



# Toxic leadership in Health Care

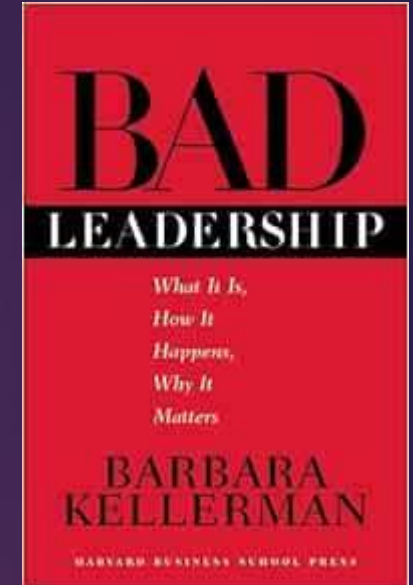
## A new pandemic?

SAAFP conference 05/09/2025

DIRK HAGEMEISTER

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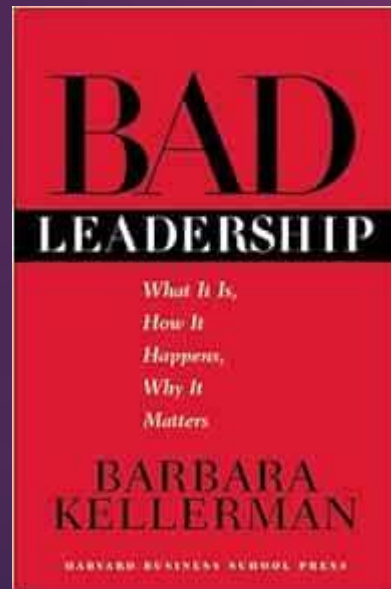
To deny bad leadership equivalence in the conversation and curriculum is misguided, tantamount to a medical school that would claim to teach health while ignoring disease.



# Content

- ▶ Types of bad leadership
- ▶ The toxic triangle
- ▶ Healthcare and toxic leadership
- ▶ Q&A

# Types of *Bad leadership* (Kellerman)



- ▶ Incompetent
- ▶ Rigid
- ▶ Intemperate
- ▶ Callous
- ▶ Corrupt
- ▶ Insular
- ▶ Evil



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## The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments

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# The toxic triangle

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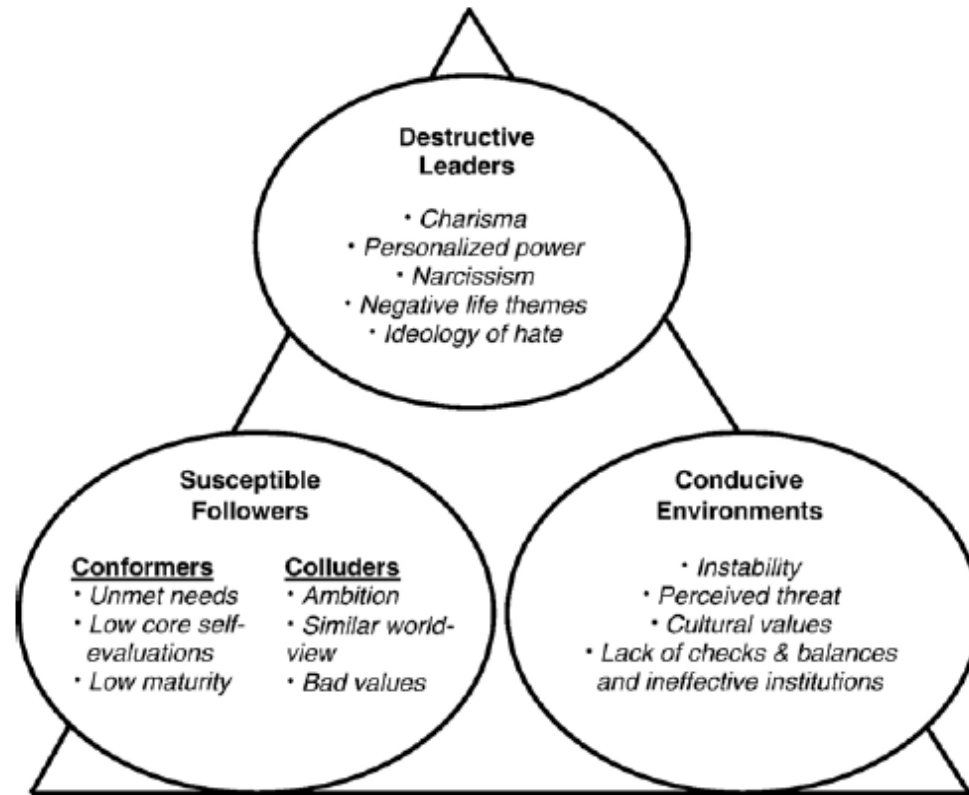


