

TITLE

Decision Making: Do People with Dark Triad Traits Utilize Advice?

ABSTRACT

This research study seeks to gain a better understanding of the effects of the dark triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) on advice taking. This research examined whether or not the dark triad traits result in working professionals being more or less likely to accept advice when making a decision. Past research has shown that outcomes are generally more favorable when the person who is making the decision takes the advice of another person into consideration. Despite this fact, I hypothesized that people with higher narcissistic or psychopathic traits will not accept advice when making a decision. Additionally, I hypothesized that Machiavellians may be the exception in the dark triad and would be more likely to utilize advice. Results indicated that narcissists were less likely to utilize advice and Machiavellians were more likely to utilize advice. There were no significant findings regarding those with psychopathic tendencies. Organizations could benefit from these findings when considering how much their advice may be considered when an employee with narcissistic or Machiavellian tendencies is making a decision.

Decision Making: Do People with Dark Triad Traits Utilize Advice?

When making decisions, people can benefit from taking the advice of others, and outcomes are generally more favorable when the decision maker takes the advice of another person into consideration (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Kausel, Culbertson, Leiva, Slaughter, & Jackson, 2015; Larrick & Soll, 2006). Because organizational leaders are often tasked with making decisions, taking advice may be essential for optimal decision making (Kausel et al. 2015, Argyris, 2000). However, when making important decisions, people often make the decision based on heuristics or intuition (Hoorens, 1993; Kruegar & Mueller, 2002; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000). Despite the research encouraging people to consider the advice of others, most people choose to proceed without considering advice, even after receiving beneficial advice on the topic (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Kausel et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study is to examine some of the individual differences that may influence advice taking. Namely, because dark personality characteristics, such as narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, can have a negative impact on the decision-making processes (Kausel et al., 2015; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2011). This study will investigate whether these dark personality characteristics impact advice taking.

We argue that advice taking may be negatively affected by personality, specifically narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. We hypothesize that narcissists are less likely to perceive the advice of others as useful, and this could result in advice discounting. Next, we hypothesize that Machiavellians will accept the advice of others, assuming the advice benefits the Machiavellian's personal goal. Finally, we hypothesize that psychopathy will have a negative relationship with advice taking because psychopaths do not value the advisor or the advice of the advisor, resulting in advice discounting.

Advice Taking

Despite research indicating that advice can benefit decision making, people often fail to effectively utilize advice (See, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll, 2011). This may be because most people have an easier time accessing their own thought process, so it is easier for them to justify their own reasoning, compared to that of someone else (Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000). A common model used to explain the foundation of advice utilization is the judge advisor system (JAS; Sniezek & Buckley, 1995).

Researchers use JAS to assess how much the judge uses the advisor's advice based on the discrepancy, if any, between the judge's initial decision and final decision. Advice taking occurs when the judge considers and weighs the advisor's opinions, resulting in the judge altering his or her judgment or decision (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Sniezek & Buckley, 1995). Advice-taking research reveals that most people only adjust their answer about 30% to match the advice of their advisor (Yaniv, 2004).

Research on advice taking has examined the circumstances of decisions and the characteristics of the advisor, both of which influence whether a person will accept and utilize the advice. There is also research examining the advisee's confidence (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2012), how much experience the advisee has with the task (Harvey & Fischer, 1997), if the advisee has a valuable relationship with the advice taker (Van Swol & Sniezek, 2005), and how much external pressure is on the decision maker to be held accountable for their decision (Kausel et al., 2015; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). However, what is missing from the literature is a focus on the impact of dark personality traits. Only one study has examined the influence of narcissism on advice taking (see Kausel et al., 2015). The present research will help close this gap by examining whether the dark triad influences a person's

willingness to accept or reject advice. With this purpose in mind, this research will adopt an egocentric advice discounting perspective.

The Dark Triad

The dark triad consists of three socially aversive traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy). Narcissists, Machiavellians, and psychopaths¹ all typically display characteristics that are positively related to egocentrism, callousness, and manipulation (DeShong et al., 2017; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). Previous research has shown that people with dark triad personality traits are less agreeable and extraverted (Dalal & Bonaccio, 2010; DeShong et al., 2017; Furnham, Richards, & Paulus, 2013; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2015) and less likely to value other people.

Narcissism, Characteristics and Influence

A narcissist is someone who is very self-involved, constantly seeks the approval of others, and views themselves as grandiose (Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2010; Kausel et al., 2015). Those with a higher narcissism level have been found to be successful in achieving leadership roles (Furnham et al., 2013; O'Boyle et al., 2011). However, narcissists make poor leaders because they are unable to empathize with their employees (Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2010). Additionally, narcissistic leaders could be willing to lower their employees' morale in order for the narcissist to boost their own self-confidence (Lubit, 2002).

