

Section II

Studies of Silence in Organizations

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Planful Machiavellians at Work: Perceived Career Potential and Actual Counterproductive Work Behavior

Abstract In this paper, we analyze the vocational behavior of individuals with different scores on the personality trait of Machiavellianism. A meta-analysis showed (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks & McDaniel, 2012) that trait Machiavellianism is associated with low performance at work. This is surprising because Niccolò Machiavelli had success in mind when he repudiated traditional morality as naïve. This paper tackles the question how highly Machiavellian individuals can become successful in vocational life. On the basis of socioanalytic personality theory (Hogan & Blickle, 2018) and mimicry-deception theory (Jones, 2014), we suggest that Machiavellians with good social skill and high impulse control will successfully mask their tendencies for amorality, callousness, and manipulation and appear benign to coworkers. Additionally, the length of time an employee works in a job is crucial: planful (as opposed to impulsive) Machiavellians with good social skill aspire a positive image among coworkers. Therefore, they curtail their counterproductive work behavior in early stages of tenure, nest themselves into an organization, and extract resources for personal gain in later stages of tenure.

Keywords Machiavellianism, Counterproductive Work Behavior, Mimicry-Deception-Theory, Career Potential, Vocational Success

Introduction

In the past few decades there have been numerous broadly publicized examples of how individuals' crooked financial actions have strongly impacted organizations and individuals. For instance, the rogue trader Nick Leeson, at that time a young broker at British Barings bank, was effective in the downfall of one of the oldest merchant banks in England by using fraudulent and highly risky trades and investments, which lost his bank £832 million and led to its bankruptcy (Powell, 2015). Another well-known example is that of Bernie Madoff, who conducted an enormous Ponzi scheme. By cheating thousands of clients out of around \$20 billion, he not only ruined the lives of several of his investors but also his own and those of his family members (Smith, 2013). A question sometimes raised in the media and legal proceedings is if others knew of the fraudulent behavior. Most coworkers or supervisors free themselves from liability by claiming to have known nothing. It is of course debatable if they were genuinely unaware or if they chose to remain silent. Subsequently, one might ask if Nick Leeson or Bernie Madoff were actually capable of skillfully hiding their wrong-doing or if their good reputations and position power prevented others from speaking up.

The vast amount of media coverage shows the public's interest in cases like these. While some may address the legal or organizational conditions that facilitate these fraudulent deeds, others focus on the key players involved, their rise to power, their biography, and character.

Correspondingly, researchers from various scientific fields have studied such behaviors, aiming at describing, explaining, and predicting causes and consequences. One strand of research focuses on the personality traits that underlie morally and socially aberrant behaviors. Using the term "dark triad", which was coined by Paulhus and Williams (2002), a body of research has emerged that focuses on the personality traits of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism. The terms psychopathy and narcissism are oftentimes confused with distinct taxonomic clinical diagnoses, but while these originate in psychiatry and clinical psychology, the dark triad facets are understood as continuous personality traits in ordinary individuals, while the taxonomic clinical diagnoses are conceptualized as extreme manifestations in individuals with personality disorders.

Subclinical antisocial psychopathic individuals show attributes such as a superficial affect (no empathy and feelings of moral guilt), callousness, and low impulse control (Decuyper, De Pauw, De Fruyt, De Bolle, & De Clercq, 2009; Lynam & Derefinko, 2006). Central aspects of subclinical trait narcissism include a disposition toward an overly inflated self-esteem, immoderately emotional responses to criticism, and a sense of entitlement and grandiosity (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Hall, 1979).

Highly Machiavellian individuals are characterized by distrustful and cynical views of human nature, ambition for prestige, the willingness to manipulate others, and a disregard for conventional morality (Christie & Geis, 1970; Miller, Hyatt, Maples-Keller, Carter, & Lynam, 2017). Research concerning the dark triad has grown

extensively in the past years (Glenn & Sellbom, 2015; LeBreton, Shiverdecker, & Grimaldi, 2018; Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012).

