Cross-Cultural Perspectives on
How to Effectively Manage Toxic Employees

by

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Abstract

The Research Problem: Toxic employees are believed to exert many negative impacts on the individuals, team, and organization. However, managers could be possibly affected by factors like conflict avoidance, thus sometimes tolerate the problem. The tendency of harmony seeking and conflict avoidance is typically associated with Eastern culture. Research shows that effective management of toxic employees is of great significance for improving the situation.

Research Aims: Limited research has been recently conducted on the topic of the management of toxic employees by academia, and the cultural aspect has never been mentioned in the existing literature. Therefore, the authors aim to explore effective methods of managing toxic employees by confirming the practicability of existing theories and discovering innovative ones, while investigating the role of cultural diversity in the research topic.

Methodology: In order to achieve research aims, literature was reviewed to build a theoretical framework and facilitate the design of the interview guide. After selecting qualifying interview candidates, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Based on both literature and empirical data, an integrated model was presented through a ground theory approach.

Results and Discussion: The results of semi-structured interviews were presented through different themes. In the meanwhile, empirical data were compared between Asian and Western managers. Next, managers' perspectives of toxic employees and managerial approaches were discussed with literature. The concluded findings were then used for the establishment of an integrated model that illustrates how to effectively manage toxic employees, to answer the research questions.

Keywords: Toxic Employees, Difficult People, Management, Coaching, Toxicity, Culture

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

The introduction chapter reveals the research problem in the background section by highlighting its significance and relevance in the workplace. Following that, the research gap is pinpointed, and it leads to the aim and objectives of the study. Next, the research purpose is explained to reinforce the value of the study, and research questions are outlined. Last but not least, an overview of the study is presented through a brief outline of the structure.

1.1 Background

In the workplace, people often find themselves interacting with someone difficult or even toxic. According to Gulesserian (2018), engaging with toxic people at work can become a living nightmare for most: it drains the energy, ruins the mood, occupies the mind, distracts from the work, and so forth. He also points out that the majority of people have encountered toxic ones at work, either at some point in their careers or throughout entire careers.

Toxic employees are generally defined as workers who, intentionally or unintentionally, engage in counterproductive work behaviors that are inconsistent with the organizational culture and harmful to the organization over the long term (Bugdol, 2018; Housman & Minor, 2015; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; McCulloch, 2016; Tastan, 2017). Different from difficult people, toxic workers are not only harming but also spreading their behaviors (verbally or non-verbally) to others, which causes coworkers negative feelings of anger, depression, anxiety, discouragement, and so forth (Gallo, 2016; McCulloch, 2016).

Overall, toxic employees exact a heavy toll on the organization itself and its people, considering the fact that they induce low morale within the organization and cause others' poor performance (Bugdol, 2018). Porath and Pearson (2013) conducted a thorough survey with 800 managers and employees in 17 industries, revealing 66% of the interview participants' performance was declined. In the meantime, nearly half admitted that the existence of toxic employees decreased their work efforts, and almost four-fifths decreased their commitment to the organization. Correspondingly, job satisfaction would also be adversely affected, and it is not surprising if high absenteeism is found in organizations with members suffering from toxicity (Bakkal, Serener & Myrvang, 2019; McCulloch, 2016; Porath & Pearson, 2009). As a result, toxic employees are costly: the annual cost of toxicity could be up to USD$4,049,357 in a hypothetical one-thousand-member organization, including the replacement cost and cost of effects (Williams, 2019). The loss cost caused by them cannot nearly be covered by the values they could possibly contribute to the company (Housman & Minor, 2015).

However, toxic employees may still be tolerated by managers for some reason (Bartlett & Wozny, 2005). One factor can be the fact that they may deliver satisfactory results; their individual performance in productivity could be even better than average workers (Housman & Minor, 2015). It can also be ascribed to the phenomenon of conflict avoidance in the workplace, especially given the fact that no one truly feels comfortable to deal with the difficult ones.

In terms of conflict avoidance, East Asia is considered to embrace this phenomenon with a long history, since people greatly value the concept of harmony. As a core concept of Confucianism, '和' (harmony) is often put into effect to explain the tendency (Leung, Koch & Lu, 2002). In line with seeking and protecting harmony, numerous old sayings reflect that Chinese tend to highlight the wisdom to tolerate, compromise, and endure, such as 'Lack of tolerance in small matters upsets great plans' (小不忍则乱大谋), 'Withdraw in order to advance' (以退为进), and 'The shot hits the bird that pokes its head out' (枪打出头鸟). As a principle of justice, social harmony is embraced by Japanese society, and it is believed to attach more importance than fairness (Ohbuchi, 1998). In Korean firms, similarly, group harmony is regarded as the most important managerial values (Cho & Park, 1998).

Harmony is also related to other concepts in East Asia, like *face* and *guanxi* (Leung, Koch & Lu, 2002). By avoiding open and direct confrontation with the toxic employees, it prevents the interactants from the embarrassment of *losing face* in public. *Guanxi* implies influential relationships in the workplace; if the toxic employee is with a powerful family background or other special ties with the company, there is a chance that he or she will be more tolerated.

To sum up, although toxic employees indeed exert a destructive influence on team performance and working environment, they are often tolerated due to conflict-avoidance or other reasons. However, according to a survey of 1008 interview participants (Fierce, 2019), approximately 3 out of 4 employees strongly wish the employer could be less tolerant of those who are perceived as toxic. In addition, research has shown that by actively and effectively managing toxic employees, managers are able to increase employees' satisfaction, lower their stress and feelings of annoyance, and consequently, reduce costs and enhance team performance (Bugdol, 2018; Sawang, 2010). Therefore, managers can genuinely make a difference; there is a great significance to investigate effective managerial methods to deal with toxic employees.

1.2   Research Gap, Aim & Objectives

Through a broad literature review, the authors have noticed that limited research has been done in academia regarding the topic of the management of toxic employees, especially there is little recent research. Although a number of theories for managing toxic employees have been proposed, there has been no consistent analysis of their effectiveness when put into practice. Besides, as discussed earlier, conflict avoidance behaviors appear to be typically associated with Eastern cultures, but

no cultural element is found in previous studies. Therefore, the authors aim to provide a general understanding of the management of toxic employees and bridge the research gap by exploring the most commonly and recently developed theories concerning this specific research topic, validating the effectiveness of the managerial tactics in practice, and adding cross-cultural perspectives.

In order to achieve the research aim, the following research objectives are outlined. Firstly, the authors intend to look into the literature to identify common managerial tactics and discover the most recent theories outside of academia. Secondly, the effectiveness of managerial tactics is evaluated through in-depth interviews with experienced managers. Thirdly, cross-perspectives are examined by conducting a comparative study with an equivalent amount of Asian and Western managers. On the whole, it is the authors' intent to propose an integrated framework and provide practical implications to contribute a cross-cultural understanding of the effective management of toxic employees.

1.3   Research Purpose & Research Questions

In short, the principal purpose of conducting this research is to investigate cross-cultural perspectives on the effective management of toxic employees. To explain this, as mentioned before, limited attention has been paid to discuss the topic of toxic employees, more awareness of the research topic is certainly needed because they exert great negative impacts on the individuals, team, and organization. However, managers could be affected by the culture of harmony seeking and conflict avoidance, thus sometimes ignore the situation. From the authors' observation, cultural factors could play a part in the management of toxic employees but have never been mentioned in the existing literature. Furthermore, it is rather important to evaluate the effectiveness of managerial tactics in practice, to provide real support for managers to better cope with the research problem.

Accordingly, two main research questions are formed:
  o   What are effective management methods of toxic employees?
  o   Do cultural differences affect managerial perspectives on toxic employees?

1.4   Delimitation

Since the purpose of the study is to investigate managerial perspectives on toxic employees in different cultures, the principal focus is to gain a general understanding of managers' perspectives on toxic employees as well as effective methods of managing them. That means, although toxic employees demonstrate a variety of toxic behaviors in the workplace and there are unique tactics for each specific behavior, the research topic is mainly discussed on a general level, instead of focusing on specific behavior and its management methods in detail.

Moreover, in this study, toxic employees are mostly referred to those have inappropriate behaviors, but their performance is usually up to standard. Owing to the fact that this type of employees can still deliver, they are more likely to be tolerated by managers. It is also more complicated for managers to consider termination since they still bring some values to the company. Therefore, disciplinary action is not the prime focus of the study; the authors focus more on the managerial methods that can improve the situation before putting termination into effect in the last resort.

1.5   Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Firstly, the overall research problem, aim and objectives, and the purpose of the study are introduced and discussed. Secondly, a theoretical framework is summarized, and it is derived from the best available knowledge (BAK) found. Thirdly, research methods, and procedures for achieving the research aim is explained. Fourthly, the findings of empirical data are summarized and presented. Fifthly, the resulting analysis is displayed by discussing empirical data with literature. Finally, the conclusion chapter answers the research questions precisely, presents practical implications, and proposes alternatives for future research to contribute to the research topic.

2 Literature Review

In order to achieve the research aim, managerial methods of toxic people proposed by the literature are first examined. A general understanding is provided by summarizing common toxic behaviors and managerial tactics proposed by different literature, while new theories are explored. It is intended to provide a solid theoretical framework to proceed towards the main research questions, and it serves as foundations and guidelines to further discuss the topic with managers, in order to further approach the objectives of the study.

2.1 Common Toxic Behaviors

In multiple published literature, the topic of managing toxic employees is zeroed in on particular negative behaviors. Apparently, there is a great need for managers to customize their actions to deal with specific idiosyncrasies of particular people in the workplace (Bugdol, 2018; Lilley 2002; Pincus, 2004). Nevertheless, there is no consistent pattern of how to categorize different types of behavior. Thereby comparing five relevant resources (see Appendix A), we select and identify six of common toxic behaviors to discuss in the section according to two requirements: one is the most mentioned in the literature; the other is with the scope of toxic employees, whose behaviors are unacceptable while being able to deliver results. This is based on Jack Welch's matrix (see Figure 2.1), evaluating two dimensions: results and behaviors, and Type 2 is targeted: employees deliver satisfactory results while having unsatisfactory behaviors.

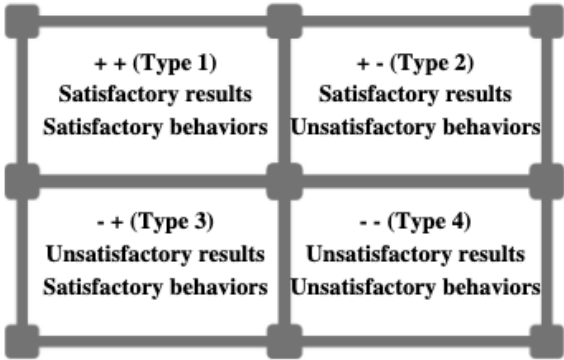| + + (Type 1) Satisfactory results Satisfactory behaviors	+ - (Type 2) Satisfactory results Unsatisfactory behaviors
- + (Type 3) Unsatisfactory results Satisfactory behaviors	- - (Type 4) Unsatisfactory results Unsatisfactory behaviors

Figure 2.1 Jack Welch Matrix (Bartlett & Wozny, 2005)

2.1.1 Bullying

There is no exact definition of bullying in the workplace (Bugdol, 2018; Milian, 2019; Pincus, 2004). In general, bullying focuses on patterns of unacceptable behaviors that are "abusive, threatening, intimidating or objectionable" (Milian, 2019, n.p.). In other words, a bully in the workplace tends to torment, frighten, and be hostile towards other people (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004). Furthermore, these behaviors can be "physical, psychological or verbal, and result in harm to the victim" (Milian, 2019, n.p.). It is also echoed that besides insulting and disrespectful language, office bullying also includes violent conduct in some extreme situations (Pincus, 2004).

Moreover, Pincus (2004) points out that there are two types of office bullies: one is those who target a handful of coworkers with their irritating behavior, and the other type is not selective about the target audience. She described the former type as cunning bullies since they "act like wolves in sheep's clothing" (p.45), and some co-workers are deceived by them. In the meantime, they tend to target and disdain gullible ones, due to their view that gullible people "are basically asking to be exploited" (Teller Vision, 2017, p.4). On the other hand, Pincus (2004) points out that the latter ones behave disruptively and rudely towards almost all the people at work, including the boss, vendors, customers, and so on. She further explains that a predictable pattern is that they act narcissistically and throw a tantrum "without a hint of embarrassment—or remorse".

·   How to manage bullies?

In order to prevent the toxic person's angry outburst, according to Pincus (2004), managers can first ask themselves if there is a simple step that is able to remove the potential challenge, or else managers can try to understand what the causes of bullies' angry outburst are and then provide one or more than one remedy to the case. If the toxic employee continuously demonstrates bullying attitudes and behaviors, managers should keep calm and recognize whether or not the aggression results from any ill intention (Bugdol, 2018). Once it is believed to be spiteful attacks, managers should act immediately and assertively (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004), and bullying should not be tolerated (Millan, 2019). The recommended methods include delivering a warning, paying a group visit, seeking legal advice, and so on (Pincus, 2004). It is also necessary for managers to bear in mind that "even though you're the manager, you still need to protect yourself" (pp.50-51) and ask for help when it is needed (Pincus, 2004).

