



REVIEW ARTICLE / DERLEME YAZISI

# Outcomes of Dark Traits at work: Role of Organization in Managing Consequences

## İşyerinde Karanlık Üçlünün Çıktıları: Organizasyonun Sonuçları Yönetmedeki Rolü

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### Abstract:

This article offers a directive analysis of research highlighting the organizational outcomes and individualized repercussions linked with Dark traits characterised personnel. This study aims to: (a) analyse and compare positive and negative outcomes of the dark triad to answer, "Are DT traits an asset or liability in the workplace"; (b) identify moderating variables of DT in organizational settings. Systematic reviewing of articles published between 2002-2022 was done under PRISMA guidelines. SCOPUS, Wiley online library, JSTOR and Mendeley search database and a combination of relevant keywords aided in the search of selected articles. Key findings from 50 papers were, (a) DT outcomes can be categorized into two domains namely organisational and interpersonal outcomes; (b) the relationship between aversive consequences and dark traits is moderated by a variety of organizational aspects. Dark triad traits are a liability in the workplace but, organizations can manage its aversive consequences by actively managing moderators of DT which are exclusively rooted within organizational settings.

**Keywords:** dark triad traits, workplace, moderators, counterproductive work behaviour, interpersonal consequences, organizational outcomes, organizational psychology.

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**Öz:**

Bu makale, karanlık kişilik özellikleriyle karakterize edilen personelle bağlantılı örgütsel sonuçları ve bireysel yansımaları vurgulayan araştırmaların yönlendirici bir analizini sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı: (a) "Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri işyerinde bir kazanç mı yoksa kayıp mı?" sorusuna yanıt vermek için karanlık üçlünün olumlu ve olumsuz sonuçlarını analiz etmek ve karşılaştırmaktır; (b) örgütsel ortamlarda karanlık üçlünün ılımlı değişkenlerini belirlemektir. 2002-2022 yılları arasında yayınlanan makalelerin sistematik incelemesi PRISMA yönergeleri uyarınca yapılmıştır. SCOPUS, Wiley çevrimiçi kütüphanesi, JSTOR ve Mendeley arama veritabanı ve ilgili anahtar kelimelerin bir kombinasyonu seçilen makalelerin aranmasına yardımcı olmuştur. 50 makaleden elde edilen temel bulgular şunlardır: Karanlık üçlünün sonuçları örgütsel ve kişilerarası sonuçlar olmak üzere iki alanda kategorize edilebilir; (b) istenmeyen sonuçlar ile karanlık özellikler arasındaki ilişki çeşitli örgütsel yönler tarafından yönetilmektedir. Karanlık üçlü özellikleri işyerinde bir kayıptır, ancak kuruluşlar, yalnızca örgütsel ortamlarda kök salmış olan karanlık üçlünün moderatörlerini aktif olarak yöneterek bunun olumsuz sonuçlarını yönetebilirler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** karanlık üçlü özellikleri, işyeri, moderatörler, üretkenlik karşıtı iş davranışı, kişilerarası sonuçlar, örgütsel sonuçlar, örgütsel psikoloji

**Introduction**

Personality plays a significant role in predicting how someone behaves at work. Dark triad (DT) as a component of an employee's persona influences their work-related attitudes, decision-making, need for achievement, performance outputs and other aspects, all of which are essential for the organisation to acknowledge to gain a rich understanding of what factors make a candidate an effective contributor to the company's goals.

Dark triad traits (DT) of personality include narcissism, Machiavellianism and subclinical psychopathy. These traits are described as distinct personal temperaments which are said to be overlapping based on a dark core or underlying element that each trait shares (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Manipulation and callousness are the common core among these traits. Narcissism is characterised by an excessive sense of self-importance, engaging in exploitative relationships, lack of empathy, difficulty with attachment and asking for help, chronic feelings of boredom, and problems in maintaining a reality-based professional profile. Machiavellianism is characterised by the willingness and ability to engage in manipulative actions, deceiving, and exploitative and is solely rooted in self-interest. Subclinical psychopathy otherwise referred to as almost psychopathy is a term frequently used for individuals in the workplace who thrive on money and power. This trait is characterised by the same patterns of debilitated behaviour, cognition and affect which are unique to clinical psychopathy but the level of intensity is not as supreme (Lebreton et al., 2006). The position of the Dark triad in the personality space is characterized by linking to three personality structure models proposed over time by psychologists. These models include interpersonal circumplex (Leary, 1957), the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1991) and the Big Six model (Lee & Ashton, 2005).

