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## The Infected Organization: “Corpz” Exposure

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*Corporate Zombies (Corpzs)* [Original Artwork]. (Martin, 2013)

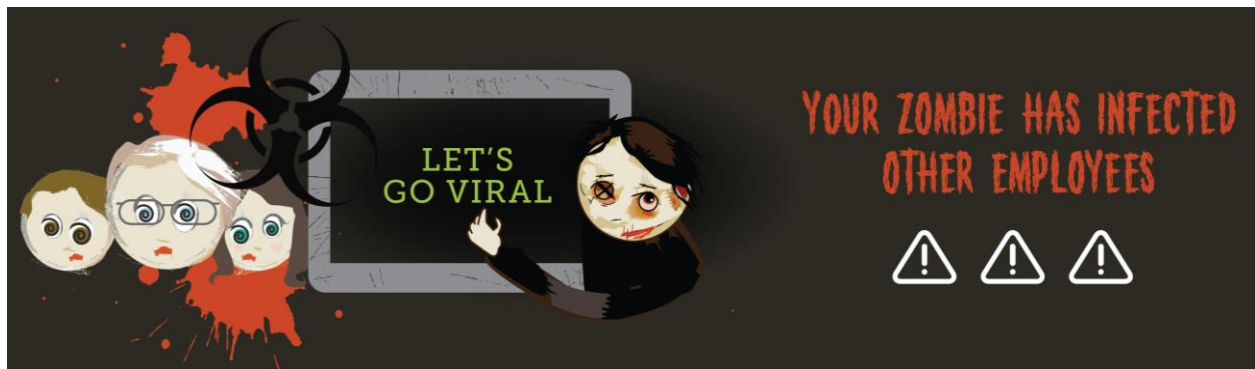
Max Brooks’ 2006 novel, *World War Z: An oral history of the zombie war* presents an account of life in a post-apocalyptic world, from the perspective of those who lived through the experience. In the world [earth] of which Brooks speaks, there are people who, whether by personal preparedness, or pure chance, survived the apocalypse unscathed, and there are also those less fortunate, who were *infected*. The infected are in effect, reanimated corpses; referred to as *Zed Heads* (Zed, British for the letter Z), or, perhaps more familiar, *ZOMBIES!* The term zombie according to Brooks (2003) is “an animated corpse that feeds on living human flesh” (p. 2). In an effort to minimize confusion, and to differentiate between Brooks’ (2003, 2006) flesh-eating zombies and the zombies, which have infiltrated many organizations, the following terminology will be used: (a) *Zombie* (Brooks’ flesh-eaters), and (b) *Corpz* (Corporate Zombie).

In the broadest sense, a zombie is a once, living being, who has lost his or her sense of self-awareness and character, thereby becoming a vessel of contamination. Zombies seek the annihilation (and often consumption) of any human in close proximity, regardless the situation,

or cost. Zombies attempt to compensate for their loss of intellect by amassing in large numbers, to better their probability of infecting the living.

The zombies, spoken of in the writings of Brooks (2003, 2006) become such (*turned*) in a relatively short span of time following one-on-one, physical, open-wound contact with an infected vessel. Unlike the familiar zombies of Brooks' literature, *corpzs* in organizations become infected over long periods of exposure—to toxic leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). *Corpzism* is a current and infectious problem in many organizations. Corpzism is neither localized nor discriminating; it can be found universally throughout organizations where toxic principles are espoused and appears to follow an indiscernible process. Corpzism does appear to be more prevalent in persons who are no longer exposed to production realities (walking the shop), and who rely solely on graphical/numerical depictions of organizational health (Porath & Erez, 2009). Over time, organizational leaders, who have lost touch with the human element, become numb to situational awareness. There is not yet, a definitive causality for corpzism, though some researchers, Martin (2011) and Porath and Erez (2009) have posited that long-term confinement [*cubicleosis*] or [*officeitis*] (never leaving the cubicle or office), and over-exposure to inanimate communication devices, directly impact awareness. Comfort zones, like addictions, gently lull one, through assimilation, into a catatonic state. Aspiring leaders, who fall victim to the assimilation process, soon find themselves entranced by the mesmerizing spell of computer-generated management fodder. Gradually, the once aspiring leader begins to justify his or her behavior, and if left unchecked, the mesmerizing effects of chart gazing and spreadsheet functions, transfigures the leader into a mere manager [*corpz*] (the turning). As the leader, turned corpz, continues to rely on the computer-monitoring paradigm for the answers to organizational problems, short cuts, workarounds, and creative bookkeeping become the norm. Like an

