

Unmasking Dark Triad: A Systematic Review of Workplace Conflict and Cooperation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The objective of this systematic review is to summarize empirical research on the ways in which the Dark Triad—psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism—affect cooperation and conflict in work environments while taking into account the larger cultural context in which these dynamics take place. This study highlights neglected areas for further research by looking at important studies over the last 15 years, offering a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between personal traits and interpersonal relationships.

Method - Following PRISMA guidelines, database search was conducted across Scopus, Springer, and Google Scholar. Ten peer-reviewed quantitative articles met the inclusion criteria. A narrative synthesis was employed due to the heterogeneity of measures and outcomes to explore how Dark Triad traits manifest in workplace relationships, focusing on conflict, cooperation, and cultural nuances.

Findings- The results show that, although the strength of these effects varies based on more general environmental cues, Dark Triad traits frequently worsen interpersonal conflict and undercut cooperative behaviours. While psychopathy is significantly correlated with detrimental work behaviours, Machiavellianism is often the best predictor of manipulative methods and conflict escalation.

Originality- This review fills a significant vacuum in the research on organisational behaviour by looking at three different but connected personality qualities and evaluating how they affect cooperation and conflict when taken as a whole. It provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between personal dispositions and workplace dynamics by demonstrating how situational conditions can either exacerbate or lessen the appearance of Dark Triad features, drawing on Trait Activation Theory.

Research limitations/implications - While the limited sample of studies constrains generalizability, the review identifies pressing directions for future research, along with insights for organizations to improve workplace outcomes fostering ethical and transparent leadership....

Keywords: dark triad, narcissism, machiavellianism, organizational conflict, workplace cooperation, systematic review...

INTRODUCTION:

In today's interconnected and fast, paced organizational environments, interpersonal dynamics are at the core of ensuring efficiency, innovation, and overall workplace harmony. Conflict, cooperation, and organizational culture act as powerful levers that shape employee performance and team cohesion (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013). However, growing evidence points to the substantial negative impact of toxic workplace behaviors—ranging from mild incivility and subtle bullying to more severe forms of harassment—on both individual well-being and organizational outcomes (Boddy, 2014). These behaviors, often referred to as counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), not only erode trust and job satisfaction but can also incur significant financial costs through turnover, absenteeism, and litigation.

Personality qualities known as the Dark Triad—psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism—are essential to comprehending the causes of these harmful behaviors (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). According to recent research, these characteristics—which include manipulation, violence, and a lack of empathy—can intensify conflict, erode teamwork, and skew organizational culture (Spain *et al.*, 2014). Leaders are becoming more worried about the factors that produce or increase the Dark Triad's influence in the workplace since these personality-driven inclinations can grow unnoticed and quietly change group dynamics (Jonason *et al.*, 2011). This thorough assessment is therefore pertinent and crucial, addressing the need to comprehend how the Dark Triad impacts team performance, morale, and culture. It provides new perspectives for practitioners and academics who want to create more robust and productive organizational settings.

Recent academic research has focused more on the ways that the Dark Triad—psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism—can have a big impact on workplace outcomes like bullying, cooperation, conflict, and rudeness. According to empirical data, people with high levels of narcissism frequently have inflated ideas of themselves and crave unending praise, which can cause interpersonal conflict and increase stress in group environments (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). Machiavellianism, which is typified by deceptive and manipulative methods, is frequently associated with counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), such as strategic undermining of coworkers and interpersonal bullying (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Psychopathy, which manifests as impulsivity, callousness, and a lack of regret, is linked to more serious workplace violence and rudeness, actions that can quickly undermine trust and group cohesiveness (Boddy, 2014).

Despite the growing evidence for the deleterious outcomes caused by Dark Triad tendencies, notable inconsistencies and gaps persist. One key area of debate centers on which trait exerts the most pervasive influence on toxic workplace behaviors. In some studies, Machiavellianism emerges as the strongest predictor of systemic manipulative strategies and lower organizational citizenship behaviors (Pilch & Turska, 2015), whereas other research points to psychopathy as the central culprit behind severe bullying and verbal aggression (Boddy, 2014).

