

## **A Theoretical Model Relating the Dark Triad of Personality to the Content of Employees' Psychological Contracts**

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### **Abstract**

Psychological contracts – an individual's perception of mutual obligations between him/herself and an organisation – form a powerful lens to understanding employment relationship. While the consequences of the psychological contract are well-documented, its antecedents are not fully understood. Research suggests that personality traits, operationalised using the Big Five taxonomy, can explain the type of psychological contract that employees develop. We extend this research by developing a theoretical model that relates three maladaptive traits – the dark triad of personality: Machiavellism, narcissism, and psychopathy – to the content of employees' psychological contracts. We propose that employees with high scores on these traits tend to develop transactional as opposed to relational psychological contracts. Moreover, we introduce five mediators to explain these relationships: the norm of reciprocity, careerism, perceived organisational support, trust, and interpersonal conflict. Finally, we offer an explanation for earlier suggestions of curvilinear effects of the dark triad traits. We reason that psychopathy and narcissism negatively relate to self-control which, in turn, moderates the relationships between the dark triad traits and the six mediators in our model.

### **Introduction**

Every so often, popular media ascribe fraudulent and deviant behaviour of employers and employees to dark personality traits. For example, when the ENRON Corporation went bankrupt in 2001, media soon focussed on the CEO, Kenneth Lay, who appeared to have deceived and manipulated people for years on end (Suddath, 2010). He was depicted as the archetype of the “corporate psychopath” because he enriched himself while driving his organisation and its employees into the ground. However, attention for dark personality traits in the workplace is not limited to popular media as scholarly attention for this topic is on the rise (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). In 2002, Paulhus and Williams introduced the dark triad of personality, a constellation of three related yet distinct traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. More than a decade later, the dark triad has been empirically related to mostly negative outcomes, such as counterproductive work behaviour (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks & McDaniel, 2012) and manipulative and ‘hard’ influence tactics (Jonason, Slomski & Partyka, 2012). Notwithstanding these

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advancements in the literature, it remains unclear how employees characterised by the dark triad are able to function in employment relationships.

The goal of the present study is to theorise how the dark triad of personality relates to different types of exchange relationships. We focus on the psychological contract, which can be described as an employee's perception of the mutual obligations between him/herself and the organisation (Rousseau, 1989), and we distinguish transactional from relational psychological contract types. In a transactional psychological contract, the economic aspect of the employment relationship occupies a central position, whereas a relational psychological contract revolves more around the socio-emotional aspects of the employment relationship (Rousseau, 1990). Explaining how employees develop transactional and/or relational contracts is important, as these psychological contract types relate differentially to outcomes (Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2009; Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Willems, Huybrechts & Jegers, 2013).

Our theoretical model makes three major contributions to the literature. First, it extends present understanding of how personality relates to the psychological contract. Studies have already explored how bright personality traits, such as the Big Five traits, relate to psychological contract types (Raja, Johns & Ntalianis, 2004; Tallman & Bruning, 2008; Vantilborgh et al., 2013). We complement these studies by proposing that the dark triad of personality traits will lead to the development of transactional psychological contracts. Understanding how dark personality traits relate to psychological contract types would improve our understanding on the development of psychological contracts. Second, our model introduces a set of mediators that explain *why* the dark triad traits relate to psychological contract types. In particular, we develop propositions on the mediating role of (1) the norm of reciprocity, (2) careerism, (3) perceived organisational support, (4) trust, and (5) interpersonal conflict. We, hence, advance present knowledge on the reasons underlying relationships between personality and exchange relationship types, and formulate a clear agenda for future research. Third, we introduce self-control as a moderator in our model. It has been argued that low levels of the dark triad traits are not necessarily maladaptive, meaning that the effects of these traits might be curvilinear (e.g., Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). We reason that the relationships between the dark triad traits and the abovementioned mediators are buffered by high levels of self-control, and that self-control, in turn, depends on the individual's psychopathy and narcissism.

In the following sections, we briefly discuss the psychological contract and dark triad of personality literatures. Next, we present our theoretical model and develop propositions relating the dark triad to psychological contract types, followed by a one-by-one introduction of potential mediators and the moderating role of self-control. Finally, we discuss our model in view of the literature, examine limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.

## **The psychological contract**

The psychological contract is commonly defined as an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party (Rousseau, 1989). Key issues here include the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration offered in exchange for it, binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations (Rousseau, 1989: 123). Moreover, Rousseau (1989) stipulated that the psychological contract entails perceived promises with a mandatory nature, instead of more global 'expectations'. She defined the psychological contract as being consciously

accessible, as opposed to the largely unconscious nature ascribed to it in earlier works (e.g. Argyris, 1960), and pointed out that psychological contracts are idiosyncratic; the specific promises that form a psychological contract can differ vastly from one person to another. This idiosyncratic nature of the psychological contract is probably one of the decisive factors that led to the development of psychological contract typologies.

We will focus on the traditional distinction between transactional and relational psychological contract types (Macneil, 1985; Rousseau, 1990). Transactional psychological contracts typically have an economic and extrinsic focus, a close-ended timeframe, a static character, a narrow scope and a public, easily observable tangibility. For example, employees with a transactional psychological contract may believe that their organisation is obliged to provide a fair wage in return for working the minimally agreed upon hours. Relational contracts are defined as having, besides an economic focus, a socio-emotional and more intrinsic focus, an open-ended time frame, a dynamic character, a pervasive and comprehensive scope and a subjective tangibility (Rousseau, 1990). For example, employees with a relational psychological contract may believe that their organisation is obliged to offer job security and promotion opportunities in return for loyalty and extra-role behaviour. Over the years, scholars introduced other psychological contract types, such as the balanced (Rousseau, 1995) and the ideological or value-driven psychological contract (Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Willems, Huybrechts & Jergers, 2014). Nonetheless, the transactional-relational distinction remains the most frequently used typology in the literature (e.g., Raja et al., 2004; Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2010), probably because it is so widely applicable and parsimonious.

