

The Leadership Recovery Framework: Rebuilding Trust and Psychological Safety Following Toxic Leadership

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ABSTRACT:- Toxic leadership has emerged as one of the most destructive forces affecting modern organizations. Research has consistently demonstrated that toxic leadership contributes to employee disengagement, psychological distress, and workplace silence, diminished organizational commitment, increased turnover intentions, and reduced innovation. While scholars have extensively examined the causes and consequences of toxic leadership, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding how organizations recover after toxic leadership environments have been identified or removed. This gap in the literature creates a significant challenge for organizational leaders seeking to restore trust, rebuild culture, and reestablish organizational effectiveness.

This conceptual article introduces the Leadership Recovery Framework (LRF), a multidimensional model that explains how organizations recover from toxic leadership and transition toward psychologically safe, innovative, and high-performing cultures. Drawing upon Psychological Safety Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Organizational Learning Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Trust Repair Theory, the framework proposes that organizational recovery occurs through a series of developmental stages including recognition, leadership transition, trust restoration, psychological safety development, employee voice activation, organizational learning, and innovation renewal.

The article synthesizes contemporary research on toxic leadership, trust repair, employee voice, organizational culture, and organizational resilience. Managerial implications and future research directions are discussed. The Leadership Recovery Framework contributes to leadership literature by shifting attention from the consequences of toxic leadership toward the mechanisms through which organizations achieve sustainable recovery and renewal.

Keywords: Toxic Leadership, Leadership Recovery, Psychological Safety, Trust Repair, Employee Voice, Organizational Learning, Organizational Renewal, Transformational Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership remains one of the most influential determinants of organizational success and failure. Although leadership is often associated with inspiration, vision, and organizational effectiveness, growing evidence demonstrates that leadership can also become destructive, self-serving, and toxic. Toxic leadership has emerged as a significant concern in both public and private organizations due to its detrimental effects on employee wellbeing, organizational culture, and organizational performance (Atkins et al., 2025; Semedo et al., 2022).

Recent research has linked toxic leadership to increased employee stress, workplace bullying, reduced organizational commitment, employee silence, lower innovation, and higher turnover intentions (Ahmed et al., 2025; Rasool et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Toxic leaders frequently create environments characterized by fear, intimidation, favoritism, manipulation, and excessive control. Such environments often undermine trust, suppress employee voice, and reduce the organization's ability to adapt to changing market conditions.

The financial implications of toxic leadership are substantial. Gallup estimates that disengaged employees cost organizations billions of dollars annually through reduced productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. Similarly, research indicates that organizations with low-trust cultures experience lower levels of collaboration, innovation, and employee engagement compared to organizations characterized by trust and psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Consequently, toxic leadership represents not merely an interpersonal challenge but a strategic organizational threat.

While the consequences of toxic leadership have been extensively documented, significantly less research has examined what happens after toxic leadership has been identified, removed, or replaced. Existing literature provides substantial insight into the causes and effects of toxic leadership; however, comparatively little guidance exists regarding organizational recovery. Questions remain concerning how organizations rebuild

trust after toxic leadership, how psychological safety is restored, how employee voice reemerges, and how organizations recover their capacity for learning and innovation.

The absence of recovery-focused leadership research represents an important gap in organizational scholarship. Organizations frequently assume that removing a toxic leader automatically resolves organizational dysfunction. However, research on organizational trauma suggests that the effects of toxic leadership often persist long after the leader has departed. Employees may continue to exhibit fear-based behaviors, reluctance to share ideas, reduced trust in management, and skepticism toward organizational initiatives (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, 1999).

The challenge facing organizations therefore extends beyond leadership replacement. Sustainable recovery requires rebuilding organizational relationships, restoring employee confidence, repairing damaged trust, and creating conditions that support psychological safety and organizational learning. Without intentional recovery efforts, organizations may remain trapped in cycles of fear, disengagement, and underperformance despite changes in leadership.

This challenge is increasingly relevant in contemporary organizational environments characterized by rapid technological change, workforce diversity, globalization, and heightened competition. Organizations seeking innovation and adaptability depend upon employees who are willing to share ideas, challenge assumptions, identify risks, and participate in organizational improvement efforts. Such behaviors are unlikely to emerge in environments where trust has been compromised by prior leadership experiences.

Building upon the Leadership Continuum Model introduced by King and Gibson (2026), which conceptualized movement from toxic leadership toward organizational excellence through psychological safety, the present article extends the discussion by examining the recovery process itself. Whereas the Leadership Continuum Model focused primarily on the relationship between leadership behaviors and innovation outcomes, the Leadership Recovery Framework focuses specifically on the organizational mechanisms required to restore trust and rebuild culture following toxic leadership environments.

The purpose of this article is to introduce the Leadership Recovery Framework (LRF), a conceptual model explaining how organizations transition from toxic leadership environments toward organizational renewal. The framework proposes that recovery occurs through a series of interconnected stages involving leadership transition, trust restoration, psychological safety development, employee voice activation, organizational learning, and innovation recovery.

Specifically, this article seeks to answer three research questions:

1. How do organizations recover following periods of toxic leadership?
2. What role does psychological safety play in organizational recovery?
3. What organizational mechanisms facilitate the restoration of trust, employee voice, and innovation?

By addressing these questions, the Leadership Recovery Framework contributes to leadership and organizational behavior literature by shifting scholarly attention from leadership failure toward leadership recovery and organizational renewal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Toxic Leadership and Organizational Damage

The growing body of toxic leadership literature demonstrates that the effects of destructive leadership extend far beyond individual employee dissatisfaction. Toxic leadership has been associated with organizational dysfunction, reduced productivity, diminished innovation, employee disengagement, increased absenteeism, and elevated turnover intentions (Ahmed et al., 2025; Rasool et al., 2021). Toxic leaders frequently employ behaviors characterized by intimidation, manipulation, authoritarianism, favoritism, self-promotion, and abusive supervision, creating workplace environments that prioritize control over collaboration and fear over trust (Semedo et al., 2022).

Unlike ineffective leadership, toxic leadership actively undermines organizational effectiveness. Toxic leaders often achieve short-term results through coercion and excessive pressure while simultaneously damaging the long-term social and psychological foundations necessary for sustainable organizational success. As a result, organizations may initially perceive toxic leaders as high performers while failing to recognize the cumulative organizational damage occurring beneath the surface.

