4-20-2022

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Kaley Klaus
Fort Hays State University, krklaus@fhsu.edu

Haley Moon
Fort Hays State University, hrmoon@fhsu.edu

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An examination of leader and follower dark triad traits and leader-member exchanges

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

Kaley Klaus, EdD & Haley Moon   Department of Leadership Studies   Fort Hays State University

ABSTRACT

This study examines whether follower Dark Triad (DT) traits impact the quality of leader-member exchanges. Data was collected from 328 individuals who completed the Short Dark Triad instrument (SD3) for themselves and their supervisor, and the Leader-member Exchange instrument (LMX-7) to determine the quality of their relationship with their supervisor. A factorial ANOVA was performed to determine the impact of leader and follower DT traits on the quality of the leader-follower relationship. A simultaneous regression tested if the quality of the leader-follower relationship could be predicted from DT traits of follower and DT traits of leader. Results suggested that narcissistic and psychopathic DT traits of the follower, as well as the leader, did significantly impact the quality of the leader-follower relationship. Moreover, results from the regression determined 24% of the variance in the quality of a leader-follower relationship can be explained by DT traits of the leader and follower.

INTRODUCTION

➢ Much of our understanding of dark leadership is based on the relationship between leaders and followers (Mackey et al., 2021).

➢ What a follower deems destructive could differ based on the quality of the leader-follower relationship.
  - ➢ Dulebohn et al. (2012) posit leader variables create the most variance in the quality of LMX.
  - ➢ Lyons et al. (2019) found followers who have high-quality relationships with their leader perceived the leader's destructive traits and behaviors as less abusive.

➢ Studies have confirmed the Big Five personality traits (positive traits) play a role in creating high-quality leader-member exchanges (Schyns, 2015).
  - ➢ Little has been discovered about whether dark personality traits also play a role in creating the leader-follower relationship.

➢ This study sought to determine whether leader and follower Dark Triad (DT) personality traits could predict the quality of the leader-follower relationship, and whether dark traits have a significant impact on the quality of the leader-member exchange.

DARK TRIAD OF PERSONALITY

Narcissism – involves engaging in exploitive behaviors, exhibiting a grandiose view of self; described as callousness; displaying an excessive need for attention and admiration (LeBreton et al., 2017)

Psychopathy – involves exhibiting superficial charm, grandiosity, counterproductive behaviors such as irresponsibility or impulsivity, and a lack of empathy or remorse for their actions (Williams *et al.,* 2007)

Machiavellianism – involves using amoral manipulation to pursue one's own goals, through lying or exploiting others; lacking empathy (LeBreton et al., 2017)

LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY

LMX seeks to measure the quality of relationships between a leader and their followers (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Two levels of relationship quality:

High-Quality LMX – Strong social ties, mutual trust, respect, & obligation; can lead to shared identities

Low-Quality LMX – Few social ties; transactional relationship

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS
328 individuals who were employed full-time and report to a direct supervisor

MEASURES
Short Dark Triad (SD3)
Leader-Member Exchange 7 (LMX-7)

PROCEDURES
When responding to the measures, eligible participants (followers) were asked to report various demographics about themselves. Next, they completed the SD3 to measure their personality traits in the domains of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Followers were then asked to report demographic information for their current leader (direct supervisor). Followers were then asked to complete the SD3 once again, but to rate their leader's personality traits in the domains of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, from their perspective. Finally, following the completion of the SD3 for their leader, followers were asked to rate the quality of their relationship with their leader using the LMX-7.

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

H_1: The quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX) can be predicted from DT traits of the leader *and* DT traits of the follower.
  TRUE. Using a simultaneous regression analysis, about 24% of an LMX can be predicted by the DT traits of the leader and follower. In particular, DT traits of the follower account for about 40% of the variance in the quality of the LMX, while the leader's DT traits along are not a significant predictor. This result contradicts Dulebohn et al. (2012).

H_2: Leader *and* follower narcissistic traits have a significant impact on the quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX).
  TRUE. Using a 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA, data indicate the interaction of leader and follower narcissistic traits do *not* have a statistically significant impact on the quality of the LMX [$F(1, 324) = 1.52$, $p = .22$]; however, narcissistic traits of the leader [$F(1, 324) = 14.12$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .04$] and follower [$F(1, 324) = 6.78$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta2 = .02$], individually, *do* impact the quality of the LMX.

H_3: Leader *and* follower psychopathy traits have a significant impact on the quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX).
  TRUE. Using a 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA, data indicate the interaction of leader and follower psychopathy traits do *not* have a statistically significant impact on the quality of the LMX [$F(1, 324) = 1.47$, $p = .23$]; however, psychopathy traits of the leader [$F(1, 324) = 11.99$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .04$] and follower [$F(1, 324) = 9.77$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta2 = .03$], separately, and do impact the quality of the LMX.

H_4: Leader *and* follower Machiavellianism traits have a significant impact on the quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX).
  FALSE. Using a 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA, data indicate there is no significant impact or interaction on the quality of LMX based on this dark triad trait.

H_5: Leader *and* follower DT traits have a significant impact on the quality of the leader-follower relationship (LMX).
  TRUE. Using a 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVA, data indicate there is a significant impact on the quality of the LMX when both the leader [$F(1, 324) = 9.04$, $p = .003$, partial $\eta2 = .03$] and follower [$F(1, 324) = 5.54$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta2 = .02$] have high levels of DT traits; however, there was no statistically significant interaction effect [$F(1, 324) = .61$, $p = .44$].

LIMITATIONS

➢ SD3 was originally developed as a self-report, but authors for this study reframed the questions, per previous studies, in order to rate others (Volmer et al., 2016; Tokarev et al., 2017; Lyons et al., 2019).

➢ When examining the results of the 2 x 2 Factorial ANOVAS for narcissism & psychopathy, the means for examining the main effect were in close proximity to one another—suggesting true differences between groups within each main effect were minimal. Findings should be interpreted with caution.

➢ Participants were recruited via Amazon's MTurk; therefore, a threat is posed to validity due to workers' inattention (Ramsey et al., 2016; Aguinis et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

With the exception of Machiavellianism, follower Dark Triad traits have a significant impact on the quality of a leader-member exchange; this adds to the body of knowledge initiated by Schyns (2015) and Lyons et al. (2019). Further, Dark Triad traits of the leader and follower can predict the quality of an LMX, with follower traits being the statistically significant predictor.

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