Archives of Business Research – Vol. 10, No. 5
Publication Date: May 25, 2022
DOI:10.14738/abr.105.12312.
Parameswaran, H., & Elsawy, M. (2022). Do You Face a Dark Triad Leader at Your Organization? A Descriptive Study on the Educational Sectors in the UAE. Archives of Business Research, 10(05). 108-120.

Do You Face a Dark Triad Leader at Your Organization? A Descriptive Study on the Educational Sectors in the UAE

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ABSTRACT

In this twenty-first century, leadership qualities are paramount for fostering organizational culture and employee performance. This study penetrated the negative aspects of leadership qualities 'dark-triad of leadership' and its impact on team members. The hypotheses were developed from a thorough literature review on dark triad traits namely Narcissist, Machiavellian, and Psychopath. To reveal the impact of traits amongst team members, the Emirati educational sector was selected, and questionnaires were distributed amongst different strata by the random sampling technique. The responses were analyzed using SPSSv27. The analysis validated the reliability of the data and confirmed the hypotheses. Furthermore, it illuminates the intricate and challenging field of leadership research. Indeed, the study can develop organizational culture and employee performance.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Employee performance; Narcissism; Machiavellianism; Psychopathy.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership qualities have a crucial role in the effectiveness of organizational tasks and employee performance. Leading positively cultivates a conducive work environment and meaningful tasks for the team, and thus, employees' goals can be accomplished. Literature reveals that there are numerous studies on leadership (Manning and Curtis, 2007).[1] Surprisingly, in the twentieth century, more than 8,000 studies on leadership emerged (Yammarino et al, 2005).[2] In fact, the mainstream of all research was based on individual, group models, and organizational models of leadership. Most studies highlighted the significance of charismatic approaches to transformational leadership in firms in achieving organizational goals. However, the question that raises one's eyebrows is how many charismatic or transformational leaders can aid business growth with a socialized motive. Are all leadership styles contributing positively to the work culture and employee performance? If so, then what can be the reasons for organizational conflicts, financial scams, unethical practices, institutional harassment, counterproductive work behavior, absenteeism, and so on. Hence, this study explores the negative side of leadership, "dark triad" (DT) refers to the three personality traits:

narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhaus & Williams, 2002).[3] Additionally, the literature indicates that the dark side of leadership is yet to explore (Furtner et al, 2017).[4]

It is evident that organizational psychology has been focused on the attributes of leaders due to financial scandals and fraud cases at large organizations (Jonason et al. 2015).[5] This can be aligned with the dark triad traits of leaders and their impact on the organization. Abundant studies throw light on the dark triad traits in leadership styles with an emphasis on narcissists and psychopaths (Ashchroft, 2016; Isaacson, 2011).[6-7] These narcissistic leaders can ruin the firms by manipulating policies, perilous decisions, and misleading financial information (Cragun et al. 2020).[8] Narcissism and psychopathy are medical terms that are derived from the literature. However, the philosophy and tactics linked to Machiavellianism are rooted in Niccolo Machiavelli's work as a political advisor to the Medici family during the 1500s (Christie & Geis, 1970).[9] Studies stress that all these styles share common traits, namely greediness, emotional coldness, betrayal, and exploitation (Furnham et al, 2013; Paulhaus, 2014).[10-11] It is astonishing that people with high levels of DT traits are commonly found in leadership positions (Babiak et al. 2015; Harms et al. 2011; Nai, 2019).[12-14] The connection between DT traits and leadership is like two sides of a coin. Is it due to the DT traits that leaders have emerged? Or do the leadership levels amongst individuals create DT traits?

In research, organizational culture is defined as a shared construct among members (Glisson & James, 2002)[15], which determines employee behaviors and attitudes on an individual and group level. The organizational culture has a crucial role in managerial development by proper internal functions, finding solutions, and thus adapting to the external circumstances. It also moderates personality and job performance. While considering the organizational culture and DT, the practices of DT traits leaders create less ethical methods, manipulation of things to get things done would fake their skills in job-related situations (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000).[16]