Narcissism, meanwhile, is sometimes viewed as comparatively less harmful when paired with constructive feedback mechanisms, though others argue that its negative effects can be equally destructive over time (Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2021). Moreover, differences in measurement tools, cultural contexts, and varying sample compositions frequently yield conflicting findings, complicating clear conclusions.

Equally noteworthy is the fragmented understanding of how organizational culture and contextual factors either amplify or mitigate these traits. While research indicates that certain cultural profiles—such as overly competitive or hierarchical structures—may create a “fertile ground” for Machiavellian or psychopathic tendencies to flourish, the protective role of supportive or ethical cultures has not been systematically clarified (Pilch & Turska, 2015). This is compounded by insufficient exploration of leadership styles, shared norms, and ethical climates, all of which can shape the degree to which individuals with Dark Triad traits can behave unchecked. Indeed, it remains unclear whether strong ethical leadership can temper the negative impacts of narcissism, or if conflict is inevitable regardless of any moderating cultural elements (Boddy, 2014).

This review focuses on the specific mechanisms by which the Dark Triad traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—shape workplace dynamics, with an emphasis on conflict, cooperation, and related outcomes (Boddy, 2014). Although numerous studies address one or two of these traits in isolation (Pilch & Turska, 2015), few take a holistic approach that examines all three simultaneously, especially in light of broader organizational factors. Our primary goal, therefore, is to synthesize empirical findings that illuminate how each trait can trigger negative behaviors (e.g., bullying, incivility, counterproductive work behavior) or, in occasional cases, offer short-term advantages (e.g., charismatic leadership styles).

A second core objective is to identify key gaps and contradictions in the current literature, particularly where consensus remains elusive (Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014). For instance, while some work highlights Machiavellianism as the most manipulative and far-reaching in its detrimental effects (Pilch & Turska, 2015), other research underscores psychopathy's strong links to overt aggression (Boddy, 2014). Similarly, overt narcissism can appear less harmful at first but may erode team functioning and trust over time. By analyzing varying research designs, cultural contexts, and operational definitions, we aim to pinpoint boundary conditions under which Dark Triad tendencies are most salient.

In pursuit of these objectives, we also draw on Trait Activation Theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) to illustrate how organizational cues (e.g., ethical norms, leadership styles) can either foster or constrain these toxic traits. This theoretical lens enriches our understanding by clarifying how situational factors “activate” narcissistic, Machiavellian, or psychopathic behaviors. In turn, the review's practical implications span structured hiring protocols, clear ethical guidelines, and targeted conflict,

resolution strategies (Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2021). By integrating scholarship across personality psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management, we hope to provide both researchers and practitioners with actionable implications for recognizing and mitigating Dark Triad, driven disruptions. Ultimately, this review addresses a critical gap in the study of toxic workplace dynamics and aims to contribute meaningfully to the development of healthier, more productive organizational environments.

Method

Guidance from the 2011 PRISMA guidelines, developed by Higgins and Green, is utilized for shaping the search strategy and deriving conclusions in this systematic literature review, which adheres to the Cochrane approach. The steps used to carry out this review are described in full below.

Eligibility criteria

Studies were selected for the systematic literature review based on specific inclusion criteria: (a) They must quantitatively examine and report the relationship between at least one of the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) and interpersonal dynamics (conflict, cooperation) within organizational settings; (b) Must be published in a peer, reviewed academic journal to ensure the credibility and academic rigor of the sources; (c) Published within the last 15 years to capture recent trends in organizational behavior and the development of theories; (d) Must be available in English to ensure accessibility and manageability of the review process; (e) Include empirical research that utilizes quantitative methodologies, such as surveys, experiments, or secondary data analysis.

Given the methodological and conceptual heterogeneity across existing research—ranging from diverse measures of the Dark Triad traits to varying conceptualizations of conflict, cooperation, and culture—a meta, analytic synthesis is not feasible. Instead, we adopt a narrative synthesis approach to integrate findings. This method allows us to systematically review and discuss themes, patterns, and discrepancies across studies. By qualitatively mapping out the commonalities and distinctions in how Dark Triad traits manifest in organizational contexts, we provide a more nuanced understanding that accommodates the wide range of study designs and measurement instruments

