

## NEGATIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SELF-MONITORING AMONG SALES MANAGERS

Ludmila Kalinnikova<sup>1,2</sup>, Jelena Saplavska<sup>2</sup>, Aleksey Zavodilov<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“Psy Technology” LLC, Latvia; <sup>2</sup>Baltic International Academy, Latvia  
kalin.l@inbox.lv, lena.sapl@inbox.lv, aleksejs\_zavodilovs@inbox.lv

**Abstract.** Taking into account the main objective of any organization engaged in retail, sales and provision of services there are high expectations towards the personal skills and professional competence level of a sales manager. The functional responsibilities of a sales manager suggest an ambition to be active, flexible, take responsibility for own decisions, be able to take risks, and make a positive impression on clients. Previous studies revealed that a certain combination of negative personality traits that make up the Dark Triad complex allows to actively attract customers and contributes to closing high-value profitable deals. It was noted that eagerness to achieve professional success, typical for the individuals affected by the Dark Triad complex, allows them to control their behavior and compensate for the complex's negative manifestations in behavior and communication. This ability is associated with self-monitoring factors. Recent studies have identified certain career benefits available for these individuals. It was suggested that examination of negative personality traits of managers is essential for predicting the results of their professional activities. In the current study, an empirical evaluation of the assumption was made regarding how self-monitoring is associated with negative personality traits among sales managers. It was demonstrated that the distribution of the levels of negative personality traits among sales managers with different self-monitoring levels is not random.

**Keywords:** negative personality traits, self-monitoring, Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, sales managers.

### Introduction

In recent decades, an interest to study manifestations of negative personality traits of a professional and their impact on the results of his/her professional activity has emerged in research focused on personality psychology [1]. This approach is relevant to study the efficiency of sales professionals, since the focus of professional tasks of a sales manager is on active sales of a product/service and working with people. The functional responsibilities of a sales manager imply that the professional has a desire to be active, creative, flexible, as well as an ability to be responsible for own decisions, take risks, and produce a favorable impression. Effective managers aim to achieve high levels of sales; they favor complicated situations and consequent credit for finding solutions that led them to success. The research authors indicate that managers with a certain combination of the Dark Triad negative personality traits are capable of closing large profitable deals in order to achieve their goal of high sales levels.

In theoretical aspect, the negative personality traits are considered as a single complex of features, *the Dark Triad*, which includes such subclinical traits as Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy [1-5]. Research [3] revealed the typical features of individuals with the Dark Triad traits: proneness to lie and manipulate people, if this is beneficial to them or helps to achieve their goals. Since the concept of the Dark Triad is strictly conceptualized and personality traits are regarded as stable, mainly negative manifestations of the Dark Triad personality traits have been studied [1]. This direction has been noted in the review of scientific studies on manifestations of the personality traits of the Dark Triad among employees of business organizations for the period 2012-2014 [6]. The authors of the review note that the studies mainly consider such negative manifestations as unethical behavior towards employees and customers, financial frauds and deception. At the same time, a number of studies [7; 8] demonstrated that, under certain circumstances, the features of the Dark Triad can be beneficial for the professional and for the organization. For example, it was revealed [9] that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are loosely related to the quality of the performed tasks, whereas, for a Narcissist it is more typical to obtain satisfaction from sales [10].

The authors of the current article support the idea [1] that for organizational psychology the research on revealing which combinations of the Dark Triad can be problematic and which lead to effective professional results in certain fields of activity is highly relevant.

In the study [11], the authors mention that Machiavellianism is one of the main professionally significant personal qualities of a manager. Individuals with this trait are pragmatic, emotionally

distant and able to make decisions on their own [12]. They know how to control their behavior, are enterprising, charming, open, tell people what they want to hear, know how to use influence techniques and manipulate clients to achieve their professional goals [13], adjust their behavioral strategies for long-term gain. The combination with narcissistic features allows the manager to be active and engaging in communication, to attract customers, to make a favorable impression [14]. Recent studies have identified certain career advantages that individuals with these traits receive [15]. Psychopathic traits make it possible to take risky decisions in difficult sales situations for the sake of *short-term* pleasure. The study revealed that psychopathy is associated with charisma and does not necessarily hinder the progress and development of the organization. Nonetheless, it was noted that in the absence of self-control the considered features can manifest themselves negatively, causing harm to the organization. This may be pronounced in unethical behavior, deception of customers or employees, unreasonable risk and irresponsible decisions. These studies are mainly descriptive.

