



# THE TOXIC EQUATION REVERSED: ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE BY TRANSFORMING KEY NEGATIVE VARIABLES INTO POSITIVE DRIVERS

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## Abstract

*Organizational success relies on a harmonious and productive workplace, yet many organizations struggle with toxic variables such as lack of experience, incompetence, jealousy, greed, tribalism, job mismatch, and favoritism. These factors not only obstruct operational efficiency but also erode morale and hinder long-term growth. This paper analyzes the multifaceted impacts of these negative variables and offers a structured framework for transforming them into positive, performance-enhancing drivers. Through a synthesis of literature, expert insights, and best practices, this study demonstrates how fostering experience, competence, collaboration, integrity, inclusivity, job-person fit, and meritocracy can yield significant improvements in organizational performance. Toxic workplace dynamics have drawn increasing attention from both scholars and practitioners, particularly as organizations seek to compete in rapidly evolving markets. The presence of negative behaviors and attitudes can lead to a cascade of adverse outcomes, ranging from decreased engagement and productivity to heightened employee turnover and reputational damage. By understanding the underlying factors that contribute to workplace toxicity, leaders can design targeted interventions that not only address immediate challenges but also promote sustained organizational health. This paper is structured to first review existing research on toxic workplace variables and their impact, then introduce a methodology for analyzing and addressing these factors. The core of the paper presents a detailed analysis of both negative and positive organizational variables, culminating in a practical framework for transforming*

*workplace culture. The discussion highlights implementation strategies and potential challenges, while the conclusion reinforces the critical importance of continuous improvement in organizational practices.*

*Keywords: Organizational performance, workplace toxicity, incompetence, inexperience, jealousy, greed, tribalism, job mismatch, favoritism, collaboration, integrity, inclusivity, job fit, meritocracy, employee engagement, turnover*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's dynamic business landscape, organizations are continually seeking ways to optimize performance and maintain a competitive edge. However, despite sophisticated strategies and advanced technologies, many organizations are undermined by internal factors that impede their progress (Brown & Lee, 2019). These factors, often referred to as toxic organizational variables, include lack of experience, incompetence, jealousy, greed, tribalism, job mismatch, and favoritism. Recognizing and addressing these variables is essential for creating a work environment conducive to high performance and innovation.

Toxic workplace variables manifest in various forms, from overt behaviors such as favoritism and exclusion to more subtle issues like misaligned job roles and insufficient skill development (Lee & Chen, 2021). The cumulative effect of these factors can be devastating, leading to diminished morale, reduced productivity, and increased staff turnover. Moreover, toxicity within an organization can spread rapidly, eroding trust and collaboration, and ultimately impacting the organization's reputation both internally and externally (Smith et al., 2018; Khuhro, 2025).

This paper aims to analyze the specific ways in which these negative variables affect organizational performance and to propose a transformational framework that replaces these detractors with positive drivers. By reframing the organizational equation to emphasize experience, competence, collaboration, integrity, inclusivity, job-person fit, and meritocracy, it is possible to cultivate a culture where employees thrive and organizational goals are more readily achieved. The following sections will delve into the literature, methodology, and practical implications of this approach.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The body of literature on workplace toxicity underscores its significant impact on organizational outcomes. Smith et al. (2018) found that toxic behaviors such as favoritism and tribalism are directly correlated with decreased employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, studies have shown that environments characterized by incompetence and lack of experience often experience higher rates of error, missed opportunities, and stunted innovation (Brown & Lee, 2019). These findings highlight the urgent need for organizations to identify and address sources of toxicity to maintain a productive workforce.

In addition to productivity losses, toxic workplace variables can lead to severe psychological and financial costs. Johnson (2020) notes that organizations plagued by jealousy and greed often face a breakdown in team cohesion, as employees become more concerned with personal advancement than collective success. This shift in focus frequently results in increased conflict, absenteeism, and turnover, all of which carry significant financial implications for organizations. Studies in the hospitality sector have further demonstrated that favoritism negatively impacts employee well-being, morale, and psychological capital, thus undermining workforce sustainability (Lasisi et al., 2022).

