



Detect **toxic behaviors** before they degenerate

The challenge

Psychosocial disorders often emerge insidiously; everyday annoyances, recurrent tension and information retention prevent people from doing their job over time. These recurrent hostilities—intentional or not—eventually sap employee self-confidence and ability to act and interact with one another productively. At a certain point, the situation becomes unbearable and people become depressed, aggressive, withdrawn or simply stop coming to work. However, managers can prevent these disorders by detecting and defusing toxic behaviors before they degenerate.

Examples of toxic behaviors

Managers can be alerted to toxic behavior by a number of indicators concerning interpersonal dynamics and individual employee reactions. They can then use suitable management drivers to rebalance these relationships within the group.

Points to watch

What to do

DETERIORATING WORKING CONDITIONS

e.g.: A person lacks the resources or information needed to carry out his or her duties. His or her work is systematically challenged and tasks are regularly allocated in a way that is unfavorable to him or her or does not match his or her skills.

- ▶ The employee struggles constantly and can't do his or her job properly. His or her self-confidence and reputation suffer as a result.

- **Regularly review the roles and responsibilities of employees** as well as information channels to eliminate grey areas that may encourage toxic behaviors.
- **Take the time to listen.** People's feelings reveal a lot about latent conflicts and the little annoyances that may become dangerous when they accumulate.

WITHDRAWAL AND REFUSAL TO COMMUNICATE

e.g.: A person is systematically interrupted at meetings, and his or her suggestions are ignored. He or she is seated away from the rest of the group and communicates only in writing. Silence falls when he or she arrives at the coffee machine.

- ▶ The employee feels demeaned and rejected by the group. The longer this situation persists, the less he or she can contribute to the group. This in turn confirms the perception that the person is maladjusted and reinforces rejection by the group.

- **Give people equal time to speak at meetings.** Isolation often begins in such key moments in the life of a group.
- **Talk with isolated individuals about their contribution to the group.** Although employees' interpersonal skills cannot be the responsibility of the manager, the latter can help them clarify their role within the team and be more assertive.

VIOLATION OF DIGNITY

e.g. A person is the butt of rumors and gibes; others criticize his or her private life or personal traits such as physical appearance, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. He or she is mimicked or caricatured.

- ▶ This type of harassment often takes place intermittently and is disguised as joking. But even when no malice is intended, these sort of comments can be devastating because they violate the individual's personal integrity.

- **Refuse to accept harassment in the team.** Personal antagonism must not affect collaboration. The limits must be clearly defined.
- **Bring the discussion back to the professional level.** This is often sufficient to get people to look past their biases.
- **Encourage dialogue.** Often, inappropriate behaviors are caused by ignorance and the fear of differences.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE

e.g.: A person is verbally or physically aggressed, bullied or otherwise intimidated by unwelcome gestures or allusions, incessant phone calls, etc.. Whether these acts are blatant or apparently harmless, their repetition adds up to harassment.

- ▶ "Silent" forms of violence are particularly insidious. A person trapped in a relationship which undermines his or her self-assurance may ultimately become depressed or even suicidal.

- **Listen to offenders as well.** Violence may be deviant behavior, but is often also a sign of distress on the part of the aggressor. So, offenders must also be given a chance to tell their side of the story.
- **Punish offenders.** Understanding does not mean acceptance. Strongly signaling that a given behavior is unacceptable is critical to discourage repetition.
- **Let others know that the offender has been punished.** Setting an example discourages others from following suit.