# UNHEALTHY LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION THAT SHAKES ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM A CRITICAL REALISTIC APPROACH

## *COMPORTAMENTO DE LIDERANÇA NÃO SAUDÁVEL E RETENÇÃO DE FUNCIONÁRIOS QUE ABALAM A EXCELÊNCIA ACADÊMICA NO ENSINO SUPERIOR A PARTIR DE UMA ABORDAGEM REALISTA CRÍTICA*

## *COMPORTAMIENTO DE LIDERAZGO MAL SALUD Y RETENCIÓN DE EMPLEADOS QUE ROCA LA EXCELENCIA ACADÉMICA EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR DESDE UN ENFOQUE REALISTA CRÍTICO*

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**ABSTRACT**: Unhealthy leadership behavior also known as Toxic leader's theory. It affects employee base and create environments to be less effective due to stress, devaluation, and potential job loss. And today, this challenge has also rocked academic excellence in higher education. This paper took a giant step to investigate unhealthy leadership behavior and employee retention that affects academic excellence and suggested a coping strategy by adopting a critical realist approach. This approach is used and adopted to understand the significant relationship between unhealthy leadership behavior, employee retention, and academic excellence. The study is centered on 48 head of units of universities both public and privately owned. The findings reveal that lack of job satisfaction and organizational commitment are rampant among higher educators due to unhealthy leadership behavior of which leads to implications on job satisfaction, job retention, and organizational commitment which are key components of organizational productivities.

**KEYWORDS**: Academic excellence. Employee retention. Higher education. Organizational commitment. Unhealthy leadership behavior.

*RESUMO: Comportamento de liderança não saudável, também conhecido como teoria do líder tóxico. Afeta a base de funcionários e condiciona ambientes para serem menos eficazes devido ao estresse, desvalorização e possível perda de emprego. E hoje, esse desafio também abala a excelência acadêmica no ensino superior. Este artigo deu um passo gigantesco para investigar o comportamento prejudicial de liderança e a retenção de funcionários que afetam a excelência acadêmica e sugeriu uma estratégia de enfrentamento por meio da adoção de uma abordagem realista crítica. Essa abordagem é usada e adotada para compreender a relação significativa entre o comportamento não saudável de liderança, a retenção de funcionários e a excelência acadêmica. O estudo está centrado em 48 chefes de universidades*

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*públicas e privadas. Os resultados revelam que a falta de satisfação no trabalho e compromisso organizacional são galopantes entre os educadores devido ao comportamento de liderança doentio que leva a implicações na satisfação no trabalho, retenção no trabalho e compromisso organizacional que são componentes-chave da produtividade organizacional.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: *Excelência acadêmica. Retenção de funcionários. Ensino superior. Compromisso organizacional. Comportamento de liderança insalubre.*

**RESUMEN**: *Comportamiento de liderazgo no saludable también conocido como teoría del líder tóxico. Afecta a la base de empleados y crea entornos que son menos efectivos debido al estrés, la devaluación y la posible pérdida de puestos de trabajo. Y hoy, este desafío también ha sacudido la excelencia académica en la educación superior. Este documento dio un paso de gigante para investigar el comportamiento de liderazgo no saludable y la retención de empleados que afecta la excelencia académica y sugirió una estrategia de afrontamiento mediante la adopción de un enfoque realista crítico. Este enfoque se utiliza y adopta para comprender la relación significativa entre el comportamiento de liderazgo no saludable, la retención de empleados y la excelencia académica. El estudio se centra en 48 jefes de unidades de universidades tanto públicas como privadas. Los hallazgos revelan que la falta de satisfacción laboral y compromiso organizacional es rampante entre los educadores superiores debido a un comportamiento de liderazgo poco saludable que conduce a implicaciones en la satisfacción laboral, la retención laboral y el compromiso organizacional, que son componentes clave de las productividades organizacionales.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE**: *Excelencia académica. Retención de empleados. Educación superior. Compromiso organizacional. Comportamiento de liderazgo no saludable.*

