

A Meta-Analysis of the Dark Triad and Work Behavior: A Social Exchange Perspective

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We reviewed studies of the Dark Triad (DT) personality traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—and meta-analytically examined their implications for job performance and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Relations among the DT traits and behaviors were extracted from original reports published between 1951 and 2011 of 245 independent samples ($N = 43,907$). We found that reductions in the quality of job performance were consistently associated with increases in Machiavellianism and psychopathy and that CWB was associated with increases in all 3 components of the DT, but that these associations were moderated by such contextual factors as authority and culture. Multivariate analyses demonstrated that the DT explains moderate amounts of the variance in counterproductivity, but not job performance. The results showed that the 3 traits are positively related to one another but are sufficiently distinctive to warrant theoretical and empirical partitioning.

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Despite positive psychology's emphasis on human strengths and virtues, studies of counterproductive work behavior (CWB), such as employee theft (Buss, 1993), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), leadership derailment (Hogan & Hogan, 2002), and excessive organizational politicking (Poon, 2003), attest to the darker side of human nature. Optimism, integrity, and self-authenticity may predict health and happiness, but personality traits such as Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy may predict misbehavior. Paulhus and Williams (2002) named these three traits the Dark Triad (DT), for "individuals with these traits share a tendency to be callous, selfish, and malevolent in their interpersonal dealings" (p. 100).

The DT personality traits have been linked empirically to a wide range of negative outcomes. Machiavellians, for example, are more likely to take revenge against others (Nathanson, Paulhus, & Williams, 2006), and they lie more regularly to their friends (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996). Narcissists, when their egos are threatened, are often hostile and aggressive, and their romantic relationships tend to be troubled due to their egocentrism and infidelity (Miller, Widiger, &

Campbell, 2010). Psychopathy is associated with various forms of criminality, including sexual assault and murder (Megargee, 2009).

This review examines the DT to determine if this constellation of personality traits' association with dysfunction in interpersonal relations extends to organizational contexts. We begin with a conceptual analysis of the DT that assumes these traits are manifestations of an agentic but exploitative social strategy that motivates striving for personal goals but undermines the balance of social exchange essential to smooth organizational functioning. We then meta-analytically review past empirical studies of the relation between the DT traits and two forms of work behavior: job performance and CWB. Whereas much of that work suggests that the DT's impact is primarily negative, the empirical findings are far from consistent. For example, some researchers (e.g., Giacalone & Knouse, 1990) have reported that Machiavellians are more likely to engage in such CWB as abuse, theft, and sabotage. Other investigators, however, have found that Machiavellians who are concerned with maintaining their power in an organization are more conscientious and less likely to engage in most forms of CWB (Kessler et al., 2010). Overall, the link between the DT and work behavior is tentative, with a substantial number of positive, negative, and null findings. We examine the results of 245 separate samples totaling 43,907 participants to identify associations across studies and also identify factors that moderate the strength of those associations. We also examine the degree of overlap among the DT variables and gauge their combined predictive utility in explaining work behaviors.

The Dark Triad

Evolutionary analyses of the function of personality suggest that traits emerged in the "social landscape to which humans have had

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