¹ It is important to note that the dark triad personalities stem from clinically diagnosed disorders, but this research will address each personality as a sub-clinical personality dimension (Giacomin et al., 2014). Although narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy are all associated with psychological disorders, this research will not be categorizing participants. Instead, these characteristics will be viewed as traits lying on a continuum (Foster & Campbell, 2007; Giacomin et al., 2014). When the terms narcissist, Machiavellian, or psychopath are used, this is only shorthand for referring to someone who may possess higher levels of these traits.

Research has demonstrated that higher levels of confidence are associated with less use of advice (Bonnaccio & Dalal, 2006). Narcissists report having higher levels of confidence (Beck et al., 1990); therefore, narcissists may reject advice because they believe that their opinion is more accurate and valuable than the advisor's advice. Additionally, narcissists may have a superiority bias, which results in seeing others as inferior and perceiving others' opinions as unimportant (Kausel et al, 2015).

In line with Kausel et al.'s (2015) findings, we argue that narcissists will be less likely to take advice. As mentioned, narcissists respond negatively to constructive criticism or feedback (O'Boyle et al., 2011), which may be delivered in the form of advice. If the advice provides negative feedback regarding the narcissist's initial judgment, then it is much more likely that the narcissist will become defensive and dismiss the advice. Based on the aforementioned research, we predict that a person with a higher narcissism level is going to be less likely to take advice, because the narcissist believes that the advisor is inferior. Therefore, the advisor's advice will be perceived as useless. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Narcissism is associated with less advice taking.

Hypothesis 1a: Perceived usefulness of advice mediates the relationship between narcissism and advice taking.

Machiavellianism, Characteristics and Influence

Machiavellianism is characterized by three interrelated values. Namely, Machiavellians find it appropriate to manipulate others in some situations, have a cynical view of all humanity, and believe that reaching their desired outcome is their top priority; the steps that it takes to reach their goals are irrelevant (O'Boyle et al., 2011). Indeed, Rauthmann and Will (2011) examined different behaviors commonly associated with Machiavellianism and found that the

behaviors that are most characteristic of Machiavellians include cynicism, manipulation, and exploitation.

Machiavellians believe that if someone is naïve enough to be taken advantage of, then the individual deserved to be manipulated (DeShong et al., 2017; Lyons & Aitken, 2010). The Machiavellian's lack of empathy could result in a disregard for how others are impacted by the Machiavellian's decision. If a person does not care how their decision will influence others, then it is much less likely that he will consider the advice of others. Finally, Machiavellians' cynical world view lead them to believe that all people are motivated by selfish goals (DeShong et al., 2017). A Machiavellian's lack of trust in other people (O'Boyle et al., 2011) may lead the Machiavellian to ignore the advice of others because the Machiavellian believes that the advisor is acting in the advisor's own self-interest.

On the other hand, Machiavellians may use the advice of others because it will help them reach their goal faster. Machiavellians will take advice because they use a mature decision making process (Jones, 2014; Cooper & Peterson, 1980). A mature decision making process involves considering all the steps that go into making a decision and all possible consequences that the decision may bring (Carre & Jones, 2016; Jones, 2014). In other words, Machiavellians have the capacity to think logically through a decision and its outcomes.

Based on the preceding discussion, I propose a set of competing hypotheses regarding how Machiavellians use advice. First, Machiavellians may reject advice from others. They may not want to allow another person the chance to give advice (Smith, Summers, Dillon, Macatee, & Cogle, 2016) because this would mean that the Machiavellian is letting another person help them. Another person helping the Machiavellian may seem impractical to the Machiavellian because the Machiavellian sees other people as naïve and motivated by their own selfish goals

(DeShong et al., 2017; Lyons & Aitken, 2010). Therefore, a Machiavellian's cynical worldview may lead the Machiavellian to lack trust in the advisor which would lead the Machiavellian to perceive the advice as useless. This leads to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: Machiavellianism is associated with less advice taking.

Hypothesis 2a: Trust in the advisor and perceived usefulness of advice will mediate the relationship between Machiavellianism and advice taking. Specifically, I hypothesize a serial mediation: Machiavellianism → Trust in the advisor → Perceived usefulness of the advice → advice taking.