This paper concerns the question of how highly Machiavellian individuals progress in their respective careers while having a tendency to show behaviors such as deception, manipulation, and callousness. Based on socioanalytic personality (Hogan & Blicke, 2018) and mimicry-deception theory (Jones, 2014), we argue that successful Machiavellians have good social skill and strong impulse control. They are able to adjust their behavior in the workplace in order to appear benign at the beginning of their organizational career and consequently nest themselves into the new organization to extract resources for their own benefit.

Theoretical Foundations

Machiavellianism as Personality Trait

A personality trait is a relatively time-stable individual disposition of how a person feels, thinks, perceives the self and others, and acts (McCrae, 2018). The concept of the personality trait of Machiavellianism is based on the writings of the Italian politician, diplomat, and political theorist of the Renaissance period, Niccolò Machiavelli. In *The Prince* (1532; 1950), he suggests that methods of deception, ruthlessness, and amorality must be readily used to become an effective leader who strives for power and wealth. Christie and Geis (1970) described the personality trait of Machiavellianism accordingly. Highly Machiavellian individuals are ambitious, strategic, callous, distrustful, cynical, and prone to manipulate and deceive others for personal gain (e.g., Jones & Paulhus, 2009).

Within the extensive research on the personality trait of Machiavellianism in the vocational and organizational context and beyond, there has been growing criticism concerning the traditional measures that supposedly assess the trait (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2015). To be more precise, Machiavellianism is conceptually thought to include "a long-term, strategic focus, the ability to delay gratification, and average to good impulse control" (Miller et al., 2017, p. 440). The traditional measures of Machiavellianism (e.g., Mach-IV, MPS, Dirty Dozen; Christie & Geis, 1970; Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009; Monaghan, Bizumic, & Sellbom, 2018; Jonason & Webster, 2010), however, do not cover this domain of the construct. Recent meta-analytic findings even suggest Machiavellianism to be associated positively with impulsivity and negatively with conscientiousness (Monaghan et al., 2018).

Highly impulsive individuals (Dickman, 1990) act "without thinking," without giving themselves time to assess the situation, to appreciate dangers, to foresee the consequences, or even to anticipate how they will feel about their action them-

selves when they have time to consider it" (Lykken, 1995, p. 122). Accordingly, there is a need to explicitly represent the extent of an individual's impulse control in combination with Machiavellianism. This allows for the assessment of the consequences of Machiavellianism, which may vary depending on whether Machiavellianism comes along with high or low impulse control.

Socioanalytic Personality Theory

The socioanalytic theory of personality (Hogan & Blickle, 2018) is a perspective on human nature that combines insights about human evolution (Darwin), unconscious motivation (Freud), and the dynamics of social interaction (Mead). Socioanalytic personality theory postulates that human beings are motivated by a combination of two evolutionarily-based social motives: the motive to get along and the motive to get ahead. The motive to get along indicates the need for approval, community, and acceptance, while the motive to get ahead describes the need to strive for power, to control resources, and to gain status within one's social group. The extent and strength to which individuals exhibit either motive can vary from person to person.

Socioanalytic theory not only proposes that the intensity of the two basic social motives can differ individually. The ability to put these motives into successful action can vary as well. A key factor for success is social skill, as it is needed to translate aspirations into action. Social skill can be described as capable impression management (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). It comprises the ability to control how others see us. Socially skilled individuals are savvy observers of social situations and are able to adjust their behavior to changing social contexts. Consequently, they gain the trust of others which gives them the chance to exercise influence (Hogan & Blickle, 2018).

Empirical research strongly supports the idea that successful individuals use social skill to competently manage their images and reputations. For example, there is evidence for the relation between social skill and academic success (Kholin et al., 2016), supervisor-rated cooperation, job performance, and promotion potential (Blickle, Momm, Liu, Witzki, & Steinmayr, 2011), higher income and marketability of new employees (Blickle et al., 2011).

Recent research suggests that social skill does not only help bright personalities but can compensate for dark personalities such as psychopathy and narcissism (Owens, Wallace, & Waldmann, 2015; Schüttele et al., 2015).

