

THE DARK TRIAD OF PERSONALITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE – A CORRELATIONAL STUDY WITH COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR AND WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL

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Abstract. *Despite the recent flurry of scientific interest in the Dark Triad – narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism – the research has been mostly descriptive in nature. Relatively ignored by researchers, darker personality variables may prove valuable in understanding counterproductive work behaviors. In the present study, we attempt to integrate the Dark Triad personality traits into organizational life by correlating them with the level of counterproductive work behavior and with work locus of control. Although those three facets have different origins, the personalities described as dark personalities share a number of features. In different degrees, all of them entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness. A narcissistic person is described in terms of a high vanity, constantly seeking for attention and admiration, with a sense of superiority or authority. Most often he or she manifests manipulative and exhibitionist behaviors. Machiavellianism is a tendency to be cynical, pragmatic, emotionally detached in interpersonal relations but, at the same time a good organizer and having long-term strategically thinking. Psychopathy presents as cardinal features: impulsiveness, emotional detachment, manipulative antisocial behavior. The recently published meta-analysis by O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks and McDaniel (2011), showed that counterproductive behavior in the workplace is associated with all three facets of the dark triad. In the current study 122 participants (36 males and 86 females) were invited to fill in the following measures: Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1988), MACH IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979), Self-Report Psychopathy scale – version III (Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, in press) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (Spector & Fox, 2002). Results did not showed positive correlations between Machiavellianism and counterproductive work behaviour, or between narcissism and counterproductive work behaviour. Nevertheless, one strong positive correlation was found between psychopathy and counterproductive work behaviour ($r = .438, p < .01$), mirroring Patrick's results (2007, as cited in Paulhus and Williams, 2002). Regarding the work locus of control, it was identified a positive significant correlation with Machiavellianism ($r = .204, p < .05$), meaning that the higher the score on work locus of control – internal, the higher the tendency to act in a machiavellic way.*

Keywords: *dark triad; CWB; work locus of control.*

Introduction

Despite their diverse origins, the personalities composing this Dark Triad share a number of features. To varying degrees, all three entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Subclinical narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy are referred to as the Dark Triad due to their socially undesirable nature, similar phenotypical behaviors (e.g., manipulation), positive intercorrelations of their scales, and conceptual similarities (e.g., ego-centricity) (Rauthmann, 2012).

Psychopathy is the tendency to impulsive thrill-seeking, cold affect, manipulation, and antisocial behaviors (Williams, Nathanson & Paulhus, 2003), often falling into a primary factor, characterized by callous affect, affective shallowness, lack of empathy and remorse, superficial charm, and interpersonal

manipulation, and a secondary factor, expressed through erratic lifestyles and anti-social behaviors, social deviance, low socialization, impulsivity, irresponsibility, aggression, sensation seeking, delinquency (Hare, 2003). Psychopathy is now recognized as a subclinical variable, exhibiting meaningful variation within “normal” populations (Hare, 1991). Psychopathy is also described by cold and rigid affectivity, a superficial interaction style, manipulative in interpersonal relations (Kring & Bachorowski, 1999). Benning, Patrick, Hicks, Blonigen, and Krueger (2003) showed that psychopathy is defined by impulsive behaviours and emotional and interpersonal detachment.

Machiavellianism is the tendency to cynical, misanthropic, cold, pragmatic, and immoral beliefs; detached affect; pursuit of self-beneficial goals (e.g., power, money); strategic long-term planning; and manipulation tactics (Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samsom & Paulhus, 1992; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). Machiavellianism is also characterized by the manipulation and exploitation of others, cunning, cold affect, and a lack of sincerity or ethical concern (Christie & Geis, 1970).

High Mach scorers exhibit manipulative behaviours towards others in order to promote their own interests and are found to be emotionally detached in their interactions with others, with an interpersonal orientation, which is described as cognitive as opposed to emotional, and with little tendency to focus on individual differences (Christie & Geis, 1970). They tend to exhibit a cool and detached attitude, an opportunist approach to norms, regulations and social values. They are able to make use of other people in order to fulfill their own wishes, and often disappoint others (Mudrack & Mason, 1995). Hunter, Boster and Gerbing (1982, as cited in Reimers, 2004) mentioned four essential components extracted from factorial analysis: flattery, honesty rejection, rejection of the belief that humans are moral, and the conviction that they are corrupt and unreliable.

