



doi 10.5281/zenodo.6992226

Vol. 04 Issue 12 Dec - 2021

Manuscript ID: #0521

## DARK TRIAD PERSONALITY TRAITS: RELEVANCE ON WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS AND OUTCOMES

**ALAGAH, Adekemi Drusilia**

*Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria*

*Corresponding author: \*ALAGAH, Adekemi Drusilia  
Email: alagahk@gmail.com*

### ABSTRACT

*The article examines the impact of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy on workplace behavior and management implications of the three dark triad personality characteristics. According to the findings, most companies employ a diverse group of people. Humans, by their inherent complexity, bring a wide range of quirks and peculiarities to the table. As a result, managers must be aware of these human intricacies while interacting with their employees. Unfortunately, some people are severely misaligned and disruptive who are not among the well-adjusted and mentally sound. According to an extensive study of the existing research, despite the distinctiveness of the personality traits that make up the 'Dark Triad,' they all have some commonalities even if they are different. Those who are Machiavellians or narcissists are socially awkward and prone to traits like conceit, emotional reluctance, deceit, and brawn. Managers should consider frequent training as a way to decrease problematic workplace behaviours, according to this study. But on the other hand, managers should avoid assuming the worst about their workers or dismissing individuals with the dark triad personality characteristics since they may be useful to the company. This will allow managers to make the most of their skills and abilities.*

### KEYWORDS

*Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Personality Trait, Dysfunctional Organizations, Social Chameleons*

## Introduction

The study of organizational behaviour revolves on the idea of personality. In addition to its effectiveness in recruitment/selection processes and the individual's transition to the workplace (Holland, 1997), it is a predictor of work-related results, affects on social relationships inside organizations and defines the corporate culture. Also, it's a possible predictor of work behaviour and performance, as well as successful leadership, and it shows how a person reacts to stress as well as their perspective and attitude towards it. Personality is defined operationally by psychologists and organizational behaviourists as a person's interactions with others and the behaviours that are exhibited during those interactions. As defined by Allport (1937), it is the dynamic organization inside the person of those psychophysical processes that determine the individual's particular acclimatization to his surroundings. From the term "persona," which refers to a theatrical mask used by Greek actors, it refers to a collection of distinguishing traits that set one person apart from another (Luthans, 2010).

Disagreements inside a company have the potential to grow and detract from the performance of a work group if they are not handled. The majority of companies employ a diverse group of people. When it comes to a successful organization, it's important to have individuals that like both detail work and large picture thinking, as well as both creative thinkers and analytical ones. You also need team players and solo thinkers. Because of this, while working with others, it's important to remember the complexities of human nature. Unfortunately, there are people who are severely misaligned and disruptive who are not among the well-adjusted and mentally sound. The "dark triad" is made up of three personality types: Machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopath (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Lack of empathy and self-centeredness characterize the three dark types, leading to a skewed way of interacting to other people. It is the "Machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic personalities" and their influence on organizational performance that are the focus of this review. A research conducted by Spain et al. (2014) claims that there has been an increase in interest in studying the dark triad personality because of the widespread effect it is having in the workplace.

## Theoretical Framework

**Trait Theory:** Using trait theory can help figure out a lot about people's personalities. It is possible to define personality traits using this approach as recurrent patterns of behaviour, thinking, or feeling which show up in several contexts. To have any lasting effect on behaviour, these patterns of behaviour must be stable and consistent throughout time; enduring in people. Human personality may be measured and understood better, thanks to trait theory. This perspective defines a personality characteristic as recurring patterns of behaviour, thinking, and emotion that can be observed under a wide range of conditions.

**Personality traits:** These patterns of behaviour must endure and be constant over time, and they must have some effect on the behaviour of people. Essentially, the method based on traits assumes that people's behaviour is predetermined by relatively stable dispositions that serve the core characteristics of their personalities. It goes on to explain that people vary in their characteristics due to differences in their genetic make-up. Personality characteristics are made up of three main dispositions according to Allport, (1936). Humans have a set of core characteristics known as cardinal dispositions. Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and other characteristics like these are highly prominent

in people according to Allport. Finally, Secondary disposition: characteristics that are difficult to identify or notice because they are less readily apparent, less stable, and can only be recognized or seen when certain circumstances arise; they are less prominent than Central dispositions, yet they are frequently just as important.

