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The bad, the very bad and the ugly: towards an integrated model of dark leadership

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The Bad, The Very Bad, and the Ugly: Towards an integrated model of Dark Leadership

Abstract

Purpose

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the effects of bad leadership on organisations and employees. In part, this can be seen as being associated with the continuing emergence of corporate scandals and high-profile cases of mistreatment of employees. In this paper, we present a systematic review and critique of the literature that explores dark leadership over the last 24 years.

Method

The approach adopted employed a systematic literature review followed by an analysis of the key themes, findings, and gaps in the literature.

Findings

The literature is diverse and often confusing, with multiple terms, conceptualisations, absence of shared theoretical underpinning, and measurement scales for similar phenomena. We identify the major gaps and challenges within the literature and conclude by presenting a potential model that integrates the dark leadership literature within a clear theoretical framework.

Originality/Value

The paper integrates over 20 years of literature, providing a clear framework for future research, and highlighting how personality traits, specifically the dark triad, act as foundational antecedents of dark leadership behaviours.

Practical Implications

Developing a clear understanding of the nature and consequences of dark leadership will be of value to organisations in terms of developing strategies that avoid its emergence and negative consequences.

Key Words: Dark Leadership, Dark Triad, Toxic Leadership, Destructive Leadership, Abusive Supervision, Personality

Introduction

In 2019, Zhu *et al*. identified an increasing number of leadership articles, published between 2010 and 2017, relating to abusive supervision. Other authors have explored different aspects of bad leadership (e.g., Mackey *et al.,* 2021; Dinh *et al*., 2014). It appears that growing interest has been sparked by practitioners writing on the topic (Higgs, 2022). This growing and diverse literature can be grouped within the umbrella term 'Dark Leadership' (Higgs, 2022).

The global financial crisis of 2008 and related corporate scandals led to an increase in interest in the effects of bad leadership and unethical behaviour (Higgs, 2022). Subsequent examples of corporate wrongdoing have shown continuing problems associated with leadership. In many cases, responsibility has been seen to rest with the CEO and top leadership, leading to resignations. Indeed, in some cases, the consequences have been more serious including charges of fraud or money laundering (Higgs, 2022). These developments have eroded trust in senior executives (Simonet *et al*., 2018), raising questions around personal and organisational ethics (Solas, 2016), and sparked debates around the absence of accountability (Frangieh and Yacoub, 2017). The shift in focus from examining 'good' or 'effective' leadership (Simonet *et al*., 2018) to 'dark leadership' has been accompanied by the emergence of a range of constructs including exploitative, destructive, toxic, narcissistic, and psychopathic leadership (Dinh *et al.,* 2014). However, research in this area has often led to confusing and contradictory findings (Zhu *et al.,* 2019). For example, Mackey *et al.* (2021) commented that: "*...destructive leadership lacks a solid foundation because prior findings remain disjointed. The multitude of destructive leadership styles and theoretical foundations applied within this*

literature have generated confusion about the current state of knowledge in the field" (p.705). Similarly, Shaffer *et al.* (2016) point out that there is a significant level of construct proliferation within the destructive leadership literature. Given this, rather than add to construct proliferation, we use the term 'dark leadership' throughout this paper as an umbrella term for facets of leadership (or leaders') destructive traits or behaviours that have a negative effect on individuals or organisations. While there is a general view that dark leadership has largely negative outcomes for organisations and individuals, the literature contains contradictory findings indicating positive outcomes. For example, in relation to narcissism (Ong *et al.,* 2016), Machiavellianism (Szabo *et al.,* 2018), toxic leadership (Wolor *et al.,* 2022) and dark triad (Furnham *et al.,* 2012).

Given the above, we identified a need for a comprehensive review of this literature. Key questions considered were:

- To what extent does differing terminology cover similar constructs?
- What are the effects of 'dark leadership' on followers and organisations?
- What are the antecedents of dark leadership behaviours and their nature?
- What can be done to mitigate the effects of 'dark leadership'?

