

# Do Bad Guys Get Ahead or Fall Behind? Relationships of the Dark Triad of Personality With Objective and Subjective Career Success

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## Abstract

This study analyzed incremental effects of single Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) on objective (i.e., salary and leadership position) and subjective (i.e., career satisfaction) career success. We analyzed 793 early career employees representative of age and education from the private industry sector in Germany. Results from multiple and logistic regressions revealed bright and dark sides of the Dark Triad, depending on the specific Dark Triad trait analyzed. After controlling for other relevant variables (i.e., gender, age, job tenure, organization size, education, and work hours), narcissism was positively related to salary, Machiavellianism was positively related to leadership position and career satisfaction, and psychopathy was negatively related to all analyzed outcomes. These results provide evidence that the Dark Triad plays a role in explaining important career outcomes. Implications for personality and career research are derived.

## Keywords

Dark Triad, narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, career success

## Introduction

There is a growing interest in dark traits at work, mainly due to their costs for individuals and organizations, which result out of negative or harmful behaviors or attitudes (Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014). A second-order construct that is frequently referred to and that subsumes three dark traits is the *Dark Triad*, which includes narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Jonason & Webster, 2010). *Narcissism* is characterized by a grandiose, yet fragile, sense of the self, a preoccupation with success, a demand for admiration, an engagement in self-enhancement, and by difficulties in maintaining interpersonal relationships due to a lack of trust and care for others (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). *Psychopathy* is shaped by impulsivity, low empathy and anxiety, a lack of guilt or remorse, emotional shallowness, a belief in the superiority of oneself, and a parasitic lifestyle which can involve criminal activities (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). The willingness to manipulate and exploit others characterizes individuals high in *Machiavellianism* (Spain et al., 2014). Individuals high in Machiavellianism follow three core values: the belief in the effectiveness of manipulative tactics in dealing with other people, a cynical view of human nature, and a moral outlook that puts expediency above principle (O'Boyle et al., 2012).

Past research has focused on identifying negative consequences of the Dark Triad at work (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Spain et al., 2014). However, as Judge and

LePine (2007) stated some years ago, there might also exist bright sides of dark traits at the workplace (e.g., better performance in negotiations, lower expressed stress and anxiety, and preference for jobs with greater responsibility). Moreover, most research on the topic has examined Dark Triad traits separately. However, the three traits are moderately correlated (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and “a study that assesses all three of these simultaneously is warranted” (Jonason et al., 2012, p. 449; see also O'Boyle et al., 2012).

Besides this general need for research, a few studies explored the relations of single Dark Triad traits with career development, and specifically with career success (i.e., salary, status, and career satisfaction; e.g., Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2008; Hirschi & Jänsch, 2015; Ullrich, Farrington, & Coid, 2008). However, no study systematically analyzed whether the Dark Triad traits exert differential (positive and/or negative) and incremental effects on career success. Thereby, career success might be a construct where not only dark sides but also bright sides of the Dark Triad become visible. For instance,

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some studies found low agreeableness (which is related to all Dark Triad traits) to be related to higher objective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Hence, a study including all Dark Triad traits would provide an important conceptual contribution regarding which career outcomes the Dark Triad might be positively related to. Furthermore, it is also important to know how individuals with dark personality traits perform in the area of career advancement because career success represents a major desired life and work outcome for most individuals (Hall, 2002).

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to expand research on personality and careers by, first, analyzing whether narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism differentially (negatively and positively) predict objective (i.e., salary and status in terms of leadership position; Ng et al., 2005; Schein, 1971) and subjective career success (i.e., career satisfaction; Spurk, Abele, & Volmer, 2011). Second, we tested for incremental validity of single traits beyond the others regarding career success (e.g., if narcissism explains variance in salary after accounting for psychopathy and Machiavellianism). By doing this, we were able to analyze which Dark Triad trait is more important compared to others regarding its predictive validity. Third, we included a series of relevant controls in our analysis (i.e., gender, age, job tenure, organization size, education, and work hours) to analyze whether the Dark Triad traits explain incremental variance in career success after controlling for other relevant predictor variables.