Eysenck (1966) also proposes a third characteristic, psychoticism, which describes people who lack empathy, are loners, are violent, harsh, or otherwise problematic. He goes on to say that these characteristics are linked to having a lot of testosterone in your system. As a result, greater testosterone levels are associated with increased psychoticism, whereas lower testosterone levels are associated with more normal, balanced behaviour. Also, Adorno et al. (1950) claim that prejudice stems from a person's personality type in a similar vein a person is more likely to be dictatorial and anti-democratic if they have deeply ingrained psychological characteristics that make them extremely prejudiced. Fascist traits like ethnocentrism, obsessiveness, the need for respect and submissiveness, hardness, and power intoxication may also be inherent in people with certain personality types. This means that people like Adolf Eichmann tend to be harsh because of their background (Adorno et al., 1950).

## Conceptual Review

### Machiavellianism

People who are identified as Machiavellians tend to be sneaky, deceitful, distrusting, and manipulative. They reject traditional morality and have a cynical view of human nature. Their primary traits include callousness, egocentricity, and a lack of empathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They don't care about being the centre of attraction or attention, and they aren't very impetuous. Instead, they tend to behave in a clever and manipulative manner. They are not. Machiavellians, according to Jacobwitz and Egan, (2006), are those who employ deceit to further their interests and have no regard for the well-being of those they harm. Machiavellians rely on the gullibility of others to make decisions and do actions, and they disregard the rights of others in doing so (2012). Machiavellians believe they are more successful than others, according to O'Boyle and colleagues, and the only way to prove it is by finding loopholes in the rules that allow them to accomplish their goals with ease. In addition, as "social chameleons," they adopt other people's attitudes and behaviours while manipulating and changing circumstances in their favor at the same time (Hurley, 2005). These people prioritize practicality above connections, which explains why they may put themselves before others (Sakalaki, Richardson, and Thepaut, 2007; Wilson, Near, and Miller, 1996). They view other people as just a resource to further their ends. They take advantage of others to further their interests, viewing them as nothing more than a resource (Burris, Rempel, Munteanu, & Therrien, 2013). Because they seem to be powerful, aggressive leaders, Machiavellians are frequently chosen for high-power roles because of their ability to control their public image (Jonason, Slomski & Partyka, 2012).

### Machiavellianism in the workplace

People with this personality characteristic deliberately pursue goals and objectives in organizations. They prefer to employ manipulative methods, such as lying, cheating, or strategizing, to take advantage of recognized chances to accomplish their goals, and they are more closely associated with strategic choices and behaviours. It is for this reason that they commit agentic objectives, and this propensity may lead them to carefully study the corporate environment to discover possibilities for profit maximization on behalf of the organization (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). One reason they may

successfully manipulate others in social settings is that they can identify the emotional signals of vulnerability in their subordinates or colleagues. When they exploit their victims, they don't feel any remorse or shame (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007). To this end, they cultivate a negative attitude toward the other members of the organization. They also have a proclivity for collecting other people's information since they see it as a means to an end. Because of their detachment and lack of emotional connection with others, they are excellent at image management and can easily climb the corporate ladder of success (Christie, & Geis, 1970). Because of their irrationality and recklessness, they fail to consider the repercussions of their actions on others (Wu & Lebreton, 2011). They are anti-social, deceive others to get what they want and demonstrate a propensity to exploit people in their deeds (Wu & Lebreton, 2011).

