

The Dark Triad of Personality and its Relationship to Leadership, Management, Team Work and Influencing Behaviours, and 360 Degree Assessments of Satisfaction

Tony Manning*

St Ronan's Cottage, Mavis Bank, Selkirk, TD7 4EA, Scotland

Abstract: The 'Dark Triad' refers to three socially-aversive personalities, namely, Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. Previous research shows both how such behaviours can be both counter-productive and advantageous. However, there is little on how the Dark Triad is linked to specific workplace behaviours. This article fills this gap by looking at the relationship between measures of the Dark Triad and self-assessments of leadership, management, team working and influencing behaviours, as well as with 360 degree assessments of such behaviours. It identifies particular behaviours that are used by each of the three personality types, along with 360 degree assessments of such behaviours. Given that the Dark Triad exists and that it has implications for the workplace behaviours, organisations have to deal with such behaviours. The article ends by considering the practical implications of the research findings, including issues around selection and placement, team composition and training and development. Finally, it suggests areas for further research.

Keywords: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Personality, Workplace behaviour, Behaviour management.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of the 'Dark Triad' refers to three socially-aversive personalities, namely, Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. Originally popularised by Paulhus and Williams [1], Furnham *et al.* [2] have provided a more recent critical review of the expanding literature on this topic, including major outcome domains.

One outcome domain Furnham *et al.* [2] examined was occupational, where they described counter-productive behaviour associated with the Dark Triad personalities. They also considered how such personalities have proved advantageous. However, there was little in the way of detail on how the Dark Triad is linked to specific workplace behaviours.

There is, nonetheless, an extensive body of research on the relationship between personality and workplace behaviour. Thus, for example, Judge *et al.* [3] carried out a meta-analysis using 222 correlations and based on 73 studies that looked at leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness and personality. Similarly Bono and Judge [4] carried out a meta-analysis on a combined sample of 3,130 from 12 samples on transformational and transactional leadership and personality.

It is clear from the literature reviewed and the research findings presented that the Dark Triad exists and has implications for the performance of people at work. This means that organisations have to deal with these personalities. Moreover, because they are within the normal range, organisations must do so in ways that respect and value individual differences.

This article seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature on the Dark Triad and workplace behaviour by looking at the relationships between measures of the Dark Triad and measures of leadership and management, team work and influencing behaviours, along with 360 degree assessments of satisfaction with such behaviours. In so doing, it provides evidence indicating the specific behaviours used and avoided by the three personality types, and levels of satisfaction with such behaviours.

This article begins with an account of the Dark Triad of personality. It outlines the Five Factor model of personality (Big Five) and research into the relationship between the Dark Triad and the Big Five. It describes the research methodology used, including the measurement of the Dark Triad, the various behaviours and 360 degree assessments of satisfaction with such behaviours. Conclusions are drawn about the specific behaviours high scorers on the Dark Triad tend to use and avoid, and the levels of satisfaction associated with such behaviours.

The article ends by briefly considering the practical implications of the research findings, including issues

*Address correspondence to this author at the St Ronan's Cottage, Mavis Bank, Selkirk, TD7 4EA, Scotland; Tel: 01750 23565; E-mail: tonymanning46@btinternet.com

around selection and placement, team composition and training and development. Finally, it suggests areas for further research.

THE DARK TRIAD OF PERSONALITY

Three variables have been found to be particularly prominent when looking at personalities which are socially-aversive but within the normal range. These constructs and their measurement in the sub-clinical domain are considered briefly below.

1. MACHIAVELLIANISM

The construct of Machiavellianism, the manipulative personality, was developed by Christie and Geis [5] from the original ideas of Machiavelli. Individuals scoring highly on this trait were more likely to behave in a cold and manipulative fashion in laboratory and real world studies.

2. NARCISSISM

The construct of sub-clinical narcissism emerged from the work of Raskin and Hall [6]. Facets of this trait included grandiosity, entitlement, dominance and superiority.

3. PSYCHOPATHY

The most recent concept to be applied to the sub-clinical sphere is psychopathy [7, 8]. This trait is characterised by high impulsivity and thrill-seeking, along with low empathy and anxiety.