While addressing the counterproductive work behaviors due to DT, literature drew attention to the situational factors and organizational conditions and the impact of these factors on employees' performance (Agarwal & Farndale, 2017; O‟Boyle, Forsyth, Banks & McDaniel, 2011).[17-18] This can link to the Trait-activation theory (TAT), which stresses the relationship between personality traits and behavior. It points out that personality traits are the responses to situational demands (Tett & Guterman, 2000).[19] Geukes et al. (2012) discovered that when individuals enter a situation based on situation-specific traits, those traits are awoken, shaping behavior in that specific context.[20] The underlying perspective of TAT involves the interaction between the individual and the situation, which affects the individual's behaviors (Agarwal & Farndale, 2017). As a result of a colleague, customer, supervisor, and task demands, the personality is triggered into its behavioral expression (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Many studies have explored the relationship between the DT and CWBs by using TAT as the conceptual framework. Based on these backgrounds, this study revolves around three basic questions:

- Can Dark Triad traits of personalities impact organizational culture?
- Can Dark Triad traits of personalities influence employee's performance?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Psychology behind Dark Triad of Personality

McClelland & Burnham (1976) identifies that fundamental motives for all human actions are due to the need for power, the need for achievement, and the need for affiliation. A person who exhibits a high desire for power is more likely to exert control over others[21]. Next, the need for achievement strives a person for excellence. When an individual strives to build, and maintain positive relationships, then it expresses that person's need for affiliation. To support this view, Jonason & Ferrel (2016) pointed out that the mentioned three human motives and DT are interrelated.[22]

According to Paulhus and Williams (2002), there exists a trio of socially evil tendencies, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism, which share a socially malign character, but differ in their motives, thoughts, values, and behaviors. In addition, the dark personality traits all show their own unique behavioral patterns. Individuals with high Machiavellianism and psychopathy rarely exhibited self-enhancement behaviors. On the other hand, individuals high in narcissism tend to frequently engage in self-enhancement behaviors, aggression typically the following provocation. While compared with Machiavellians and narcissists, psychopaths are more likely to behave in antisocial, indiscriminate aggression, and violent behavior. Moreover, psychopaths were found to have weaker capabilities of moral reasoning. Based on genetic and phenotypic research on moral development, research suggests that Machiavellians are the best moral philosophers, even if they act in a self-serving manner regardless of their moral reasoning. Therefore, it is evident that all the three dark-triad traits have unique behavioral and cognitive expressions, according to the empirical study by Jones & Paulhus (2011).[23]

Narcissism

Narcissism is characterized by the feeling of superiority, seeking attention and admiration (Gardner & Pierce, 2011)[24], hyper-competitiveness (Watson et al 1998)[25] dominance, (Corry et al 2008),[26] and entitlement (Raskin & Hall, 1979).[27] To support this view, Back et al (2013) described a "bright" and a "dark" side of narcissism, narcissistic admiration, and rivalry. Narcissistic admiration involves grand illusions, captivating behavior, and the pursuit of uniqueness. Competing for superiority and devaluing others are characteristics of narcissistic rivalry. The impact of the former leads to a self-confident, expressive, and dominant appearance. While narcissistic rivalry entails arrogant and contentious behavior. Over the medium-to-long term, social groups may experience serious declines in popularity due to narcissistic rivalry. Over the medium-to-long term, social groups may experience serious declines in popularity due to narcissistic rivalry.[28]

Machiavellianism

Paulhus (2014) argues that Machiavellians are master manipulators, pursuing a long-term oriented calculated social manipulation.[29] These groups have a strong tendency to maximize personal benefits and achieve individual goals by using other people as means (Christei & Geis, 1970).[30] Individuals with these traits are unemotional and insensitive, and their primary motive rests on gaining money, power, and status. These groups do not need constant admiration, rather they would enjoy it to the extent that it helped them achieve some other goal. Machiavellians, therefore, are not interested in self-promotion, and self-aggrandization as their ultimate goals, but rather as means to another end instead (Furtner et al. 2017).[31]

Psychopathy

Jones and Paulhus (2014) stress that psychopathic traits are related to dysfunctional impulsivity, inability to inhibit antisocial impulses, uncontrolled aggression, and high risk-taking behavior. This high impulsivity leads to disinhibition, meanness, and boldness. The uncontrolled aggression for a thrill differs the psychopath from the impression-motivated narcissist. Psychopaths maintain their callous and unemotional effect even when watching a suffering person, whereas narcissists and Machiavellians would not express aggression in front of others.[32] For narcissists, it means making a poor impression of them and because Machiavellians are too strategic and controlled, it would mean making a bad impression on others (Cima & Raine, 2009; Patrick et al. 2009; Lee & Gibbons, 2017).[33-35] Hence, they lack not only empathy but also anxiety. (Babiak & Hare, 2006).[36]

