This book delves into the ‘underbelly’ of organizations. It’s about subversiveness, counterproductive behaviour, psychological disorders, and nearly every other aspect of an organization that could become dysfunctional. To be sure, organizational dysfunction has always existed in one form or another. Moreover, it is often at the heart of works of fiction or tabloid exposés. However, it has only recently become a focus for systematic investigation and a field of research. Thus you, the reader, should find the content of this volume novel, exciting and, we predict, useful. Our treatment of dysfunction is extensive and detailed. The authors of the volume discuss the features of dysfunction – what they are, what they do to an organization, what research has been conducted and what was found. They also describe what happens when ‘toxic issues’ become comfortably bedded down and institutionalized. But then they go on to make recommendations for interventions and improvements. They give us hope for the future.

The book is organized around two themes: ‘Barriers to productive work’ and ‘Managing organizational mayhem’. The first theme explores organizational dysfunction as it concerns individuals, and the second examines broader issues of dysfunction and the effects involving teams, managers and organization-wide systems.

Contributors responded to a broad class of variables related to the ‘dysfunctional organization’. Rate and Sternberg (Chapter 1) address what they see as a crisis of courage in corporate boardrooms. They state that up to two-thirds of people currently in management positions fail and that groups of people collude to overlook the negative actions of colleagues, resulting in a failure of courage. Focusing on behaviours such as intentionality, deliberation, risk, good purpose and personal fear, the authors show that organizations can develop programmes to enhance courageous behaviour.

Adrian Furnham (Chapter 2) examines the pathology of senior managers ‘who create and maintain a toxic culture epitomized by mistrust, dishonesty and lack of equity’. Adrian pursues the idea that many ‘successful’ bosses may have psychopathic, narcissistic and histrionic personality disorders which, although they may sometimes help them in business settings, will eventually result in a dysfunctional workplace for others.

Kyrios, Nedeljkovic, Moulding and Doron (Chapter 3) focus on one disorder, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), which represents a common problem affecting workplace performance. By examining the aetiology, assessment and workplace effects of individuals with OCPD, engagement in work tasks, and their workplace relations, Kyrios et al. reveal that the negative aspects of the disorder can be controlled and managed.

Workplace bullying is one aspect of organizations that is difficult to control and manage. Langan-Fox and Sankey (Chapter 4) explain how the problem emerges, develops and eventually ‘grips’ the life of the victim. The chapter reviews the literature to date, reporting both empirical and theoretical work, and details crucial elements of the organization that facilitate bullying, as well as strategies that can be taken to prevent recurrence.

Glen Kreiner (Chapter 5) depicts how the ‘struggle for self’ emerges in dysfunctional ways in the workplace by examining eight dysfunctions that stem from imbalanced
identity boundaries and suboptimal identification states, and concludes by suggesting ways that can reduce the impact of these dysfunctions.

Shapiro and Von Glinow (Chapter 6) ask the question – what happens when leaders are in fact the disruptive force in their organization? In developing a new theoretical framework that helps illuminate ‘bad leadership’, they convey the dynamics associated with employees’ hierarchical status and how stature is associated with sources of power that enable senior employees to remain in post long past it is appropriate to remove them.

Schabracq and Smit (Chapter 7) ask what good leadership is, and how it relates to ethics and integrity. The authors scrutinize the influence of values in acting as a guideline and control for behaviour at work.

Loss of employee trust in management (Chapter 8) has many negative outcomes for a business. Roger Mayer discusses how multiple workplace dimensions from referents of trust, sources of risk, and past behavioral performance affect employees’ trust in management. Based on classical conditioning, he argues that in severe situations replacing the leader may be the only practical option to restore trust.

Workplace deviance, the subject of Becker and Bennett’s chapter (Chapter 9) is highly costly and unfortunately not much is known about how misbehaviour might be reduced. Various antecedents have been suggested, but the authors believe that one promising route to understanding employees’ social contexts lies in the phenomenon of employee attachment.

Chapter 10 (Burke and McAteer) reports on research into workaholism and long work hours, and found that the old saying, ‘hard work never killed anybody’, was supported. But theirs is not just good news, as they go on to show that it is not ‘how hard you work, but why, and how you work hard that matters’, when it comes to negative consequences.

Cleveland, Lim and Murphy (Chapter 11) identify the characteristics of individuals, organizations and situations that can lead to the success or failure of performance appraisal and feedback systems. In summarizing their review, they conclude that rather than relying on formal systems of appraisal, self-evaluations can prove highly useful, and attempts should be made to improve relationships between supervisors and subordinates.

Anandakumar, Pitsis and Clegg (Chapter 12) illustrate how dysfunctional workplaces are typified by divergence in emotions towards one’s workplace, co-workers and management. Their work in a neo-natal intensive care unit illuminated the importance of managing emotions at work, and the need for management training in people management skills.