The Dark Triad and Workplace Behaviour

A general review of the Dark Triad is beyond the scope of this article. However, research findings on workplace behaviour are relevant. Furnham *et al.* [2] drew the following conclusions on this topic:

1. At least one of the Dark Triad personalities invariably emerges in analyses of counter-productive workplace behaviour. There is also evidence that Dark Triad leaders and non-leaders typically derail at some time down the line.
2. There is, however, an adaptive side to such behaviour, in that there are contexts in which they can be advantageous. They can also be combined with other factors (e.g. intelligence and physical attractiveness) to help people acquire leadership positions. However, they serve to

help people get into leadership positions more than to get on with others when they are in such positions.

3. There is evidence from simulations involving student samples that narcissists claimed to use soft manipulation tactics, psychopaths chose hard tactics and Machiavellians chose both hard and soft tactics. However, this research is not based on actual assessments of the behaviour of people at work.

The Five Factor Model of Personality (Big Five)

The Five Factor Model of Personality (Big Five) assumes that individual personality differences can be comprehensively described on five more-or-less independent factors, dimensions or traits. These factors recur in studies of the terms used in natural languages and in research using questionnaires, self-ratings, peer ratings and observer ratings. See, for example: Digman and Inouye [9]; Costa and McCrae [10]; Goldberg [11].

The Big Five personality factors are:

- I. Extraversion i.e. comfort in social relations, a lack of social inhibition.
- II. Agreeableness i.e. friendliness, warmth and consideration for others.
- III. Conscientiousness i.e. persistence, self-control and organisation.
- IV. Neuroticism i.e. a lack of emotional resilience.
- V. Openness i.e. openness to experience, broad interests and imagination.

The Dark Triad and the Big Five

Paulhus and Williams [1] examined whether, in normal samples, the constructs of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy could be mapped onto the Big Five domains of personality. Their findings are shown in Table 1 below.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected by the author during his training and development work. Samples included men and women, at all organisational levels from a wide variety of mainly public sector organisations in the UK. See Appendices 1 to 4 for details of sample sizes.

Table 1: Correlations of the Dark Triad with the Big Five

| Big Five Inventory | Narcissism | Machiavellianism | Psychopathy |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| I. Extraversion | 0.42 | -0.05 | 0.34 |
| II. Agreeableness | -0.36 | -0.47 | -0.25 |
| III. Conscientiousness | -0.06 | -0.34 | -0.24 |
| IV. Neuroticism | 0.02 | 0.12 | -0.34 |
| V. Openness | 0.38 | -0.03 | 0.24 |

N = 245. All correlations in bold are significant at $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Individuals were typically participants on management and leadership development programmes run by the author, on his own behalf or for the or by the UK National School of Government, formerly the Civil Service College.

Individuals typically completed the assessments online before the events. Results were returned and reviewed in confidence on the various events. Individuals agreed to their results being used in an anonymous form for research purposes.

The research findings presented here describe the degree of correlation, and its statistical significance, between measures of the Dark Triad and measures of three types of workplace behaviour, namely, leadership and management, team work and influencing behaviour. They also describe the relationship between these behaviours and 360 degree assessments of satisfaction.

Measures of the Dark Triad were derived from measures of the Big Five using equations derived from Paulhus and Williams [1], as detailed above. The Big Five traits were self-assessed on an adjective checklist, based on research by Trapnell and Wiggins [12].

Leadership and management behaviours were self-assessed using the Leadership Style Inventory [13]. This is based on the Three Factor Model of leadership [14, 15]. It seeks to provide a comprehensive and parsimonious description of leadership and management behaviour, assessing 17 sets of behaviours grouped under three headings, namely, relations, task and change.

Self-assessments of team work behaviours were obtained using the Team Role Questionnaire [16]. Scores were obtained on the nine team roles described by Belbin [17] in his team role theory. Each role is described in behavioural terms indicating its particular contribution to team working, along with associated strengths and weaknesses.

Self-assessments of influencing behaviours were obtained using the Influencing Strategies and Styles Profile [18]. This provides scores on the frequency with which people at work use six influence strategies.

360 degree assessments were obtained using an instrument developed by Sir John Hunt of the London Business School [19]. This was used to produce scores on satisfaction with three areas of performance, namely, relations, task and change.

Further details of the assessment methods and on the reliability and validity of the instruments are available from the author on request.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Detailed research findings are presented in the Appendices. These look at the degree of correlation and its statistical significance between Dark Triad measures and measures of leadership and management behaviour (Appendix 1), team work behaviours (Appendix 2) and influencing behaviours (Appendix 3). Appendix 4 examines relationships between the Big Five, the Dark Triad and 360 degree assessments of satisfaction.

