

# WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING: SPOTTING THE DARK TRIAD OF PERSONALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS AND OVERCOMING THE TROUBLES THEY CAUSE

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to examine the Dark Triad personality traits and to show the ways of spotting them easily and exactly at workplaces in order to reduce their destructive effects in organizations. The dark personality characteristics mainly refer to socially aversive behaviors and associated with various kinds of interpersonal difficulties, problems and cover potentially destructive behaviors such as aggression, deception, manipulation and exploitation. The Dark Triad of personality is the group of personality traits which includes narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. The maladaptive features of the Dark Triad often deteriorate the work flow and relationships among employees at work. The Dark Triad traits are related with behaviors and features that lead to impaired social relationship functioning including aggressive tendencies, limited empathic abilities, hostility, and deception at workplaces. The Dark Triad traits: are the prominent socially destructive personality traits that simply poison the organizations because these traits might cause serious counterproductive behaviors that may lead to huge hidden costs (e.g., employee burnout, higher employee turnover) for the organizations. In this conceptual study, the Dark Triad of Personality, will be outlined and the behaviors of the employees that show the Dark Triad traits will be focused on thoroughly. In the conclusion section, the recommendations will be made and solutions will be offered in order to reduce and overcome their devastating effects at workplaces.*

**Keywords:** *Dark Triad, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy.*

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## **KUZU POSTU GIYMIŞ KURLAR: ÖRGÜTLERDE KARANLIK ÜÇLÜ KİŞİLİK ÖZELLİKLERİNİ TESPİT ETME VE NEDEN OLDUKLARI SORUNLARIN ÜSTESİNDEN GELME**

### **Öz**

*Bu çalışmanın amacı karanlık üçlü kişilik özelliklerini incelemek ve örgütlerde neden olacakları olumsuz etkilerini azaltmak için onları kolayca tespit etmenin yolları ele alınacaktır. Karanlık kişilik özellikleri ağırlıklı olarak kişiler arası çeşitli türde güçlüklerle ilgili sosyal yönden itici davranışları, sorunları ve öfke, aldatma, hileyle yönlendirme ve suiistimal gibi potansiyel açıdan yıkıcı davranışları işaret etmektedir. Kişiliğin karanlık üçlüsü narsizim, makyavelizm ve psikopatiyi içeren bir kişilik özelliği grubudur. Karanlık üçlünün uyumu bozan özelliği sıklıkla işlerin işleyişini ve işteki çalışanların arasındaki ilişkiyi bozar. Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri işyerlerinde sosyal ilişkiyi bozan saldırganlık eğilimine, sınırlı empati yeteneklerine, düşmanlığa ve aldatmacalara neden olan davranışlar ve özelliklerle ilgilidir. Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri olan narsizim, makyavelizm ve psikopati örgütler için büyük gizli maliyetlere yol açabilecek (örn. çalışan tükenmişliği, yüksek düzeyde işgücü devri) amaca zararlı ciddi davranışların oluşmasına neden olabileceğinden örgütü açıkça zehirleyen, sosyal açıdan belirgin yıkıcı kişilik özellikleridir. Bu çalışmada, Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri olan narsizim, makyavelizm ve psikopati ana hatlarıyla irdelenecek ve karanlık üçlü kişilik özelliklerini yansıtan çalışanların davranışları ele alınacaktır. Sonuç bölümünde ise bu kişilik özelliklerinin yıkıcı etkilerini azaltmak ve başa çıkılmasıyla ilgili çözüm ve önerilerde bulunulacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Karanlık üçlü kişilik özellikleri, Narsizim, Makyavelizm, Psikopati.*

### **Introduction**

Today, hundreds of millions of people go to work every day. There are lots of reasons that motivate these people to get up early and, they work almost one third of the day at workplaces. Majority of the individuals sometimes see and interact with their coworkers more than their family members. So, the relationships among employees play a vital role in their daily life. Since personality is a set of traits and characteristics unique to an individual, it's so real that everyone all has their own personality just like everyone's fingerprints are unique. Thus, it's obvious that while individuals working in an organization, they will experience different reactions or perceptions from their coworkers or supervisors and they will have to deal with all different kinds of people (e.g.