Research has identified the dark triad to be associated with undesirable or aversive behaviours, but this is countered by studies in an organisational setting where the dark triads have shown promising effects on employee productivity and resistance to burnout. This leaves the concept of the dark triad in a controversial position in literature. Therefore, there is a need for addressing the consequences

of the dark triad at work to establish whether DT is a liability or an asset at work, and if it is a liability then how can we manage the aversive effects it has on organizational functioning

A systematic review was conducted in a scientifically correct manner by considering the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) recommendations. The current systematic review was used to appraise and synthesize articles that examined interpersonal individual and organizational outcomes of Dark traits and the mediator affecting the relationship between DT and its outcomes.

**Search strategies**

Online electronic databases including SCOPUS, Mendeley search, Wiley online library, and JSTOR were employed. The search was done by typing in keywords including dark triad at work, organizational setting and dark traits, dark triad personality, dark triad reviews, Dark triad among employees, and moderators of dark triad / moderating variables of dark traits.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The search yielded 1324 articles but not all of them were relevant to the objectives of the current review. The research papers were included in the review process based on the following criteria; (a) the study measured dark triad outcomes, (b) the study measured moderators that affected the cause and effect between dark triad and maladaptive behaviours as well as other aversive consequences of DT, (c) the study measured dark triad in organizational context published between 2002 and 2022, (d) peer-reviewed articles published in the English language, and (e) peer-reviewed articles published in the English language.

**Results**

Upon systematic analysis of the 50 papers selected for review, it was found that the broad range of consequences of dark traits in organizational context can be categorized into two main domains; (1) organizational outcomes which include counterproductive work behaviour, employee task/job performance, career success, organizational deviance, low organizational citizenship behaviour, and

low affective professional commitment; (2) interpersonal outcomes which include leaders with dark triad affecting work of their subordinates, interpersonal manipulation and impression management, team play, emotional manipulation, weak morals, and interpersonal deviance. It was also established that the relationship between dark triad traits and the above-mentioned outcomes is significantly affected by various mediators present in organizational settings.

### Organizational Outcomes

#### Counterproductive Workplace Behaviours (CWBs)

The relationship between CWBs and dark triad traits was addressed by several studies. Most stated that there is a significant correlation between Dark traits and engagement in CWBs (Palmer et al., 2017; Özsoy, 2018). Others focused on tracking how other variables affected this relationship and assessing which unique Dark trait was the most significant in predicting CWBs (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Filipkowski & Debis, 2020; Ernest et al., 2012; Tarantino, 2019; Danielle, 2019). Psychopathy had the strongest correlation with CWBs and on the other hand, narcissism had the weakest correlation with CWBs among the Dark Triads (Özsoy, 2018). Contradictory finding stated that Dark Triads can be dissected into facets, among these facets entitlement/exploitative narcissism strengthen the relationship between DT and CWBs (Grijalva & Newman, 2015).

Authority levels were found to have significant mediating effects on the relationship between DT and CWBs. Higher levels of authority resulted in weak correlation and vice versa (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Along with authority, organizational culture was also established as a mediating factor in this context (Ernest et al., 2012). High levels of work engagement and achievement motivation weakened the correlation between CWBs and DT (Filipkowski & Debis, 2020). Individuals' perceptions of the deceptive environment, burnout, negativity and inherent aggression all strengthened the relationship between DT and CWBs (Tarantino, 2019). Danielle 2019 found that these moderators of CWBs and the Dark triad can be classified into four classes relevant, restraining, regulatory, and resourceful. Peer reporting about counterproductive work behaviour among co-workers was also found to be a significant outcome of dark triad traits at work (Lyons et al., 2022).