The following account summarises the statistically significant relationships between the Dark Triad personalities and the various behaviours. It identifies behaviours most likely to be used and avoided by high scorers on each Dark Triad measure. Brief comments are then made on 360 degree assessments of satisfaction for these behaviours.

The level of two-tailed statistical significance is shown as: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01. Items within each group are listed in order, according to the degree of correlation.

1. Narcissism

The main conclusions drawn from the above table are that narcissists tend to:

Table 2: Behaviours Used and Avoided by Narcissists

| Leadership and management | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Shows and expects commitment. (***) | None significant. |
| Scans the external environment. (***) | |
| Builds a support network. (***) | |
| Clarifies roles. (***) | |
| Stimulates innovation. (**) | |
| Takes risks. (**) | |
| Plans activities. (**) | |
| Team roles | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Shaper. (***) | Team worker (supporter). (**) |
| Resource investigator. (***) | Completer finisher. (**) |
| Plant (innovator). (***) | Implementer. (*) |
| Co-ordinator. (***) | |
| Influencing strategies | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Assertion. (***) | None significant. |
| Reason. (**) | |
| Partnership. (**) | |

1. Take the lead and adopt a directive and autocratic style of leadership, as indicated by their use of shaping co-ordinating, clarifying roles and asserting behaviours.
2. Be outward-looking, as indicated by their use of environment scanning and resource investigating.
3. Actively promote change, as indicated by their use of showing commitment, networking, stimulating innovation, taking risks, innovating, reasoning and partnership behaviours.

However, narcissists also tend to have significant weaknesses in relation to:

1. Building positive relationships with other team members, as indicated by their avoidance of team worker behaviours.
2. Getting tasks completed properly and on time, as indicated by their avoidance of completer finisher behaviours.

2. Machiavellianism

The main conclusions drawn from Table 3 below are that Machiavellians tend not to:

1. Build positive working relationships, as indicated by the lack of supporting, generating security, consulting and praising behaviours.
2. Ensure tasks are carried out effectively, as indicated by the lack of clarifying roles, developing members, co-ordinating, implementing and shaping behaviours.
3. Promote changes, as indicated by the lack of showing commitment and networking behaviours.

While Machiavellians appear to contribute little to organisations as leaders, managers or team members, they are willing to take risks and use coercion to influence others.

3. Psychopathy

The main conclusions drawn from Table 3 below are that psychopaths tend not to:

1. Take the lead in teams and adopt a punishment-centered style style, as indicated by their use of shaping and coercive behaviours.

Table 3: Behaviours Used and Avoided by Machiavellians

| Leadership and management | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Takes risks. (*) | Provides support. (***) |
| | Generates security. (***) |
| | Shows and expects commitment. (***) |
| | Builds a support network. (***) |
| | Consults members. (***) |
| | Clarifies roles. (**) |
| | Empowers members. (**) |
| | Praises and recognises. (**) |
| | Promotes team work. (**) |
| | Develops members. (**) |
| Team roles | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| None significant. | Co-ordinator. (***) |
| | Implementer. (***) |
| | Team worker (supporter). (***) |
| | Shaper. (**) |
| | Resource investigator. (*) |
| Influencing strategies | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Coercion. (***) | Courting favour. (*) |

Table 4: Behaviours Used and Avoided by Psychopaths

| Leadership and management | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Takes risks. (***) | Generates security. (***) |
| Scans the environment. (**) | |
| Stimulates innovation. (**) | |
| Team roles | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Shaper. (**) | Team worker (supporter). (***) |
| Plant (innovator). (**) | Implementer. (***) |
| Resource investigator. (**) | Completer. (***) |
| | Co-ordinator. (***) |
| Influencing strategies | |
| Behaviours used | Behaviours avoided |
| Coercion. (***) | Courting favour. (*) |

2. Have an outward-looking, change-oriented focus, as indicated by their use of environment

scanning, resource investigating, risk taking and stimulating innovation behaviours.

However, psychopaths also tend to have significant weaknesses, in that they:

1. Pay little attention to building positive working relationships, as indicated their avoidance of generating security and team working behaviours
2. Be poor at organising their own work and that of others, as indicated by their avoidance of implementing, completing and co-ordinating behaviours.