## Introduction

In a debate by Ryan *et al*. (2012), they express that critical realism is opening a fresh perspective by taking a step back and investigating the relationship between the realities. Adetunji (2014) also shares that critical realism aims to understand the theories researchers build. Therefore, a part of a particular domain of the philosophy of science is termed ontology (investigation of the existence of toxic leadership styles). Rather than directly engage in the design of theory, critical realists aim to inform researchers with insights into the conditions of theory design and research strategies. Unhealthy leadership behavior can be caused by several issues that can only be uncovered through a wider lens of exploration of findings. Although behavior is tactically a way of life display through attitude, value, personal characteristic, perception, personality, and beliefs. Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube (2015) describe educational leadership as a process of influencing employees to achieve organizational goals and organizational excellence. Speaking of leadership in an educational context, leadership is defined as the ability to possess a vision with authority that is a leader must have a futuristic

dimension of actions, clear vision including taking into consideration the accomplishment of the desired state in the long run. A leader would devise a means of communication within the sector, plan as well as create new programs of teaching and learning for all members of the institution at all levels. The daily life of an institution consists of leadership ability to re-create activities that would also further reflect plans and procedures, politics, and priorities. Hence, a vital element of leadership in education is the ability to predict the future.

Adopting a critical realist approach to the unhealthy leadership behavior inquiries posits that developing a reliable account of social life is undoubtedly complicated but its multi-layered dimension can be uncovered through appropriate research initiatives. This is not far from the composition of higher education layers. To understand the multi-faceted concept of leadership, it is imperative to analyze the leadership ethos of higher education. Webster *et al.* (2016) argue that toxic leadership nowadays is an increasingly crucial phenomenon in the study of dark side leadership. Likewise, Omar and Ahmad (2020) assert that toxic leadership possesses destructive behavior, dysfunctional personal characteristics, inflict severe and enduring harm on individuals, organizations, communities, and nations. These are not to ignore other entities that influence toxic leadership styles (such as violations, mislead, play to the fears, fail to mentors, ignore competence, and isolate their followers and many more) but to narrow down the study by focusing on factors that behavior that rocks academics excellence. Edward *et al.* (2014) expresses that using critical realism in this context is an emergent process, which involves agency, social and personal knowledge of both the mechanisms in play and the structure where the events are generated. Academic excellence can be understood as the trigger that sets in motion the unhealthy leadership behavior "events" in Nigerian Universities. Therefore, close attention is paid to key aspects of unhealthy leadership behavior that require academic excellence to uncover what causes an event to happen within the structure.

In a debate by Hogan and Kaiser (2005), they postulate that leadership style is derived from leaders' personality, perception, value, and attitudes which reflect in their behavior ultimately influencing the employees' involvement and performance. Within the field of social science research, leadership is given more importance because leaders are an essential part of an organization's success. As well as employees are valuable assets retaining the value of the organization. The importance of a leader is as strong as that of the employees. No wonder, Amin and Akbar (2013) advocate a strong need for organizations to focus on their employees in other to increase turnover rate. Another conclusive research by Burns (2017) claims that it is very difficult to explain the association between leaders and their employees

as their relationship is very important and crucial to the decision of the organization. From these arguments, it is vital to understand the significant relationship between a leader's behavior and employee ability to retain the job. However, several studies suggest that some leadership behavior had been very chaotic to the development of their employees widen the gap in knowledge to whether unhealthy leadership behavior has an impact on employee behavior, especially in academic settings.

The story of behavior within higher education can be traced to things that cause employees' unhappiness. These issues are centered on few but not limited to appointment confirmation, probation period, the appointment for responsibility (such as deans, directors, head of units or departments), promotion, appointments, benefits, leaves, and many more even with the fact that there are written policy and procedure for implementing these benefits accrued to employees of any higher education yet some leaders' behavior towards implementation are unhealthy. Talking about it paints employees as sabotage. The researcher tends to drift that the use of strong words such as toxic may hurt or sound offensive to some respondents due to cultural issues, therefore adopting a soft language unhealthy behavior to allow participants to participate well in the study. With the interest of the researcher trying to uncover the reality on why leaders' behavior becomes unhealthy and what is the possible solution to such behavior. Therefore, this study aims to identify whether leaders' behavior contributes to the employees' decision of leaving their organizations. As per the literature, there exists a relationship between leaders' behavior and employees' intention to leave. Nada, and Ruth (2020) identify employees working under supportive leaders such as transformational leaders have lower turnover intentions as compared to those working under leaders depicting toxic traits. In order words, toxic leadership is not a new phenomenon