Research conducted by Lee et al. (2022) found that abusive supervision significantly contributes to employee silence and relational conflict. Similarly, Sharma and Kulshreshtha (2023) reported that toxic leaders often become the focus of employee resentment and disengagement, reducing organizational cohesion and commitment. Employees operating in toxic environments frequently expend considerable emotional energy managing fear, uncertainty, and interpersonal conflict rather than focusing on innovation, collaboration, and performance.

The effects of toxic leadership often become embedded within organizational culture. Employees adapt to toxic environments by altering communication patterns, avoiding risk-taking, withholding information, and

limiting participation in organizational initiatives. Over time, these adaptive behaviors become normalized, creating cultures characterized by silence, distrust, and low engagement. Consequently, removing a toxic leader does not automatically eliminate the behavioral and cultural patterns that emerged during the toxic leadership period.

2.2 Trust Erosion Following Toxic Leadership

Trust represents one of the most important organizational resources and one of the most significant casualties of toxic leadership. Organizational trust refers to the willingness of employees to be vulnerable to leadership decisions based on positive expectations regarding leaders' intentions and behaviors (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Trust functions as the foundation for cooperation, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and organizational effectiveness. When employees trust leadership, they are more likely to support organizational initiatives, engage in discretionary effort, and contribute innovative ideas. Conversely, when trust is compromised, employees often become skeptical, defensive, and disengaged.

Toxic leadership accelerates trust erosion through behaviors that violate employee expectations of fairness, integrity, competence, and concern. Favoritism, cronyism, inconsistent decision-making, retaliation, and abusive supervision communicate to employees that leadership cannot be relied upon to act in the organization's or employees' best interests (Ali et al., 2022).

Research suggests that trust is significantly easier to destroy than to rebuild. Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer (2009) argued that trust repair requires more than simply removing the source of the violation. Instead, organizations must actively address the conditions that contributed to trust deterioration. Employees often continue to interpret organizational actions through the lens of previous negative experiences, resulting in lingering skepticism even after leadership changes occur.

2.3 Psychological Safety and Organizational Recovery

Psychological safety represents a critical factor in organizational recovery. Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief that individuals can take interpersonal risks without fear of punishment, embarrassment, or negative consequences. Psychological safety influences employees' willingness to ask questions, admit mistakes, seek feedback, challenge assumptions, and propose innovative ideas.

Edmondson and Lei (2014) argued that psychological safety serves as a prerequisite for organizational learning and adaptation. Employees who feel psychologically safe are more likely to engage in constructive conflict, share knowledge, and participate in continuous improvement efforts. Frazier et al. (2017) further demonstrated that psychological safety positively influences employee engagement, creativity, commitment, and performance.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that psychological safety serves as the bridge between trust restoration and employee reengagement. Once employees begin to perceive leadership as trustworthy and supportive, psychological safety increases, enabling greater participation and organizational involvement.

2.4 Employee Voice and Cultural Renewal

Employee voice refers to the discretionary communication of ideas, concerns, suggestions, and opinions intended to improve organizational functioning (Detert & Burris, 2007). Voice behaviors are essential for innovation, problem-solving, risk identification, and organizational learning.

Toxic leadership environments frequently suppress employee voice. Employees who fear retaliation or believe their input is unwelcome often choose silence over participation. Over time, silence becomes institutionalized, reducing organizational adaptability and innovation capacity.

Research consistently demonstrates that voice behaviors are strongly influenced by leadership practices. Wu and Li (2023) found that inclusive leadership positively affects employee innovative behavior through reductions in relational silence. Similarly, Detert and Burris (2007) concluded that leadership openness significantly influences employees' willingness to speak up regarding organizational issues.

Recovery from toxic leadership requires more than encouraging communication. Organizations must actively rebuild employee confidence in the value and safety of speaking up. Employees who have previously experienced negative consequences for expressing concerns may require substantial evidence that organizational conditions have changed.

Voice activation therefore represents a critical stage in organizational recovery. As employees begin to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and participate in organizational discussions, organizations regain access to valuable knowledge and expertise that may have been suppressed during periods of toxic leadership.

2.5 Organizational Resilience and Recovery

Organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to adapt, recover, and thrive following adversity, disruption, or crisis (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). While resilience has traditionally

been examined in the context of economic crises, natural disasters, and technological disruptions, the concept is equally relevant to toxic leadership recovery.

Organizations recovering from toxic leadership often experience challenges similar to those associated with other forms of organizational trauma. Employees may exhibit reduced morale, diminished trust, lower engagement, and resistance to change. These challenges require leadership approaches focused on rebuilding organizational capacity rather than merely restoring previous conditions.

Research suggests that resilient organizations do not simply return to their previous state following disruption. Instead, they often emerge stronger because recovery efforts create opportunities for learning, adaptation, and transformation. This perspective aligns closely with the Leadership Recovery Framework, which views recovery as a developmental process rather than a return to the status quo.

2.6 Leadership Transition and Trust Repair

Leadership transitions represent critical moments in organizational recovery. New leaders inherit not only organizational responsibilities but also the consequences of previous leadership behaviors. Employees often evaluate incoming leaders based on prior experiences, creating significant challenges for trust development.

Trust repair literature suggests that effective recovery requires acknowledgment, transparency, accountability, and consistent behavior over time (Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006). Employees must observe evidence that organizational conditions have genuinely changed before trust can be restored.

Transformational leadership plays an important role in this process. Through inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, transformational leaders create conditions that support trust rebuilding and cultural renewal (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE LEADERSHIP RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

The Leadership Recovery Framework (LRF) is grounded in six complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively explain how organizations recover from toxic leadership environments and rebuild the conditions necessary for long-term success. While existing leadership research has extensively examined the causes and consequences of toxic leadership, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding the mechanisms through which organizations repair damaged relationships, restore trust, and renew innovation capacity following leadership failures.

The Leadership Recovery Framework addresses this gap by integrating Trust Repair Theory, Psychological Safety Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Resilience Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive explanation of how organizations move from leadership-induced dysfunction toward organizational renewal. The framework assumes that recovery is neither immediate nor automatic. Rather, recovery occurs through a developmental process involving trust restoration, psychological safety development, employee reengagement, organizational learning, and innovation renewal. Each theoretical perspective contributes unique insights into this transformation process.