360 Degree Assessments of the Dark Triad

360 degree assessments of satisfaction serve as a useful measure of both 'socially-aversive' behaviour and performance. Appendix 4 shows the degree of correlation between measures of the Dark Triad and such assessments. From this data, it is possible to draw the following general conclusions:

1. Narcissism scores are positively correlated with satisfaction, although relationships are weak and not statistically significant. However, those for 'change' behaviours approach statistical significance, indicating that respondents see high scorers as somewhat effective in leading change.
2. Machiavellianism scores are negatively correlated with satisfaction with all three sets of behaviours, with those for 'relations' behaviours statistically significant. This indicates that Machiavellians are seen as ineffective, particularly in building working relationships with those they lead and manage.
3. Psychopathy scores are negatively correlated with satisfaction with two sets of behaviours (i.e. relations and task) and positively related to the third (i.e. change), although none of the relationships are statistically significant.

The above findings indicate that Machiavellianism is the most toxic of the Dark Triad, in that levels of dissatisfaction are the highest and linked to the widest range of outcomes.

However, the relationship between specific behaviours linked to the Dark Triad and 360 degree assessments of satisfaction is more complex than the above account suggests. In particular, satisfaction is high in behaviours that combine high narcissism with

low Machiavellianism and psychopathy (e.g. coordinator), while dissatisfaction is high in behaviours that combine high narcissism with high Machiavellianism and psychopathy (e.g. risk taking). See Appendices 1 to 3 for details.

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This article is concerned with socially-aversive personalities that are within the normal range and are represented among people at work. The approach adopted herein is to respect and value such individuals. This article provides ways in which this might be achieved. It also offers suggestions for further research based on these ideas.

1. Matching the Person to the Situation

Given that there are both counter-productive and adaptive elements to the three Dark Triad personalities, it is useful to identify situations where each may be more or less effective. This issue has been explored by Furnham and Pendleton [20]. It has practical implications for the selection, placement and promotion of people at work.

Research findings indicate that narcissists and, to a lesser extent psychopaths, are likely to take the lead and do so in a directive, autocratic, outward-looking and change-oriented manner. However, they pay little attention to building positive working relationships or organising tasks. This suggests that they may be most effective in more symbolic leadership roles, where they are not directly responsible for managing people or operations.

Research findings also indicate that psychopaths and, to a lesser extent Machiavellians, are likely to be adaptable thinkers, willing to take risks and make tough decisions. However, they pay little attention to building positive working relationships or organising tasks.

This suggests that they may be suited to roles requiring intellectual detachment, providing they are not required to gain the support of others or carry out tasks arising from their decisions, or they can be overruled.

2. Team Composition and Complimentary Roles

Another strategy for dealing with Dark Triad personalities is to select teams that contain a balance of attributes, thereby counter-balancing the more socially-aversive features of these personalities. This approach is in line with the theory of team roles [17].

There is some evidence to support the idea that high team performance is associated with teams containing a balanced mix of personalities [21]. A recurring theme in the research findings presented in this article is that Dark Triad personalities tend to be relatively poor at building positive working relationships as well as organising, implementing and completing tasks. This suggests teams containing Dark Triad personalities may be more effective if they also contain individuals with complementary strengths in interpersonal and organisational skills.

3. Training and Development

It may also be possible to train and develop individuals to overcome or limit the socially-aversive

aspects of their personalities, particularly by developing interpersonal and organisational skills. Manning and Robertson [13, 22] have developed behavioural frameworks describing learnable followership and leadership skills.

4. Further Research

The research described in this article builds on and goes beyond existing research on the Dark Triad and workplace behaviour. Further research in this area could usefully employ direct measures of the Dark Triad, be extended beyond public sector organisations in the UK, include other measures of competences and evaluate the effectiveness of the three interventions described above.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Leadership and Management Behaviours, the Dark Triad and 360 Degree Assessments

Statistically significant items above 0.1 two-tailed in all tables are shown in bold.