## Literature review

## Employee Retention

In any organization, leaders are key actors that their influence has an impact on the development of the activities and human capacity. In a debate by Chaminade (2006), she claims that retention is a voluntary move by an organization to create an environment that engages employees for the long term. In another study, Chiboiwa, Samuel, and Chipunza, (2010) debate that a more detailed and recent definition of the concept of retention is to prevent the loss of competent employees from leaving productivity and profitability. However, Waldman and Arora (2004) postulate that debating employee retention within the

framework of employee turnover is deficient; instead, emphasis should be on how employee retention stimulates the preservation of a workforce that can meet the company's needs. For Waldman and Arora (2004), employee turnover is crucial to remove employees who are incompetent to meeting the objectives of the organization; good retention emphasizes keeping those employees who can. Likewise, Schmidt, (2008); Stouten, and Tripp (2009) explain that employee retention is the 'converse of turnover—turnover being the sum of voluntary and involuntary separations between an employee and his or her company'. While some people's assessment of employee retention as the result of the implementation of policies and processes enhanced the provision of a work environment that meets employees' needs contribute to the reason why employees remain with the company (BAER; FAGIN; GORDON, 1996). In a like manner Lockwood and Ansari (1999), express that organization must compare and tolerate to their benefit the cost of hiring or losing an employee the more reason why organizations try to keep their existing staff. In another work by Kyndt *et al*. (2009), they postulate that because employees' knowledge and skills are central to a company's ability to be economically competitive therefore exposed that retention of talented employees is an advantage to an organization. A debate by Jones and Skarlicki (2003) shares that employee retention becomes more and more important to organizations because periodic labor shortages can reduce the availability of high-performing employees. Omar and Ahmad (2020) claimed and expand that while firms are seeking to improve the productivity of the workforce, workers are also searching for better employment opportunities, therefore increasing the challenges in attempting to retain employees. Some researchers (TAPLIN; WINTERTON, 2007; SAMUEL; CHIPUNZA, 2009) claim that HR executives discover that attracting and retaining a talented employee is a problem because of bounded rationality, particularly of cultural and social norms associated with the country. Metcalfe (2008) also supports Acton and Golden (2003) and explains that retention of employees and their appreciated skills helps the organization to preserve their investment of employee training, which causes lower loss of human capital and yields higher retention. Metcalfe (2008) also shares that organizations are more apprehensive about the retention of their employees because intent to leave is disappointing for both employees and employers. Metcafe opinion is not far from what Atif *et al*. (2011) conclude that given the circumstance of competition in the workplace today, organizations should take steps to retain employees, to avoid waste, unwanted turnover due to stress, low-job satisfaction, unsatisfactory working condition, and inadequate benefits. Surprisingly, the claim that the decision to retain is directly linked with the leadership attitude

and behavior is even more challenging and needs to be studied because the concept of leadership is dynamic has been studied by various scholars.

The concept of leadership is studied from multiple perspectives. From behaviors (LARSSON; VINBERG, 2010) to traits (ZACCARO *et al.,* 2018) from leadership theories (KHAN *et al.,* 2016) to leadership styles (NANJUNDESWARASWAMY; SWAMY, 2014), from its importance (CIULLA, 2007) to its impact (EKATERINI, 2010). The common factor seen in leadership definitions is the leader's influence on his/her work team for achieving goals (HOGAN; HOGAN, 2002). The focus of all researchers mentioned above is to investigate the positive aspects of leadership, but not until recently other researchers (WEBERG; FULLER, 2019) start studying its negative aspects due to needs for more productivity within the sector. The decision to study the negative aspect of leadership is a result of Hogan and Hogan (2002) studies. They find that over the past decade the number of failed leaders is increasing and almost 50% to 75% of leaders have unsatisfactory performance. In fact, in a recent studies Orunbon **(**2020), and Omar and Ahmad, (2020) finds that 75% of vice-chancellors are not qualified to lead. In Hogan and Hogan's study, they mention that unsatisfactory performance leads to toxic behavior towards employees in form of abusive supervisors, destructive leadership, and even toxic leadership as suggested by various scholars on the study of negative leadership aspects. In this paper, the term toxic or unhealthy leadership refers to narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision as used by Schmidt (2008).