#### Employee task/job performance

Literature focused on measuring personality-rooted predictors of job performance prioritised big five and big six model as the independent variable (Costa & McCrae, 1991; Lee & Ashton, 2005). There has been a shift, Dark Triad traits are trending in research done on determinants of performance at work. Average scores on DT were found to be associated with a positive correlation with job performance, but as the scores on DT increased this relationship was reversed (Uppal, 2022). Machiavellianism and psychopathy among the DT were the most significant determinants of reduced job performance. Whereas, narcissism was not a significant predictor of performance (Crosman, 2021). There are certain latent profiles within the three major Dark triad traits namely benevolent, high Machiavellianism, high Psychopathy, and Malevolent. Malevolent profile was found to have the highest degree of correlation with job performance, specifically profiles characterised by

rationality, focus, work-oriented, introvert and perfectionist (Nguyen et al., 2021; Roter, 2018). High scores on narcissism were associated with high self-reported job performance. Overall there is a positive relationship between self-reported job performance and dark traits (Furnham & Treglown 2021).

A Meta-analysis provided insight into DT at work stating that there is no direct relationship between DT and job performance, rather this relationship is dependent on the presence, absence and the degree of various mediating variables (Boyle et al., 2012). Socio-emotional wealth such as an accepting and inclusive family environment helps reduce the aversive effects of DT on job performance (McLarty & Holt, 2019). Level of authority was also established as a moderator. Higher position of authority and narcissism result in reduced job performance. In addition to that culture was also a moderator of DT and job performance relationship. Personnel scoring high on narcissism paired with those operating in a culture that includes in-group collectivism are associated with high job performance (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013). Level of education was reported to be another significant mediator. High scores on Psychopathy along with higher education levels were associated with better performance at work. Similarly, low scores on psychopathy and low level of education result in reduced job performance. (Blickle & Schiitte, 2017)

#### Career success

Dark triad traits were consistent with higher salaries and leadership positions (Palczek et al., 2018). While analysing the impact of each dark triad trait with objective (leadership position and salary) and subjective (job and career satisfaction) aspects of career success it was established that narcissism and Machiavellianism have a positive correlation with objective career success as long as extraneous variables are controlled. On the other hand, Psychopathy was associated with a significant negative correlation with both (Spurk et al., 2016). Dark traits were also found to help in strengthening impression management and social capital which contributes to a successful career in the long run (Tariq et al., 2021). In addition, High scores on dark triad were significant predictors of higher perceived career success (Cohen & Ozsoy, 2021)

#### Other organisational outcomes

Psychopathy among the dark triad traits was found to have the most significant positive relationship with organizational deviance (Ellen et al., 2021). Study also disclosed that there is a negative correlation between DT and organizational citizenship behaviour, this negative correlation was reported to be weakened in the presence of positive emotions (Al Abrow et al., 2020). Research assessing the relationship between professional commitment (affective, normative and continuance commitment) and DT revealed that psychopathy was associated with low affective commitment. Machiavellianism and narcissism were associated with a higher degree of normative and continuance commitment (Kauffmann, 2021).

#### Interpersonal Outcomes

##### Leadership Roles and Dark Traits

People with dark personality traits are frequently found actively working in leadership positions, to justify this observation a study was conducted that concluded that

individuals who are at higher levels of leadership score higher on dark triad traits (Diller et al., 2021). Research investigating how DT leaders influence the career success and well-being of their subordinates stated that among the DT traits, narcissism proved to be positively related to subordinates' career success. Whereas, Machiavellianism and psychopathy were found to have an aversive impact on subordinates' success (Volmer et al., 2016). DT leaders have been reported to contribute to employee burnout (Yagil, 2006). Research revealed that employees' perceptions of dark triad leaders can regulate the relationship between dark leadership and burnout. When subordinates perceive their leader as an individual with dark tendencies, they experience a higher degree of burnout (Basar, 2020). Another research finding suggested that team-level appraisals were significantly better when the leader of the team scored higher on narcissism (Fodor et al., 2021). CEO with dark triad traits contributes to subordinates' CWBs, but it also has a positive relationship with long-term firm performance (Palmer et al., 2020). Narcissistic leaders are associated with high organizational performance. Presence of top management team behavioural integration was a significant mediator of this relationship (Reina et al., 2014). CEOs with narcissism were also associated with high organisational performance in the context of innovation. This positive influence was subjective to a situation where CEOs showcased humble behaviour towards their subordinates (Zhang et al., 2017).

