

The Prevalence of Toxic Personality Traits in OUM Kelana Jaya

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ABSTRACT

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Toxic personality traits, particularly narcissism and Machiavellianism, are characterized by detrimental behaviours that can negatively impact organizational climate and employee well-being. These traits are increasingly relevant in workplace studies due to their profound effects on performance, satisfaction, and organizational dynamics. This research aims to identify the factors contributing to the development of toxic personalities and assess the consequences of unmanaged toxic personalities on organizational climate, employee satisfaction, and performance, particularly at Open University Malaysia. Using a quantitative approach, the study gathered data through surveys measuring levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, toxic personality traits, organizational climate, employee satisfaction, and job performance. Analytical methods included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and independent samples t-tests to identify significant relationships and variations among these variables. The findings reveal skewed distributions for narcissism, toxic personality traits, and contributing factors, with a weak positive correlation between narcissism and Machiavellianism. No significant gender differences in toxic traits were identified, and the age factor was not a significant predictor. These results underscore the subtle but present impact of toxic personalities within OUM, suggesting that, while not pervasive, toxic traits can disrupt organizational harmony if left unaddressed. This study highlights the importance of fostering a positive organizational culture by implementing targeted interventions, such as training programs, conflict resolution mechanisms, and clear human resources policies. Such measures can help mitigate the adverse effects of toxic personality traits, contributing to a healthier, more productive work environment at OUM. Further research is

encouraged to deepen understanding of the factors shaping toxic personality traits and their long-term impact on institutional dynamics.

Contribution/Originality: This research investigates toxic personality traits, particularly narcissism and Machiavellianism, within the OUM context. It examines their prevalence, interrelationships, and impact on organizational climate and employee satisfaction. The study also explores the influence of gender and age on the manifestation of these traits.

1. Introduction

A toxic relationship is characterized by an uncomfortable and detrimental dynamic. Toxic individuals have a detrimental effect on one's mental resilience, causing an inability to accurately assess one's own abilities and limitations ([N. Ussolikhah et al., 2023](#)). Research on toxic workplace behaviors has gained significance in the past twenty years because to its impact on organizational performance and well-being ([Cortina et al., 2017](#); [Cortina et al., 2001](#); [Yildiz & Alukan, 2015](#)). These impacts cause disturbances in the regular operations of enterprises, resulting in adverse effects on the well-being of workers, reputation, productivity, customer experience, and value ([Appelbaum et al., 2012](#); [Gursoy et al., 2017](#); [Harvey et al., 2017](#)).

Deviant behaviors in the workplace refers to intentional actions that go against important organizational standards, posing a threat to the well-being of the company and its members ([Robinson & Bennett, 1995](#)). These behaviors can vary and include bullying, sexual harassment, lack of civility, undermining, marginalization in the workplace, and aggressiveness ([Cortina et al., 2001](#); [Hershcovis & Barling, 2010](#)).

Toxic personalities, characterized by traits such as narcissism and Machiavellianism, can have detrimental effects on individuals and organizations. Given the potential organizational harm caused by toxic individuals, it is important to investigate these dynamics in specific institutional contexts. In particular, Open University Malaysia (OUM) Kelana Jaya presents a relevant and timely case for study. As a higher learning institution that thrives on collaboration, academic freedom, and mutual respect, the presence of toxic personalities could undermine its core values and hinder both staff and student performance. The university setting provides a unique environment to explore how toxic behaviors can manifest and disrupt the academic culture, affecting job satisfaction, organizational climate, and overall institutional success.

Addressing the prevalence of toxic personality traits in OUM Kelana Jaya is essential for fostering a positive and productive work environment. By identifying the underlying factors and understanding the potential consequences, organizations can take steps to prevent and manage toxic behavior, promoting a healthier and more harmonious workplace.

1.1. Research Objectives

- i. To identify the variables that shape toxic personalities.
- ii. To examine the repercussions of unmanaged toxic personalities in the context of OUM.

2. Literature Review

In this review, we will segregate the literature into two components which consist of toxic personalities, and toxic personalities in organization.