**Toxic or Unhealthy Leadership**

The word Toxic derives from Greek mythology: *toxicus* means "poison". Hence, the first to link toxicity with leadership is Whicker (1996) and she debates in her research three types of leaders within workplaces, using traffic light color-coded to designate the level of toxicity observed: "trustworthy (green light), the transitional (yellow light), and the toxic (red light). The implication of red traffic light is that it is robotic in nature and never considers the environmental situation in its decision apart from programed information. Even when the traffic load is higher than the timing, it sticks to old decisions which as implications on the flow of traffic. This attribute is a common and good example of Toxic leaders in an organization. It is observed by Lipman-Blumen (2010) that unhealthy or toxic leaders damage their organizations by engaging in activities that alienate employees and create an overall negative work environment. Walton (2007) stresses that when we examine toxic leadership

behaviors, we are faced with a leadership type that has an understanding of an abusive management approach and insulting communication style (puts the values and norms of the institution in a situation that causes harm and develops inappropriate working environments behaviors as observed by Ozlem, Ugurluoglu, Kahraman and Keziban (2017). Likewise, Webster, Brough and Daly (2016) in their research, make a general definition of toxic leadership and specified that toxic leadership refers to individuals who tend to manipulate and exhibit intimidating, arrogant, and unethical behaviors towards those around them systematically and repetitively. At the same time, Weberg and Fuller (2019) elucidate that toxic leaders have a self-repeating communication style, with which they share their knowledge based on confidential or what they need to know, conduct many non-targeted meetings and telephone conversations to support their evil intentions.

According to Schmidt (2008), he suggests five dimensions of toxic or unhealthy leadership behavior in any organization be: first Self-Promotion, he claims in support of Ensley, Hmielesk and Pearce (2006) that unhealthy or toxic leaders frequently take all the credit for their team's success and their employees' good work. A good example is when an employee writes a proposal and the leader hijacked it for implementation. Toxic leaders here take all the glories of any work done by the subordinates. To the extent that in a school organization, the leader puts him or herself in the position of owners. In the conclusion of Schmidt's work, he claims that school leaders are responsible for the good results while otherwise are ascribed to the employees. The second dimension is Abusive Supervision. Unhealthy or Toxic leaders abuse their employees, points accusing fingers at the employee while they claim perfectionist. In a clear statement by Schmidt, he shares that unhealthy leadership is often un-forgetful of the past wrongdoing of the followers and reminding them of their past incapable of success, they are quick to publicly debase and emotionally reproach their subordinates. A supporting debate to Schmidt is raised by Reed (2004), who shares that abusiveness is one dimension of toxic leadership. Other scholars as laid claims to employees less satisfied thorough their research, explain that the results of toxic behavior are clear; Ensley, Hmielesk and Pearce (2006) claims less committed from the employee, Aryee *et al.* (2007) establish that such attitude gives employee opportunity to start considering his or her options, and likely more deviant behavior toward their co-workers; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne and Marinova (2012) also add that unhealthy leadership causes the organization as a whole to lose image and integrity. The third dimension to toxic leadership is that they are Capriciousness: Hadadian and Zarei (2016) maintain that a matchless trait among toxic leaders, especially when to equate to other workplace bullies or office jerks, is that they are

unpredictable. Ozlem, Ugurluoglu, Kahraman, and Keziban. (2017) also supports that employee can never know what kind of behavior to expect from toxic leaders, and this capriciousness or unpredictability keeps everyone on edge all the time. In essence, when followers are more often exposed to toxic leadership unpredictability stance, they always have a defensive mechanism as a shield for them against such leaders. Circumstances like this in higher education institutions always put employees on their toes so as not to offend the school management or leaders. Wright (2015) shares that when toxic leaders want to castigate or punish employees, they make a claim to management decisions and not the leader. The fourth dimension is Narcissism, Burns (2017) shares that toxic leaders have an unrealistically optimistic view of themselves and their philosophies. They often ignore and minimize their employees' suggestions, assuming that if the idea is not similar to their philosophy, it is not good. Ebrahim *et al*. (2019) highlight that narcissistic institutional leaders have little or no empathy for employees as their followers. They have no interest in any condition of their subordinates rather they always show contemptuous indifference, self-centeredness, and arrogance.

In Dame and Gedmin (2013), they acknowledge toxic leaders as self-admiration, someone who combines an exaggerated sense of one's abilities and achievements with a constant need for praise, attention, and affirmation. They claim that narcissist lacks empathy and self-awareness and are often hypersensitive to perceived insults or criticism. Dame and Gedmin (2013) emphasize that he or she frequently claims to be an "expert" at many different things and exaggerates contributions. Dame and Gedmin (2013) strongly conclude that if you are part of an organization with a leader exhibiting such characteristics, you have a problem. The last dimension discussed by Schmidt is authoritarianism: from Schmidt's discussion, it is obvious that toxic leaders micromanage their employees. They see employees as worthless persons and act as if the subordinates are nothing more than the tools for them to use. As a result, toxic leaders in higher education institutions do not care about the learning of the employees or team building, instead of at every given opportunity they condemned employees. Orunbon (2020) also shares that toxic leadership in HEI setting actions include: open favoritism of some subordinates over others, suppress the opinions of those considered to be a potential threat to the existing state of affairs, deliberate exclusion of certain groups within the institution, using existing personal relationships within the faculty to influence the progression of some employees and not others. However, Reed (2004) takes another position to identify three key elements of the toxic leader syndrome which he mentioned as an apparent lack of concern for the wellbeing of subordinates. Second, a personality or

interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate, and last, a conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest. Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll and Mackay (2014) also join by expressing that higher education institutions are complex with multifaceted layers, making them unpredictable social organizations that are extremely vulnerable to a host of powerful internal and external influences. They assert that toxic leaders may be doing this because they are worried about the consequences of failure or to boost their egos, whereas successful leaders want to secure the highest possible standards. Successful leaders' actions are grounded in a deeper moral purpose without sentiments. Hence, this paper intends to investigate unhealthy leadership behavior and employee retention that affects academic excellence in Nigerian higher education institutions. The study adopting the following research hypothesis from a quantitative critical realist approach to the study:

H1: there is no significant relationship between an Unhealthy leadership style and employee retention

H2: Unhealthy leadership styles cannot be used as predictors and for academic excellence in higher education

**Methodology**

The study examines the implication of unhealthy leadership behavior on employee retention and academic excellence in higher education. The paper adopts a critical realism mixed method. The paradigm is adopted because the critical realist assumption depicts that reality exists independently from our knowledge of occurrences demands a move from the abstract to the physical to identify the intransitive association. Easton (2010) claims that critical realism hypothesizes that developing a reliable account of social life is undoubtedly complicated, but the multi-layered dimension of education can be uncovered through appropriate research activities. Therefore, the application or introduction of Unhealthy leadership style is used in this study as one of the mechanisms at play to help discuss the practical and multi-layered components that cause an event to occur within the structure (not as employee retention per se or as a theory but as a mechanism). 'Structure' in this context means universities in Nigeria. In terms of the data, it was collected from 50 employees purposively. The employee selected has direct roles and responsibilities with leaders of their institutions as head of units. 12 universities were selected across 3 geopolitical zones (south-south, south-west, and north-central). The reason for the selection of these zones is linked

with the security issue of the nation. Selected institutions within the cluster were considered based on information of recent transition of vice-chancellor with the huge negative celebration of such leaders' end of tenure from their university. This was assumed an approach to play safely on the part of participants as the majority of participants do not want to be identified for personal protection. At this stage, an ethical consideration form was introduced to re-assure the participants of their confidentiality. As a result, the researcher carefully crafted but wide-ranging questionnaire aimed at eliciting responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was designed and administered to the participant as shown in table 2 below. The questionnaire consisted of two sections which were of structural disguised and structural undisguised questions. Section 1 was the demographic characteristic of respondents while section 2 was made up of the variables that informed the respondents' choices to test the relationship that exists between the dependent (unhealthy leadership style) and independent variable (employee retention) to achieve the research objective and the formulated hypotheses. This was measured on 5 points Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The data were then analyzed using the simple frequency counts, percentage, and ANOVA while the simple correlation coefficient of determination was employed to test the formulated hypothesis. Section 3 was an open-ended question to gather from respondents how they have been able to manage or cope with such leadership style over time. The data was also analyzed through the adoption of thematic analyses. The commonality in responses of participants and repetition of similar phrases were considered as a criterion for the selection of the themes selected for discussion.

**Findings and discussion**

**Results of demographic characteristics**

In order to obtain an objective analysis of the research work, 50 copies of the questionnaire were administered to heads of units in selected institutions, out of which 48 questionnaires were validly returned. The following table shows the distribution of respondents by demographic characteristics.

**Table 1** – Distribution of respondents' sex

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Male | 28 | 58.3 |
| Female | 20 | 41.7 |
| Total | 48 | 100.00 |

Source: Prepared by the authors

The above table shows the distribution of respondents' sex. From the table, 58.3% of the respondents interviewed for the study are male while 41.7% are female. This reveals that there are more males in higher education than females. The distribution in the tale of male proportion to female is high, and in 100 leaders, it is most likely to experience 10 to 20% female leaders give room to personality, ego, and official clashes responsible for behavioral reactions.

