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## **Dark Personalities in the Workplace**

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### **Table of Contents**

Table of Contents .....	1
Introduction .....	2
Dark Triad: Definitions .....	3
Narcissism .....	6
Machiavellianism.....	10
Psychopathy.....	14
How to deal with Dark Triad personalities in the workplace.....	20
Summary and outlook .....	23

### **Summary**

Dark Triad personality traits in the workplace comprise of the traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The Dark Triad and its relationships with individual and organisational variables has received increasing attention in organisational behaviour research. These three traits share a lack of concern for others, but also have idiosyncratic attributes. Narcissism is characterised by a sense of entitlement and self-absorption. Machiavellianism comprises a focus on instrumentality and willingness to engage in manipulation. Psychopathy, possibly the darkest of the three traits, renders individuals callous, impulsive and display antisocial behaviour. While Dark Triad traits may be adaptive in some regards (e.g., narcissism facilitates leadership emergence), the majority of empirical findings point to the damage that individuals high in those traits can do to other organisational members and effective organisational functioning.

**Keywords:** Dark Triad, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Leadership, Counterproductive Work Behaviour

## **Introduction**

Perhaps spurred on by numerous scandals revealed in organizational contexts in the last decade ranging from fraud to sexual harassment in the workplace dark personalities have become a topic of considerable interest (Schyns, 2015). People with dark personalities are often considered to possess one or more of the Dark Triad traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The expression of dark personality traits can do considerable damage in organisational contexts (e.g., LeBreton, Shiverdecker, & Grimaldi, 2018).

Dark personalities can be found in organizations occupying positions ranging from lower level rank- and-file employee to CEO. However, some authors have argued that dark personalities are more prevalent in leadership positions than can be assumed based on their prevalence in the general population (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Boddy, 2011a). This can be problematic, given that leaders<sup>1</sup> are charged with authority over others and have the power to exert influence on organisational functioning. As such, those in those in higher organizational positions can be quite a destructive force (see Magee and Galinsky, 2008), making the study of leader dark personality highly relevant. Indeed, most research into dark personalities has been conducted with or about leaders (see Braun, 2017; LeBreton et al., 2018; Spain et al., 2014). A substantial part of this research focuses on leader emergence (e.g., Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011; see also a recent meta-analyses by Landay, Harms, & Credé, 2019) or leader performance (e.g., Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006). Therefore, the following review will mainly focus on research on leader dark traits, but we will also discuss the little available knowledge about followers with dark personality traits. First, the term dark personalities will be defined, then, for each of the Dark

Triad traits, we will review the available literature. Finally, suggestions for ways of dealing with dark personality employees will be made and areas for future research will be highlighted.

### **Dark Personalities: Definitions**

While different definitions of dark personalities exist (e.g., Moshagen, Hilbig, & Zettler, 2018; Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014), the most commonly used theoretical framework is the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The Dark Triad comprises the traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. All three of these traits have in common that individuals who score highly in each of these areas lack empathy (Paulhus, 2014), that is, they are interested mainly in themselves and tend to pursue their self-interest at the expense of others. According to Paulhus and Williams (2002), narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy all refer to “a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness” (p. 557). At the same time, each trait has specific features that differentiate it from the others. Importantly, most research on the role of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy in organisations focusses on the personality *trait* rather than the *disorder*. That is, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy are usually not operationalized as clinical conditions but assessed as individual difference factors, which are normally distributed in the population (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2007).

*Narcissism* is characterised by a strong sense of entitlement (e.g., Raskin & Terry, 1988). Sedikides and Campbell (2017) nicely summarise narcissism as a “self-absorbed, self-aggrandizing, vanity-prone, arrogant, dominant, and manipulative interpersonal orientation. Narcissists are preoccupied with their own sense of specialness and importance, and with fantasies of power, beauty, and acclaim. They manifest low levels of empathy, shame, or guilt, while boasting about their ability, thinking of themselves as exceptional or unique, demanding adulation, lashing out at rivals, and not shying away from interpersonal, business,

or political brawls.” (p. 400). Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) argue that narcissists’ self-concept can be “grandiose yet vulnerable” due to their “chronic goal of obtaining continuous external self-affirmation” (p. 177). Clinical psychology, and more recently, social and personality psychology research suggests that narcissists come in two types: vulnerable and grandiose. Grandiose narcissism is related to disagreeableness and extraversion (Paulhus, 2001), whereas vulnerable narcissism is related to disagreeableness and neuroticism (Miller et al., 2018). This differentiation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (e.g., Wink, 1991) can be important in the workplace.