Fig. 1. The toxic triangle: elements in three domains related to destructive leadership.

# The toxic triangle

Table 1

Five features of destructive leadership

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1. Destructive leadership is seldom absolutely or entirely destructive: there are both good and bad results in most leadership situations.
  2. The process of destructive leadership involves dominance, coercion, and manipulation rather than influence, persuasion, and commitment.
  3. The process of destructive leadership has a selfish orientation; it is focused more on the leader's needs than the needs of the larger social group.
  4. The effects of destructive leadership are outcomes that compromise the quality of life for constituents and detract from the organization's main purposes.
  5. Destructive organizational outcomes are not exclusively the result of destructive leaders, but are also products of susceptible followers and conducive environments.
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# Why is Health prone to bad leadership?

- ▶ High stakes
- ▶ High budget
- ▶ Political interest

# Toxic triangle: Destructive leaders

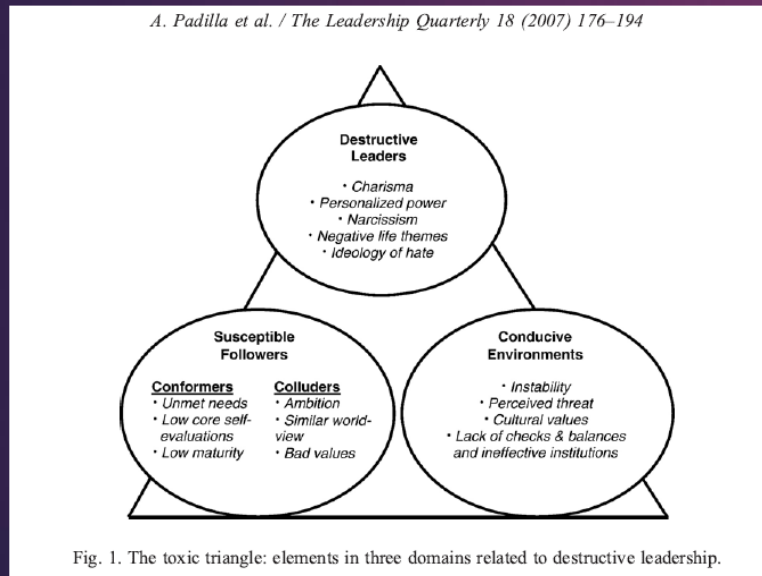
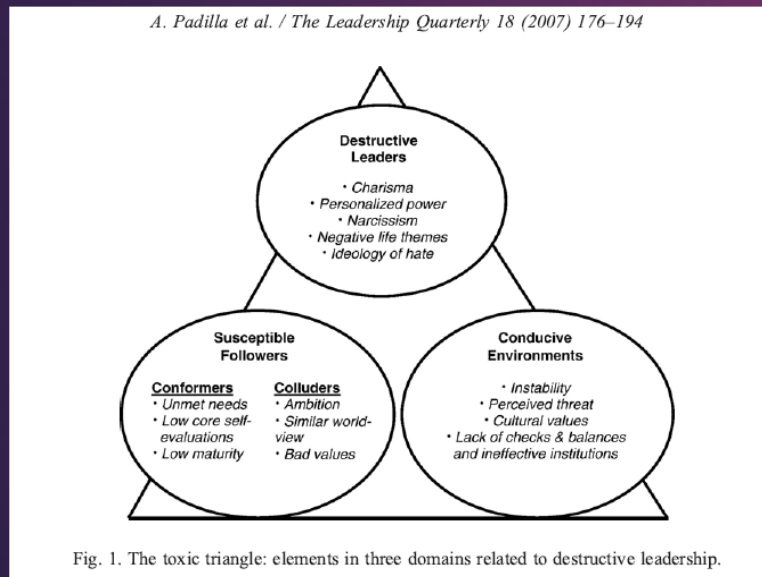


Fig. 1. The toxic triangle: elements in three domains related to destructive leadership.