### Personality and Career Success

*Objective career success* can be externally verified by variables such as pay, hierarchical position, status, or promotions. *Subjective career success* is a self-evaluation of career progress by an individual, such as career satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2011). Different studies have established a significant relationship between different personality traits and career success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Spurk & Abele, 2011). Theoretically, this relation can be explained within the meta-framework by McCrae and Costa (1996), where personality broadly influences individuals' objective biography (e.g., career outcomes). Furthermore, a contest–mobility perspective on career success assumes that individuals with specific traits show specific motivational tendencies, behavior, and performance that, in turn, put them at a competitive advantage/disadvantage compared to other individuals. This leads to either higher or lower career success, depending on the nature of the analyzed trait (Ng et al., 2005).

### Narcissism and Career Success

We assume that narcissism is positively related to both objective and subjective career success because of motivational tendencies to get ahead and to be successful and because of a high self-worth (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Spain et al., 2014). For instance, some researchers concluded that at least some components of narcissism are positively related to achievement

orientation (Elliot & Thrash, 2001). Achievement orientation, in turn, is positively associated with upward career goals (Judge & Bretz, 1992), so that goal selection processes may be one mechanism whereby narcissists are objectively more successful within their career. Furthermore, within success-related situations, narcissists show strong emotional reactions and use them as a further source of self-enhancement (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998).

Additionally, research showed that narcissists perform well in impression management, especially in selection contexts (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011) that might help them obtain more prestigious jobs. Wille, De Fruyt, and De Clercq (2013) analyzed dark personality clusters (derived from the Big Five) and their relation to career success and found that narcissistic tendencies were positively related with hierarchical position and financial achievement. A recent study by Hirschi and Jänsch (2015) suggested that narcissists earn higher salaries and are more satisfied with their careers. This might also be explained by the high self-worth of narcissists, which is related to high self-efficacy beliefs and high self-esteem (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). High self-efficacy beliefs, in turn, are positively related to objective and subjective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009). Finally, because narcissists are assumed to have higher levels of objective career success, and objective career success is assumed to be a precursor of subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005), they should also be subjectively more successful with their career.

**Hypothesis 1:** Narcissism is positively related to (a) objective and (b) subjective career success.

### Psychopathy and Career Success

Due to psychopathic attributes such as impulsivity, emotional shallowness, and lack of remorse, psychopaths have diminished levels of corporate responsibility and can adversely affect productivity (Boddy, Ladyshewsky, & Galvin, 2010). Psychopathy is, for example, positively related to severe forms of counterproductive work behavior (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013) and is the strongest (negative) predictor of job performance among the Dark Triad traits (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014). Individuals high in psychopathy apply hard and aggressive manipulation tactics (e.g., threat of appeal and threat of punishment), which suggest that they face strong occupational socialization problems (Jonason et al., 2012). Finally, although little empirical research has been done on this topic, these results suggest that psychopaths suffer from constant intraorganizational repositioning and involuntary turnover (Spain et al., 2014). In sum, this may lead to severe disadvantages for them in prevalent career tournament systems, where people are hired and promoted based on their past achievements. According to such a contest–mobility perspective of career success (Rosenbaum, 1984), individuals high in

psychopathy might suffer from lowered career success because they do not receive organizational rewards such as higher salaries or higher positions (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014). From a sponsored-mobility perspective, where career success is attained through the help of impactful third persons or networks (Rosenbaum, 1984), psychopaths might achieve lower career success because of the socialization problems described above (Boddy et al., 2010).

Empirically, this reasoning is in line with a study by Ullrich, Farrington, and Coid (2008) who identified negative relations of psychopathy with life success in terms of status and wealth. More specifically, the affective, impulsive, and antisocial components of psychopathy were detrimental for status and wealth, including income and supervisor responsibility.

There might also be some arguments why psychopathy could be positively related to career success. For instance, people high in psychopathy may use extroverted charm to convey charisma or may fit well with some workplace demands in leadership positions (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, 2013). Related to this possibility, Wille and colleagues (2013) found a positive relationship of antisocial tendencies (who partially overlap with psychopathy) with hierarchical position and financial achievement. In sum, however, we think that there are stronger arguments and clearer empirical findings to suggest that individuals with psychopathic tendencies should show less objective and subjective career success because of their impulsivity, negative affectivity, and social malfunctioning.