For the organizational and work context, a specific conceptualization of social skill, so called political skill, has been developed and comprehensively validated (Bedi & Skowronski, 2014; Bing et al., 2011; Ferris et al., 2005, 2007, 2008; Jacobson & Viswesvaran, 2017; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015; Ng et al., 2005). Political skill refers to "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal

and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). It is a blend of four distinct dimensions: *social astuteness* refers to the ability to sense (hidden) motivations and agendas of others. *Interpersonal influence* describes the capacity to persuasively communicate with others. *Networking ability* comprises the building, and use of interpersonal connections, relationships, and networks to achieve work- and career-related goals. *Apparent sincerity* includes the ability to convey authenticity and integrity while influencing others at work (Ferris et al., 2005, 2007, 2008). Previous research suggests that politically skilled individuals are capable of effectively marketing themselves in order to achieve more fulfillment of their motives (Blickle, Schüttele, & Wihler, 2018).

In sum, political skill allows individuals to put their social aspirations into successful vocational action. Highly Machiavellian individuals are highly motivated to get ahead while their motive to get along is low. To successfully enact their motive in the work place, they need political skill in order to build a façade over a period of time and consequently appear benign to coworkers. This rather complex scheme of deception is required to follow a long-term strategy according to mimicry-deception theory (Jones, 2014).

Mimicry-Deception Theory (MDT)

Mimicry-deception theory (Jones, 2014) proposes that human deceptive behavior for selfish gain can be described as long- vs. short-term strategies that differ in four aspects: complexity of deception, detectability, rate of resource extraction, and host integration. Within this theory, human behavior is compared to the behavior of nonhuman animals and microorganisms. A short-term strategy is characterized as a superficial, rather easily detectable deception, a predator uses to overwhelm its unsuspecting victim and extract as many resources as possible in a short amount of time. As this deception is easily detectable, it is not specific to one victim but needs to be spread out in order to be successful. In nonhuman animals, this kind of deceptive tactic is for example found in predators that use their exterior coloring to either confuse their prey or approach unnoticed. In humans, this deception is observed in, e.g., credit card fraud or the use of spam e-mails. The long-term strategy, however, is found in parasitic infection or viral diseases: the victim unknowingly acts as a host organism which is usually unaware of the infection because of complex deception techniques. The predator then extracts resources from this specific host over a long period of time and at a slow rate to minimize the threat of detection. In humans, this kind of strategy might be used in embezzlement or antitrust violations. To carry out embezzlement, the perpetrator not only requires a high-ranking position but also a complex deceptive strategy and has to restrain the frequency of extraction to minimize the risk of detection (Jones, 2014).

On the basis of mimicry-deception theory, highly Machiavellian individuals are expected to successfully follow a long-term strategy if they have good political skill

and impulse control. At low political skill and impulse control, they are more likely to use a short-term strategy. There is empirical evidence supporting this assumption. Dahling et al. (2009) reported that highly Machiavellian individuals with a long job tenure have higher task performance ratings. From the perspective of mimicry-deception theory, this can be interpreted as host integration. Accordingly, the length in which an employee works in a job for an organization is of interest in studying the behavior of highly Machiavellian individuals.

Implications for Vocational and Organizational Behavior

Machiavellianism refers to the motive to get ahead by manipulating and betraying others, when it serves personal advantage or advancement (Dahling et al., 2009; Hogan & Blickle, 2018). As highly Machiavellian individuals are supposedly ambitious and strive for power and control, they should aspire to use a long-term strategy according to mimicry-deception theory (Jones, 2014), which is characterized by complex deception tactics.

However, an important factor to consider is political skill, as it allows individuals to put their aspirations into successful action (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). Politically skilled individuals are not only able to appear sincere and trustworthy but can also use impressions management tactics successfully (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Further, individuals with high impulse control think first and act later, learn from their mistakes, carefully plan ahead, and put a great deal of thought into their long-term goals (Lykken, 1995).

Consequently, individuals high in Machiavellianism, low in political skill, and low in impulse control should use superficial deception tactics, whereas individuals high in Machiavellianism, high in political skill, and high in impulse control should use complex deception tactics with different short- and long-term consequences for their career progression, i.e., career role performance as well as deviance in the workplace, i.e., counterproductive work behaviors.