The impact of DT leaders on organizational culture

The above reviews provide an insight that DT leaders seem charismatic, encouraging, and faithful at first glance along with positive traits like extraversion or open-mindedness. Additionally, these groups can exhibit constructive leadership qualities such as visionary thinking (narcissism; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006),[37] strategic planning (Machiavellianism; Wilson et al. 1996),[38] or courage (Psychopathy: Babiak and Hare, 2006). For instance, narcissists are forceful enough to speak up and guide their team with confidence. Similarly, psychopaths use hard tactics (threats) as a part of work manipulations. Machiavellians can be perceived as people who support their team members by more talkative and self-promotion. In fact, these actions can be disastrous. The narcissist's self-involved decision-making and hypersensitivity to self-image can detrimentally influence job and company performance as well as interpersonal relationships (Blair et al, 2008).[39] Likewise, Jonason et al. (2015) mention that Machiavellians disagreeing, ruthless, and egoistic striving for power can lead to highly competitive workplaces and unethical work strategies. Additionally, psychopathy can lead to increased bullying, unfair supervision, and conflict, complicating interpersonal relationships at work and violating ethical standards (Scherer et al. 2013).[40]

The leaders are the motives for the employees in creating a positive work culture as the culture shares the beliefs, ideas, and notions of all individuals. This facilitates accomplishing the organizational goals. However, with DT traits, leaders would exploit and emotionally exhaust their subordinates, put stress on them, make them depressed, and less satisfied and engaged in their work (Ellen et al. 2017).[41] Moreover, Spain et al. (2013) highlight that dark personalities at work are relatively understudied.[42] At the same time, a lot of studies show interest in this dark personality at work (Harms & Spain, 2015; Cohen, 2016).[43-44] Hence, the first hypothesis for the study is:

H_1: There is a significant relationship between DT traits and organizational culture.

The impact of DT leaders on employee's performance

The literature emphasizes that DT personalities can affect individual performances through negative interpersonal work relationships and psychological well-being (Southard et al. 2015).[45] This would reflect on individual productivity. Another notion that is not well-researched is that individuals in higher positions develop higher DT tendencies. The power or demands placed on executives/leaders can lead them to be more strategic, and this may sometimes result in unethical behavior (Hambrick et al. 2005).[46] Further, risk-taking character towards innovation amongst managers to de-accentuate responsiveness and accountability.

These executives are willing to do anything and use anybody in an egotistical pursuit of their goals (Gilley et al. 2002).[47] These practices can lead to unethical practices, and hence, other team members' performance will also be affected. Additionally, personality can change with respect to the context. The DT traits are less stable than other personality traits (Schreiber and Marcus, 2020), so in the long run, the team members will also be less stable in their tasks. In the above background, it is imperative to find the relationship between DT traits leaders and their effect on employee's performance.[48]

H_2: There is a significant relationship between DT traits and employee performance.

Based on the above background, the study has developed a conceptual model to know about the dark triad leadership in a detailed manner and is illustrated in Fig 1.

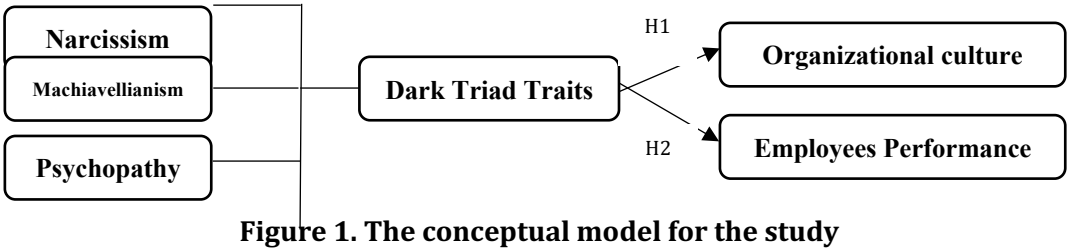


Figure 1. The conceptual model for the study
Source: Literature review

RESEARCH METHODS

Sample size and Sociodemographic factors of the study

An electronic questionnaire was designed and sent by email to the respondents. The study sample was 400 full-time employees working in the Emirati educational sectors chosen by the random sampling method. The valid responses were 360. The male participants were 201 (55.8%). Female participants were 159 (44.2%). Participant's ages below 25 years old were 36 (10%), participants between (25 to less than 35 years) were 120 (33.3%), participants between (35 to less than 45 years) were 100 (27.8%), participants between (45 to less than 55 years) were 78 (21.7%), and participant's age more than 55 years old were 26 (7.2%). Additionally, 242 participants have bachelor's degrees (67.2%), 86 participants have master's degrees (23.9%), and 32 participants hold PhDs (8.9%).