**Hypothesis 2:** Psychopathy is negatively related to (a) objective and (b) subjective career success.

### *Machiavellianism and Career Success*

Machiavellianism has a long research tradition within leadership research (Dahling et al., 2008). This is not surprising, given that core attributes of individuals high in Machiavellianism, such as the willingness to manipulate and exploit others, can be easier lived out in positions with high responsibility and authority over other people. Although it was shown that Machiavellianism is associated with diminished organizational, supervisor, and team commitment (Zettler, Friedrich, & Hilbig, 2011), along with a tendency to be perceived as abusive by subordinates (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010), Machiavellianism is beneficial for attaining leadership positions (Dahling et al., 2008). This could also possibly be because individuals high in Machiavellianism make occupational choices associated with legal and management careers (Dahling et al., 2008). Furthermore, they tend to focus on maintaining and broadening power (Kessler et al., 2010), strive for control, and have a desire for status (Dahling et al., 2008).

Empirically, research showed that Machiavellianism is positively related to political skills and need for achievement (Dahling et al., 2008), which are both positively related to

objective career success (Ferris et al., 2005; Ng et al., 2005). Another study suggested that compared to individuals high in psychopathy, individuals high in Machiavellianism more often apply soft manipulation tactics (e.g., charm, appearance, joking, compromise, exchange of a favor, alliances, and offering compliments) that are socially acceptable and therefore do not backfire in the mid- to long term (Jonason et al., 2012). These tendencies and behaviors should enhance objective career success.

Regarding subjective career success, comparable to narcissism, the reasoning is not as clear as it is for objective career success. Individuals high in Machiavellianism report lower levels of job satisfaction, possibly because they are likely to desire greater rewards and control over others (Dahling et al., 2008). However, subjective career success is slightly different from job satisfaction and focuses more on successes already attained and on career progress from the past until now (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2011). Therefore, future desires are not the most important factors when evaluating actual career success. Consequentially, individuals high in Machiavellianism might feel successful in their careers because of their powerful, prestigious positions, despite striving for even more influence.

**Hypothesis 3:** Machiavellianism is positively related to (a) objective and (b) subjective career success.

## **Method**

### *Procedure and Sample*

The sample was gathered in Germany through a German International Standards Organization (ISO)-certified (ISO 26362) survey company ([www.respondi.com](http://www.respondi.com)) during a 2-week period at the end of the year 2014. Other studies demonstrated that data quality of standing online panels is at least as high as data obtained from online samples by other means (Kubicek, Paškvan, & Korunka, 2014; Ng & Feldman, 2010). We constructed the survey, and the research company distributed it to participants who were employed at the time of the survey and were aged between 25 and 34 years. We selected persons in their early career stage because the early career stage is considered to be critical with respect to occupational and organizational socialization (problems) and, hence, is a critical stage for analyzing personality effects on career success.

In all, 2,786 individuals were invited to participate in the survey. From these individuals, 1,536 (55.1%) responded to the survey. Of this pool, the sample was rounded out to a target size of 934 individuals who finished the questionnaire and matched the criteria of working in private industry (not self-employed or working students) and working more than 50% of full-time employment. Moreover, this sample was representative of the population with respect to gender and education (within the boundaries of selected criteria).

We carefully examined the data before starting the analyses, with the goal to detect and exclude participants who had completed the survey with minimal interest and/or insufficient

seriousness (DeSimone, Harms, & DeSimone, 2014), resulting in 830 individuals. Because of missing data on some study variables, we excluded another 37 (4.5%) participants from the data set, resulting in 793 individuals for use in this study. These exclusion criteria were applied prior to data analysis during the sampling procedure and immediately after closing the survey.

The final sample was 46% female with a mean age 30 years ( $SD = 2.76$ ); 68% reported vocational training as their highest degree, while others had bachelor degrees at minimum; and participants worked, by contract, 37.5 hr/week, on average ( $SD = 5.25$ ).

## Measures

**Dark Triad.** The Dirty Dozen measure was used as an accepted short version to measure the Dark Triad (4 items on a 9-point Likert-type scale for each Dark Triad trait; Jonason & Webster, 2010; this sample: narcissism, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ; psychopathy, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ; Machiavellianism, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ). Sample items were "I tend to want others to pay attention to me," for narcissism; "I tend to lack remorse," for psychopathy; or "I tend to manipulate others to get my way," for Machiavellianism.