### Narcissism

Narcissism is somewhat the most researched dark trait with respect to workplace behaviour and outcomes (Grijalva & Harms, 2014). It is a personality disorder; and has been coined as Narcissism Personality Disorder (NPD). According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), NPD is commonly referred to as a "Cluster B" personality disorder, that is linked with a ubiquitous flair for impressiveness; severe need for approbation and absence of empathy. Narcissists wear different masks; they have a strong sense of entitlement and are constantly seeking for attention and recognition, are selfish, egoistical, are inexplicably self-conscious at all times and are overly sensitive to criticism or negative feedbacks. They are arrogant, so they see themselves as better as, and more knowledgeable than others. (Baskin & Terry, 1988; Nevicka, DeHoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011). They have an inflated view of self, delusions of grandeur, self-promotion and engagement in attention-seeking organization (O'Boyle et al., 2012); mainly motivated by the objective to guard their lavish self-views, and they do these in two ways: through assertiveness, self-enhancement, (Narcissistic admiration) and antagonistic self-protection (Narcissistic rivalry). These strategies are related to diverse kind of organization. There are two types of narcissism discussed in the literature: Grandiose (overt) and Vulnerable (covert) narcissism. Grandiose narcissism is characterized by high self-esteem, charm, disregard for criticism, entitlement, dominance and exploitativeness, whereas vulnerable Narcissists are much more hostile, depressed, with low-self-esteem, more defensive and their grandiosity is more fragile. Narcissists' fantasy life includes controlling others, and being admired by others; they desire to be rewarded and reinforced by others (Morf & Rhodenwalt, 2001). Those high on narcissism are more likely to make extreme internal, global, and stable attributions in the face of success than individuals lower on narcissism (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). In the literature, narcissism is highly correlated with impulsiveness (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Furthermore, as CWBs are characterized with impulsive organization, (Marcus & Schuler, 2004), it may be suggested that CWB and narcissism are positively related (Michel & Bowling, 2013). According to Cohen, (2016), narcissists' rebelliousness and grandiose belief that they are special can be a determinant of behaving inconsiderately to others. Cohen further argues that their willingness to manipulate others is the reason why they show their superiority over others (Cohen, 2016). A negative view of others makes them more willing to dominate and exploit others (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and seeing themselves as incredibly important (Raskin & Hall, 1981). Therefore, when an opportunity arises for them to be able to outshine others, they engage in all types of interpersonal directed CWBs (Cohen, 2016).

### Narcissistic Workplace Behaviour

Narcissists are toxic. This behaviour can be exhibited at any time on the job; research has shown that it can significantly damage team performance (Grijalva, Newman, Tay, Donnellan, Harms, Robins & Yan, (2015). When exhibited, it can prevent team members from putting in their effort to accomplish an assigned task; this behaviour can also have a negative impact on the organization. Narcissists that are managers can destroy the core components of an organization and even the larger society. Thus they must be identified and removed from the system before any damage is done. A Denver based consulting firm - Innovative Connections and author of "Leading Without Fear" (Tate Publishing, 2012), Laurie Cure, posits that possible narcissist behaviour in the workplace includes; not wanting to be questioned over issues or challenged, excessively seeking for approval, praise, admiration, loyalty or adoration, unwillingness to accept and enforce feedbacks, unacceptance of other's opinion and singlehandedly making decisions without other's input with regards to solving problems or effecting changes, lack of interest about team members' or organization's needs, and not consulting with stakeholders before decisions are made. A large number of narcissists do get to positions of power, most likely as a result of their ferocious competition and desire to expand their empires. Narcissism has been linked to a host of negative professional behaviours, including spreading rumours, sabotaging and mocking the efforts of others, being aggressive, wasting other people's time, and being anti-social. Employee assessors with greater experience and training tend to have a more positive impression of narcissists. Narcissism is one of three dark triadic personality characteristics seen in the workplace, according to UK Psychologist Oliver James. Narcissists are completely reliant on narcissistic material throughout their whole existence; they hinge on other people's goodwill to feed their own vision. This idea is so deeply ingrained in the narcissist's psyche that any challenge to it will likely be greeted with hostility. Furthermore clinically, there is a spectrum of narcissism. A high spectrum score can be influenced by the following factors: An inflated feeling of self-importance that surpasses the norm or what could be deemed justified by others. Insufficient empathy for others, incapacity to view criticism constructively (as it likely deflates their sense of self-importance and uniqueness). They utilize the goodwill of others to bolster their own irrational belief in their superiority (the so-called narcissistic supply); a desire for adulation shown by bragging, and exaggeration of accomplishments, or aspiration to high position. They expect to be seen as superior and will work diligently to get jobs that will allow for that perception. Obsessing over and publicly professing self-centred characteristics such as attractiveness, success, and sexual prowess, monopolizing discussions and an unwillingness to listen to other viewpoints, exhibiting condescending attitude, envious of people and being apprehensive before them and very egocentric - insisting on possessing and presenting only the best: house, office, car, phone, jewellery, partner, etc.). To gain compliance and control, fear, guilt, humiliation, punishment, and manipulation are employed. There is evidence of very competitive behaviour. Taking credit for others' or the team's work. Additionally, narcissism may drive valuable workers away. "Allowing a narcissist to run wild in the workplace gives them license to harass other workers, to disregard work rules, to misunderstand feedback, and ultimately to create an environment in which others get triggered just by being in the narcissist's company," Harry said. "All of this ultimately results in people leaving."