Tests

The research adopted the Dirty Dozen Scale to measure the Leaders DT (Jonason & Webster, 2010), the scale consisted of the three DT sub-variables (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy).[49] The scale has twelve items, items from (1 to 4) measure Narcissism, items from (5 to 8) measure Machiavellianism, and items from (9 to 12) measure Psychopathy. To measure the organizational culture, the study adopted the Van den Berg & Wilderom, (2004) scale, which contains (10) items that reflect the employee's common understanding of workplace practices related to the leadership and cultural aspects.[50] Employees' performances were measured using a short version of the Self-Assessment Scale developed by (Andrade et al., 2020), which has 10 items.[51] All items are measured with a five-point Likert scale. To measure the validity of the data, Cronbach's alpha has done. As a next step, descriptive analysis has been made to test the hypotheses. For this, correlation analysis aims have been utilized for the study. Correlation coefficients show the direction of an association (Tate, 1995).[52] A higher correlation coefficient indicates a stronger association. The values between +1 and -1 show a significant relationship

between variables. Additionally, regression analysis allows examining the relationship between two or more variables of interest. The R-squared represents the percentage of variation in the response variable explained by the predictors in the model collectively.

Reliability test

Reliability is a measuring tool that calculates the instrument consistency of data. Relate to this assertion, Cronbach's alpha indicator was used to assess the survey item's internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability analysis

Variables	Items	Alpha Score
Narcissism	4	0.863
Machiavellianism	4	0.849
Psychopathy	4	0.885
Organizational Culture	10	0.872
Employees Performance	10	0.858

Table 1 clarifies that Cronbach's alpha values reflect all survey items to be accepted for the study because all the values are above 0.8.

Descriptive analysis

Table 2. Employees' Responses to the study variables

Items	μ	S. D
Dark Triad Traits	**3.86**	**1.07**
Narcissism	**4.04**	**1.11**
1. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior wants others to admire him.	3.88	1.10
2. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior wants others to pay attention to him.	4.22	1.13
3. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior wants to seek prestige or status.	4.31	1.15
4. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior expects special favors from others.	3.74	1.09
Machiavellianism	**4.07**	**1.09**
5. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior manipulates others to get his way.	3.79	1.11
6. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior lies to get his way.	4.52	1.12
7. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior flatters to get his way.	3.63	1.10
8. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior exploits others towards his own end.	4.37	1.06
Psychopathy	**3.48**	**1.03**
9. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior tends to lack regret.	3.55	1.04
10. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior is not concerned with the morality of his actions.	3.49	1.03
11. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior is insensitive or unsympathetic.	3.51	1.03
12. My Supervisor / Manager / Superior is often cynical.	3.39	1.02
Organizational Culture (as an impact of manager's traits)	**2.73**	**0.816**
1. I feel it is important for individuals working at different levels to have a common view.	2.98	0.834
2. I feel ethical values are needed which help us to differentiate right from wrong and guide our behavior.	2.82	0.772
3. I believe it is important to have a value system that determines the business.	2.78	0.744

Items	μ	S. D
4. I believe it is important for my organization to provide freedom.	2.43	0.801
5. I believe it is significant for the employees to have the chance of introducing their ideas before management makes decisions.	2.65	0.829
6. There is an ethical code that guides our behavior and tells us right from wrong.	2.88	0.851
7. I believe it is necessary to create a very strong culture.	2.71	0.862
8. I believe it is important to reach on an agreement, even on difficult issues.	2.91	0.849
9. I believe it is important for my organization to have a clear agreement about the right way and the wrong way to do things.	2.87	0.832
10. I believe it is important to create a culture that encourages learning.	2.31	0.792
Employee Performance	**2.61**	**0.696**
1. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to perform challenging tasks properly.	2.86	0.714
2. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to update my knowledge to do my job	2.7	0.652
3. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to do my job according to what he/she expects from me.	2.66	0.624
4. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to plan the execution of my job by defining actions, deadlines, and priorities.	2.31	0.681
5. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I plan actions according to my tasks and organizational routines.	2.53	0.709
6. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to take the initiatives to improve my results at work.	2.76	0.731
7. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I seek new solutions for problems that may come up in my job.	2.59	0.742
8. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to work hard to do the tasks designated to me.	2.79	0.729
9. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to execute my tasks foreseeing their results.	2.75	0.712
10. According to my Supervisor / Manager / Superior influence, I need to seize opportunities that can improve my results at work	2.19	0.672

Overall, the results validate that there is an existence of dark triad leadership in some ay way or another way in the UAE educational sectors as the value for SD is <1. The samples have maintained consistency in their responses. Moreover, it confirms that dark traits can impact positively or negatively on organizational culture and employee performance.