**Objective career success.** We assessed (a) monthly salary before taxes (i.e., *salary*; Judge et al., 1999) and (b) leadership position as an indicator of *status* because leadership positions are usually associated with more power and are located on a higher hierarchical level (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Schein, 1971). Salary was measured with 21 equal steps such that *less than €500* coded as 1, *€9,500 to €9,999* coded as 20, and *equal or more than €10,000* coded as 21. Leadership position was a dichotomous measure (0 = *no leadership position*, 1 = *leadership position*).

**Subjective career success.** We applied the 5-item career satisfaction scale (5-point Likert-type scale, sample item: "I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals"; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Spurk et al., 2011). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .92.

**Control variables.** We assessed some variables that have been shown to be relevant for predicting career success (Ng et al., 2005) and that are specifically relevant for the sample analyzed in our study. We controlled for *gender* (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) because men usually earn higher salaries and are frequently in higher positions than women (Ng et al., 2005). Moreover, men also show higher values on the Dark Triad than women (Jonason & Webster, 2010). We also controlled for *age in years* (open question) and *contractual working hours* (open question) because these variables are positively related to objective career success and may affect the understanding of subjective career success. People with a higher occupational education usually enter and follow different career paths that affect career success. We therefore also accounted for *occupational education* (0 = *lower than academic degree*, 1 = *academic degree*).

Finally, we controlled for *job tenure in years* (open question) and *organization size* (1 = *less than 5 employees*, 2 = *5 to 9 employees*, 3 = *10 to 19 employees*, 4 = *20 to 99 employees*, 5 = *100 to 199 employees*, 6 = *200 to 1,999 employees*, and 7 = *equal or more than 2,000 employees*), because human capital and organizational structures are meaningfully related to career success, and therefore should be ruled out as alternative explanations for the results. We carefully selected these controls a priori before the data analysis based on former research and also by considerations that the used controls show relatively few content overlap and represent different predictor categories for career success (Ng et al., 2005) and, hence, show no or only minor intercorrelations.

## Results

### Preliminary Results: Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Correlations

We used Mplus Version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) to calculate confirmatory factor analyses to show that all three Dark Triad factors can be empirically distinguished. We compared a one-factor solution in which all 12 Dark Triad items loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 1330.6$ , degrees of freedom [ $df$ ] = 54, comparative fit index [CFI] = .79, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .17, standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .09) against a three-factor solution ( $\chi^2 = 301.5$ ,  $df = 51$ , CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .04). Results revealed only good model fit for the three-factor solution. Correlations between the three factors ranged between  $r = .63$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r = .72$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations between all study variables. On a bivariate level, narcissism was positively related to salary ( $r = .14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), psychopathy negatively to career satisfaction ( $r = -.09$ ,  $p = .016$ ), and Machiavellianism positively to salary ( $r = .07$ ,  $p = .037$ ) and leadership position ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Moreover, as expected, the controls revealed mostly nonsignificant to maximum moderate relations with each other ( $r$ s from  $-.15$  to  $.31$ ). Despite age, all controls were significantly related to career success. Gender, age, and organization size were also significantly related to at least two Dark Triad components. Hence, as already explained above, we included the control variables in the regression analyses.

### Hypotheses Testing

In order to assess our hypotheses, we performed multiple and logistic regressions (Table 2). For a broader understanding of the results, besides regression coefficients, we also included partial correlations and odds ratios as indicators of effect sizes as well as confidence intervals as indicators of the stability of the results (Table 2). We included the Dark Triad traits in Step 1 and the control variables in Step 2 in order to separate pure effects in Step 1 from changes in these effects due to the inclusion of control variables in Step 2. For hypotheses testing, we



**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	.54	.50											
2. Age (years)	30.12	2.76	.09*										
3. Working hours	37.64	5.25	.21**	-.01									
4. Occupational education <sup>b</sup>	.32	.47	-.02	.05	.07								
5. Job tenure (years)	4.86	3.73	.09*	.32**	.04	-.15**							
6. Organization size <sup>c</sup>	4.92	1.77	.14**	.04	.05	.04	.09*						
7. DT narcissism <sup>d</sup>	4.02	1.84	.05	-.15**	.04	.02	.03	.16**					
8. DT psychopathy <sup>d</sup>	3.84	1.69	.17**	-.08*	.04	.01	.02	.11**	.55**				
9. DT Machiavellianism <sup>d</sup>	3.89	1.84	.12**	-.11**	.06	.01	.03	.09	.67**	.61**			
10. Salary <sup>e</sup>	5.48	2.65	.23**	.07	.32**	.25**	.09*	.27**	.14**	.04	.07*		
11. Leadership position <sup>f</sup>	0.38	0.49	.11**	.04	.12**	.07	.12**	-.11**	.02	.01	.10**	.11**	
12. Career satisfaction <sup>g</sup>	3.26	0.85	.12**	.01	.08*	.09**	.11**	.08*	-.01	-.09*	.02	.32**	.26**

Note. DT = Dark Triad.