Studies on job mismatch reinforce the importance of aligning roles with employee capabilities. Roque (2018) found that mismatches—either over- or under-qualification—reduce productivity and increase turnover. More recent research confirms that higher levels of mismatch significantly lower worker performance, especially in attractive firms that compromise fit for appeal (ScienceDirect, 2024). Additionally, job mismatch negatively impacts wages, job satisfaction, and even patent performance among doctoral researchers (ScienceDirect, 2022). This literature provides a strong foundation for the framework proposed in this paper, which seeks to replace toxic variables with their positive counterparts to enhance organizational performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to provide an in-depth understanding of toxic organizational variables and the processes needed to transform them into positive drivers of success. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena and capturing the nuanced perspectives of stakeholders within organizational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using qualitative inquiry, the research is able to identify underlying patterns, motivations, and contextual factors that quantitative methods might overlook.

The research design integrates multiple sources of information to enhance validity and comprehensiveness. Insights are drawn from recent organizational psychology literature, real-world case studies, and firsthand accounts from experts in the field. This multi-source approach allows for a more robust analysis and ensures that the findings and developed framework are well-grounded in both theory and practice (Yin, 2018).

## Data Collection

Data collection consisted of an extensive review of academic journals, industry reports, and organizational case studies documenting workplace toxicity and interventions. The literature review focused on identifying common toxic variables, their impacts on organizational outcomes, and best-practice strategies for remediation. By systematically reviewing a diverse range of sources, the study ensures a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Booth et al., 2016).

In addition to secondary data, primary data were collected through expert interviews. This triangulation of sources enhances the credibility of the research findings by validating insights across different types of evidence. The combined use of literature, case studies, and expert perspectives aims to provide a holistic and actionable framework for addressing workplace toxicity (Fusch et al., 2018).

## Expert Interviews

To supplement the findings from literature and case studies, expert interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of twelve (12) organizational leaders, human resources professionals, and management consultants. This sample size was chosen to ensure thematic saturation—a point at which no new significant insights emerge from additional interviews—while still capturing a diverse range of professional perspectives (Guest et al., 2006). Participants were selected based on their direct experience with organizational change and their proven ability to foster positive work environments.

Each interview was semi-structured, allowing for both consistency across participants and flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy, with ethical considerations such as confidentiality and informed consent strictly observed throughout the process (Wiles et al., 2008).

## Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enables researchers to distill large volumes of qualitative data into manageable themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences and recommendations. This approach facilitated the extraction of actionable strategies and barriers commonly faced when addressing toxic organizational variables.

Coding was conducted in multiple stages to ensure reliability and to minimize researcher bias. Initial codes were developed inductively from the data, followed by a process of refinement and categorization into overarching themes. This rigorous analytical process contributed to the

development of a framework that reflects both scholarly knowledge and practical expertise (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Framework Development**

Findings from the literature review, case studies, and expert interviews were synthesized to construct a practical framework for transforming toxic organizational variables. The framework emphasizes the replacement of negative factors such as favoritism, job mismatch, and tribalism with positive drivers like meritocracy, job-person fit, and inclusivity. This synthesis approach ensures that recommendations are both evidence-based and feasible in real organizational contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The framework is designed to be adaptable, recognizing that each organization has unique challenges and cultural contexts. As such, it encourages leaders to tailor interventions to their specific environments while maintaining core principles identified as critical for organizational health and success. The adaptability of this framework makes it relevant for a wide range of organizations seeking to improve workplace culture and performance.

### **Application of Methodology**

The subsequent sections of the paper apply the developed methodology to analyze the impact of toxic workplace variables and propose actionable solutions. By illustrating the application of the framework with examples and recommendations, the study demonstrates its utility for both scholars and practitioners. This applied approach bridges theory and practice, contributing to the field of organizational development.

Finally, the discussion explores potential challenges in implementing the framework and strategies for overcoming them. Continuous improvement and adaptability are highlighted as essential for sustaining positive change and ensuring long-term organizational success, supporting the overall goals outlined in the research design.