HYPOTHESES TEST

Both correlation and linear regression have been conducted to test the identified hypotheses. First, the Pearson correlation analysis has been chosen to examine the linkage between the dark triad and its dimensions and for both dependents (organizational culture and employee performance). Likewise, a regression analysis has been applied to measure the direct relationship between the study variables. The analyses are depicted in Table 3 and Table 4.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Correlation - Dark Triad and its Dimensions with Organizational Culture

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Sig.
	Organizational Culture Correlation (R)	
Dark Triad	0.91**	0.00
Narcissism	0.920**	0.00
Machiavellianism	0.95**	0.00
Psychopathy	0.93**	0.00

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

As shown in Table 3, all correlation values are significant, which means that there is a relation between the dark triad traits and organizational culture. Increasing leaders' dark triad traits should affect organizational culture in a negative way. These findings are consistent with the views of Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Wilson et al. 1996; Babiak and Hare, 2006 that these three types of leadership traits can positively contribute to the organizational culture. The results reflected that the highest correlation value (-0.737) was between narcissism and organizational culture, which means that the dark traits amongst managers/supervisors in the selected education sectors have a negative influence on the overall organizational culture.

Table 4. Correlation - Dark Triad and its Dimensions with Employees' Performance

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Sig.
	Employees Performance (R)	
Dark Triad	0.980**	0.00
Narcissism	0.948**	0.00
Machiavellianism	0.941**	0.00
Psychopathy	0.953**	0.00

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Table 4 clarifies that correlation values are significant, which means that there is a significant relationship between the dark triad traits and employees' performance. In a long run, it can negatively affect the organization. Increasing leaders' dark triad traits should affect the employee's overall performance in a negative way. These findings confirm the view that (Southard et al. 2015) dark traits affect individual performances through negative interpersonal work relationships and psychological well-being, which in turn reflect on individual productivity. Moreover, the risk-taking character can slow down the ethical practices in firms (Southard et al. 2015; Schreiber and Marcus, 2020). The results reflected that the highest correlation value was >0.9 for all traits and employee performance, so 95% of the relationship between variables. Additionally, Figure 2 exhibits the correlation between dark traits and organizational culture, and employee performance.

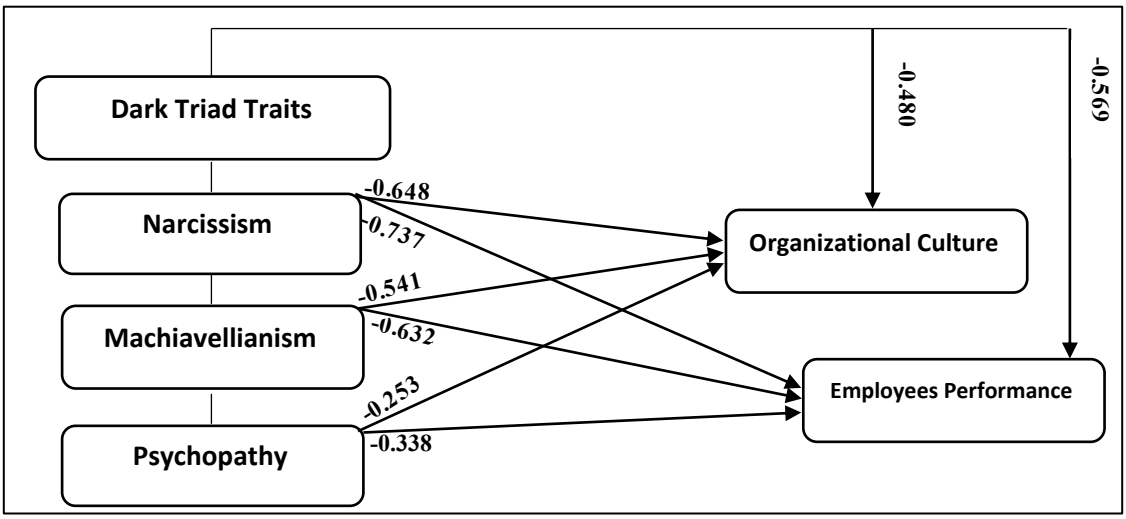


Figure 2. Correlation between the study Variables
Source: Data analysis

Regression Analysis

As a next step, regression analysis has been made as this analysis is a quantitative research method used in studies that analyze multiple variables, where a dependent variable is paired with one or more independent variables. Tables 5 and 6 represent the regression analysis.