Bullying could be different from harassment or discrimination; it may not be easy to obtain legal remedies if inappropriate conduct is not expressly prohibited by law (Milan, 2019). Therefore, organizations should be mindful of establishing a code of conduct (Millan, 2019). Researches suggest organizations take the following actions: providing training that helps employees aware of the toxic behavior, shaping an anti-bullying culture by communicating unambiguously zero tolerance for bullying, developing procedures for reporting, and appointing accountable people for solving bullying problems (Bugdol, 2018; Durniat, 2014). Moreover, some researches show that it is managers' behaviors that frequently involve bullying, and many cases are covered up (Durniat, 2014; Menon & Priyadarshini, 2018); anti-bullying procedures are of little effectiveness (Durniat, Krupa & Dziala, 2016).

2.1.2 Negativity

One of the most common toxic behaviors witnesses a lot of negativity and passivity (Anderson, 2013; Brightman, 2013). This kind of toxic employees is usually named as the pessimist and the complainer. Instead of getting involved and focusing on problem-solving, they consistently take negative attitudes and express negative opinions about on-going activities, assigned tasks and goals (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004). Therefore, negative employees are not doers (Pincus, 2004), and they are resistant to change and particularly pessimistic about new initiatives (Murray, LaRosa & Gutterman, 2019). Pincus (2004) also adds that people who complain a lot are very self-centered to the extent that "he or she doesn't hone in on anything else with objectivity" (p.61); they demonstrate a lack of empathy with other people.

A chronic complainer is used to blaming others, leading to the working environment being charged with negativity (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004). In the long run, they are inclined to suffocate and irritate others, as "people can't relax in the presence of a whiner" (Pincus, 2004, p.60). Consequently, co-workers and managers feel needed to be on guard and grow into the habit of ignoring this individual; ultimately, when he or she unravels something valuable to whine about, it is likely to be disregarded as well (Pincus, 2004).

· How to manage negative employees?

As proposed by Pincus (2004), during conversations with employees who have a regular tendency to accuse and assume, it is suggested to ask open-ended questions, to collect enough information to have a clear understanding of the situation. She continues, another tactic is to conduct positive behaviors actively when encountered with pessimists and complainers, to deflect their negativity. Whenever a complainer begins to "suck the air out of the room" (p.60), she reminds managers that they should not take it personally and quickly move on by introducing another topic for discussion, or simply agreeing with the person and showing sympathy. Additionally, managers can choose not to be coerced into making comments since this type of employees "gets bored without the give-and-take, gives up, and moves on" (p.74). Besides, she adds that managers should prevent pairing up a complainer with a soft employee, who is easy to become a captive audience and experience a meltdown.

Negative employees tend to deny their responsibilities, so managers need to explain clearly the accountable persons for specific tasks and what the complaining employee's share is (Bugdol, 2018). Similarly, it is advisable to follow the person's complaint with questions like, 'What do you suggest?', to make it as his or her responsibility (Pincus, 2004). This is because such employees often use complaints to "confirm that they are not in control or responsible for things that are done wrong, reaffirming perfectionism" (Lilley, 2002, p.9).

2.1.3 Know-It-All

Know-it-all employees often act narcissistically, impatiently, peculiarly, and distantly (Pincus, 2004). There is a strong need for know-alls to be recognised for their intellectual capability, and it is their belief that they are the best among others (Lilley, 2002; Usman, 2018). There is a general pattern of exaggeration: these employees tend to act as experts by exaggerating or even inventing some facts (Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2004). Know-it-all people are also likely to jump to conclusions impulsively (Pincus, 2004) while being reluctant to change since they are content with what they perform (Murray, LaRosa & Gutterman, 2019).

Lilley (2002) suggests that two types of know-alls are common: some are bullies, appear confident that they are always right, and hold the opinion that it is meaningless to argue. Therefore, they are capable of provoking others' feelings of anger and resentment, as they often communicate in an inconsiderate and superior manner as well as have a tendency to dismiss others' contributions. Another kind demands excessive attention and is eager to dominate conversations; the endless speech could result in loss of time in accomplishing tasks and projects (Kets de Vries, 2014; Keyton, 1999). Nevertheless, undeniably, some know-alls have true valuable expertise to contribute (Murray, LaRosa & Gutterman, 2019).

· How to manage the know-all?

First of all, according to Pincus (2004), managers should distinguish the know-it-all "who doesn't know much and a know-it-all who does" (p.94), as some can cause damage quickly, while the others are apt to propel the company into a new stage of success. She further states that, with regards to those truly intelligent know-alls, managers can keep them well-informed instead of giving out the filtered information. At the same time, more authority can be given since "the less you meddle and demand, the more you're likely to get from them" (Pincus, 2004, pp.81-82). Pincus (2004) adds that, however, sometimes this genius type of employee can be off track, managers are suggested to "insist on being kept in the loop" (p.84) and ask them to write simple and short reports at defined intervals.

On the other hand, facing those embellished with pretentiousness and deception, managers should be prepared to point out the downside and stick with the facts (Pincus, 2004). Equivalently, Lilley (2002) also believes the right strategy is "deny them the oxygen of attention" (p.53) and hold on to the facts. She continues that managers should not be hesitated to give positive feedback when it is praiseworthy since the occasional pat on their backs can help the situation more manageable.

2.1.4 Manipulation

Manipulators are apt to seize opportunities to take advantage of others and situations (Pincus, 2004). They are perceived as artful bullies, who maneuver and influence others to achieve their own aims rather than directly intimate or agonize coworkers (Teller Vision, 2017). This type of employees acts self-importantly as well: a manipulator does not take reciprocal actions and is

suspected of upholding an ulterior motive (Lilley, 2002). That is to say, he or she will not share the workload or lend a hand to colleagues without self-benefits, and does not appreciate receiving no for an answer (Pincus, 2004). Moreover, common patterns of manipulation include lying and flattering, and it may prevent them from being spotted by managers in the first place (Lilley, 2002).

·   How to manage manipulators?

The first rule of dealing with manipulators is, do not attempt to out-manipulate them but confront it head-on; otherwise, managers may have fallen into a complex world that is full of conspiracy and schemes (Lilley, 2002). Similarly, Pincus (2004) argues that managers and coworkers should stand firm once they are certain about their positions. Furthermore, managers ought to be well aware that manipulators may intentionally employ their charm to make their deficiencies overlooked, and when opinions differed or in the face of lies, managers should deliver the message with simplicity and state facts, maybe repeatedly (Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2004). Moreover, it is suggested to take time to listen and ask questions that are not easy to answer with only one word, to size up the situation (Pincus, 2004).

2.1.5 Gossip

The gossip type refers to those who spread rumors about others within the organization or informally judge others with negative comments (Xie, Wang & Shen, 2019; Pavlou, 2018; Pincus, 2014). Such negative workplace gossip would affect the mood and behavior of other employees, especially the targets of the gossip (Bencsik & Juhasz, 2019; Xie, Wang & Shen, 2019). Excessive gossip can turn into office politics and drama that affect the personal relationship in the workplace (Bencsik & Juhasz, 2019; Pavlou, 2018). In addition to that, their colleagues' work performance could be declined since they distract other coworkers from work (Pavlou, 2018; Pincus. 2014).

·   How to manage gossip?

Direct feedback is supposed to be effective in handling gossip: managers should let them know that although they demonstrate great social skills, their behavior is distracting, and no social chatting is allowed during work hours (Pincus. 2014). If rumors continue, disciplinary actions can be considered as the next step (Heathfield, 2019). Besides, managers can initiate an adequate number of team activities to ensure sufficient interaction time as well as enhance team bonding; otherwise, gossips may use it as an excuse for enhancing the relationship with coworkers to justify their reasons for chatting during billable hours (Pavlou, 2018).

2.1.6 Unresponsiveness

When communicating with the silent and unresponsive, there is no reaction or limited responses such as a few grunts (Bugdol, 2018; Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2014). This type of employees use silence as a defensive weapon to avoid revealing their thoughts; a lack of confidence plays a part in their silence (Lewis-Ford, 1993). Thus, they are often insulated and ostracized (Pincus, 2014).

Also, it is likely for them to act as an outsider of the team and feel reluctant to get involved (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2014). The trait of uncommunicativeness triggers dysfunctional interaction and a breakdown of team communication (Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2014). As a result, their coworkers may be disappointed, puzzled, and piqued by their attitudes; the teamwork is deteriorated (Pincus, 2014).

·   How to manage the silent?

Patience is a must for the managers to draw the silent out of their shells. When scheduling a talk with them, the managers should guarantee enough time, avoid interruptions, and do not fill in the silence (Bugdol, 2018; Lilley, 2002). Listening carefully and asking open questions are of great importance so that they are less likely to respond with short answers (Bugdol, 2018; Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2014). Apart from that, in order to encourage them to speak up, actively recognizing their insights or performance in front of other coworkers is beneficial since most are not confident (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2014). Additionally, managers can arrange training sessions for the team or department to improve communication skills together (Pincus, 2014). The purpose is to help the whole unit build on communication skills; in the meanwhile, silent people do not feel targeted as well as the team learns how to communicate with the silent more effectively.

2.2   DIS Model

A discourse system based on the DIS model (Figure 2.2) is recommended by HR specialists (Bugdol, 2018). The model is tailor-made for the managerial methods of toxic employees. It incorporates three principles: D-Direct, I-Immediate, S-Specific.
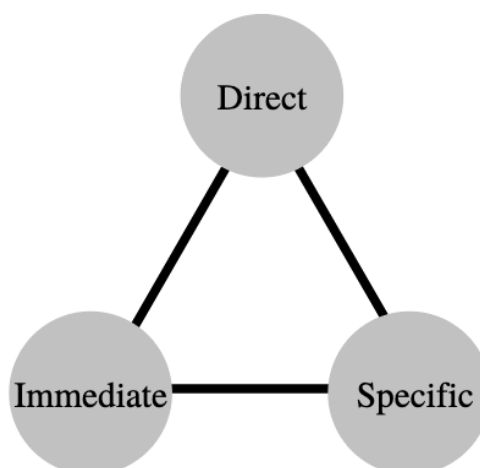

Figure 2.2 DIS Model (Bugdol, 2018)

2.2.1 D-Direct

As the model suggests, it is a must to communicate with a toxic employee in a direct and straightforward way. The principle of directness is also applied in the standard feedback rules (Carmichael, 2014). Toxic employees need to be given feedback explicitly, as they are usually oblivious to the negative influence that they exert on others (Gallo, 2016; Usman, 2018).

According to Bugdol (2018), the manager must directly inform the employee that his or her behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable while discussing specific and concrete examples. He adds that their impact should also be addressed; after the feedback, the employee should well understand how his or her behavior can be detrimental to team productivity and morale. The awareness of toxic employees concerning their unsatisfactory behavior serves a starting point for them to change (Bugdol, 2018; Usman, 2018).

Next, it is of considerable significance that managers set realistic expectations of what to change (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004; Porath, 2016), with clearly defined and measurable goals (Porath, 2016). In addition to that, while iterating expectations, managers can support the employee to accomplish it by providing a roadmap as well as a timeline (Kristen & Meryl, 2019; Murray, LaRosa, & Gutterman, 2020).

However, not everyone is willing or able to change after being informed of their misconduct and negative effect, as research conducted by Porath (2014) on incivility discovers that a number of "people engage in this kind of behavior just because it's fun and they believe they can get away with it" (n.p.). Thus, consequences ought to be directly explained as well. In particular, people are usually more likely to respond to their potential losses, compared with potential gains; it is crucial for them to keep it in mind "what they stand to lose if they don't improve" (Porath, 2016, n.p.). Similarly, Gallo (2016) highlights the importance of getting to know what concerns the toxic employee the most; for example, as to many people, suffering consequences "tied to the pocketbook" (n.p.) can become a strong motivation for them to behave in a more civil manner.

2.2.2 I-Immediate

Bugdol (2018) mentions that at the time when managers are aware of toxic behavior, it has to be addressed immediately. He also points out that 'act immediately when something bad happens' is a typical guideline presented in management manuals; this principle stems from the assumption that disciplinary action imposed immediately is more effective than the ones administered after a while.

Particularly, unacceptable behavior like bullying, the moment managers witness people threaten, intimidate, and taunt others is the moment managers must act, to prevent toxins aggravating and further spread (Pincus, 2004). Kristen (2019) emphasizes that managers need to let toxic people know immediately and be ready to explain clearly how the toxicity is affecting others negatively, which can help refute any potential claim that it was not their fault.

2.2.3 S-Specific

In order to manage toxic employees effectively, managers should tailor specific actions and responses "to address the specific idiosyncrasies of particular employees" (Pincus, 2004, p.8). In the same way, Bugdol (2018) suggests managers have to understand what particular type of employees are involved and based on which, to identify what specific remedial measures to be employed. He also points out that in practice, however, not many managers have sufficient competency to realize this specific approach. That is to say, managers are expected to have relevant psychological knowledge to truly fulfill the responsibilities of the role. Unfortunately, in most cases, they fail to act as a true coach (Bugdol, 2018).

