroughly the reasons people continue to work for these dysfunctional leaders by taking a look at these individual’s pasts and studying
their personalities to see if there were any themes that arose such as insecurities, victims of past abuse, low self-esteem, etc.

2. A qualitative study that focuses more on the actual response people have to dysfunctional leaders such as workplace violence and post traumatic stress disorder.

3. A study involving pre and post observations of a work environment where bad leadership exists and what happens to that work environment once the dysfunctional leader has been removed.

4. A literature review of dysfunctional leadership throughout history that focuses on theme analysis of how dysfunction develops and what some root causes are that make leaders turn bad.

Advice to employees dealing with dysfunctional leaders

1. You have to pick the most reasonable alternative for your situation to have the most favorable outcome when dealing with your dysfunctional leader. Although you may want to walk out on your job or tell your boss how you really feel these may not be the best courses of action to take. You must truly evaluate what plan of attack makes the most sense for your life but will also help alleviate the problem. If you can’t afford to quit your job or find something else outside of the organization then you may want to find a way to transfer to a different department within in your organization but away from your dysfunctional leader.

2. When looking for a new job try to get a feel for the organization’s culture, norms, and standards this will help to determine if you would be a good fit. If, for example, you are the type of person that likes a more relaxed work environment and you go to an
organization for an interview and notice that it is extremely quiet on the floor and no one
is out of their seat you may want to rethink whether that will be a good fit for you or not.
If something about the potential employer’s culture just doesn’t seem to suit who you are
and what you’re about you should ask yourself if you would be happy working in that
kind of environment before accepting an offer of employment.

3. Don’t be afraid to ask questions of a potential employer and try to find out more
about your potential new boss. At the end of an interview when the prospective
employer asks you if you have any questions, don’t just smile and politely say no. You
are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you. Ask your potential new
boss what their vision is for the future of the position and the department as a whole. Find
out if that vision corresponds with what you want for your own career.

4. Try to understand your supervisor’s personality and if there is a reason for their
behavior. Initially, try to give your supervisor the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps they are
experiencing some difficulty in their personal life or maybe they are having a lot of
pressure put on them by upper management to produce which is making them behave in a
dysfunctional manner. You might discover that their dysfunction is isolated to a few pet
peeves and as long as you can avoid those things they are reasonable to deal with. If you
find that this is not the case, then start thinking about what your next steps should be to
resolve the situation to the best of your ability.

5. Create allies by finding out how other employees feel about your supervisor.
Creating allies will help you to realize that you are not alone in your unfortunate
situation. Not only will this give you people to turn to vent your frustrations but this will
also help you keep your self-esteem intact and will allow you to work with others who
can sympathize as well as help you strategize with ways to deal with your dysfunctional leader.

6. Be assertive, speak up, find someone who can impact change that will listen. In order for your situation to improve you have to tell someone who can impact change. This may be the most difficult step to follow because typically finding someone who can impact change means going above your supervisor. Sometimes upper management will not want to listen to what you have to say because it shows someone they have put in a leadership role in a negative light. If you find that management disregards what you are saying and considers your issue to be an isolated personality conflict between just you and your boss, then you need to take collective action.

7. Take collective action. You will be more successful in achieving results if more than one person is willing to speak out against the poor treatment. It is a known fact that numbers carry weight with organizations; just look at the impact that unions have had on the way organizations do business. Management will have a difficult time ignoring a group of people who come forward with the same complaint. Out of the participants interviewed Chad was the only participant who was able to have his supervisor removed through collective action. By getting his coworkers to speak up with him, his organization could no longer ignore the fact that the supervisor’s behavior needed to be addressed.
Conclusion

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the different types of dysfunctional leadership and how each one affects both employees and organizations negatively. The study has been conducted to fill in some of the gaps in leadership research, such as the fact that there has not been much research to show why organizations tolerate or even reinforce dysfunctional leadership behaviors. This study included a review of relevant literature combined with qualitative interviews with seven participants, all of whom have had unique experiences with dysfunctional leadership styles.

This project was primarily conducted to get a better understanding of the various forms dysfunctional leadership can take and to help develop some strategies that can be used to deal with the dysfunction. It is also the hope of this researcher that this study will help create an awareness of the prevalence of dysfunctional leadership in the workplace and the kind of toll it can take on the employees. This negative impact on employees can in turn have a negative impact on the entire organization due to low morale of employees, missed work days due to stress leaves, and even creating a bad name for the organization in the community because of the mistreatment of employees spilling over into the public's perception.

To conclude, the researcher hopes that this study may also benefit HRD in organizations by providing a clearer picture of the many issues surrounding dysfunctional leadership. With proper insight HRD may be able to lessen the impact of dysfunctional leadership and deal with the problem before it consumes the entire organization.
References


Harvey, Jerry B. (Summer 1974). "The Abilene Paradox and other Meditations on Management". *Organizational Dynamics* 3 (1).


Appendix A

*Interview Questions*

1) What is your age and gender?

2) Please describe the worst supervisor that you have worked for.

3) If you had to select one of the following terms to define the leadership style of your aforementioned supervisor, which would best apply? Why? (narcissistic/arrogant, suspicious, dramatic, detached, compulsive)

4) How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about yourself?

5) How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about your job performance?

6) How did your supervisor’s behavior impact how you felt about the organization in which you worked?

7) What is your assessment of how your organization handled your supervisor’s behavior? What if anything did your organization do?

8) If you had to select one of the following “flaws” which would you say your supervisor displayed most often? (intimidation, inflexibility, favoritism, self-indulgence, distrust)

9) During the time when you were reporting to this particular supervisor please describe your interactions you had with colleagues, customers, or vendors.

10) What was the end result of the relationship with this supervisor? Was there a tipping point, if so when and how did it occur? How has this impacted future career decisions?

11) Given hindsight what do you think your organization should’ve done to deal with your supervisor? What do you think you could’ve done differently to handle this situation?
Appendix B

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Dysfunctional Leadership

Name(s) of researcher(s): Erin Cornelius

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Seth Silver
Phone for further information: 585-241-3038

Purpose of study: To determine the impact of dysfunctional leadership on employee morale as well as its effect on the organization as a whole.

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: The interview will either be conducted face to face at a neutral location for both the respondent and the primary investigator or the interview will be conducted telephonically.

Length of participation: If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to be a respondent in an interview consisting of ten questions regarding dysfunctional leadership. Your participation will last approximately 20 to 40 min per session and will require one session which will require 20 to 40 min in total.

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:
- Your participation is voluntary and poses no risk to you.
- The benefits will accrue to the institutions that are the subject of the survey.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name or the name of the organization in which you work/worked.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant): Signature: Date:

Print name (Investigator): Signature: Date:

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8260 for appropriate referrals.