### Psychopathy

When someone has severe psychopathy, they will engage in reckless, callous, irresponsible, unremorseful conduct, a lack of emotional sensitivity, impulsivity, superficial charm, and



insensitivity to those who suffer or are punished as a consequence of their actions. They will also be dishonest, lack empathy, and are ready to manipulate people for their gain. Psychopathy affects approximately 1% of the population, according to research. Men are more prone than women to be affected by this disorder (Lykken, 1957; & Patrick, 1994 & Lober, 2004). According to studies, psychopaths have a lack of fear reactivity, as shown by their propensity to display less fear conditioning, as evidenced by their low skin conductance classical conditioning (Lykken, 1957). Psychopathy is characterized by nonconforming emotional reactions and pugnacious or aggressive conduct. As a consequence, they act in ways that demonstrate a lack of concern for others' emotions, and they exhibit little or no physical response to other people's pain, especially when they come into contact with someone in distress.

### **Psychopathy in the workplace**

Psychopaths who are not impulsive may exhibit adaptive outcomes of psychopathy, which may correspond to professional success. Questions remain, however, about the processes at play here and why a competent psychopath may be able to succeed in the working environment as well. People with psychopathic characteristics may readily adjust to business dynamics and regular personnel fluctuation by creating alliances with like-minded people and antagonizing opponents (Babiak, 1995). To make matters worse, people with psychopathic characteristics influence their colleagues and they threaten those in lesser levels in order to create a toxic work environment by charming their superiors and presenting themselves as perfect. As a result, manipulation is the primary means through which psychopaths succeed on the job. People with psychopathic characteristics may portray themselves in a manner that is appropriate for management roles. A charismatic leadership style and self-confidence may be readily linked to leadership abilities, as opposed to other traits like grandiosity. In a fast-paced and high-stress work atmosphere like the corporate one, emotional superficiality, lacking understanding, empathy, and regret are easily misconstrued as toughness and fortitude to remain calm. Nevertheless, there is an important concern about the consequences of psychopathy in the workplace and how some organizations may inadvertently attract and take care of psychopathic individuals.

### **The Relevance of Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy on Workplace Behaviours and Outcome**

Machiavellianism and Narcissism are important in workplace behaviour because individuals with high levels of these characteristics are more likely to participate in unproductive job activities (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Psychopaths, for example, harm others to achieve their objectives. Psychopaths may utilize hurting others to divert attention away from their responsibilities (Boddy, 2006). Narcissism is characterized by extreme self-love, exaggeration of one's significance, and attention-seeking. When they are in a relationship, these individuals use deceitful tactics. Low self-esteem makes a person more vulnerable to ego challenges. Anger and violence are more frequent among people with big egos. While Machiavellianism is associated with soulless and unscrupulous conduct, as well as dishonesty and insensitivity, it is not the philosophy's sole component (Campbell et al., 2009). Individuals who lean toward Machiavellianism are motivated by a strong desire to fulfil one's self-interest at the cost of others. There is much transgressive behaviour associated with Machiavellianism, such as a proclivity to exploit others, commit fraud, and participate in anti-social behaviour (Moore et al., 2012). According to Wu and Lebreton, (2011), Machiavellian-type personalities are ready to engage in immoral and unethical behaviour to achieve their goals, even if it

