EXAMINATION OF NARCISSISTIC AND MACHIAVELLIAN CHARACTER TRAITS IN LEADERS

Gerda Szántó

Work- and organizational psychologist, PhD student

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics and Business, Institute of Management and Organization

szanto.gerda@econ.unideb.hu

Abstract: *The leader is a person of essential importance in the life of an organization. Someone who can keep things in order. All of this is a very diverse task that requires countless skills, which affects the organizational culture, the success of the company, the satisfaction and efficiency of the employees. The objective of my research is to examine whether narcissistic and Machiavellian traits appear in individuals with leadership experience, and how they feel about the issue of empowerment and certain assertive situations. The sample of my research was 102 leaders. I made sure that there is a correlation between the mentioned variables.*

INTRODUCTION

Most of our lives are filled with work, as we are obliged to earn money, and the satisfaction of our basic needs is a function of existence. Although many of us identify work with this, work is much more than that. Work is actually a manifestation of personality, which is also a personality shaper. To put it simply, two types of employees can be distinguished, there are those who struggle to get up, those who don't even get to work and already know that only negativity is waiting for them inside, and there are those who approach their work with great desire. This is an extremely simplified form of categorization, and it is of course influenced by many different factors, for example the leader's personality and the relationship between the leader and subordinate.

This can also be considered the subject of work psychology, in addition to its many other functions. One of its most important tasks is to get to know the suitability and competence of the person capable of working, and to facilitate in the most favorable way so that as many people as possible can do "good work". As a task, we can also list the psychological root of the problems that occur during work. The goal is to maximize profit, in such a way that the employee also feels good in the process. This is where creating the right work environment, cooperating colleagues and the person of the manager come into play.

One of the most popular research areas in modern psychology today is the Dark Triad, i.e. psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism. The term was coined by Paulhus and Williams in 2002. Many aspects of our lives can be affected by those people who can be characterized by this triad, and it cannot be a coincidence that these personality traits are very common in leadership positions. Undeniably, we all have these traits, that is, we are persuasive, we represent our interests, we are able to gather people around us, we can handle criticism, and we handle spontaneous situations appropriately. The target group of Barizsné and Ujhelyi's (2018) research was the students of the University of Debrecen, and their goal was to explore the relationships between the Dark Triad's personality traits and its ethical attitude, 16% of the sample of their research can be described as Dark Triad membership marks, and men's higher rates of Machiavellianism and psychopathy are typical.

The manager's task is to create an atmosphere that is stimulating and encourages appropriate efficiency. However, there are also conditions for this, a leader's job is not easy, but the fundamental thing is that he can only lead if he knows himself and evaluates himself properly. You must be aware of your strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and you must be constantly open to the new, i.e. to development. I also based my research on this appropriate self-evaluation, as I was curious to what extent the given individual could identify with specific

narcissistic and Machiavellian personality traits. The concept of narcissism is such a hot topic these days that Narcissus himself would blush with pride (Malkin, 2015). A narcissistic personality can often seem like an excellent choice for a leadership role, as they crave a challenge, enjoy competition and, by the way, are there to win. He has abilities and skills that direct him to this field. However, this is not necessarily true, as interpersonal skills that may be essential are lacking, for example, he is not a good team player (Bánki, 2016). Machiavellians can be like that, tricksters, cheats, swindlers, but still leaders, they achieve their goals by using others. They are smart and rational, able to think with a cool head and without emotion (Bereczkei, 2016).

Narcissistic and Machiavellian traits often go hand in hand, as self-adoration and the ability to effectively influence others are key elements in the exercise of power. All of these are character strengths that can balance out their undesirable behavior, but if they all go hand in hand, the positive qualities of one cannot offset the negative of the other. The main question in the case of leaders is not whether they are narcissistic or Machiavellian, but what characteristics are associated with all of this and in what proportion these are manifested in their behavior. People with narcissistic personality traits can be found most easily by looking for positions involving power: a large number of them are company managers, politicians, and law enforcement officers. As a result, it is an interesting question whether they got into these positions because of the desire for power, or because they are treated well?! There are many ways in which someone can abuse their power, using abuse as a means of power control, and they are able to control subordinates, students, or other subordinates with mastery.

