The bright and dark sides of leaders: Dark Triad traits: Effects on subordinates’ career success and well-being

Judith Volmer
University of Bamberg

Iris Katharina Koch
University of Bamberg

Anja S. Göritz
University of Freiburg

(July 2016)
LASER Discussion Papers - Paper No. 98
(edited by A. Abele-Brehm, R.T. Riphahn, K. Moser and C. Schnabel)

Correspondence to:
Prof. Dr. Judith Volmer, An der Weberei 5, 96047 Bamberg, Germany, Phone: ++49 961 863 1894, Fax: ++49 961 863 2049, Email: judith.volmer@uni-bamberg.de.
Abstract

Leaders play a pivotal role in organizations. In the present study, we investigated the role of leaders’ Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) on employees’ objective career success (i.e., salary and number of promotions) and subjective career success (i.e., career satisfaction). Further, we investigated how leaders’ Dark Triad traits affect employees’ well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction). In a longitudinal study with two measurement points and a time lag of three months, 811 employees from the private and public sector in Germany participated. Results from multiple regressions showed that leaders’ Dark Triad traits had, depending on the specific Dark Triad trait, bright and dark sides for employees. Narcissism turned out to be the brightest Dark Triad trait with benefits for subordinates’ objective and subjective career success, and with no adverse effects on subordinates’ well-being. Extending previous research by investigating the link between leaders’ Dark Triad traits on subordinates’ outcomes, we found evidence for the assumption that Machiavellianism and psychopathy have detrimental effects, also when considering subordinates’ career success and well-being. Implications for leadership and career research are derived.

Zusammenfassung

Leaders play a pivotal role in organizations. In the present study, we investigated the role of leaders’ Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) on employees’ objective career success (i.e., salary and number of promotions) and subjective career success (i.e., career satisfaction). Further, we investigated how leaders’ Dark Triad traits affect employees’ well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction). In a longitudinal study with two measurement points and a time lag of three months, 811 employees from the private and public sector in Germany participated. Results from multiple regressions showed that leaders’ Dark Triad traits had, depending on the specific Dark Triad trait, bright and dark sides for employees. Narcissism turned out to be the brightest Dark Triad trait with benefits for subordinates’ objective and subjective career success, and with no adverse effects on subordinates’ well-being. Extending previous research by investigating the link between leaders’ Dark Triad traits on subordinates’ outcomes, we found evidence for the assumption that Machiavellianism and psychopathy have detrimental effects, also when considering subordinates’ career success and well-being. Implications for leadership and career research are derived.

Copyright statement


Author note

We would like to thank Alexandra Hagemeister with her help in data preparation and project work.