Related to psychopathy and Machiavellianism, narcissism represents an exaggeration of self-worth and importance, superiority over others (i.e., grandiosity), and attention-seeking (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Put simply, narcissism is an “excessive love for one’s self” (Vernon, Villani, Vickers & Harris, 2008, p.445), is the tendency to harbor grandiose and inflated self-views while devaluing others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

Narcissists are shown to exhibit extreme vanity; attention and admiration seeking; feelings of superiority, authority, and entitlement; exhibitionism and bragging; and manipulation (Raskin & Terry, 1988). They have a high need of achievement and a low one for affiliation. That is why they easily accept challenges, they show a high degree of competitiveness (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists are interested in success, power, beauty and glamour. They live as they are on a stage showing off and asking for others attention and admiration. They might be perceived as being arrogant, dominant and even hostile (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

Regarding the relationship between the dark triad facets and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) defined as volitional acts that can be aimed at the organization itself or people in the organization (e.g., supervisor, coworker, subordinates) and either harm or is carried out with the explicit intention to harm (Spector & Fox, 2005), Patrick (2007, as cited in Paulhus & Williams, 2002) highlighted the role of psychopathy as one of the most consistent predictor of antisocial behavior, including aggression. Counterproductive behavior involves deliberate actions by individuals to violate central organizational policies, rules, and procedures. By doing so, these actions harm both the organization and its members (Robinson & Bernet, 1995).

Researchers (O’Boyle, Forsyth & O’Boyle, 2011) have identified certain factors that might explain why do individuals engage in counterproductive work behavior. These factors include “individuals’ personal qualities, the press of the environment, and the moral ambiguity in some business situations” (O’Boyle et al., 2011, p.2). Previous empirical research suggests that several personality constructs are related to CWB. Several authors (Salgado, 2002; Mount, Ilies & Johnson, 2006) examined the relations between the big five-factor model and CWB. They found that the largest negative relationships were with conscientiousness and agreeableness. Moreover, Bennett and Robinson (2000) have found that narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy explain different proportions of CWB variance.

Fox and Spector (1999, as cited in Dahling, Whitaker & Levy, 2009) showed that the persons with high scores on Machiavellianism have the tendency to get more frequently involved in counterproductive work behaviors. Fehr, Samson and Paulhus (1992) also found that those persons are more likely to be involved in stealing acts than those having lower scores. Furthermore, the recently published meta-analysis by O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks and McDaniel (2011), showed that counterproductive behavior in the workplace is associated with all three facets of the dark triad.

Regarding the relationship between the dark triad and locus of control, Gable and Dangello (1994, as cited in Corral & Calvete, 2000), highlighted a moderate association between Machiavellianism and locus of control, defined as a generalized expectancy that rewards, reinforcements or outcomes in life are controlled either by one's actions (internally) or by other factors and forces (externally). Internals tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than externals, report less role stress, perceive more autonomy and control, and enjoy longer job tenure (Spector, 1988).

Individuals high on Machiavellianism tend to demonstrate more aggressive behaviors (Repacholi, Slaughter, Pritchard & Gibbs, 2003). Similarly, McHoskey (1999) found that Machiavellianism was associated with self-reported antisocial behavior in a sample of undergraduate students. Giacalone and Knouse (1990) examined employees' justification for organizational sabotage and found that individuals high on Machiavellianism and hostility showed greater justification for sabotage methods related to information manipulation and control. Examples of behaviors endorsed are spreading rumors, altering or deleting data, and placing false orders. Other research on workplace aggression has found that Machiavellianism was associated with both interpersonal ($r = .39$) and organizational ($r = .26$) deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Furthermore, previous research has shown that high Machiavellians tend to endorse organizational sabotage more than those low on Machiavellianism (Giacalone & Knouse, 1990).

Participants

One hundred and twenty-two employees (36 men, 86 women), aged 21-51 years ($M = 27.5$; $AS = 0.64$) coming from both private and public organizations were invited to participate in the study. Participants were given the complete packets, including informed consent and measures to complete.

Measures

Dark Triad was measured using the NPI (Raskin & Hall, 1979), the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (Paulhus et al., in press), and the MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Subclinical narcissism was assessed with the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979) which assesses four distinct factors: exploitativeness/entitlement, leadership/authority, superiority/arrogance, and self-absorption/self-admiration. For each item, participants have to choose one of two statements (forced choice) they felt applied to them more. One of the two statements reflected a narcissistic attitude (e.g., "I have a natural talent for influencing people."), whereas the other one did not (e.g., "I am not good at influencing people.").

The 31-item Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (Paulhus et al., in press) was used to assess nonclinical psychopathy. Participants rated how much they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) with statements such as, "I purposely flatter people to get them on my side" (IPM); "I never feel guilty for hurting others" (CA); "I've often done something dangerous just for the thrill of it" (ELS); and "I have tricked someone into giving me money" (CT). These items reflect psychopathic characteristics modeled in four dimensions: interpersonal manipulation (IPM), callous affect (CA), erratic life style (ELS), and criminal tendencies (CT). Good alpha were reported both for the total score (.81) and for the scales (between .74 and .82).

Machiavellianism was measured with the 20-item MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970). Those items cover the use of deceit in interpersonal relationships, and a cynical attitude to human nature. Participants respond by indicating the extent to which they agree with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. In this questionnaire, higher scores represent higher levels of Machiavellianism, as defined by manipulative interpersonal strategies and a skeptical view of others. An example item is 'The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.'

The Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) was developed to measure a wide range of counterproductive work behaviours (Fox & Spector, 2002). Participants were presented with 32 items describing behavioral reactions and were asked to indicate how often they performed each behavior. The response choices were presented in a five-point scale ranging from 'never' to 'every day.' Higher scores indicate higher levels of counterproductive work behaviour. The CWB-C demonstrated good internal consistency (.89) in previous studies (Penney & Spector, 2005). In addition to an overall score, the CWB-C also provides sub-scores for abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft and withdrawal.

Work locus of control was measured using Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS) (Spector, 1988). The scale has half of its items written in each direction--external and internal. Scores on the scale can range from 16 to 96. Each item can have a score from 1 to 6 (1 disagree very much, 6 agree very much), where a score of 6 representing strongest possible agreement on an externally worded item which is equivalent to a score of 1 representing strongest possible disagreement on an internally worded item.

Objective and research questions

In the present study, we attempt to integrate the Dark Triad personality traits into organizational life by correlating them with the level of counterproductive work behavior and with work locus of control. At the same time we aim at studying the moderating role of the WLC in the relation between Dark Triad and counterproductive work behaviour.

Starting from those aims the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What kind of relations could be identified between Dark Triad and counterproductive work behaviour?

RQ2: Is there any relation between Dark Triad and work locus of control?

RQ3: Does work locus of control moderate the relation between Dark Triad and counterproductive work behaviour?

Results

Although the scores from the Dark Triad three scales could be combined to create a composite Dark Triad index as has been previously done (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009), we have decided to treat them as separate constructs, due to the fact that on a single factor they accounted for 49.03% of the variance (Jonason et al., 2009).

The descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table.1 Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD
Machiavellianism	59.58	6.96
Narcissism	15.11	7.55
Psychopathy	143.75	25.75
WLC	49.67	6.96
CWB	43.63	9.71

In order to answer to our first research question (RQ1: What kind of relations could be identified between Dark Triad and counterproductive work behaviour?) we have computed the correlations

between all three domains of Dark Triad and CWB (Table 2).

Mirroring the findings of Patrick (2007, as cited in Paulhus and Williams, 2002) who mentioned psychopathy as the most consistent predictor of antisocial behavior, the current results showed a significant positive correlation between psychopathy and CWB ($r=.438, p<.05$). Opposite to the findings coming from O'Boyle et al. (2011) meta-analysis, who showed that counterproductive behavior in the workplace is associated with all three facets of the dark triad, in our sample machiavellianism and narcissism did not significantly correlate with CWB, psychopathy being the only domain of the Dark Triad being related with CWB.

Table 2. Correlations between Dark Triad, WLC and CWB

	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
CWB	-.005	.065	.438**
WLC	.204*	-.147	-.040

Related to our second research question (RQ2: Is there any relation between Dark Triad and work locus of control?), the same bivariate correlation was computed, results showing that the only domain of the Dark Triad who correlated with work locus of control was Machiavellianism ($r=.204, p<.05$), replicating the Gable and Dangelo (1994, as cited in Corral & Calvete, 2000) findings who highlighted a moderate association between Machiavellianism and locus of control.

Related to the third research question (RQ3: Does work locus of control moderate the relation between Dark Triad and counterproductive work behaviour?), we employed a moderation analysis (using multiple regression).

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	ΔR^2	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F Ch.
1	.463 ^a	.214	.201	.721	.214	16.335	2	120	.000
2	.631 ^b	.399	.383	.633	.185	36.543	1	119	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Psychopathy, WLC

b. Predictors: (Constant), Psychopathy, WLC, Psychopathy X WLC

c. Dependent variable: CWB

The moderation analysis (Table 3), show that work locus of control does moderate the relation between Psychopathy (being the only Dark Triad domain who significantly correlated with counterproductive work behaviour) and counterproductive work behavior, $\Delta R^2=.185, F(1, 119) = 36.543, p < .000$.

Conclusions

The fact that Machiavellianism and Narcissism was not correlated with counterproductive work behaviours deserves further attention. On one hand, the current study demonstrated that dark personalities do not uniformly entail similar negative organizational outcomes such as counterproductive work behaviours. On the other hand, there are some limitations that future studies should address. First, neither subfacets nor different “forms” of each Dark Triad trait were investigated (Jonason, Kavanagh, Webster & Fitzgerald, 2011). For example, grandiose versus vulnerable narcissism (Miller, Hoffman, Gaughan, Gentile, Maples & Campbell, 2011) and primary versus secondary psychopathy (Hare, 2003) can be distinguished. Also, Machiavellianism likely has subfacets (tactics, morality, and views) despite being often unidimensionally conceptualized (Rauthmann & Will, 2011). Second, all instruments are self-reported and therefore different type of biases might occur.

To sum up, findings of the current study should be extended in more diverse samples (e.g., better female–male ratio, different age ranges etc.), with different or more complex Dark Triad measures, and with different research designs (e.g., mixed methods).

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