The essence of narcissistic personality disorder is that the person suffering from it develops maladaptive (that is, ill-adjusted) strategies in their thinking about the world and themselves, and because of this they get involved in repeated conflicts in which only the actors change, everything else is eerily similar to the previous occasions (Farkas, 2018). Decision-making is one of the most important expectations from the leader, and the resulting responsibility. Of course, all this does not mean that the narcissistic leader only makes good decisions, rather that whatever the consequences of his decision, he will consistently stand up for what is right. Of course, managing others is also an equally important task, and this is particularly typical for this personality type, as they like to be the center of attention and are not embarrassed at all when attention is drawn to them, and they also like it when others are aware of their knowledge, which is why they find them impressive. With their appearance and charisma, they are able to draw attention to themselves.

It goes without saying that these personality traits also have a positive side, we often think that narcissistic traits are inherent in successful people (Danka, 2019). They are actually characterized by a kind of charisma, they affect subordinates with their personal radiance and charm. With his easy irony and cynicism, he goes against company processes and even organizational culture. For example, he easily gives negative feedback such as: "let's be honest, you don't have the talent for this" or "it's hard for me to understand that

if you don't even know what you're doing here" (Lisznyai, 2018), he can say these with sufficient relaxation and seriousness, thereby destroying the person who receives it. His belief in his talent is unshakable, in fact it's healthy, since we all need to think of ourselves as special, and the aggressive narcissist shrinks away from the very thought of someone making him indispensable.

"Machiavellianism" is a mindset that is associated with a behavioral strategy (Paál, 2011), a so-called cold rationalism, which can often be recognized in leaders, sometimes ignoring moral rules. Nowadays, it is no coincidence that there are many negative signs at the leadership level, but this person still has the skills that enable him to become a leader, that is, in addition to power, ability is also important, it is not enough to want it, you have to acquire and keep it. Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism) often appear among leaders who tend to use their subordinates as tools to achieve their own goals. On average, the listed personality traits can be demonstrated to a greater extent in men (Ujhelyi, 2017). We call Machiavellian leaders those who are able to influence others in such a masterful way that they do not even notice it, or are even particularly happy about it, we identify Machiavellian leaders with authoritarianism. Machiavellian traits are not necessarily bad and destructive, since if their interests are the same as the goals of a group, they can bring significant benefits in the long term (Jones and Paulhus, 2009). As a result, we assume the existence of leadership qualities in these people, since they are assertive, able to control others and events, and also influence others in an amazing way, for their own purposes. They regulate their emotions excellently (Gardner and Avolio, 1995,1998; cited by Deluga, 2001), they are confident even in doubtful situations, although they are uncertain if they do not have sufficient or adequate information (House, 1977, Jameson, 1975; cited by Deluga, 2001). They perform excellently in stressful, personal disputes and competitive situations, as they are driven by the ability to keep emotions in the background, and at the same time, they quickly see through situations and analyze them excellently, thus smoothly finding a suitable strategy (Christie and Geis, 1970; quoted by Deluga, 2001). In the vocabulary of today's modern psychology, a Machiavellian personality is one who sees other people as a means to achieve his own goals. A behavioral strategy in which manipulation of others is the path to self-interest (Wilson, Near and Miller, 1996).

The downside of the Machiavellian personality is that they are excellent liars, sneaky and hypocritical (Christie and Geis, 1970; cited in Deluga, 2001). Manipulation can be the result of emotionlessness and "cold-bloodedness", i.e. their empathic skills and willingness to cooperate are low, as a result they are able to act calmly, as they do not allow others to affect their own emotions (Wilson et al., 1996). Machiavellians convincingly lead others astray, if there is a way, they even resort to family. Leary and Hoyle (2009) hypothesized that high Mach people - referring to the above - have higher intelligence, since they understand their communication partners through persuasive communication. However, they found out that all of this is not connected, in fact, the emotional intelligence of people with a high Mach is significantly lower.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

With my research, I would like to get an answer to the extent to which Machiavellian and narcissistic personality traits appear among managers, how they evaluate themselves, how they handle specific assertiveness situations, and how they think about the issue of empowerment in their work.