2.1. Toxic Personalities

Toxic personalities engage in deliberate and voluntary actions with the primary intention of causing harm to the organization, its members, or stakeholders ([Yildiz & Alukan, 2015](#)). [Robinson and Bennet \(1995\)](#) classified workplace deviance into two primary categories: (1) organizational deviance, which involves actions directed towards the business itself, such as sabotage, computer fraud, embezzlement, and theft; and (2) interpersonal deviance, which involves actions targeting individuals or groups of co-workers, such as spreading rumours, engaging in verbal, physical, or sexual abuse.

[Kusy and Holloway \(2009\)](#) categorized harmful behaviours into three primary classifications. These behaviours are mostly characterized by shaming, such as embarrassment, sarcasm, making derogatory remarks, and pointing out mistakes. For example, they employ haughty and patronizing language and conduct towards their colleagues and occasionally towards their supervisor. Furthermore, passive hostility encompasses behaviours such as passive aggression, scepticism towards differing viewpoints, territorial tendencies, responding to negative feedback with verbal attacks, and a lack of awareness regarding their own poisonous behaviours. For instance, they exhibit amiable and cooperative behaviours in individual interactions, yet fail to fulfil anticipated obligations. Furthermore, team sabotage includes actions such as monitoring the team, interfering with teamwork, and misusing one's power to administer punishment. For instance, they weaken the influence of the team leader and other significant contributors by withholding information.

Toxic personalities possess certain characteristics that set them apart from individuals who display violent conduct with the goal of causing bodily harm ([Chen & Wang, 2019](#)). There is compelling evidence that toxic individuals can significantly affect employees by causing negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and confusion. They also have negative consequences for organizations, including decreased performance, productivity, and service quality, which in turn leads to higher turnover rates ([Chen & Wang, 2019](#); [Ghosh et al., 2013](#); [Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010](#); [Pearson & Porath, 2005](#)). If these behaviours are not addressed, employees may consider them acceptable, which can lead to a work culture characterized by toxic personalities ([Abubakar et al., 2018](#); [Foulk et al., 2016](#); [Houseman & Minor, 2015](#); [Kusy & Holloway, 2009](#)).

2.2. Toxics in Organization

Narcissism is characterized by an excessive belief in one's own superiority, a profound desire for adulation, and a deficiency in empathy towards others. People exhibiting elevated degrees of narcissism generally possess hyperinflated perceptions of their own capabilities and accomplishments, and they may manipulate relationships to satisfy their own want for affirmation. This characteristic is linked to a range of interpersonal impairments, such as difficulty in sustaining positive connections because of the narcissist's inclination to put their own objectives over those of others. According to the [American Psychiatric Association \(2013\)](#), narcissism is commonly perceived as a spectrum, encompassing both typical, adaptive degrees that can promote self-assurance

and resilience, and more severe, maladaptive manifestations that may lead to narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

Existing research indicates that narcissism may exert both beneficial and detrimental effects on individuals and their social connections. For example, some research has shown that those who possess higher degrees of narcissism are more likely to attain success in leadership positions because of their confidence and assertiveness ([Grijalva et al., 2015](#)). Nevertheless, these exact same characteristics might result in harmful actions, such as manipulating or underestimating people in order to preserve their own perception of themselves. Furthermore, severe narcissism is associated with challenges in sustaining long-term relationships and a higher probability of encountering interpersonal problems ([Miller et al., 2011](#)). Gaining insight into narcissism and its consequences is essential for effectively dealing with its possible negative impacts, especially in areas such as organization leadership and personal relationships.

Machiavellianism is a psychological trait marked by manipulative conduct, a sceptical perspective on human nature, and a prioritization of self-interest and personal benefit, frequently to the detriment of others. Individuals with a high level of Machiavellianism are skilled in exerting influence and control over others in order to accomplish their objectives, principally relying on deception and manipulation. The term of this characteristic is derived from the political ideology of Niccolò Machiavelli, whose book *The Prince* promotes the use of foresight and strategic manipulation in leadership. According to [Christie and Geis \(1970\)](#), individuals who display Machiavellian traits are generally perceived as aloof, strategic, and unreliable, placing their aspirations above ethical deliberations. Machiavellianism in interpersonal relationships can result in exploitative actions, since these persons are prone to deceive and use others for their own purposes.