3.1 Trust Repair Theory

Trust Repair Theory serves as a foundational component of the Leadership Recovery Framework because trust is often the first organizational casualty of toxic leadership and the first requirement for sustainable recovery.

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) defined trust as the willingness of individuals to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding another party's intentions and behaviors. In organizational settings, trust influences employee cooperation, commitment, communication, and willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors that support organizational effectiveness.

Toxic leadership frequently undermines trust through behaviors such as favoritism, deception, inconsistency, manipulation, retaliation, and abuse of authority. Employees who experience these behaviors often develop skepticism toward leadership and organizational systems. As trust deteriorates, employees become less willing to share ideas, participate in organizational initiatives, or invest discretionary effort in organizational success.

Trust Repair Theory suggests that restoring trust requires more than leadership replacement. Kim et al. (2006) argued that trust repair involves acknowledgment of past failures, accountability, transparency, consistent behavior, and demonstrated commitment to change. Employees must observe evidence that organizational conditions have genuinely improved before trust can be reestablished.

Within the Leadership Recovery Framework, trust restoration serves as the critical starting point for organizational recovery. Without trust, subsequent efforts to improve communication, encourage innovation, or

increase employee engagement are unlikely to succeed. Trust functions as the social foundation upon which psychological safety, employee voice, and organizational learning are built.

The framework therefore proposes that organizations recovering from toxic leadership must intentionally prioritize trust-building activities before expecting significant improvements in organizational performance or innovation outcomes.

3.2 Psychological Safety Theory

Psychological Safety Theory represents the central explanatory mechanism within the Leadership Recovery Framework. Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief that employees can engage in interpersonal risk-taking without fear of punishment, humiliation, or retaliation.

Psychological safety is particularly relevant during organizational recovery because employees emerging from toxic leadership environments frequently exhibit heightened caution and self-protective behaviors. Even after toxic leaders have departed, employees may continue to avoid speaking up, sharing ideas, reporting concerns, or challenging existing assumptions due to fears rooted in prior experiences.

Edmondson and Lei (2014) argued that psychological safety promotes learning, adaptability, collaboration, and innovation by reducing interpersonal risk perceptions. Employees who perceive their environment as psychologically safe are more willing to participate in organizational decision-making, contribute creative ideas, and engage in continuous improvement efforts.

Frazier et al. (2017) further demonstrated that psychological safety positively influences employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes. These findings suggest that psychological safety functions as a critical bridge between trust restoration and organizational renewal. The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that psychological safety develops gradually as employees observe leadership behaviors that reinforce fairness, respect, transparency, and accountability. As psychological safety increases, employees become more willing to reengage with organizational processes, share information, and participate in organizational change efforts.

3.3 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory provides the leadership perspective underpinning organizational recovery efforts. Originally developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), transformational leadership emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire, motivate, and develop followers while creating a compelling vision for organizational success.

Bass and Avolio (1994) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions collectively support organizational recovery by promoting trust, engagement, learning, and innovation. Transformational leaders play a particularly important role during recovery because employees often require reassurance, guidance, and support following toxic leadership experiences. Through individualized consideration, leaders demonstrate concern for employee wellbeing. Through inspirational motivation, they create optimism regarding the organization's future. Through intellectual stimulation, they encourage employees to challenge assumptions and contribute new ideas.

Within the Leadership Recovery Framework, transformational leadership functions as the primary leadership approach capable of facilitating recovery. Transformational leaders help organizations move beyond survival and toward renewal by creating conditions that support trust rebuilding, psychological safety, and organizational learning.

3.4 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory provides insight into how employees respond to leadership behaviors during organizational recovery. Blau (1964) argued that workplace relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges in which individuals respond to treatment received from others.

Employees evaluate leadership actions and organizational practices to determine whether the organization is worthy of trust and commitment. Positive experiences generate reciprocal behaviors such as engagement, cooperation, and organizational citizenship. Negative experiences produce withdrawal, silence, resistance, and reduced commitment.

Toxic leadership disrupts these reciprocal relationships by creating perceptions of unfairness, exploitation, and organizational indifference. Employees often respond by reducing discretionary effort and limiting participation in organizational activities.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that recovery occurs when organizations gradually restore positive social exchange relationships. As employees experience supportive leadership, transparent communication, and fair treatment, they become increasingly willing to reciprocate through trust, engagement, collaboration, and innovation.

3.5 Organizational Resilience Theory

Organizational Resilience Theory provides a broader perspective on recovery by explaining how organizations adapt and thrive following disruption. Lengnick-Hall, Beck, and Lengnick-Hall (2011) defined organizational resilience as an organization's capacity to absorb adversity, adapt to changing conditions, and emerge stronger following disruption.

Although resilience research has traditionally focused on external crises such as economic downturns and natural disasters, the theory is equally applicable to leadership-related disruptions. Toxic leadership often produces organizational trauma that requires significant adaptation and recovery.

Resilient organizations demonstrate several characteristics that facilitate recovery, including effective communication, adaptive leadership, collaborative relationships, and learning-oriented cultures. These characteristics align closely with the factors identified within the Leadership Recovery Framework.

Rather than viewing recovery as a return to previous conditions, Organizational Resilience Theory suggests that adversity can create opportunities for growth and transformation. Organizations recovering from toxic leadership may emerge stronger if recovery efforts successfully address underlying cultural and structural weaknesses.

3.6 Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational Learning Theory provides the final theoretical foundation supporting the Leadership Recovery Framework. Scholars such as Argyris and Schön (1978) and Senge (1990) argued that organizations achieve sustainable success through continuous learning, adaptation, and knowledge creation.

Learning organizations encourage experimentation, reflection, feedback, and knowledge sharing. Innovation emerges when employees feel comfortable challenging assumptions, identifying opportunities, and proposing alternative approaches.

Toxic leadership environments frequently suppress organizational learning because fear and silence restrict information sharing. Employees become reluctant to report mistakes, challenge ineffective practices, or contribute innovative ideas. Consequently, organizational adaptability declines.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that organizational learning represents one of the final stages of recovery. Once trust has been restored, psychological safety established, and employee voice reactivated, organizations regain their ability to learn collectively and innovate effectively.