The distinction between transactional and relational psychological contracts seems important because both types differentially relate to a number of outcomes. Generally speaking, studies suggest that transactional psychological contracts lead to maladaptive consequences whereas relational psychological contracts result in positive consequences (Aggarwal & Barghava, 2010; Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Raja et al., 2004; Richard, McMillan-Capehart, Bhuian & Taylor, 2009). Social exchange theory offers a theoretical explanation for these findings, stating that employees reciprocate in kind when they perceive that their employer promises them a certain type of obligations (Conway & Briner, 2009). Relatively few studies explored the consequences of psychological contract types as the majority of the literature focussed on psychological contract breach. This is perhaps unsurprising as breach represents an employee's perception that the employer has failed to provide a promised obligation, which may elicit a strong affective reaction (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Nonetheless, research demonstrates that transactional psychological contracts are positively associated with turnover intentions, and negatively relate to affective organisational commitment, job satisfaction, psychological ownership, innovative work behaviour, yearly earnings, and the amount of extra hours worked (Aggarwal & Barghava, 2010; Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Raja et al., 2004; Richard et al., 2009). In contrast, relational psychological contracts negatively relate to turnover intentions, and positively relate to affective organisational commitment, job satisfaction, psychological ownership, and the amount of extra hours worked per week (Aggarwal & Barghava, 2010; Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Raja et al., 2004; Richard et al., 2009). In sum, relational contracts appear to be preferable over transactional contracts.

Recent theorising suggests that psychological contract formation involves a progression through various phases (Rousseau, Hansen & Tomprou, 2015). The psychological contract gradually takes shape once that an employee enters the organisation, labeled the *creation* phase. After awhile, the psychological contract crystallises and stabilises (*maintenance phase*). However, certain events, such as a psychological contract breach, may lead to sudden changes in the content of the psychological contract, as employees

*renegotiate* or *repair* their contract. Several factors have been identified that potentially influence the content of the psychological contract throughout these various phases (Conway & Briner, 2009). These can be grouped into factors outside the workplace (e.g., parenthood), organisational factors (e.g., HR practices), social factors (e.g., comparisons with coworkers), and individual factors (e.g., personality). We will focus on one particular individual factor, namely the dark triad of personality.

## **The dark triad of personality**

The dark triad is a constellation of three empirically related yet theoretically distinct personality traits that are seen as interpersonally malevolent, namely narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These three traits share a common core as evidenced by the high correlations found between them (*ibid*). This empirical relatedness may seem obvious, given that the manipulation of others for personal gain is one of the central features of Machiavellianism; psychopathy entails, amongst others, guiltlessness and a lack of empathy, and narcissism is characterised by a great sense of entitlement (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Hence, it is clear that these traits share a certain disregard towards the well-being of others. Studies have shown that there are common cores underlying all three traits, such as high levels of disagreeableness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and callousness (Jones & Figueredo, 2013).

Despite these common cores and similarities, the three dark triad traits can still be considered unique constructs. According to Jones and Paulhus (2010), the dark triad traits can be differentiated by their inherent temporal orientations and identity needs. For example, Machiavellianism involves a more long-term orientation in comparison to psychopathy and narcissism, while narcissism comprises a greater identity need compared to Machiavellianism and psychopathy. The three dark triad traits, thus, differ from one another. Moreover, Jonason & Webster (2010) reported that a tridimensional confirmatory factor model fits better to the data than a unidimensional model. Consequently, we are convinced that the dark triad traits are perhaps strongly related, yet distinct constructs. We will, therefore, refrain from focussing on a global dark triad construct in favour of the three separate underlying constructs. We believe that such an approach is crucial as these traits still have a fair degree of unique characteristics, meaning that they might lead to different outcomes through distinct processes and, additionally, a possibility that the three different traits might counteract each other, which might be overlooked if merely focusing on a single, global dark triad construct.

### ***Machiavellianism***

The construct of Machiavellianism was originally developed by Christie (1970), based on their studies analysing how leaders of extreme political and religious groups used manipulation to further their own personal desires. The characteristics of these leaders were then interpreted according to earlier politics research and to historical perspectives, mostly of Niccolo Machiavelli, on power (Dahling, Whitaker & Levy, 2009). In "*The Prince*" (1944), for example, Machiavelli describes a great leader as one who can hold onto power by means of, amongst others, a gift for manipulation, an amoral disposition and a belief that the end justifies every means. Machiavellian personality, as originally defined by Christie (1970), comprises of three components: a cynical view concerning human nature, a belief in the effectiveness of

the manipulation of others and a moral outlook that values expediency over principle. Other conceptualisations have later on been proposed, such as a three-dimensional perspective differentiating between manipulation, exploitation, and deviousness (Gable & Topol, 1988), and a four-dimensional perspective distinguishing between amorality, distrust of others, desire for control, and desire for status (Dahlin et al., 2009). Returning characteristics in these conceptualisations are manipulation and a readiness to seek gains at the expense of others. For the purposes of our model, we will, therefore, define Machiavellianism as “a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gain, often against the other’s self-interest” (Wilson, Near & Miller, 1996: 285).