Studies on Machiavellianism have emphasized its influence on lots of spheres of life, especially in professional environments and social contacts. Those with elevated degrees of Machiavellianism may thrive in competitive settings that value manipulation and strategic thinking, such as politics or business ([Dahling et al., 2009](#)). Nevertheless, their absence of compassion and indifference towards the welfare of others can result in deleterious work atmospheres and strained interpersonal connections. Machiavellianism has been associated with unethical decision-making and an increased propensity for participating in unproductive professional activities ([Jones & Paulhus, 2009](#)). It is critical to comprehend Machiavellianism in order to recognize and reduce its adverse consequences, especially in environments where trust and cooperation are vital.

Psychopathy is a multifaceted personality impairment marked by enduring antisocial conduct, diminished capacity for empathy and regret, audacity, emotional superficiality, and self-centeredness. Psychopaths frequently have a shallow attraction, manipulative inclinations, and a distinct absence of remorse or consideration for the damage they inflict upon others. In contrast to other personality qualities, psychopathy is linked to a more intense and widespread pattern of conduct that frequently results in criminal behaviour and extreme violence. Affective processing deficits are closely associated with the disorder, resulting in psychopaths being able to comprehend the emotions of others intellectually but lacking emotional experience of them ([Hare, 1993](#)). These individuals' emotional detachment enables them to participate in detrimental actions without the usual human limitations of remorse or love.

Studies on psychopathy clearly show its substantial association with criminal conduct and the likelihood of reoffending. Within forensic contexts, psychopathy is commonly evaluated using instruments such as the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), which quantifies characteristics such as glibness, arrogance, and a parasite way of life (Hare, 2003). Persons exhibiting elevated levels of psychopathy are more prone to participating in aggressive and predatory actions, thereby presenting significant difficulties in their management within criminal justice environments. Additionally, psychopathy has been associated with challenges in establishing authentic interpersonal relationships, as these persons seek to exploit people for their own benefit without developing emotional connections (Cleckley, 1988). Although exhibiting antisocial behaviours, psychopaths may be quite adept at scheming their way into positions of authority and influence, rendering this personality disorder especially perilous in social and professional settings.

[Khatri et al. \(2003\)](#) explained cronyism refers to the act of a superior using their connection with a subordinate, rather than considering the subordinate's competence or qualifications, in order to gain the subordinate's allegiance. [Khatri et al. \(2006\)](#) also mentioned, inside organizations, cronyism manifests in two distinct forms: horizontal cronyism and vertical cronyism. Horizontal cronyism encompasses the practice of favouritism among colleagues. Vertical cronyism refers to the situation where a leader selectively benefits their subordinates by disregarding their performance-related aspects. As a result, organizational inequality and favouritism in the workplace give rise to stress and workplace discrimination, which in turn lead to detrimental job results for employees. The repercussions encompass diminished performance, deteriorating work satisfaction, less organizational commitment, heightened stress levels, desire to quit, instances of bullying, a decline in organizational citizenship behaviour, and other related outcomes ([O'brien et al., 2016](#)).

While deviant behaviour in the workplace refers to deliberate actions that go against important organisational standards and thereby endanger the welfare of the organisation, its members, or both ([Robinson & Bennett, 1995](#)). The variety of behaviours observed in the workplace includes bullying, sexual harassment, incivility, undermining, workplace exclusion, and hostility ([Cortina et al., 2001](#)).

3. Research Methods

A quantitative research design was employed to investigate the prevalence of toxic personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and their impact on organizational outcomes at Open University Malaysia (OUM) Kelana Jaya. 88 participants out of 200 employees from OUM completed surveys measuring these traits, as well as organizational climate, employee satisfaction, and job performance. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression, and potential structural equation modeling were utilized to analyze the data. Strict adherence to ethical guidelines, including informed consent and confidentiality, was ensured. The findings from this analysis provided insights into the characteristics of toxic personalities, their relationships with other variables, and potential differences between groups.