Table 5. Regression between Dark Triad Dimensions and Organizational Culture

Dependent	Independents	β	R^2	Sig
Organizational Culture	**Narcissism**	0.10	0.950	0.10
	Machiavellianism	0.17	0.982	0.10
	Psychopathy	0.09	0.994	0.10

Table 6. Regression between Dark Triad Dimensions and Employees' Performance

Dependent	Independents	β	R^2	Sig
Employees' Performance	**Narcissism**	0.91	0.10	0.10
	Machiavellianism	0.88	0.981	0.10
	Psychopathy	0.11	0.990	0.10

The R-squared values (>0.95) for both variables with their constructs show significance, hence the regression model is considered reliable and there is no variability in the dataset. This confirms the fact that leaders' dark triad traits in organizations have a significant effect on both organizational culture and employee's performance, the results also reflected that the narcissistic trait has the highest effect on both organizational culture and employees' performance, the second in order comes Machiavellianism then Psychopathy.

INTERPRETATION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings the selected firms can take a move on the following strategies to streamline the leadership traits in a transformational way.

Narcissism

The employees' responses to the narcissism dimension reflect that the selected firms have narcissistic leaders to some extent, as it was characterized by a feeling of dominance and the looking for esteem (Gardner & Pierce, 2011).

Machiavellianism

The results also showed that the selected firms have Machiavellianism in their workplace as these types of managers use manipulative tactics in interpersonal relations to gain and maintain power (Paulhus, 2014; Christie & Geis, 1970).

Psychopathy

The findings indicate that this trait can also be visible but to a lesser extent as it is associated with high impulsivity, uncontrolled aggression, and boldness (Cima & Raine, 2009; Back et al., 2013). These traits lack not only empathy but high anxiety as well (Paulhus, 2014).

Organizational culture

The outcome from the analysis proves the effect of all three traits on organizational culture. The narcissists' self-involved decision-making behavior affects the job, company performance, and interpersonal relationships. The Machiavellian's ruthlessness and striving for power can lead to unethical and competitive workplaces (Jonason et al. 2015).

Employee Performance

The results reflected that the employee's performance within the selected firms was affected by the manager's practices. Overall, DT traits will damage interpersonal work relationships and others' well-being. Employees feel exhausted by their supervisors, putting them demotivated, and tensed in their tasks (O'Boyle et al. 2012; Southard et al. 2015).

Suggestions

Recommendation	Description	Responsibility	Practices
Dark Triad Traits Eradication	Rooting such traits out of the organizational environment	HRM Department	1. Constantly document these traits.
			2. Ensure that expectations are clear and have a clear vision and mission.
			3. Move the troublesome person inside the organization to buy time.
		Top Management	4. Create clear and healthy boundaries.
			5. The organization's values should be assured.
Execute psychometric evaluation	A periodical Evaluation should be done	HRM Department	1. Execute a psychometric evaluation to the organization managers annually.
			2. A psychological evaluation should be included during staffing for managers.
Develop psychological counseling plan	The plan targeting managers to	HRM Department	HRM Department develop a plan to reduce the negative effect of such behavior, to keep it within the accepted margins.

Recommendation	Description	Responsibility	Practices
	reduce dark triad traits		
Reconsider the Training strategy	A new Training strategy should be considered	Top Management	Reconsidering the training strategy by drawing a strategy that includes a bundle of skills enables the employees to reduce the DT manager's effect through teamwork practices.
Using Reenforce approach	Adopting a reenforce approach to eliminate DT Behaviors	Top Management & HRM Department	Activate a set of procedures and rules that aims to penalize leaders with such behaviors.

CONCLUSION

The current research aims to investigate the nature of the relationship between the manager's DT traits and both organizational culture and employee performance. The hypotheses tested using correlation and regression analyses confirm the significance of variables to the dependent constructs. In all sense, this study can throw light on the leadership traits of any organization in creating organizational culture by valuing employees' beliefs and improving individual performance. It may feel that the dark traits can be helpful in the beginning, but in a long run, the three traits; narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopath would negatively impact the work, organizational culture, and employee performance. Hence, there is more scope to diversify these types of study to other sectors as well. At the same time, the study has limitations due to sensitive aspects, and ethical factors.

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