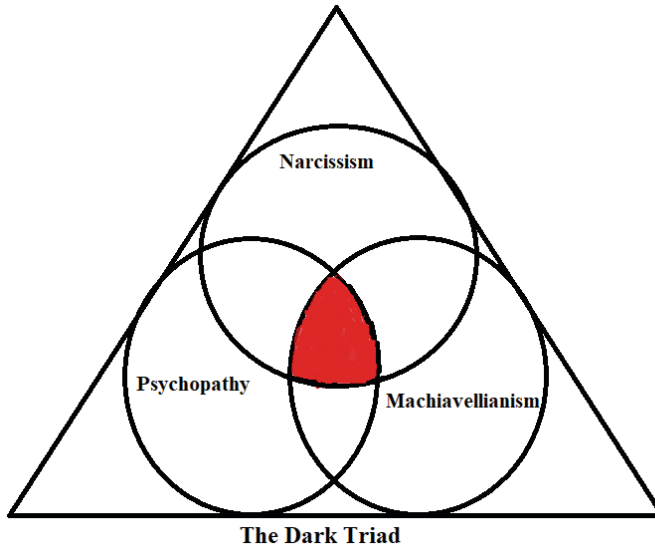
stubborn, modest, optimistic, pessimistic or mean etc.) at their workplaces. However, apart from basic personality traits like optimism, pessimism, competitiveness or shyness, some people have poisonous, darker ones such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy that are really toxic and very hard to deal with. Because it's so difficult to predict their behaviors and insidious plans in advance and it might be too late when you find out that you have been abused by one of the darkest triad of personality at work.

The term the Dark Triad was first coined by Paulhus and Williamsin(2002: Jones and Paulhus, 2017:1). narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy are called as the Dark Triad personalities and they are often guided by evil values and individuals who have these personality traits usually lack a moral compass and mercy for other people. They can do anything possible, for example they can use their position to pursue their own goals because they somehow think that it's fair and permissible to get whatever they want. Employees who engage in behaviors that are related to, Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy, really hurt organizations in many ways, potentially poison and destroy a team because their interests aren't organizational interests, their interests are just for themselves. The Dark Triad is well-known for showing no remorse, telling lies, stabbing and showing malevolent or harmful behaviors in organizations. In brief, The Dark Triad is composed of three personality components: have much in common but they are partly interrelated each other and reflect different tendencies on their ownso in this conceptual study, The Dark Triad, Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy will be define thoroughly, the distinct and common behaviors that The Dark Triad engage in in organization will be outlined. Then, in the conclusion section, recommendations will be made in order to deal with The Dark Triad and reduce their devastating effects in organizations.

### **1. The Dark Triad of Personality, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy**

Some individuals are the different members of the society as they volatile, aggressive, arrogant or domineering. It's very hard to get along with these people but the Dark Triad is quite different for their behaviors that they can be seriously damaging and may sabotage the organization on the whole. Figure 1 displays the three toxic traits that constitute the "toxic triangle", the Dark Triad. The red section in the middle where the three circles meet shows the main features of the dark triad traits; these are arrogant, callousness, antisocial, emotional coldness, dishonesty, antagonistic, volatile, and criminal behaviors which are all associated with the Dark Triad (Lyons, 2019:5).

**Figure 1.** The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy



**Source:** Lyons, M. (2019). *The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy in Everyday Life*. Academic Press. p.5.

Jones and Neria (2015) maintained in their study that all three Dark Triad traits, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy are high in callousness and manipulation so it is essential to focus on the differences in their motivations and behavioral reflections. Additionally, Paulhus and Williams (2002) stated that the personalities that compose the Dark Triad have diverse origins but to some extent they share common features such as emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness and show socially malevolent character. So, it is important that the Dark triad should be focused on well to understand the differences among them in detail.