2.3 Coaching Framework

Kris Plachy (2020) puts forward a structure of how to coach toxic employees effectively, and accordingly, the below flow chart is summarized as the Coaching Framework (Figure 2.3). Based on the framework, an effective structure should start by identifying the behavior and the impact on the individual, the team, the organization. Next, the manager needs to understand the why then state the expectation and what the consequences are if they do not change their behavior.
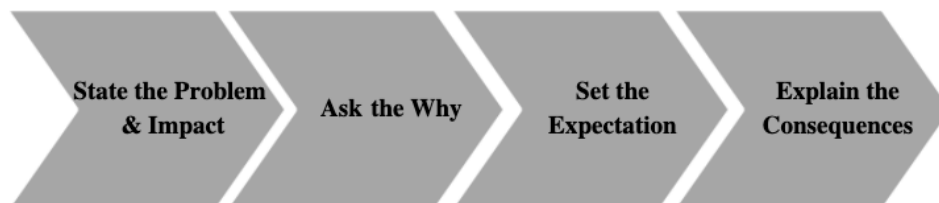
Figure 2.3 Coaching Framework (Adapted from Plachy, 2020)

In Plachy's course of *Coaching Conversations* (2016), a specific example was provided to demonstrate how managers would potentially coach an employee with unsatisfactory behavior. In this example, Janet is the employee, who is consistently late to work:

M>> Janet thanks for meeting with me. I wanted to talk with you about your tardiness. I noticed that you've been late, is it eight times in the last month?
J >> I don't know, I haven't really kept track.
M >> I think it is. I think it's eight times that you've been late. And what happens when you're late is that other people have to cover for your shift. If you're not here to answer the calls that come in, then calls are going to get dropped and so the rest of the team is pitching in. And the bottom line is ultimately, it feels really disrespectful that you're not carrying your weight and the team is having to pitch in. So I really want you to think about that and think about who you want to be on this team, and I really want you to show up on time,

and I want to see that happen for the next several months because I want this to be the last conversation that we have to have about this.
J>> Well I have a lot going on at home and I'll do my best to get here a little earlier.
M>> Okay, I'm glad to hear that, that you're going to do your best because that's what we really need from you and that would really communicate that you really respect this team and the work that we're doing.
J>> Well I don't mean to be disrespectful, but again, just my plate is so full at home. I'm just juggling the best I can. So I will make an effort to get here a little earlier.
M>> Okay. And on time.

The manager started with identifying the problem and expressed the impact of her being late. However, based on the proposed coaching framework, the manager failed to have the employee's voice heard, instead negatively charged this conversation with a label that 'you're being really disrespectful'. Supposedly, open questions like 'Why are you late?' would better help understand why she is frequently late. Besides, the manager did not allow the employee to take ownership of changing her behavior, simply communicated the desired result that she expected from Janet. Besides that, the consequences were not clearly stated. In another more effective example of coaching provided by Plachy (see Appendix B), the manager demonstrated her confidence that Janet could change her behavior, then Janet was encouraged to come up with her own solutions on what could be done differently to get to work on time by brainstorming together. Next, the manager identified the consequences of what would happen if the employee did not resolve this performance gap, while expressing her support. At the same time, she scheduled a follow-up session with a specific time to review the employee's progress on getting to work on time.

2.4   Behavioral Intelligence Framework

In order to effectively deal with toxic people in the workplace, Johnson (2018) introduces a unique approach with the concept of behavior intelligence (see Figure 2.4), and four quadrants are included: to be able to explain existing behaviors; predict future behaviors; influence others' behaviors, and control the manager's own behaviors.

It is a distinct framework that operates from the inside, based on the assumption that others' behavior cannot be changed, and "the only thing that we can change is our own behavior" (Johnson, 2018, 00:04:25). Johnson (2018) highlights the fact that people are under a heightened state of anxiety when interacting with people who are perceived as difficult to deal with. He believes that intense anxieties stop people from rational thinking and cause harm to their well-being. Therefore, it is necessary for people to control their own behavior to prevent those stress hormones causing detrimental effects to themselves.

Figure 2.4 Behavior Intelligence Framework (Adapted from Johnson, 2018)

2.4.1 Explaining

First of all, Johnson (2018) points out that people show a tendency to label others' behavior; labels ultimately infiltrate the way how the surrounding is understood. To explain this, someone that we do not get along with may be labeled as 'stubborn', while if a friend behaves in the same way, he or she is likely to be described as a very resilient person. In the same way, it is habitual for people to label the other as difficult or toxic when they experience certain unsatisfactory behavior from them. Due to this kind of bias, managers would better try to discover the underlying causes to be able to explain why toxic employees behave that way rather than simply label and continue (Gallo, 2016; Johnson, 2018).

In general, the attempt to understand what is causing the unsatisfactory behavior ought to be the first step (Gallo, 2016); asking questions is believed to be optimal to explain behavior (Johnson, 2018). By understanding the reasons why toxic people are acting the way they are, managers can use that information to be able to address the root of the issue and provide real support; for instance, if the toxic person suffers a mental health situation, managers could offer resources like counseling or provide them time off to alleviate the intrinsic problem (Gallo, 2016). By contrast, Pincus (2004) believes that managers have no need to worry about the exact reason why toxic employees behave that way, which is seen as a psychiatrist's job. She further states that managers' responsibilities should focus on how to keep the workplace unharmed from the negative effects that a toxic person engenders.

2.4.2 Predicting

According to Johnson (2018), once behaviors are explained, it allows managers to predict behaviors; the underlying effect of prediction is to reduce the anxieties created by the uncertainty. He continues, by predicting potential destructive behaviors, people are able to be better prepared and not to take it personally during interaction since it is only the person's behavior patterns.

Therefore, when managers directly communicate with the toxic employee, they are less likely to be hit with an onslaught of anxiety.

2.4.3 Influencing

Managers are often suggested not to expect to change toxic people to a great degree (Pincus, 2004). Likewise, influencing toxic employees' behavior can be seen as a challenging task; Johnson (2018) particularly brought up two tactics.

One tactic is to use inclusive language. The coaching manager, in the example shown in 2.3, illustrates the exact opposite; it is recommended to use the keyword 'we are' instead, as communication is seen as a mutual interaction. Thereby, creating a sense of togetherness and engaging the toxic person is thought to be an effective way to influence people's behavior.

The other suggested way is reward and recognition. Johnson (2018) highlights that it can be rather difficult to give rewards or recognition to those people who are believed to be toxic. He believes that, when managers reach out to toxic employees and recognize their satisfactory delivery, they are stepping out of the enemy zone and into the friend zone, and being a friend can be valuable to address the problem effectively.

2.4.4 Controlling

Lastly, Johnson (2018) highlights the notion that each individual may be somewhat toxic for others, saying "the reality is until we recognize that each of us is a difficult person for someone else, we're never going to be able to adjust our behavior" (00:11:38). On top of that, he adds that controlling one's own behavior of not being triggered is crucial. He recommends simple methods like taking a deep breath and counting to ten can be effective, as they help managers to address the problem with clear heads.

2.5 Thought Model

In order to have a further understanding of the inner approach, like the concept of behavior intelligence suggests, a well-established model named the Thought Model (see Figure 2.6) is presented in the following. This model is useful for helping any individual to better cope with toxic people at work. The Thought Model consists of five elements: circumstance, thought, feeling, action, and results. In short, circumstances can trigger thoughts that cause feelings and then cause actions or behaviors, which leads to results, and results become evidence for the originating thought.
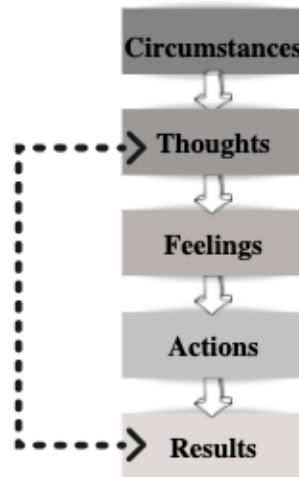
Figure 2.5 Though Model (Plachy, 2016)

The first step in the thought model is circumstances, which are provable facts that happen in the world every day. Frequently, people tend to attribute the circumstance to how they feel and wait for external circumstances to change, to feel better. However, circumstances do not drive feelings since people can have different feelings for the same circumstance. Instead, it is people's thoughts that determine how they feel about the circumstance. That is to say, feelings stem from people's mind, not external events. Then, feelings stimulate how people act and people are supposed to be responsible for their actions, while some people are inclined to blame circumstances (other people) accountable for their behavior. The last step of the model is results, and results will always affirm the originating thought.

In order to gain a better grasp of the Thought Model, a specific coaching scenario is introduced in the model of *Dealing with Difficult Colleagues* (Plachy, 2016):

M>>Elaine, thanks for the update, it sounds like all of your work is really on target. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about today?

E>> Yeah, actually. I have been noticing when we have been having department meetings, some of the other people on our team have been commenting on my work and talking about how I'm not learning the new computer system as quickly as they are, and I just feel singled out.

M>> I don't think that's what's going on. I think everybody is just under a lot of pressure, and I don't think they mean to single you out or anything. I think everyone is just kind of venting about what's going on.

E>> Because I've just noticed that it's been a continuous thing over the last couple of months since we got the new system, and it just kind of makes me feel like I don't really want to go to the meetings and be a part of the team.

M>> Okay. Well, you know, I really want to suggest, Elaine, that you really kind of just let it go. You're going to get better in the system and then the comments are going to stop. And you know, just, I think it's time to move on.

E>> Okay. All right. I'll try that.

In this case, the manager completely invalidated Elain's concern. As a result, the employee would be much less likely to share any concerns with the manager in the future because she knows she will just be dismissed. Besides, it is natural for Elaine to believe that if there is no one 'attacking' her, she would not have her concern. However, others' behavior is not something Elaine can control. Therefore, it is essential for the manager to coach employees to deal with the situation by helping them to shift focus onto what they can decide at that moment. Plachy (2016) introduces another example to show how managers could effectively achieve that (see Appendix C).

In that scenario, the manager started by asking the employee to explain what was going on and carefully uncovered what the employee was thinking, thus the information with respect to the Thought Model was collected: the circumstance was that an employee said to Elaine that she should retake the training. Elaine interpreted it as "I'm not doing as good of a job as I could", due to this thought, Elaine felt being targeted and disappointed about herself that "I'm letting the team down and frustrated, too." Then, the manager asked, "What do you do when you feel disappointed in those meetings?" Elaine responded, "Well, I shut down." The result was clear: Elaine was not participating, letting herself down, and not doing as good of a job as she could be. As the manager pointed out, "you're sort of playing it out exactly as you're believing it, right?"; the originating thought is echoed by the result.

Next, the manager guided Elaine to focus on what she would be able to control by helping her walk up the Thought Model from the result to get to a new way of thinking to get a different outcome. This started by asking the question to identify the result, "What would you like your result to be?... And how would you need to feel, in order to speak up?... feeling confident, right? And then, so, what do you have to believe that makes you feel confident?" Elaine came to realize that she should focus on "taking steps to learn what I need to learn" to build up the confidence to achieve the expected result of "speaking up" instead of feeling distressed caused by what the other person said to her.

2.6   Concluding Remarks: Theoretical Framework

In the chapter, a general classification of common toxic behaviors and specific tactics has been outlined, to help managers adopt suitable solutions on particular types of toxic employees. Notably, some general patterns stand out: although people have counterproductive behaviors categorized in a different way, the majority types have a narcissistic characteristic; asking open-ended questions is a popular managerial tactic that applies to most types of toxic employees.

With an aim to change the employee's unsatisfactory behavior for the better, the *DIS Model*, as well as the *Coaching Framework*, have been introduced to serve as main principles and structure to follow when managers address the problem by having a conversation with the toxic employee. In particular, the coaching framework enables to put the pieces together, which are largely aligned with the tactics mentioned in the D-Direct principle (see Chapter 2.2.1). Additionally, the S-

Specific principle in the DIS model resonates with the purpose of Chapter 2.1 by discussing common behaviors with respective methods.

Moreover, unconventional tools like the *Behavior Intelligence Framework* and the *Thought Model* are revealed to provide additional perspectives on managing toxic people in the workplace. These two frameworks have similarities in the assumption that toxic employees' behavior cannot be controlled or changed, thus a better focus is to control people's own thoughts and behaviors to reduce the toxicity. At the same time, these two approaches regarding "toxic" as a label that is imposed on the targeted employee, which is prone to biased attitudes during interaction with the person.

This theoretical framework will be tested and developed further with the examination of the empirical data, and meanwhile, some insights are used for establishing guidelines for semi-structured interviews. When combined with the empirical data, the final framework of the effective management of toxic employees can be created.

3 Methodology

This chapter presents an overall research design with approaches of qualitative, abductive, and comparative natures. The data collection method is described through the selection of the best available knowledge, interview participants, the reasoning of interview questions design, and the ways that interviews are conducted. Next, data analysis is introduced through the use of grounded theory. Lastly, the validity and reliability are evaluated as well as the limitations of the research are reflected.

3.1 Research Design

In order to approach the aim of investigating cross-cultural perspectives on effective management of toxic employees, while testing the applicability of theories of managerial strategies proposed by literature; the qualitative strategy and the abductive reasoning are adopted, while a sequence of steps is designed.

3.1.1 Qualitative Strategy

According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative approach is suitable when there is a need to understand a situation better because of a lack of research. As mentioned before, the management of toxic employees is not heavily studied, and the theories of managerial tactics barely cover cultural perspectives. Therefore, the qualitative approach by conducting interviews is chosen to explore the research questions further.

In addition, the qualitative strategy is chosen for being able to create grounded cross-contextual generalities (Mason, 2017). The authors aim for in-depth exploration, as the topic of toxic employees entails a great degree of contextualism and complexities. Moreover, the method of semi-structured interviews is chosen to generate data. It enables the authors to adapt to specific cases of interviewees to ask relevant follow-up questions, considering those interview participants should have a diversity of experiences with toxic employees, and their managerial methods can be quite varied. This is aligned with the fact that a semi-structured approach allows for an objective comparison of candidates' views, while also providing an opportunity to explore topics relevant to that particular candidate spontaneously (Pollock, n.d.).

