



The bright and dark sides of the Dark Triad traits among senior managers: effects on organizational commitment

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Received: 5 June 2021 / Accepted: 5 July 2022 / Published online: 29 August 2022
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Abstract

Senior managers play a fundamental role in organizations. They shape organizational strategy and culture, set the mission, including opportunities for new markets, and construct the business models. Their commitment to the organization is vital to organizational performance, yet research on personality traits of senior managers and their commitment to organizations is limited. Drawing on self-affirmation theory, we investigate the consequences of senior managers' 'Dark Triad Traits' (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) for their organizational commitment. We use the three-component model developed by Allen and Meyer (*J Occup Psychol* 63:1–18, 1990) to distinguish affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Our findings from a dataset of 394 senior French managers collected between 2017 and 2018 show that narcissism positively affects continuance commitment and normative commitment. This study contributes to a neglected stream of research investigating the relationship between Dark Triad traits and organizational commitment; contributes to 'destigmatizing' Dark Triad traits, often considered problematic for individuals; and adds to the minimal research currently on manager personality and organizational commitment.

Keywords Dark Triad · Self-affirmation theory · Organizational commitment · Personality

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JEL Classification M12

1 Introduction

Senior managers play a fundamental role in organizations because they shape organizational strategy and culture. Organizations even mirror their senior managers' personalities, values, and actions (Hambrick 2007). Senior managers explain 5 to 20 percent of the variance in a company's outcomes (Crossland and Hambrick 2007), and this powerful effect has increased significantly over the last 40 years (Quigley and Hambrick 2015). Thus, senior manager personality is a crucial predictor of firm performance (Palmer et al. 2019a). So, "to understand why organizations do the things they do, or why they perform the way they do, *we must consider the biases and dispositions of their most powerful actors—their top executives*" (Hambrick 2007, p. 334). Senior management commitment to the organization—defined as a volitional state that reflects a dedication to and responsibility for the organization (Klein et al. 2012, p. 131)—is then vital to its effective functioning, and appreciating the personality traits of senior managers is, therefore, of utmost importance. However, research on the relationship between executive personality and their commitment to organizations is surprisingly thin. Overlooking executives' motivational states, like commitment, is equally problematic because these states are essential drivers of human behavior and performance (Meyer et al. 2002; Steyrer et al. 2008). Despite considerable importance, Steyrer et al. (2008) proposed that organizational commitment is a missing link in leadership studies. Thus, unveiling personality antecedents of senior managers' commitment is essential.

Research has focused mainly on the bright sides of personality traits and their positive effects on the firm (Miller 2015; Palmer et al. 2019b) to the point that so-called 'dark' traits are relatively understudied and misunderstood (Furtner et al. 2017; Palmer et al. 2019b, 2020). However, personalities are multifaceted (Miller 2015), and we should not neglect the murkier and thus negative sides of personality (Palmer et al. 2019b, 2020; Smith et al. 2018). Literature in psychology has increasingly explored the so-called *Dark Triad traits* (for an overview, see Brownell et al. 2021; Hirschfeld and Van Scotter 2018; Marcus and Zeigler-Hill 2015). The *Dark Triad* is a subclinical personality construct that incorporates the primarily negative personality constructs of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus and Williams 2002). Self-promotion, status, dominance, prestige, and monetary aspects motivate those individuals scoring higher on the Dark Triad (Boddy 2006). This combination results, *prima facie*, in socially undesirable behavioral tendencies (Jones and Paulhus 2014), an undesirable and interpersonally problematic behavioral style (Mutschmann et al. 2021; O'Boyle Jr et al. 2012; Piotrowski 2018), and an exploitative social strategy (Jonason and Webster 2010). For instance, the Dark Triad has been associated with selfish and short-term behavior (Jones and Paulhus 2014; Lee and Ashton 2005; Paulhus and Williams 2002). Nonetheless, individuals scoring highly on Dark Triad traits strive for and tend to hold *more* senior management positions (Babiak et al. 2010; Landay et al. 2019; Ramo et al. 2018; Wales et al. 2013; Zhu and Chen 2015) than those not exhibiting such traits, because they

fulfill their desire for status, power, and prestige. However, writings on the dark side of personality in the management and leadership context hypothesize that dark traits might, paradoxically, be *desirable* and even *necessary* for organizations (Brownell et al. 2021; Cragun et al. 2020; Volmer et al. 2016). Ames et al. (2006) and Pautonen et al. (2006) demonstrate that dark personalities have essential leadership skills as they are often charming and assertive. Taken together, these streams of research suggest that senior managers' Dark Triad might have both dark and bright sides.

The self-affirmation theory (SAT) assumes that people behave in specific ways that strengthen their self-views (Cohen and Sherman 2014). Self-affirmation theory is a recursive system where outcomes affirm past behaviors leading an individual to strengthen those behaviors further (Mao et al. 2021b). Holding a senior position indicates prior high job performance, making those individuals feel more performant, which activates efforts to achieve even higher performance levels (Mao et al. 2021b). However, being in a position of power to give orders affirms one's self-view of being an influential person, driving one to show more dominance (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007). The question then is what consequences are there for organizational commitment by senior managers who experience self-affirmation of Dark Triad traits?

Organizational commitment is essential because it relates to critical organizational outcomes. These include turnover and performance (Gong et al. 2009; Steyrer et al. 2008), motivation and job satisfaction (Pool and Pool 2007), well-being, task performance, departure intentions and actual departure (Meyer et al. 2002; Riketta 2008), and identification with the organization (Eisenberger et al. 2010). An absence of organizational commitment is heralded by senior managers who follow *their* course of action *and not that of the organization*.

Cragun et al. (2020) have recently suggested that research into Dark Triad traits needs fresh theoretical insights. Moreover, research is characterized by a lack of attention to executives' commitment, focusing instead on the leadership–subordinate dyad and how senior managers' leadership style and behavior affect *subordinates'* organizational commitment (Cragun et al. 2020; Landay et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2020). Research shows that personality as a disposition affects organizational commitment as a work-related outcome (Meyer et al. 2002; Panaccio and Vandenberghe 2012). Given the utmost importance of senior manager personalities and the potential harm that uncommitted managers can have, it is vital to determine the consequences for theory and practice of Dark Triad personalities on senior managers' organizational commitment. Accordingly, we answer the following research question: *what effects do Dark Triad traits have on senior managers' organizational commitment?*

Using self-affirmation theory, we aim to unravel the bright and dark sides of senior managers' Dark Triad personalities on organizational commitment. Following their desire for prestige, status, and power, Dark Triad personalities should not place a high premium on the organization, prioritizing their career path instead. Dark Triad personalities may exhibit little organizational commitment to the point where they are willing to leave when their interests are frustrated or cannot be furthered by the organization. Indeed, research suggests that narcissists will seek to strongly

affirm their feelings of uniqueness and superiority (Mao et al. 2021b) through recognition and admiration (Back et al. 2013). This suggests that they need to engage in behaviors that are considered praiseworthy in the eyes of others to (re)affirm their self-views (Back et al. 2013; Campbell and Foster 2007; Mao et al. 2021b). Elsewhere, Machiavellians often break the rules (Litvin 2019), acting as antiheroes (Wright 2015) for causes; they are ultimate ends-oriented, capable of performing highly and committed to their cause. Therefore, we explore whether organizational commitment results from Dark Triad senior managers' self-affirmation tendencies.