I was interested in whether there are common characteristics between people with narcissistic or Machiavellian traits, and whether they differ in self-esteem, empowerment and the way of solving different situations. My aim is to assess the relationship between self-esteem, narcissistic and Machiavellian personality traits, as well as empowerment and assertiveness.

To examine my research questions, I chose the questionnaire method, which took place from October to November 2019 within the framework of my master's thesis in psychology. In advance, the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Debrecen's Institute of Psychology reviewed my research, deeming it to be free of ethical problems, so I was able to start carrying out my research. My research ethics permit number: UD-IP-2019/121. In the questionnaire, I used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, RSES, Rosenberg (1965), which was adapted for a Hungarian sample by Sallay et al. in 2014. Due to the inadequate fit of the two-factor model (CFA results for two factors: cmin/df=3.53; RMSEA: 0.111; SRMR: 0.076; CFI: 0.909; TLI: 0.88), I used the one-dimensional model. The reliability of the scales is good (Cronbach's alpha: 0.866), the first principal component explains 47%.

Dahling, Whitaker, and Levy (2009) created the Machiavellianism Personality Scale (MPS) in order to eliminate the criteria of the earlier Mach-IV. The four factors of this model (amorality, sense of control, desire for control and distrust of others) contain a total of 15 items. All this was validated by György Talmácsi (University of Szeged), Gábor Orosz (University of Szeged), Béla Birkás (University of Pécs) and Tamás Bereczkei (University of Pécs) on a university sample of 404 students. This enables the usability of the questionnaire, as both its validity and reliability are adequate, the original model fitted well (cmin/df=1.39; RMSEA: 0.044; SRMR: 0.074; CFI: 0.949; TLI: 0.936), thus psychological can be used in research.

Based on the literature summaries, the NPI (Narcissistic Personality Inventory) and HSNS (Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale) tests play a prominent role in the empirical investigation of the phenomenon of narcissism. The HSNS is a 10-item self-report test created by Holly M. Hendin and Jonathan M. Cheek in 1997 to measure covert narcissism, and then in 2013 a new, expanded version of the HSNS was created, which became a 23-item test, so the The MCNS (Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale) test is considered an improved version of the HSNS. The Institute of Psychology of the University of Pécs adapted the HSNS and then the MCNS tests, the Hungarian version was prepared by Ivett Horváth and Szabolcs Bandi (University of Pécs). In my current research, I used this improved version to map narcissistic personality traits.

The test, which contains 12 statements, explores the question of empowerment along different dimensions, which are as follows: Meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. The model itself fits well (cmin/df=1.52; CFI: 0.920; TLI: 0.891; RMSEA: 0.053; SRMR: 0.052). I used the statements based on my own translation, and my respondents had to rate how much they agreed on a five-point Likert scale. The test was validated by Gretchen M. Spreitzer in 1995.

I used the assertive situations based on the unpublished questionnaire of Szilvia Fodor and Tímea Olajos (n.n.; forthcoming). Seven situations were formulated, to which four reactions were associated, in each case they were formulated based on the following: Aggressive Assertive (AgrAssz), Adaptive Assertive (AdAssz), Submissive (Szub), Aggressive (Agr). With the diversity of the tests used, my aim was not to look at the examined question along an existing dimension.

The questionnaire was filled out by 207 people, of which 102 people have management experience (1-30 years), so in my current assessment I deal with this sub-sample.

The sample included 40 men and 62 women, whose average age was 41 years. Fillings were received from many work areas, the data is too scattered among the different areas, significantly represented areas were the following: finance and accounting, tourism and hospitality, HR, trade.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I considered Spearman's correlation suitable for investigating the correlation, which is a kind of rank correlation and shows to what extent the magnitude of one variable determines the magnitude of the other variable, as well as the direction and strength of the correlation. In this way, we can say whether the two examined variables are related.