**Table 2** – Frequency distribution of respondents' departments

| Respondents' department | Frequency | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Registry | 15 | 31 |
| Bursary | 10 | 21 |
| Student Affairs | 8 | 17 |
| Security Units | 5 | 10 |
| Works and Maintenance | 8 | 17 |
| ICT | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 48 | 100 |

Source: Prepared by the authors

The table above depicts the distribution of respondents' departments. From the table, 31% of the respondent used for the study is from registry department while 21% is from Bursary department. Also, 17% of respondents randomly taken for the study is from student affairs 10% from the security unit. 4% of the contribution is from the works and maintenance department and finally, 2% is from the ICT units of the institution selected. This implies that the majority of the respondent considered for the study are employees of the university selected.

**Table 3** – Frequency distribution of respondents'' academic qualifications

| Academic Qualifications | Frequency | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| OND | 4 | 8 |
| NCE | 5 | 10 |
| BSc | 20 | 42 |
| Masters | 12 | 25 |
| Professional certificate | 7 | 15 |
| Total | 48 | 100 |

Source: Prepared by the authors

The table shows the distribution of respondent academic qualification. From the table, 8% of the respondents has OND as their highest academic qualification while 10% is with NCE as their highest qualification, about 42% had BSc. Moreover, 25% has master's as their own highest academic achievement while 15% of the respondents randomly considered for the survey has professional qualification and so on. This reveals that majority of the respondent are graduate and professionally qualified. The implication of this to the study is that all the respondent used for the study are academically qualified to response fairly to the research questions raised for the study.

1. **Model Specification**

The model specification for the study are as expressed as $Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x + £$………… (i) and $Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 x \, £$………..(ii)

Where (i):

- $Y$ = dependent variable (i.e. the need for academic excellence) which is measured using the difference between agree and dis agree response on the test items assuming that indifferent response remained unchanged
- $\alpha_0$ = constant
- $\alpha_1$ = slope
- $x$ = independent variable. That is unhealthy leadership behavior of leaders, which is measured using the number of the test items for the independent variable since failure is an abstract concept
- $£$ = error item

Where (ii):

- $Y$ = dependent variable. That is Unhealthy leadership behavior. This is measured using the variation between agree and disagree responses on the test items assuming that insufficient rate remains unchanged
- $\alpha_0$ = constant
- $\alpha_1$ = slope
- $X$ = independent variable. That is job satisfaction. This is measured by the number of tests on unhealthy leadership behavior and employee retention

2. **Types of hypotheses**

H1: There is no significant relationship between unhealthy leadership behavior and employee retention. TEST of the overall regression coefficient for unhealthy leadership behavior on employee retention.

**Table 4** – ANOVA test

|  | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 180.000 | 1 | 180.000 | 3.000 | .225 |
| Residual | 120.000 | 2 | 60.000 |  |  |
| Total | 300.000 | 3 |  |  |  |

Source: Prepared by the authors

H2: unhealthy leadership behavior cannot be used as predictor for the detection of employee retention in higher education

**Table 5** – Coefficients

|  | Unstandardized | coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | T | ig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| job retention (x) | 6.000 | 3.464 | .778 | .732 | 225 |
| (constant) | 130.000 | 9.487 |  | 3.703 | 005 |

Source: Prepared by the authors

**Discussion**

The p-value for employee retention (from table 4) of 0.225 is greater than the significance value of 0.005, for this, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that the need for academic excellence helped in the realization of employee retention. Therefore, academic excellence is a good predictor for the detection of employee retention. Additionally, if the coefficient of determination above is multiplied by 100% the result would be 60%. This shows that 60% of job satisfaction that might be committed in higher education can be detected by leadership behavior. It, therefore, implies that unhealthy leadership behavior is a good predictor of organization commitment minimization in higher education.

From this research finding, it seems that toxic leadership remains inevitable in the leadership process because one's toxic leader is another person's hero. As the study suggests that toxic leadership is not an anomaly, but to be expected. The findings also posit that there is no significant relationship between unhealthy leadership behavior and employee retention, this is because even leaders who are widely applauded as exemplary are not necessarily without their occasional toxic chinks. This is also supported by the literature as observed by Lipman Blumen, (2005) that best leaders also have their occasional toxic chinks which has no relationship with employee retention. Therefore, identifying the need to learn how to cope with such behavior becomes a plus to the effective running of any institution. The study findings through the open-ended questions suggest five major themes as discussed.