The distinctive contribution of this paper is its in-depth analysis of personality traits as antecedents of dark leadership. Specifically, we examine how the 'dark triad' – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy- serve not only as correlates but as foundational personality drivers that predispose individuals to engage in exploitative, manipulative, and unethical leadership behaviours. By highlighting these personality antecedents, this study offers deeper insight into the individual-level origins of dark leadership and how these traits interact with organisational and contextual factors to impact dark leadership dynamics.

We conclude that our review provides a further contribution by integrating a diverse literature and proposing a framework offering a basis for future research.

Methodology

A systematic literature review was undertaken following the three stages recommended by Tranfield *et al.* (2003). The study's dataset comprises articles published in business and management journals between 2000 and 2024.

The search was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases and limited to peer-reviewed SSCI-listed academic journals. We utilised a structured set of keywords from current literature and Mackey *et al.*'s (2021) expanded list of dark leadership constructs. These keywords included the terms "abusive supervision", "destructive leadership", "toxic leadership", "authoritarian leadership", "narcissistic leadership", "despotic leadership", "exploitative leadership", "leader Machiavellianism", "pseudo-transformational leadership", "psychopathic leadership", "negative leadership", "tyrannical leadership", "aversive leadership", "leader bullying", "leader incivility", "corrupt leadership", "leader undermining", "petty tyranny" and "derailed leadership". Table 1 provides a definition of all constructs identified.

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

We established inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure selected studies directly addressed relevant dark leadership constructs. Our primary inclusion criterion required studies to explicitly examine at least one 'dark leadership' construct. We excluded papers which were not in English, and which were either unpublished, or were presented as conference proceedings or dissertations. This yielded an initial pool of 820 papers. After removing duplicate entries, the authors screened titles and abstracts to remove those that were not

primarily addressing dark leadership resulting in retention of 493 studies for analysis. A full list of reviewed papers is provided in the supplementary material appendix 1, and a flowchart detailing the process in appendix 2.

Sample Description

Figure 1 shows the publication years of the articles, illustrating the growing interest in 'dark leadership', which could be associated with heightened interest prompted by corporate misbehaviour following the financial crisis in 2008.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

The sample is dominated by empirical studies (423), with 69 conceptual, and one mixed-methods study. The levels of analysis varied, with the majority focused on the individual-level (245 studies), followed by 171 organisational-level analyses, and smaller representations for dyadic (11), and multilevel (35).

Analysis of Literature

Nature of Dark Leadership

Our review traced the evolution of research on terminology relating to, or interchangeably with, 'dark leadership'. Academic interest traces back to earlier research on abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000). The concept expanded significantly into two primary themes, toxicity and destructiveness, highlighting the harmful aspects of leadership, and dark triad, increasing focus on the dark personality traits (see Figure 2). Most studies focused on abusive supervision (81), authoritarian leadership (76), toxic leadership (70), destructive

leadership (59), narcissistic leadership/narcissism (47), and despotic leadership (41). While exploitative leadership (Schmid *et al.,* 2019) is relatively new, interest in this is growing (38).

INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

In quantitative studies the most frequently utilised measures were the toxic leadership scale (40 instances) (Schmid, 2008), exploitative leadership (23) (Schmid *et al.,* 2019), abusive supervision (22) (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, 2000), destructive leadership (11) (Shaw *et al.,* 2011), and narcissistic personality inventory (NPI) (9) (Raskin and Terry, 1988). Measurement predominantly relies on 'employee perceptions', reflecting the consensus that subordinates' perceptions of negative behaviours encountered are the arbiters of negativity.