The result achieved in the Rosenberg self-assessment test correlates with managerial experience (Correlation Coefficient = 0.274** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level). From this, I conclude that success at work, or the number of years spent at work, has a great impact on our self-evaluation. Being a leader encourages self-acceptance and affects all areas of life. For managerial self-evaluation through individual experiences; it can be realized through the individual's goals of success and failure, methods of reward and punishment, and the degree of group acceptance. Thus, I retain my hypothesis that managers have high self-esteem, as it has been confirmed that the experience gained in leadership is positively correlated with self-esteem.

During the period of processing literature, I read many articles about the fact that the vast majority of leaders have narcissistic or Machiavellian traits, based on which I considered it essential to examine whether this proposition is confirmed in my research. Leadership experience and narcissism are negatively correlated with each other (Correlation Coefficient= -0.232* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level), i.e. the more leadership experience a given person has, the less narcissistic traits are perceptible. This can be explained in several ways, but it contradicts the research that focuses on toxic leaders. Probably for the sake of group acceptance, the leaders in my sample do not use behaviors that could be identified with narcissism. I also examined all of this with the variables of Machiavellianism (desire for control, sense of control, mistrust of others, amorality), and it showed no significant difference. Based on these, I reject my hypothesis

that narcissistic and Machiavellian traits appear among leaders, as it correlates negatively with narcissistic traits and not with Machiavellian traits.

Furthermore, I wanted to examine how the leaders in my sample feel about the issue of empowerment, and I hypothesized that: Narcissistic leaders have a high need for empowerment. I got the following results:

Table 1. Correlation between Narcissism traits and Empowerment

	Competence	Intellect	Self-determination	Influence
Narcissism	-,330**	-,172	-,172	-,074

Source: Own editing based on own research, 2020
Note: The values in the table are Spearman rank correlations
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level*

The table clearly shows that the statement formulated in my hypothesis is to be rejected, since in all cases a negative correlation can be read for my management group, moreover, what is significant is only the variable of competence.

Regarding Machiavellian leaders, I believed that Machiavellian leaders have high influence.

Table 2. Correlation between Machiavellian traits and Empowerment

	Competence	Intellect	Self-determination	Influence
Desire for control	,357*	,149	,158	,200*
A sense of control	-,225*	-,220*	-,020	-,180
Distrust of others	,171	,131	,199*	,203*
Amorality	-,021	-,066	,134	,204*

Source: Own editing based on own research, 2020
Note: The values in the table are Spearman rank correlations

My hypothesis was confirmed, as influence showed a correlation with the desire for control, distrust of others, and amorality. An interesting additional result is that there was a negative relationship with the sense of control in all cases. And independence correlates with mistrust of others.

In addition, I wanted to compare how narcissistic leaders behave in different assertive situations. I believed that: Narcissistic leaders are characterized by assertive problem solving.

Table 3. Correlation between Narcissism traits and Assertiveness

	Aggressive assertive	Adaptive assertive	Submissive	Aggressive
Narcissism	-,097	-,196*	-,178	-,047

Source: Own editing based on own research, 2020
Note: The values in the table are Spearman rank correlations
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

I reject my hypothesis, since the results clearly show that there is a negative correlation with adaptive assertive problem solving.

After that, the examination with assertive situations followed, in this case I am examining Machiavellian traits with different assertive situations. My hypothesis is the following: Machiavellian leaders are characterized by aggressive problem solving.

Table 4. Correlation between Machiavellian traits and Assertiveness

	Aggressive assertive	Adaptive assertive	Submissive	Aggressive
Desire for control	-,031	-,193	,000	,136
A sense of control	-,070	-,215*	,173	-,017
Distrust of others	-,023	-,116	,003	,130
Amorality	,046	-,188	-,100	,220*

Source: Own editing based on own research, 2020
Note: The values in the table are Spearman rank correlations
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

All this was verified with the amorality variable, a correlation was shown. Another result is that the sense of control is negatively correlated with adaptive assertive problem solving.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the examined dimensions. When comparing self-esteem with narcissism, a negative relationship was revealed, which was surprising to me - although in pathological cases it can all be a real negative relationship (Bánki, 2016). At the same time, a positive relationship with Machiavellianism's desire for control and mistrust of others was confirmed. Managerial experience also showed a connection with self-evaluation, I interpret all this in terms of the time spent at the workplace, since success and performance at the workplace increase our evaluation of ourselves.