Machiavellianism has been linked to a number of organisational outcomes, such as lying and deceiving (DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979), turnover intentions (Becker & O’Hair, 2007), knowledge sharing willingness (Liu, 2008) and careerism (Kuyumucu & Dahling, 2013). However, despite being linked to many organisational outcomes, the (behavioural) processes through which Machiavellianism leads to these outcomes have mostly remained speculation.

### *Psychopathy*

Cleckley (1941) can be considered the founding father of research on subclinical psychopathy in the workplace. He suggested 16 characteristics of psychopaths, based on a case study of a prosperous and successful, though psychopathic businessman. Some of these characteristics were not maladaptive, such as intelligence, superficial charm and a lack of neurotic/psychotic symptoms. Consequently, subclinical psychopathy was not considered entirely maladaptive, and could – in certain cases – lead to positive outcomes (Cleckley, 1941; Widom, 1977). In view of this, it is important to distinguish subclinical from clinical psychopathy. While the latter is considered a maladaptive personality disorder, the former represents a personality trait that can actually be beneficial at low to moderate levels (Levenson, Kiehl & Fitzpatrick, 1995). Various operationalisations of psychopathy have been proposed over the years, but they commonly distinguish emotional and interpersonal aspects of psychopathy from antisocial and behavioral aspects of psychopathy (e.g., Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996). For example, psychopaths are typically characterised by a lack of empathy and guilt, and by an unstable, antisocial lifestyle (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). We follow recent descriptions of psychopathy by Cooke and Michie (2001) and define psychopathy as a personality trait involving an arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style, a deficient affective experience and an impulsive and irresponsible behavioural style.

The presence of psychopathic personalities in organisations has been associated with several detrimental outcomes. Psychopathy has, for example, been linked to lower self-control (Jonason & Tost, 2010), lower emotional intelligence (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer & Veselka, 2011), and increased counterproductive work behaviour (Scherer, Baysinger, Zolynsky & LeBreton, 2013). Moreover, colleagues also seem to be affected by the presence of an employee with high levels of psychopathy. For instance, the presence of psychopaths in the workplace has been associated with higher levels of bullying and unfair supervision (Boddy, 2011). Additionally, the presence of psychopathic leaders in the workplace has been related to decreased perceptions of corporate social responsibility and lower commitment in coworkers (Boddy, Ladyshevsky & Gavin, 2010). However, research also suggests that there may be some silver linings. Psychopathy has also, for example, been related to more rational decision-making (Osuni & Ohira, 2010) and to increased levels of entrepreneurship (Akhtar, Ahmetoglu & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013). Although psychopathy, thus, appears to have a few positive consequences, we can conclude that the majority of the consequences in the workplace are negative.

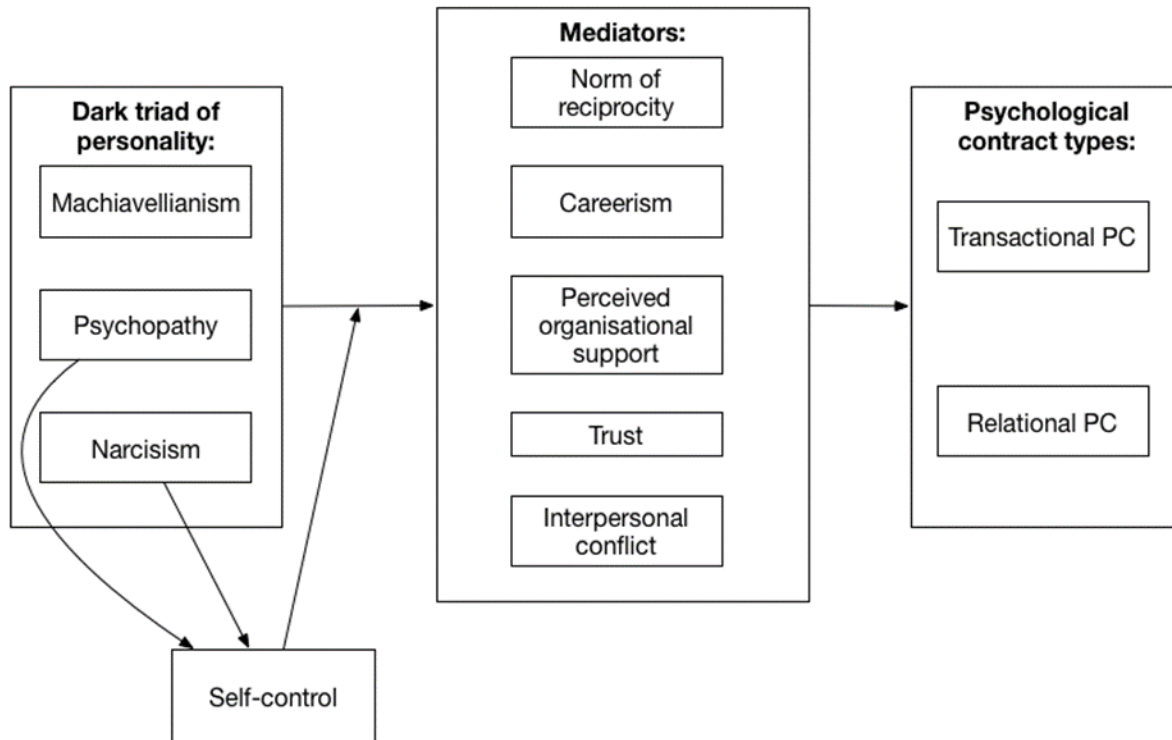
### *Narcissism*

Just as with psychopathy, a distinction must be made between narcissism as a non-clinical personality trait and narcissism as a personality disorder, as defined in the *Diagnosics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). We again focus on non-clinical narcissism for the purposes of our model. Subclinical narcissism can be defined as a personality trait stemming from an unstable self-image and involving feelings and behaviors reflecting a sense of grandiosity, entitlement, superiority and dominance (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists have a positive self-image that is not grounded in reality but that is distorted by their desire for superiority (Penney & Spector, 2002). Behaviours that have been associated with narcissism include a grandiose sense of self-importance, exaggerating achievements, excessive self-admiration, and a lack of tolerance for criticism and compromise (Resick, Whitman, Weingardenn Hiller, 2009).