As previously stated, Machiavellians may use a mature decision process that could include the decision to trust the person who is giving the advice because the Machiavellian believes that utilizing the advice is in their own best interest. As part of this process, Machiavellians spend time carefully planning the steps to reach their goal (Jones & Paulhus, 2009, Carre & Jones, 2016). As such, Machiavellians will utilize advice if they perceive it as beneficial to reaching their goal. It is important to the Machiavellian to do whatever is necessary to get ahead (Furnham, Richards, & Paulus, 2013), which may include using advice. In other words, Machiavellians may use advice if they trust the advisor and perceive the advice as useful (i.e., they view the advisor as a useful tool to be used to reach the Machiavellian's goals). This leads to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3: Machiavellianism is associated with more advice taking.

Hypothesis 3a: Trust in the advisor and perceived usefulness of advice will mediate the relationship between Machiavellianism and advice taking. Specifically, I hypothesize a serial mediation: Machiavellianism → Trust in the advisor → Perceived usefulness of the advice → advice taking.

Psychopathy, Characteristics and Influence

Psychopaths are impulsive and make riskier decisions (Jones & Paulus, 2011; Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). A psychopath's erratic tendencies may lead to hasty decisions, ignoring input from others. People with high levels of psychopathy may reject advice because they do not believe it is necessary to consider others' advice. Another reason that people with high levels of psychopathy may be more likely to reject advice is because they find enjoyment in high-risk situations (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011; O'Boyle et al., 2011).

Research has shown that psychopaths tend to feel indifferent about any type of feedback (O'Boyle et al., 2011). The psychopath's lack of concern for others is one reason that psychopaths do not feel guilt for their destructive behaviors. If a psychopath does not feel concern for an advisor, then the psychopath is less likely take the advice because he does not see the advisor as useful (Palmer, Komarraju, Carter, & Karau, 2017). A psychopath may view advice as a type of feedback, and therefore, they would prefer not to listen to the advice of another person. This leads to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: Psychopathy is associated with less advice taking.

Hypothesis 4a: Perceived usefulness of advice mediates the relationship between psychopathy and advice taking.

Method

Participants

We recruited 299 working adults by utilizing Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants were paid \$0.50 for their participation. Usable data were obtained from 284 participants. All participants were above 18 years of age, native English speakers, currently employed, and citizens of the United States. The average age of participants was 43 years ($SD =$

11.2). On average participants worked 39 hours each week ($SD = 8.3$). About 53% of the participants were female, and 79.6% were White, non-Hispanic.

Materials and Procedures

First, participants completed the Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010), a 12-item questionnaire that assesses the dark triad traits. Sample items include, “I have used flattery to get my way” and “I tend to lack remorse.” Participant responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Each of the subscales had acceptable levels of internal consistency reliability (psychopathy, $\alpha = .82$; narcissism, $\alpha = .85$; and Machiavellianism, $\alpha = .88$). Extraversion will be controlled in this study because positive emotions have been found to be related to advice taking (Gino & Schweitzer, 2008), and previous research has found that extraversion may have an influence over increasing advice taking (Kausel et al., 2015). In other words, a person who is extraverted may have a stronger desire to form relationships and may be more inclined to consider the advice of others.

Advice Taking Task. After completing the Dirty Dozen, participants completed the advice taking task.

Task 1. This task consists of 13 general knowledge questions that each require numeric answers. After providing their estimate for each question, participants were asked to indicate their level of confidence in their estimate from 0% (*not at all confident*) to 100% (*completely confident*). Once the participant entered their initial guess and their percentage of confidence in their response, the participant was then shown advice pertaining to the question that was just answered. The advice remained the same across all participants and was purportedly from a previous participant. The advice values were determined by Kausel et al. (2015) in advance by using scores from a random individual in a pilot study.

Perceived usefulness of the advice. Once the participant reviewed the advice, a rating scale was used to ask the participant to provide ratings regarding how accurate and useful they believed the previous participant's answers were. Response items ranged from 1 (*not accurate/useful at all*) to 7 (*very accurate/useful*). The higher the participant scores the advice, the more useful the participant perceives the advice to be when making decisions.

Perceived usefulness of the advisor. Following the completion of the perceived usefulness of advice scale, participants were asked to rate how useful and confident they perceived their advisor to be. If the participants indicated that they perceived the advisor to be useful, then the participant was asked if they used the advice to help improve their response.

Task 2. The next task required the participant to provide estimates to the same set of trivia questions and indicate their degree of confidence in each estimate for the second time. Asking the participants to answer the same general knowledge questions a second time allowed for the measurement of how much the participant adjusted his or her responses based on the advice. This is called the weight of advice (WOA). The WOA is used to measure the degree to which the participants utilize the advice. The WOA is the absolute value of the difference between the final estimate and the initial estimate, which is then divided by the absolute value of the difference between the advice and the initial estimate (Kausel et al., 2015). Participants then completed the demographics questions.