3.7 Integrating the Theories: The Leadership Recovery Framework

Collectively, these six theoretical perspectives explain how organizations recover from toxic leadership environments. Trust Repair Theory explains how damaged organizational relationships are restored. Psychological Safety Theory explains how employees regain confidence to participate and contribute. Transformational Leadership Theory identifies the leadership behaviors necessary to support recovery. Social Exchange Theory explains employee responses to organizational actions. Organizational Resilience Theory explains how organizations adapt following adversity. Organizational Learning Theory explains how recovery ultimately contributes to innovation and organizational excellence.

Together, these theories support the central proposition of the Leadership Recovery Framework: organizational recovery is a developmental process that begins with trust restoration and culminates in innovation renewal. Recovery occurs not simply because toxic leaders are removed, but because organizations intentionally rebuild the psychological, social, and cultural conditions necessary for employee engagement, organizational learning, and sustainable performance.

IV. THE LEADERSHIP RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

Building upon the theoretical foundations presented in the previous section, the Leadership Recovery Framework (LRF) proposes that organizational recovery following toxic leadership occurs through a sequential and developmental process rather than through a single intervention or leadership replacement. The framework suggests that recovery requires the restoration of trust, the development of psychological safety, the reactivation of employee voice, and the rebuilding of organizational learning capabilities before innovation and organizational excellence can be achieved.

A central assumption of the Leadership Recovery Framework is that the effects of toxic leadership persist long after the departure of a toxic leader. Employees who have experienced fear, retaliation, favoritism, manipulation, or abusive supervision frequently carry those experiences into subsequent leadership environments. As a result, organizations often experience what may be described as a "toxic leadership legacy" a collection of behaviors, perceptions, and cultural norms that continue to influence organizational functioning despite leadership changes.

The Leadership Recovery Framework addresses this challenge by outlining eight distinct stages through which organizations progress as they move from leadership dysfunction toward organizational renewal.



Figure 1. Leadership Recovery Framework

The framework proposes that each stage creates the conditions necessary for progression to the next stage. While some overlap may occur, organizations that attempt to bypass earlier stages often experience incomplete recovery and reduced long-term effectiveness.

4.1 Phase One: Recognition and Assessment

Organizational recovery begins with recognition. Before recovery can occur, organizations must acknowledge the existence and consequences of toxic leadership.

Many organizations struggle during this phase because toxic leadership is often tolerated, rationalized, or misunderstood. High-performing toxic leaders may be perceived as effective because they achieve short-term results despite creating long-term organizational damage. Consequently, organizations may fail to recognize the severity of leadership-related dysfunction until employee turnover, engagement declines, or organizational performance begins to deteriorate.

Recognition requires organizations to assess leadership effectiveness honestly and evaluate the broader cultural consequences of toxic behaviors. Employee climate surveys, exit interviews, organizational culture assessments, engagement surveys, and 360-degree feedback processes can provide valuable insight into the extent of organizational damage.

This phase also requires leadership accountability. Organizations must acknowledge employee experiences and demonstrate a commitment to addressing the underlying issues that contributed to the toxic environment.

4.2 Phase Two: Leadership Transition

Once toxic leadership has been identified, organizations enter the leadership transition phase.

Leadership transition involves more than replacing an individual leader. New leaders inherit organizational relationships, cultural norms, employee perceptions, and historical experiences created by previous leadership practices. Consequently, incoming leaders often face significant challenges establishing credibility and trust.

Employees frequently evaluate new leaders through the lens of prior experiences. Promises of change may be met with skepticism, particularly when previous leaders failed to deliver on similar commitments.

Successful transitions therefore require visible demonstrations of leadership authenticity, transparency, consistency, and accountability. New leaders must communicate openly about organizational priorities while demonstrating respect for employee concerns and experiences.

Research on transformational leadership suggests that leaders who establish a compelling vision, demonstrate empathy, and encourage participation are more likely to facilitate successful transitions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The primary objective of this phase is to establish leadership legitimacy and create initial conditions for trust restoration.

4.3 Phase Three: Trust Restoration

Trust restoration represents the foundation of organizational recovery. Trust is frequently the most significant casualty of toxic leadership because employees exposed to manipulation, favoritism, retaliation, or deception often become skeptical of leadership intentions. As Mayer et al. (1995) suggested, trust involves a willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding another party's actions.

The restoration of trust requires consistent leadership behavior over time. Employees must observe evidence that organizational conditions have genuinely changed. This evidence may include increased transparency, improved communication, fair decision-making processes, ethical leadership practices, and accountability mechanisms.

Trust restoration also requires addressing unresolved organizational issues. Employees who perceive that previous injustices remain unaddressed may remain reluctant to reengage fully with organizational initiatives.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that trust serves as the gateway to psychological safety. Without trust, employees are unlikely to perceive organizational environments as safe for participation and contribution.

4.4 Phase Four: Psychological Safety Development

Once trust begins to reemerge, organizations can focus on developing psychological safety. Psychological safety refers to employees' shared belief that they can express concerns, share ideas, admit mistakes, and challenge assumptions without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Employees recovering from toxic leadership often remain cautious even after trust improves. Previous experiences may create lingering concerns regarding retaliation, criticism, or exclusion. Consequently, psychological safety requires deliberate cultivation.

Leaders play a critical role in this process by encouraging dialogue, demonstrating openness to feedback, admitting mistakes, and responding constructively to employee concerns. Organizations may also strengthen psychological safety through collaborative decision-making processes, employee listening sessions, mentoring programs, and transparent communication practices.

As psychological safety increases, employees become increasingly willing to participate in organizational activities and contribute their expertise.

The framework identifies psychological safety as the pivotal turning point in organizational recovery because it enables the behavioral changes necessary for long-term renewal.

4.5 Phase Five: Employee Voice Activation

Employee voice activation represents the first major behavioral indicator that organizational recovery is occurring.

Employee voice refers to the discretionary communication of ideas, concerns, recommendations, and observations intended to improve organizational functioning (Detert & Burris, 2007).

In toxic environments, employees often adopt silence as a self-protective strategy. Recovery therefore requires organizations to demonstrate that speaking up is both safe and valuable.