Until quite recently, research in the organisational context had mainly focussed on the influence of narcissism on leadership (e.g., Khoo & Burch, 2008). Narcissism nonetheless seems to relate to impulsive and risky decision-making (e.g., Vazire & Funder, 2006), lower organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g. Judge, LePine & Rich, 2006), increased counterproductive work behaviour (e.g. Penney & Spector, 2002; Judge et al., 2006) and interpersonal exploitativeness (Campbell, Brunel & Finkel, 2006). The relationships between narcissism and task performance are less clear. Narcissists can actually perform well when the situation offers an opportunity to self-enhance (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). However, narcissists perform worse than non-narcissists when they cannot garner admiration or respect of others in a situation. Generally speaking, narcissism – much like psychopathy and Machiavellianism – appears to relate to several negative workplace outcomes.

## Theoretical model

Figure 1. Overview of theoretical model on the relationships between the dark triad of personality and psychological contract types.



We propose a theoretical model that relates the dark triad of personality to psychological contract types. As can be seen in Figure 1, we propose that Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism explain the type of psychological contract employees develop. In particular, we propose that the dark triad traits relate positively to transactional psychological contracts and negatively to relational psychological contracts. We further propose that these relationships can be explained by five mediators, namely the norm of reciprocity, careerism, perceived organisational support, trust, and interpersonal conflict. Finally, we reason that these relationships are moderated by self-control, and that psychopathy and narcissism negatively relate to self-control. In the next sections, we develop arguments for these propositions.

### *Direct effects of the dark triad on psychological contract type*

Our model assumes that personality traits have an impact on the content of employees' psychological contracts. According to Raja et al. (2004), personality influences psychological contract content through choice, construal and enactment. *Choice* refers to job-seeking behaviour and relates to the psychological contract one searches and self-selects; someone ambitious, for example, will most likely search for a job where the psychological contract includes promises related to swift career advancement. *Construal* refers to how employees perceive and interpret their psychological contract; an ambitious employee may pay

particular attention to promises relating to career advancement, leading to an emphasis on career advancement in the content of his/her psychological contract. Finally, personality may affect psychological contract content through *enactment*, meaning that content is shaped by an individual's behaviours and attitudes; an ambitious employee may work considerable extra hours and, as a result, he/she may be offered career advancement by the employer (Raja et al., 2004). These three processes – choice, construal, and enactment – explain why personality can lead to employees developing a transactional or relational psychological contract.

Results from prior studies that related the Big Five personality traits to psychological contract types confirm that personality, indeed, influences psychological contract content (e.g. Raja et al., 2004, Tallman & Bruning, 2008; Vantilborgh et al., 2013). For example, Raja et al. (2004) found that neuroticism related negatively, and conscientiousness related positively to relational psychological contracts while extraversion related negatively to transactional psychological contracts in a paid employment context. Likewise, Vantilborgh et al. (2013) demonstrated that conscientiousness related positively to transactional psychological contracts while agreeableness related positively to relational psychological contracts in a volunteering context. Hence, it appears that the Big Five traits can be related to psychological contract types in various types of exchange relationships. However, the Big Five taxonomy entails bright traits, so it remains uncertain if similar relationships can be discerned for dark traits.

We propose that all three dark triad traits – Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism – will positively relate to transactional psychological contracts and negatively relate to relational psychological contracts. We base this proposition on the idea that these three traits share a common core characterised by high levels of disagreeableness and an insensitive, even cruel disregard for others (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). As a result, people who score high on the dark triad traits will be more likely to choose a job with a transactional than with a relational psychological contract (i.e., *choice*), because they prefer the rational, quid-pro-quo nature of transactional contracts over the trust-based, socio-emotional exchanges of relational contracts. Moreover, employees with high dark triad trait levels are more likely to *construe* their psychological contract as transactional, because they focus on promises that are directly relevant to themselves (as in transactional contracts) as opposed to promises that carry mutual benefits (as in relational contracts). Finally, the insensitive behaviour and disregard for others may result in coworkers refraining from making relational promises (i.e., *enactment*). However, Machiavellians are more likely to develop a long-term exchange relationship than psychopaths and narcissists (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Given that transactional contracts focus on the short-term, while relational contracts focus on the long-term (Rousseau, 1990), we propose that the relationships between Machiavellianism and psychological contract types are weaker than those between psychopathy and narcissism and the psychological contract types.

*Proposition 1: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism are positively related to transactional psychological contracts, and negatively related to relational psychological contracts. These relationships are weaker for Machiavellianism, compared to psychopathy and narcissism.*

### ***Indirect effects of dark triad of personality on psychological contract types***

#### *Mediating role of the norm of reciprocity*

The norm of reciprocity, as originally laid out by Gouldner (1960), states that when a benefit has been accorded to or refused to another party, an obligation ensues for the other party to reciprocate in kind.