In terms of empowerment, narcissism brought negative relationships, which raised new questions for me, since in all cases I assumed a positive and strong relationship (Bánki, 2016). This may be worth investigating with further research. With regard to Machiavellianism, the issue needs to be renegotiated, as the influence was not as strong as what was supported in the literature (Bereczkei, 2016). In the case of persons with leadership experience, narcissism showed a negative relationship with the variable of competence, while Machiavellian leadership showed a negative relationship with influence. Although the latter has typically developed for non-leaders as well.

I consider situations based on problem solving to be an extremely useful element of my research, and I am glad that I was one of the first to use this research tool. Assertiveness is closely related to my areas of interest anyway, so I was happy to use it. The four behavioral differences can properly separate the personality traits. Regarding narcissism, the results did not develop as expected, but the relationship with

Machiavellianism was fulfilled, since the aggressive behavior appeared to a high degree. The presence or absence of managerial experience did not show any significant difference in the examined situations.

CONCLUSION

I believe that my research, together with the significant and non-significant results, despite the limitations, adequately addressed the desired questions, i.e. the examination of narcissistic and Machiavellian traits among leaders with leadership experience in terms of self-esteem, empowerment, and assertive situations.

Based on the results of my research, it can be concluded that the people participating in the research did not achieve exceptionally high results on the narcissism or Machiavellianism test, possibly with the inclusion of a larger sample, more people with more serious management experience, there could have been a greater difference. In terms of future research, it is by all means necessary to further develop all of this, possibly to use a different narcissism test, which can more precisely define the investigated characteristics. I would call the mapping of Machiavellian traits the main result of my research, since both influence and aggressive behavior were confirmed. Another result of my research is that high Machiavellians communicate assertively and aggressively in many cases.

REFERENCES

Barizsné Hadházi, E., - Ujhelyi, M. (2017): University students' Dark Triad traits and ethical attitudes. The annals of the University of Oradea, 739. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339630203_ UNIVERSITY_STUDENTS'_DARK_TRIAD_TRAITS_AND_ETHI-CAL_ATTITUDES

Bereczkei T. (2009): Az erény természete. Önzetlenség, együttműködés, nagylelkűség. Typotex Kiadó. Budapest.

Danka B. (2019): Lehet egy nárcisztikus személy jó vezető? Letöltve: https://mindsetpszichologia.hu/2019/05/06/lehet-egy-narcisztikus-szemely-jo-vezeto/ 2020.01.15.

Deluga, R. J. (2001): American presidental machiavellianism implications for performance and charismatic leadership. The leadership quarterly, 12, 339-363

Farkas Nóra (2018): Menekülj, amerre látsz? Amikor a vezető nárcisztikus. Letöltve: http://hrpwr.hu/pszichologia/cikk/menekulj__amerre_latsz__amikor_a_vezeto_narcisztikus 2020.02.09.

Jones, D. L., Paulhus, D.L. (2009): Machiavelliasm. In: M.R. Leary, R. H. Hoyle: Handbook of individual differences in social behaviour. New York, Guilford, 93-108.

Leary, M.R. és Hoyle, R.H. (2009): Handbook of Individual Differences in Social Behavior, The Guilford Press, New York

Lisznyai S. (2018): Agresszív nárcizmus – a sikeresen mérgező vezető. Letöltve: https://mindsetpszichologia.hu/2018/01/31/agresszivnarcizmus-a-sikeresen-mergezo-vezeto/ 2020.01.05.

Malkin, C. (2015): A nárcizmus pszichológiája. Hogyan ismerjük fel és kezeljük az önimádókat? HVG Kiadó Zrt., Budapest.

Paál T. (2011): Machiavelliánus döntéshozó stratégiák a szociális kapcsolatokban. Doktori (Ph.D) Értekezés, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Pécs

Ujhelyi, M. (2017): A sötét hármas megjelenése egyetemi hallgatók körében. International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences, 2 (4), 579-588.

Wilson, D.S. – Near, D.C. – Miller, R.R. (1996): Machiavellianism: A synthesis of the evolutionary and psychological literatures. Psychological Bulletin. 119. 285-299.