### **1.1. Narcissism**

Narcissism is a personality disorder, namely narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), and subclinical personality trait and the term “Narcissist” evolved from Greek mythology which is about the handsome, self-aggrandizing, and vain young man Narcissus. He fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. Then, he couldn’t take his eyes off of himself and slowly pined away at the pool of water and died (Brummelman et al., 2016:8). Narcissism refers to a

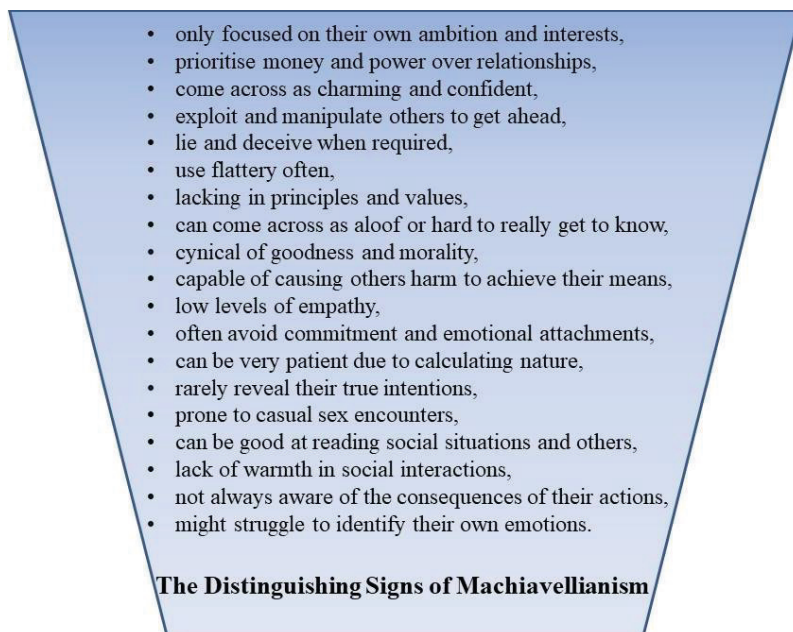
personality trait reflecting a grandiose overtly immodest, self-centered and inflated self-concept with a high degree of extraversion and a low level of agreeableness or communion. Narcissists lack compassion and empathy and they often yearn for attention and admiration. Narcissistic individuals admire only themselves and they usually think that the other people around them are the audiences of them to applaud ceaselessly functioning as the mirror reflecting back the excellence and magnificence of the narcissistic individuals. The most distinguishing behaviors that they engage in are arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes and they usually envy of others or a feeling that others are envious of them (Jacoby, 2016:1; Buffardi and Campbell: 2008:1304). According to Miller et al. (2017), narcissism falls into two main dimensions that are grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissism refers to the prototypic manifestation of narcissism that covers higher trait levels of antagonism (e.g., grandiosity, selfishness, deceitfulness, oppositional, and callousness) and agentic extraversion. However, vulnerable narcissism represents higher levels of antagonism (e.g., distrust, selfishness, deceitfulness, oppositional, and callousness) and negative effect (e.g., anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, and vulnerability).

## **1.2. Machiavellianism**

Machiavellianism is a construct originated from the book “The Prince” which was written in 1513 by Niccolo Machiavelli who was a philosopher, a diplomat and a political theorist. The root idea of the book was maintaining political control highly depends on "the end justifies the means." Again, a ruler with a clear agenda must be open to any and all effective tactics, including manipulative interpersonal strategies such as flattery, backstabbing and lying. Moreover, strong rulers must be grim with their subjects and rivals or enemies, and that glory and survival justified any way, even ones that were perceived as immoral and brutal. Today, Machiavelli's political strategies are common and associated with people's everyday social behavior (Christie and Geis, 2013:1-3). Machiavellian individuals can usually be observed as ambitious, strategic, capable of delaying gratification, highly manipulative, amoral manipulation, and they usually engage in unethical behaviors and attitudes (Jones and Paulhus, 2009:93; Miller et al., 2017:2). Machiavellianism is one of the toxic personality traits that Machiavellian individuals often seek control over others, for example coworkers at work, they seek status for oneself by engaging in amoral manipulation. The employees who show higher traits of Machiavellianism are highly destructive to the effective functioning of organizations and work flow

(Greenbaum et al, 2017:586). Since 16th century “Machiavellianism” became a popular term to define the art of being deceptive to get ahead and until the 1970s, Machiavellianism hadn’t been a psychological term when two social psychologists, Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis, developed “the Machiavellianism Scale” in their studies (Jacobson, 2015:1). Figure 2 below displays the distinct behaviors and attitudes that Machiavellian individuals show:

**Figure 2.** The Distinguishing Signs of Machiavellianism



**Source:** Sheri Jacobson, What is Machiavellianism in Psychology?, <https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/machiavellianism-psychology.htm>, Accessed:12.10.2019.