Antecedents

'Dark leadership' is associated with personality traits such as narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (the 'dark triad'). Psychopathy is the least studied (5), while narcissism (47) and Machiavellianism (17) have received more attention. Narcissistic traits involve a personalised use of power, self-promotion, unpredictability, dominance, arrogance, grandiosity, entitlement, and selfish pursuit of pleasure, and are associated with destructive, autocratic, and abusive leadership styles (Padilla *et al.,* 2007; Finney *et al.,* 2021). Machiavellianism, characterised by manipulation and exploitation for personal gain, is an antecedent to engagement in unethical workplace behaviours (Frazier and Jacezko, 2021). Machiavellians often distrust others, express negative emotions, and exhibit controlling and demanding behaviours towards followers (Liyanagamage *et al.,* 2022). Narcissism and Machiavellianism are linked to counterproductive workplace behaviours and unethical actions (Webster *et al.,* 2016). Psychopathy includes risk-taking and rule-breaking behaviours that

can be mistaken for bold and decisive leadership, especially in competitive or high-stakes environments (Jonason and Webster, 2010). These three traits influence leader-follower relationships and contribute to dark leadership behaviours.

There appear to be several central but overlapping behavioural themes associated with these traits:

a) Leader self-interest and exploitation of others. (Schmid *et al.,* 2019).
b) Abuse of power: to serve personal goals or achieve personal gain; to reinforce self-image, and to conceal personal inadequacies (Naseer *et al*., 2016).
c) Inflicting damage on others: bullying, coercion, damaging subordinate self-efficacy and psychological well-being, and other unethical behaviours (Fatfouta, 2019).
d) Over-exercise of control to satisfy personal needs such as obsession with detail, perfectionism, limiting initiative and disregarding information from others (Itzkovich *et al.,* 2020).
e) Rule breaking to serve own purposes (e.g., corrupt, unethical and/or illegal behaviours) (Bulkan and Higgs, 2019; Solas, 2016).

Beyond these, several contextual factors such as organisational culture, organisational factors (e.g., high-stress environments, lack of accountability), relational dynamics and follower related factors contribute to dark leadership (Padilla *et al.,* 2007; Liyanagamage *et al*., 2022). These interact with dark traits enabling dark leadership to thrive, amplifying negative effects.

Outcomes, mediators, and moderators

Dark leadership negatively impacts both individual and organisational outcomes. Across the literature, distinct outcome variables were identified. Employee performance (65) is the most

dominant outcome, followed by employee counterproductive/negative work behaviour/workplace deviance (27), job satisfaction (25), turnover/turnover intention (24), well-being (22), employee engagement (13), employee creativity (12), organisational commitment (11), employee voice behaviour (11), stress (9), organisational citizenship behaviour (9), emotional exhaustion (8), and project success (7). The effects of dark leadership were often observed with mediating (259) and moderating variables (296), with 187 studies utilising both (e.g., Williams *et al.,* 2024). Despite mostly negative outcomes, some studies showed positive effects (e.g., authoritarian leadership and creativity, Zhao *et al.,* 2022) Although little commonality occurred in mediators, those more frequently encountered were: emotional exhaustion (17), stress (14), trust (8), team/organisational identification (8), leader-member exchange (LMX) (8), and moral disengagement (7).

Common moderating variables included organisational context (16), power distance orientation (15), organisational culture (10), LMX (7), gender (6), and ethical climate/work ethic (6). Overall, the effects of dark leadership on organisational and individual outcomes were mitigated in studies that explored the influence of moderating variables. However, there was no pattern in the selection of these moderators, with most focusing on follower-related outcomes. Several variables served as both mediators and moderators (See supplementary appendix 3).

Theoretical Underpinnings

Table 2 shows the diversity in theoretical perspectives. Conservation of resources theory (COR) (84), social exchange theory (SET) (68) and toxic triangle theory (29) stood out as dominant. There was no consistency in theoretical underpinnings of moderator and mediator roles. For example, LMX as a moderator was explained by theories such as job demand-

resources theory, social learning theory, and affective events theory (AET), while emotional exhaustion as a mediator was linked to COR, SET, and AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996).

INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE

No theoretical consensus was observed across antecedent studies. Theories such as COR, displaced aggression theory, AET, arousal theory of behaviour, five-factor model of personality, and self-determination theory were used to explain the antecedents (see supplementary material appendix 4).

Research Gaps/Future Research

The gaps/areas for future research were diverse, dominated by measurement considerations such as psychometric properties, alternative measures, and alternative mediators/moderators. Potential effects of differing contexts, including effects of organisational and national cultural differences were also highlighted, with only one study addressing national cultural differences (Alexander *et al.,* 2024). Despite the predominantly negative effects of dark leadership, there was a notable absence of calls to examine how organisations can avoid or ameliorate the effects of dark leadership.

Discussion

Overall, our review indicates that dark leadership negatively impacts both followers and organisations. It impacts followers' stress levels, satisfaction with work experience (Tepper, 2000), and well-being (Hobman *et al*., 2009). From an organisational perspective, it was

linked to reduced work performance (Aryee *et al*., 2007) and disruptive behaviours (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). However, several issues warrant further investigation:

i) confounding of dark leadership traits/characteristics with behaviours

ii) nature of measures of dark leadership traits/characteristics

iii) nature of disruptive behaviours

iv) lack of a clear theoretical framework, and diversity of moderating and mediating variables

Confounding Traits and Behaviours

It appears that the personality/trait approach is, in essence, identifying antecedents of dark behaviours, yet in many studies, it was employed as the proxy for the behaviours (Mathieu *et al.,* 2014). The behaviours by which a leader's dark traits influence outcomes, and associated relationships, are yet to be fully explored (Zhu *et al*., 2019). Furthermore, some constructs were identified as both antecedents and outcomes. For example, affectivity was linked to destructive leadership (Tepper *et al.,* 2004) whilst positioned as its antecedent (Schyns and Schilling, 2013). We suggest that dark traits may be antecedents of dark behaviours associated with styles such as toxic leadership. However, linkages between the antecedent traits and outcomes warrant further exploration.

Nature/Measurement of Dark Leadership Traits/Characteristics

In examining measurement, it was evident that those related to behaviours and styles were primarily based on follower perceptions. Managerial measures of dark leadership, unlike clinical ones, target behavioural tendencies of dark-side traits rather than personality disorders. However, ironically, measures used in the managerial context assess both

behaviours and traits, often misaligned with their stated aims. For example, the Psychopathy Measure-Management Version (PM-MRV; Boddy, 2009) lacks significant behavioural elements of psychopathy, such as hostility. Several measures to assess negative leader styles/ behaviours were largely trait based. Despite apparently different constructs, we found considerable overlap in the traits measured. Research increasingly explores dark traits (see figure 2), revealing three distinct (but overlapping) dimensions: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Bulkan and Higgs, 2019; Ouimet, 2010). These all involve a socially malicious character with behaviour inclinations towards self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness (Paulhus and Williams, 2002). Interestingly, there has been a growing focus on the Dark Triad as an antecedent of dark leadership behaviour. However, in addition to the issue of overlapping characteristics, there has been debate around the traits encompassed within the Dark Triad. For example, Welsh *et al.* (2024) proposed a Dark Tetrad that included traits related to Sadism, and Marcus and Zeigler-Hill (2015) referred to the concept of a "Big Tent" approach to dark traits that enables inclusion of a broader range of dark traits (e.g., perfectionism, spitefulness, greed, sensation seeking).