Career Role Performance

Career role performance describes the individual career behavior within an organization. It refers to how well an employee seeks out career opportunities, acquires important career-related skills, and accomplishes central career goals (Welbourne, Johnson & Erez, 1998). According to socioanalytic theory, coworkers continuously exchange views on others, how easy it is to work with them and by that, individual reputations are formed (Hogan & Blickle, 2013). Reputations emerge on the basis of others' perceptions, which represent demonstrated behavior and accomplishments. A positive reputation has been shown to be related to more power, better performance appraisals, and more elbow room among others (Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird,

2007). The assessment for career role performance therefore represents an individual's reputation for the potential to achieve a successful career within the organization (Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, 2011).

Additionally, in the context of Machiavellianism and mimicry-deception theory, job tenure plays an essential role: the extraction of resources should increase over time, after individuals high in Machiavellianism have built a positive reputation. Consequently, at a short tenure, employees with low impulse control and low political skill should have a lower reputation for career role performance than employees with either high impulse control or high political skill. Individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism should thus be able to hide behind the façade of high impulse control and high political skill. For a long tenure, individuals high in Machiavellianism, political skill, and impulse control should successfully use complex deception tactics. Therefore, given these boundary conditions, there should be a positive relation between levels of Machiavellianism and career role performance reputation.

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB; Bennett & Robinson, 2000) are voluntary behaviors that threaten the well-being of the organization and its members. One form of CWB is secret organizational resource extraction, such as stealing, falsifying receipts for personal gain, intentionally working slower or coming in late to work (Mercado, Dilchert, Giordano, & Ones, 2018). According to mimicry-deception theory, highly Machiavellian individuals with high impulse control and good political skills should abstain from behaviors like these if job tenure is low, as not to jeopardize their good reputation. Once integration into the organization has been achieved however, the incidences of such behaviors should increase as a function of Machiavellianism. Consequently, if political skill and impulse control are low, Machiavellianism should be positively related to CWB at both, short and long job tenure. Additionally, highly Machiavellian individuals with high impulse control and good political skill should always show lower rates of CWB than any other combination of Machiavellianism, impulse control, and political skill, even at long job tenure, in order to minimize the risk of detection by others.

Empirical Evidence

The assumptions above have been tested by Kückelhaus, Kranefeld, Schütte, Gansen-Amann, Wihler, and Blickle (2019) in two consecutive studies with a total of 1,438 participants from the German labor market. A combination of self-assessment and other-ratings were used in order to cover behavioral as well as perceptual domains.

Study 1: Reputation for Career Role Performance

The first study with 753 participants concerned the Machiavellians' career role behavior, i.e., career role performance (Welbourne et al., 1998). In this study, self-assessments of Machiavellianism, political skill, impulse control, and job tenure were combined with coworker ratings of career role performance, resulting in a multi-source design, consisting of one target employee and two colleagues. The final sample consisted of 251 employee-coworker triads.

We postulated and tested the four-way interaction between Machiavellianism, political skill, impulse control, and job tenure on coworkers' ratings of career role performance. The data supported our hypothesis, as the relation between Machiavellianism and career role performance was indeed moderated by political skill, impulse control, and job tenure.

Figure 1 shows the plotted results of the four-way interaction. At a short job tenure (top plot in Fig. 1), individuals with low political skill and low impulse control, received low other-ratings of career role performance. However, if both, political skill and impulse control were high, career role performance was high even at a high Machiavellianism. At a long job tenure (bottom plot in Fig. 1), the relation between Machiavellianism and career role performance was positive, if political skill and impulse control were both high.

Study 2: Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB)

685 employees participated in the second, completely anonymous study. To cover actual behavior from employees, only self-ratings were assessed. In addition to Machiavellianism, political skill, impulse control, and job tenure, the target employee provided information on CWB.

We postulated a squared four-way interaction between Machiavellianism, political skill, impulse control, and job tenure. The data supported the hypothesis: the relation between Machiavellianism and CWB was jointly moderated by political skill, impulse control, and job tenure.