Organizations may activate employee voice through structured feedback systems, innovation councils, town hall meetings, suggestion programs, and collaborative problem-solving initiatives. However, employee voice increases only when employees believe leadership will respond appropriately to their contributions.

The reemergence of employee voice signals increasing trust, growing psychological safety, and renewed employee engagement.

Most importantly, employee voice restores access to organizational knowledge that may have been suppressed during periods of toxic leadership.

4.6 Phase Six: Organizational Learning

As employee voice increases, organizations enter the organizational learning phase.

Organizational learning involves the acquisition, sharing, interpretation, and application of knowledge to improve organizational effectiveness (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990).

Organizations recovering from toxic leadership often discover that valuable knowledge was withheld, ignored, or underutilized during previous leadership regimes. Employee voice creates opportunities for organizations to regain access to this knowledge and apply it toward improvement efforts.

Learning organizations encourage experimentation, reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement. Employees become active participants in organizational development rather than passive recipients of leadership directives.

This phase is particularly important because learning provides the foundation for innovation recovery and long-term adaptability.

4.7 Phase Seven: Innovation Recovery

Innovation recovery occurs when organizations regain their capacity to generate, evaluate, and implement new ideas.

Innovation frequently suffers under toxic leadership because fear suppresses creativity and experimentation. Employees become reluctant to propose novel ideas or challenge established practices due to concerns regarding criticism or failure.

As trust, psychological safety, employee voice, and organizational learning improve, innovation capacity gradually returns. Employees become more willing to experiment, collaborate, and engage in creative problem-solving.

Innovation recovery may be observed through increased process improvements, product innovations, service enhancements, operational efficiencies, and organizational adaptability.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that innovation recovery serves as a key indicator that organizational culture has fundamentally shifted from survival-oriented behavior toward growth-oriented behavior.

4.8 Phase Eight: Organizational Excellence

The final stage of recovery involves the achievement of organizational excellence.

Organizational excellence does not imply perfection. Rather, it reflects an organization's ability to sustain trust, psychological safety, learning, innovation, and performance over time.

Organizations reaching this stage demonstrate high levels of employee engagement, collaboration, adaptability, and resilience. Leadership practices support continuous learning and improvement while organizational systems reinforce trust and employee participation.

Importantly, organizational excellence is not viewed as a final destination but as an ongoing process of renewal and adaptation.

The Leadership Recovery Framework suggests that organizations capable of sustaining these conditions are better positioned to achieve long-term competitive advantage and organizational effectiveness.

V. DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The purpose of this article was to address a significant gap in leadership and organizational behavior literature by developing a conceptual framework that explains how organizations recover following toxic leadership environments. While previous scholarship has extensively documented the causes and consequences of toxic leadership, comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding the mechanisms through which organizations restore trust, rebuild psychological safety, reactivate employee engagement, and recover their capacity for innovation.

The Leadership Recovery Framework (LRF) contributes to the literature by shifting the scholarly conversation from leadership failure toward organizational recovery and renewal. Rather than focusing exclusively on the destructive consequences of toxic leadership, the framework provides a structured explanation of how organizations can intentionally rebuild the social, psychological, and cultural foundations necessary for sustainable organizational success.

The framework advances leadership scholarship in four significant ways.

5.1 Extending Toxic Leadership Research Beyond Problem Identification

The first contribution of the Leadership Recovery Framework involves extending toxic leadership research beyond the identification of leadership failures.

The majority of toxic leadership studies focus on the antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of destructive leadership behaviors (Semedo et al., 2022; Sharma & Kulshreshtha, 2023). Scholars have examined the effects of toxic leadership on employee wellbeing, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, job satisfaction, workplace bullying, and innovation outcomes. Collectively, these studies have provided valuable insight into how toxic leadership damages organizations.

However, the existing literature offers comparatively limited guidance regarding organizational recovery. Many studies implicitly assume that removing a toxic leader resolves organizational dysfunction. Yet organizational experience frequently suggests otherwise. Employees often continue exhibiting fear-based behaviors, communication avoidance, and distrust long after leadership transitions occur.

The Leadership Recovery Framework challenges this assumption by proposing that recovery is a distinct organizational process requiring intentional intervention. The framework suggests that organizations do not

automatically recover when toxic leaders depart. Instead, they must actively rebuild trust, psychological safety, employee voice, and organizational learning capabilities before sustainable renewal can occur.

This perspective expands toxic leadership scholarship by introducing recovery as an important area of inquiry deserving independent theoretical and empirical investigation.

5.2 Introducing Recovery as a Developmental Organizational Process

The second contribution involves conceptualizing recovery as a developmental process rather than a discrete organizational event.

Existing organizational research often treats leadership transitions as isolated occurrences. New leaders assume positions, organizational changes are implemented, and recovery is expected to follow naturally. The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes a different perspective.

Drawing upon Organizational Resilience Theory and Organizational Learning Theory, the framework suggests that recovery occurs through a series of interconnected developmental stages. Each stage creates conditions necessary for subsequent stages of recovery.

The proposed stages include:

1. Recognition and Assessment
2. Leadership Transition
3. Trust Restoration
4. Psychological Safety Development
5. Employee Voice Activation
6. Organizational Learning
7. Innovation Recovery
8. Organizational Excellence

This sequential approach contributes to theory by identifying specific organizational mechanisms that facilitate recovery. Rather than viewing recovery as an outcome, the framework positions recovery as a dynamic process characterized by evolving relationships, behaviors, and cultural conditions.

The developmental perspective also helps explain why some organizations struggle to recover despite leadership changes. Organizations that attempt to accelerate recovery without first restoring trust or psychological safety may experience limited success because critical developmental stages have been neglected.

5.3 Positioning Trust and Psychological Safety as Sequential Recovery Mechanisms

A third theoretical contribution involves clarifying the relationship between trust and psychological safety within organizational recovery.

Although both trust and psychological safety have received significant scholarly attention, relatively few studies have examined how these constructs interact during organizational recovery following toxic leadership.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that trust and psychological safety function as sequential mechanisms rather than interchangeable concepts. Specifically, trust restoration precedes psychological safety development.