Information sources and search strategies

In January 2025, the databases Scopus, Springer, and Google Scholar were searched. Before the official search, the search approach was tried and improved. More precisely, Boolean operators were used to combine a dark triad search string or topic phrase with an interpersonal dynamic search string. The database searches now have no further restrictions. The following key word combinations were put in the topic/subject search sections of the databases in order to find articles that qualified: "Narcissism" OR "Narcissistic" OR "Machiavellianism" OR "Machiavellian" OR "Psychopathy" OR "Psychopathic" OR "Dark Triad" OR "Dark Personality"

Traits" AND "Conflict" OR "Cooperation" OR "Team Dynamics" OR "Interpersonal Conflict" OR "Interpersonal Cooperation" OR "Teamwork" AND "Organizational Culture" OR "Corporate Culture" OR "Workplace Culture" OR "Organizational Climate" AND "Organizations" OR "Workplace" OR "Work Environment" OR "Professional Settings" OR "Business Environment".

In order to guarantee that this review covers the most recent developments we chose a 15, year window (2010–2025) for our literature search to capture the period in which the Dark Triad concept emerged as a significant focus in organizational behavior research. This timeframe balances the need to include seminal studies in this evolving area while ensuring that the insights and implications remain relevant to modern organizational contexts. Earlier works seldom addressed all three Dark Triad traits together in workplace settings, whereas research from 2010 onward reflects a more integrated and empirically robust approach to examining these traits in relation to conflict, cooperation, and organizational culture.

Study quality

Each database was subjected to the search technique, and the collected records were downloaded and consolidated into a single Zotero library. Duplicate articles, identified across multiple databases through the search process, were then removed. The titles and abstracts of the remaining records were subjected to a secondary screening. Subsequently, the titles, abstracts, and full texts of the initial search results were independently reviewed by one reviewer (MP). The reviewer removed papers that, according to their titles and abstracts, were judged ineligible. The final review contained the eligible papers. Articles deemed ineligible were explicitly omitted, along with a comment explaining the exclusion. Figure 1 provides specifics on the search selection procedure. The studies were critically appraised using the AXIS tool, an assessment instrument specifically designed for evaluating the quality of observational cross, sectional research, as outlined by Downes, Brennan, Williams, and Dean (2016). The AXIS tool incorporates a comprehensive checklist designed to scrutinize various aspects of study quality including the study's design, methodology, and potential bias. Each study was assessed against criteria such as the clarity of defining objectives, the suitability of the methodology to the research question, the handling of potential biases, the ethicality of the study, and the appropriateness of the conclusions drawn from the data.

Each study included in this review was given a quality score, which can reach up to a maximum of 20 points. These scores, derived from the AXIS checklist, are subjective but are based on clearly defined criteria that promote consistency and rigor in evaluation. For transparency, the quality scores are explicitly detailed in Table 2 under the 'Quality Rating (/20)' column, offering insight into the robustness of the studies reviewed.