Figure 2 depicts the relations between Machiavellianism, political skill and impulse control at low (top plot) and high tenure (bottom plot). At short and long tenure, the relation between Machiavellianism and CWB was positive, if political skill and impulse control were low. Those low in political skill and impulse control displayed the highest levels of CWB overall. Those high in political skill and impulse control reported low values of CWB at short tenure. When job tenure was long however, in line with Weiss et al. (2019), CWB increased exponentially for highly Machiavellian individuals. Overall, CWB remained at a comparatively low level, if political skill and impulse control were high.

In sum, the four-way interaction between political skill, impulse control, and job tenure was supported by the data. At the beginning of their organizational ten-

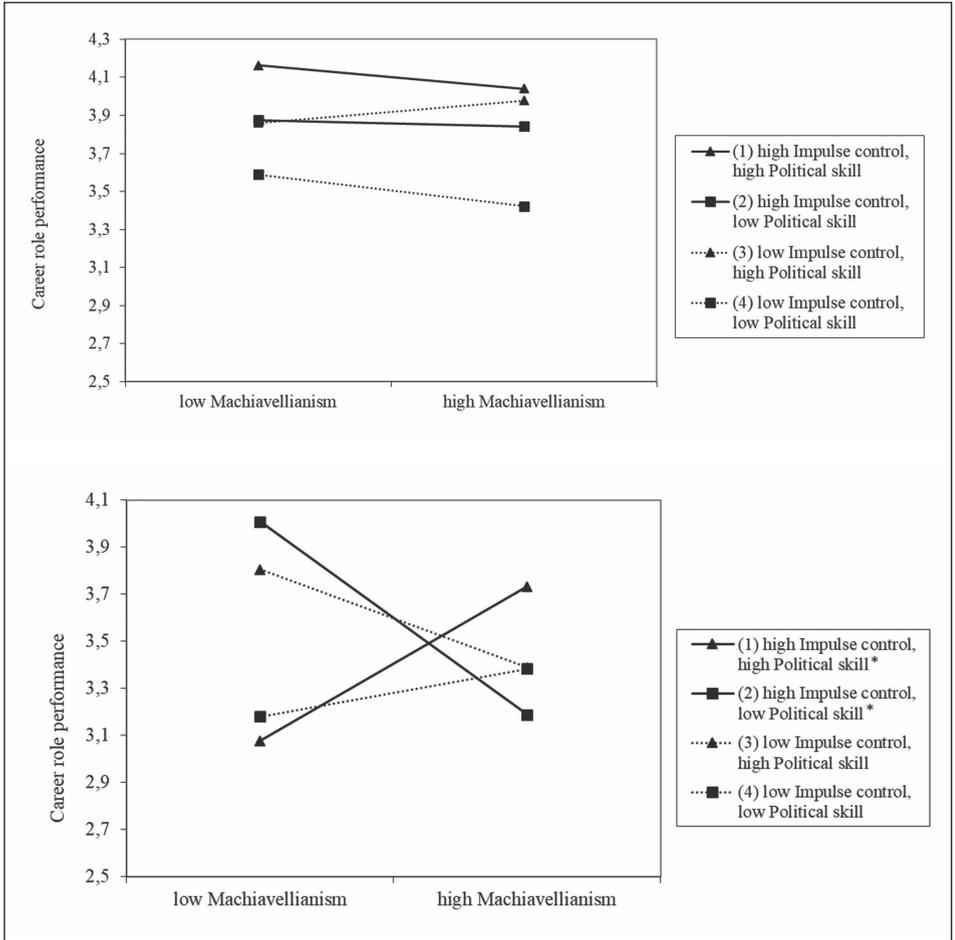


Figure 1 The relations between Machiavellianism and career role performance assessments by coworkers moderated by employees' impulse control and political skill in for those with low (top plot) and high (bottom plot) tenure (* $p < .05$).