## **THE TOXIC EQUATION AND ITS IMPACT**

The concept of the "Toxic Equation" encapsulates the idea that certain negative variables, when present within an organization, can systematically erode performance. Lack of experience often results in inefficient processes, errors, and missed opportunities for growth. Incompetence, on the other hand, can undermine trust in leadership and diminish the overall capacity of teams to deliver results (Brown & Lee, 2019).

Jealousy and greed further contribute to a toxic environment by fostering competition over collaboration. Employees who feel threatened by their peers' success may engage in

counterproductive behaviors, such as withholding information or sabotaging projects (Johnson, 2020). Greed shifts focus from organizational goals to individual gain, undermining team cohesion and ethical standards. The tribalism, or the tendency to form exclusive in-groups, can lead to discrimination, bias, and the marginalization of talented employees who do not fit the dominant culture (Smith et al., 2018; International Journal of Advanced Research, 2025).

Job mismatch and favoritism represent structural issues that hinder organizational effectiveness. Job mismatch reduces pay, satisfaction, and performance (ScienceDirect, 2022), while favoritism erodes morale, trust in leadership, and retention—studies show that one in ten employees plan to quit due to favoritism, and it significantly lowers team morale (Forbes, 2025). Further research demonstrates that favoritism increases turnover intention, especially when distributive justice is low (Khuhro, 2025). Together, these variables form a "toxic equation" that, if left unaddressed, can significantly impede organizational performance and growth.

## **TRANSFORMING TOXIC VARIABLES: THE POSITIVE EQUATION**

### **Experience & Continuous Learning**

Organizations that prioritize experience and continuous learning set the stage for sustained excellence. By investing in onboarding, mentorship programs, and ongoing professional development, companies ensure that employees possess not only the requisite skills but also the confidence to tackle evolving challenges. Experience is not limited to tenure; it encompasses exposure to diverse roles, industries, and problem-solving scenarios, all of which contribute to a more adaptable and resourceful workforce (Brown & Lee, 2019).

Continuous learning is critical in environments characterized by rapid technological and market changes. Organizations that create learning cultures encourage employees to pursue certifications, attend workshops, and share new knowledge with colleagues. This proactive approach not only fills skill gaps but also fosters innovation, as employees are equipped to implement best practices and novel solutions. Furthermore, it signals to staff that their growth is valued, enhancing engagement and loyalty (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Leaders play a crucial role in modeling and supporting lifelong learning. When senior management demonstrates a commitment to personal and professional growth, it sets a powerful example and embeds learning as a core organizational value. This shift from a static to a dynamic skillset mitigates the risks associated with lack of experience and positions the organization to weather industry disruptions (Smith et al., 2018).

## **Competence & Professionalism**

Competence is foundational to organizational success, encompassing the technical, cognitive, and interpersonal skills required to achieve goals. Developing competence involves not only hiring individuals with strong credentials but also providing ongoing training, constructive feedback, and opportunities for stretch assignments. Organizations that foster competence empower employees to operate autonomously and contribute meaningfully to team objectives (Brown & Lee, 2019).

Professionalism complements competence by establishing standards for behavior, communication, and accountability. Professional organizations articulate clear expectations and provide mechanisms for addressing lapses in conduct or performance. This creates an environment where employees feel respected and are motivated to uphold organizational values (Smith et al., 2018).

Encouraging professionalism also involves recognizing and rewarding exemplary performance. When employees see that effort and skill are acknowledged, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and strive for continuous improvement. This positive reinforcement helps to neutralize the effects of incompetence and ensures that high standards are maintained throughout the organization (Johnson, 2020).

## **Collaboration & Supportiveness**

Collaboration is the antidote to jealousy and internal competition, enabling organizations to leverage diverse talents and perspectives. High-performing teams are characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to share knowledge and resources. Effective collaboration is facilitated by structures such as cross-functional teams, regular check-ins, and collaborative technology platforms (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Supportiveness within teams builds psychological safety, encouraging employees to express ideas, ask for help, and take calculated risks without fear of ridicule or reprisal. Managers can cultivate a supportive environment by recognizing contributions, mediating conflicts constructively, and providing resources for team development. When employees feel supported, they are more likely to collaborate, innovate, and remain committed to organizational goals (Smith et al., 2018).