alcoholic whose behaviors begin to cause a breakdown of the family unit, leaders, turned corpz, begin to alienate the people within the organization. Corpzs “are unconcerned about, or oblivious to, staff or troop morale and/or climate” (Reed, 2004, p. 67). Paranoia may soon follow, as the corpz perceives that the downward trend of the organization is resultant of departmental leaders’ failure to make the numbers. The people in the organization are considered insignificant, solely an end to a means, and thereby, become disenfranchised; performing only mundane tasks, when asked, and exactly as requested (Schneider, 2013). In organizations where this level of toxicity resides, extra effort is often withheld (de Luque et al., 2008). In the literal sense of *going viral*, the corpzs will continue to infect the healthy within the organization; spreading toxicity, and accelerating organizational decay (Hacker, 2010, p. 28).



Let's go viral [Infographic Ssegment] from *I hired a zombie* (Badtiff, 2009)

Identifying zombies is intuitive; telltale signs include, slow, lethargic movement, and of course, by sight and smell. The process of identifying corpzs can be equally intuitive, once an awareness of the existence is created.

One of the first indications of a corpz-infected organization is an observable lack of motivation within the regular members, and departmental directors, who appear numb to personal interaction. As any good auditor can attest, the symptoms of organizational decay (the lack of motivation) are an indication of a larger, systemic decomposition (Marr, 2015). Likened

unto the analogy of peeling back the layers of an onion in search of obvious rot, corpzism becomes more apparent as one digs deeper into the core, for causality.

Destroying healthy minds appears to be the mission of both zombie and corpz alike. The *modus operandi* of traditional zombies, Brooks (2003, 2006) is having a ravenous need for consuming human flesh (brains specifically). The objective of corpzs, is to devoid the organization of knowledge. The knowledge purging process involves assigning monotonous projects and mindless work; thereby allowing the good, healthy brains to stagnate and rot. In fact, I posit that knowledge-hoarding rather than knowledge-sharing is the by-word of corpzism; ideas, initiative, and creativity are swiftly eradicated through the tornadic vacuum, generated by the plagiaristic behaviors of the *coprzist hoard*—infected senior managers, who take credit, rather than giving credit for the work of others.

Corpzs are similar to zombies in that they do not tire, having spent the majority of the workday seated behind a computer, searching spreadsheets and slide decks for an explanation of the organization's declining health, only to emerge from the office (at the end of everyone's workday), to convene a meeting. Unlike zombies, who are incapable of planning or coordinating their attacks, by design, corpzs schedule many of the meetings, in which important decisions are generally made, late in the day, when the majority of the attendees are exhausted and ready to go home; thereby insuring a diminished attention span, and little, to no resistance to the advancement of toxic ideas.

Further, corpzs are renowned for their innate ability to suck the life, energy, and spirit out of the organization, by spewing forth negativity and doubt (Hacker, 2010). Corpzism is reaching near-epic proportions. The ranks of the infected are ever-increasing, and their actions are becoming more brazen, because they crave the mind, the consciousness, and if possible, through

demoralization, the very souls of the uninfected within organizations. Unlike zombies, who have no self-preservation instincts, and can only be stopped, if shot in the head, corpzs are adept at self-preservation, and since the bullet-in-the-head methodology is frowned upon, as violence in the workplace, a more humane methodology of *awakening* is suggested as a means to *resuscitate* rather than eliminate the infected. Thanks for reading...

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