*Machiavellianism* has been defined as “a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gain” (Christie & Geis, 1970, p. 285) and is characterised by a focus on instrumentality, a cynical disregard for morality, a focus on self-interest, the tendency to distrust others, and a willingness to engage in manipulation (e.g., Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy 2009; Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Machiavellians happily use whatever means available to achieve their goals (e.g., Belschak, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2018), and they typically enjoy and excel in strategic behaviours. In fact, in studies that compare the three Dark Triad traits, Machiavellianism is most often regarded as linked to strategic action and goal oriented manipulation (see Schyns, Wisse, & Sanders, 2019). Although some scholars distinguish several dimensions of Machiavellianism (e.g., distrust, desire for status and control, and amoral manipulation; see Dahling et al., 2009) most organizational research applies the composite score of Machiavellian tendencies. Notably, Machiavellianism has a substantial environment component, which suggests that Machiavellianism may – in part – denote a person’s adjustment to the environment (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008).

Possibly the darkest of the Dark Triad traits is *psychopathy* (Paulhus, 2014) as psychopaths often appear to act impulsively and irresponsibly, lacking guilt and behavioural control, and display antisocial behaviour. Research into psychopathy took off after Cleckley

(1941) provided a description of clinical psychopathy and offered a list of 16 defining characteristics. His work served as a basis for models that emphasize two core areas of dysfunction of psychopaths: one pointing at diminished affective experience (i.e., callousness, lack of empathy, anxiety and feelings of guilt) and one pointing at behavioural deviance and deficits in self-control (i.e., impulsivity, antisocial behaviour). Competing conceptualizations of psychopathy exist, some of them suggesting a unitary construct whereas others imply a multi-dimensional nature (Lilienfeld, Watts, Smith, Berg, & Latzman, 2014; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). More recently, models distinguishing three- and four-dimensions have been offered for summarizing psychopathic characteristics (disinhibition, boldness, and meanness in Patrick & Drislane, 2015; Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger, 2009; interpersonal manipulation, criminal tendencies, erratic lifestyle, and callous affect in Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007). Some psychopaths can be perceived as charismatic due to their impression management skills (Babiak et al., 2010; but see Lilienfeld, Watts, Smith, & Latzman, 2018) and they tend to focus on short-term goals and instant gratification (e.g., Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). While the bulk of research relates to psychopathy in clinical terms, already in 1941, Cleckley described psychopaths in the workplace (for a more recent overview see Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

Dark Triad personality traits have been studied in multiple contexts. Here, the focus is on research into Dark Triad personality in the workplace. For each of the three traits, the main findings in the light of the extant literature will be discussed. Given the definition of the respective traits, it may come as no surprise that individuals high in those traits are found to have a detrimental impact on other employees and organizational functioning (e.g., LeBreton et al., 2018). More specifically, Machiavellianism has modest negative effects and psychopathy has low but substantial negative effects in multisource studies (O'Boyle, Forsyth,

Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). It should be noted that in monosource studies the negative effects of Dark Triad traits can be overblown (see Blickle, Schütte, & Genau, 2018).

Yet, some research also suggests that the three traits have an adaptive side and that people and organizations may actually sometimes benefit from having these traits.

## **Dark Personality in the Workplace**

### *Narcissism*

In terms of organisational behaviour research, narcissism is the Dark Triad personality trait that has been on the agenda most often. This may be the case because the assessment of narcissism (e.g., the often administered Narcissistic Personality Inventory; Raskin & Terry, 1988) typically contains aspects of leadership, making the concept particularly relevant in organisational research. Within narcissism, it is grandiose narcissism that research in organisational behaviour tends to focus on. In the following, the focus is on research into narcissism and leader selection and emergence, narcissism and leadership, CEO narcissism, and narcissism and employee behaviour.

### *Narcissism, Workplace Behaviour, Leader Selection and Emergence*

Campbell and Campbell (2009) argue that narcissists strive to achieve leadership positions. Indeed, it seems that narcissists are successful in their endeavour to achieve leadership positions. For example, Brunell et al. (2008) indicated that narcissists are rated highly on leadership criteria in assessment centres similar to manager selection tools (Study 3). Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, and Harms (2013) argue that in a Western context, narcissism is linked to success in job interviews, as narcissists show the type of behaviours expected in this context, specifically, self-promotion.