A culture of collaboration and supportiveness reduces the likelihood of jealousy-driven behaviors, as success is viewed as a collective achievement rather than a zero-sum game. This shift not only improves morale but also enhances problem-solving capabilities and adaptability, positioning the organization for long-term success (Johnson, 2020).

## **Integrity & Altruism**

Integrity is the cornerstone of ethical organizational behavior, guiding decision-making and fostering trust among employees, customers, and stakeholders. Organizations that prioritize integrity develop codes of conduct, institute transparent processes, and hold individuals accountable for their actions. Ethical leadership inspires employees to act with honesty and fairness, reducing the prevalence of greed and opportunistic behavior (Johnson, 2020).

Altruism in the workplace is demonstrated through actions that prioritize the collective good over individual gain. This can involve mentoring colleagues, volunteering for organizational initiatives, or supporting community programs. Organizations that reward altruistic behavior create a sense of shared purpose, which strengthens team cohesion and reinforces ethical standards (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Promoting integrity and altruism requires consistent messaging from leadership and the integration of these values into performance evaluations and reward systems. When employees see that ethical and altruistic actions are recognized and rewarded, they are more likely to internalize these values and contribute positively to the organizational culture (Brown & Lee, 2019).

## **Inclusivity & Diversity**

Inclusivity and diversity are essential for unlocking the full potential of an organization's workforce. Diverse teams bring a variety of perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches, which can drive innovation and adaptability. Inclusivity ensures that all employees, regardless of background, feel valued and empowered to contribute to the organization's success (Smith et al., 2018).

Organizations can promote inclusivity and diversity by implementing unbiased recruitment processes, providing diversity training, and establishing employee resource groups. Leadership must also model inclusive behaviors, such as soliciting input from all team members and addressing discriminatory practices promptly. An inclusive culture reduces the negative impacts of tribalism and creates a more equitable work environment (Lee & Chen, 2021; International Journal of Advanced Research, 2025).

The benefits of inclusivity and diversity extend beyond the organization, enhancing its reputation with customers, partners, and the wider community. Companies that are known for their inclusive practices are better able to attract top talent and retain employees, further strengthening their competitive position in the market (Brown & Lee, 2019).

## Job-Person Fit

Ensuring job-person fit is a critical component of maximizing employee motivation and productivity. This involves aligning employees' skills, interests, and values with the requirements and culture of their roles. Organizations can achieve this through robust recruitment and selection processes, career development programs, and regular performance reviews (Johnson, 2020).

Job-person fit not only increases job satisfaction but also reduces turnover and absenteeism. When employees are well-matched to their roles, they are more likely to be engaged, perform at a high level, and pursue opportunities for growth within the organization. Conversely, poor fit can lead to frustration, disengagement, and ultimately, loss of valuable talent (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Ongoing dialogue between employees and managers is essential for maintaining job-person fit as both organizational needs and individual aspirations evolve. By remaining attentive to these dynamics, organizations can ensure that employees remain motivated and that roles are continuously optimized for maximum effectiveness (ScienceDirect, 2024).

## Meritocracy & Fairness

A meritocratic culture is built on the principles of fairness, transparency, and equal opportunity. In such an environment, promotions, rewards, and recognition are based on demonstrated performance and potential rather than personal connections or favoritism. This not only boosts morale but also motivates employees to perform at their best, knowing that their efforts will be fairly evaluated (Smith et al., 2018).

Establishing meritocracy requires clear, objective criteria for advancement and regular, unbiased performance evaluations. Transparent communication about expectations and opportunities for development further reinforces the perception of fairness. When employees trust that the system is just, they are more likely to invest in their work and remain committed to the organization (Johnson, 2020).

However, meritocracy must be carefully managed to avoid unintended consequences, such as excessive competition or neglect of team contributions. Organizations should balance individual achievement with recognition of collaborative efforts, ensuring that fairness is maintained across all levels and functions (Lee & Chen, 2021; Bauch & Weißenberger, 2025).

