



Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism understood as political realism is supposedly an amoral doctrine.

From: [Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics \(Second Edition\)](#), 2012

Related terms:

[Empathy](#), [Locus of Control](#), [Personality Trait](#), [Narcissism](#), [Dark Triad](#), [Agreeableness](#), [Impulsivity](#), [Neuroticism](#), [Psychopathy](#)

Machiavellianism

M. Ramsay, in [Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics \(Second Edition\)](#), 2012

Abstract

Machiavellianism is a term derived almost exclusively from Machiavelli's advice in *The Prince*. Machiavellianism is associated with the doctrine of moral expediency and deviousness in political actions; the divorce of politics from private morality; and the justification of all political means, even the most unscrupulous when the interests of the state are at stake. Machiavellianism is generally interpreted as an immoral doctrine, and so is used as a term of reproach and dishonor. But Machiavelli's arguments have also been seen as recognition of the realities of political life, and so some view Machiavellianism as amoral, objective, or descriptive, rather than immoral. Contemporary writers grappling with the problem of the need for 'dirty hands' in politics see in Machiavellianism a justification for a morality appropriate to political actions, different from principles that govern private life. Machiavelli's enduring contribution to political thought and practice is the remarkably resilient idea that politics involves the transcendence or violation of ordinary moral principles; that fraud, force, lies, and violence are justified because they are necessary for political success.

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Measures of Dark Personalities

Delroy L. Paulhus, Daniel N. Jones, in [Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Constructs](#), 2015

Validity

Convergent/Concurrent

The MACH* correlated .63 with the 15 remaining Mach IV items. Moreover, the MACH* correlations were similar to those of the original Mach IV scale (with the MACH* items removed). Despite the reduction to five items, the criterion correlations were only slightly weaker. MACH* also correlated with a full range of self-reported manipulation tactics including betrayal (.40) and revenge (.39) (Rauthmann, 2013).

Divergent/Discriminant

Compared with the full Mach IV, MACH* showed lower correlations with [narcissism](#) and Machiavellianism. These reductions were evident even after disattenuation was used to control the differential reliabilities of the full Mach IV

and the trimmed version.

Construct/Factor Analytic

A confirmatory factor analysis revealed a clear fit to a unidimensional model (Rauthmann, 2013).

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Leadership and dark personalities

Cynthia Mathieu, in [Dark Personalities in the Workplace](#), 2021

Machiavellian leadership

Machiavellianism favors leader emergence in low structures (Okane & Stinson, 1974). Managers high on Machiavellianism also score high on “need for power” and low on “consideration” dimensions of leadership (Al-Jafary, Aziz, & Hollingsworth, 1989). Manager’s Machiavellianism is associated with authoritarian leadership and abusive supervision (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). However, Wisse and Sleebos (2016) found that the relationship between Machiavellianism and supervisors’ abusive supervision was only present when the supervisors’ positions gave them high levels of power. This last finding is an example of how Machiavellian individuals adapt to their surroundings to better manipulate and get what they want; they wait until they perceive that they have enough power to use abusive behaviors toward their subordinates. This also means that, given more power, supervisors with Machiavellian traits will abuse their subordinates. This may be, in part, explained by the fact that Machiavellianism is associated with low ethical orientation (Rayburn & Rayburn, 1996). In fact, individuals high on Machiavellianism score low on ethical leadership style (Demirci, Gümüştekin, Mercan, Alamur, & Tiryaki, 2013).

In a review on personality and charismatic leadership, House and Howell (1992) proposed a distinction between personalized charismatic leaders (self-aggrandizing, nonegalitarian, and exploitive) from socialized charismatic leaders (collectively oriented, egalitarian, and nonexploitive). The authors conclude that Machiavellianism and [narcissism](#) are associated with personalized rather than socialized charismatic leadership (House & Howell, 1992).

In organizations, knowledge is power, and one way to exude power over others is to retain important information from employees or “to keep them in the dark.” Information can then be used to manipulate colleagues and employees or to manipulate outcomes. A study on knowledge share, an important behavior for team effectiveness, has shown that Machiavellian individuals are less inclined to share their knowledge with others (Liu, 2008). Not surprisingly, in a study on bullying at work, bullies presented higher Machiavellianism scores (Pilch & Turska, 2015). Kessler et al. (2010) introduce a new model of Machiavellianism in the workplace in which Machiavellianism is composed of three factors: maintaining power, harsh management tactics, and manipulative behaviors. These characteristics cannot be conducive to positive leadership.

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Introduction to the Dark Triad

Minna Lyons, in [The Dark Triad of Personality](#), 2019

1.1.1 Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism has been a widely researched concept in social and personality psychology since the 1970 publication of “Studies in Machiavellianism” by Christie and Geis. The term originates from the 16th century philosopher, diplomat, and political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli, who advised leaders to use tactics of deceit in achieving their goals. In Fig. 1.2, Machiavelli is portrayed by Santi di Tito, painted

in the mid-part of the 16th century.