Employees recovering from toxic leadership must first believe that leadership intentions, decisions, and behaviors are trustworthy before they are willing to engage in interpersonal risk-taking. As trust increases, employees become more willing to express concerns, share ideas, admit mistakes, and challenge assumptions. These behaviors represent the emergence of psychological safety.

This distinction contributes to the literature by explaining why some organizational interventions fail to improve employee participation. Organizations that encourage openness and communication without first rebuilding trust may encounter employee skepticism and resistance.

The framework therefore positions trust restoration as the social foundation of recovery and psychological safety as the behavioral mechanism that enables employee reengagement and organizational learning.

5.4 Integrating Employee Voice, Learning, and Innovation into a Recovery Framework

A fourth contribution involves integrating employee voice, organizational learning, and innovation into a unified recovery process.

Research on employee voice, learning organizations, and innovation frequently occurs within separate scholarly streams. Employee voice scholars focus on communication behaviors. Organizational learning researchers emphasize knowledge acquisition and adaptation. Innovation scholars examine creativity and performance outcomes.

The Leadership Recovery Framework integrates these perspectives by proposing a sequential relationship among the constructs.

Specifically, the framework suggests that:

Trust Restoration
Psychological Safety
Employee Voice
Organizational Learning
Innovation Recovery
Organizational Excellence

This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of how organizations regain their capacity for innovation following toxic leadership.

Rather than viewing innovation as a direct outcome of leadership behavior, the framework proposes that innovation emerges through a series of intermediate organizational processes. Employees must first feel safe speaking up before knowledge sharing can occur. Knowledge sharing facilitates learning, and learning creates the conditions necessary for innovation.

Consequently, innovation recovery becomes an indicator of successful organizational recovery rather than an isolated organizational objective.

5.5 Relationship to the Leadership Continuum Model

The Leadership Recovery Framework also extends and complements the Leadership Continuum Model developed by King and Gibson (2026).

The Leadership Continuum Model explained how organizations move from toxic leadership environments toward innovation through transformational leadership and psychological safety. The model focused primarily on leadership behaviors and innovation outcomes.

The Leadership Recovery Framework addresses a different but related question: What happens after toxic leadership has been identified and removed?

Together, the two frameworks create a broader leadership transformation perspective.

The Leadership Continuum Model explains the directional movement from toxic leadership toward organizational excellence. The Leadership Recovery Framework explains the organizational processes required to achieve that movement.

Viewed collectively, the models suggest that organizational transformation occurs through two interconnected dimensions:

Dimension One: Leadership Transformation

(Toxic Leadership to Transformational Leadership)

Dimension Two: Organizational Recovery

(Trust Restoration - Psychological Safety - Employee Voice Learning - Innovation)

The integration of these models provides a more comprehensive explanation of how organizations transition from dysfunction toward sustainable excellence.

5.6 Toward a Recovery-Based Leadership Paradigm

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Leadership Recovery Framework is its potential to establish recovery as a distinct area of leadership scholarship.

Historically, leadership research has focused heavily on leadership effectiveness, leadership styles, leader-follower relationships, and organizational outcomes. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how organizations heal from leadership failures.

As organizations increasingly confront leadership scandals, toxic workplace cultures, employee disengagement, and workforce instability, recovery-oriented leadership research becomes increasingly important.

The Leadership Recovery Framework provides an initial foundation for this emerging perspective by proposing that organizational recovery involves identifiable stages, mechanisms, and outcomes. Future empirical research can test, refine, and expand the framework across industries, organizational contexts, and leadership environments.

Ultimately, the framework argues that leadership effectiveness should be evaluated not only by a leader's ability to achieve results but also by an organization's capacity to recover, learn, and grow following periods of leadership dysfunction. Organizations that successfully rebuild trust, restore psychological safety, and reactivate employee voice are better positioned to achieve long-term resilience, innovation, and organizational excellence.

In this sense, recovery becomes more than a response to failure; it becomes a strategic capability that distinguishes resilient organizations from those that remain trapped by the legacy of toxic leadership.

VI. DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The Leadership Recovery Framework offers important practical implications for organizational leaders, executive teams, human resource professionals, and policymakers responsible for organizational performance and workforce development. While toxic leadership has traditionally been viewed as an individual leadership problem, the framework suggests that toxic leadership should be understood as an organizational challenge requiring systematic and strategic intervention. Recovery does not occur automatically following leadership transitions. Instead, organizations must intentionally rebuild trust, restore psychological safety, reactivate employee voice, and strengthen organizational learning capabilities.

The framework provides leaders with a roadmap for navigating these recovery processes while minimizing the long-term consequences of leadership dysfunction.

5.7 Recognizing Recovery as a Strategic Organizational Priority

One of the most important implications of this research is the recognition that organizational recovery should be treated as a strategic priority rather than an informal cultural adjustment.

Organizations frequently invest significant resources in technology, infrastructure, process redesign, and workforce development initiatives while underestimating the long-term effects of toxic leadership. Research suggests that unresolved organizational distrust and employee disengagement can undermine the effectiveness of even the most sophisticated organizational improvement efforts (Rasool et al., 2021; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Leaders should therefore view recovery as an organizational investment. Recovery efforts should be incorporated into strategic planning, leadership development, employee engagement initiatives, and organizational effectiveness assessments.

Executive teams should recognize that trust, psychological safety, and employee voice represent organizational assets that directly influence innovation, adaptability, and performance. Organizations that intentionally invest in these assets are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage than organizations that focus exclusively on operational efficiency.

5.8 Conducting Organizational Recovery Assessments

A second implication involves the implementation of comprehensive recovery assessments following toxic leadership environments.

Organizations often underestimate the extent of damage caused by toxic leadership because many consequences remain hidden. Employees may continue performing assigned responsibilities while simultaneously experiencing diminished trust, reduced engagement, and reluctance to participate in organizational improvement efforts.

Leaders should therefore conduct systematic assessments to evaluate organizational recovery needs. These assessments may include:

- Employee engagement surveys
- Psychological safety assessments
- Organizational culture audits
- Exit interview analyses
- Climate surveys
- Focus groups
- 360-degree leadership evaluations

The purpose of these assessments is not simply to identify organizational weaknesses but to establish a baseline for recovery efforts. Understanding employee perceptions regarding trust, communication, leadership credibility, and psychological safety enables organizations to develop targeted recovery strategies.