<sup>a</sup>0 = female, 1 = male. <sup>b</sup>0 = below academic degree, 1 = academic degree. <sup>c</sup>Values from 1 to 7. <sup>d</sup>Values from 1 to 9. <sup>e</sup>Values from 1 to 21. <sup>f</sup>0 = no leadership position, 1 = leadership position. <sup>g</sup>0 = values from 1 to 5.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

relied on results from Step 2. We checked our models for multicollinearity by investigating tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics. Tolerance is recommended to not fall below .20, and VIF should not exceed 10 (Menard, 2002; Myers, 1990). All three regression models showed satisfactory tolerance statistics (i.e., no values below .47) and VIF statistics (i.e., no values higher than 2.1).

Results showed a significant positive relationship of narcissism with salary ( $\beta = .14, p = .001$ ), but no significant relationship with leadership position ( $\text{Exp}(B) = -.06, p = .325$ ) or career satisfaction ( $\beta = .01, p = .974$ ), partially confirming Hypothesis 1a and rejecting Hypothesis 1b. This pattern was the same in Step 1 of the regression analysis, where controls were not included in the analysis. In line with Hypothesis 2a and 2b, psychopathy was negatively related to salary ( $\beta = -.08, p = .041$ ), leadership responsibility ( $\text{Exp}(B) = -.12, p = .048$ ), and career satisfaction ( $\beta = -.18, p < .001$ ). However, the effects of psychopathy on salary and leadership position were only significant after the inclusion of control variables in Step 2. In Step 1, psychopathy was marginally significantly related to leadership position ( $\text{Exp}(B) = -.10, p = .086$ ). Machiavellianism had a nonsignificant relationship with salary ( $\beta = -.02, p = .633$ ) but a significant positive relationship with leadership position ( $\text{Exp}(B) = .22, p < .001$ ) and marginally significant with career satisfaction ( $\beta = .10, p = .052$ , the 95% confidence interval for unstandardized coefficients did not include 0: lower bound = .01, upper bound = .09). In sum, this pattern partially confirmed Hypothesis 3a and fully confirmed Hypothesis 3b. For Machiavellianism, the same result pattern was found in Step 1 of the regression analysis; however, the relation to career satisfaction was fully significant ( $\beta = .11, p = .037$ ).

Table 2 also shows that all effects were of rather small size (partial correlations  $r$  below .30 and odds ratios below 2.47). However, none of the confidence intervals of the significant regression coefficients did include 0. Lastly, we also investigated the amount of variance explained by the Dark Triad traits

beyond the control variables by including the Dark Triad traits in the regression models after entering the controls. Combined, narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism explained between 1.5% and 2.0% of variance in the analyzed career success indicators beyond the control variables.

## Discussion

### Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study analyzed the relationship of the Dark Triad of personality with objective and subjective career success in a large sample of young adults working in private industry in Germany. An important contribution of the study is the simultaneous examination of all three Dark Triad traits in relation to an important life and work outcome, analyzing incremental effects of the Dark Triad traits (Jonason et al., 2012). Results provided support for the assumptions that narcissism and Machiavellianism are positively related to objective career success (i.e., salary and status, respectively), that Machiavellianism is positively related to career satisfaction, and that psychopathy is negatively related to all analyzed indicators of objective and subjective career success. Hence, whether bad guys get ahead or fall behind seems to depend on the type of dark trait. Overall, the study provides a first differentiated look at relationships of all Dark Triad traits with career success and extends earlier research on other dark traits and career success that did not focus on narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism but more on dark personality operationalized as a combination of the Big Five traits (e.g., Wille et al., 2013). Therefore, our study contributes to both the field of career and personality research.