More generally, studies have shown that narcissism is positively related to leadership emergence (Nevicka et al., 2011; Ong, Roberts, Arthur, Woodman, & Akehurst, 2016), that is, narcissists are more likely than their less narcissistic counterparts to be considered by their

peers to be a group's leader or to be leader-like. However, this phenomenon seems to be time-sensitive: With longer acquaintance, the relationship between peer-rated leadership and narcissism decreases and eventually turns negative (Ong et al., 2016). This is in line with Campbell's (2005) chocolate cake model of narcissism. As Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, and Marchisio (2011) put it: "Relationships with narcissistic individuals are like eating chocolate cake. They are appealing and exciting, and initially far better than relationships with non-narcissists. Over time, however, these exciting leaders/workers/partners turn out to be dishonest, controlling, and not concerned with your interests. In the same way, chocolate cake makes you feel sluggish, depressed and unhealthy 20 min after you eat it." (p. 271). Thus, while narcissists tend to emerge as leaders in non-acquainted groups, positive perceptions do not hold when group members start to know the narcissistic individual better.

### *Narcissism and Leadership*

So, what happens when narcissists get into leadership positions? Braun, Aydin, Frey and Peus (2018) found in a series of five field and experimental studies that leader narcissism relates positively to followers' negative emotions (malicious envy), which in turn mediates the positive relation between leader narcissism and leader-targeted counter-productive work behaviour (CWB).

In terms of leader effectiveness, Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, and Fraley (2015) found in a meta-analytic review that narcissism is related to self-rated leader effectiveness but not to other-rated leader effectiveness. Using the HDS bold scale (Hogan & Hogan, 2009), they found a curvilinear relationship between narcissism and supervisor reported leader effectiveness. These results should be interpreted with care, though, as Grijalva et al. (2015) note about the HDS Bold scale that "High scorers on the Bold scale are described as overly self-confident, arrogant, and having inflated feelings of self-worth (HDS technical

manual; Hogan & Hogan, 2009).” (p. 20). This measurement contains positive aspects of narcissism (similar to the NPI), which could explain the results found.

However, Wisse and Sleebos (2016) found that of the three Dark Triad traits, narcissism – as compared to the other two dark traits – had the lowest correlation with follower rated abusive supervision. This is somewhat surprising, given how self-centred and dismissive of others narcissists are. Therefore, recent research (Braun, Schyns, Zheng, & Lord, 2018; Koch, Schyns, & Vollmer, 2018) looked deeper into the relationship between narcissism and abusive supervision, arguing that a differentiation between different aspects of narcissism will shed further light on this relationship. Both studies consider grandiose and vulnerable sub-dimensions of narcissism. Grandiose or overt narcissism is described as arrogant, assertive, and aggressive, while vulnerable or covert narcissism is described as shy, insecure, and shame-ridden (Ronningstam, 2009). Both types of narcissists are “preoccupied with self-enhancing fantasies and strivings and hyperreactive to oversights or unfulfilled expectations from others” (Ronningstam, 2009, p. 113). However, the vulnerable type is more prone to self-criticism and feelings of guilt (Ronningstam, 2009) and more prone to abusive supervision (Koch, Schyns, & Vollmer, 2018).

### *CEO Narcissism*

Studying leadership on a more strategic level, O’Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell, and Chatman (2014) found that CEO narcissism is related to higher compensation packages and a bigger difference between their own and their team members’ salaries. At the same time, companies run by narcissistic CEOs are involved in more and longer lawsuits (O’Reilly et al., 2018). Narcissism does not predict CEO performance positively (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). However, narcissists have inflated self-views that lead them to self-report positive performance (e.g., Campbell et al., 2011). Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007) found that CEO narcissism is related to more extreme and fluctuating

company performance. It is also related to more strategic dynamism and to number and size of acquisitions, meaning that narcissists CEOs take more risks, which might or might not work out positively for the organisation they work for. Chatterjee and Pollock (2017) argue that narcissistic CEOs have a higher need for acclaim and dominance, leading to a pursuit of media celebrity status as well as the overshadowing of others. They propose that narcissistic CEOs create their own environments, which leads, amongst others, to more risk taking. Chatterjee and Hambrick (2011) showed that social praise through media influenced narcissistic CEOs' risk taking. Thus, there seems to be a vicious cycle between narcissistic CEO's risk taking and media attention: narcissistic CEOs strive for media praise, which, when successful, reinforces their risk taking.

In sum, narcissists can emerge as leaders, particularly when others do not know them well. They do not perform better than others, and may be prone to abusive supervision (depending on the type of narcissism) and to put their organisations' functioning at risk (e.g., with prolonged law suits). In terms of direct abuse of followers, initial evidence suggests that vulnerable dimensions of narcissism may be particularly relevant and require further attention in future research.