Regular assessments also allow organizations to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of recovery interventions over time.

5.9 Prioritizing Trust Restoration before Organizational Change

A third implication concerns the sequencing of organizational recovery efforts.

Many leaders attempt to implement major organizational changes immediately following leadership transitions. While such initiatives may be well-intentioned, employees recovering from toxic leadership often remain skeptical of organizational promises and leadership intentions.

The Leadership Recovery Framework suggests that trust restoration should precede large-scale organizational change efforts. Employees are unlikely to fully support strategic initiatives if they remain uncertain about leadership credibility and organizational integrity.

Trust restoration requires visible demonstrations of fairness, transparency, accountability, and consistency. Leaders should communicate openly regarding organizational priorities, decision-making processes, and recovery objectives. They should also acknowledge previous challenges and demonstrate a willingness to address employee concerns.

VI. BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

The framework further suggests that psychological safety should be viewed as a strategic organizational capability.

Psychological safety directly influences employee engagement, innovation, learning, collaboration, and adaptability (Frazier et al., 2017). Yet many organizations fail to intentionally cultivate psychologically safe environments.

Leaders can strengthen psychological safety through several practices:

- Encouraging open dialogue
- Soliciting employee feedback
- Admitting mistakes
- Responding constructively to criticism
- Supporting experimentation
- Promoting respectful disagreement
- Recognizing employee contributions

Organizations should also train managers to recognize behaviors that undermine psychological safety. Even well-intentioned leaders may unintentionally discourage participation through dismissive responses, excessive criticism, or inconsistent communication.

Creating psychologically safe environments is particularly important during recovery because employees emerging from toxic leadership experiences often require substantial evidence that organizational conditions have genuinely changed.

6.1 Reestablishing Employee Voice Systems

The framework highlights employee voice as a critical indicator of recovery progress.

Organizations recovering from toxic leadership should implement formal mechanisms that encourage employee participation and communication. Examples include:

- Employee advisory councils
- Innovation committees
- Cross-functional teams
- Town hall meetings
- Continuous improvement programs
- Anonymous suggestion systems
- Employee listening sessions

However, establishing communication channels alone is insufficient. Leaders must demonstrate responsiveness to employee input. Employees are more likely to continue sharing ideas when they observe evidence that their contributions influence organizational decisions.

Organizations should therefore establish feedback loops that communicate how employee recommendations are evaluated and implemented. Such practices reinforce trust, strengthen psychological safety, and increase employee engagement.

6.2 Leadership Development as a Recovery Strategy

Leadership development represents one of the most significant long-term recovery investments organizations can make.

Research consistently demonstrates that leadership behaviors influence employee attitudes, organizational culture, innovation, and performance outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Carmeli et al., 2010). Consequently, organizations seeking recovery should view leadership development as a strategic intervention rather than a routine training activity.

Leadership development programs should emphasize:

- Emotional intelligence
- Transformational leadership
- Ethical leadership
- Psychological safety competencies
- Conflict resolution
- Communication effectiveness

- Trust-building behaviors
- Employee engagement strategies

Organizations should also incorporate leadership accountability mechanisms that reinforce desired behaviors and discourage practices associated with toxic leadership.

6.3 Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The Leadership Recovery Framework has particularly important implications for colleges and universities.

Higher education institutions frequently operate within complex environments characterized by shared governance, faculty autonomy, multiple stakeholder groups, and competing organizational priorities. Leadership dysfunction within such environments can significantly influence faculty morale, staff engagement, student success initiatives, and institutional innovation.

Colleges and universities recovering from toxic leadership may experience:

- Faculty disengagement
- Reduced collaboration
- Governance challenges
- Resistance to change initiatives
- Innovation stagnation
- Increased turnover

Institutional leaders should therefore prioritize trust restoration and psychological safety when implementing organizational changes. Transparent communication, shared decision-making processes, and opportunities for meaningful stakeholder participation can significantly enhance recovery efforts.

Given increasing pressures related to enrollment, workforce development, technology adoption, and student success, psychologically safe and collaborative institutional cultures have become essential strategic assets within higher education.

6.4 Building Organizational Resilience Through Recovery

Perhaps the most significant managerial implication of the Leadership Recovery Framework is the recognition that recovery itself can become a source of organizational strength.

Organizations that successfully rebuild trust, restore psychological safety, and reactivate employee voice often emerge stronger than they were before experiencing leadership dysfunction. Recovery efforts frequently expose organizational weaknesses, communication failures, and cultural vulnerabilities that may have otherwise remained hidden.

By addressing these issues intentionally, organizations create opportunities for learning, adaptation, and growth.

The framework therefore encourages leaders to view recovery not merely as a response to organizational problems but as a strategic opportunity for transformation. Organizations capable of recovering effectively from toxic leadership are likely to develop greater resilience, adaptability, and innovation capacity than organizations that simply attempt to return to previous conditions.

Ultimately, the Leadership Recovery Framework suggests that sustainable organizational success depends not only on avoiding toxic leadership but also on developing the organizational capabilities necessary to recover when leadership failures occur. Leaders who understand and manage recovery processes effectively are better positioned to build organizations characterized by trust, engagement, learning, innovation, and long-term excellence.

VII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The Leadership Recovery Framework represents an initial effort to conceptualize how organizations recover from toxic leadership environments and progress toward organizational renewal. While the framework integrates several established theories and contemporary leadership concepts, substantial opportunities remain for empirical validation, refinement, and extension. Future research should examine the relationships proposed within the framework and explore how recovery processes vary across organizational contexts, industries, and leadership environments.

6.5 Industry-Specific Applications

An important avenue for future research involves examining how organizational recovery varies across industries.

The challenges facing healthcare organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector corporations differ significantly. Consequently, recovery strategies that prove effective in one context may require adaptation in another.

For example, healthcare organizations may experience unique recovery challenges related to patient safety, professional hierarchies, and regulatory requirements. Educational institutions may face recovery challenges associated with shared governance structures, faculty autonomy, and academic freedom. Similarly, public-sector organizations may encounter political and bureaucratic factors that influence recovery processes. Comparative studies examining recovery across industries would contribute valuable insight regarding contextual influences on organizational recovery.