3.1.2 Abductive Reasoning

When scrutinizing two of the most common views of the relation between theory and research, neither of the inductive theory nor deductive theory is completely applied in this study. In other words, both are valid: deduction applies, as the authors aim to collect empirical data to test and to some extent verify the theory data collected by the literature; while inductive reasoning is used for the generalization of managers' perspectives since each manager shares a unique experience; the cultural aspect is examined as well as an integrated model is created in the final analysis. Therefore, as a combination of deductive and inductive methods, abductive reasoning is most appropriate for this research. This unique approach helps create space for alternatives that are outside of what already existed (Jokhio & Chalmers, 2015); it thus allows the authors to add innovative insights in this study.

3.1.3 Comparative Design

Comparative design is typically applied to cross-cultural research (Bell & Bryman, 2011). When comparative design being applied to a qualitative research strategy, a multi-case study comes into being (Bell & Bryman, 2011). The authors need to seek comparisons between Eastern and Western managers to examine whether diverse cultural backgrounds will affect managers' perspectives of handling toxic employees to serve the purpose of the study.

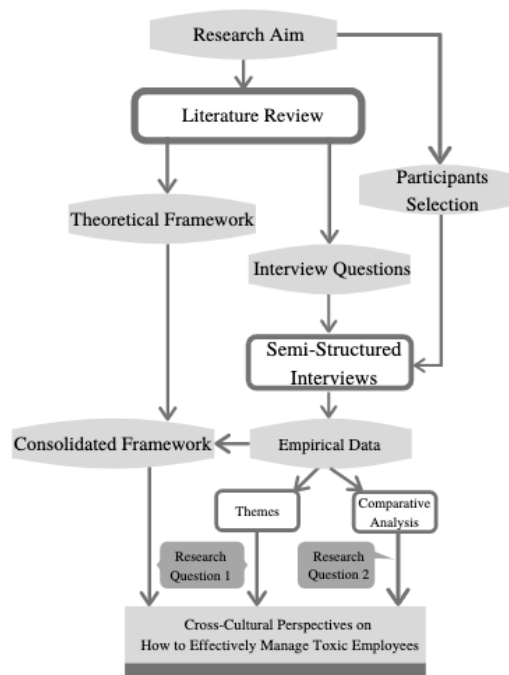## 3.1.4 Research Procedures

Figure 3.1 Research Design Overview

Following the main strategies described, an outline of the research design is illustrated in Figure 3.1 above. First, the literature review was conducted to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the research topic. From these theories, a theoretical framework was developed and can be found in the former chapter (see Chapter 2.6). It facilitated the design of interview questions and was utilized as the guideline for interviews (see Chapter 3.3); as mentioned in Chapter 3.1.1, it was determined that the best method to proceed was to conduct semi-structured interviews. Meanwhile, the interview participants are selected with multiple criteria to serve the purpose of the study (see Chapter 3.3).

Once empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews, it was analyzed by the way described in Chapter 3.4. On the one hand, the first research question could be answered by analyzing the data with themes, as well as through the integrated framework that was consolidated from both interview and literature data. On the other hand, through a comparative approach, cross-cultural perspectives were enlightened to fulfill the other research question, together to serve the research purpose.

3.2   Data Collection Method

A mixed approach was used during the research process to gain a comprehensive perspective on the topic by collecting the best available knowledge and having direct input from the interviewees. To elaborate on it, secondary data were collected through literature review within and outside of the academic world, while primary data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with managers from different cultural backgrounds.

3.2.1 Best Available Knowledge Collection

In order to offer a theoretical background to the study, a comprehensive literature review was carried out by exploiting the database of Lund University library and Google Scholar, and using keywords like 'toxic employees', 'difficult people', 'counterproductive work behavior', et cetera. By examining a range of relevant published materials, such as published books, academic papers, periodical articles, and so forth, it was obvious that this topic has not been heavily studied by academia. In addition, there is no uniform standard or a systematic approach while discussing the topic; a very few models or recent theories could be found. Therefore, the authors looked into other media platforms, including TED Talk, podcasts, and Coursera.

The TED talk presented by Jay Johnson (2018) with over 1,450,000 views was chosen because he is both the CEO of Coeus Creative Group and the professor of Madonna University. That means, he has great academic as well as practical experience. Similar to Kris Plachy, she is not only the CEO and Founder of Leadership and Coach, but also assumes the instructor role at the University of California. Given her 25 years-experience as a coaching leader as well as published books like *5 Truths for Thinking About Difficult People,* her theory of the Thought Model was introduced.

Besides, the authors summarized her communication techniques mentioned in the podcast: *The Modern Manager: Create and Lead Successful Teams*; only the most respectable managers are invited to the show. By reviewing and summarizing the most recent and relevant theories, a theoretical framework has been developed in the previous chapter.

3.2.2 Participant Selection

Once the strategy of semi-structured interviews was settled, interview participants should be searched out, and the interview participants were contacted via LinkedIn and network referral. It is in agreement with convenience sampling, as the approach is primarily based on the authors' own network. This method is selected out of the consideration that personal connection can help interviewees to better contribute to the depth of the interview, especially with respect to the complexity and sensitivity of the research topic. That is because interviewees would feel more comfortable with someone they know and more likely to express their genuine perspectives.

In line with the cross-cultural trait of the study, purposive sampling is used to gain credibility, and the authors identify the below criteria to locate potential interview candidates:

- · with management experience for more than five years
- · equal numbers of Western and Asian managers

In the study, ten managers fulfilling the criteria above participated in the interviews, they were located in different geographical areas that encompassed 10 Western and Asian cities. The full list of the sample interview candidates can be found in Table 1. Out of respect for their privacy, participants' names and companies are anonymized. By taking into account the convenience of the data analysis, they are also coded with assigned titles, which are in accordance with their cultural backgrounds: "A" represents Asian culture and "W" Western culture. Their citizenship, location, position, industry, and the number of years with managerial experience are displayed as follows.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

No.	Citizenship	Location	Position	Industry	Management Experience
A1	Hong Kong	Berlin	HR Manager	IT	6 years
A2	Chinese	Shanghai	Office Manager	Legal	7 years
A3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	HR Manager	Legal	15 years
A4	Philippine	Manila	HRSS Service Delivery Manager	Legal	6 years
A5	Chinese	Beijing	Recruitment Manager	Legal	5 years

W1	British	London	VP, People Operation	IT	23 years
W2	British	Bristol	Head Of Development	Legal	13 years
W3	Australian	Sydney	Office Manager	Legal	15 years
W4	Swedish	Stockholm	Regional Director	Environmental Engineering	13 years
W5	Swedish	Copenhagen	Head of Communication	Food and Beverage	23 years

3.2.3 Interview Questions Design

Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, the authors designed an interview guide, which is mainly based on the theories introduced in the previous chapter. It is the authors' aim to organically develop the content of interviews to capture more in-depth insights. Therefore, not necessarily all the questions would be asked and the order of a list of pre-designed questions was not strictly followed. The below Table 2 illustrates the pre-designed questions and the designing purpose, including how questions are related to the theoretical framework.

Table 2: Interview Questions and Explanations for Design Purpose

No.	Questions	Purpose
1	Could you give us a brief overview of your role in the company?	To gain general background information of the manager & provide a specific context of the working environment
2	Could you share your experience with toxic employees?	To step into the research topic and reveal their personal experience
3	Could you describe the behaviors and their impacts on the team or organization?	To compare with the common behaviors identified in 2.1.1
4	Would you like to take any actions to manage the toxic employee? Do you have certain steps to follow when you attempt to manage the person?	To explore interviewees' managerial approaches according to their experience
5	When it comes to communication with toxic employees, what specific strategies come to your mind, such as a	To explore interviewees' communication strategies & potentially compare with the D-Direct principle proposed by the DIS Model

	straightforward or euphemistic approach, a formal or informal setting, etc.?	
6	Do you believe there is a right timing to deal with toxic employees? Do you see any challenge to spot their unsatisfactory behavior in the first place?	To test the validity of I-Immediate principle of the DIS Model and hope to generate further insights
7	Do you think toxic employees' behaviors can be changed or influenced? If so, what would be the best methods?	To examine relevant insights mentioned in the Behavior Intelligence Framework and the Thought Model.
8	Do you have a structure when you communicate with the toxic employee?	To examine the structure proposed in the Coaching Framework
9	Is there anything would hold you back before you decide to deal with toxic employees?	To gain perspectives outside of the theoretical framework and hope to explore the cultural aspect
10	Do you have any secret recipe when it comes to toxic employee management?	To capture aspects not covered before and possibly innovative ways to deal with toxicity.

3.2.4 Interview Conduction

Based on the interview guide outlined above, semi-structured interviews were conducted with add-on questions to unearth managers' additional perspectives; meanwhile, the order of the pre-designed questions is rearranged in light of the individual case. All the interviews were conducted remotely through Skype or Zoom, owing to the diverse locations of interviewees and the COVID-19 pandemic. Consent was also received by each of the interview candidates to conduct and record all the interviews to guarantee the reliability of collected data. Each interview's duration of time is over 30 minutes to secure a sufficient amount of data and the average time of interviews is around 40 minutes.

3.3 Data Analysis

In order to answer research questions, the authors' approach corresponds to the most widely used qualitative analysis strategy: grounded theory. It emphasizes that theoretical ideas are derived from data systematically gathered (Bell & Bryman, 2011). As the result of data analysis, the integrated framework was rooted in both literate data as well as empirical data. To further explain this, managerial tactics from the theoretical framework were discussed by comparing with managers' perspectives to create further implications. Throughout the process, the authors divide the collected data with selective themes. At the same time, the role of cultural factors is provided with insights by comparing two equivalent amounts of data sets: Asian and Western managers' perspectives.

In addition, another prominent feature of grounded theory is the ability to test the emerging theory, which is iterative. It is echoed by the fact that the Coaching Framework was added after three interviews being conducted since all the managers highlighted the importance of communication, thus it was the authors' intent to gather more insightful data on communication techniques. In doing so, emerging theories can be further tested by later interview participants.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

It has been suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated by alternative criteria to reliability and validity, and two primary criteria were proposed: trustworthiness and authenticity (Bell & Bryman, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The authors attempt to achieve the criteria throughout the research.

To make sure the trustworthiness of empirical data collected, all the managers participated in the interviews have over five years of managerial experience, and the average year of experience is 13 years. Besides, ten managers all respectively locate in 10 different cities across the world, resulting in a good amount of geographical and cultural diversity. In addition, five of them are originated from Asian countries and another five are westerners; the equivalence of samples fulfils the need of comparative nature (Bell & Bryman, 2011).

Empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide was built upon established models and frameworks, which can add validity to the collected data and analysis results. The semi-structured method also helps to gain validity by capturing additional perspectives to the theoretical framework (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). By picking up on things said by interview participants, the authors aim to create psychological safety for them to add authenticity to the research, as it allows them to feel being sympathized and share their perspectives more genuinely. Moreover, to ensure the best accuracy of the information, English, Chinese, and Cantonese are adapted to the interviewees' native language.

3.5 Limitations

Due to the qualitative approach, this study has a limitation of sample size because the collected data may not reflect the general population which may cause sample bias (Wordvice, n.d.). Apart from that, one limitation of the research is a certain contradiction between qualitative research strategy and comparative research design. Supposedly, according to Bell & Bryman (2011), one of the greatest advantages of qualitative strategy is to explore contextual insights. They continue, however, due to the nature of the cross-cultural study, a multi-case study approach is adopted; less attention can be paid to the depth of specific context since the authors also need to focus on how to contrast cases.

Another limitation is the authenticity and trustworthiness of collected data can be challenged, as the authors are not able to guarantee that managers disclose the whole truth, since it is possible that managers would like to hide the fact if they actually prefer to tolerate toxic employees in practice, or managers themselves are perceived as difficult, too. Besides, many interviewees are the network of one of the authors, leading to an imbalance of samples in the human resource department and law firms. It may influence the trustworthiness of the data and resulting analysis in an unspoken way.

4 Data Findings

In this chapter, the data collected from the interviews are summarized and categorized into five sections. The insights of managerial perspectives on toxic employees and effective ways of managing them are displayed in the following. Besides, the empirical data between Asian managers and Western managers are compared in order to see any difference between the two groups of managers on their perspectives for the research problem.

4.1 Managers' Perspectives on Toxic Employees

To begin with, all ten managers described the toxic employees as the employees who bring negative impacts to other staff and the organization through their behaviors or attitudes. Managers further explained that, although toxic employees themselves are able to deliver satisfactory results, their behaviors would spread to others, which could draw the energy out of the team by reducing the job satisfaction, work performance, et cetera. Due to the severe consequences that are originated from the toxic individual, managers claimed that they would handle the problem as soon as they discover it. Otherwise, the retention rate of skilled staff can be lower as people may leave due to the toxicity. Even worse, some managers argued that a toxic culture could easily take shape. That is because other team members may think that inappropriate behaviors are accepted by the management; they either lose faith in the working environment or start to follow the toxic patterns.

Moreover, the interviewees agreed that managers have the responsibility to manage toxic employees actively. However, their behavior is regarded to be extremely difficult to change, especially if it is on the grounds of their personality. According to managers' experience, most of the time, managers' actions could help to improve the situation but not change the person.