Gouldner distinguished between a positive and a negative reciprocity norm. The former refers to a situation where one offers help in reaction to receiving help from another party and the latter describes a situation where one takes revenge following negative treatment by another party. The norm of reciprocity is considered a cornerstone of social exchange relationships (Blau, 1964), such as the psychological contract, because it guides the formation and strengthening of interpersonal relationships (Gouldner, 1960).

Gouldner (1960) originally considered the norm of reciprocity to be universal and, therefore, believed that individual differences would not influence the norm of reciprocity. However, this claim was later on contested by other scholars. For example, Sahlins (1972) further defined the norm of reciprocity and distinguished between generalised, balanced, and negative reciprocity. Generalised reciprocity is characterised by

“indefiniteness in the obligation, both in terms of equality and immediacy of returns, and it reflects a kind of altruistic interest in others.”, balanced reciprocity by “immediacy of the return of a customary and recognized equivalent and reflects mutuality in interests between exchange partners (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997: 525-526)

and negative reciprocity can be seen as a norm “in which giving is replaced by taking and complete self-interest” (ibid). Importantly, Sahlins (1972) explained that people differed in their use of and preference for these different norms of reciprocity. More recently, Perugini, Galluci, Presaghi, and Ercolani (2003) described reciprocity as an internalised social norm that can be considered a personality trait. Evidence that individual differences in the norm of reciprocity exist has also been found in experimental research (Gallucci & Perugini, 2000).

We propose that the dark triad of personality can explain why people differ in their preference for and use of a certain norm of reciprocity (Perugini et al., 2003; Sahlins, 1972). First, Meyer (1992) already demonstrated a link between Machiavellianism and a negative norm of reciprocity and reasoned that this was due to Machiavellians exploiting and manipulating others for own personal gains. As a result, Machiavellians perceive reciprocity as a means to further their own interests, and focus more on gaining than giving in the exchange relationship. Second, we propose that narcissism will relate positively with the negative norm of reciprocity, because narcissism implies a sense of entitlement and an obsession with the self (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1979). As narcissists feel entitled and, consequently, believe they deserve more than others, we expect that they will focus on exchanges in which they receive more than they contribute. Likewise, psychopaths appear unconcerned with meeting social obligations (O’Boyle et al., 2012). Overall, they do not care about social exchange relationships, unless they can derive some personal benefit from them. Hence, psychopathy can be reasoned to positively relate to the negative reciprocity norm.

Individual differences in the norm of reciprocity will subsequently influence the type of psychological contract that is developed. As stated above, the relational psychological contract is defined by an economic as well as a non-economic, socio-emotional focus, a pervasive scope and an open-ended time frame (Rousseau, 1990). We propose that a generalised reciprocity norm, or at least a balanced reciprocity norm, would be required in order to develop and maintain a relational psychological contract. In contrast, a negative reciprocity norm will render a relational psychological contract impossible, steering towards a transactional psychological contract instead.

*Proposition 2: Machiavellians, narcissists, and psychopaths are more likely to develop transactional psychological contracts and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts, because they are characterised by a negative norm of reciprocity.*

### ***Mediating role of careerism***

Careerism relates to a belief that for one to make progress career-wise, simply being competent is sometimes not enough (Feldman, 1985). This position, in turn, leads towards trying to progress through the echelons of often multiple organisations by other means than just performing well and ‘delivering good work’. Careerism is, thus, defined as the propensity to pursue career advancement through non-performance-based means (Feldman & Weitz, 1991). Careerism entails a set of beliefs concerning career advancement that can be seen as interpersonally maladaptive and detrimental to the organisation. The seven beliefs, as originally proposed by Feldman & Weitz (1991), encompass a number of recurring themes, namely viewing competence alone as insufficient for advancement, the instrumental use of interpersonal relationships, a greater importance given to impression management and political behaviour, a belief in the irreconcilability of the goals of person and organisation, and a greater sensitivity to perceived inequity.

Machiavellianism has unequivocally been linked to a careerist orientation in past research (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004; Kuyumcu & Dahling, 2013). Moreover, it has been related to negative impression management behaviours (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004). Machiavellists are likely to use manipulation in interpersonal relationships and in organisational politics (Christie, 1970), resulting in a careerist orientation. Narcissism also shows considerable parallels with careerism, as both stress the instrumental use of interpersonal relationships for personal gain, respectively, for maintaining a bolstered, though fragile self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and for advancing one’s career (Feldman & Weitz, 1991). Narcissism also entails a need for power (O’Boyle et al., 2012), which comes as no surprise as having power over others implies a higher status and a greater perceived valuation of the self. Narcissists’ lack of empathic capabilities (Watson, Grisham, Trotter & Biderman, 1984) and high focus on the self, leading to a disregard for the well-being of others, would facilitate the use of careerist strategies which sometimes entail negative consequences for others. As narcissists’ self-regulation of their inflated self-image is, thus, also pursued through the inconsiderate, yet vigorous striving for power and status, we assume that they will use a careerist orientation to climb the corporate ladder more efficiently. As for psychopathy, a recent study examined the link between ‘primary psychopathy’ and careerism (Chiaburu, Muñoz, & Gardner, 2013). Primary psychopathy – i.e. the selfishness, uncaring and manipulative tendencies of the psychopathic individual – was positively related with a careerist orientation (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Moreover, psychopathy explained variance in careerism above and beyond the well-known Five Factor Model personality traits. Psychopaths may be more likely to develop a careerist orientation because their lack of empathy means that they are not hampered by feelings of guilt when manipulating others to achieve their own career goals.