#### *Narcissism and Employee Behaviour*

Generally, narcissists show more counter-productive work behaviour than non-narcissists (Grijalva & Newman, 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2012). This is particularly the case for entitlement and exploitative aspects of narcissism. This research shows that narcissism is not only relevant in the context of leadership but also more widely in terms of employee organisational behaviour. A recent theory paper on follower Dark Triad personality argued that narcissistic followers will engage in strategic behaviours such as (a) over-claiming their contribution (Goncalo, Francis, & Flynn et al., 2010), (b) showing behaviour to promote themselves (e.g., 'public' OCB; Spain et al., 2014), (c) becoming aggressive after negative

feedback and devaluing the feedback source (Thomaes & Bushman, 2011; Schyns et al., 2019). That means that narcissists are not only problematic in leadership positions but more generally in the workplace.

### ***Machiavellianism***

Unlike psychopathy and narcissism, Machiavellianism is typically studied in healthy populations and organizations and less so in a clinical context. Kessler et al. (2010) defined *organizational Machiavellianism* more specifically as “the belief in the use of manipulation, as necessary, to achieve one’s desired ends in the context of the work environment” (p. 1871). In the following, a review of research into (a) Machiavellianism and leader selection and emergence, (b) Machiavellianism and leadership, and (c) Machiavellianism and employee behaviour will be provided.

#### *Machiavellianism and Leader Selection and Emergence*

The term Machiavellianism derives from Niccolo Machiavelli, an Italian diplomat and strategist who wrote ‘The Prince’, a notoriously influential book on the accumulation and leverage of political power. As such, it would seem that Machiavellianism and leader selection and emergence are closely related. Moreover, it has been argued that power, wealth and admiration are particularly appealing for people high in Dark Triad traits – Machiavellians being no exception (see Kajonus, Persson, & Jonason, 2015; Lee et al., 2013; McHoskey, 1999). The fact that people are more likely to acquire something if they really want it, increases the chances that Machiavellians actually identify leadership opportunities and actively work towards obtaining those positions. As a case in point, research has shown that individuals higher in Machiavellianism are more willing to be dishonest during job interviews, arguably in order to land the desired job (Fletcher, 1990; Lopes & Fletcher, 2004). Interestingly, direct evidence on the relationship between Machiavellianism and leader selection and emergence is far from abundant. In one experimental study, Gleason, Seaman,

and Hollander (1978) showed that people with medium levels of Machiavellianism were more likely to be selected as leaders than people with low or high levels of Machiavellianism.

Moreover, Spurr, Keller, and Hirschi (2016) found that Machiavellianism positively predicted the acquisition of a leadership position.

### *Machiavellianism and Leadership*

Some studies have linked leader Machiavellianism to abusive supervision. For instance, Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, and Tang (2010) found that supervisor Machiavellianism was positively associated with subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision, and that this effect was mediated by subordinate perceptions of authoritarian leadership behaviour. In a similar vein, Wisse and Sleebos (2016) investigated the role of the Dark Triad traits in leaders and the perception of abusive supervision in 225 work teams and found that leader Machiavellianism was positively related to abusive supervision in work teams, but only when leaders perceived their position power to be high rather than low. Thus, possessing power amplifies the behavioural consequences of Machiavellian predispositions in leaders. Sendjana, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, and Butarbutar (2016) used self-rated, observational, and cognitive reasoning data to investigate the role of Machiavellianism in the relationships between authentic leadership on the one hand and moral reasoning and action on the other hand. They found that leader Machiavellianism reverses the positive effects of both moral reasoning on authentic leadership and of authentic leadership on moral actions. This finding suggests that leaders who understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong will more likely turn into an authentic leader if they are low on Machiavellianism. Moreover, just because a leader is perceived to be authentic, it does not necessarily mean that he or she will engage in moral action. Indeed, if the leader scores high on Machiavellianism that is more unlikely to happen. Notably, Machiavellians are considered to be adaptable and may also invest in pro-organizational activities if they see this as beneficial to themselves (Den

Hartog & Belschak, 2012). Therefore, Machiavellian leaders can sometimes also successfully exert ethical leadership behaviours. A recent study by Kwak and Shim (2017) revealed that Machiavellian supervisors' ethical leader behaviours were perceived to be genuine by subordinate employees (perhaps because they are able to lie more successfully, see DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979). Moreover, the effects of Machiavellian supervisors' ethical leader behaviours were intensified in case of higher, versus lower, employee power distance orientation (Kwak & Shim, 2017).

Leaders with Machiavellian traits may have a deleterious impact on employee well-being and attitudes. This shows, for instance, from a study that found that leaders' Machiavellianism was related to lower subordinate career satisfaction and higher subordinate emotional exhaustion (Volmer, Koch, & Göritz, 2016). Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) found that the positive effects of ethical leadership behaviour on employee work engagement were suppressed when leaders were comparatively high on Machiavellianism. Moreover, Belschak, Muhammad, and Den Hartog (2016) found that leader Machiavellianism was significantly correlated with employees' lack of trust and their engagement in counterproductive work behaviour.