### **1.3. Psychopathy**

Psychopathy has been studied within the concept of psychology for a long time and has been a topic of clinical nomenclature since the mid-19th century and, researches that have been carried out especially within forensic and clinical psychology because of its intense links with crime and antisocial attitudes and behaviors (Vize et al., 2016:2). Psychopathy refers to callous, impulsive, and predatory behaviors and at clinical levels; psychopathy is the single best predictor of violent habitual crime and accounts for an excessive level of violent crime for example, psychopaths represent 15–30% of the prison population but commit up to 50% of violent crimes (Book et al., 2015:30). Psychopathy can be considered

as the “darkest” of the Dark Triad traits since it has stronger ties with disregard for others, manifesting in deteriorating interpersonal behaviors and attitudes such as sadism, pounding and bullying and they are prone to exhibit serious criminal activities (Lyons, 2019:11-12). Psychopathy is mainly distinguished by low neuroticism, guiltlessness, volatile, impulsivity, dishonesty, cynicism and antisocial behavior (Koladich and Atkinson, 2016: 253) and psychopaths have lower levels of corporate responsibility so that they can negatively affect the productivity in organizations and, they usually don't hesitate to pursue their own personal agendas without detection by creating chaos not only in the organization but also in coworkers' personal lives as well (Jonason et al., 2012:249). Last but not least, psychopathy is generally characterized by lack of remorse for hurting others and individuals with higher levels of psychopathic traits tend to appear as an issue in the criminal justice and corrections systems rather than the psychiatric system. In addition, psychopaths are thrill-seeking individuals who usually have erratic lifestyles and, they are highly related with higher rates of violent recidivism, criminal violence, and resistance to treatment, sub-clinical psychopathy is problematic in non-forensic settings. For instance, sub-clinical psychopathy is often associated with cheating, lying and aggression at school or in academic, marital-family life, and causing unrest in workplace relationships. (Visser and Campbell, 2018: 573; Wisse and Sleenbos: 2016:123).

## **2. Spotting the Dark Triad of Personality in Organizations**

Before the Dark Triad employees sabotage the organization, spotting the individuals in sheep's clothing is the best way for maintaining the harmony at workplaces. Besides, it will be the best option and a kind of preemptive precaution if HR would be very careful while recruiting new employees at the beginning. Additionally, the Dark Triad can exhibit numerous tactics of influence independently, manipulation tactics or may adopt an aggressive or forceful style of interpersonal influence at the workplaces. So, observing the behaviors of the employees eminently is the key for distinguishing the Dark Triad personalities in the organization. Fortunately, as a manager or a supervisor at a company, there are some ways that supervisors can manage employees with dark triad traits effectively and reduce their negative effects. However, it's obvious that everyone might have characteristics of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy during their lives, and most people are aware of that these behaviors don't work well both professionally and personally, in contrast, some others never care for the malevolent, invidious behaviors they engage in, even giving harm other people. First of all, determining an employee who rates highly in one or more of



the Dark Triad characteristics is essential for outlining the issue well. Therefore, detecting and understanding the tactics of individuals with higher the Dark Triad traits well is so important for preventing counterproductive behaviors in organizations.

Although it's well known that the Dark Triad traits possess undesirable characteristics of personality, individuals with the Dark Triad are still being get hired. Because, these individuals also have a lot of desirable traits like determined, energetic, talkative, charm, leadership, ambition, decisive, assertiveness, and impression management skills. Since job interviews last in a limited time that may not permit HR professionals enough time for the darker sides of these individuals to be revealed efficiently and then they get the job and begin to work and, show their real faces gradually until they might be dismissed (Jonason et al.,2012:449). The Dark Triad traits are simply the collection of grandiose and entitled narcissism, strategically manipulative Machiavellianism and reckless and selfish psychopathy. In essence, they have common features like dishonesty/manipulation and callousness. Namely, if the core of callous-manipulation is removed, the traits can be considered as unrelated. However, the Dark triad traits are certainly related with a willingness to gain at the expense of other people. Additionally, these toxic traits refer to bad behaviors such as cheating, deceiving, stealing and fraud in organizations. For example, narcissistic individuals can be extremely toxic when in power (Jones, 2013:563). Therefore it's really important to reveal the striking attitudes and behaviors of the Dark Triad traits at workplaces.