**Theme 1. Avoidance:** the majority of the respondent (almost 100 percent) share that it is very safe to avoid toxic leaders because it will help followers who prefer to reduce or

eliminate contact with the toxic leader. In a clear definition put forward by Omar and Ahmad, (2020) they share that avoidance will help to ignore conflict by withdrawing or suppressing one's feelings and avoiding the topic of what had happened or is happening. On a similar debate, Dauber and Tavernier (2011) affirm that equivocating difficult individuals or situations minimizes the risk of conflict or a repeat toxic event. Bursary staff views are in line with Dauber and Tavernier believes who claim that avoidance as a coping strategy should include keeping an emotional distance by isolating oneself from the toxic leader. Although Richardson (1995) is of the opinion that it may be easier to use avoidance rather than aggression regardless of the stress levels experiencing however approach adopted or use can only be determined by the victim's personality. The victim will also determine his or her intention to retain the job or leave for a better life. Dauber and Tavernier (2011) also express that even though avoiding toxic leaders is a passive withdrawal from confrontation and potential conflict, active avoidance occurred when victims dealt with toxic leaders by physically staying away. The assertion of Dauber and Tavernier (2011) is also the position of respondents in the open-ended report. 75 percent of the participants lend their voices toward a similar direction. Unfortunately, Richardson (1995) asserts that if the leader is one's supervisor or report line of authority, it is not always possible to avoid these leaders in the workplace. This is also the fear of the respondents as registry staff lament that adopting avoidance as a preventative measure and solution for dealing with toxic leaders' victims in term of conflict will suppress victims' opinions which in turn will also affect productivity and retention capability. Surprisingly in a research work by Cloke and Goldsmith (2011), they postulate that avoidance is the most difficult coping strategy to accomplish when employees work directly for toxic leaders. Avoidance is also argued by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) as a second most used coping strategy, and it is simply easier and less stressful to avoid the bullying of a superior. In conclusion, the study reveals that fight or flight mentality is one of the coping strategies to be adopted when confronted with a toxic leader.

**Theme 2 - Seek help:** the majority of respondents from both registry and bursary share that communication strategy or seeking for help involved seeking assistance from friends, co-workers, another leader, or human resource department. Works and maintenance participants share a different view that seeking help might be more dangerous as misconception or interpretation might cause more damage if not managed properly. Of course, Dauber and Tavernier (2011) write that seeking help is most employed to avoid confrontation. Some of the participant views are not far from Dauber and Tavernier's position. This is also supported by Aubrey (2012) that employees need to actively reach out for help to

handle the situation in the case of a toxic leader as it cannot be managed alone. A supporting statement is made by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), it is argued that most followers get confused and seeking help by talking to a representative at work from a union or human resource department and even founders or shareholders to reduce the tension before it impacts the system. Arguably, the open-ended column refills that with toxic leaders following the proper command of authority is not a concern and they can always use power to act retroactively. This position was also supported by Bushman and Huesmann (2010), who share that reporting the matter to proper authorities may result in the best outcomes but if not, legal matter share is a pursuit to seek clarification in case there are breaches or misinterpretations of policy. In a situation where such matters are resolved, it will also impact employee retention capability. On another note, registry respondents shared that accessing influential action could be an alternative option where affected employee filed a complaint to authorities as a method of seeking help but Lutgen-Sandvik Nmaie and Nmaie, (2009) point that accessing influential action must be done with care as the result might affect the relationship and distort the peace complete first not with the higher or highest authority in the chain of command. Likewise, Simons and Sauer (2013) advise that seeking help might be the most appropriate form of coping as all toxic events must be addressed, even if the result seems unfavorable. This is also in line with the perception of all the participants who share similar experiences in the past.

**Theme 3 - Assertiveness**: Few respondents comments that victims of toxic leaders in higher education use assertiveness to directly challenge toxic leaders about the toxic behaviors, event, and effects. Aubrey (2012) refers to assertiveness as retribution or eccentricity from acceptable leader-follower relationships. The majority of the respondents share that assertiveness is used least frequently when communicating directly with the toxic leader out of all coping strategies because it is more or less a defense mechanism that gives reassurance to the victims of toxic leaders. Hadadian, and Zarei (2016) adds that assertiveness towards a leader who caused the employee stress may relieve the stress by reducing the toxic behavior. On the contrary, Hadadian, and Zarei (2016) posits that assertiveness action may cause adverse effects on the employees, nevertheless, as assertiveness often leads to increased occurrences of toxic events or bullying. Bushman and Huesmann (2010) find that assertive victims of toxic behavior or events may become aggressive when confronting the leaders, which may result in shouting, verbal insults, and physical intimidation. These are also supported by respondent comments on their experience of responding to a toxic leader as a way of coping with bullying. One of the respondents shares a different view by acclimating to toxic behavior which like may have a negative impact on his response to situations. From the