Results

All three hypotheses were tested using Hayes' (2012) procedure to analyze mediation. Hypotheses 1 and 4 were analyzed using Model 4. Hypothesis 1 tested the indirect effect of narcissism on advice taking through perceived usefulness of advice. Accuracy in one's initial estimate and extraversion were entered as covariates (see Kausel et al., 2015). After controlling

for both of these variables, we found that narcissism significantly predicted perceived usefulness of the advice ($\beta = .06, p < .05$). Perceived usefulness of advice significantly predicted advice taking ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). Overall, narcissism had a significant indirect effect on advice taking, when mediated by perceived usefulness of advice ($effect = .008; 95\% CI [.002, .015]$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. Further exploration of the data revealed that narcissism was positively associated with self-reported use of the advice ($r = .13, p < .05$).

Hypothesis 2 & 2a stated that Machiavellianism would have a negative indirect effect on advice taking through trust in the advisor and perceived usefulness of advice. In contrast, Hypothesis 3 & 3a stated that Machiavellianism would have a positive indirect effect on advice taking through trust in the advisor, followed by perceived usefulness of advice. To test these competing hypotheses, we used Hayes' (2012) procedure for testing serial mediation (Model 6). Again, we controlled for extraversion and overall accuracy. After controlling for both of these variables, we found that Machiavellianism significantly (positively) predicted trust in the advisor ($\beta = 1.72, p < .01$). Trust in the advisor significantly predicted perceived usefulness of the advice ($\beta = .04, p < .01$). Perceived usefulness of advice predicted advice taking ($\beta = .12, p < .01$). Overall, Machiavellianism had a significant positive indirect effect on advice taking, when mediated by trust in the advisor and perceived usefulness of advice ($effect = .007; 95\% CI [.003, .015]$). Thus, Hypotheses 3 & 3a were supported, and Hypothesis 2 & 2a were *not* supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there would be an indirect relationship between psychopathy on advice taking through perceived usefulness of advice. We controlled for extraversion and overall accuracy. After controlling for these variables, we found that psychopathy did not significantly predict advice taking ($\beta = -.03, p = .22$). Perceived usefulness of advice significantly predicted advice taking ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). Overall, psychopathy did not have a significant indirect effect on

advice taking, when mediated by perceived usefulness of advice ($effect = -.005$; 95% CI $[-.014, .003]$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the dark triad and advice taking. Our results suggest that narcissism is positively related to advice taking in part because narcissists perceived the advice as useful. Further, narcissism is positively related to self-reported use of advice. Our results contrast previous research demonstrating that narcissists are more likely to dismiss advice (e.g., Kausel et al., 2015). However, our results may demonstrate narcissists engaging in self-enhancement strategies. For instance, Hart, Adams, Burton, and Tortoriello (2017) found that narcissists engage in assertive impression-management strategies, whereby narcissists actively promote a desired self-image. As such, narcissists may have used advice in our study because they believed it would make them look better.

As expected, we also found that Machiavellianism was positively related to advice taking in part because Machiavellians trusted the advisor, which in turn led the Machiavellians to perceive the advice as useful. However, this contrasts previous research that suggests Machiavellians do not trust the advice of others (O'Boyle et al., 2011). Due to our results showing that Machiavellians utilized the advice, we believe that Machiavellians viewed the advisor as a tool to be used to improve their own responses to the trivia questions. The Machiavellians may have used their more mature (albeit somewhat manipulative) decision making process and viewed the advice as a useful way to help them achieve their goal (in this case, correctly answering the trivia questions). As such, the Machiavellians viewed the advisor as trustworthy and viewed the advice as useful. Indeed, this is consistent with previous research

showing that Machiavellians will exploit other people if they believe that using another person will help them achieve their own goals (e.g., Furnham, Richards, Paulhus, 2013).

Lastly, contrary to our expectations, psychopathy did not have an indirect effect on advice taking through perceived usefulness of the advice. This may be in part because a key aspect of psychopathy is the lack of empathy, and the nature of the advice taking task was not designed to evoke empathic reactions. One practical implication of this could be that those with psychopathic tendencies feel indifferent towards their answer to the question. A psychopath's tendency to feel indifferent towards feedback may result in the psychopath not caring one way or another about the advice or their responses (O'Boyle et al., 2011). This information could be beneficial to an organization because while psychopaths may not accept advice, there are also no significant results saying that they will ignore the advice.

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