Fig. 1.2. Sixteenth century portrait by Santi di Tito

(with permission of Wikimedia commons licence).

In one of Machiavelli's most famous essay, "The Prince" ("Il Principe"), Machiavelli discussed "conquest by criminal virtue," where he advised the prince that it would be wise to calculate the costs and benefits of cruel deeds (such as the execution of rivals) in an attempt to achieve more power. In one of his famous quotes, Machiavelli advised the prince to "... appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, guileless, and devout. And indeed he should be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how." This quote crystallizes the core of Machiavellianism as a personality trait—use of strategic manipulation flexibly in order to achieve one's own goals.

Indeed, individuals who score high on Machiavellianism (so-called High-Machs) are sensitive to social context and can switch between tactics of cooperation and competition when it is useful to do so (Czibor & Bereczkei, 2012). High-Machs endorse emotional manipulation, for example, playing two people off against each other, paying compliments to others in order to get in their "good books," or using emotional skills to make others feel guilty (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007). It is of no surprise that individuals high in this trait can be successful in careers such as marketing, business, and sales—fields of work where cool-headed decision making and strategic manipulation would help individuals to further their careers.

There is some confusion about what Machiavellianism consists of, and the theoretical base for this trait is not clear (e.g., Rauthmann, 2013). Some researchers have claimed that Machiavellianism is not qualitatively different from [psychopathy](#). Rather than a distinctive personality trait, Machiavellianism could be a subclinical manifestation of psychopathy, only different in the degrees of severity (Mealey, 1995). However, many studies have found distinctive differences between psychopathy and Machiavellianism, suggesting that they are better treated as separate personality traits. Further, it is possible that Machiavellianism is not a unidimensional, monolithic personality trait, but it may consist of several interrelated subcomponents. For example, Christie and Geis (1970) proposed that Machiavellianism consists of two traits: interpersonally manipulative tactics, and a cynical view of human nature. The tactics and views were confirmed in a recent large-scale cross-cultural study which also found that the tactics, but not the views dimension of Machiavellianism related to psychopathy (Monaghan, Bizumic, & Sellbom, 2018). Most studies on the [Dark Triad](#) have considered Machiavellianism as just one trait, which may have masked important differences between actual behavior and perceptions of others.

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The Dark Triad Within a Clinical Framework

Minna Lyons, in [The Dark Triad of Personality](#), 2019

2.2 Machiavellianism as a Clinical Construct

Although Machiavellianism does not directly feature in the classification systems, some consider it as part of the [psychopathy](#) continuum. The cold, detached interpersonal style of individuals high in Machiavellianism has been proposed as a nonclinical manifestation of psychopathy, exhibited in individuals who have not been incarcerated and institutionalized (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). For example, McHoskey (2001) analyzed the MACH-IV scale in relation to a host of clinical symptoms, and concluded that those who score high on the questionnaire are also high on a number of other scales indicating personality dysfunction. More specifically, Machiavellianism had links to antisocial personality, which is currently classified as a mental disorder. It would be easy to conclude that Machiavellianism is pretty much the same as psychopathy, but to a lesser degree, and would be at least a predisposing factor for vulnerability to mental illnesses. Indeed, research that has investigated the [Dark Triad](#) and a host of physical and mental health difficulties have demonstrated that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are associated with worse health outcomes (Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015).

However, other studies have found that psychological well-being is negatively associated with psychopathy, but not Machiavellianism (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015). In another study, Richardson and Boag (2016) demonstrated that in a heterogeneous internet sample, stress had a positive relationship with Machiavellianism, but not with psychopathy. These studies suggest that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are not similar when it comes to psychological outcomes, and Machiavellianism warrants being treated not just as a lesser degree of psychopathy, but as a personality trait in its own right. Although Machiavellianism does not have a clear place in the clinical literature, it has its utility in understanding several mental health outcomes and a predisposition to vulnerability.

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The Dark Tetrad and malevolent creativity

Gayle T. Dow, in [Creativity and Morality](#), 2023

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism was coined after the renowned 16th century Italian diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli, who, after a diplomatic and military career, wrote a book entitled *The Prince*, which promoted deception, treachery, and violence to obtain power. This collection of behavior traits became the standard description of Machiavellianism (Visser & Campbell, 2018). Unlike [NPD](#) and [ASPD](#), Machiavellianism is not classified as a mental disorder but is a collection of traits characterized by cold and strategic manipulation of others (Christie & Geis, 1970, pp. 1–9) with tendencies to distrust and use others while making immoral decisions to achieve wealth and power (Montag et al., 2015). While the prevalence rate cannot be measured accurately, men score higher than women on assessments of Machiavellianism (Collison et al., 2021).