- First, narcissism is associated with selfish behaviors, entitlement, callous-manipulation, envy, egotism, grandiosity, superiority and dominance and women may lack empathy through narcissism more than men (Jonason and Krause, 2013: 532). Narcissistic employees usually appear with an inflated self-view; need for attention and admiration plus vanity and exhibitionism, desire for status prestige, power, and leadership at the expense of others and come to the fore with entitlement, arrogance, and superiority toward coworkers. They usually tend to want coworkers to admire, to pay attention, to seek prestige or status to them and often to expect special favors or compliments from their coworkers (Rauthmann and Kolar, 2013: 622). Employees high in narcissism need others to constantly applaud and supply them with ego-reinforcement and they only focus on reinforcing their endless identity needs for superiority from their coworkers and their remarkable attitude is the chronic need for affirmation all the time. Again, both envy and pride with disregard and disrespect for the efforts of other employees' reflect the notable undesirable behaviors of the narcissistic employees



or bosses in the organization. Employees especially having higher traits of vulnerable narcissism may show stronger feelings of envy that they may get so jealous of their coworkers' success or happiness and they can make unfair competition with them and blame their coworkers for their own failures. (Jones, 2013:563; Book et al., 2015:30; Veselka et al., 2014:76).

• Second, Machiavellianism is dealt with glib social charm, manipulateness exploitation and self-interest (Jonason and Krause, 2013: 532). In organizations, employees high in Machiavellianism strategize in order to keep and maximize their long-term selfish gains and Machiavellian individuals exhibit antisocial behavior only when there is little to no risk of being caught and they are well-known for manipulative and deceptive proclivities, cynical worldviews, and overlooking conventional morality at workplaces (Jones, 2013:563; Djeriouat and Trémolière, 2014:12). Employees high in Machiavellianism often adopt callous and calculated behavioral strategies that are associated with career success and they are certainly “coercive controllers”, using an adaptive combination of both pro- and anti-social tactics to attain their goals at workplaces. They are often greedy of gain that they have a tendency to manipulate and betray others to keep or increase their personal gain in the organization and they can successfully adapt to the requirements of a given situation, and change tactics when it's necessary (Book et al., 2015:30; Veselka et al., 2014:76; Czibor and Bereczkei, 2012:202). They usually tend to show promiscuity, hostile sexual attitudes and various selfish and deceptive sexual tactics like cheating, divulging intimate sexual secrets to other people, feigning love and using tactics depending on sexual force (Ali and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009: 229). Moreover, they can easily be observed for cynicism while commenting and misanthropy in relationships and coldness, strivings towards agentic goals (e.g., status, money, power), duplicity, and calculated manipulation tactics at workplaces are the distinguishing features of Machiavellian employees within the organizations (Rauthmann and Kolar, 2013: 622).

• Third, psychopathy characterized by lack of remorse, callous social attitudes, predatory behaviors, impulsivity, antisociality, impulsivity, and interpersonal antagonism and men may lack empathy through psychopathy comparing to women (Jonason and Krause, 2013: 532). Employees high in psychopathy take needless risks for minimal gain and erratic lifestyle is the main reason for risk-taking which means self-destruction for them (Jones, 2013:563). Psychopaths are regarded as professional cheaters who capitalize on the cooperation of their coworkers by lacking the natural emotional and cognitive approaches that hinder antisocial behaviors so they may be successful in business

and politics (Book et al., 2015:30). Their relationships are often distressful and result in nervous breakdown and domestic violence so their lack of empathy and callousness are counterproductive for organizational goals, status, wealth and successful intimate relationships in organizations (Ali and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009: 229). In addition, they often indicate deficiencies in the abstract thinking that is essential to understand the results of their behaviors at workplaces, for example leaving a lot of broken hearts, shattered expectations, lacking in conscious and in feelings for their coworkers, they selfishly take what they desire and do until they are satisfied, without the slightest sense of guilt or remorse. They can easily be spotted with unnaturally low levels of empathy for coworkers at workplace, or don't hesitate to manipulate their friends for personal gain or interests (O'Boyle et al., 2013:789; LeBreton et al., 2018:164).