There are few empirical studies of the links between self-monitoring and the features of the Dark Triad, although there are analogies provided in theoretical works. This is due to the fact that in the structure of self-monitoring there are two factors to be distinguished: self-control and expressive behavior both orientated towards adaptability in different social situations. In this understanding, self-monitoring allows one to be flexible in interacting with other people, to adequately perceive the state and behavior of a communication partner, to constantly monitor and change one's own behavior, taking into account information received about the partner and the requirements of the communicative situation. It was noted [16] that the authors suggested that the Dark Triad personality traits are positively correlated with self-monitoring factors [17]. This statement was associated with theoretical assumptions that individuals affected by the Dark Triad features demonstrate the desire to manipulate people combined with high self-monitoring focused on achieving own goals, thus, allowing managers to be flexible and employ different behavioral strategies in various sales situations. Some authors note that Machiavellian manage the impression they produce on others not in order to achieve the desired social image but with the goal of effectively exploiting others for the sake of achieving their own goals [18]. It is noted that psychopathic traits lead to intense short-term behavioral adaptation to the environment, since manifestations of psychopathy are associated with impulsivity and proneness to sensational behavior [2], which is necessary for successful exploitation of others [19]. The higher the level of self-monitoring of a professional with psychopathic traits, the greater are his/her opportunities for self-regulation in stressful and intense sales situations. According to the authors, the correlation between Narcissism and self-monitoring may reflect the need of an individual with narcissistic traits to be admired by other people because of the false self-image as an exceptional, super competent and super talented personality, thus, cultivating a constant desire to confirm the impression of being an extraordinary person [20]. For these individuals it is more important to convey a certain image than to demonstrate real achievements, which leads to self-monitoring [21]. At the same time, it is noted that in a long-time perspective they are unable to maintain the originally created positive self-image [22], nor they are able to maintain long-term effective interaction [21]. For successful fulfillment of professional duties and the development of relationships with clients, self-monitoring allows them to constantly maintain the created image of a successful and efficient manager and enjoy the closed deals.

The research question and the purpose of this study are defined based on the theoretical principles of the Dark Triad model [4], as well as theoretical principles of the nature and essence of self-monitoring [23]. The basis of this study is understanding of the Dark Triad and self-monitoring as heterogeneous constructs, the individual manifestations of which are ambiguous.

*The purpose of the study:* to study the links between the negative personality traits and self-monitoring among sales managers.

*Research question:* "Whether there is a link between the negative personality traits and self-monitoring among sales managers?"

## Materials and methods

The study was conducted among sales managers. The sample size was 98 respondents. The sample was homogeneous. All participants were men aged 22 to 46 years ( $M = 33.3$ ,  $SD = .63$ ,

$Mdn = 34$  years.). The age distribution of participants does not correspond to the normal distribution: skewness  $-0.145$  ( $SES = .24$ ) and kurtosis  $-0.92$  ( $SEK = .48$ ).

### Study methods

Dark Triad of Personality - D3-Short (Paulhus) [24], in Yegorova and colleagues' adaptation [25]. The method aims to diagnose the three negative (*dark*) personality traits – Machiavellianism, non-clinical narcissism and non-clinical psychopathy. These features are interconnected, however, relatively independent constructs, which are similarly manifested in interpersonal interaction, reinforcing each other.

18-Item Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad) [26], in Polezayeva's adaptation [27]. The method aims to measure social self-control, the ability to exercise control over own behavior and to manage the impression produced.

### Results and discussion

Due to the fact that the distribution of the obtained quantitative data did not correspond to the normal distribution, the non-parametric Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to further process the results of the study. The  $\chi^2$  chi-squared test was used to analyze the differences in distributions. The processing of the obtained data was carried out using SPSS 20.0. The choice of statistical procedures corresponds to the purpose of the study.

According to the data obtained, monotonic correlation relationships are identified (Fig. 1). All Spearman's rank correlation coefficients are statistically significant. Self-monitoring and Machiavellianism ( $r_s(98) = .90, p < .001$ ) and narcissism ( $r_s(98) = .80, p < .001$ ) are positively correlated. A negative correlation was identified between self-monitoring and psychopathy ( $r_s(98) = -.58, p < .001$ ).