Despite these findings, some caution is warranted when interpreting the results: Narcissism was unexpectedly not positively related to leadership position and career satisfaction, and Machiavellianism was unexpectedly not positively related to salary. One explanation might be that the here analyzed sample

**Table 2.** Multiple and Logistic Regressions of Dark Triad With Objective and Subjective Career Outcomes.

Variable	Salary					Leadership Position					Career Satisfaction							
	B	SE	LB	UB	p	$\beta$	r	Exp (B)	SE	p	OR	LB	UB	LB	UB	p	$\beta$	r
<b>Step 1</b>																		
DT narcissism	.24	.07	.11	.38	.001	.17	.12	-.09	.06	.122	.92	.82	1.02	-.04	.05	.813	.01	.01
DT psychopathy	-.07	.07	-.21	.07	.329	-.04	-.04	-.10	.06	.086	.91	.81	1.01	-.13	-.03	.001	-.16	-.12
DT Machiavellianism	-.02	.07	-.16	.13	.821	-.01	-.01	.23	.06	<.001	1.26	1.12	1.41	.01	.10	.037	.11	.07
R <sup>2</sup>	.02																	
<b>Step 2</b>																		
DT narcissism	.20	.06	.08	.33	.001	.14	.12	-.06	.06	.325	.94	.84	1.06	-.05	.04	.974	.01	-.01
DT psychopathy	-.13	.06	-.26	-.01	.041	-.08	-.07	-.12	.06	.048	.89	.79	1.00	-.14	-.05	<.001	-.18	-.14
DT Machiavellianism	-.03	.06	-.16	.10	.633	-.02	-.02	.22	.06	<.001	1.24	1.10	1.40	.01	.09	.052	.10	.07
Gender	.78	.17	.44	1.12	<.001	.15	.16	.41	.16	.011	1.51	1.10	2.07	.09	.33	.001	.12	.12
Age	.03	.03	-.04	.09	.395	.03	.03	-.01	.03	.985	1.00	.94	1.06	-.02	.01	.076	-.07	-.06
Working hours	.13	.02	.10	.16	<.001	.26	.28	.04	.02	.008	1.05	1.01	1.08	-.01	.02	.278	.04	.04
Occupational education	1.33	.18	.98	1.69	<.001	.23	.26	.43	.17	.010	1.53	1.11	2.12	.07	.32	.002	.11	.11
Job tenure	.05	.02	.01	.10	.041	.07	.07	.08	.02	.001	1.08	1.03	1.13	.02	.05	<.001	.14	.13
Organization size	.32	.05	.23	.41	<.001	.21	.23	-.18	.05	<.001	.84	.77	.91	-.01	.06	.105	.06	.06
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	.24**																	

Note. Leadership position Step 1: Cox and Snell R<sup>2</sup> = .02, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = .03; Step 2: Cox and Snell R<sup>2</sup> = .08, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = .10, r = partial correlation based on regression analysis. DT = Dark Triad; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; LB = lower bound 95% confidence interval for B or OR; UB = upper bound 95% confidence interval for B or OR; OR = odds ratio. \*\*\*p < .01.

did not have enough occupational tenure to show all assumed manifestations of personality within the objective biography (McCrae & Costa, 1996). Moreover, for psychopathy and Machiavellianism, the results of the regression analysis are slightly differing from the results of the correlation matrix. Regarding psychopathy, the negative effects with respect to objective career success occurred only when simultaneously considering the effects of the controls. This suppression effect can be explained in the way that psychopathy is negatively related to factors that are positively related to career success, leading to a nonsignificant bivariate relation. However, the negative effects found in the regression analysis seem not to be very stable and Type I errors might be evident. Therefore, these results should not be over interpreted.

Regarding Machiavellianism, a positive effect on career satisfaction occurred after adding the two other Dark Triad traits in the regression analysis. Hence, it seems that Machiavellianism independent from narcissism and psychopathy is positively related to subjective career success. It might be that the high desire for status represents a component of Machiavellianism, which helps individuals high in Machiavellianism to occupy organizational positions that lead to a positive career evaluation. Moreover, the positive correlation of Machiavellianism with salary disappeared after accounting for the other two Dark Triad traits. This suggests that narcissism has more explanatory power than Machiavellianism regarding salary when accounting for all three Dark Triad traits.