means breaking societal standards. People with Machiavellian or Narcissistic personalities, according to the social exchange theory, are more prone to participate in unproductive workplace activities. Machiavellianism and Narcissism are related to unproductive workplace activities according to O'Boyle et al., (2012). There was a small but substantial connection between psychopathy and unproductive workplace behaviours, while another meta-analysis found a weak relationship between narcissism and Counterproductive work behaviours. The Machiavellianism connection was also conceivable (Grijalva & Newman, 2015). Furthermore, Baughman et al., (2012) discovered that narcissism and Machiavellianism were strong predictors of bully behaviour in adult individuals.

### **Practical Implications**

Some significant practical/management implications emerged from the review. Machiavellian and narcissistic personalities have a very different outlook on the world than other dark triads. As a result, managers should think about offering regular training to their employees as a way to combat these toxic behaviours. In addition, they should beware of hurling the gauntlet down on anybody with the dark triad personality characteristic. Managers will be able to make better use of their workers' abilities if efforts are made to understand their personality trait. They can achieve this through different methods such as administering questionnaires or creating mock-ups to identify the personality characteristics of the employees. Human Resource professionals must take this very seriously (during the selection and promotion process). They should consider tests for subclinical dark personality characteristics in their recruiting processes, as this may shield workers from potentially damaging encounters with those with Machiavellian personality traits. In addition to protecting the organization from damage, assessing these characteristics during selection may also protect the organization from harm, from the exhibitor of the behaviour, and from possible lawsuits from workers who are victims of dysfunctional behaviours.

Machiavellianism and Narcissism have been shown to influence the decision-making process, which has a direct impact on employee behaviour. Managers should keep an eye on the actions of their workers by closely monitoring their behaviours as they interact with other organizational members, although this will be an additional responsibility for the manager. Without doubts, Machiavellian and Narcissistic personalities benefit from high levels of perceived responsibility because of high work standards, met productivity targets, and a well-functioning control structure (Martin et al., 2010). As a result, managers and policymakers must devise standards for assessment that are open and easy to understand, else their workers would behave differently (Chiaburu et al., 2013).