In sum, we propose that Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy are all positively related to careerism. In turn, careerism has already been related to transactional and relational psychological contract types (Rousseau, 1990). Rousseau found that careerism exhibited a negative relationship with the employee’s perceived relational contract and a positive link with the employee’s perceived transactional contract. Careerism implies the belief in the insufficiency of merely performing well in order to progress

in one's career, and leads to a greater desire for mobility (Feldman & Weitz, 1991). In combination with the fact that it is also related to lower organisational commitment (Feldman & Weitz, 1991), this would inevitably disturb the establishment and maintenance of a relational psychological contract with one's organisation for which a pervasive scope is needed and which has an indefinite time-frame (Rousseau, 1990). As the careerist is continuously looking for a new and better job (Feldman, 1985), we propose that careerism will be positively related to transactional psychological contracts because these contracts do not require a long-term perspective or a high level of commitment.

*Proposition 3: Machiavellists, narcissists, and psychopaths are more likely to develop transactional psychological contract, and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts, because they are characterised by a careerist orientation.*

### ***Mediating role of perceived organisational support***

Perceived organisational support is defined as employees' "...global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986: 500). Research on perceived organisational support often focussed on actions of the organisation, without considering possible effects of dispositional variables (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). We, nonetheless, propose that personality traits relate to individual differences in perceived organisational support. We argue that such relationships exist because perceived organisational support is not an objective representation of the actual amount of support an organisation lends, but a subjective and idiosyncratic perception by the individual employee. We, therefore, expect that narcissism would interfere at the perceptual level as the feelings of entitlement and superiority that are typical for narcissists will colour these perceptions (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Because narcissists are self-oriented (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and feel entitled and superior, we reason that they will perceive less organisational support as non-narcissists, believing that the support offered by the organisation falls short of the support they themselves feel they deserve. Machiavellists may, at first, receive more organisational support because they manipulate others (O'Boyle et al., 2012). However, their manipulation strategies may, in the long term, jeopardise social relationships. Once coworkers discover their manipulative nature, they may start to withdraw support to protect themselves (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Hence, we reason that Machiavellianism will negatively relate to perceived organisational support. Likewise, psychopaths' impulsive destructiveness and lack of emotions will hurt social relationships (O'Boyle et al., 2012), meaning that the organisation is likely to withhold support.

In turn, several similarities can be discerned between perceived organisational support and the psychological contract (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). They are both rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964); they both state that the socio-emotional value of a resource depends on the implicit valuation of the employee; they both emphasise the importance of justice perceptions, and they both have been related to important organisational outcomes (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). In light of these similarities, we assume that perceived organisational support and psychological contract content will be related to each other. This latter has been demonstrated by Aggarwal & Bhargava (2010), who found a positive relation between perceived organisational support and relational psychological contracts and a negative relationship between perceived organisational support and transactional psychological contracts. This is in line with the idea that, as the organisation is perceived to value and care about the employee more deeply, the employee will feel an increasing need to reciprocate in kind in accordance with the norm of reciprocity (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). This would consequently lead to the development of a more

relational psychological contract with the organisation.

*Proposition 4: Machiavellists, narcissists, and psychopaths are more likely to develop transactional psychological contract, and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts, because they perceive lower levels of organisational support.*

### ***The mediating role of trust***

Trust refers to “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998: 395). The literature on trust often makes a distinction with respect to the underlying bases of trust, acknowledging that trust is a rational as well as an emotional phenomenon (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995). Lewis & Weigert (1985) proposed a typology differentiating four types of trust. They argued that trust always consist of a ‘mix’ of rationale and emotion. Two types of trust in this typology, ‘emotional trust’ (with a high emotionality and low rationality base) and ‘cognitive trust’ (with a low emotionality and high rationality base), were subsequently picked up in the psychology literature (McAllister, 1995). The distinction was rebranded ‘affect-based trust’ and ‘cognition-based trust’ and validated in multiple studies (e.g., McAllister, 1995). We believe that the distinction between affect-based and cognition-based trust is useful when relating the dark triad of personality to trust.

First, low levels of trust are an inherent part of the conceptualisation of Machiavellianism (Dahling, Whitaker & Levy, 2009). Machiavellians tends to perceive that others may be trying to manipulate them as they themselves are trying to manipulate others (Christie, 1970). Likewise, Machiavellians show a higher tendency towards economic opportunism when faced with the option to trust and cooperate with others or to compete with others (Sakalaki, Richardson & Thépaut, 2007). We, therefore, reason that Machiavellianism will negatively relate to both affect- and cognition-based trust.

Second, narcissism entails a disregard for others and is characterised by exploitativeness which ultimately leads to defective interpersonal relationships (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Considering that affect-based trust is founded on socio-emotional exchange, which is also crucial in the development of interpersonal relationships (Blau, 1964), we expect narcissism to relate to lower levels of affective trust as a consequence of these impeded relationships with coworkers. Moreover, it will also lead to lower levels of cognition-based trust because narcissists are preoccupied with maintaining their inflated, but fragile self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). As a result, they tend to be hypervigilant for ego threats (Horvath & Morf, 2009). This hypervigilance translates into lower levels of cognition-based trust in others to prevent damage to their self-image.

Last, psychopathy involves a lack of empathy (Boddy et al., 2010), reduced emotionality (Benning, Patrick, Blonigen, Hicks, & Iacono, 2005) and poor emotion recognition in others (Decety, Skelly, Yoder & Kiehl, 2014). These characteristics of psychopaths will lead to fewer and more deficient interpersonal relationships compared to non-psychopaths. We consequently expect psychopathy to negatively relate to affect-based trust as well. Considering that psychopathy’s emotional detachment seems to concord with more rational behaviour (Osuni & Ohira, 2010), we do not expect psychopathy to be significantly related to lower levels of cognition-based trust.