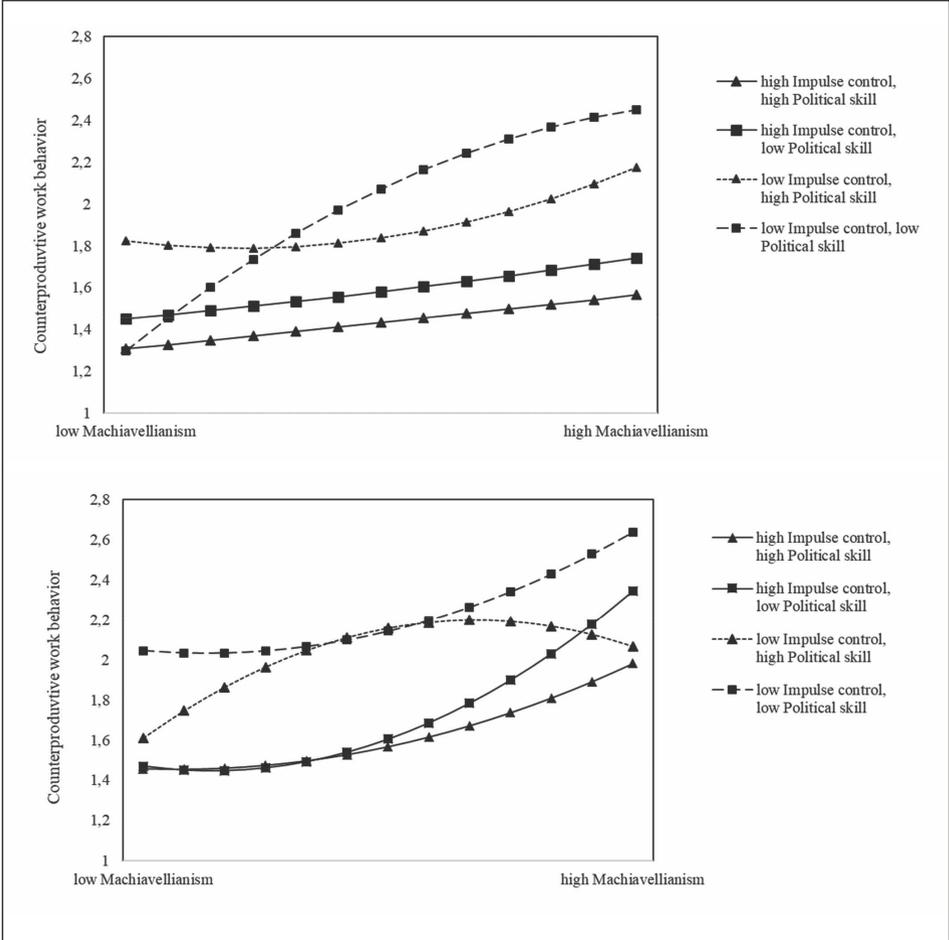


Figure 2 The relation between Machiavellianism and CWB moderated by employees' impulse control and political skill at low (top plot) and high tenure (bottom plot).

ure, individuals who are high in Machiavellianism, political skill, and impulse control strive to build a positive image by refraining from deviant behaviors, but at a longer tenure they show elevated levels of CWB. However, the amount of CWB is not excessive, as to prevent being detected as wrongdoers.

Summary

In the present paper, we discussed the career role performance and organizational misbehavior of highly Machiavellian individuals. Political skill and impulse control are important factors to consider in the context of Machiavellians' careers, as they enable individuals to mask their true intentions to enact deviance and follow a long-term deceptive strategy. Furthermore, job tenure has to be taken into account, as the behavior of highly Machiavellian individuals with good social skills and impulse control will vary. When entering an organization, they strive for a good image and tend not to engage in counterproductive work behaviors. At a longer tenure, they still strive to keep their good reputation intact, but do show exponentially increasing more counterproductive work behavior.

Significance for Theory

The empirical evidence reported by Kückelhaus et al. (2019) contribute to the body of research on socioanalytic personality theory. The results show that political skill is a moderator for the (successful) enactment of basic motives. Additionally, the data supported assumptions of mimicry-deception theory, which has previously not been tested empirically in a vocational and organizational setting. The results suggest that Machiavellians with good social skills and high impulse control do indeed use a long-term deceptive strategy and nest themselves into an organization to slowly extract resources.