#### *Machiavellianism and Employee Behaviour*

The effects of Machiavellianism in employees have been studied more extensively than those of narcissistic and psychopathic employees. These studies indicate that Machiavellian employees have a higher overall tendency to engage in unethical behaviour (Belschak et al., 2016; Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, 2018), counterproductive work behaviours (Dahling et al., 2009; O'Boyle et al., 2012), and bullying at work (Pilch & Turska, 2015). The relationship between Machiavellianism and job performance has been found to be predominantly negative but small (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Machiavellianism in employees has also been found to be associated with an increased use of both hard influence tactics (e.g.,

threats and attempts at manipulation; also see Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, & Goodman, 1997) and soft influence tactics (e.g., ingratiation, offering to exchange a favour, and compromise; see Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). Employee Machiavellianism has been negatively related to leader ratings of employee innovative behaviour (Wisse, Barelds, & Rietzschel, 2015). Furthermore, Machiavellian employees oftentimes have negative affective experiences in the workplace (Heisler & Gemmill, 1977). Their negative feelings, however, may be contingent on the traits of their interaction partners. Employee Machiavellianism was found to be only significantly negatively related to employee trust and positively related to employee stress when they had leaders with higher levels of Machiavellianism (Belschak et al., 2016).

Notably, Machiavellian employees may also use abusive means to get their way if they feel they can safely do so and if they perceive that it helps them to achieve their goals (see Schyns et al., 2019). At the same time, they may behave quite positively and pro-socially if they believe that such behaviour will further their self-interest. This focus on self-interest for instance may also explain why there is a positive relationship between Machiavellianism and self-related work commitment (career commitment), and a negative relationship between Machiavellianism and other-related work commitment (organizational, supervisor, and team commitment; Becker & O'Hair, 2007; Zettler, Friedrich, & Hilbig, 2011). Relatedly, transformational leadership may mitigate negative effects of employee Machiavellianism. Belschak, Den Hartog, and Kalshoven (2015) found that transformational leadership moderates the relationship between employee Machiavellianism and challenging organizational citizenship behaviour. When leaders were low transformational, employee Machiavellianism was negatively related to challenging organizational citizenship behaviour (e.g., contributing ideas, taking initiative, voicing opinions, etc.). However, when transformational leadership was high this effect was muted, arguably because transformational leaders emphasize the importance of new missions and organizational

change, which may appeal to Machiavellian employees' self-interested goal orientation and thus stimulate pro-social behaviour. Belschak et al. (2018) also showed that employee Machiavellianism is related to reduced helping behaviour, increased knowledge hiding and emotional manipulation, but only when ethical leadership is low. Such increases in organizationally undesirable behaviours of Machiavellian employees do not occur when ethical leadership is high. Ethical leadership has also been found to dampen Machiavellian employees' tendency to engage in unethical behaviour (Ruiz-Palomino & Linuesa-Langreo, 2018). Abusive supervision, in contrast, has been found to strengthen Machiavellian employees' tendency to engage in unethical behaviour (Greenbaum, Hill, Mawritz, & Quade, 2017). Apparently, Machiavellian employees adjust their behaviour to the circumstances.

### ***Psychopathy***

Psychopathy is commonly seen as a multi-dimensional construct (Miller & Lynam, 2012), sometimes described as primary and secondary psychopathy, where factor 1 includes affective-interpersonal traits (e.g., guiltlessness, lack of empathy) and factor 2 concerns the lack of behavioural control (e.g., impulsivity, irresponsibility; Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). The dual-pathway model of psychopathy proposes two general deficiencies, firstly, a lack of fear and social inhibition, and secondly, deficient emotional and behavioural control (Fowles & Dindo, 2009). According to this model, psychopathy is a developmental outcome with particular risks for individuals and their surroundings when both low levels of fear and behavioural discontrol come together. The triarchic model of psychopathy further distinguishes between the three factors disinhibition, boldness, and meanness (Patrick & Drislane, 2015; Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger, 2009). Behavioural expressions of psychopathy predict deceitful actions even when the risk of punishment is high and when it requires intentional lies (Jones & Paulhus, 2017).