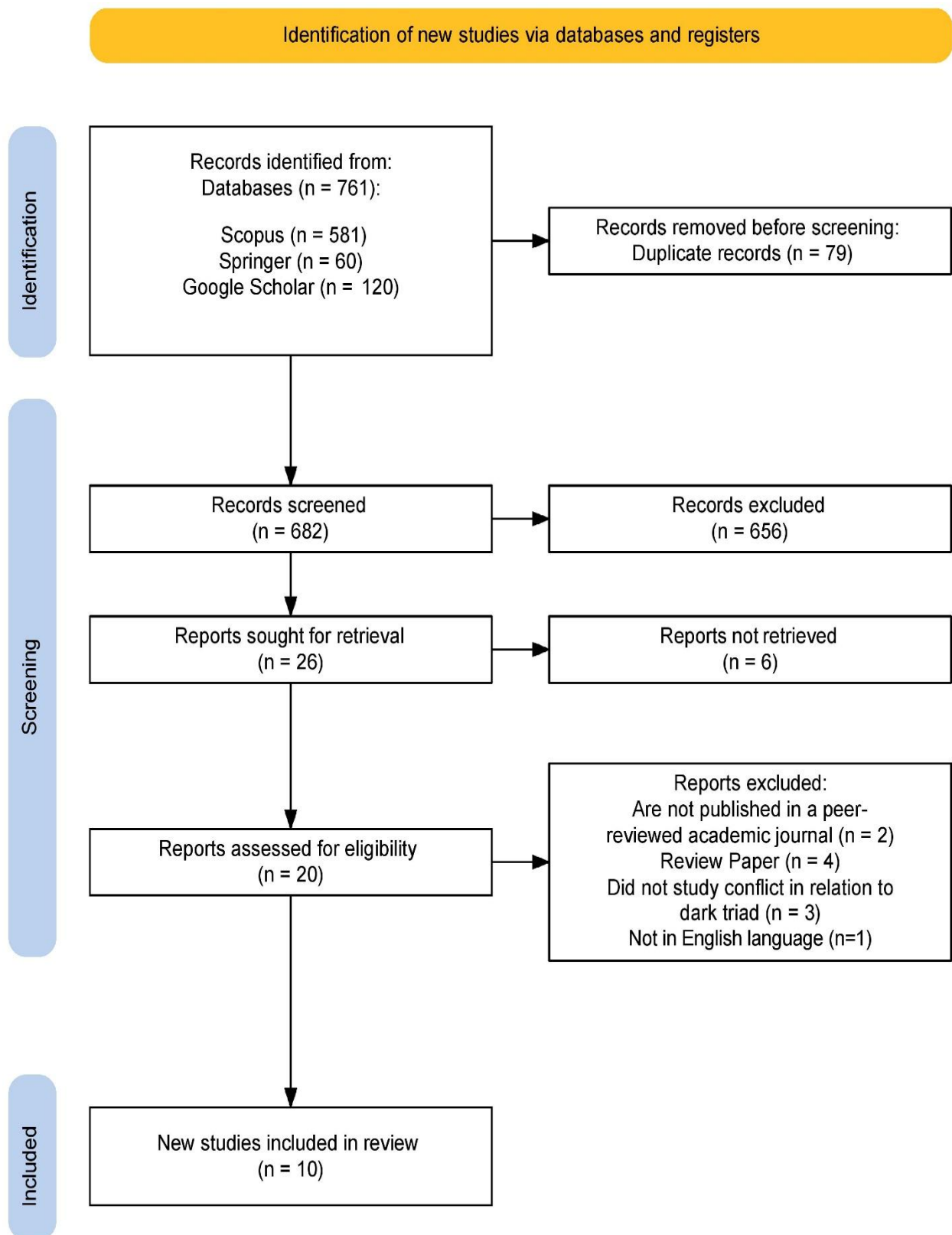


Figure. 1

PRISMA flowchart illustrating the process of selecting studies

Table 1

Measures used in the studies (n = 10) included in the review

Measure	Dimensions	N studies using the measure
Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014)	Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy	3
Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010)	Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy	2
Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Terry, 1988)	Grandiose narcissism (e.g., leadership/authority, entitlement/exploitativeness, superiority/arrogance)	2
Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) (Back et al., 2013)	Admiration (self, enhancement, self, promotion) and Rivalry (other, derogation, aggressive self, defense)	1
Levenson Self, Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP) (Levenson et al., 1995)	Primary Psychopathy (callousness, manipulation), Secondary Psychopathy (impulsivity, reactive aggression)	1
Mach, IV Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970)	Machiavellianism (manipulative strategies, cynical worldview)	2
Vulnerable/Covert vs. Overt Narcissism scales (Wink, 1991; Pincus & Roche, 2011)	Vulnerable narcissism (defensiveness, hypersensitivity), Overt narcissism (grandiosity, exhibitionism)	1
Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2001)	Incivility (rudeness, disrespectful remarks, covert hostility)	2
Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB, C) (Spector et al., 2006)	Interpersonal deviance (e.g., bullying, harassment), Organizational deviance (e.g., sabotage, theft, withdrawal)	3
Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001)	Bullying behaviors (work, related, person, related, physical intimidation)	2
Other Bullying/Aggression Inventories (e.g., LIPT by Leymann, 1990; ASA by Björkqvist <i>et al.</i> , 1992)	Specific facets of workplace bullying and aggression (e.g., verbal, indirect, social, physical components)	2

Table 2

Studies on dark triad, organizational conflict and cooperation included in the review (n = 10)