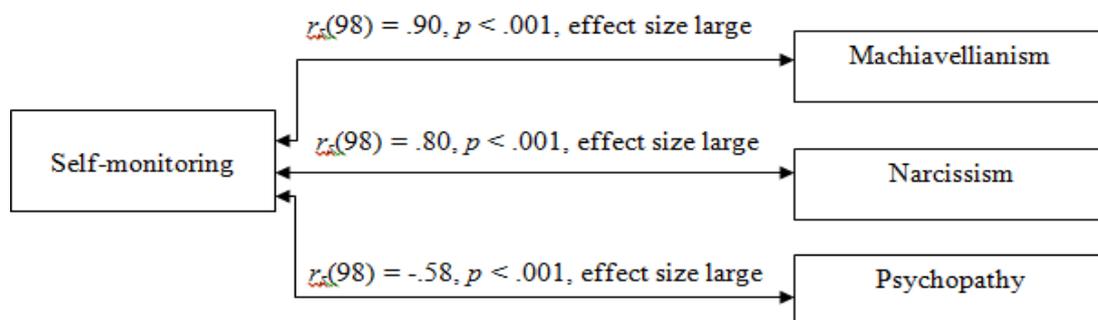


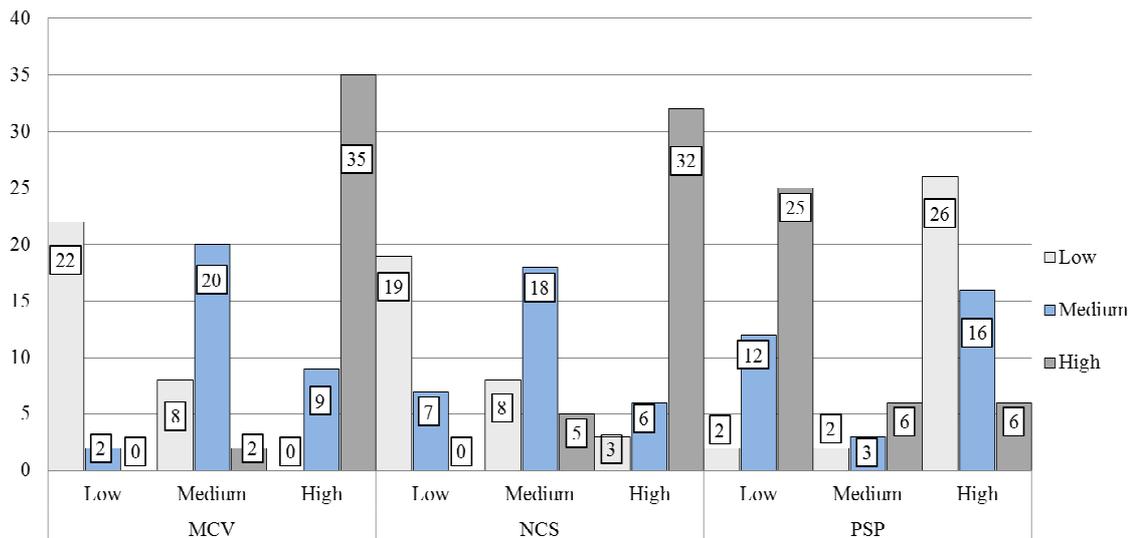
Fig. 1. Revealed correlations between variables

The Pearson's chi-squared test ( $\chi^2$ ) was implemented to examine how significantly the distribution of subgroups of variables differed from each other. Since the distribution of sample data did not correspond to the normal distribution, the indicators of self-monitoring and of the components of the Dark Triad were divided into three groups using quartiles Q1 and Q3. As a result of all the variables division into levels the frequency tables (cross-tables) were obtained and the frequency diagram was constructed (Fig. 2) to visualize the distribution of the indicators depending on each other.

Within the study the following hypotheses were tested:

$H_0$ : The differences in distribution levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy among participants with low, medium and high self-monitoring are random.

$H_1$ : The differences in distribution levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy among participants with low, medium and high self-monitoring are not random.



**Fig. 2. Distributions of participants with low, medium and high indicators of *Dark Triad* features depending on self-monitoring indicators**

As a result of the study, it was found that the distributions differ statistically significantly (Fig. 2): *Machiavellianism (MCV) – Self-monitoring (SMT)* -  $\chi^2(4, N = 98) = 97, p < .001$ ; *Narcissism (NCS) – Self-monitoring (SMT)* -  $\chi^2(4, N = 98) = 65, p < .001$ ; *Psychopathy (PSP) – Self-monitoring (SMT)* -  $\chi^2(4, N = 98) = 34, p < .001$ . In all the cases considered, the hypothesis  $H_1$  was confirmed. The relationship between the negative personality traits of the Dark Triad and self-monitoring indicators was revealed. The distributions of the levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy among participants with low, medium and high self-monitoring differ from each other naturally. The tendency typical for the studied sample of sales managers is revealed: participants with high levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism, and with low and medium levels of psychopathy demonstrate the high level of self-monitoring. The high level of psychopathic traits, as well as low levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism, are observed in participants with low self-monitoring.

As a result of the study, a positive answer was received to the research question: “Whether there is a link between the negative personality traits and self-monitoring among sales managers?” This result is consistent with theoretical assumptions [14;17;21;25;28-29]. The combination of the pronounced Dark Triad personality traits and the high level of self-monitoring [23] allows the sales manager to adapt own behavior to the expectations of the clients and adequately respond to the demands of professional situations. At the same time, the authors [3;13] note that in order to achieve their own and professional interests, individuals affected by the negative Dark Triad features require skills in controlling and managing social perception and own behavior, which is one of the manifestations of self-monitoring in the self-monitoring structure.