- ▶ National and professional history of trauma
- ▶ Perpetuation of toxic narrative ('When I was an intern ...')
- ▶ Political figures parachuted into health care

## Toxic triangle: Susceptible ('toxic') followers - Conformers



- ▶ Medical education based on positivist doctrine and indoctrination
- ▶ Historical power structures imply steep hierarchies
- ▶ Light at the end of the tunnel: if I survive internship/ comm serv/ registrarship I will enjoy a good income and social status (as consultant in private) – ‘vasbyt’

## Toxic triangle: Susceptible ('toxic') followers - Colluders

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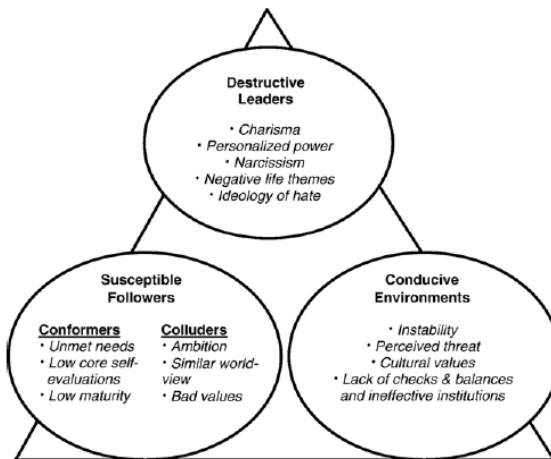


Fig. 1. The toxic triangle: elements in three domains related to destructive leadership.

- ▶ Ambitious characters subscribing to the 'bicycle strategy': buckle upwards and kick downwards
- ▶ Social networks (e.g. ethnicity) driven by the dominant socio-political doctrine ('racial trench war')
- ▶ Diversity and trans-boundary cooperation seen as threat to personal career paths

## Toxic triangle: Conducive ('toxic') environments

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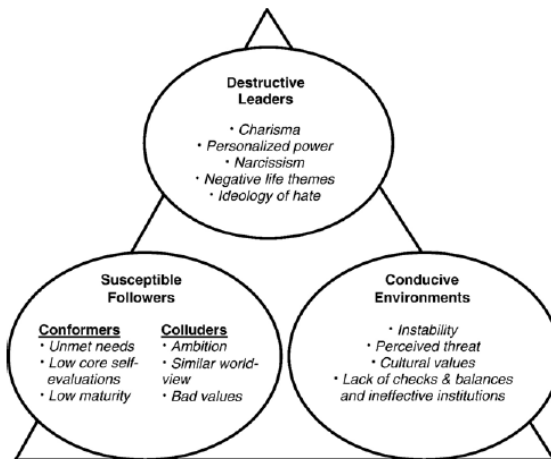


Fig. 1. The toxic triangle: elements in three domains related to destructive leadership.

- ▶ Leadership figures not qualified (political nepotism)
- ▶ Confounding of labour relations/ union functions with political leadership (parallel 'leadership' structures bypassing line management)
- ▶ Abuse of disciplinary and human resource management tools for intimidation instead of performance enhancement



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### Destructive leadership behaviors: The case of academic middle leaders in higher education

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#### ABSTRACT

Destructive leadership, characterized by abusive behaviors and a lack of ethical integrity, undermines organizational morale and performance. This phenomenological study investigates destructive leadership behaviors exhibited by academic middle leaders in higher education, examining them through the lens of faculty members. Six faculty members from six Arab States participated in three rounds of interviews to capture their lived experiences. Data were supplemented by reflective journal entries, allowing researchers to examine their preconceived notions of the phenomenon under study. A whole-part-whole approach was utilized for data analysis. Findings illuminate specific instances of destructive leadership, including micromanagement and control, vitriolic communication, a detrimental organizational climate, and encroachment upon faculty members' work-life balance. The study explores the impact of these behaviors on faculty morale, productivity, and overall organizational culture. This study contributes to a deeper understanding and discussion of the challenges presented by ineffective middle leadership in higher education environments.



The End