Wood, Beckmann and Pavlakis (Chapter 13) discuss the negative side of humour as a manifestation of dysfunctional behaviour. They then go on to relate such forms of humour to such things as failure-producing team cultures and individual censure, including the exclusion of individuals from groups (sometimes referred to as being ‘sent to Coventry’). The authors are concerned that research to date has concentrated all too much on humour as a positive force to the neglect of its potentially dark side, which is more common in organizations.

Joshi, Anand and Henderson (Chapter 14) spotlight four practices: organizational compensation and rewards; organizational structure; ethical codes of conduct; and systems and procedures for handling the discovery of corrupt acts. They explain how these practices can either help induce, or be used to prevent, what they term the ‘normalization’ of corruption.

Brown and Robinson (Chapter 15) believe that eliminating territories at work would not be possible, and even if it were, it would only undermine commitment to the organization.
But protecting territory has certain costs. The authors provide insights on how to harvest the benefits of territoriality without incurring its dysfunction.

Hershcovis and Barling (Chapter 16) review workplace aggression and stress the value of focusing on the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. This is because in their research they have found that the nature of the relationship affects such things as the onset of aggression by perpetrators and how aggression is experienced by victims. Their research also identifies predictors and consequences of aggression, and the constraints that have to be overcome for a thorough examination of the perpetrator/victim relationship.

Managers who are thinking of suing or sacking their employees for theft need first to read Chapter 17 by Tomlinson and Greenberg! They argue that there are many cases where employees guilty of theft are merely ‘righting a wrong’ and that where a more constructive approach to obtain justice is not available, theft provides an alternative route. The authors elaborate how a key to preventing theft is for managers to understand how employees form perceptions of fairness and then go on to create a workplace culture that people see as just.

Team-based organizational structures are becoming a common feature of the contemporary workplace. The next three chapters clearly demonstrate that this nominally progressive development also can have a dark side. The difficulty of working together as a team is addressed by Sims and Salas (Chapter 18), who argue that it is all too common to undermine team performance through failing to effectively manage a set of key factors, for example team leadership. These authors also outline the characteristics of effective teams.

Johnson and Hollenbeck (Chapter 19) believe it is easier for individuals to learn from their experience than it is for work teams. Consequently teams suffer from motivation and coordination losses that are unique and related conditions that they characterize as involving interpersonal, ‘between-minds’ information processing. On a more affirmative side, they give us insights into how organizations need to address such challenges if team learning is going to occur.

Judge and LePine (Chapter 20) reflect on the ‘downsides’ of traits generally deemed positive, especially in a team setting. Even a quality thought to be attractive in a person, such as extraversion, has a negative side. For example, extraverts are predisposed to accidents. They also discuss ways in which generally desirable personality traits of team members will have negative effects on team functioning. They conclude with advice on improving our personnel selection systems as a way to address some of these issues.

Grant (Chapter 21) argues that the personality characteristics of managers help determine the development of managerial styles. The author considers ‘adaptive’ and ‘mal-adaptive’ behavioural styles for their impact on the manager, on other employees and on the organization, and presents various interventions that could be considered.

Hisrich and Lutz (Chapter 22) outline how small entrepreneurial firms must tackle the problem of employing good staff in order to succeed, and how this needs to be done in a timely fashion. More importantly, they illustrate how appropriate motivation and compensation systems need to be in place so that mistakes can be avoided.

At a more macro level Worrall, Cooper and Mather (Chapter 23) set out to construct a multidisciplinary, multi-level understanding of workplace stress and organizational dysfunction and to dissect how organizational contexts are changing and filter through to
affect workers’ perceptions and experiences. The authors use a large time-series data set developed out of the Quality of Working Life project, to explore a ‘best of times–worst of times’ theme. Their goal is to help the reader to better understand and manage changes in the workplace so as to reduce the negative consequences that are often observed otherwise.

Anderson and Gasteiger (Chapter 24) write about the pressures promoting innovation in organizations. They point out that what has typically been thought of as a positive set of forces in organizations can also become problematic, and document their disruptive effects on individual creativity and work group innovation. In illuminating such problems, the authors review the empirical and theoretical literature that relates to the ‘dark side’ of innovation.

In the final chapter of this volume Lewicki, Greenberger and Coyne (Chapter 25) explore why subcultures develop and how these subcultures come to fit into the context of the larger organization. They ask whether some organizational cultures are more fertile in cultivating subcultures, and when and where these subcultures come to be labelled as dysfunctional. The authors debate whether it’s actually possible for organizations to use subcultures to enhance themselves and increase adaptability, engagement and trust among organizational members.

Collectively, the 25 chapters touch on critical themes that we think will be highly useful in stimulating ideas for future research in this unusual area of the dysfunctional organization. Happy reading!