Besides, if the toxic person refuses to change or has no improvement in their behavior, most of the interviewed managers have no hesitation in taking disciplinary actions. The interviewees stated that it is the managers' responsibility to reach a decision about what and when the disciplinary actions should take place. The disciplinary actions suggested by managers include verbal and written warnings, department and position transfer, termination, and so forth.

4.2 Common Behaviors Experienced by Managers

All of the managers have experienced toxic employees, and different behavior types they had experienced are summarized and presented in Figure 4.1. The result shows that there are five toxic behavior types with at least three managers had experienced. The authors conclude that the common toxic behaviors among the ten interviewees are: Bully, Gossip, Know-It-All, Manipulation, and Negativity.
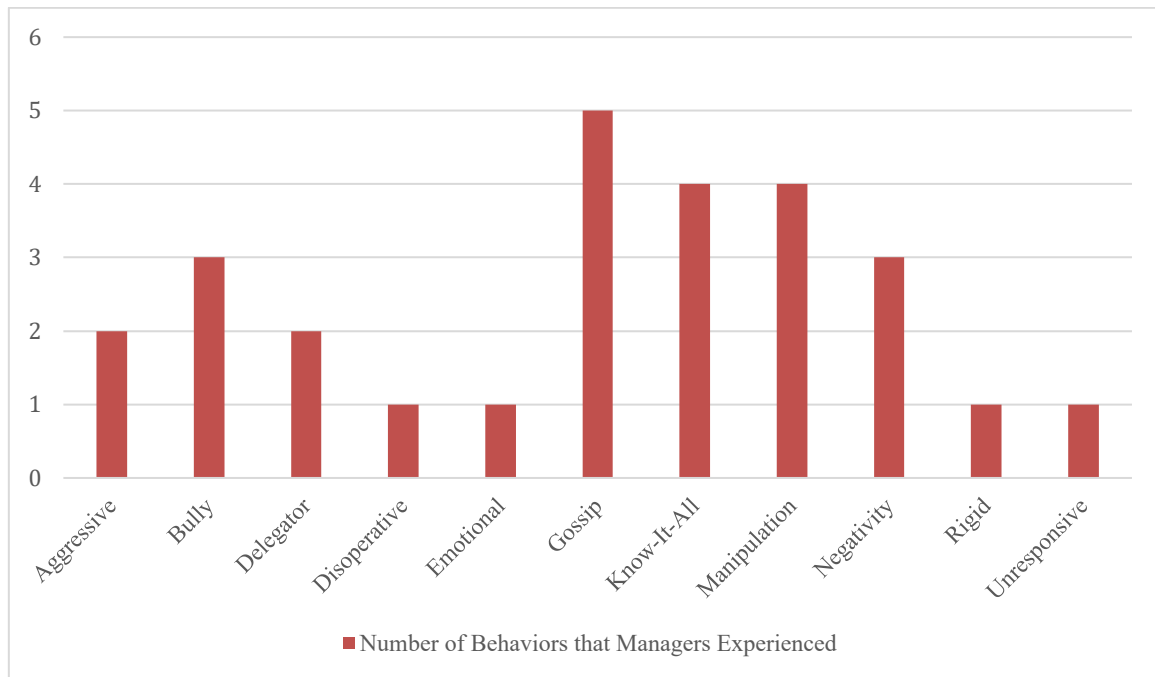
Figure 4.1 Common Toxic Behaviors in Interviewed Managers' Experience

4.3 Managerial Tactics for Toxic Employees

4.3.1 No Panacea

According to the interviewed managers, there is no panacea for all toxic employees. It is necessary to tailor the strategy according to the toxic person and situation. Even for the same behaviors, managers adopted different approaches. Hence, there is no universal solution available, and managers are supposed to be flexible according to the situation. The interview participants also revealed that their action plans were designed by their understanding of the situation and the toxic person as well as the goals that were set in order to effect change. Some interviewees set the goals with the employee based on the standards that the toxic person should reach to improve the problem. They allowed the person to propose the targets. If they agree with the proposal, they would set up a timeline with the person and clarify with the consequences if the person cannot reach the goals within a promised time.

4.3.2 Understanding Toxic Employees

Most managers mentioned in the interviews that, to improve the situation, it is crucial to understand toxic employees. That is to say, managers should know the reasons behind the toxic behaviors. There are various reasons why workers behave toxically, such as personality, stress, psychological problems, and personal issues. By understanding the reasons behind, it allows managers to design a suitable plan accordingly.

Besides, understanding toxic employees' motivation to change is also an effective method. As mentioned, the interviewed managers acknowledged that it is difficult to change a person's personality. Hence, if the toxic behaviors are caused by character traits, employing the driver of change, such as recognition and rewards, would be instrumental in this situation. From their experience, this tactic is highly effective.

4.3.3 Effective Communication

All ten interviewees mentioned that communication is crucial when dealing with toxic employees. According to the interviewed managers, the purposes of communication are to understand toxic employees and deliver the message to toxic employees that their behavior is unacceptable. As claimed by the interview participants, there are some key points that should be aware of in the conversation with toxic employees.

First and foremost, the conversation should be conducted in a direct manner. Almost all the managers tend to be straightforward in the conversation with the toxic employees so that they can point out what behaviors are unacceptable and the consequences of these behaviors clearly. Once toxic employees would know what they can do and what they cannot do, they would become conscious of their behaviors. Only one manager prefers to use an indirect approach in the conversation because she wants to keep the *faces* of both sides and maintain a superficial harmony.

Besides, from the interviewees' experience, the effects of the conversation would be better if the toxic employees open up. Once the person feels more comfortable to share, it helps the managers to understand the person better. Hence, several managers pointed out that it is important for managers to leave plenty of time for the toxicity to respond or comment in the conversation as it took time for toxic workers to open up. Moreover, most managers pinpointed that managers should be patient, stay calm, and open-ended questions are always useful to empower the person to share more thinking. Additionally, multiple managers mentioned that an informal setting could enable people to open up more quickly as it is a more relaxed environment.

In addition, managers declared that toxic people are usually sensitive. Thus, in order to avoid the person shutting down, becoming defensive, and denying the problems, the interviewed managers focused on the impacts of the toxic behaviors in communication, not over-criticizing the behaviors. Interviewees also highlighted that the conversation ought to be evidence-based to prevent

refutation. In other words, managers should provide detailed and concrete examples of negative behaviors.

Also, some managers mentioned that they were cautious to keep a positive attitude during the conversation. If people feel the managers trust them that they can behave better, their motivation to change would be higher and vice versa. Therefore, although managers thought that it is difficult to change a person, they would still express the attitude that they have confidence in the person he/she is able to change in the hope that can motivate the person.

4.3.4 Coaching

Coaching was brought up by more than half of the managers as an effective way to manage toxic employees. The coaching here means a training that helps the toxic employee to change their behavior by a series of guidance. Through coaching, some toxic workers can improve their behaviors to reach a certain standard. At the same time, coaching could drop a hint that the organization and the team manager value the individuals and are willing to invest in them; high effectiveness was witnessed by putting it into practice.

Managers added that coaching could be done by a third party or team managers, and it depends on the organization's resources and the team managers' skills and available time. As coaching is a long-term project, it is important for the coach manager to ensure he or she has sufficient time to coach employees. Furthermore, coaching should be mutually agreed upon by the manager and the toxic employees on the objectives. If the goals of coaching are not agreed by each party, the effectiveness would certainly not be optimal.

4.4 Additional Insights

With toxic employees in sight, the interviewed managers emphasized that it is vital to manage other team members as well. On the one hand, managers should deliver a clear message to team members that toxic behavior is intolerable, and they have started to cope with the problem. It is not necessary to disclose the details on how to manage the toxic person, but managers must show the attitude that they take the problem seriously. Otherwise, team members are inclined to lose faith, become demotivated at work, or even consider quitting the job. On the other hand, it can bring extra benefits by coaching team members how to interact with the toxic ones, to prevent their work performance from being affected alarmingly. However, managers also pointed out that just coaching team members cannot fix the problem. If the toxic person has not been handled promptly, the toxicity will not stop spreading and team members would still leave because they lose their trust in the manager as well as the organization.

Another insight brought up by interview participants was all the evidence, and the process of dealing with toxic workers must be kept in the record. It should be described in a detailed and

objective manner, recording the whole process, and focusing on the facts. Documentation is key because it would be crucial evidence for managers' further actions, especially if they decide to take disciplinary actions.

Apart from the above, interviewees raised a point that managers should be careful to determine a person as toxic or not. Since personal chemistry can disturb managers' judgment on toxic behaviors, it is advised that managers should collect feedback from other colleagues to seek an objective perspective when deciding whether the person needs to be managed. All the feedback would be useful for further action and should be kept in the employee's personal record.

4.5   Comparison Between Asian and Western Managers

In comparing Asian and Western managers' perspectives on toxic employees, three bar charts (see Figure 4.2, 4.3, 4.4) were created to illustrate the collected empirical data, that consist of three dimensions: general perspectives, managerial tactics, and factors affecting their attitudes toward toxic behaviors. From the results, the authors found that Asian and Western managers hold similar ideas in the general perspectives and managerial tactics; for example, they all said they would manage toxic employees as soon as possible, and most of them preferred being straightforward in the conversation.

When comparing the factors affecting their attitudes toward toxic behaviors, neither Asian nor Western managers mentioned that ethnic culture influences their attitudes toward toxic behaviors. Instead, organizational culture, labor law, and managers' personalities were brought up in the interviews. Three Asian managers indicated that labor law would affect their attitudes, while no Western managers mentioned this factor. Organizational culture was the most prevalent factor: seven managers, four from the West and three from Asia, stated that organizational culture is the most important factor. Also, one manager from each side raised managers' personalities as a key factor.
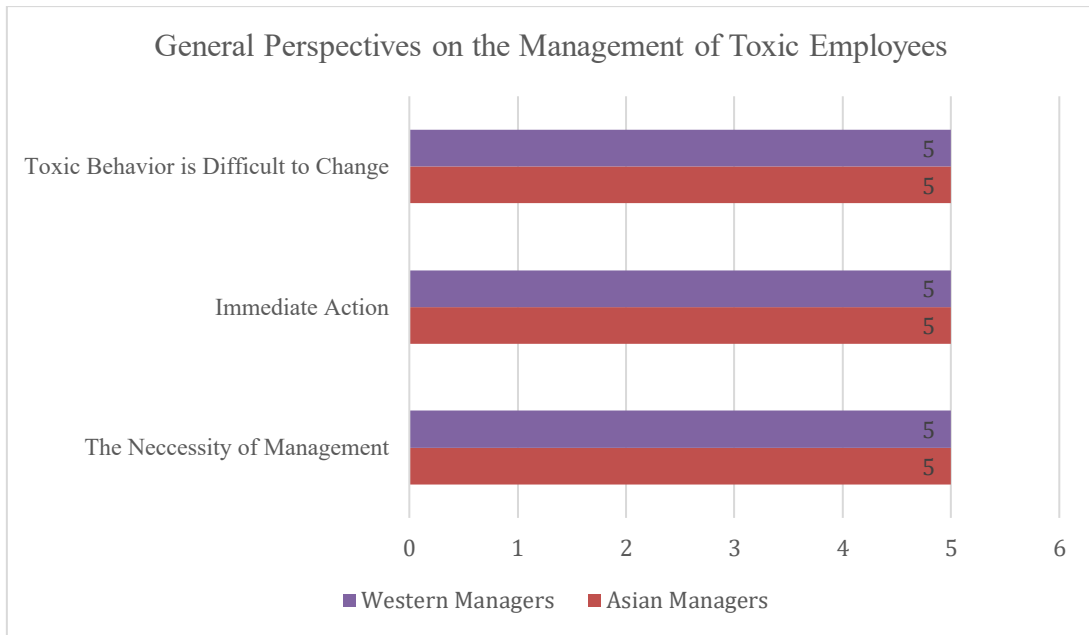
Figure 4.2 Comparison Between Asian and Western Managers on General Perspectives

Figure 4.3 Comparison Between Asian and Western Managers on Managerial Tactics

Figure 4.4 Comparison Between Asian and Western Managers on Factors Affecting Their Attitudes

5 Data Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the interview data are discussed with the data collected from the literature review to approach the research questions. The aim is to test the effectiveness of theories in practice on the basis of interviewed managers' years of experience, meanwhile discovering further implications when combining the insights from both sides of data. At the end of the chapter, an integrated framework is presented, and it is a major outcome of the study.

5.1 General Perspectives on the Management of Toxic Employees

In terms of the definition of toxic employees, the interviewed managers defined them as the employees with unsatisfactory behaviors, which would spread the negative impacts on the team and organization. Still, their performance is up to standard. The definition from the interview participants is similar to the Type 2 employees in Jack Welch's matrix, as discussed earlier, that are the ones who deliver results while having inappropriate behaviors (Bartlett & Wozny, 2005).

When identifying toxic employees, Manager A1, Manager A5, Manager W2, Manager W3, and Manager W4, mentioned that managers' personal chemistry with employees could color their judgment on toxic behaviors. Thus, to avoid a subjective opinion, Manager A1 brought up that managers can collect feedback from different personnel, such as colleagues from various departments before they define the person as toxic or not. If the feedback shows that the person misbehaves, the feedback could become the evidence for further action in managing toxic employees. Therefore, the interview participants also emphasized the importance of documentation of the toxic employees' actions in the handling process, especially considering disciplinary actions are possibly needed in the future.