Our study is based on data collected from a survey of 394 French senior managers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from different activity sectors. It empirically investigates the effects of dark personality traits on executive commitment as a vital work outcome. We go beyond the standard narrative that dark traits are always detrimental for organizations. Instead, we show that Dark Triad personalities have dark *and* bright consequences *for organizational commitment*. Thus, these leaders can have a stable and healthy organizational commitment despite their personalities. Our study contributes to advancing our understanding of the threats and benefits of senior managers' Dark Triad in organizations shedding light on "healthy" *and* "toxic" forms of senior managers' organizational commitment. Guided by self-affirmation theory, we contribute to resolving the purely agentic view of the Dark Triad and its effect on organizational commitment.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Organizational commitment of senior managers

Organizational commitment reflects an individual's overall attachment to an organization (Allen and Meyer 1990; Mowday et al. 1979). The three-component model by Allen and Meyer (1990) proposes a three-dimensional construct distinguishing: (i) Affective Commitment, describing an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Strong affective commitment means that the organization has great personal importance for the individual and he/she wants to continue to belong to the organization. (ii) Continuance Commitment, reflecting an awareness of the costs associated with leaving versus the expected value of remaining with an organization, and (iii) Normative Commitment, referring to someone's acceptance of organizational values and their sense of obligation to stay in the organization. The three-component-model views these three commitment dimensions as a glue to the organization (Meyer et al. 2013). One axiom of organizational commitment theory is that high organizational commitment results in positive outcomes for organizations (Steyrer et al. 2008). Research has extensively explored the situational antecedents of commitment but has been given much less attention to its dispositional antecedent: personality (Meyer et al. 2002; Zimmerman 2008).

Prior studies suggest that among the three components of commitment, affective commitment is more predictive of critical organizational consequences (e.g., turnover, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior) than normative and continuance commitment (e.g., Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran 2005; Meyer

et al. 2002; Mercurio 2015; Solinger et al. 2008). Likewise, psychological states other than commitment, such as affect (Mesmer-Magnus et al. 2012), job satisfaction (Harter et al. 2002), and motivation (Yalabik et al. 2013), have been related to organizational outcomes. However, separate streams of research have also shown that, at the *managerial* level, affective commitment, normative, and continuance commitment are uniquely related to *different* and relevant work-organizational outcomes. Precisely, while managers' affective and normative commitment have been found to influence positive outcomes, such as employee task performance (Loi et al. 2012), organizational performance (Gong et al. 2009), and managers' job involvement (Carmeli 2005), managers' continuance commitment is more predictive of negative outcomes, such as managers' turnover intentions (Guerrero and Herrbach 2009). Notably, senior managers have more responsibility than lower-level managers and, thereby, have a greater impact on organizational outcomes. Taking into account the emergence of the three components of organizational commitment is thus more relevant than focusing on one single component (i.e., affective commitment) or alternative psychological states (i.e., affect, job satisfaction and motivation) to determine how to both optimize senior managers' positive impact and minimize their undermining influence on organizational functioning.

2.2 The Dark Triad and organizational commitment: a self-affirmation perspective

Commitment is an informal contract associating with the motivation to contribute additional discretionary effort in the interests of the collective (Riketta 2002). This indicates a long-term orientation toward the relationship between employee and organization, the desire to develop a stable relationship, a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to realize long-term benefits, and maintain the relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1992). This perfect employee would align his or her decisions with the organization's interests, taking into account all stakeholders, and act in the organization's best interest (Anderson and Weitz 1992).

A large body of the literature has emphasized the impact of situational factors on organizational commitment (e.g., Aubé et al. 2007; Loi et al. 2006; Meyer et al. 2002; Moideenkutty et al. 2001; Panaccio and Vandenberghe 2009). However, a parallel stream of research has progressively emphasized a dispositional approach (Tziner et al. 2008), which suggests that variance in personal characteristics, such as personality traits, might predispose people to experience organizational reality differently, and, thereby, might shape their organizational commitment. Correspondingly, most research into the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment has focused predominantly on the bright sides of personality and the Big Five personality traits. For example, Erdheim et al. (2006) showed significant associations between extraversion and affective, normative, and continuance commitment; neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience with continuance commitment; and agreeableness with normative commitment. Moreover, Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) found that extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism influence affective, normative, and continuance commitment through

affective states. And Choi et al. (2015)) meta-analytically analyzed the relationship between the big five traits and organizational commitment, demonstrating that all traits were positively related to affective and normative commitment; emotional stability, extraversion, and openness to experience were negatively associated with continuance commitment.

Interestingly, the literature on commitment suggests that high levels of commitment are associated with characteristics such as altruism, intrinsic motivation, aligned values, supporting the collective, and long-term organizational goals (Covin et al. 2020; Davis et al. 1997; Hernandez 2008). These characteristics are contrary to people scoring high on the Dark Triad. Typical features of all three Dark Triad traits are a “socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion” (Paulhus and Williams 2002, 557), including selfish, short-term, and agentic behavior (Lee and Ashton 2005; Paulhus and Williams 2002). Persons with elevated Dark Triad levels are rational utility maximizers who act in self-interest, pursuing actions that benefit them, regardless of the consequences to the organization (Hernandez 2012). Thus, these premises seem to suggest that Dark Triad traits might represent an impediment to organizational commitment.

However, the few empirical studies examining the Dark Triad-commitment relationship have provided mixed findings. Precisely, Veres et al. (2020) and Koo and Lee (2021) provided evidence for the harmful effects of Dark Triad traits on commitment by showing, respectively, that psychopathy was negatively related to affective commitment, and that Machiavellianism was associated negatively with affective commitment and, positively with continuance commitment. Yet, Michel and Bowling (2013) proposed and found that narcissism positively predicted affective commitment, whereas Kaufmann et al. (2021) showed that narcissism and Machiavellianism were positively related to normative.

When taken together, these premises seem to point to two competing perspectives, namely managers serving their interests *versus* serving the organization's interests. This suggests that Dark Triad traits might bear the seeds for both improved and impaired organizational commitment. However, none of these earlier investigations have incorporated the three dimensions of Dark Triad and three components of commitment into an integrative model. Such a fragmented and scattered study of the Dark Triad-commitment relationship has thus resulted in a limited understanding of how the various Dark Triad traits might differentially relate to affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Addressing this issue is essential to advance theory on the threats and benefits of senior managers' Dark Triad and provide new, evidence-based practical information on how to promote “healthy” forms and prevent “toxic” forms of commitment among senior managers with varying dark-side dispositional tendencies.

We contend that self-affirmation theory represents a valuable framework to account for the differential relationships of Dark Triad traits with the three components of organizational commitment. Self-affirmation theory suggests that managers will pursue collective orientations and strive to achieve organizational strategic goals *if it serves their self-affirmation*. In this sense, some researchers observe that an individual's sense of control, a salient characteristic of narcissism (Resick et al. 2009) and Machiavellian (Rayburn and Rayburn 1996) senior managers, plays a

crucial role in shaping an organization-oriented attitude. We believe that self-affirmation theory provides the missing theoretical apparatus to reconcile competing expectations about when senior managers exhibiting Dark Triad traits will remain committed to the organization and the forms of that commitment.