Corporate personnel in authority who scored higher on the dark triad spectrum often engage in shady strategic behaviour (Schyns et al., 2019). Supervisors who scored high on psychopathy affected the degree of job satisfaction among their subordinates (Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014). Leaders with narcissism have positive effects on subordinates' objective and subjective career satisfaction. Additionally, subordinates working under a leader with Machiavellianism reported career dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion (Volmer et al., 2016). Machiavellianism was found to be a predictor of abusive supervision when the leader perceived him/herself as the power holder (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016).

### **Interpersonal Manipulation and Impression Management**

Levashina and Campion (2006) while studying the effects of Dark traits on organisational interaction found that individuals with high scores on Dark triad traits are associated with faking responses and giving socially desirable answers during a job interview (preliminary job interview). Machiavellian traits were found to have the highest positive correlation with faking responses. Similar research added to this by stating that individuals with DT are more comfortable engaging in faking behaviour (Spain et al., 2014). High scores on narcissism are more likely to actively try and make positive impressions and promote themselves through overinflation and dishonesty (Paulhus et al., 2013). Psychopathy is linked with latent profiles of interpersonal manipulation, inflated impression management, lying and lack of guilt. These latent profiles were associated with a higher tendency to engage in manipulation within organizational environments including job interviews (LeBreton et al., 2006). Personnel scoring high on Dark triad are skilled in manipulating their impression management strategies based on the nature of the hiring interview framework and structure (Roulin & Bourdage, 2017).

### **Team play**

Narcissism was the DT that has been highlighted in a team context. Individuals with significantly higher scores on narcissism tend to have an accepting and positive initial interaction in interpersonal settings at work because in preliminary interactions they showcased assertiveness, responsibility and dominance. This accepting and positive interaction flattens with time and in the long run individuals with narcissism engaged in aggressive and arrogant behaviour (Küfner et al. 2013). Among all three dark traits, individuals scoring the highest in Machiavellianism were found to be the most likely to engage in undermining team members for achieving a better evaluation (Castille et al. 2017). The perceived Dark triad was also found to be a significant aspect of maladaptive interpersonal actions like workplace gossiping. When supervisors are perceived to have dark triad traits it is associated with workplace gossip and disrespect among subordinates irrespective of the fact whether the supervisor scores low or high on DT (Wantaate, 2019). The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between DT and social loafing, this relationship was influenced by team member exchange. Team member exchange influenced the relationship between Machiavellianism and social loafing as well as psychopathy and social loafing but failed to have any significant effect on the relationship between narcissism and social loafing (Wilhau, 2021).

### **Other interpersonal consequences**

Employees with Machiavellian tendencies are referred to as individuals with weak morals and cynical attitudes towards others (Rauthmann, 2012). Emotional manipulation among employees was found to be a consequence of scoring high on DT this relationship was moderated by the degree of emotional intelligence. Additionally, it was found that females with DT were less likely to engage in malicious emotional games at work as compared to male employees with DT (Hyde et al., 2020). Dark triad traits moderate the patterns and nature of manipulation tactics used by employees as well. Hard tactics including threats and verbal abuse were used by employees scoring high on psychopathy whereas, employees who identified with Machiavellianism and narcissism are predisposed to adopting soft tactics of manipulation at work including compliments and people-pleasing. (Jonason, 2012). Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were found to be significant predictors of interpersonal deviance (Ellen, 2021).

### **Role of Organization in Managing Mediators**

Studies selected and reviewed in the current article disclosed variables within an organisation that are intrinsically mediating the relationship between DT and its corresponding outcomes. These variables can be managed by organisations allowing them to reduce maladaptive behavioural patterns associated with DT. Employees scoring high on DT were reported to be more likely to engage in CWBs. This relationship between dark triad traits and CWBs was significantly affected by perceived organisational support. Employees characterised by high scores on perceived organisational support were less likely to engage in CWBs (Palmer et al., 2017). Organizations can promote perceived organisational support and in turn manage CWBs by ensuring that employees receive fairness, support from supervisors, rewards and a favourable working environment (Rhoades et al., 2002). Constant expectations made by organisations and

