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

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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.

Keywords: Dark Triad, leadership, career success, well-being

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