Self-affirmation theory contains three assumptions germane to senior management commitment. First, self-affirmation theory assumes that individuals seek conditions that affirm their favorable self-views (Back et al. 2013; Campbell and Foster 2007). Second, self-affirmation characterizes an individual's system of psychological and behavioral tendencies in which their self-image motivates behaviors that strengthen their self-views further (Cohen and Sherman 2014; Sherman and Cohen 2006). Third, maintaining self-integrity, a sense in which an individual feels capable and in control of important outcomes, is central to the self-affirmation process (Cohen and Sherman 2014). Individuals will then engage in actions that maintain their self-integrity (Mao et al. 2021b). Senior managers have already reached an elevated position indicative of higher performance. To some extent, those exhibiting the Dark Triad might have arrived in that position nefariously, having caused harm to others (e.g., Palmer et al. 2020; Spain et al. 2014), and by taking risks (O'Reilly et al. 2014). Consequently, they are high performers, and research suggests that narcissist CEOs who have been with their firm longer receive more total direct compensation, more valuable shareholdings, and have larger pay discrepancies over other executives (O'Reilly et al. 2014). This suggests that commitment will increase their financial gain, serving and affirming their self-interest around money, status, and self-image. They are star employees (Call et al. 2015), a status often befitting of their traits.

Our study draws on self-affirmation theory explores the different effects that each Dark Triad trait might exert on the various types of organizational commitment senior managers may exhibit. We develop our hypotheses for each Dark Triad trait in the next section.

2.3 Senior managers' Dark Triad and organizational commitment: development of hypotheses

2.3.1 Psychopathy

Individuals with subclinical psychopathy tendencies aspire to leadership positions to fulfill their desire for power, prestige, control (Babiak et al. 2010; Landay et al. 2019), and money (Boddy 2006). Babiak and Hare (2006) and Gudmundsson and Southey (2011) demonstrate that the percentage of psychopaths in senior management are higher than the average percentage in the general population. In self-affirmation terms, an integral part of subclinical psychopathy is anti-sociality (Hare and Neumann 2008), a lack of conscience (Boddy 2006; Boddy et al. 2010), remorse, empathy, and responsibility (Crysel et al. 2013; Hare and Neumann 2006). Subclinical psychopaths manipulate and exploit others (Boddy 2006; Jonason et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2018), and the organization's issues are not of any interest to them (Boddy 2006) and other stakeholders. As self-affirming

agents then, they primarily act in their favor and not in the company's one (Boddy et al. 2010). Accordingly, subclinical psychopaths will not have a significant emotional attachment to the organization.

Furthermore, because of their lack of empathic concern for others, psychopath managers will likely engage in more conflictual interpersonal relationships with other organizational members (Baysinger et al. 2014), making these managers feel less socially appreciated, valued, and liked. As these senior managers do not feel cared for and do not enjoy positive esteem by others, they might consequently develop a weaker affective commitment to the social environment to which they belong (Buchanan 1974; Vinarski-Peretz et al. 2011). We, therefore, predict the following:

Hypothesis 1a Psychopathy negatively influences senior managers' affective commitment.

Concordant with their impulsive nature, psychopaths continuously seek thrill (Paulhus and Williams 2002) and stimulation (Hare and Neumann 2006), but also power. Being in a senior executive position affords those senior managers with psychopathy traits opportunities to affirm their self-view of being a powerful and influential person (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007). Under self-affirmation theory, those with elevated psychopathy scores tend to achieve more dominance (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007) because self-affirmation functions as a recursive, self-reinforcing system (Call et al. 2015; Cohen et al. 2009). Thus, organizational psychopaths would believe that, given the consolidated power position in their current organization, the possibility for them to use such position to achieve their self-affirmation purposes would be lost or significantly reduced if they leave the organization. As they have shaped their organization's strategy and culture, they are well placed to benefit and appropriate wealth from remaining with the organization for longer. Since the perception of the costs associated with leaving the organization form the basis of continuance commitment (Meyer et al. 2002), we, therefore, expect psychopath senior managers to exhibit higher levels of continuance commitment to the organization.

Likewise, psychopaths lack the social skills to be sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of other organizational members (Baysinger et al. 2014), thus being unable to build the social networks that facilitate the move to a new organization (Roberts et al. 2008; Watson and Clark 1997). Consequently, such a reduced network-building capacity would strengthen managers' expectation that the costs of leaving their current organization are higher than expected benefits. From a self-affirmation perspective, psychopath senior managers would then believe that the risks of not affirming their favorable self-views are higher by leaving than by remaining in their organization, resulting in a stronger continuance commitment to the organization.

Hypothesis 1b Psychopathy positively influences senior managers' continuance commitment.

Normative commitment reflects the desire to behave morally right rather than fulfill personal goals. Normatively committed individuals are loyal to an organization because they believe they should be. Being primarily concerned with personal enrichment and success (Boddy 2006), organizational psychopaths lack morals (Jonason and Luévano 2013), and their primary values are power, money, and prestige that come along with managerial positions (Maibom 2005; Smith et al. 2016) and not that of the organization they work for.

Moreover, it is worth recalling that high levels of normative commitment indicate that the employee/manager feels indebted toward the organization due to the valuable benefits received from it. As such, normative commitment reflects the idea of reciprocity (Panaccio and Vandenberghe 2012). Because of their lack of empathic skills, psychopaths might be unable to resolve differences related to values, attitudes, and task behaviors with other members, thus being more likely to experience relational conflict (Baysinger et al. 2014). As a result, psychopaths are unlikely to find social workplace interaction particularly supportive and rewarding of their need for self-affirmation. Consequently, they would be less likely to feel that they owe their organizational environment loyalty in return. This might lead them to experience a reduced sense of duty and obligation toward the organization, resulting in a lower normative commitment (Zimmerman 2008). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1c Psychopathy negatively influences senior managers' normative commitment.

2.3.2 Narcissism

Among the Dark Triad traits, narcissism is the most studied (Kraus et al. 2020; Palmer et al. 2020). Narcissists are convinced of their superiority and strongly need self-affirmation (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). They prefer to take risks (Buyl et al. 2019), work outside rules and routines (Smith and Webster 2018), and embark on ambitious and bold activities highly visible to a respected audience (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007; Wallace and Baumeister 2002) to achieve self-affirmation. As well, they believe to be more intelligent, innovative, creative (Mao et al. 2021b), or competent than anyone else (Campbell et al. 2011) and feel entitled, resulting in dominance and attention-seeking (Campbell et al. 2004; Lee and Ashton 2005). Their primary behavioral motivator is self-enhancement (Campbell et al. 2004) and personal aspiration for admiration, power, prestige, status (Gudmundsson and Southey 2011; Jonason and Luévano 2013), applause, and reward (Foster et al. 2009; Foster and Trimm 2008). A longer tenure in the organization facilitates many of these functions because the senior executive will have time to accumulate more power (Hambrick and Fukutomi 1991). This feature diminishes upon departure (Hughes et al. 2010).

Affective commitment defines the extent to which an individual feels emotionally attached to an organization and sees the firm's success as their own. Narcissists are unlikely to have any such care. Their self-affirmation derives from themselves, not from emotional attachment to an organization or any sense of its success. Narcissists are self-absorbed (Mao et al. 2021b), lacking interest, empathy, or concern for others (Campbell et al. 2011; Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

According to management literature, narcissism is commonly found among CEOs (Buyl et al. 2019; Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007; O'Reilly et al. 2014; Resick et al. 2009). Narcissists' need for influence, power, and admiration are characteristics believed as prerequisites for senior managers, which motivate subclinical narcissists "rather than empathetic concern for constituents and institutions" (Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006, p. 617). Therefore, organizations do not have great personal importance to subclinical narcissists, reducing the likelihood that affective commitment features in their self-affirmation. Subclinical narcissists primarily act for their self-enhancement and extract resources from the collective for their own intentions and to affirm their own self-interest. Accordingly, their emotional and cognitive bond, their affective commitment, is primarily guided by personal interests. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a Narcissism negatively influences senior managers' affective commitment.