According to Johnson (2020) and Plachy (2016), others' behavior cannot be changed. It is resonated by the interviewed managers: all the managers expressed that it is hard to change the toxic persons, especially if their toxic behaviors are caused by their personality traits. As Manager W4 said, "In the past, I believed that toxic employees could be changed, but after many years' experience, I found that it is really difficult to change them." Most of the time, what they can do is to minimize the negative impacts of toxic employees to make the situation better.

In chapter 4.2, the authors summarized five common toxic behaviors from the interviewees' experience (Figure 4.1). As shown in Table 4, the result from managers' experience is very similar to the common toxic behaviors in Chapter 2.1 that the authors identified from the literature. In

addition, most behaviors in the agreement have the idiosyncrasies of self-centeredness, as suggested by Chapter 2.6. It shows that people, who think self-importantly to an excessive degree, are prone to become the toxicity at work.

Table 3: Comparison of Common Toxic Behaviors Between Managers' Experience and Literature

Common Behavior	Manager Experience	Literature (Chapter 2.1)
Bully	√	√
Negativity	√	√
Know-It-All	√	√
Manipulation	√	√
Gossip	√	√
Unresponsiveness		√

5.2   Factors Affecting Managers' Attitudes Toward Toxic employees

From the interviews, three factors were found that would affect interviewees' attitudes toward toxic employees: organizational culture, labor law and managers' personality. In particular, the factor of organizational culture stands out.

Manager A5, Manager W3, Manager W4, and Manager W5 are good examples of how organizational culture influenced them. Working in a company that is strongly value-oriented, Manager W5's attitude toward toxic employees is less tolerant and she prefers a strict approach. When she discovered that person was not cooperative, specifically mentioning the action of the employee did not live up with the six leadership behaviors proposed by the company, she had no hesitation in deciding on letting the person go. In the same way, Manager W4 works in a value-based company and holds an assertive attitude of managing toxic employees. By contrast, Manager W3 and Manager A5, who work in a performance-based company, are more lenient to toxic employees. They said if the toxic person can bring many businesses to the firm, they would only take action to reduce his or her negative impacts. They would not consider termination unless the person violates the company policy seriously or harms the company's benefits.

The great significance of organizational culture is also highlighted by managers who have had experience in multiple organizations that embrace a different culture. For example, Manager A2 has worked in different law firms in Shanghai as an Office Manager, Manager W2 previously worked in Australia, Asia and currently works in the United Kingdom, and Manager A1 is from Hong Kong and she is currently working in Berlin. They all commented that their attitudes on the management of the toxic employee stem from the organizational culture. Manager A1 added that her decision was not only affected by the company culture but also the local employment law.

Personally, my tolerance level for toxic employees is quite low. If I find the persons cannot change their behaviors, I prefer to let the persons go. However, in my work experience, my preference was not that important if the company culture valued performance more and I would keep the person because of that. And now, since I am working in Berlin, it is difficult to terminate the employees here according to labor law. Therefore, I would not consider termination easily unless the person's problem is super serious (Manager A1).

Regarding the important role of labor law, Manager A4 and Manager A5 resonated with Manager A1. They expressed their willingness to fire toxic workers, but they were stopped by the difficulty of terminating employees in labor law. In Manila, toxic behaviors cannot be the reason to terminate an employee. Therefore, unless the toxic worker violates the company policy, Manager A4 would not consider termination as the method to handle toxic employees. For Manager A5, the cost of terminating a worker can be very expensive concerning the labor law. As her company values the cost, she would not fire the worker unless he or she harms the company benefits. However, Manager W4 and Manager W5, although they work in Sweden and Denmark, where the termination is by no means easy, their tolerance level to toxic employees do not become higher. They insisted that if the person cannot fit in the company culture, it is not ideal for keeping them in the company.

In addition, according to Manager A3 and Manager W1, the manager's personality is the factor that affects managers' attitudes toward toxic employees. They both argued that in their experience, managers with the same ethnic background in the same company could treat toxic workers differently. From their perspectives, the type of managerial approach is more dependent on managers' personalities.

5.3   Managerial Methods

In light of the findings from both interviews and literature, the authors summarize effective methods to manage toxic employees as follows. It mainly encompasses five aspects: immediate action, full understanding, effective communication, specific approach, and disciplinary actions.

5.3.1 Immediate Action

As recommended by the DIS Model (Bugdol, 2018), once the managers are aware that there are toxic employees in the team, the managers should address the problem immediately. Immediate action is more effective than those conduct later. This is aligned with the interviewed managers' opinions. All interview participants stated that they would handle the toxic employees as soon as they discover the problem because the negative impacts of toxic behaviors would spread. From their experience, team performance, job satisfaction, teamwork, and team culture would be impaired. Moreover, the other team members may imitate the same because they think such

behaviors are acceptable in the organization. As the organization witnesses an increasing trend of such counterproductive behaviors, the organizational culture is prone to be toxified in the near future. Therefore, immediate actions are more effective than delayed actions.

> If you don't handle the toxic employee immediately, the situation will get worse and people will follow the toxic behaviors because they think the behavior is allowed by the senior management. As a result, the team culture would become toxic and then further affect the organizational culture (Manager W1).

Moreover, inappropriate behaviors can evolve if the problems are not pointed out at an early stage. The toxic behavior would become deep-rooted in the toxic person's personality or working style. The consequences of not managing the toxic person in the team are destructive and the toxic subordinate in Manager A3's team is a case in point: before she has promoted to HR Manager, she has worked with the toxic person for over ten years. She has witnessed this person's behavior, which has continued to worsen and disrupted the team by making other team members regularly leave the firm. This is owing to the fact that her toxic behavior had never been managed.

> To be honest, if my old boss (previous HR manager) had managed this person, the current situation could be a lot better. Since her toxic behaviors haven't been stopped, the toxic behaviors have become deep-rooted in her working style. It is too late and difficult for her to change now because she has behaved toxicity for over ten years. Unfortunately, it is difficult for me to get rid of her now due to her experience in the team and no one can replace her. However, at the same time, she makes other team members unhappy. Therefore, I need to spend extra time handling the two sides regularly to avoid conflicts, which increases my workload (Manager A3).

However, managers also admitted that it is difficult to spot the problem at an early stage. Usually, they realized it until the person made critical mistakes or other teammates hopped into another job because of the person. Manager W5 admitted it took her almost four months to notice the toxic employees' behavior patterns; she was not aware of the toxic behavior until the employee was late for her presentation for global executives in an annual meeting. Manager W1 gave an example that an employee confessed that she resigned because she could not tolerate a coworker's behavior during an exit interview. Manager W1 did not notice the problem because the coworker behaved differently in the face of him. He declared the team member's leave was a loss to the company, and it was a regrettable matter that he could not make the resigned person feel comfortable to inform him of the problem earlier. After the incident, he has made extra efforts to build trust with his subordinates and develop an open culture in the team, in case any similar issues recur.

Apart from building trust in the team, the company's policy is also vital as well. Manager A1, Manager W1, Manager W2, and Manager W3 brought up that it is a challenging job to create a secure environment for employees to trust the organization and report coworkers or supervisors' inappropriate behaviors. This is echoed by Bugdol (2018) and Durniat (2014), procedures for reporting and shaping an organizational culture that has no tolerance for toxic behaviors are essential. The interviewed managers described that, frequently, employees would have concerns that there are consequences after reporting the troublemakers, they thus stay silent and leave the

organization. Therefore, only a well-established policy from the company can help remove employees' concerns, that would also enable managers to notice the problems sooner.

5.3.2 Full Understanding

"Usually, persons are toxic for reasons" (Manager W2). According to the Behavioral Intelligence Framework, understanding the reason behind the toxic behavior is the first step and asking questions is believed to be optimal to achieve this goal (Gallo, 2016; Johnson, 2020). It is commonly agreed by the managers that in order to make an effective strategy to handle toxic workers, they need to understand the person better, such as why they behave like that or what motivates them to change.

Manager W5 is the only one who holds a dissimilar opinion. She focuses more on how to reduce the negative impacts of the toxic person and has less interest in knowing why the person behaves toxically. Her opinion is similar to Pincus (2004), who believes that managers do not need to worry about the exact reason why toxic employees behave that way as it is the psychiatrist's job; managers' responsibilities should focus on how to keep the workplace unharmed from the adverse impacts engendered by toxic persons.

Understanding the reasons for toxic behaviors enables the managers to hit the nail on the head. According to the interviewed managers, there are a number of factors at play in explaining why the workers appear toxic. The most common reason raised by interview participants is character traits. Apart from that, stress, psychological problems, and personal issues were also the reasons for toxic behaviors in managers' experience. Managers can devise the most effective plan according to the causes; for instance, if the toxic behavior is caused by stress, the manager can arrange a training session that helps them equipped with techniques to manage stress. As for psychological problems, professional help should be referred or leave of absence can be arranged after discussion with the HR department (Gallo, 2016). Yet, according to Manager W1 and Manager A4, managers should understand that it is not the managers' job to solve subordinates' personal problems. The manager in the coaching example (see Appendix B) also proves the same: the focus should be resolving the performance gap at work. Moreover, if the worker cannot solve the issue and improve the behaviors within a deadline, managers should take further action.

In addition to understanding the reasons behind toxic behaviors, knowing what the toxic employee values the most and putting it at stake can be another effective tactic (Porath, 2016; Gallo, 2016). Manager A1, Manager A4, Manager W2, and Manager W4 raised a similar idea: managers could adopt effective methods that are tailored to a specific motive. The following are the examples that Manager A4 and Manager W4 put this technique into practice.

In Manager W4's case, the toxic worker is recognized as someone who greatly values the recognition from the supervisor. Thus, Manager W4 assigned him in a project with substantial responsibility and told him that if he performs well and receives positive feedback from coworkers

in this project, she would assign him more responsibility in the future. The result exceeded Manager W4's expectation: the person's toxic behaviors had improved, and he received many positive comments from the teammates. However, Manager A4 recognized the toxic employee was stimulated by remuneration, so he told the toxic employee that her behavior was unsatisfactory to the extent that her appraisal rating was affected, which was utilized to determine the worker's amount of year-end bonus. Manager A4 delivered the message clearly that if she could not improve her behaviors, the performance bonus would be reduced. Not surprisingly, the worker started changing her behavior after the conversation. This concurs with the notion mentioned by Porath (2016), claiming that people respond more strongly to what they stand to lose compared with potential wins. Moreover, in terms of motivation, Manager A4 emphasized that the power of rewards should never be underestimated.

Besides, Manager W3 mentioned that understanding toxic employees could help to predict their behavior patterns. With the prediction, the managers can prepare in advance on how to respond to the actions. Also, the prediction can allow the managers to secure a clear head, better mentally prepared, and not taking the toxic behavior personally during interaction (Johnson, 2020).

5.3.3 Effective Communication

According to Manager A1, communication is an effective method to manage toxic employees, and this is a consensus among all interviewees. They aim to make full use of communication to understand the toxic workers better as well as deliver a clear message to the person that his or her behaviors are not acceptable. Similarly, literatures also draw much attention to how to communicate effectively with the toxic employees. Evidently, communication is an indispensable part of the management tactic of toxic employees, and Manager W4 emphasized that managers should never give up communication, no matter how toxic the person is.

Managers should let the toxic person understand clearly that their behaviors are unacceptable at the beginning of the conversation (Kristen, 2019; Plachy, 2020). The interviewed managers also acknowledged that they would clarify the unacceptable behaviors and the consequences of these behaviors in their meetings with toxic employees. According to the DIS model (Bugdol, 2018), managers must directly inform the employees that their behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable to raise their awareness concerning their unsatisfactory behavior, which serves as a starting point for them to improve the behavior.

> I let her know my bottom line and there are consequences if she goes beyond my bottom line. After she realized that I mean it seriously, she became careful about her behaviors (Manager A3).

Almost all of the interview participants hold the same idea that they prefer to be straightforward in the conversation with the toxic employees to deliver a clear message that their behaviors with adverse effects do not meet the managers' expectations. As Manager W1 said, "I tend to be straightforward to tackle the issues in communication so that I do not confuse people on what I mean."

To size up the situation, it is important for employees to speak up their minds and then managers can receive more valid information; asking open questions and giving sufficient time for employees to respond is always beneficial (Bugdol, 2018; Lilley, 2002; Pincus, 2004; Plachy, 2020). Based on the interviewed managers' experience, it takes time for toxic employees to open up. Therefore, managers should be patient and stay positive to build trust with the individual. In addition, Manager A1, Manager A4, Manager W1, and Manager W3 preferred to have an informal meeting because they think informal settings could make the employees more relaxed, resulting in a more effective process of opening up.

> I remember once I had a conversation with a team member who complained a lot in the team. He refused to talk about the issues in the beginning. Hence, I tried to ask him open questions such as "How do you find the new system user friendly?", "What are your opinions on the team's new target?", etc. The questions helped him to warm up and I gave him time to respond. Once he opened up, he told me a lot of his true feelings, which was useful for me to understand the situation and how I could help him (Manager A5).

"Normally toxic people are very sensitive and usually, people become defensive when they are being criticized" (Manager W2). Therefore, as Manager W1 said, the conversation should avoid criticizing too much about the behaviors. Instead, focusing on the impact to let the toxic employees understand how his or her behavior can be detrimental to team productivity and morale (Plachy, 2020; Bugdol, 2018). Similarly, the Coaching Framework (see Chapter 2.3) also reinforces the problem identification, and its impact should be first communicated.