Authors (year)	Country	Design	Sample characteristics Age = M (SD)	Findings	Quality rating (/20)
Chughtai et al. (2020)	Pakistan	Cross, sectional	Employees/super visors in diverse industries (N = 196) Age=29.5 (5.4)	Workplace incivility partially mediated the relationship between Dark Triad traits (SD3 used) and OCB ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$). Islamic work ethics moderated the negative impact of Machiavellianism on OCB (interaction term $\beta = .22$, $p < .05$).	14

				Findings suggest ethical norms can buffer some deviant predispositions.	
Mushtaq & Rohail (2021)	Pakistan	Cross, sectional	Public and private sector employees (N = 203)	Psychopathy ($r = .42, p < .01$) and Machiavellianism ($r = .38, p < .01$) showed the strongest correlations with workplace bullying. Narcissism's correlation with bullying was moderate ($r = .21$)	12
Boddy (2014)	United Kingdom	Cross, sectional	Managers and employees across firms (N = 304) Age=38 (9.2)	Psychopathy correlated strongly with conflict ($r = .44, p < .001$) and CWB ($r = .40, p < .001$). Employees reporting corporate psychopathic leadership experienced lower affective well-being (mean difference = -1.2 on a 5, point scale, $p < .01$).	18
Rizvi & Siddiqui (2021)	Pakistan	Cross, sectional	Private sector employees (N = 290) Age=32 (6.5)	Perceived fairness mediated the link between Dark Triad traits and CWB (indirect effect $\beta = .25, p < .05$). Ethical organizational climate moderated the relationship between psychopathy and CWB (interaction term $\beta = -.18, p < .05$), suggesting structured climates reduce deviant acts.	11
Biolik (2024)	Poland	Cross, sectional	White, collar employees (N = 500) Age=41.8 (11.3)	Narcissistic Admiration linked positively with work engagement ($r = .32, p < .01$). Rivalry correlated with increased workaholism ($r = .27, p < .01$) and family, work conflict ($r = .24, p < .05$). Vulnerable narcissism displayed negative associations with engagement ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and positive associations with work, family conflict ($r = .21, p < .05$).	15
Rasheed et al. (2020)	Pakistan	Cross, sectional	Banking sector employees (N = 247) Age=28 (4.2)	Abusive supervision correlated with ostracism ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) and higher conflict perceptions ($\beta = .35, p < .01$). Narcissistic subtypes (covert vs. overt) had different relationships with conflict: covert narcissism showed a stronger link to conflict escalation ($r = .31, p < .01$)	12
Wang et al. (2022)	China	Quantitative; partial mediation	Higher education professionals (N = 350)	Narcissism and sadism interacted to increase incivility (interaction term $\beta = .30, p < .01$), partially mediated by paranoia ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) and antagonism ($\beta = .20, p < .05$).	16
Lynch et al. (2021)	Canada	Longitudinal	University student project teams (N = 100 teams)	Narcissistic rivalry ($\beta = .27, p < .05$) increased competitive conflict processes, especially close to deadlines. Narcissistic admiration showed no significant effect ($\beta = -.05, p = .46$).	18
Aghaz et al. (2014)	Iran	Cross, sectional	Managers & employees in SMEs (N = 417) Age=36 (7.8)	Covert narcissism was a stronger predictor of both interpersonal deviance ($r = .34, p < .01$) and organizational deviance ($r = .29, p < .01$) than overt narcissism.	16

Pilch & Turska (2015)	Poland	Cross, sectional	Employees in multiple organizations (N = 117) Age=35 (6.0)	Machiavellianism predicted both bullying perpetration ($\beta = .31, p < .01$) and victimization ($\beta = .21, p < .05$). Perception of a hierarchical culture correlated with increased bullying risk ($r = .33, p < .01$)	11
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Results

Study characteristics

There were 761 documents found in total from the first search. Following a double, screening of the abstract and title, 26 papers were screened for full text, of which 10 met the inclusion criteria.