The following summary of studies is specifically concerned with what has been termed psychopathy in a corporate or organisational context, namely, corporate psychopathy (Boddy, 2015; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). Scholars have argued that in a business setting, psychopathic traits may fulfil at least some adaptive functions, especially for the individual who possesses them (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). However, while employees with psychopathic traits appear to be successful members of the corporation on the outside, they can also pose significant risks to organisational functioning, particularly when they climb the organisational ladder towards influential leadership roles. These risks are rooted in psychopaths' love of money and status in combination with their immorality (Glenn, Koleva, Iyer, Graham, & Ditto, 2010) and their propensity to make unethical decisions (Stevens, Deuling, & Armenakis, 2012). Notably, research into corporate psychopathy often targets the finance and banking industry, suggesting that key players' psychopathy may have contributed to the global financial crisis (Boddy, 2011b, 2015).

#### *Psychopathy and Leadership*

Insights into leader psychopathy came for instance from Babiak et al. (2010), who ran a study of 203 corporate professionals selected for a management development programme. Managers' psychopathy was studied in relation to ratings obtained from 360-degree assessments and performance evaluations for these professionals. Psychopathy related positively to others' perceptions of charisma/presentational style, but negatively to responsibility/performance. No significant correlations between total psychopathy scores and perceived leadership skills (decision-making, problem-solving, resolving issues without direction, integrity) occurred. The authors speculated that, while the selected professionals may not have been skilled leaders per se, certain psychopathic characteristics could have enabled individuals with high levels of psychopathy to manipulate decisions-makers into recommending them for participation in the management development programme. However,

as Lilienfeld, Waldman, Landfield, Watts, Rubenzer, and Faschingbauer (2012) pointed out that the results of this study need to be further replicated due to some methodological issues, notably “the PCL-R ratings in this study were conducted by a single individual who was not blind to other information about participants, including information potentially relevant to criterion ratings” (p. 490).

Later studies suggested that psychopathic individuals lack the skills and characteristics that are typically required for effective leadership. Westerlaken and Woods (2013) surveyed 115 students with management experience. They included self-rating measures of the Full Range of Leadership Model (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership) and the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-Revised. The total psychopathy score correlated negatively with transformational leadership – especially with the individualized consideration dimension – but positively with laissez-faire leadership. However, the single source design limits the implications of this finding to some extent. No significant relationship between psychopathy and transactional leadership occurred. In sum, these results point to psychopaths’ lack of the active and supportive functions necessary to lead others.

A number of studies focused on the relationships between leaders’ psychopathy and outcomes for their followers. Boddy (2011a) conducted a monosource survey of 346 Australian senior white collar workers, asking them to identify and measure the behaviours of their managers, clustering the rated managers into three groups: Corporate Psychopaths (with clear indications of psychopathic traits), Dysfunctional Managers (with some indications of psychopathic traits), and Normal Managers (no indications of psychopathy). Instances of bullying and unfair supervisory treatment were higher for the group of Corporate Psychopaths. However, psychopathic traits were rated by employees, not focal managers. In a similar vein, Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, and Babiak (2014) explored the relationships between followers’ perceptions of their leaders’ psychopathy and followers’ self-reported

psychological distress, work-family conflict, and job satisfaction in two samples. In the first sample, leaders' psychopathy predicted followers' job satisfaction directly and through work-family conflict, but it did not predict followers' psychological distress. Followers of psychopathic leaders were more likely to experience work-family conflict and less likely to be satisfied in their jobs. In the second sample, leaders' psychopathy predicted both followers' work-family conflict and psychological distress positively, and job satisfaction negatively. However, an indirect effect on job satisfaction occurred through psychological distress in this sample. The authors concluded that the differences in results may originate from different sample characteristics (e.g., sample size, private and public sectors), but that overall leaders' psychopathy posed significant risks to employee wellbeing and satisfaction (Mathieu et al., 2014). In addition, it should be noted that both studies employed single-source ratings of psychopathy and outcome variables which may have inflated relationships.

Further evidence of contextual factors that shape the adaptiveness (or maladaptiveness) of psychopathy for leadership stems from the political realm (Lilienfeld et al., 2012). The study assessed psychopathy trait estimates for 42 U.S. presidents along with historical surveys of presidential leadership and indicators of presidential performance. For this purpose, 121 presidential experts assessed personality traits, which were subsequently mapped onto larger factors underlying psychopathy. The two factors Fearless Dominance (FD) and Impulsive Antisociality (IA) proved most predictive. However, while FD related positively to ratings and indicators of presidential performance (e.g., leadership, persuasiveness, crisis management), IA remained largely unassociated with performance, but it related positively to undesirable perceptions of presidential behaviour and character (e.g., tolerating unethical behaviour in subordinates, negative character). It therefore appears that in the context of political leadership at least some of the boldness and dominance characteristics that go along with psychopathy can fulfil adaptive functions (Lilienfeld et al., 2012).