Detailed information on all measures used is available from the author.

| | Dark Triad (N = 147) | | | 360 Degree Satisfaction (N = 53) | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Relations behaviours | | | | | | |
| Praise and recognise | 0.12 | -0.19 | -0.09 | 0.23 | 0.17 | 0.09 |
| Provide support | 0.10 | -0.39 | -0.05 | 0.23 | 0.19 | 0.05 |
| Generate security | -0.08 | -0.36 | -0.26 | 0.27 | 0.23 | 0.12 |
| Consult members | -0.01 | -0.23 | -0.12 | 0.15 | 0.23 | 0.12 |
| Empower members | -0.09 | -0.19 | -0.12 | 0.15 | 0.00 | -0.01 |
| Task behaviours | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Plan activities | 0.14 | -0.13 | -0.05 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.30 |
| Clarify roles | 0.24 | -0.19 | 0.04 | 0.35 | 0.38 | 0.33 |
| Monitor operations | 0.00 | -0.13 | -0.09 | 0.06 | 0.08 | -0.07 |
| Control work | 0.12 | -0.09 | 0.02 | 0.23 | 0.33 | 0.31 |
| Develop members | 0.10 | -0.15 | 0.05 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.08 |
| Change behaviours | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Scan the environment | 0.28 | -0.01 | 0.17 | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.27 |
| Envision change | 0.13 | -0.11 | 0.11 | 0.14 | 0.13 | 0.23 |
| Build support network | 0.25 | -0.28 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 0.16 | 0.29 |
| Show and expect commitment | 0.30 | -0.28 | 0.10 | 0.38 | 0.45 | 0.44 |
| Promote team work | 0.09 | -0.15 | -0.03 | 0.17 | 0.27 | 0.19 |
| Stimulate innovation | 0.20 | -0.05 | 0.16 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.15 |
| Take risks | 0.20 | 0.14 | 0.23 | -0.19 | -0.21 | -0.18 |

Appendix 2: Team Work Behaviours, the Dark Triad and 360 Degree Assessments

| Team role | Dark Triad (N = 184) | | | 360 Degree Satisfaction (N = 100) | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------|--------|
| | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Team worker (supporter) | -0.18 | -0.40 | -0.49 | 0.24 | 0.09 | 0.11 |
| Co-ordinator | 0.21 | -0.46 | -0.26 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.18 |
| Implementer | -0.14 | -0.46 | -0.48 | 0.15 | 0.29 | 0.18 |
| Completer finisher | -0.17 | -0.16 | -0.36 | 0.14 | 0.17 | 0.12 |
| Specialist | -0.09 | 0.00 | -0.06 | -0.04 | 0.01 | 0.06 |
| Monitor evaluator | 0.09 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.11 | 0.10 |
| Plant (innovator) | 0.26 | 0.05 | 0.16 | -0.03 | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| Resource investigator | 0.44 | -0.12 | 0.16 | -0.11 | -0.16 | -0.04 |
| Shaper | 0.52 | -0.16 | 0.16 | -0.04 | 0.01 | 0.10 |

Appendix 3: Influencing Behaviours, the Dark Triad and 360 Degree Assessments

| Influencing strategies | Dark Triad (N = 184) | | | 360 Degree Satisfaction (N = 100) | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------|--------|
| | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Reason | 0.18 | -0.11 | 0.06 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.06 |
| Assertion | 0.20 | 0.00 | 0.05 | -0.05 | 0.01 | -0.03 |
| Exchange | -0.08 | 0.05 | -0.10 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Courting favour | 0.04 | -0.14 | -0.12 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.06 |
| Coercion | 0.09 | 0.24 | 0.19 | -0.11 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Partnership | 0.18 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| Influencing styles | Narcissism | Machiavell | Psychopathy | Relations | Task | Change |
| Bystander v Shotgun | 0.17 | -0.02 | 0.03 | -0.03 | 0.05 | 0.04 |
| Strategist v Opportunist | -0.21 | 0.05 | -0.10 | 0.01 | -0.03 | 0.01 |
| Collaborator v Battler | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0.20 | -0.12 | -0.06 | -0.06 |

Appendix 4: The Big Five, the Dark Triad and 360 Degree Assessments of Satisfaction

| The Big Five | 360 Degree Assessments of Satisfaction | | |
|------------------------|--|-------|--------|
| | Relations | Task | Change |
| I. Extraversion | 0.23 | 0.13 | 0.27 |
| II. Agreeableness | 0.21 | 0.04 | -0.04 |
| III. Conscientiousness | 0.26 | 0.34 | 0.20 |
| IV. Neuroticism | -0.18 | -0.15 | -0.03 |
| V. Openness | -0.01 | -0.12 | -0.01 |
| The Dark Triad | Relations | Task | Change |
| Narcissism | 0.12 | 0.06 | 0.21 |
| Machiavellianism | -0.31 | -0.21 | -0.10 |
| Psychopathy | -0.14 | -0.11 | 0.04 |

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