All ten included studies were published between 2010 and 2025, reflecting an ongoing and growing scholarly interest in how narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy affect workplace behavior. Most of the studies (eight) employed cross, sectional survey designs, while one adopted a longitudinal approach (Lynch *et al.*, 2021) and another incorporated mixed methods (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Geographically, four studies were conducted in Pakistan (Chughtai *et al.*, 2020; Mushtaq & Rohail, 2021; Rasheed *et al.*, 2020; Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2021), two in Poland (Biolik, 2024; Pilch & Turska, 2015), and one each in the United Kingdom (Boddy, 2014), China (Wang *et al.*, 2022), Canada (Lynch *et al.*, 2021), and Iran (Aghaz *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding sample composition, six studies concentrated on employees drawn from varied organizational contexts (e.g., banking, corporate, or public sector), two included student, based samples (Lynch *et al.*, 2021; Biolik, 2024), and two targeted manager–employee comparisons (Aghaz *et al.*, 2014). All ten studies explicitly evaluated at least one Dark Triad trait, although narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy frequently appeared together. Five placed particular emphasis on Machiavellianism as a predictor of bullying or manipulative workplace behaviors, while four explored more granular distinctions in narcissism (e.g., covert versus overt) or subdimensions like narcissistic admiration versus rivalry. Two studies (Wang *et al.*, 2022; Rasheed *et al.*, 2020) also incorporated additional personality factors, such as sadism or abusive supervision, to assess interactive or compounded effects on workplace incivility and conflict. The metrics employed by the research that are part of the review are displayed in Table 1.

Main findings

Across the ten included studies, Dark Triad traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—consistently correlate with negative workplace behaviors, yet each investigation highlights nuanced dimensions. For instance, Chughtai *et al.* (2020) identify workplace incivility as a mediator between Dark Triad dispositions and declining organizational citizenship behavior. In a similar vein, Mushtaq and Rohail (2021) emphasize that Machiavellian and psychopathic traits particularly heighten bullying in permissive cultures, indicating that

manipulative and callous behaviors tend to have more direct links to overt bullying. Psychopathy, shown by Boddy (2014) and Rizvi and Siddiqui (2021), often manifests in higher conflict and counterproductive work behaviors, although organizational fairness can mitigate, but not fully eliminate, deviance.

Regarding narcissism, Biolik (2024) differentiates admiration from rivalry, finding that rivalry drives negative outcomes like workaholism and conflict, whereas admiration aligns with heightened engagement. Rasheed *et al.* (2020) further reveal that covert narcissists escalate interpersonal conflict under abusive supervision. Similarly, Wang *et al.* (2022) incorporate sadism and narcissism to illustrate how this toxic combination fuels incivility, with emotional intelligence offering minimal protection.

At the team level, Lynch *et al.* (2021) show narcissistic rivalry hinders cooperative conflict resolution, especially near deadlines. Meanwhile, Aghaz *et al.* (2014) find covert narcissism a stronger predictor of deviant acts than overt narcissism among Iranian managers and employees. Finally, Pilch and Turska (2015) confirm Machiavellianism's role in both perpetrating and experiencing bullying, suggesting hierarchical structures embolden manipulative individuals. Collectively, these findings underscore the multi, layered pathways by which Dark Triad traits—particularly psychopathy, Machiavellian manipulation, and distinct facets of narcissism—undermine organizational harmony.

Discussion

The results of these 10 research offer a comprehensive understanding of how the Dark Triad characteristics of psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism trigger undesirable behaviours in work environments. According to Tett & Burnett's (2003) Trait Activation Theory (TAT), certain workplace cues or circumstances might "switch on" these evil tendencies, leading to more conflict, rudeness, and a wider variety of unproductive work behaviours. According to TAT, not all toxic qualities manifest themselves in the same way; rather, the darker aspects of personality are accentuated or repressed by the organisational or situational context, such as competitive reward systems, lax ethical standards, or insufficient leadership.

One clear theme running through the studies is the potency of psychopathy in triggering interpersonal conflict and aggression. Psychopathic employees, and particularly those in leadership roles, were shown to induce a climate of mistrust and hostility, fueling significant breakdowns in team cohesion. By contrast, Machiavellianism emerged as fundamentally manipulative, thriving in environments where ambiguity and power differentials allow covert

strategies to flourish. Employees high in Machiavellianism often engage in bullying or undermining behaviors when such actions appear likely to help them secure influence or control. Meanwhile, narcissism exhibits more nuanced patterns. Overt, grandiose narcissists may initially present themselves as charismatic or driven, potentially offering short, term gains in leadership or problem, solving. However, if organizational culture fails to check their inflated egos, narcissistic rivalry escalates, undermining trust and cooperation over time.