6.6 Recovery in Higher Education

The higher education sector presents a particularly promising area for future investigation. Colleges and universities frequently operate within complex organizational structures characterized by multiple stakeholder groups, distributed decision-making processes, and competing institutional priorities. Toxic leadership within such environments can significantly influence faculty engagement, staff morale, institutional innovation, and student success outcomes.

Future research should examine:

- Faculty perceptions of psychological safety
- Leadership recovery in shared governance environments
- The relationship between leadership recovery and institutional effectiveness
- Recovery strategies following administrative leadership failures
- The role of trust restoration in faculty and staff engagement

Given the increasing pressures facing higher education institutions, understanding how colleges and universities recover from leadership dysfunction has important practical and scholarly implications.

6.7 Psychological Safety as a Mediating Variable

The Leadership Recovery Framework identifies psychological safety as a central mechanism connecting trust restoration and employee voice. Future studies should investigate this mediating role more extensively.

Researchers may explore whether psychological safety fully or partially mediates the relationship between trust restoration and employee participation. Additional studies may examine how psychological safety interacts with factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, employee tenure, and workforce diversity. Understanding these relationships would enhance scholarly understanding of how psychological safety contributes to organizational recovery and innovation.

6.8 Leadership Recovery and Organizational Resilience

Future research should also explore the relationship between organizational recovery and resilience. While the present framework suggests that successful recovery contributes to resilience, additional research is needed to examine this relationship empirically. Researchers may investigate whether organizations that recover successfully from toxic leadership develop stronger adaptive capabilities than organizations that have not experienced similar disruptions. Such research could contribute to both resilience theory and leadership scholarship by clarifying how adversity contributes to organizational growth and transformation.

6.9 Cross-Cultural Leadership Recovery Research

Finally, future studies should examine leadership recovery across cultural contexts. Perceptions of leadership, trust, communication, and psychological safety vary significantly across cultures. Recovery strategies that prove effective in one cultural environment may not produce similar outcomes elsewhere. Cross-cultural research would enhance the generalizability of the Leadership Recovery Framework while identifying cultural factors that influence recovery processes. Such studies could contribute significantly to the growing body of international leadership research. Collectively, these research opportunities suggest that leadership recovery represents a promising and largely underdeveloped area of organizational scholarship. The Leadership Recovery Framework provides an initial foundation for future inquiry, but continued empirical investigation is necessary to refine, expand, and validate the model.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Leadership continues to serve as one of the most influential determinants of organizational success, employee wellbeing, innovation capacity, and long-term organizational performance. While considerable scholarship has examined the causes and consequences of toxic leadership, significantly less attention has been

devoted to understanding how organizations recover following leadership dysfunction. This gap in the literature provided the foundation for the development of the Leadership Recovery Framework.

The purpose of this article was to advance leadership scholarship by introducing a conceptual framework that explains how organizations rebuild trust, restore psychological safety, reactivate employee voice, and recover their capacity for learning and innovation following toxic leadership environments. Drawing upon Trust Repair Theory, Psychological Safety Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Resilience Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory, the Leadership Recovery Framework offers a multidimensional explanation of organizational renewal.

A central contribution of this article is the recognition that recovery is not an automatic consequence of leadership replacement. Organizations frequently assume that removing a toxic leader will resolve organizational dysfunction. However, the literature suggests that the effects of toxic leadership often persist long after leadership transitions occur. Employees may continue to exhibit fear, silence, distrust, and disengagement unless organizations intentionally address the underlying social and psychological consequences of leadership dysfunction.

The Leadership Recovery Framework proposes that successful recovery occurs through a developmental process involving eight interconnected stages: recognition and assessment, leadership transition, trust restoration, psychological safety development, employee voice activation, organizational learning, innovation recovery, and organizational excellence. Each stage creates conditions necessary for subsequent stages, illustrating that organizational renewal requires more than isolated interventions.

The framework further contributes to the literature by positioning trust restoration and psychological safety as central recovery mechanisms. Trust provides the social foundation necessary for employee confidence, while psychological safety enables employees to engage in the interpersonal risk-taking required for learning, collaboration, and innovation. Together, these constructs explain how organizations move beyond survival-oriented behaviors and toward growth-oriented cultures.

Another important contribution of this article involves the integration of employee voice, organizational learning, and innovation into a unified recovery process. Rather than treating these concepts as separate organizational outcomes, the framework proposes that they represent sequential stages of recovery. Employees who feel safe speaking up contribute valuable knowledge and perspectives, which support organizational learning and ultimately facilitate innovation renewal.

From a practical perspective, the Leadership Recovery Framework provides organizational leaders with a roadmap for navigating recovery efforts. Leaders seeking organizational renewal must recognize that recovery requires intentional investment in trust-building, psychological safety, communication systems, and leadership development. Organizations that neglect these factors risk remaining trapped in the legacy effects of toxic leadership despite changes in personnel or organizational structure.

The implications of this research are particularly significant in contemporary organizational environments characterized by rapid technological change, workforce diversity, global competition, and increasing demands for innovation. Under such conditions, organizations depend upon employees who are willing to collaborate, share knowledge, challenge assumptions, and participate in continuous improvement efforts. These behaviors emerge most consistently within environments characterized by trust and psychological safety.

The Leadership Recovery Framework also extends the Leadership Continuum Model by King and Gibson (2026). While the Leadership Continuum Model explained how organizations move from toxic leadership toward innovation through transformational leadership and psychological safety, the Leadership Recovery Framework explains the organizational processes required to achieve that transformation. Together, the models provide a comprehensive perspective on leadership renewal and organizational excellence.

Ultimately, the Leadership Recovery Framework argues that organizational transformation begins with organizational healing. Recovery is not merely a response to leadership failure; it is a strategic capability that enables organizations to rebuild stronger, more adaptive, and more innovative cultures. Organizations that successfully restore trust, cultivate psychological safety, encourage employee voice, and support organizational learning are better positioned to achieve long-term resilience and sustainable excellence.

As organizations continue to confront complex challenges and unprecedented change, the ability to recover from leadership dysfunction may become one of the most important determinants of future organizational success. Leaders who understand and manage recovery effectively will be better equipped to create workplaces characterized by trust, engagement, innovation, and organizational excellence.

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