3.1. Research Sample

A total of 88 full-time employees from OUM Kelana Jaya participated in the study. Participants for the study were employees from OUM Kelana Jaya, who were selected

through purposive sampling which is non-probability sampling method in which researchers deliberately select participants who are most relevant to the research objectives and possess specific characteristics necessary to provide in-depth insights on the study topic ([Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016](#)). The inclusion criteria in this study required participants to be full-time employees at OUM, while the exclusion criteria ruled out part-time or temporary staff. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were informed about the research purpose, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of their responses as suggested by [Manti and Licari \(2018\)](#). The study adhered to ethical guidelines by ensuring informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants were made aware that they could leave the study at any time. All data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected through a structured survey comprising validated instruments. The survey was designed to measure the following variables:

- i. Narcissism: Measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory ([Raskin & Hall, 1979](#)).
- ii. Machiavellianism: Assessed using the Machiavellianism Scale ([Christie & Geis, 1970](#)).
- iii. Psychopathy: Evaluated through the Psychopathy Checklist ([Hare, 1993](#)).
- iv. Toxic Personality Traits: Combined scores from the Dark Triad traits.
- v. Organizational Climate: Assessed through employee perceptions of their work environment.
- vi. Employee Satisfaction: Measured using a standard job satisfaction scale.
- vii. Organizational Performance: Evaluated through self-reported measures of productivity and performance outcomes within the organization. The survey was distributed online to employees to ensure convenience and anonymity, with a response window of two weeks. Follow-up reminders were sent to encourage participation.

3.3. Data analysis

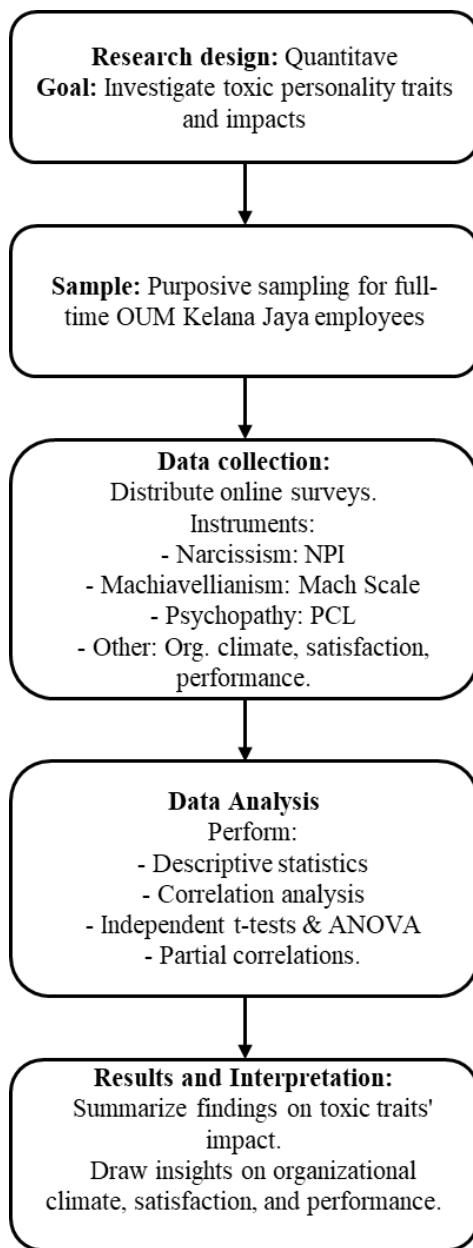
The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the prevalence of the Dark Triad traits among the participants. Correlation analysis as mentioned by [Cohen et al. \(2003\)](#) was employed to examine the relationships between narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and toxic personality traits, as well as their impacts on organizational climate, employee satisfaction, and organizational performance. Additionally, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare differences in toxic personality traits between male and female employees, and an ANOVA as guided by [Field \(2013\)](#) was performed to examine the influence of age on toxic traits. Pearson's partial correlations were used to explore the connections between narcissism, Machiavellianism, and the contributing factors, while controlling for toxic personality traits. SPSS software was used to conduct all statistical analyses, with a significance level of 0.05.

3.4. Research Framework

The research framework, depicted in [Figure 1](#), illustrates the research design and methodology employed in this study. The research aims to investigate the presence and impact of toxic personality traits within a sample of full-time employees at OUM Kelana Jaya. Data collection will involve online surveys utilizing established instruments such as

the NPI, Mach Scale, and PCL to measure narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, respectively. Additionally, employee perceptions of organizational climate, job satisfaction, and performance will be assessed. The collected data will be subjected to a range of statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, independent t-tests, ANOVA, and partial correlations. The findings of this analysis will be used to understand the impact of toxic personality traits on organizational outcomes and draw relevant insights.