Narcissistic CEOs tend to believe that their understanding of corporate strategy is superior to others' (Zhu and Chen 2015). Further, narcissists have a strong desire to leave behind a grand, admirable legacy of achievement (Wales et al. 2013). Commensurately, research on narcissists suggests that narcissists will seek to strongly affirm these feelings of uniqueness and superiority (Mao et al. 2021b). In doing so, narcissists will actively seek recognition and admiration (Back et al. 2013), suggesting that they need to engage in behaviors that are considered praiseworthy in the eyes of others to achieve such affirmation of their self-views (Back et al. 2013; Campbell and Foster 2007; Mao et al. 2021b). Accordingly, remaining in a CEO position reinforces their feeling of success and superiority and will fulfill their need for admiration, power, prestige, status, or leaving behind a legacy. Moreover, narcissistic behaviors represent a means for people to acquire external rewards (e.g., higher compensation), approval and recognition from others; thus, narcissists are likely to be motivated by a strong internal compulsion to gain superiority over others as well as to obtain their approval, loyalty, and respect (Sedikides et al. 2019). These self-affirmation tendencies represent external forms of motivation. That is, the motivation stemming from an individual's engagement in an activity to address external constraints, such as gaining a reward or avoiding a loss (Sheldon et al. 2017). Importantly, continuance commitment originates primarily from such external constraints (the costs of leaving the organization) and, thereby, likely reflects an external form of motivation (Battistelli et al. 2013; Johnson et al. 2010). This line of thought suggests that narcissistic senior managers' external motivational tendencies would lead them to ascribe higher importance to the constraints associated with leaving the organization, thus being likely to develop a higher continuance commitment. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2b Narcissism positively influences senior managers' continuance commitment.

Narcissists are disagreeable extroverts (Paulhus 2001) and have self-perceptions of entitlement, shameless self-admiration, and excessive arrogance (Wales et al. 2013). When their ego is threatened, they dismiss any feedback, rules, and regulations. Instead, they make decisions guided by their self-centered view and ignore any information to the contrary (Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006). Accordingly, they do not necessarily accept *any* organizational values but those *they* shaped. Narcissistic senior executives are very well-placed to shape those values, and senior managers shape their organizations to mirror their senior managers' personalities, values, and actions—their own image (Hambrick 2007). Because of this, narcissistic senior managers might develop a unique sense of organizational identification in which they do not define themselves in terms of the organization. Instead, they derive a sense of an organization's identity from their own identity—a non-conventional form of identification that can result in a more significant concern for the organization. Importantly, Galvin et al. (2015) argued that narcissistic individuals with a strong sense of control and influence would be more likely to see themselves as highly important to the organization's identity. Due to the high power and status position that senior managers inherently have in the organization (Kerfoot and Knights 1993), their narcissism-induced sense of control and influence is particularly pronounced and will feed into the feeling that *they* are *the* driving forces of the organization. As such, narcissistic senior managers might have an exaggerated perception of the magnitude of the impact exerted by their work and decisions on the organizational identity (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007). This inflated perception of the importance of their contribution to what the organization is and will be might lead narcissistic senior managers to believe that their presence in the organization is indispensable to further organizational functioning. Narcissists have enhanced control perceptions regarding their work, and as a result, they tend to internalize their jobs as aspects of the self (Mao et al. 2021a; Pierce et al. 2003). This internalization process reflects an autonomous form of motivation that leads the individual to endorse organizational goals fully and, correspondingly, to experience an augmented sense of moral obligation to act on behalf of the company (Deci and Ryan 1985; Meyer and Parfyonova 2010). This line of thought is consistent with the self-affirmation theory, which suggests that narcissistic senior managers would feel responsible for achieving organizational goals because they want to be and maintain control of such relevant outcomes and, thereby, maintain self-integrity. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2c Narcissism positively influences senior managers' normative commitment.

2.3.3 Machiavellianism

Similar to the other two Dark Triad traits, Machiavellians tend to choose management careers (Fehr et al. 1992). They enjoy working and feel at ease in unstructured and stressful work settings with face-to-face competition (Fehr et al. 1992), offering them autonomous decision-making and power (O'Boyle et al. 2012). Machiavellians often break the rules (Litvin 2019) and appear as antiheroes

(Wright 2015), capable of performing highly and remaining committed to their cause. Their aptitude to appropriately forecast future benefits and focus on the best winning strategy makes them successful in risky and unpredictable situations, especially those requiring improvisation (Bereczkei et al. 2013). However, compared to the other Dark Triad personalities, they do not have bold visions but concentrate on in-depth focus and analysis (Bedell et al. 2006), which can include (somewhat surprisingly) long-term strategic planning (Jones and Paulhus 2009; Rauthmann and Will 2011) and a long-term orientation. Together with charisma and effectiveness, these characteristics make them ideal senior managers (Bedell et al. 2006), although their high result orientation only serves to accomplish their personal goals (Fehr et al. 1992). Machiavellians' behavioral motives are power, money, and status (Jones and Paulhus 2009). For example, Elias (2013) shows that individuals with higher levels of Machiavellianism are attracted more to money than individuals with low Machiavellianism. Zettler et al. (2011) indicate that Machiavellianism positively relates to self-related career commitment and negatively to organizational, supervisor, and team commitment. As a result, we expect that Machiavellians are emotionally unattached to their organization, and the organization carries little importance for them. Therefore, we expect Machiavellian senior managers to exhibit low affective commitment:

Hypothesis 3a Machiavellianism negatively influences senior managers' affective commitment.

Machiavellians are emotionless, rational, and long-term oriented (Rauthmann and Will 2011) to accomplish their personal goals (Fehr et al. 1992). Sakalaki et al. (2007) found that Machiavellianism positively correlated with an economic locus of control; they are less intrinsically motivated at work. Being cold calculators and acting self-beneficially to achieve their long-term goals of self-promotion, Machiavellian senior managers will try to maintain the position that best fits their self-interest and self-image in the long term. Machiavellians then are ends-oriented, capable of performing highly and exhibiting an unusually high commitment to their cause (Wright 2015). Given their long-term orientation and tendencies to shape organizational design features to their benefit (Lewin and Stephens 1994), we expect their behavior to foster high continuance commitment. Moreover, it is worth highlighting that continuance commitment tends to arise when the individual perceives increased sunk costs associated with alternative employment options. These include within-organization personal investments in knowledge, skills, and networks that are less likely to apply to other organizations (Meyer and Allen 1991). The Machiavellianism literature suggests that such a cost-based form of commitment might be prominent among Machiavellians since they are susceptible to the investments made in a given context and to the related costs (Koo and Lee 2021). Indeed, changing employment involves substantial costs in adjusting to the new organization and building new networks. Thus, the highly calculative mindset of Machiavellians should enhance their preferences for remaining in their current company unless they detect significantly better opportunities elsewhere

(Koo and Lee 2021). Given the high importance they ascribe to their investments in an organization and to the related costs of leaving, Machiavellians are likely to show a high level of continuance commitment. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3b Machiavellianism positively influences senior managers' continuance commitment.