Similar to narcissists and psychopaths, Machiavellians are often charming and charismatic in short-term social interactions but then engage in lying, sabotage, and revenge of others (Wilson et al., 1998). Machiavellianism include cynical worldview, manipulateness, amorality, callousness, and strategic-calculating behavior, with the latter being its unique quality (Pajevic et al., 2018). Machiavellians tend to exhibit better self-control than narcissists and psychopaths, and regularly sabotage others for their own benefit or personal advancement

(Monteiro et al., 2017). Machiavellians, who lack affective empathy, are masters of manipulation and highly skilled at deception and exploiting others due to their above average cognitive empathy (aka theory of mind) (Baron-Cohen, 2011). This, coupled with their desire for wealth and power make them seek out positions of power in the workplace and community, and much like narcissists they tend to seek positions in leadership (Furtner et al., 2017) and are highly skilled at taking advantage and exploiting work or social environments (Scheper, 2003).

Similarly to psychopaths, Machiavellians do not necessarily exhibit more creativity, their creative ideas just tend to include more malevolent ideation (Kapoor, 2015). Machiavellians, along with narcissists and psychopaths, exhibit higher rates of malevolent creativity as measured by daydreaming about hurting people, generating lies, planning pranks, and willingness to commit fraud (Jia et al., 2020; Modic et al., 2018).

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Eliminating the blind spot

Cynthia Mathieu, in [Dark Personalities in the Workplace](#), 2021

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is also called the manipulative personality; Machiavellian individuals behave in a cold and manipulative fashion and are insincere and callous (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The term Machiavellianism comes from Niccolo Machiavelli, an Italian diplomat who wrote a book entitled “The Prince.” He explains that rulers should use any means at their disposal to get what they want, including committing immoral deeds. Some of the characteristics associated with Machiavellianism are relative lack of affect in interpersonal relationships, lack of concern with conventional morality, lack of gross psychopathology, and low ideological commitment (Christie & Geis, 1970). As opposed to psychopaths and narcissists, Machiavellians are able to conduct long-term schemes; they are not as impulsive and may not be as flamboyant as the other two personalities, which serves them well as they are able to operate under the radar for longer periods. Indeed, impulsivity is often what allows others to see through the lies and manipulation beyond the image created by individuals with dark personalities. As such, not being as impulsive as the other two personalities composing the [Dark Triad](#) is an asset that serves Machiavellians. It allows them to be more calculating and strategic when conducting their schemes.

Machiavellian violence is instrumental rather than emotionally reactive; it serves their end goal. The violence they use is calculated and covert more than overt, making it insidious and difficult to identify and prosecute. Machiavellians have an excellent political sense, and they have the ability to learn the ins and outs of an organization in very little time, which allows them to navigate its power structure with dexterity. They are less obvious than the other two Dark Triad personalities. They do not display grandiosity and have the ability and patience to wait for the right moment and make sure that all is in place before they commit a crime. For more information on Machiavellianism, see Jones and Paulhus (2009).

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What falls outside of the Big Five? Darkness, derailers, and beyond

P.D. Harms, Ryne A. Sherman, in [Measuring and Modeling Persons and Situations](#), 2021

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is characterized by a cynical perspective of humans combined

with a willingness, bordering on enthusiasm, to lie to and manipulate others (Christie & Geis, 1970). It is the only component of the [Dark Triad](#) to not be derived from an existing clinical construct. Individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism tend to be characterized by a lack of concern for or caring for relationships, ideology, and concerns of conventional morality while at the same time lacking any other gross psychopathology or cognitive deficits (Christie & Geis, 1970; Jones & Paulhus, 2009). The most widely used measure is the Mach-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), which consists of 20 attitude statements conveying broad cynicism and comfort with deceit or manipulative behaviors. The nature of these items, such as their dated language and the inability to generate appropriate other-report items from personal attitudes, has resulted in ongoing demands for improved measures (LeBreton et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019). Some alternative measures and models have been developed that have attempted to introduce new aspects to traditional conceptions of Machiavellianism such as the desire for status (Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009; Kessler et al., 2010), but these new scales show poor convergence with other Machiavellianism measures or between their own subscales (DeShong, Helle, Lengel, Meyer, & Mullins, 2017; Kessler et al., 2010).