Figure 1: Research Framework



4. Results

The descriptive statistics presented in [Table 1](#) provide a summary of the key characteristics of the four variables: Narcissism, Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy), Machiavellianism, and Contributing Factors.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Narcissism	2.699	0.625	-0.763	0.257	0.552	0.508	1.000	4.000
Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy)	1.420	0.619	1.813	0.257	3.376	0.508	1.000	4.000
Machiavellianism	2.804	0.840	-0.028	0.257	-0.420	0.508	1.000	5.000
Contributing Factors	2.045	0.848	0.700	0.257	-0.094	0.508	1.000	4.400

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Central Tendency: Narcissism had a mean score of 2.699, indicating a moderate level. Toxic Personality Traits scored 1.420, suggesting a relatively low level of psychopathic tendencies. Machiavellianism had a mean of 2.804, indicating a moderately high level. Contributing Factors scored 2.045, suggesting a moderate level.

Variability: The standard deviation for each variable provides insight into the spread of scores.

Skewness: Narcissism was slightly negatively skewed, with more scores clustered towards the higher end. Toxic Personality Traits and Contributing Factors were positively skewed, indicating a few individuals with exceptionally high scores. Machiavellianism was nearly normally distributed.

Kurtosis: Narcissism was slightly leptokurtic, with more scores clustered around the mean. Toxic Personality Traits were highly leptokurtic, with a sharp peak and heavy tails. Machiavellianism was slightly platykurtic, with flatter tails. Contributing Factors were nearly normally distributed.

Table 2 presents the results of Pearson's partial correlation analysis, controlling for Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy). A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.232, p = 0.030$) was found between Narcissism and Machiavellianism, suggesting a potential association between these two traits. However, no significant correlations were found between Narcissism or Machiavellianism and the Contributing Factors. This indicates that the relationship between Narcissism and Machiavellianism is not solely driven by their shared association with toxic personality traits.

Table 2: Pearson's Partial Correlations

Variable		Narcissism	Machiavellianism	Contributing Factors
1. Narcissism	Pearson's r	—		
	p-value	—		
2. Machiavellianism	Pearson's r	0.232	—	
	p-value	0.030	—	
3. Contributing Factors	Pearson's r	-0.002	0.023	—
	p-value	0.985	0.829	—

Note: Conditioned on variables: Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy)

Table 3 presents the results of independent samples t-tests comparing males and females on four variables: Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy), Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Contributing Factors. The t-test results indicate no significant gender differences for any of the variables. For example, the t-test for Toxic Personality Traits yielded a t-value of 1.176 with a p-value of 0.243, which is not statistically significant. Similarly, the t-tests

for Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Contributing Factors also yielded non-significant p-values. These findings suggest that gender does not significantly influence these personality traits within the sample.

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test

	t	df	p
Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy)	1.176	70.539	0.243
NARCISSISM	0.679	85.662	0.499
Machiavellianism	0.064	76.441	0.949
Contributing Factors	-0.318	71.582	0.751

Note. Welch's t-test.

The Shapiro-Wilk test results in [Table 4](#) indicates that the assumption of normality is violated for most of the variables. For instance, for Toxic Personality Traits, the p-values for both males and females are less than 0.05, suggesting significant deviations from normality.

Table 4: Test of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)

		W	p
Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy)	Male	0.770	< .001
	Female	0.665	< .001
NARCISSISM	Male	0.930	0.022
	Female	0.942	0.015
Machiavellianism	Male	0.949	0.092
	Female	0.942	0.015
Contributing Factors	Male	0.898	0.003
	Female	0.941	0.014

Note: Significant results suggest a deviation from normality.

Similarly, for Narcissism, Contributing Factors, and in the female group for Machiavellianism, the p-values are less than 0.05, indicating non-normality. These findings imply that the data may not be normally distributed, which could influence the reliability of certain statistical tests that require this assumption, such as t-tests and ANOVA. Therefore, it's important to consider alternative statistical methods or data transformations to address the non-normality issue.