The conferring of powerful, ownership-based positions is generally regarded as a good treatment of the individual from the organization when the recipient sees it as an opportunity for control and influence and in the organization (Culpepper et al. 2004). The need for control and influence is particularly salient for people with higher levels of Machiavellianism (Rauthmann and Will 2011; Rayburn and Rayburn 1996). Accordingly, Machiavellian senior managers should perceive their high-power position in the organization as a favorable treatment, affirming their self-image and self-integrity under self-affirmation theory (Cohen and Sherman 2014). Importantly, Machiavellians are particularly sensitive to the degree of imbalance in their exchange relationships (Koo and Lee 2021). Consequently, exposure to personally beneficial conditions would motivate Machiavellians to display a higher felt obligation to restore the balance in the social exchange with their organization by engaging in behaviors that favor the organization (Blau 1964; Kessler et al. 2010). This is reflected in a more substantial normative commitment (Gouldner 1960; Meyer and Allen 1997). Moreover, Machiavellians value those work situations that serve their interests and, thereby, strive to take advantage of the opportunities provided by these situations and by the people involved (Zettler et al. 2011). This implies that Machiavellian senior managers might also regard their engagement in professional obligations as an opportunity to gain personal benefits. Thus, Machiavellians' manipulative tendencies can increase their sense of loyalty to the organization as a means to obtain personal returns on their investments at work and with their colleagues (Kaufmann et al. 2021). As a consequence, they will adopt a transactional approach to organizational commitment in which their professional obligation to sustain the organization is seen as instrumental to secure personal benefits that would nurture their self-affirmation needs. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3c Machiavellianism positively influences senior managers' normative commitment.

Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual framework.

3 Method

3.1 Sample and data collection

Our study is based on primary data collected through a survey administered between 2017 and 2018. We sent email invitations with a questionnaire link to approximately

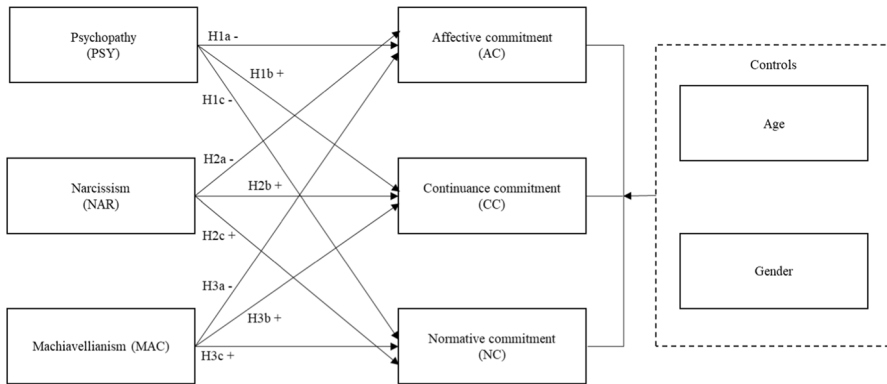


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

6,000 French senior managers¹ and CEOs, randomly selected from the directory of French companies (AEF). This directory includes more than 2.5 million SMEs and large companies from different sectors (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, education)² registered in the network of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI). We limited our data collection in the AEF to SMEs according to the definition set by the European Commission (2005). Such a choice was motivated by the fact that French SMEs are the key drivers of innovation and the national economy in general (OECD 2019). Hence, not only CEOs play a key strategic role for innovation but also senior managers who are primarily responsible for human resources, participate in the formulation of strategy, and thus have decision-making power in French SMEs (Korosec 2006). Accordingly, we included a screening question at the beginning of the survey to determine whether the respondent is a senior manager or a CEO. Respondents with low-level management status (e.g., middle/intermediate managers) were not included in the survey.

We first administered a pilot questionnaire to about 20 managers from AEF who voluntarily agreed to answer and provide their feedback. The questionnaire was redesigned to improve clarity and prevent ambiguous questions. Participants interested in responding to our questionnaire were able to click on the embedded link in the email to be directed to the survey website.

A total of 451 responses were received, out of which 394 were employed managers and 57 were owners of their firms. The response rate was 7.5% and thus comparable to numerous other studies in organizational behavior research (Anseel et al. 2010) science. We then excluded the subsample of owners from our dataset to prevent possible sample heterogeneity bias and “to provide a stronger test of

¹ In France, senior managers and CEOs have the status of employees and can be a company executive either by their education level (Bachelor’s degree or master’s degree), or by their salary level, or by their supervisory role, or by their accomplished responsibilities (R epublique Fran aise 2021).

² Using the French nomenclature of activity sectors classified by the French National Institute of statistics and economic studies (INSEE).

Table 1 Overview of sample statistics

	Sample size (n = 394)	Mean
Gender		
Female	206 (52.28%)	–
Male	188 (47.72%)	–
Age (years)		
≤ 29	195	25
30–44	113	36
45–59	74	52
≥ 60	12	62
Monthly net salary (euros)		
< 1000	19	1000
1000–less than 2000	178	1500
2000–less than 3000	102	2500
3000–less than 5000	55	4000
≥ 5000	40	8700

theory” with a homogenous sample (Calder et al. 1981, p. 200). Most importantly, employed senior managers are more likely to be committed to their organizations in affective, continuance, and normative manners, while owners’ organizational commitment is often affective and naturally follows from the alignment between their personal interests as shareholders and their interests as managers of SMEs (Zahra et al. 2007). Thus, the final sample contains data from 394 senior managers whose companies operate across various economic sectors (industry, commerce, and services). These managers’ experience in such a position ranges from 1 to 35 years. Respondents were between 29 and 62 years of age, with an overall average age of 35 (see Table 1). The sample comprised 47.72% men and 52.28% women. The reported net salary is around 2,000 euros. These statistics are in line with the remuneration of salaried executives in French SMEs, which remains very often lower than those in large companies as reported in some studies (Dreher et al. 2019) and generally varies with the firm size.

3.2 Measures

All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents indicated their agreement with a set of statements ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. All measures are validated in existing management literature and display good reliability with Cronbach alpha exceeding 0.70 (Hair et al. 2010). The Appendix reports the items used in this study.

3.2.1 Independent variables: Dark Triad personality traits

Dark Triad personality traits are measured using items from Jonason and Webster (2010) consisting of: *Psychopathy* (four items; $\alpha_{PSY} = 0.739$; e.g., “I tend to lack remorse”; “I tend to be callous or insensitive”), *Narcissism* (four items;

$\alpha_{\text{NAR}}=0.835$; e.g., “I tend to want others to admire me”; “I tend to want others to pay attention to me”), *Machiavellianism* (four items; $\alpha_{\text{MAC}}=0.838$; e.g., “I have used deceit or lied to get my way”; “I tend to manipulate others to get my way”).

3.2.2 Dependent variables: organizational commitment dimensions

We measured organizational commitment using valid items developed by Meyer et al. (1993), reflecting its three dimensions: affective commitment (AC: three items; $\alpha_{\text{AC}}=0.744$; e.g., “I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (reversed scale)”; “I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization (reversed scale)”), continuance commitment (CC: four items; $\alpha_{\text{CC}}=0.813$; e.g., “It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to”; “I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization”), and normative commitment (NC: five items; $\alpha_{\text{NC}}=0.834$; e.g., “I would feel guilty if I left my organization now”; “This organization deserves my loyalty”).