There has been some debate in recent years as to whether or not [psychopathy](#) and Machiavellianism are really distinct constructs (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998; Miller, Hyatt, Maples-Keller, Carter, & Lynam, 2017). Although some meta-analytic evidence suggests that there is substantial overlap between measures of each (e.g., Vize, Lynam, Collison, & Miller, 2018), it has been noted that there are important conceptual differences between the two constructs. For example, psychopathy is characterized by thrill-seeking and recklessness, whereas Machiavellians are thought to be highly planful and mindful of the consequences of their actions (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus, 2014). Moreover, it has been noted that much of the research used as the basis for drawing the conclusion that these two traits are not meaningfully distinct has tended to utilize poorly-designed instruments that may not be accurately reflecting the intended constructs at all (Miller et al., 2012; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Consequently, a reasonable conclusion is that there is a need for the development of new instruments that better represent the theoretical conceptualization of these traits. One recent example of such an effort (Grosz, Harms, Dufner, Kraft, & Wetzel, 2020) has managed to develop two short measures, the M7 and P7, that come very close to addressing the problems common in other measures. That is, while the P7 psychopathy scale is highly related to impulsivity and higher levels of deviance, the M7 Machiavellianism scale is more highly associated with low levels of honesty. That said, even well-designed self-report measures such as the M7 and P7 are always going to be limited by the difficulties inherent in the task of accurately assessing individuals who readily and skillfully lie and engage in impression management.

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Negative attitudes, counterproductive work behavior, and corporate fraud

Cynthia Mathieu, in [Dark Personalities in the Workplace](#), 2021

Organizational commitment, turnover intention, and loyalty
Machiavellianism and [psychopathy](#) have been negatively associated with relationship commitment (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). [Narcissism](#) is also linked to low relationship commitment, in part, because narcissistic individuals perceive the quality of alternative partners to be higher than do less narcissistic individuals (Campbell & Foster, 2002). I believe that the same is true for organizational commitment. Indeed, employees with dark personalities would likely score low on organizational commitment as they would evaluate possibilities of obtaining better positions in other organizations higher than employees who do not present dark personalities. Furthermore, as presented in previous chapters, individuals with dark personalities have an inflated view of themselves. They may think that they can do better than the organization they are presently working

for.

Finally, as we have discussed earlier, individuals with dark personalities are motivated by agentic goals rather than communal goals, meaning that their motivation is associated with positive rewards for themselves and has nothing to do with the wellness of others or the organization they work for. In fact, Zettler, Friedrich, and Hilbig (2011) found that Machiavellianism is positively associated with self-related career commitment and negatively associated with organizational, supervisor, and team commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) presented a three-component model of organizational commitment: 1. Affective commitment (emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization); 2. Continuance commitment (perceived costs associated with leaving the organization); 3. Normative commitment (perceived obligation to remain in the organization). Of the three forms of organizational commitment, affective commitment has the strongest and most favorable correlations with organizational and employee outcomes such as higher levels of employee attendance, performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and lower levels of stress and work–family conflict (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Researchers have found that individuals high on Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Extraversion report higher affective commitment levels (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). Considering that dark personality traits have been linked to lower levels of relationship commitment and that all three [Dark Triad](#) (DT) personalities are associated with low levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, there is reason to believe that they would score low on organizational commitment. Low job satisfaction and low organizational commitment have been known to increase the risk of turnover intentions (thinking about quitting one's job) (Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière, & Raymond, 2016). In fact, in my studies, I have found that all three dark personalities present higher scores of turnover intentions.

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The Dark Side of Personality

Seth M. Spain, in [Leadership, Work, and the Dark Side of Personality](#), 2019

Dark Personality and Interviewing

Individuals with dark personality traits such as Machiavellianism may be more skilled and more willing to engage in faking in employment interviews (Levashina & Campion, 2006). This hypothesis has been supported by the limited research on dark personality in interview settings. For example, individuals higher in Machiavellianism are more willing to be dishonest during interviews (Fletcher, 1990). Research focusing on the behavior of narcissists in job interview settings has shown that highly narcissistic individuals are more prone to two behaviors that positively influence ratings of employability: self-promotion and talkativeness (Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, & Harms, 2013).

As with creativity, narcissists' advantages in interviewing seem to be attributable to two main reasons: their motivation and their skill in performing self-presentation behaviors. Narcissists like to talk about themselves and do so while presenting themselves in a highly favorable light. Moreover, narcissists often make very positive first impressions in groups (Back, Schmulke, & Egloff, 2010). Narcissists' ability to create these positive impressions may not only benefit them in selection for first jobs but also to self-promote their way into leadership positions (Brunell et al., 2008; cf., Babiak & Hare, 2006). Even so, those good first impressions quickly wear off after prolonged exposure to individuals with noxious personalities and that narcissists will usually come to be viewed as hostile and arrogant at some point (Paulhus, 1998). Consequently, several dark personality characteristics, particularly those in the [Dark Triad](#), may represent short-term evolutionary strategies for success (Jonason et al., 2010; McDonald, Donnellan, & Navarrete, 2012). That is, narcissistic and other Dark Triad tendencies help people to get what they want right now but can undermine their attempts to keep those gains. This is essentially

the game theoretic logic laid out by Hawley (2006) described above.

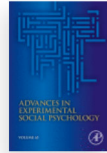
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