Moreover, regarding identifying the toxic behaviors, specific and concrete examples should be given to toxic persons to avoid refutation from them (Bugdol, 2018). It is also mentioned by most managers that the conversation should be evidence-based. With the facts provided, the likelihood of denial or defensiveness would be lower.

Furthermore, raised by Manager A3, Manager W1, and Manager W2, managers should avoid any assumptions before the conversation, such as the person is likely to resist change and difficult to communicate. It is because if they hold prejudgements in mind, the subconscious bias may reflect in the conversation. This kind of approach is similar to the insights from the Behavior Intelligence Framework (see Chapter 2.4), once the person has been labeled as toxic or resistant to change, he or she is likely to feel more frustration during the interaction and decrease their motivation to change. Therefore, the negative attitude can decrease the motivation of changing as well as the effectiveness of communication. As a result, the problem would not be solved successfully.

5.3.4 Specific Approach

There is no magic remedy to manage toxic employees. The interviewed managers said that managers should adopt different effective approaches according to different situations: "Managers should be flexible on the approaches to manage toxic employees" (Manager A1). Their point of

view aligns with the 'S-Specific' principle in the DIS model (Bugdol, 2018): managers should understand what particular behavior type of employees are involved and tailor specific actions based on their behavioral types.

Nevertheless, some managers continued that management approaches should not be based on toxic behavioral types but on the situation. According to the interviewees' experience, even for the same behavior, managers adopted different approaches. For example, both Manager A2 and Manager A4 experienced the Gossips. When Manager A2 found the Gossip was spreading false information, she chose to set up an office meeting to clarify the firm benefit policy to stop the rumor. By contrast, Manager A4 decided to have a one-to-one conversation with the Gossip to request her to stop spreading false news; otherwise, he would take further actions.

Thus, it is important for the managers to make the plan based on the reasons behind the toxic behaviors, what motivates them to change, and the desired outcome of behavior change. After the communication with toxic employees, if they admit the problems and have the intention to change, managers can set up the goal with them (Bugdol, 2018; Pincus, 2004; Porath, 2016). According to the Coaching Framework (Plachy, 2020), managers are encouraged to let the employees take ownership of setting the target and even come up with solutions. When setting the goals, managers should actively express their confidence and support (Plachy, 2016). Similarly, Manager A1, Manager A4, Manager W2, and Manager W3 did the same things before. With their guiding, the toxic people set up the goal by themselves, and then the managers devised a timeline and specific actions with them. The consequences of not achieving the goals within timelines would also be discussed. According to their feedback, the employees were motivated with positive results. In addition, managers can gain trust by encouraging the person to come up with his or her solutions and determining the desired results together (Plachy, 2016). Last but not least, interviewees also mentioned that follow-up sessions would be needed to check the status of the person's improvement process.

In the interviews, the managers shared the management methods that they used before: among the methods mentioned, coaching, a training to guide how to change behaviors, is most favored. Over half of the interviewed managers think that coaching is an effective management tactic for toxic employees: through coaching, some toxic workers' behavior can be more or less improved. If the organization has resources, like Manager W5's company, coaching service from the third party would be a better option because the coach is more neutral and could relieve some burden from the team managers. If the organization has no resources, the team managers can be the coach if they have the right skills. In addition, managers should ensure they have sufficient time for coaching in a long period. Also, the objectives of coaching should be mutually agreed by managers and toxic employees to maximize the effectiveness of coaching, as specified by Manager A1 and Manager W2.

Coaching can not only apply to toxic employees but also to team members who exposed to the toxicity. Managers can also coach these team members to reduce the negative impacts of the toxic person. For example, they can learn how to control their mind or behavior of not being triggered, such as taking a deep breath, to stay rational at work (Johnson, 2018; Plachy, 2020).

5.3.5 Disciplinary Actions

If toxic employees refuse to change their behaviors or have no improvement after the deadline, managers can take disciplinary actions. Typical disciplinary actions mentioned by the managers are department or position transferring, verbal and written warnings, termination, et cetera. Although salary reduction was indicated by Gallo (2016), a few interviewees reminded a point that it might violate the labor law; therefore, it is better to consult legal advice before adopting the salary deduction method. Besides, even though termination is not an easy decision for the interviewees, it sometimes needs to happen in any regard. Managers need to know when to cut losses in time and it is their responsibility.

5.4   Integrated Framework

To consolidate the findings and the theoretical framework of this study, an integrated framework was created and presented in Figure 5.1. When the managers are aware that there is a subordinate who is bringing negative impacts to the team with inappropriate behaviors, they should take action as soon as possible to stop the adverse effects taking a drastic turn for the worse. In order to effectively manage toxic employees, the following process was developed by combining the interview results and the theoretical framework.
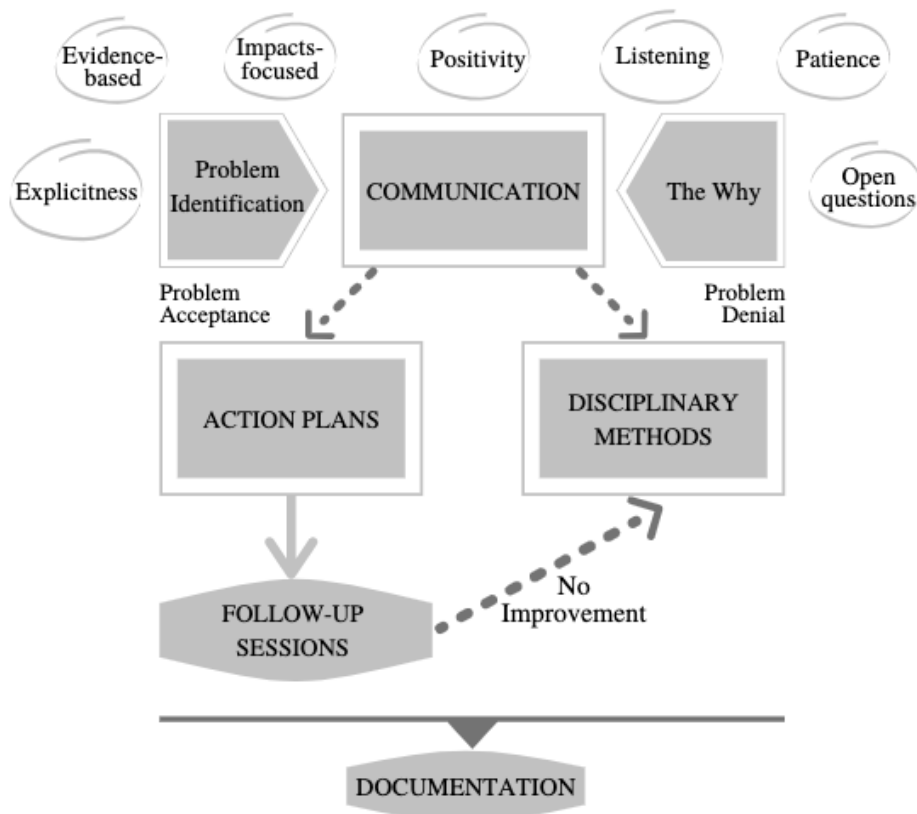

Figure 5.1 Integrated Framework of Effective Management on Toxic Employees

Communication

The first step is to communicate with the toxic person. There are two purposes of the conversation: one is to deliver a clear message that his or her behavior is unacceptable and destructive to the team, the other is to understand the reasons behind the toxic behavior. Explicit feedback on the behavior itself and its impacts allow the toxic employee aware of the existing problem, making it possible for improving the behavior. A better understanding of why toxic employees behave that way helps managers know the situation more comprehensively to be able to explore the most suitable action plan. The communication content would be adjusted differently according to the situation; however, the authors narrow down seven principles that can be kept notice during the conversation.

Explicitness: Managers should state the problem in a direct and clear manner, ensuring the toxic employee aware of the behavior is not acceptable, and he or she is a detriment to the team.

Evidence-based: When delivering the above message, concrete examples or evidence should be given to avert a denial or refutation.

Impacts-focused: Instead of passing judgments on the person or behavior, solid facts of the harmful impacts should be underlined. Otherwise, the person may take it personally and become very defensive.

Positivity: Managers should express their confidence that the person has the capacity to make progress. A positive attitude helps the person feel being trusted, and the motivation for change will be higher.

Listening: In order to find out the why, managers should create a safe environment by having the person's voice heard carefully.

Open questions: Asking open questions allows people to share more, and it is a common managerial approach to dig out more in order to understand the why.

Patience: It takes time for people to open up; therefore, sufficient patience is needed.

Action Plans

If the person admits that their behavior is unsatisfactory, the next step for the manager should sit down with the employee to settle on a plan of action, discussing what is expected to achieve to improve the problem. In this session, managers are recommended to encourage the person to take ownership of setting his or her objectives. In other words, the goal would be better raised by the person and agreed with the managers. Empowered with ownership, the person tends to be more involved with a greater sense of responsibility and motivation to change for the better.

In order to effectively reach the goal, objectives should be clear and measurable with a timeline. Managers should have the employee's back by maintaining a positive attitude and initiating any sort of support. In accordance with the specific situation, managers may help arrange a coaching session provided by a third party, refer to professional consultation, reassign the person a different task or role, and so forth. Additionally, the consequences ought to be outlined with clarity, having the employee well understand what he or she stands to lose if failing the goal. Last but not least, a follow-up session should be set up to see if the person resolves the performance gap and achieves the goal in time.

Disciplinary Methods

In general, the following two scenarios entail disciplinary methods:

- o After the manager states the problem, the feedback recipient is in firm denial that he or she has unsatisfactory behavior. A lack of acceptance of the problem makes it unlikely that the person will improve their behavior.
- o In the follow-up session, little progress has been made towards the goal. That means, the employee has hardly changed his or her behavior for the better, or the individual simply cannot fit in with the team.

As for this sort of toxic employee, disciplinary action can be more effective compared with other methods. With disciplinary action, managers can prevent the toxicity further spreading in the organization and prevent irreversible problems from occurring. In respect of the organization's value, code of conduct, policy, or the local law, disciplinary actions are differed: termination, oral and written warnings, job transfer, et cetera. Most importantly, documentation throughout the management process is a crucial step to effectively practise disciplinary action, meanwhile affording indispensable protection for the manager, the team and the organization.

6   Conclusion

This chapter aims to conclude the answers for the research questions to fulfil the aim of the study. Next, practical implications are revealed and ideas for future research are recommended in order to contribute a more overarching understanding of the research topic.

6.1   Answering Research Questions

6.1.1   What are effective management methods of toxic employees?

Above all, admittedly, it is challenging to detect the toxic employee in the very beginning, but managers should address the problem immediately, reassuring other employees that toxic behavior is intolerable. Normally it is through a brief communication with the employee. After the conversation, the employee should be well aware that he or she has unsatisfactory behavior and its negative impact; managers are better informed of the situation.

In order to deliver a precise message that the behavior is unacceptable and it is bringing harm to the team, managers need to communicate in a straightforward manner, providing concrete evidence and focusing on the real consequences. Furthermore, a thorough understanding of the situation is essential because it helps managers tailor the remedy according to the specific situation. To understand the situation and the reasons behind toxic behavior, managers are suggested to ask open questions, having employees' voices heard carefully. At the same time, managers should be aware that people need time and psychological safety to speak their minds. Thus, it entails managers' great patience and positive attitudes. Also, managers can consider having the conversation in an informal setting.

The next step is to resolve a specific action plan based on the conversation, as there is no magical formula for toxic employees' management. In this phase, managers are recommended to involve the employee to determine a measurable goal and formulate a specific plan together. By giving the freedom for the employee to come up with his or her own solutions, the individual is likely to feel more responsible and motivated to change the behavior and reach the goal. In the meantime, managers should be clear about what can be agreed and what cannot, while outlining the consequences if he or she fails the objectives. Throughout the process, managers are suggested to express their confidence and support for the individual actively. Corresponding to the need, managers can employ available resources. Furthermore, a follow-up session needs to be scheduled to make sure the behavior is improved within a specific timeline. However, the existing problem

is denied, or no significant improvement is shown, managers ought to collaborate with the human resource department and turn for disciplinary approaches, including termination.

6.1.2 Do cultural differences affect managerial perspectives on toxic employees?

In Chapter 4.5, the authors summarized the data from ten interviews and compared the interviewed managers' perspectives on toxic employees. In general, the interviewed Western and Asian managers showed no big difference in their perspectives and management tactics to toxic employees. The authors divide the data into three aspects, and the details are discussed in the following.

As to general perspectives (Figure 4.2), all the interviewees hold the same opinions: toxic employees should be managed, managers should manage toxic employees as soon as possible, and it is difficult to change the toxic employees. In this comparison, the ethnic-cultural background has no influence on managers' general perspectives of toxic employees.

When it comes to managerial tactics (Figure 4.3), all the interviewed managers would adopt different approaches to managing toxic workers according to the specific situation. Nine managers think understanding toxic employees is an effective tactic, indicating that open up is helpful to understand the toxic workers, while only one Western manager thinks differently. Nearly all the interview participants tend to use direct manner in communication with toxic employees except one Asian manager, who prefers to maintain superficial harmony. Lastly, both Asian and Western sides have three managers who highlighted coaching as an effective tactic. It can be seen that there is no significant difference between Asian and Western managers' perspectives on managerial tactics.