## References

- Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper and Row (pp. 228).
- Allport, G. W. (1937). *Personality: A psychological interpretation*. Holt.
- Austin, E. J., Farrelly, D., Black, C., & Moore, H. (2007). Emotional intelligence, Machiavellianism and emotional manipulation: Does EI have a dark side? *Personality and individual differences*, 43(1), 179-189.
- Babiak, P. (1995). When psychopaths go to work. *Applied Psychology*, 44, 171–188
- Baughman, H. M., Dearing, S., Giammarco, E., & Vernon, P. A. (2012). Relationships between bullying behaviours and the Dark Triad: A study with adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52 (5), 571–575.
- Boddy, C. R. (2006). The dark side of management decisions: Organizational psychopaths. *Management Decision*, 44(10), 1461–1475.
- Campbell, W. K., & Campbell, S. M. (2009). On the self-regulatory dynamics created by the peculiar benefits and costs of narcissism: A contextual reinforcement model and examination of leadership. *Self & Identity*, 8, 214-232.
- Chiaburu, D. S., Muñoz, G. J., & Gardner, R. G. (2013). How to spot a careerist early on: Psychopathy and exchange ideology as predictors of careerism. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 118 (3), 473–486.
- Cohen, A. (2016). Are they among us? A conceptual framework of the relationship between the dark triad personality and counterproductive work organizations (CWBs). *Human Resource Management Review*, 26, 69-85.
- Eysenck, H. J. (1966). Personality and experimental psychology. *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*.
- Geis, F.L., & Christie, R. (1970). *Studies in Machiavellianism* (pp. 314-338). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Grijalva, E., & Newman, D. A. (2015). Narcissism and counterproductive work behavior (CWB): Meta-analysis and consideration of collectivist culture, big five personality, and narcissism's facet structure. *Applied Psychology*, 64 (1), 93–126.
- Grijalva, E., Newman, D. A., Tay, L., Donnellan, M. B., Harms, P. D., Robins, R. W., & Yan, T. (2015). Gender differences in narcissism: a meta-analytic review. *Psychological bulletin*, 141(2), 261.
- Holland, J.L. (1997). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. 3rd Edition, Psychological Assessment Resources, Odessa.
- Hurley, S. (2005). Social heuristics that make us smarter. *Philosophical Psychology*, 18, 585-612.
- Jakobwitz, S., & Egan, V. (2006). The dark triad and normal personality traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40(2), 331-339.
- Jonason, P. K., Slomski, S., & Partyka, J. (2012). The Dark Triad at work: How toxic employees get their way. *Personality and individual differences*, 52(3), 449-453.
- Jones, D. N., & Paulhus, D. L. (2011). The role of impulsivity in the Dark Triad of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 51, 679-682.
- Luthans, F. (2010). *Organizational behaviour: An evidence-based approach (12th Ed.)*. New York, N.Y: McGraw-Hill.
- Marcus, B., & Schuler, H. (2004). Antecedents of counterproductive behaviour at work: A general perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(4), 647-660.



- Martin, L. E., Brock, M. E., Buckley, M. R., & Ketchen, D. J. (2010). Human resource management review time banditry: Examining the purloining of time in organizations. *Human Resource Management Review*, 20 (1), 26–34.
- Mero, N. P., Guidice, R. M., & Werner, S. (2014). A field study of the antecedents and performance consequences of perceived accountability. *Journal of Management*, 40(6), 1627–1652.
- Michel, J. S., & Bowling, N. A. (2013). Does dispositional aggression feed the narcissistic response? The role of narcissism and aggression in the prediction of job attitudes and counterproductive work behaviours. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 28(1), 93-105.
- Moore, C., Detert, J. R., Klebe Treviño, L., Baker, V. L., and Mayer, D. M. (2012). Why employees do bad things: moral disengagement and unethical organizational behaviour. *Pers. Psychol.* 65, 1–48. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.2011.01237.x
- Morf, C. C., & Rhodewalt, F. (2001). Unraveling the paradoxes of narcissism: A dynamic self-regulatory processing model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12, 177-196.
- O’Boyle, E. H., Forsyth, D. R., Banks, G. C., & McDaniel, M. A. (2012). A meta-analysis of the Dark Triad and work behaviour: A social exchange perspective. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97 (3), 557–579.
- Paulhus, D. L. & Williams, K. M. (2002). The dark triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556-563. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566\(02\)00505-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00505-6)
- Raskin, R., & Hall, C. S. (1981). The narcissistic personality inventory: alternate form reliability and further evidence of construct validity. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 45(2), 159-162.
- Rhodewalt, F., & Morf, C. C. (1995). Self and interpersonal correlates of the narcissistic personality inventory: A review and new findings. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 29, 1-23.
- Wu, J., & Lebreton, J. M. (2011). Reconsidering the dispositional basis of counterproductive work behaviour: The role of aberrant personality. *Personnel Psychology*, 64(3), 593-626.
- Yin, P., Lau, Y., Tong, J. L. Y. T., Lien, B. Y., Hsu, Y., & Chong, C. L. (2017). Ethical work climate, employee commitment and proactive customer service performance: Test of the mediating effects of organizational politics. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 35, 20–26.
- <https://www.psypost.org/2019/11/psychopathy-might-facilitate-workplace-success-according-to-new-psychology-research-54763>