discussion above, assertiveness as a coping strategy is just to buy time but can give satisfaction to an event or behavior. Similarly, a supporting statement is raised by Simons and Sauer (2013) that assertiveness appears in form of confrontation, is an effective way of coping with toxic behavior as it often stops the bullying. Few respondents share that assertive coping strategies had worked for them in some instances such as face-to-face confrontations, a characteristic of aggressive behavior at the extreme end of the assertive strategy triggered by fear, anger, and being emotionally scarred. Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) also share that in extreme cases, victims of continued toxic leadership or corporate bullying threatened to physically harm others, to stop the situation or toxic event. These will cause a lot of confidence to the victim as suggested by the respondent while in turn, it may aggress the leader is not ready to change. Likewise, it will have an implication on job retention or satisfaction.

**Theme 4 - Do nothing:** The majority of the female respondents are of the view that the do-nothing strategy of coping may be the most stressful method but also can help cope better with toxic leaders especially those with tenure track jobs. Similarly, few of the male respondents also support that the doing nothing strategy might work for a short time because toxic leaders are always inquisitive and always want to know what is always going on. Two participants share that silence kills faster than the response on many occasions. In research by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) they find that the toxic events were likely to continue causing reactions, stress, and behaviors derived from the toxic event or behavior. Dauber and Tavernier (2011) suggest that the do-nothing strategy is closely related to the adaption and the accommodation or reframing strategy, while Webster, Brough and Daly (2014) point that coping strategy may lead to the worsening of negative effects of toxic leadership on the institution. Completely, studies in the organization behaviorist sciences suggest that coping strategies fall under the cognitive theory of trauma in which you reason through the event by restructuring your perception then adapting versus coping in another fashion.

**Theme 5 - Forgiveness:** Another coping strategy suggested by participants who had been the victim of toxic leaders expressed that the best thing is to forgive toxic leaders and simply move on from the situation. Some of the respondents stated that changing jobs or institutions will be a better opinion to explore. A unanimous voice advised that it will be good that one ignore job retention as it will be difficult to cope without moving on. In another argument, 55 percent of respondents shared that as a result of adopting the coping strategy, it may result in into least stress for the victim if affected employees can truly move forward without harboring resentment towards the toxic leader. The researchers support that forgiving

people were best suited to cope with workplace toxicity because they exhibited effective skills to create and sustain social relationships; communicate and resolve conflicts and finally, help to maintain peace.

## Conclusion and recommendation

It is found from the study that lack of job satisfaction and organizational commitment are rampant among higher education institutions employees due to unhealthy leadership behavior. This creates a negative impact on the growth and development of the economy with result in a decline as observed by past researchers. It is also found that people were of the opinion that unhealthy leadership behavior is found in both public and private universities in Nigeria which transect into organizational culture of deviant behavior. It can also be concluded that unhealthy leadership behavior in the countries is alarming and is not only crumbing their economy but also affecting organizational culture and behavioral attitude towards organizational commitment. In the light of the above finding and conclusion, the following recommendation is apropos.

i. Academia should lay more emphasis on a leadership style that can motivate employee retention for more productivity;

ii. A leader is a key determinant of organizational success and productivity, therefore they should be selected carefully in other to function effectively;

iii. This study provides the first analysis of unhealthy leadership behavior within the higher education context. The findings indicate the implication of unhealthy leadership style on job satisfaction, job retention, and organizational commitment.

It is important to point here that, effective leadership are essential if institutions are to achieve the wide-ranging objectives set for them by their many stakeholders. Therefore, the success of any institution lies in the leadership behavior adopted by the leader. On a final note, it is imperative that other researchers build on the abovementioned recommendations for future studies, because several questions remain unanswered, for example, the unexpected difference in the result of job satisfaction, organization commitment, job retention, and inclusion. This research fills the gap in knowledge by understudying the significance of unhealthy leadership on the key component of organizational behavior that is employee involvement, commitment, and retention. The study also provides an insight into human

resource managers' focus on leadership balancing through the subordinate account of the perceived behavior of leaders.

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