3.2.3 Control variables

We included age and gender as control variables because meta-analyses suggest their effects on organizational commitment (Cohen 1993; Meyer and Allen 1991). For instance, relatively younger people with less work experience may be more committed because they have fewer job opportunities to leave the organization (Meyer and Allen 1984). Contrary to increased age, people with more accumulated work experience have more chances of finding another job, decreasing their continuance commitment (Cohen 1993). Further, it has been suggested that women are more likely to be committed to their organizations than men due to job market-related barriers (e.g., equal treatment and pay, flexible work arrangements, and promotions (Chusmir 1982; Scandura and Lankau 1997). As women value job stability, such barriers may increase their perceived costs of leaving because they fear not finding a job (Scandura and Lankau 1997).

4 Results

We first assessed the measurement scales’ convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. A confirmatory factor analysis verified the factor structure of the reflective constructs. Table 2 shows adequate convergent validity as all items load onto their corresponding constructs with values exceeding 0.60 (Hair et al. 2010). As shown in Table 2, all item loadings are significant (t-values exceed 1.96, and zero is not a part of the confidence interval), which supports the convergent validity of the measurement scales.

Our results also show good discriminant validity because the square root of AVE values are larger than the correlations between the construct and all other constructs in Table 3 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Table 3 reports adequate reliability because all Cronbach’s alpha (α) and Rho values (ρ) exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Jöreskog 1971; Nunnally 1978).

Table 2 Item loadings and statistics

Scale item	Mean	Standard deviation	Item loadings	Standard error	t-value	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)
<i>AC</i>							
AC1	3.737	1.037	0.748	0.123	3.109	0.067	0.658
AC2	3.422	1.219	0.825	0.103	3.482	0.184	0.586
AC3	3.443	1.326	0.862	0.077	6.290	0.294	0.719
<i>CC</i>							
CC1	2.575	1.354	0.813	0.071	4.340	0.165	0.489
CC2	2.395	1.361	0.859	0.064	6.133	0.305	0.597
CC3	2.397	1.274	0.827	0.085	3.439	0.095	0.422
CC4	2.396	1.080	0.693	0.070	3.569	0.067	0.443
<i>NC</i>							
NC1	2.413	1.220	0.689	0.033	4.976	0.085	0.232
NC2	2.258	1.271	0.830	0.026	10.219	0.222	0.352
NC3	2.494	1.196	0.803	0.028	9.945	0.207	0.340
NC4	2.395	1.196	0.793	0.025	11.684	0.233	0.334
NC5	2.789	1.150	0.748	0.030	9.410	0.224	0.349
<i>MAC</i>							
MAC1	1.886	0.992	0.826	0.020	13.998	0.229	0.324
MAC2	1.569	0.820	0.775	0.023	12.055	0.225	0.334
MAC3	2.165	1.069	0.808	0.022	12.904	0.233	0.336
MAC4	1.845	0.979	0.868	0.020	18.788	0.333	0.415
<i>PSY</i>							
PSY1	1.952	1.059	0.640	0.044	5.414	0.137	0.339
PSY2	1.406	0.728	0.834	0.041	10.639	0.355	0.538
PSY3	1.505	0.813	0.776	0.039	8.139	0.206	0.382
PSY4	1.693	0.937	0.728	0.043	7.739	0.249	0.431
<i>NAR</i>							
NAR1	2.437	1.103	0.833	0.023	11.332	0.204	0.312
NAR2	2.594	1.100	0.794	0.021	12.983	0.234	0.325
NAR3	2.579	1.149	0.827	0.021	15.802	0.290	0.384
NAR4	1.927	0.950	0.811	0.028	12.987	0.289	0.421

AC affective commitment, *CC* continuance commitment, *NC* normative commitment, *MAC* Machiavelianism, *PSY* psychopathy, *NAR* narcissism

Further, we tested for multicollinearity issues and common method bias (CMB: Podsakoff et al. 2003). The results show that the inflation variance factor (VIF) for each variable ($VIF_{AC} = 1.094$; $VIF_{CC} = 1.164$; $VIF_{NC} = 1.293$; $VIF_{MAC} = 1.804$; $VIF_{PSY} = 1.475$; $VIF_{NAR} = 1.445$) is below the threshold of 3, indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue in this study (Diamantopoulos and Sigua 2006).

We also tested for CMB using Harman's (1976) one-factor test to separate the artifactual covariance possible in self-reported data (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The

Table 3 Discriminant validity and reliability

	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (ρ)	Correlation of constructs ^a						
			AC	CC	NC	MAC	PSY	NAR	
AC	0.744	0.855	0.813						
CC	0.813	0.877	-0.002	0.800					
NC	0.834	0.883	0.206	0.364	0.774				
MAC	0.838	0.892	-0.070	0.066	0.174	0.820			
PSY	0.739	0.836	-0.119	0.088	0.112	0.559	0.748		
NAR	0.835	0.890	-0.118	0.094	0.226	0.525	0.327	0.817	

Bold values represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

^aDiagonal elements are the square root of the AVE; *MAC* Machiavellianism, *PSY* psychopathy, *NAR* narcissism

results suggest that CMB is not a problem since the first factor only accounts for 23.61% of the variance (far less than 50%). We also controlled for CMB using the unmeasured common latent method (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The results support the absence of CMB and the validity of our measures. Finally, we tested our hypotheses with the total dataset of 394 senior managers. Table 4 contains our regression results.

The results show that two hypotheses (H2b and H2c) are supported. Narcissism has a positive effect on continuance commitment (H2b: $\beta=0.127$; $p=0.027$) and normative commitment (H2c: $\beta=0.179$; $p=0.002$). We observe a significant change in variance (ΔR^2), i.e., 2.5% (CC) and 4.9% (NC), compared to models with control variables (age and gender). The overall model explains 7% in the variance of continuance commitment and 5.2% in the variance of normative commitment. To determine the approximate model fit in PLS, we generated the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) for each model as Henseler et al. (2016) recommend. The results yield SRMR values of 0.06 (<0.08), indicating adequate fit (Hu and Bentler 1999).

5 Conclusion

5.1 Discussion and theoretical contributions

This study set out to understand the effects of the dark side of personality on organizational commitment's affective, continuance, and normative dimensions. Only a few studies have empirically investigated the effects of *personality traits* on executive work outcomes. These studies focus predominantly on positive personality traits and neglect negative, or so-called 'dark', traits. This neglect is worrisome for accurate theory development and theoretical prediction of senior management behavior because, *prima facie*, DT traits reflect behavioral tendencies that are generally perceived as socially undesirable (Jones and Paulhus 2014) or associate with undesirable and interpersonally problematic behaviors (Mutschmann et al. 2021; O'Boyle Jr

Table 4 Main regression results

	Affective commitment (AC)		Continuance commitment (CC)		Normative commitment (NC)	
	Control variables	Main effects	Control variables	Main effects	Control variables	Main effects
	β	β	β	β	β	β
Constant	-0.236 (0.208)	-0.293 (0.209)	-0.378 (0.205)	-0.310*** (0.206)	-0.096 (0.194)	-0.023 (0.193)
Age	0.137** (0.004)	0.124* (0.004)	0.203 (0.004)	0.221*** (0.004)	-0.046 (0.004)	-0.023 (0.004)
Gender	-0.059 (0.100)	-0.029 (0.104)	-0.078 (0.099)	-0.117* (0.102)	0.038 (0.094)	-0.009 (0.095)
Machiavellianism (MAC)		0.041 (0.068)		-0.008 (0.067)		0.074 (0.063)
Psychopathy (PSY)		-0.111 (0.063)		0.079 (0.062)		0.004 (0.058)
Narcissism (NAR)		-0.075 (0.059)		0.127* (0.058)		0.179** (0.054)
R ²	0.021*	0.037*	0.044***	0.070***	0.003	0.052**
ΔR^2		0.016		0.025*		0.049***
X-square	8.140	14.369	17.431	27.439	1.114	17.649
p value	0.017	0.013	0.000	0.000	0.524	0.001