Strong positive links at the maximal significance level between the indicators of Machiavellianism and self-monitoring were revealed, which is consistent with the theoretical explanations of the behavior of people with a high level of Machiavellianism associated with self-monitoring [27;28].

The correlation between narcissism and self-monitoring revealed in the study corresponds to the results of the research [30] and demonstrated that narcissism is associated with a high level of self-monitoring. Narcissistic traits of a sales manager are manifested in his/her professional activity, allowing him/her to be engaged in communication, to attract customers, to produce and maintain a favorable impression [14], to have certain career advantages available for the narcissistic individuals [15].

A negative correlation found between psychopathy and self-monitoring demonstrates the manifestation of the protective function of self-monitoring [17]. The high level of self-monitoring allows a sales manager with psychopathic features to control his/her impulsive behavior, thus, preventing imprudent actions while closing deals as well as conflicts with clients.

Based on the frequency analysis, it was revealed that the distribution of levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy among participants with low, medium and high levels of self-monitoring differ from each other naturally. This confirms similar results obtained on samples of participants representing other professional groups [16].

The behavior of sales managers with a high level of Machiavellianism and a high level of self-monitoring largely overlaps. This may be due to the orientation towards their own selfish interests and their reluctance to accept someone else's point of view [31], namely, a client's or a colleague's. The main features of Machiavellianism are emotional coldness [32-33], negativism, increased hostility, external locus of control [34], orientation toward achievements, proneness to lies and manipulation. In order to maintain his/her status, a person with established Machiavellian traits can quickly react to situational changes and easily adjust his/her behavior according to the appropriate role, despite his/her true attitude towards the client or the situation. This ability to manipulate allows to make a favorable impression on the right people. Also, this allows to avoid conflict situations with clients and/or managers. In a situation of stress and instability, high self-monitoring allows not to reveal the situationally manifested features of Machiavellianism to a client [35].

Managers with mildly pronounced Machiavellianism and low self-monitoring are presumably not oriented towards professional goal achievement, are not ambitious. They may prefer to work with regular customers, find it difficult to navigate in the changing conditions of sales, they have a set of specific patterns they employ when closing deals. Customers, colleagues and supervisors usually develop a definite and unchanging opinion about the sales managers of this type [36].

The behavior of a pronounced Narcissist is contradictory: he/she knows how to please people, be charming and create a favorable impression [14; 29], be an outstanding professional. On the other hand, he/she can be aggressive, demonstrative, not to take into account others while considering him/her self to be the best, claim privileges and fight for attention [37]. Established narcissistic traits can nudge a manager to build fraudulent relationships with a client [38], make him/her prone to unethical behavior.

Many of the narcissism features can be manifested in behavior even in the presence of the high self-monitoring level. However, self-monitoring helps the manager maintain a favorable impression for a long time as well as to control his/her aggressive impulses.

Managers with mildly pronounced narcissistic features and low self-monitoring are very responsible, reliable and stable in their relations. However, they do not always take into account the requirements of the changing situation, which can lead to errors in closing deals and a negative assessment by customers [23].

Managers with pronounced psychopathy may demonstrate emotional coldness, low anxiety, a tendency to lie and manipulate, impulsivity, a tendency to take risks. Often they are dissatisfied with their life in general; therefore, they are unhappy with everything [5]. They may not fulfill their professional duties in full, which they are trying to hide. Low self-monitoring does not allow to fully control own behavior and mood, which can lead to periodic decline in the quality of work and to conflicts. Managers with mildly pronounced psychopathy are very careful in their actions, afraid to make a mistake. This impedes prompt decision making and can be an obstacle when closing deals. High self-monitoring makes it possible to exercise a fairly rigid self-control and not to show their internal aspirations (protective function). These qualities may prevent managers from being effective when performing their professional duties.

The limitation of this study was the sample size. Since the variables of the study are the personality constructs and the study revealed strong correlations between them, it seems necessary to run further research to examine whether self-monitoring is a part of the Dark Triad complex.

## Conclusions

1. A positive answer to the research question "Whether there is a link between the negative personality traits and self-monitoring among sales managers?" is received.
2. The distribution of the levels of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy among participants with low, medium, and high levels of self-monitoring is non-random.

3. Descriptions of the manifestations of the Dark Triad negative features coincide with the description of the manifestations of self-monitoring factors.
4. Managers with pronounced Dark Triad features and the high level of self-monitoring have greater potential for successful sales.
5. It seems relevant to conduct further research on a larger sample, taking into account the professional success of sales managers.

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