A notably new lens on the relationships between psychopathic leaders and their followers illuminates the current understanding of psychopathy in organisations. Barelds, Wisse, Sanders, and Laurijssen (2018) conducted two studies to test the relationship between leaders' psychopathy and their self-serving behaviour as well as the moderating role of follower traits for this relationship. Specifically, the authors argued that the likelihood that psychopathic leaders would engage in more self-serving behaviour vis-a-vis followers who have low self-esteem stems from those followers' own compliant tendencies, as well as from the psychopathic leader's competencies in recognizing vulnerability and their willingness to take advantage of that. One experimental study and one multi-source field survey supported this prediction. Psychopathic leaders' expression of their callous traits appears at least in part to be a matter of context, in particular the attributes that followers bring into the relationship.

Blickle et al. (2018) found similarly that context variables influence psychopathic managers' behaviour. Specifically, high levels of ascendancy prospects as well as prospects for income increases moderated the relationship between psychopathy and consideration. Under both environmental conditions, psychopathic managers showed less considerate leadership towards their followers.

#### *Psychopathy and Employee Behaviour*

While a number of studies focused on leaders' psychopathy, its potential negative influence on organisational functioning is clearly not limited to the upper echelons of leadership. A meta-analysis of the Dark Triad traits found that psychopathy related significantly but at a very low level negatively to the quality of employees' job performance and positively to CWB (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Again, contextual moderators played a role in these relationships. Employees' authority weakened the positive relationship between psychopathy and CWB, potentially suggesting that these individuals were better able to control their antagonistic tendencies. The results also concur with a recent conceptual

framework of Dark Triad traits and CWB, which highlighted the role of mediators and moderators of this relationship (Cohen, 2016). The suggested moderating factors include individual levels of political skills, similarly to O'Boyle et al.'s (2012) conceptualization of authority as a regulating factor of trait expression, as well as organisational factors (transparency, policies, culture/climate), which perform similar functions at higher levels of control (Cohen, 2016). Mediating mechanisms concern the extent to which the individual perceives political opportunities within their organisation as well as a personal sense of accountability for their actions in the organisation.

Jonason et al. (2012) showed that psychopathy coincided with employees' use of hard influence tactics (i.e., threatening others, manipulating) in a sample of 419 employees, who rated their own psychopathy and use of influence tactics. Similarly, when Jonason, Wee, and Li (2015) assessed mechanisms through which Dark Triad traits influenced job satisfaction, they found that individuals with high levels of psychopathic traits were more likely to perceive situations at work as competitive. Interestingly, when Jones (2014) assessed tendencies to engage in financial misbehaviour of working adults with Dark Triad traits, he also found that psychopathy was the sole predictor of objectively measured continued risky gambling at the expense of others. Ragatz, Fremouw, and Baker (2012) demonstrated that white-collar offenders scored higher on psychopathic traits compared with non-white-collar offenders.

In sum, these results suggest that psychopathy may in fact be the darkest of the Dark Triad traits in terms of predicting undesirable attitudes and behaviours at work. It is less clear, however, how psychopaths manage to climb organizational ladders when their behaviours are likely to harm and damage their surroundings. While one line of reasoning suggests that psychopaths manipulate others into seeing them as successful, and that their dark sides only become apparent later on (Babiak & Hare, 2006), current evidence is somewhat contradictory.

Spurk et al. (2016) surveyed 934 German speaking working adults with the Dirty Dozen measure (Jonason & Webster, 2010), and also assessed objective career success (monthly salary before taxes, leadership position) as well as subjective career satisfaction. Psychopathy scores related negatively to both objective and subjective indicators of career success, while narcissism predicted salary positively and Machiavellianism was positively related to leadership position and career satisfaction. While the cross-sectional nature of the study restricts causal interpretation, it appears worthwhile for future research to explore whether psychopathy may indeed prevent long-term career progression.

### **How to Deal with Dark Triad Personalities in the Workplace**

Considering that the Dark Triad comprises personality traits, it is perhaps most promising to investigate conditions under which individuals high in Dark Triad traits are less likely to show behaviours associated with those traits (in the sense of trait expression, Christiansen & Tett, 2008). For example, initial insights suggest that leader humility counterbalances some of the negative employee outcomes. When followers saw their narcissistic leaders as being humble, narcissism related positively to perceived leader effectiveness, follower job engagement, and follower job performance (Owens, Wallace, & Waldman, 2015). Cohen (2016) considered organisational conditions under which Dark Triad personalities are less strongly correlated to counterproductive work behaviour, such as perceived accountability, organizational transparency, organizational policies, and organizational culture/climate. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) suggested that Dark leadership may be more likely to emerge in environments that can be characterized by instability, perceived threat, the endorsement of collectivistic and high-power distance values, and absence of checks and balances and institutionalization. In a similar vein, Nevicka et al. (2011) investigated leadership emergence and performance of narcissistic individuals in reward independent vs. interdependent student teams playing a computer simulated game.