supervisors from their employees characterised by consistent progress and in-group collectivism were also associated with strengthening the correlation between DT and CWBs (Danielle, 2019). By controlling their expectations to find a balance between organisational goals and employee well-being through feedback from their employees, organisations can manage CWBs among employees with DT. When employees feel like they are expected to complete certain tasks in a period which is perceived as "not enough" it increases the risk of DT engaging in CWBs. It was also identified that scoring high on DT makes employees more susceptible to time-related work stress (Clercq et al., 2019). Employees suffering from stress-related symptoms should disclose their concerns to their employers through written complaints when experiencing stress initially and keeping records of incidents or work situations triggering the stress. Organizations can then use the information collected to identify stressors in the workplace and develop corresponding management strategies (Hartley, 2003). Perceived accountability among employees is also established as a mediator of CWBs associated with Dark traits. When employees perceive that they alone held the responsibility for their actions they are less likely to engage in CWBs despite scoring high on DT (Cohen, 2016). Organisations should consider evaluating employee performances on an individual level more often to hold employees more accountable. CWBs among employees can be managed by promoting work engagement among the organisation's workforce (Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020). Work engagement among personnel can be improved by engaging in workplace health practices characterised by supervisory communication, job design, resource support, working conditions, corporate culture and the style of leadership style (Attridge, 2009). Another mediator that resides at the heart of any organisation is organisational change. If an organisation fails to tackle organisational changes with systematic coping strategies it increases the tendency to engage in CWBs among employees scoring high on DT (Ernest, 2012).

## Discussion

Existing literature on dark triad traits showcases contradictory findings. Among the studies assessing outcomes of dark triad traits, there are some which provide evidence that members of the workforce who were characterized with dark triad traits are associated with negative organizational outcomes as well as interpersonal outcomes such as engaging in counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) (Palmer et al., 2017; Özsoy, 2018), reduced job performance (Uppal, 2022; Crossman, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021; Roter, 2018), employee burnout (Yagil, 2006), interpersonal manipulation (Levashina & Campion, 2006), along with others. Whereas, other studies suggested that dark triad traits are associated with positive organizational outcomes including increased levels of performance at work (Uppal, 2022), long-term career success (Tariq et al., 2021), as well as others discussed in the results. Despite these contradictions, it is evident that

the negative outcomes of the dark triad outweigh the positive which suggests that the dark triad at work is a significant liability for organizations. Furthermore, studies reviewed in this article established that dark triad traits have a complex nature and a malleable scope, they can have both negative and positive consequences determined by certain variables inclusive of scores on dark triad traits as study reveals that average scores on DT are accompanied with non-aversive consequences (Uppal, 2022). The dark triad that is dominant among the three also determines the nature of consequences, employees that are characterised with psychopathy as the most dominant DT have the strongest correlation with negative organizational outcomes (Özsoy, 2018; Crossman, 2021; Spurk et al., 2016; Ellen et al., 2021; Kauffmann, 2021). Another key factor that governs the relationship between dark triad traits and organizational outcomes are mediators which are present in organizational settings (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Ernest et al., 2012; Pierce & Aguinis, 2013; Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020; Palmer et al., 2017; Danielle, 2019; Clercq et al., 2019; Cohen, 2016). That said, organizations can manage dark triad traits as a liability by proactively controlling and manipulating these organizational mediators to minimize the aversive consequences of DT on an organization's functions and goals.

The facts and data cumulated and interpreted in this article have widened the scope of an organization's ability to manage aspects affecting overall growth and balance within the system and established that personnel's personality traits are significant factors for the quality of organizational functioning. This will promote organizations to rethink what variables should be included and or excluded during building strategic frameworks and models for effective organizational management.

Further research trends should be focused on developing more reliable measures for dark triads that can be implemented cross-culturally and assess the extent to which various interventions, training and coaching sessions can effectively manage dark traits

## Declarations

### Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable.

### Consent for Publication

Not applicable

### Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

### Competing Interests

The author declares that no competing interests in this manuscript.

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### Authors' Contributions

VC carried out the proposal of the main idea of the research, VC contributed to the collection of data, analysis. VC and SAA carried out revision of the article content. All authors have read and approved the final article.

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