The study by Kückelhaus et al. (2019) further supports the assumption that impulse control is an important factor to consider. The measures of Machiavellianism have been criticized for lacking this crucial part of the construct. In response to the criticism, Collison, Vize, Miller, and Lynam (2018) developed a new measure of Machiavellianism that comprises not only the antagonistic but also the agentic and planful parts of Machiavellianism. Although a first study has shown promising evidence for its validity in a general sample, this new measure of Machiavellianism has not yet been comprehensively validated for the vocational and organizational context.

Significance for Practice and Future Research

Future research might focus on the type of organization and job demands that attract those high in Machiavellianism and political skill, whether and why there were no identifying indicators when these individuals were hired, and how it is possible for these individuals to persist in organizations instead of getting fired.

The perception of highly Machiavellian individuals by coworkers, supervisors and subordinates might be of further interest. The results by Kückelhaus et al. (2019) imply that highly Machiavellian individuals can use social skill to hide their misdemeanors at work and thereby evade detection and consequently dismissal from the organization. Correspondingly, Kholin et al. (2020) showed that social skill might be an important factor in the career advancement of dark personalities. Yet another potential explanation for the continued progression of highly Machiavellian individuals might lie in the construct of organizational silence. It is possible that individuals working closely together with highly Machiavellian individuals do indeed notice counterproductive work behavior to some degree, but choose to remain silent to either protect themselves or because they feel unable to make a difference. As highly Machiavellian individuals with good social skills build up a good reputation, strive for integration into the organization, and keep their misbehavior to a minimum at the beginning of their careers, a coworker or subordinate might feel that it is too dangerous to tell on a powerful person like this.

Future studies should therefore incorporate self- and other-ratings of counterproductive work behavior as well as a measure of the multidimensional approach of organizational silence (van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003) to cover a multitude of possible reasons not to disclose relevant information. This might disentangle the relation between Machiavellianism, actual, and perceived counterproductive work behavior.

Machiavellianism was nearly perfectly masked by high political skill and impulse control. However, their dark intentions were more pronounced at higher levels of Machiavellianism. Because of their highly skillful social behavior, it seems that conventional selection-approach-based personality questionnaires should not be able to identify these individuals. However, individuals also have a desire to express their identity in personality questionnaires (Johnson & Hogan, 2006) and in personnel selection situations (Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007). A strong marker of a Machiavellian identity is a distrustful and cynical view of human nature (e.g., Christie & Geis, 1970; Dahling et al., 2009). Because such beliefs are taken as indications of competence and intelligence by laypersons (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2018), even though individuals high in Machiavellianism probably try not to disclose their willingness to act amorally for personal gain on personality questionnaires in personnel selection situations, they are likely to candidly express their distrustful and cynical views of human nature in such situations to create an image of competence and intelligence. Therefore, there is a good chance of detecting such nearly perfectly masked individuals' high Machiavellianism even when political skill is high.

Conclusion

Cases like those of Nick Leeson and Bernie Madoff attract a lot of attention from the public, media as well as the organizational sciences. A frequently asked question is how fraud on this level could ever have occurred. While some seek answers in organizational structures, missing government oversight or dysfunctional laws, answers may also be given from a psychological point of view focusing on individuals' personality: those with dispositions towards manipulation, deception, and amorality are able to build a protective façade through good social skills and impulse control and consequently appear benign to the people around them. This might enable them to climb the organizational ladder way up to the top and ultimately give them the power and status to harm others (Kholin, Kückelhaus, & Blickle, 2020).

The positive reputation such individuals build up might lead to silence on an individual, team- or even organizational level. Either because wrong-doing is in fact not being detected or because these individuals have acquired enough power to force the people around them into self-protective silence. We suggest that employers use the self-disclosure of distrustful and cynical views of human nature as markers in personnel selection to crack this nearly perfect mask of benignancy. Further, organizations should strengthen individuals' voice behavior, in that they feel secure enough to disclose

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