In turn, the distinction between affect-based and cognition-based trust is relevant when relating trust to

psychological contract types. Building on Rousseau et al. (1998), one could argue that affect-based trust would relate to socio-emotional exchanges while cognition-based trust would relate to transactional exchanges. Cognition-based trust fits with the quid-pro-quo nature of the transactional psychological contract while affect-based trust is required to fully establish the trusting, long-term commitment that characterises relational psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1990). Tentative evidence for these links were found in a qualitative study by Atkinson (2007), who confirmed that cognition-based trust and affect-based trust were related to transactional and relational psychological contracts, respectively. Considering the above, we expect that cognition-based trust will stimulate the development of transactional contracts while both cognition and affect-based trust are needed to stimulate relational psychological contract formation. A lack of both types of trust will likely result in instable and closely-monitored transactional psychological contracts.

*Proposition 5: Machiavellists and narcissists are more likely to develop transactional psychological contracts and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts because they experience lower levels of cognition and affect-based trust.*

*Proposition 6: Psychopaths are more likely to develop transactional psychological contracts, and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts because they experience lower levels of affect-based trust.*

### ***The mediating role of interpersonal conflict***

While many definitions and operationalisations of interpersonal conflict can be found in the literature, we will focus on ‘interpersonal conflict’ between employees and other organisational members that represent the organisation. We define interpersonal conflict as “...a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (Barki & Hartwick, 2004: 218). A further distinction is often made between task, process and relationship conflict (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Task and process conflict both pertain to the task, respectively, to the content and the outcomes of the task, and to the logistics of the task. Relationship conflict refers to interpersonal issues between individuals that are related to characteristics of individuals instead of the task (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

We propose that all three dark triad traits will positively relate with interpersonal conflict, and relationship conflict in particular. The dark triad of personality traits all entail a general lack of concern for the well-being of others complemented by highly self-oriented attitudes and behaviours (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Such a focus on the individual’s satisfaction over the satisfaction of others, accompanied by a need for status and power, will likely trigger conflicts with coworkers. For example, the striving for status and power of employees who score high on the dark triad may lead to competition while the lack of concern for other may lead to communication problems, which in turn may trigger interpersonal conflict (Cosier & Rose, 1977).

Although we propose that all three dark triad traits will positively relate to interpersonal conflict, we believe that the strength of these relationships may differ between the traits; we expect that psychopathy will demonstrate the strongest relationship, whereas Machiavellianism will show the weakest relationship with interpersonal conflict. First, one might argue that Machiavellists may actually be able to avoid interpersonal conflict because they can effectively manipulate others (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Machiavellists think strategically, translating into a long-term orientation (Jones & Paulhus, 2010), good impulse control (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), and good deceptive skills (Geis & Moon, 1981). However, Machiavellians are not always able to smoothly handle conflict situations, and often resort to confrontational conflict handling styles (Jones & Melcher, 1982), which may increase conflict. Additionally, Machiavellianism has also been linked to frequent use of “hard” manipulation tactics, such as threatening with punishment (Jonason et al., 2012). Based on these arguments, we propose that Machiavellianism is weakly positively related to interpersonal conflict. Second, we believe that psychopathy is most strongly related to interpersonal conflict because it is associated with impulsivity and a lack of self-regulation (Jonason & Tost, 2010). Because psychopaths have difficulties controlling their immediate impulses, they are more likely to resort to aggressive behavioural responses (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). These aggressive responses are likely to further aggravate interpersonal conflict (Hershcovis et al., 2007) and may even lead to an escalation of conflict (Anderson & Pearson, 1999).

We reason that interpersonal conflict will prevent the development and sustenance of a relational psychological contract. Relational contracts typically emphasise the exchange of inducements that aim to develop and nurture a long-term, trusting exchange agreement with the employer (Rousseau, 1990). However, interpersonal conflict is likely to damage such a relationship, leading employees to shift to a more basic transactional psychological contract. Likewise, research shows that psychological contract breach may lead to employees shifting from a relational to a transactional psychological contract (Lester, Kickul & Bergmann, 2007). Moreover, repeated interpersonal conflict decreases goodwill and mutual understanding, and erodes mutual trust (Langfred, 2007), all essential elements to form a relational psychological contract (Blau, 1964). We, therefore, hypothesise that interpersonal conflict will be negatively related to the relational psychological contracts, and positively to transactional psychological contracts.

*Proposition 7: All dark triad traits are positively related to interpersonal conflict, psychopathy being more strongly related to interpersonal conflict than narcissism, and narcissism being more strongly related to interpersonal conflict than Machiavellianism.*

*Proposition 8: Machiavellists, narcissists, and psychopaths are more likely to develop transactional psychological contracts, and less likely to develop relational psychological contracts, because they experience higher levels of interpersonal conflict.*

### ***The moderating role of self-control***

Research suggests that the dark triad of personality does not uniformly yield negative outcomes (Furnham et al., 2013). These traits may actually help people to get ahead in the workplace in certain situations (Levenson et al., 1995). For example, Smith and Lilienfeld (2013) suggested that low to moderate levels of psychopathy might actually have adaptive features, resulting in curvilinear relationships between psychopathy and workplace outcomes. Building on these suggestions, we propose that the relationships between the dark triad traits and the mediators in our model display curvilinear patterns. More precisely, we propose an indirect curvilinear effect, that manifests itself through self-control.