Narcissistic individuals were generally more likely to emerge as leaders. However, when team success was rewarded interdependently, narcissistic individuals' performance was even higher than in the independent reward condition. Narcissists appear to be keen on contributing to team success when this gives them positive reinforcement within the team. Blickle et al. (2018) point to the relevance of making adaptations in incentive structures in order to affect the behavioural expression of psychopathy. Schyns et al. (2019) further argue that certain leadership styles, the degree of leader power, as well as leader traits (e.g., if they are similar or not to their Dark Triad followers) and values can facilitate or hinder the expression of their followers' dark traits. All this research shows boundary conditions under which Dark Triad traits might be more or less likely to translate into Dark Triad behaviours.

Another approach to the issue is to prevent individuals with high levels of Dark Triad traits from entering an organisation and exerting their negative influence over others. In their book, provocatively titled "Snakes in Suits", Babiak and Hare (2006) suggest a number of practical strategies that may stop psychopaths from entering an organisation or rising up to management levels. In early hiring and selection stages, they recommend particular diligence. If managers are well trained in interview techniques, they are less likely to give psychopathic candidates control of the process. Structured interviews, work samples, and focus on actions and feelings can help to spot inconsistencies between the tales of success and integrity the candidate may seek to present and the possibly bleak reality. Checking the facts (e.g., speaking with previous colleagues or employers) can be a time consuming, but purposeful endeavour. Once they have entered the organisation, psychopathic individuals can be difficult to identify. Babiak and Hare (2006) list a number of "red flags" and provide recommendations to avoid that co-workers collude with the individual and cause harm to the employer or other colleagues.

Similarly, Braun (2017) recommends to try and avoid hiring or promoting narcissistic leaders by incorporating background checks and objective measures of previous performance into the selection process. She also suggests to use 360 degree feedback to better understand if and when issues with narcissistic leaders arise. Kwak and Shim (2017) recommend ethical leadership to weaken Dark Triad trait expression and to promote desirable employee work behaviours, including voice. Thus, organisations should pay particular attention to their selection processes and, if they already have employees with high levels of Dark Triad traits in their organisation, try to contain their behaviour by setting boundaries and preventing the development of environments that are conducive to Dark Triad behaviour.

### **Areas for Future Research**

Very often, the Dark Triad personality traits are assessed using short one dimensional instruments such as the Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010) or the Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) although all Dark Triad traits are essentially multidimensional (see e.g., Back et al., 2013; Dahling et al, 2009; Patrick & Drislane, 2015). One of the issues with these short measures is that the three traits are more strongly related than theoretically assumed (Maples, Lamkin, & Miller, 2014), making it more difficult to draw conclusions about differential effects. Other research focuses on one of the traits without taking into consideration the others, although some studies now control for other aspects of the Dark Triad (e.g., Koch et al., 2018; Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). Overall, more research is needed to better understand the different predictive value of each of the three Dark Triad traits.

Research into narcissism in particular found that subdimensions of the concept are relevant in order to better predict the behaviours narcissists show. While most research to date focuses on grandiose narcissism, the few studies that differentiate between grandiose and vulnerable dimensions find marked differences. It would be interesting to see, in how far similar results emerge for subdimensions of Machiavellianism and Psychopathy. For example,

Miller et al. (2010) argue for a vulnerable Dark Triad. According to these authors, the vulnerable Dark Triad consists of vulnerable narcissism, Factor 2 psychopathy, and borderline personality disorder. More research is needed to better understand the differences more extraverted and more introverted/disinhibited (Miller et al., 2010) types of Dark Triad personality traits.

### **Outlook**

In conclusion, this chapter has reviewed literature on the Dark Triad personality traits in the workplace, clearly showing the damage that individuals high in those traits can do to others and to their organisations. There is a clear need for organisations to avoid hiring or at least containing the behaviour of individuals high in Dark Triad personality traits to prevent the harm they can cause to organisational members and effective functioning.

Please, insert here a suggested reading list of at least 10 sources

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<sup>1</sup> We define leadership as conceptually distinctive and complementary to management.

Leaders are individuals in organizations who “influence others through formal or informal contextually rooted and goal-influencing processes” (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Leaders influence others through the power, which can be justified by their position (i.e., management), but also other means such as identification or expertise.