Significant figures are shown in boldface. N = 394. Figures in parentheses are standard errors. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

et al. 2012; Piotrowski 2018), including an exploitative social strategy (Jonason and Webster 2010), and selfish and short-term behavior (Jones and Paulhus 2014; Lee and Ashton 2005; Paulhus and Williams 2002). Nonetheless, individuals scoring highly on Dark Triad traits strive for and tend to hold *more* senior management positions (Babiak et al. 2010; Landay et al. 2019; Ramo et al. 2018; Wales et al. 2013; Zhu and Chen 2015) than those not exhibiting such traits, because they fulfill their desire for status, power, and prestige. However, writings on the dark side of personality in the management and leadership context hypothesize that dark-side traits might, paradoxically, be *desirable* and even *necessary* for organizations (Brownell et al. 2021; Cragun et al. 2020; Volmer et al. 2016), even commensurate of essential leadership skills (Ames et al. (2006); Paunonen et al. (2006)). Our findings add clarity to this debate by revealing greater nuance and complexity to the function of DT traits and executives' organizational commitment.

Motivated by the minimal body of work that presently exists, we connected expectations from self-affirmation theory and managers' Dark Triad personality traits with organizational commitment. Our results from 394 senior French managers show that narcissism positively affects continuance commitment and normative commitment. Prior theorizing on the Dark Triad points to the assumption that narcissists should exhibit little or negative organizational commitment (Elliot and Thrash 2001; Foster et al. 2009; Foster and Trimm 2008) because of the premium they attach to *personal* outcomes such as success, achievement, and rewards. Our results indicate that organizations can fulfill these personal aspirations with dark and bright side implications.

First, Narcissists are visionaries whose passion drives their innovative business approach (Campbell et al. 2011). The positive link between narcissism and normative commitment carries a bright side of this personality trait. Narcissists develop a shared mindset with their organization, reflecting a narcissist's desire to build a sustainable power base and embed themselves within that base, wanting the organization to reflect their vanity, values, and vision. These managers are motivated by utility maximization, a moral obligation, or a personal desire to be associated with social importance or to leave a positive legacy (Ng and Wyrick 2011). By engineering the organization's values in line with their own and having created a solid power base, organizational outcomes then affirm narcissists' normative commitment and fuel their continuance commitment. The organization affirms narcissists' self-views and fosters their self-worth and belief about leaving behind a legacy. The organization reflects the meaning of his/her life and what he/she has accomplished (Dobel 2005), which he/she does not want to leave behind. Self-affirmation theory suggests that narcissistic senior managers behave in a way that strengthens their positive and grandiose self-views further (Cohen and Sherman 2014; Sherman and Cohen 2006). They align their work environment to re-affirm their favorable self-views (Back et al. 2013; Campbell and Foster 2007). For this, they invest time and commitment to the organization instead of themselves only. This is reflected in the positive effect of narcissism on continuance commitment: narcissists place a higher value on staying than quitting. These findings challenge the recursive assumption contained in a self-affirmation theory of DT traits and executive behavior. Self-affirmation theory expects people to behave according to their traits in ways that strengthen their

self-views (Cohen and Sherman 2014). Self-affirmation theory is a recursive system where outcomes affirm past behaviors leading an individual to strengthen and repeat those behaviors (Mao et al. 2021b).

While narcissism is potentially unhelpful, our findings show it is not entirely negative, explaining why narcissists persist in organizations. However, the reason for their commitment may be their aspiration for admiration, power, prestige, or status (Jonason and Luévano 2013; Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006) and the need for reaffirmation. Quitting the enterprise would signify a significant investment to rebuild their image and get the self-affirmation they want. We caution, however, this entirely positive view on narcissists' continuance commitment. It may lose its silver lining because literature (Meyer et al. 2002) shows that continuance commitment is negatively related to desirable work outcomes and CEOs' tenure and attitude toward change are negatively associated (e.g., Musteen et al. 2006). Thus, in the end continuance commitment may not be beneficial for organizations in its sum total. Narcissists' initial visionary and innovative approach may vanish because their commitment to stay with the organization only reflects their need for reaffirmation. From the view of self-affirmation theory, self-affirmation theory leads us to anticipate that all narcissism is bad, but our findings suggest more nuance to this, and scholars should consider at what point narcissism presents a zero-sum or sum-loss scenario. At the very least, our findings shed light on how a self-affirmation theory of executive narcissism and their implications for organizational behaviors and outcomes are at best theoretically long-linked, calling for more subtle assessment of contingencies and intermediate factors.

Together, our results offer fresh scrutiny into the nomological network of self-affirmation theory regarding the Dark Triad and organizational commitment elements. Theoretical expectations grounded in principal-agent theory about the effect of the Dark Triad on organizational commitment appear to be premature and imprecise when viewed from a *purely* negative perspective. Whereas this view has dominated the literature, more recently, the bright upsides of the Dark Triad have been advocated (Smith et al. 2018). Principal-agent theorizing suggests that senior managers high on Dark Triad traits act opportunistically. Instead, our results indicate that their commitment shows some positive facets. Narcissistic managers' behavior is partially pro-organizational, placing a higher utility (unexpectedly) on the organization than on self-serving behaviors. Self-affirmation theory gives an answer to this dark and bright mystery: Narcissists settle in their powerbase with normative commitment, achievement and growth re-affirm their self and their commitment and, in particular, their continuance commitment. However, compared to true stewards, it cannot be expected that narcissists have a deep obligation to the organization because their motives for being committed to the organization is not a collective utility but their personal one reaffirming their grandiose self-views.

5.2 Managerial implications

To achieve their goals, organizations need highly qualified and committed managers (Covin et al. 2020), and the Dark Triad and its relation to workplace outcomes such

as counterproductive work behavior are vital in this consideration. Research has, for example, demonstrated that empowerment, participative strategic planning, and ethical and servant leadership—all not attributes of any of the three dark personality traits—stimulates employees' work attitudes including employees' job satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Kashyap and Rangnekar 2016; Kohtamäki et al. 2012; Liden et al. 2000; Qing et al. 2020). Hence, a recent systematic literature review by Kunz and Sonnenholzner (2022) demonstrates that managerial overconfidence has a positive impact on social resources but a negative impact on procedural resources. Thus, human resource departments and boards of directors may opt for highly committed managers when appointing managers. This applies to the selection and the promotion process for leadership positions. An assertive supervisory board however should then carefully screen these managers to diminish negative influences from a manager with a high level of narcissism. Human resource departments should also consider the importance of favoring an effective work environment where narcissist managers may be committed. However, they should be aware that narcissism may not necessarily be related to effectiveness to supervise narcissist behavior (Grijalva and Newman 2015). Accordingly, we suggest a structured approach for leader selection, such as the one suggested by Heimann et al. (2019). The board of directors is a monitoring device for shareholder interests (Fama and Jensen 1983). Frequent board meetings, experienced board members with long tenure, and board members representing specific ownership groups (Eisenhardt 1989) may be powerful means to understand if a senior manager is a true or a superficial steward or an opportunistic agent.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Despite these promising contributions, our study carries limitations. A limitation of our study is the lack of support for our research model for the most part. Against what we were led to assume based on the theory, psychopathy and Machiavellianism did not significantly affect sub-dimensions of organizational commitment. Similarly, previous literature uncovered non-significant findings between organizational commitment and the Dark Triad traits. Kaufmann et al. (2021), for example, found no significant relationship of narcissism on affective commitment and significant positive relationships with continuance and normative commitment. Machiavellianism and psychopathy showed non-significant relations to continuance commitment, but psychopathy has a negative association with affective commitment and Machiavellianism is positively related to normative commitment. This may indicate that the constructs researched are more complex than captured by our measures and the relationship between Dark Triad traits and organizational commitment is more subtle (behaviorally) than expected. Future research for this should therefore reconsider whether the Dark Triad—commitment linkage is theoretically link-linked at present and consider contingencies and intervening variables that may elucidate further our understanding of these personality features. Future research should also examine contingent associations between Dark Triad personality traits and organizational commitment sub-dimensions by considering contextual factors because Dark Triad

personality traits can be positively related to organizational commitment in one circumstance and negatively associated with it in another one (Kaufmann et al. 2021).