## The Positive Equation

Organizational Performance  $\uparrow = f$  (Experience + Competence + Collaboration + Integrity + Inclusivity + Job-Person Fit + Meritocracy)

This equation provides a blueprint for organizations to cultivate a high-performance culture by systematically replacing toxic variables with their positive counterparts.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study delineates the influence of both negative (toxic) and positive (transformed) independent variables on organizational performance. The negative variables—such as incompetence, inexperience, jealousy, greed, tribalism, job mismatch, and favoritism—are hypothesized to hinder organizational effectiveness by fostering an unhealthy work environment and reducing employee engagement. In contrast, the positive variables—including competence, experience, collaboration, integrity, inclusivity, job-person fit, and meritocracy—are expected to enhance performance by promoting a supportive and productive organizational culture. As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework visually maps how these opposing sets of variables converge to impact the dependent variable, organizational performance, providing a structured basis for subsequent analysis and discussion.

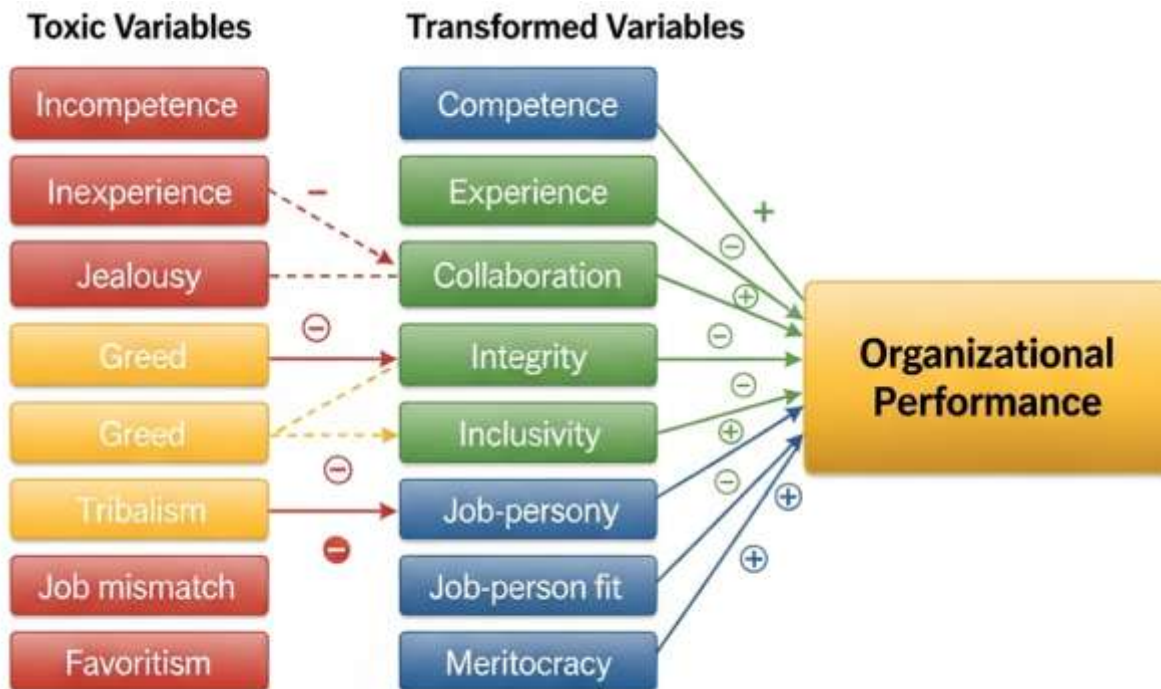


Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing the influence of independent variables (toxic and positive factors) on organizational performance.

## DISCUSSION

Implementing the positive equation requires a deliberate and sustained effort from organizational leadership. Change often encounters resistance, particularly when entrenched behaviors and systems are challenged. Leaders must communicate the rationale for change clearly, involve employees in the process, and provide support throughout the transition. Regular training, open forums for feedback, and visible commitment from senior management are key to overcoming resistance and building momentum (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Practical implementation involves integrating the positive variables into all aspects of organizational operations, from recruitment and onboarding to performance management and succession planning. For example, hiring processes should assess not only technical skills but also cultural fit and alignment with organizational values. Performance reviews should evaluate collaboration, integrity, and inclusivity alongside traditional metrics such as sales or productivity. By embedding these values into everyday practices, organizations reinforce the desired behaviors and make them part of the organizational fabric (Smith et al., 2018).