The reviewed research also underscores that covert (vulnerable) narcissism can be equally, if not more, destructive than the overt type. Sensitive to perceived slights or rejection, covert narcissists may retaliate through subversive or passive, aggressive means, fostering interpersonal tension. These findings underscore that organizations cannot simply rely on superficial assessments of confidence or charm when evaluating potential toxicity. Instead, the deeper nuances—how individuals respond to feedback, handle conflict, or react under stress—need attention.

From a practical standpoint, these insights highlight several actionable strategies for organizations. First, structured hiring procedures, including standardized personality assessments and scenario, based evaluations, can help identify high, risk candidates before they enter pivotal roles. According to Chambers *et al.*, (2024) when employees perceive a coworker to be narcissistic, they anticipate ongoing deviant acts and respond by escalating their own counterproductive behaviors in retaliation. Interestingly, individuals who display narcissistic tendencies react differently: they tend to view a narcissistic coworker more favorably and are thus less inclined to retaliate. From a practical standpoint, these insights highlight the need for caution in both hiring decisions and day, to, day managerial practices. Second, establishing clear ethical codes and consequences for deviant behavior can serve as situational cues that help neutralize or lessen the activation of malevolent traits. Providing robust support systems—such as anonymous reporting channels, well, defined escalation procedures, and targeted training for conflict resolution—can further deter individuals inclined to exploit ambiguous or permissive environments. Leaders and managers frequently strive to strengthen employees' commitment to the organization, yet it is essential to recognize that heightened commitment does not invariably yield positive outcomes. Encouraging flexibility, oriented cultures, such as those emphasizing team collaboration or innovation, can help mitigate the risk of unethical pro, organizational behavior among committed employees (Fulmore, *et al.*, 2024)

Leadership development programs should also incorporate education about dark personality traits, equipping leaders to recognize signs of covert manipulation or rivalry and address them proactively. Additionally, embedding “ethical champions” or specialized HR liaisons can set a cultural tone that discourages Machiavellian and psychopathic expressions. Coupled with transparent performance and feedback mechanisms, these steps can mitigate the very triggers that

allow harmful traits to run rampant. Research indicates that narcissism—particularly when evident in leadership—can substantially undermine organizational health by fostering abusive supervision and shaping a toxic work culture (Tiwari and Jha, 2022). In such settings, employees who possess narcissistic traits or work under narcissistic leaders face a complex dilemma: they might consider exiting the organization, but if that is not a viable option, they may resort to deviant behaviors as a means of coping. When leaders become overly absorbed in their own grandiosity and ego, driven needs, they often employ abrasive tactics to dominate team members, thereby eroding team morale and fueling further deviance (Tiwari and Jha, 2022).

Despite its comprehensive nature, this systematic review faces certain constraints. The ten included studies, while rich in detail, represent a range of research designs (primarily cross, sectional) and varied organizational contexts, which can limit the generalizability of results. Several studies focus on single, country or single, industry samples, thereby restricting broader cultural applicability. Moreover, personality measures differ across the studies, sometimes capturing slightly different facets of narcissism, Machiavellianism, or psychopathy. Lastly, although TAT provides a valuable framework for understanding how situations activate these darker traits, direct empirical testing of TAT was limited within these articles, underscoring the need for future research to incorporate experimental or longitudinal designs that isolate situational triggers more definitively.

Overall, the synthesis of these studies makes it clear that Dark Triad traits represent a pressing concern for organizational health and effectiveness. By applying TAT, we see how situational elements—ranging from ethical climates to power structures—can exacerbate or mitigate these toxic dispositions. As organizations evolve in increasingly competitive environments, the need to recognize and address these personality, driven workplace hazards grows correspondingly. Future research would benefit from more diversified methods, including long, term tracking of employees across different cultural and corporate settings, as well as interventions that explicitly test whether recalibrating situational cues can reduce the likelihood of harmful trait activation. Until then, a combination of vigilant HR practices, robust ethical cultures, and informed leadership stands as the most pragmatic approach to tempering the darker side of workplace behavior.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Mrinalini Pandey, Dr Charu Dhankar, and Dr Kriti Vashishtha. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Mrinalini Pandey and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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