The Brown-Forsythe test in [Table 5](#), used to assess the equality of variances, indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met for all variables. For instance, for Toxic Personality Traits, the F-value is 1.105 with a p-value of 0.296, indicating that the variances between groups are not significantly different. Similarly, the p-values for Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Contributing Factors are all greater than 0.05, suggesting that the assumption of equal variances holds for these variables as well. This finding is important because it ensures the validity of certain statistical tests, such as t-tests and ANOVA, which rely on this assumption.

Table 5: Test of Equality of Variances (Brown-Forsythe)

	F	df ₁	df ₂	p
Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy)	1.105	1	86	0.296
NARCISSISM	1.670	1	86	0.200
Machiavellianism	0.185	1	86	0.668
Contributing Factors	0.551	1	86	0.460

The ANOVA Table 6 examines the effect of age on Toxic Personality Traits (Psychopathy). The F-statistic is 1.510 with a p-value of 0.227, indicating that there is no significant difference in toxic personality traits across the three age groups. This suggests that age is not a significant predictor of toxic personality traits in this sample.

Table 6: ANOVA

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Age	1.143	2	0.572	1.510	0.227
Residuals	32.175	85	0.379		

Note: Type III Sum of Squares

5. Discussion

Based on the analysis, toxic personalities can be characterized by a combination of high levels of narcissism and Machiavellianism. Individuals with toxic personalities often exhibit excessive self-importance, entitlement, and a lack of empathy (narcissism), as well as manipulative behavior, a focus on personal gain, and a willingness to exploit others (Machiavellianism).

While the provided data does not directly identify specific variables that shape toxic personalities, the analysis suggests that certain personality traits and behaviours may contribute to their development. Further research is needed to explore the underlying factors that influence the formation of toxic personalities.

The potential repercussions of unmanaged toxic personalities in the context of OUM can be significant. Toxic individuals can create a negative work environment, damage relationships, and hinder organizational performance. This can lead to decreased employee morale, increased turnover, and a decline in overall productivity.

To mitigate the negative impacts of toxic personalities, organizations can implement strategies such as providing training programs to help employees identify and manage toxic behaviors, establishing effective conflict resolution processes, fostering a positive and supportive leadership culture that promotes ethical behavior and teamwork, and implementing clear human resources policies for dealing with toxic behavior, including disciplinary actions if necessary. By proactively addressing toxic personalities, organizations can create a foster a more positive and efficient workplace.

6. Conclusion

The study's descriptive analysis revealed a skewed distribution of toxic personality characteristics, highlighting a small cohort with significantly elevated levels of narcissism and Machiavellianism—traits that seem to substantially influence toxic personalities. A small positive association was identified between narcissism and Machiavellianism, indicating a potential relationship between these characteristics. Gender comparisons revealed no significant disparities in toxic personality characteristics, narcissism, Machiavellianism, or associated variables, suggesting that these qualities may impact individuals uniformly, irrespective of gender.

Organizations are urged to cultivate a good and inclusive culture that actively deters harmful behaviours. Training programs that cultivate emotional intelligence, empathy, and conflict resolution competencies may mitigate the adverse effects of toxic personalities, therefore preparing staff with vital abilities for conflict management and resolution. Well-defined human resources policies are essential; by establishing procedures for addressing toxic behaviour and enforcing disciplinary measures as necessary, organizations may mitigate the potential for toxic individuals to disrupt the workplace.

Given the study's restricted sample size and dependence on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, generalization of these findings should be approached with caution. Subsequent research may expand upon this study via longitudinal investigations to monitor the evolution of harmful personality traits over time and evaluate diverse interventions, including coaching, to mitigate these tendencies. Cross-cultural comparisons may further investigate how cultural variables affect the prevalence and impact of harmful personality characteristics across various contexts. By comprehending the factors that contribute to toxic personality traits and executing targeted tactics, organizations such as OUM Kelana Jaya may cultivate a healthier, more productive work environment, so enhancing both employee well-being and organizational efficacy.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were informed about the research purpose, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of their responses as suggested by Manti and Licari (2018).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors disclose no conflicts of interest and certify that there are no potential conflicts regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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