Measuring the impact of these changes is essential for continuous improvement. Organizations should track key indicators such as employee engagement, turnover, diversity metrics, and performance outcomes to assess progress. Regular pulse surveys, exit interviews, and benchmarking against industry best practices provide valuable feedback for refining interventions. The discussion underscores that while the journey to a positive workplace may be challenging, the long-term benefits in terms of performance, innovation, and employee well-being are well worth the investment (Johnson, 2020; Khuhro, 2025).

## LESSON TO BE LEARN FROM SUCH PRACTICES

### a. Toxic Workplace Variables Undermine Success

One of the core lessons from this research is the significant harm that toxic workplace variables can inflict on organizations. Factors such as incompetence, favoritism, jealousy, tribalism, and job mismatch are not merely abstract concepts; they have real, measurable impacts on morale, productivity, and overall organizational reputation. When these negatives are left unchecked, they foster environments of mistrust, disengagement, and high employee turnover, all of which undermine the organization's ability to achieve its goals and sustain competitive advantage.

### b. Positive Transformation Is Possible

Another important takeaway is that organizations are not powerless in the face of toxicity. By actively identifying toxic variables and implementing targeted interventions, organizations can transform these negatives into positive drivers. This transformation involves fostering competence, collaboration, inclusivity, integrity, and meritocracy. Such deliberate efforts not only

mitigate harm but also create a positive feedback loop, where healthy behaviors become embedded in the organizational culture, leading to enhanced performance and employee satisfaction.

**c. Leadership and Culture Are Critical**

The role of leadership and organizational culture emerges as a critical factor in driving and sustaining transformation. Change initiatives are most successful when leaders model ethical behavior, enforce fairness, and champion continuous learning and development. A culture that rewards integrity, aligns people with suitable roles, and values diversity is far more likely to succeed in neutralizing toxic influences. Leadership commitment sets the tone for the entire organization, demonstrating that positive change is both a priority and a shared responsibility.

**d. Performance Depends on Environment**

Organizational performance is shown to be deeply intertwined with the work environment and interpersonal dynamics, rather than being solely a result of resources or strategic planning. The quality of relationships, sense of fairness, and opportunities for meaningful engagement significantly affect motivation and productivity. Healthy environments encourage employees to contribute fully, foster innovation, and support the organization's strategic objectives, while toxic environments do the opposite.

**e. Proactive Management Brings Long-Term Benefits**

Finally, the research underscores that proactive management of organizational culture brings enduring advantages. Organizations that intentionally cultivate a supportive, ethical, and inclusive environment not only reduce conflict and turnover but also promote innovation, employee engagement, and sustainable growth. The long-term benefits of investing in positive workplace variables far outweigh the costs, providing organizations with a resilient foundation for continued success.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that toxic organizational variables are a significant barrier to achieving high performance. Lack of experience, incompetence, jealousy, greed, tribalism, job mismatch, and favoritism each contribute to a dysfunctional workplace, undermining both individual and collective success (Smith et al., 2018; Roque, 2018; Forbes, 2025). Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that transforms negative variables into positive drivers of organizational performance.

By focusing on experience, competence, collaboration, integrity, inclusivity, job-person fit, and meritocracy, organizations can foster a culture that supports continuous improvement, innovation, and employee engagement. The positive equation outlined in this paper offers a

practical framework for achieving these outcomes, supported by evidence from both scholarly research and real-world practice. Leadership commitment, transparent communication, and ongoing measurement are critical to sustaining change and ensuring that positive behaviors are maintained over time (Lee & Chen, 2021; ScienceDirect, 2022).

Ultimately, transforming the toxic equation is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing journey. Organizations that proactively address workplace toxicity and invest in positive variables are better positioned to attract and retain top talent, adapt to changing environments, and achieve sustainable growth. The journey may be complex, but the rewards—in terms of morale, productivity, and long-term success—are substantial (Johnson, 2020; Lasisi et al., 2022).

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