In the tradition of past personality studies (e.g., for an overview see Brandstätter 2011), we attempted to shed light on the DT as independent variables while some researchers argue that personality traits influence organizational outcomes, for example, indirectly (Baum et al. 2001; Rauch and Frese 2000; Utsch and Rauch 2000). A more recent study by Bouncken et al. (2020) indeed demonstrates that the DT traits operate as moderators in the entrepreneurial orientation and business performance relationship. Hence, recent studies on employees' organizational commitment (e.g., Fernández-Mesa et al. 2020; Mihalache and Mihalache 2021) also indicate that personality traits act as moderators. Accordingly, we suggest future research to look at DT traits as moderators of the relationship between relevant boundary conditions and forms of organizational commitment.

In a similar vein, according to trait activation theory, a personal disposition is more likely to be expressed and, therefore, to influence work-related outcomes in "trait-relevant" contexts, which signal to the individual that expressing the focal disposition is appropriate and relevant (Tett and Burnett 2003). This implies that DT traits might be more likely to significantly influence senior managers' organizational commitment in situations that are responsive to the expression of a specific DT trait. Drawing from this perspective, Blickle et al. (2018) hypothesized and showed that managers' psychopathy resulted in lower consideration for subordinates and, ultimately, lower job performance only when ascendancy prospects and prospects for income increases were high. Taken together, these premises suggest that the non-significant relationships between senior managers' DT traits and organizational commitment reported in the present study might be explained by the presence (vs. absence) of trait-relevant situational factors (i.e., moderators) that activate the expression of these traits.

Literature concludes that the manifestations of personality traits across the life span is characterized by stability *and* change (e.g., Costa et al. 2019; McAdams and Olson 2010). Although we controlled for age, we cannot see whether there are subtle changes over time as an individual matures or expresses their range of personality traits in different ways. To be clear, personality traits are generally regarded as stable. But their expression is less sure and characterized by change. In conjunction, scholars should also consider the role of cognition among future studies.

Although Paulhus and Williams (2002), argue that bright, for example the Big Five personality factors (Costa and McCrae 1992) and dark sides of personality are distinct, Smith et al. (2018) suggest that emerging evidence raises unresolved questions about the true uniqueness of dark traits and bright traits. These scholars suggest that the study of dark traits in isolation may miss a more extensive system of effects. We chose not to study them simultaneously in the concern that collecting data on both sets of traits at the same time may lead to erroneous, biased, or misleading responses from managers because of the high likelihood that they would infer a link between positive and negative traits. Future studies should treat this problem with caution and seek to study both sets of traits simultaneously but through data collected from different means, two different time points, or one group versus a separate control group. Even though our study shows the 'bright' sides of narcissism, the evidence for narcissist leaders is still

mixed in literature. Most studies on narcissism and leader effectiveness report either no or negative behaviors depending on the organizational culture (e.g., individualist or collectivist) (Grijalva and Newman 2015). Indeed, further research will be needed to compare narcissist leaders' behaviors in collectivist and individualist cultures, which may help better understand the bright and dark sides of narcissism.

Although the present research aims to understand whether there is an association between Dark Triad personality traits and organizational commitment, the explained variance in organizational commitment is still low ($R^2 < 10\%$). Further research is needed to replicate our study in other contexts, including other variables (e.g., role clarity, resources availability) reported in literature associated with organizational commitment (Chiaburu and Harrison 2008; Cohen 1992, 1993). We recommend scholars also to study the reasons for some apparent commitment among senior managers with Dark Triad personalities. Situational factors (Cragun et al. 2020), such as stock options and an ethical versus unethical stance held by a company (the latter creates room for more self-serving behavior), are of specific concern. An organization may inadvertently generate commitment among Dark Triad personalities by providing a context that furthers their interests. The structure of the organization, for example, may further complicate these matters. For example, agile rather than mechanistic forms of organizing suggest scope for a Dark Triad personality to sneak through and benefit from others' actions to get ahead. These conditions are attractive to subclinical psychopaths and narcissists.

Our focus on organizational commitment as the dependent variable is consistent with the idea that departure can cause sizeable disruptive effects, especially when narcissist, Machiavellian, or psychopathic senior managers shape organizations. Other dependent variables now require investigation. For example, principal-agent theory suggests that managers exhibiting the Dark Triad will build their power to strengthen their wealth and position. A higher potential for disruptive departure is possible under these conditions. In the literature on senior manager change, the effects of a departure are a matter of enduring interest. However, the nature of departure, its conditions, and disruptiveness have received less attention (e.g., Hughes et al. 2010). Contrary, results by Sahin and Ermis (2020) suggest that managers who reported manipulative tendencies and lack of empathy were more likely to continue with their current organization as they are scared to not find other job opportunities due to their individual differences. The study of departure, type, and disruptiveness would thus benefit from incorporating the Dark Triad, focusing on the potential for a recovery or healing period post-departure of a senior manager high in the Dark Triad.

Examining all these boundary conditions in future studies will be essential to enhance current understanding of the influence of senior managers' Dark Triad traits on organizational commitment.

Appendix: List of items

Organizational Commitment (Meyer et al. 1993): 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree—5 = strongly agree)

Affective commitment ($\alpha_{AC}=0.744$)

- AC1. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization
 AC2. I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization
 AC3. I do not feel like part of the family at my organization

Continuance commitment ($\alpha_{CC}=0.813$)

- CC1. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to
 CC2. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now
 CC3. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization
 CC4. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives

Normative commitment ($\alpha_{NC}=0.834$)

- NC1. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now
 NC2. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now
 NC3. This organization deserves my loyalty
 NC4. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it
 NC5. I owe a great deal to my organization

Dark Triad Personality Traits (Jonason and Webster 2010): 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree—5 = strongly agree)

Machiavellianism ($\alpha_{MAC}=0.838$)

- MAC1. I have used deceit or lied to get my way
 MAC2. I tend to manipulate others to get my way
 MAC3. I have used flattery to get my way
 MAC4. I tend to exploit others towards my own end

Psychopathy ($\alpha_{PSY}=0.739$)

- PSY1. I tend to lack remorse
 PSY2. I tend to not be too concerned with morality or the morality of my actions
 PSY3. I tend to be callous or insensitive
 PSY4. I tend to be cynical

Narcissism ($\alpha_{NAR}=0.835$)

- I tend to want others to admire me
 I tend to want others to pay attention to me
 I tend to seek prestige or status
 I tend to expect special favors from others
-

Acknowledgments This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Funding Open access funding provided by University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria.

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