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# **Toxic Bosses: When Leaders' Words and Actions Diverge**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined “toxic bosses” as a form of destructive leadership, characterized by recurring gaps between their stated values and their enacted behaviors, and how these word-action divergences generate downstream workplace “fallout.” Using qualitative data from a convenience sample of 120 managers, we conducted thematic analysis of reported leadership episodes in mixed work environments. The analysis documents repeated instances in which toxic bosses’ conduct conflicted with espoused standards, formal commitments, or communicated expectations, patterns consistent with widely recognized toxic boss behaviors that harm employees and organizations. The findings identify prevalent categories of word–action divergence and show how descriptive attributions undermine organizational health by eroding leader credibility, trust, and the perceived legitimacy of leadership messages, aligning with broader evidence that toxic bosses’ behaviors are associated with diminished morale, well-being, and employee retention.

**Keywords:** Leaders; Toxic; Words; Actions; Diverge