Through the above analysis, the collected data do not reflect culture difference has much impact on managerial perspectives on toxic employees. When the authors explored potential factors affecting managerial perspectives with the interview participants, in lieu of ethnic culture, organizational culture, labor law, and managers' personality were frequently mentioned. These factors are believed to influence how tolerant managers are when confronting toxic employees.

It is raised by the interviewees that it is common to witness managers with the same ethnic background, who work in the same company, hold diverse attitudes toward toxic employees. From their point of view, it is the managers' personality that drives the managers' attitudes on the management of toxic people. Particularly, one Asian manager and one Western manager consider it as the most influential factor.

Seven managers, three Asian managers and four Western managers pointed out that organizational culture would be the main concern for their managerial perspectives toward toxic workers. For managers who worked in a value-based company, their attitudes toward toxic employees are more strict and firm. By contrast, managers who worked in the performance-based companies would be

comparatively lenient. Some managers who worked in different places and countries also think that organizational culture plays a vital role in managers' perspectives.

Three Asian managers mentioned that labor law would affect their attitudes, while no Western managers raised it. This is the most significant difference between Asian and Western managers among all comparison data. The three managers all revealed that they are somewhat lenient with the toxic employees, due to the difficulty of termination imposed by the local labor law.

To conclude, from the empirical data collected, cultural differences have no significant impact on how to manage toxic workers. Instead, managerial perspectives on toxic employees stem in part from company culture, labor law, and personality. In particular, the factor of organizational culture stands out.

6.2   Practical Implications

Difficult employees are not difficult until they are perceived as difficult people to work with. By labeling them as 'difficult', it is more likely for their colleagues to be affected during interaction with them. Once there is an increasing trend of colleagues are negatively influenced by the individual, he or she becomes the toxic employee in the managers' perspective. Therefore, by helping other employees to better cope with the individual who is commonly believed as difficult, managers are able to prevent the toxicity spreading so as to bring down the repercussions.

During the sessions with other employees, Then, taking into account the Thought Model (see Chapter 2.5), managers can guide employees to realize the fact that their unpleasant feelings about the specific individual stems from how they think of the person's behavior rather than the behavior itself. Employees can be encouraged to manage their minds not to let others ruin their mood of affect their performance, including being aware where they are in resistance, dropping the resistance, and focusing on solutions and what they are expected to achieve at work. In order to drop the resistance effectively, in light of the Behavior Intelligence Model (see Chapter 2.4), it is beneficial for employees to realize 'difficult' or 'toxic' is a label that may change how people interact with them. To further explain this, once people judge someone is difficult to deal with, the fixing idea may influence how they interact with the person, giving rise to biased attitudes and emotional responses. The one perceived as toxic is also likely to sense the antagonism; his or her behavior becomes aggravated, and the overall situation is deteriorating.

However, the prime focus of the management is still the toxic employees, who are accountable for the exasperating situation. The relevant management methods have been explicitly outlined in the previous section.

6.3 Future Research

Firstly, the integrated model suggested by the authors can be tested with an inductive approach, to evaluate the effectiveness of management methods for toxic employees as well as explore additional insights.

Secondly, the research purpose can be better served by adding a quantitative method to further validate the generalized perspectives and the role of cultural factors with a large number of datasets.

Thirdly, the scope of the research can be narrowed down by focusing on a certain size of the company. A start-up and international organization may exert fairly different results since the organization culture, and the comprehensiveness of the company policy is likely to affect the management of toxic employees.

Fourthly, the authors recommend some additional aspects to explore more additional insights with respects to the research topic of toxic people management:

- A vertical study that examines how managers are perceived will affect their perspectives on how to manage toxic employees
- A comparative study between department managers and HR managers
- A continuous study that evaluates the effectiveness of a specific theory like the Thought Model with a specific organization

In short, what has been mentioned above can potentially contribute a deeper understanding of the research topic, and in the meantime, the authors hope to raise awareness of reflecting everyone's behavior in the workplace; encourage managers to actively manage these difficult cases to protect the organization intact from the toxicity.

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Appendix A: Selection of Toxic Behaviors

This appendix shows how common toxic behaviors are identified. Behaviors highlighted with dark grey meet both criteria: frequently mentioned and in agreement with the scope of toxic employees in this research. Although there are behaviors brought up in literature more than once, they do not match with the assumption that toxic employees are considered as people who conduct unsatisfactory behaviors and deliver satisfactory results.

	Managing Difficult People (Book)	A Different Approach to Work Discipline (Book)	Dealing with Difficult People (Book)	How to Identify and Address 'Toxic Employees' (Article)	Office Pollution: The Core Traits of Toxic Employees (Article)
The Bully	√	√	√	√	√
The Complainer /The Negativist	√	√	√		
The Procrastinator	√			√	
The Know-It-All	√		√	√	
The Unresponsive	√	√	√		
The Gossip	√			√	
The Overly sensitive	√				
The Manipulator	√				√
The Super Agreeable			√	√	
The Excuse Maker				√	
The No-Skill	√				
The Rookie	√				
The Resecuer		√			
The Victim		√			
The Indecisive			√		
The Over-Time				√	
The Calculator					√
The Schadenfreude					√

Appendix B: Effective Example of Coaching

M>>Thanks for meeting with me today, Janet. Yeah, I wanted to talk with you about your tardiness to work. You've been late eight times in the last two weeks. Why are you late?

J>> I just have so much going on at home it's just hard to get out of the house. You know? Sometimes my sitter's late, and I've been having car problems, and there's just so much in the morning. I just can't get here, I can't get out of the house on time.

M>> Yeah, I get it. I understand and I know you've had a lot going on. It can be challenging, from time to time. This hasn't been an ongoing issue for you, it's just been in the last couple of weeks.

So, I think what I wanted to do was make sure we addressed it today and I also wanted you to sort of have a sense of what happens, what the impact is when you're late. When you don't get here on time, then what that means is someone else has to cover the phones, right? And, we've had a lot of volume lately so we've been dropping calls, we've been missing some calls with some of our important customers. And other colleagues of yours are getting a little frustrated that they're having to pick it up when you're not here, right? Here's the thing, I can't manage what's going on for you at home. That's not my responsibility and it's certainly isn't my place to even do that. I think I'm respectful of the fact that you have some challenges.What needs to happen is that you need to get here on time. And if it continues to be a problem, then what I'm going to have to do is document the tardies, and start moving in that disciplinary, performance management direction. Which I really don't have any interest in doing. If you'd like, I'd be happy to brainstorm with you some things that you might be able to do over the next couple of weeks to make sure you're not late. Or, we could just leave it at you agree, yep, I've got to get here on time, and we don't ever have to address it again. Which would you prefer today?

J>> Well, I'd like to do some brainstorming. That may help.

M>> Okay, cool. So why don't we talk about what do you think are three things you could do differently to get here on time?

J>> Well, first I can probably get up earlier.

M>> Okay.

J>> And maybe prepare the night before for some of the tasks that I do in the morning.

M>> Okay.

J>> And maybe put different demands on my sitter as far as the time that she is expected to arrive.

M>> Okay. Yeah, I mean we can hold her accountable right? Just the same way that we get held accountable at work.

J>> Right.

M>> Anything else?

J>> Also maybe if I were to possibly change my work hours for a while. There's been a lot going on at home and maybe if I can change to maybe a half an hour later that might help?

M>> Well, it's not an option right now just because of the way the shifts are set up, but I certainly would like to continue to entertain that as an option. You know we set our shifts up every 90 days so we still have a little bit of time left in this current window, but I'll be happy to talk to you about that in the coming months and see if that would work differently for you.

J>> Okay.

M>> Okay, all right so cool,sounds like you have a couple of things you can work on. I will certainly be support of you moving forward and encouraging you, I know you're going to be all get here on time. I appreciate this is just kind of a weird time in your life that's affecting work. And then we'll go from here, see how things go. How about we set up some time next Tuesday at 3:00 to check in and see how things are going with your attendance?

J>> Tuesday sounds good.

Appendix C: Effective Example of Applying the Thought Model

M>> Hi, Elaine. Thanks for meeting with me. So we're here for our weekly check-in. How are things going?

E>> You know, things are going okay, I've had a little bit of a concern about some of our department meetings that we've had. I've just felt like, since we put our new computer system in a couple of months ago, I've been struggling with it a little bit. And when I go to the department meetings, I feel like I'm just kind of, getting some comments from my coworkers, about my performance.And, sort of getting some negative feedback.

M>> Okay. What specifically have they said to you?

E>> Just comments on how long it's taking me to get up to speed again. And maybe I should go to the training again. They're just negative comments, I just don't feel like it's taking into account that I'm working hard you know?

M>> Yeah, doesn't feel very supportive? So when they say these things, you should be more up to speed or take the class again, what do you think about that? Like what goes through your mind?

E>> Well in some ways I try to just laugh it off like they're kind of joking and chit chatting, but it kind of bothers me.

M>> Yeah. Why? Why does it? I mean what do you tell yourself when that happens? Why does it bother you?

E>> I start to question myself, like maybe I'm not doing as good of a job as I could be.

M>> Mm-hm. Yeah, so you start kind of believing them. Isn't that interesting? People say stuff and then we believe it. Right? And then how do you feel? How do you feel when you're thinking, maybe I'm not doing as good of a job as I could?

E>> I feel disappointed. I feel kind of like I'm letting the team down and frustrated, too.

M>> So, if you can think about yourself in that meeting, and someone just says, "Elaine, don't you think you should have learned this by now." And then, you feel like you're letting people down. Or, you think that you're letting people down, and then you feel bad. You feel disappointed. How are you acting in that meeting?

E>> I think I just kind of shut down. I just kind of shut down and I just am quiet. And just kind of back away from the conversation.

M>> And so when you shut down and you're in a meeting with them what kind of result do you get?

E>>Well, I think it makes me feel like I'm letting them down because I'm not being part of the meeting and I'm not participating.

M>> Yeah and you're kind of letting yourself down, right? You're not participating, you're sort of playing it out exactly as you're believing it, right? Which is what we know is that the way we think is always going to kind of support the result that we get, right?

E>> Mm-hm.

M>> So let's just think about this for a minute, because you and I have already talked about a plan to help you learn these skills and get up to speed, which is such good news, right?

E>> Right.

M>> But we can't control what they're going to do, right? And, people can say stuff to us all the time, and we never know what's going to come out of their mouths.

E>> Right.

M>> So what I always like to think about is regardless of what other people say, what do I want to believe about myself, right? What do I want to think about my capacity to learn and my capability to be talented or grow and build skill? And even if someone says something to me, who do I want to be in it, rather than trying to say they shouldn't say that, because people say stuff. Right?

E>> Right.

M>> So let's say you go to a meeting again, and someone makes a comment. The current result that you're getting is that you're just stepping out of it and letting yourself down. What would you like your result to be?

E>> Well, I'd like to let it not bother me as much as it is. And I thought about maybe something I could say in the moment. But I'm not quite sure what.

M>> If you could say something, what would you want to say?

E>> I guess I'd have to think about what I want to say.

M>> And then-

E>> Be prepared?

M>> Yeah. Be prepared. And how would you need to feel, in order to prepare?

E>> Maybe just more confident that I am working hard, and I am, like the conversation we had about getting more training. And, I'm taking steps to fix it.

M>> Brilliant. So feeling confident, right? And then, so, what do you have to believe that makes you feel confident? You just said two great things, right. I am continuing the training, I am taking steps, right. When you say that to yourself, I am taking steps to learn what I need to learn, do you feel confident?

E>> I am starting to.

M>> Good. And then when you feel confident you think about, you prepare how you want to show up in that meeting. And then, the result is, you speak up if you want to. Yeah, you know what happens is sometimes people do things that we can't control, and then we don't necessarily like how we respond, but then we get kind of mad at them for it.

E>> Yeah.

M>> [LAUGH] But really what we want to do is decide how we want to respond regardless of what's going on. And I think the best news here is that you are moving forward with helping yourself. And at the end of the day, that's what matters most for you, right? We don't need to worry about them.

E>> Right.

M>> Let's focus on helping you, getting the skills you need, and also probably working on feeling a little more confident in those meetings. Okay? So that thought, I'm taking the steps I need to take to learn what I need to learn, does that still feel good to focus on that?

E>> Yeah. Absolutely.

M>> Good. So take some time to think about it. I'm happy to, in our next chat if you want just to even roleplay, how you would respond if someone said what they've been saying to you so that you just have that practiced a little bit. Because sometimes we expect ourselves just to be able to say something that we've never said before. And if you've never practiced it why would you be good at it? So we could practice it a little bit.

E>> Yeah, that would be great.

Appendix D: Interview Summary

Asian Managers

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
General Perspectives					
Toxic employees should be managed?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Immediate action to manage toxic employee?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Difficult to change toxic persons?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Managerial Tactics					
Specific plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Understanding	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Direct Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Coaching	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Factors affecting Managers' Attitudes					
Ethnic Culture					
Organizational Culture	Yes	Yes			Yes
Labor Law	Yes			Yes	Yes
Personality			Yes		

Western Managers

	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5
General Perspectives					
Toxic employees should be managed?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Immediate action to manage toxic employee?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Difficult to change toxic persons?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Managerial Tactics					
Specific Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Understanding	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Direct Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coaching	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Factors affecting Managers' Attitudes					
Ethnic Culture					
Organizational Culture		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labor Law					
Personality	Yes				