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THE DARK TRIAD: NARCISISM, PSYCHOPATHY, AND MACHIAVELLIANISM AS PREDICTORS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ENTRY (SUMMARY)

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Principal Topic

The Dark Triad is an established set of personality characteristics: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Jonason & Webster, 2010). These characteristics are distinguishable, but overlap with respect to being highly ego-centric and socially exploitative interpersonal styles. The current research seeks to determine if individuals high on the Dark Triad possess higher intentions to enter into entrepreneurship than other individuals—as a pathway to use others toward their own gain, satisfy their sensation-seeking appetites, and receive the attention and admiration that they obsessively desire. Specifically, we develop and empirically examine an indirect effects model linking the components of the Dark Triad with entrepreneurial intentions—defined as the degree to which an individual has taken steps toward launching a new venture. In so doing, we consider the extent to which entrepreneurial motivation (destructive and productive forms) (Baumol, 1990) and entrepreneurial alertness (Kirzner, 1999) act as sequential underlying mediating mechanisms. Findings shed light on the Dark Triad as a previously under-examined set of individual characteristics—ones that are likely to strongly influence why and how many new ventures are launched and developed.

Method

The sample included 466 nascent entrepreneurs, who completed our questionnaire containing items relating to the study’s focal constructs. Bootstrapped path analysis (MacKinnon et al., 2002; Preacher & Hayes, 2004) was conducted using AMOS 19.0 to evaluate the indirect effects of the dark triad’s components (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) on entrepreneurial intentions sequentially through entrepreneurial motivation (productive and destructive) and entrepreneurial alertness.

Results and Implications

Findings support our prediction that the Dark Triad is indirectly related to entrepreneurial intentions through the sequential meditational path of entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial alertness. These results suggest that persons high in narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism are more likely than those who rate lower on these dimensions to take steps toward starting a new venture. However, in terms of entrepreneurial motivation, only destructive (and not productive) motives were found to be a significant mediator in our model. These destructive entrepreneurial motives are, in turn, transmitted to entrepreneurial intentions through heightened levels of entrepreneurial alertness. While certainly not all entrepreneurs are high in the Dark Triad, the results offer a nuanced consideration of venturing and suggest important economic and social implications. The findings revitalize important questions about value creation versus unproductive or even destructive entrepreneurship.

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