### **Conclusion and Solutions**

It's so obvious that the Dark Triad traits can be poisonous and destructive at workplaces. If one or more employees exhibit narcissistic, Machiavellian, or psychopathic characteristics, the entire office will suffer in the end because other employees will certainly feel uncomfortable and unsafe because of the Dark Triad traits' bothering behaviors and attitudes in the organization. On the other hand, it must be remembered that employees showing these toxic traits might be a high achiever and charming, energetic, talkative, conscientious and achievement-oriented at first but it might be too late when they begin to undermine the organizational peace and harmony. So, being on alert and being aware of these bad traits at workplace and getting prepared to handle them properly are very important steps for overcoming the negative consequences of the bad behaviors such as employee burnout and higher employee turnover rates and achieving the organizational goals.

The first and the best ways to avoid the dark triad traits from any workplace are to eliminate them during the hiring phase. It's clear that it can be very difficult to determine them first among the job applicants on the interview day because there's limited time to distinguish them effectively. Indeed, it's easy to be fooled by a narcissist individual because he/she might seem to be energetic, charming, outgoing, charismatic, and confident which are often wanted features for the HR to hire anyone for the position. In sum if you have noticed that he/she is the one who displays the major signs of the Dark Triad traits, it's highly recommended to hire someone else immediately before your organization might have been demolished.

If the organization already has these kinds of difficult employees showing the Dark Triad traits, the management must be aware of them and should take precautions before it's too late. For example maintaining calm is the key for handling with these individuals at workplace. Otherwise, one can easily be intimidated, swayed, or wooed by the Dark Triad traits and it will only help to escalate the problems in the organization. For example, as a manager or a coworker, keeping your emotions in check and remaining calm are the first steps for describing the issue well and then handling their bad behaviors in a rational way seems to be the best option to stop the developing unwanted behaviors. Accordingly, taking notes about bad behaviors (e.g., showing low or no empathy to others, arrogant, manipulating their coworkers for their interests, domineering, lying, insulting etc.) doing an honest and fair evaluation of the organization and conducting questionnaires on employees would help managers or supervisors to learn about the degree and the prevalence of the Dark Triad traits at workplace. So, the managers/supervisors can neutralize the unsavory elements of their toxic behaviors, and restore team harmony and employee well-being in the organization.

After having evaluated the employees and the relationships among them in the organization fairly and honestly, then it's time to determine who the sufferers of the Dark Triad traits are and who the real perpetrators in the organization are. It must be remembered that this action must be handled with care because they might feel offended or embarrassed if they won't be treated properly while telling them about the bad behaviors they sometimes show in the organization, otherwise, improper approaches only makes things worse, triggers worse behaviors at workplace. Talking to the employees showing the Dark Triad traits when they in good mood and underlying the effects of their bad behaviors honestly to them face to face away from other employees might be effective for finishing the repetitive bad behaviors at workplace. Additionally, giving precise examples with the dates and time when the bad behaviors occurred to back up what you're telling them would be helpful to convince them about what they've done before so it will be easier to tell that they must change their ways immediately.

After having approached successfully to the perpetrators of the dark Triad traits, then it's time to check thoroughly the possible triggers of the bad behaviors that might originated from the working conditions or the sort of distributed duties and teams in the organization as well. Because there may be some specific situations at work that cause behaviors to develop associated with narcissism, Machiavellianism, or psychopathy. Or one of employees just can't stand working with a certain team member in the organization. It's obvious that every situation

doesn't have such a simple fix but removing the sufferers or perpetrators from the teams or changing them with other group members might help to sweep the triggers of the unwanted behaviors in the organization.

Last but not least, it's vital that one can never support a troublesome employee's bad behavior even indirectly or unintentionally. When any chaos or toxic behaviors appear in the organization, they must never be overlooked and neglected or managers/supervisors should never defend them or make excuses for them. If not, it will not only help them to continue acting badly and toxic, but it will also alienate your other innocent employees within the organization and simply destroy the healthy team performance and development.

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