The dark triad of personality has recently been linked to self-control (Jonason & Tost, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2011). In general, Life History Theory (Wilson, 1975) suggests that people with high dark triad

scores live life according to a ‘fast strategy’, characterised by limited self-control, a lack of attention for future consequences, and high levels of attention deficit disorders (Jonason & Tost, 2010). This lack of self-control is most prominent for psychopaths, who have been shown to engage in dysfunctional impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Likewise, narcissism can also be linked to impulsivity, although narcissists engage more in functional impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Machiavellians, in contrast, appear to possess some form of self-control, resulting in no significant relationships between Machiavellianism and impulse control (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Based on these findings, we propose:

*Proposition 9: Psychopathy and narcissism are negatively related to self-control; this relationship is strongest for psychopathy.*

Self-control, in turn, is expected to moderate the relationships between the dark triad of personality and the mediators in our model, that is, the norm of reciprocity, careerism, perceived organisational support, trust, and interpersonal conflict. Self-regulation theory stipulates that people use resources to regulate their impulses and act in line with social norms (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006). However, when resources are depleted, this regulation of impulses fails and personality traits fully manifest themselves in overt behaviours. For example, an employee with high scores on Machiavellianism may be inclined to distrust others. However, as long as this employee has sufficient resources to engage in self-control, he/she may be able to inhibit impulses and display trusting behaviour despite his/her Machiavellistic personality. In other words, self-control is expected to buffer the relationships between the dark triad of personality traits and the abovementioned mediators in our theoretical model. Given that psychopathy and narcissism negatively relate to self-control, we propose the presence of an indirect moderator effect: psychopathy and narcissism moderate the relationships between the dark triad of personality and the mediators in our model, via self-control. For example, when an employee scores high on both Machiavellianism and psychopathy, he/she may both be inclined to distrust coworkers and lack the resources to engage in self-control to inhibit these impulses. This indirect moderator effect may explain earlier suggestions of curvilinear effects of the dark triad traits (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

*Proposition 10: Psychopathy and narcissism indirectly moderate the relationships between the dark triad of personality and the mediators (norm of reciprocity, careerism, perceived organisational support, trust, and interpersonal conflict) in our model, via self-control.*

## Discussion

We presented a theoretical model that relates the dark triad of personality – that is, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy – to transactional and relational psychological contract types. Briefly put, our model proposes that all three dark triad traits will lead employees to develop a transactional as opposed to a relational psychological contract. Moreover, we introduced six mediators that explained these relationships. The dark triad of personality can be related to psychological contract types because they influence the norm of reciprocity, careerism, perceived organisational support, trust, and interpersonal conflict of employees. Finally, we proposed that psychopathy and narcissism indirectly moderate the relationships between the dark triad traits and these six mediators. Employees with high scores on psychopathy and narcissism are suggested to have lower levels of self-control, meaning that they will not be able to control the behaviours originating from the three dark triad traits.

Our model adds to the literature in a number of ways. First, there is a dearth of research on antecedents of psychological contract content (Conway & Briner, 2009). Knowing which factors influence the development of a certain psychological contract type is nonetheless important as these contract types have been related to a number of outcomes (e.g., Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2010; Millward & Hopkins, 1998). We, hence, add to the literature that examined personality traits as antecedents of psychological contract types (Raja et al., 2004; Tallman & Bruning, 2008; Vantilborgh et al., 2013). In contrast to these prior studies, we highlight the influence of dark as opposed to bright traits (e.g., the Big Five). Second, previous studies relating personality traits to psychological contract types explained relationships based on the processes of choice, construal, and enactment (Raja et al., 2004). However, these processes were never empirically tested and remained rather elusive and abstract. We introduced six specific mediators that can be directly empirically scrutinised. Third, our model offers a theoretical explanation for earlier suggestions that the dark triad traits may show curvilinear relationships with employee cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). We introduce self-control as a moderator in the relationships between the dark triad traits and the six mediators of our model. While self-control and impulsivity have frequently been linked to the dark triad (Jonason & Tost, 2010), it has also been demonstrated that self-control influences how personality affects attitudes and behaviours (Baumeister et al., 2006). By linking psychopathy and narcissism to self-control and by positioning self-control as a moderator, we illuminate a potentially complex interaction between the dark triad traits. In particular, this unique perspective explains how the dark triad traits can enhance each other's effects because they also diminish self-control.

A number of avenues can be further explored to expand our theoretical model. First, recent studies suggest that the dark triad could be expanded to form the dark tetrad, by adding sadism to the constellation of traits (Paulhus & Buckels, 2011). Hence, it could be interesting to theorise how sadism could be integrated in our theoretical model. For example, employees who score high on sadism may encounter more interpersonal conflict because they display 'schadenfreude' when coworkers experience misfortunes, leading to the development of transactional psychological contracts. Second, the dark triad of personality is likely also related to employees' reactions to psychological contract breach. For example, the lack of trust that typifies Machiavellianism may lead to increased vigilance and a higher likelihood to perceive psychological contract breaches (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Hence, it appears that there are ample opportunities to further integrate these dark traits into theoretical models on the consequences of psychological contract breach and violation. Third, we focussed on how the dark triad personality traits influence the development of employees' psychological contracts. However, it also appears important to investigate how supervisors' or colleagues' personality traits relate to subordinates' psychological contract content and reactions to psychological contract breach. Research suggests that supervisors are one of the most important factors in the development of psychological contracts (Conway & Briner, 2009). For example, a Machiavellian supervisor may offer mainly transactional inducements that can be easily monitored to his subordinates because he does not trust them. Consequently, these subordinates may be more likely to develop a transactional psychological contract. Likewise, a psychopathic supervisor may not be able to show empathy when subordinates' psychological contracts are breached, further aggravating their reactions.



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