The results of our study are well interpretable within past research on personality traits and career success. First, although the size of effects of the Dark Triad traits were not very large on an absolute level, a past meta-analysis found similar effect sizes of personality variables for career success outcomes (personality and salary:  $r$ s range between  $-.10$  for neuroticism and  $.10$  for extraversion, personality and promotions:  $r$ s range between  $-.11$  for neuroticism and  $.18$  for extraversion, personality and career satisfaction:  $r$ s range between  $-.36$  for neuroticism and  $.11$  for agreeableness; Ng et al., 2005). Another study that explicitly analyzed personality and prestige and salary found correlations between  $-.17$  (neuroticism and salary) and  $.18$  (openness and prestige; Sutin, Costa, Miech, & Eaton, 2009; for a qualitative review, see also Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). Hence, on a relative level, the effect sizes for the Dark Triad found here were expected and suggest that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism are similarly important in predicting career success as other personality traits, such as the Big Five.

Second, one of the most consistent findings of past research was that agreeableness is negatively related to objective career success (Ng et al., 2005). This parallels the findings of our study that narcissism and Machiavellianism are positively related to objective career success because these persons usually also show lower levels of agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). However, although psychopaths also show lower levels of agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), they were less successful within our study. One reason for this finding might be that individuals high in psychopathy express their

(low) agreeableness in a different way compared to individuals high in narcissism and Machiavellianism (e.g., they rely on different manipulation tactics; Jonason et al., 2012). Underlining this reasoning, psychopathic individuals show more impulsivity than individuals high in narcissism and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). This, in turn, can result in more uncontrolled aggressive and antisocial behavior compared to the other two Dark Triad traits. Moreover, psychopathy is also related to lower levels of conscientiousness compared to narcissism and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), which is another possible explanation for the differential and negative relations of psychopathy.

Third, the results of our study confirmed results from Hirschi and Jänsch (2015) regarding a positive relation of narcissism with salary but go beyond these findings by showing that this effect remains when controlling for the other two dark traits. We also extend findings by Wille and colleagues (2013), by specifically focusing on the Dark Triad—and not dark personality tendencies operationalized by the Big-Five—regarding their relation to career outcomes. In sum, it seems that a relatively broad range of dark traits (i.e., the Dark Triad and a composition of the Big Five subcomponents) can account for variability in career success outcomes.

### Limitations and Future Research

Although our study is based on a large, heterogeneous, and partially representative sample and analyzed incremental effects of the Dark Triad traits, there are nonetheless some limitations of the study. As the study is based on cross-sectional data, no assumptions of causality can be drawn from the results. Nevertheless, our assumptions were theory driven and because of their stability, personality constructs are plausible predictors of diverse outcomes (McCrae & Costa, 1996).

Moreover, common method bias cannot be ruled out because all variables were collected as self-report data at the same time. However, at least for the objective career success outcomes, this problem should be minimal because other research showed that, for instance, self-reported salary data closely matches archival salary data. Related to this topic, one might argue that persons with high values on the Dark Triad overestimate their objective and subjective career success. However, differentiated effects of single Dark Triad components on different career success indicators found in this study contradict the assumption of a systematic overestimation of career success, in general.

We applied a short measure of the Dark Triad that showed high levels of reliability and validity in its initial validation study (cf. Jonason & Webster, 2010). The decision to apply this scale was also based on the economical use of such a scale in an employed adult sample. It would be hard to motivate such a target sample to provide data on three extensive Dark Triad scales. Nonetheless, results might have been even more differentiated when using more detailed and multifaceted scales (e.g., Ames et al., 2006).

In terms of generalizability, an extrapolation of the findings to other employment fields, such as to self-employed or state-employed individuals, should be made with caution. However, our sample is representative with respect to gender and educational degree within private industry in Germany. Therefore, a generalization across young employees within this population seems to be justified. Related to the analyzed young age-group, it might be that Dark Triad effects become more pronounced over the working life because of cumulative effects of personality across several situations over the life span (McCrae & Costa, 1996). Therefore, a reinvestigation of the effects after several years may lead to larger and/or different effects of the Dark Triad traits. Finally, we recommend the continuation of research on career-related outcomes of the Dark Triad. Occupational socialization processes, career-related networks, and career ambitions might be of specific interest for career researchers.

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