While recently there has been an emergence of work exploring managerial psychopathy (Bulkan and Higgs, 2018, 2019), a larger body of work focuses on narcissism (Solas, 2016), indicating that leaders with 'dark triad' traits tend to be promoted based on, or despite, their bad behaviours (Solas, 2016). One explanation for such an apparent absurdity is that these traits are mistakenly seen by boards as characteristics of exceptional leadership (Fatfouta, 2019). Traits such as exceptional charm, persuasiveness, courage, high intelligence, and charisma may be mistaken for charismatic leadership (Andrews *et al*., 2009). This appears particularly notable in individuals displaying high levels of narcissism (Solas, 2016) and possibly accounts for the dominance of narcissism studies in leadership literature. Similarly,

leaders with high levels of Machiavellianism tend to present in a way that aligns with others' views of effective leadership through manipulation and exploitation.

Our review identified some contradictory findings (Clarke *et al.,* 2015), possibly due to the nature of the measures employed. For example, contradictory findings relating to narcissism may stem from the tendency to portray narcissism as a unitary construct, overlooking nuanced relationships (Miller and Matsa, 2013). More recently, narcissism is seen as multi-dimensional (Clarke *et al.,* 2015). Ackerman *et al*. (2011) conceptualised two higher order dimensions - adaptive and maladaptive narcissism. Adaptive is related to psychological health and resilience, whilst maladaptive is related to entitlement and negative affect (Pincus *et al*., 2009). These profiles are often uncorrelated, and researchers have questioned whether adaptive should be considered as narcissism at all (Ackerman *et al*., 2011). Much research focusing on narcissism as aligned with Maccoby's assertion (2000) that a degree of narcissism is necessary for effective leadership. Yet, these findings may be influenced by the nature of the measure used and the failure to distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive narcissism (Clarke *et al.,* 2015).

The most common narcissism scale employed was the NPI (Raskin and Terry, 1988). This has been criticised for poor internal reliability, a tendency to sum scores across scales creating a global score (Brown *et al.,* 2009), and inconsistent factorial structure (Maxwell *et al.,* 2009). It is seen as primarily measuring adaptive narcissism, leading to suggestions (Brown *et al.,* 2009) that grandiosity and entitlement subscales should be used to replace the NPI altogether. Given this, it is unsurprising that the consequences of narcissistic leadership can be found to be positive. It is therefore important that these measurement issues are addressed to avoid confusing results. The above issues are also present in broader debates around antecedent

traits (i.e., psychopathy and Machiavellianism), as evident in terms of the critiques relating to the dark triad (Miller *et al.,* 2011).

Nature of disruptive behaviours

Dark leadership has been associated with various employee and managerial disruptive behaviours, including CWB, organisational deviance, workplace deviance, and unethical pro-organisational behaviour. However, the generic use of the term, and limited conceptual underpinning pose challenges, necessitating an understanding of disruptive behaviours in relation to their targets. Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) found that in addition to direct retaliation to the supervisor, followers of abusive leaders will exhibit 'displaced' deviance towards the organisation. Schyns and Schilling (2013) suggested that since direct retaliation towards the leader involves a higher risk of punishment by the leader, general CWBs serve as a safer means to retaliate against the leader. Additionally, CWBs targeting the organisation rather than the leader may arise due to the perceived organisational failure in protecting employees from destructive leaders (Bulkan and Higgs, 2019). We suggest that employee perceptions of breached psychological contract provide a theoretical approach to understanding this relationship. In line with the previous studies, dark leadership behaviours violate this contract, leading employees to engage in supervisor-directed deviance to 'get even'. This, in turn, can cause an overspill of negative feelings about the leader towards organisation-directed negativity (Bulkan and Higgs, 2018, 2019). Indeed, followers of destructive leaders exhibit more negative attitudes toward the organisation overall (Schyns and Schilling, 2013), - perceived breaches of psychological contract result in a revenge motive initially towards the leader, then extends to the organisation, cascading into supervisor and organisation-directed deviant behaviours (Bulkan and Higgs, 2018, 2019).

Lack of a Clear/Shared Theoretical Framework

The theoretical arguments for the selection of mediating or moderating variables were again diverse and no clear pattern emerged. Absence of consensus on theoretical perspectives may reflect the emergent nature of research in this field (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). A basis for a potential theoretical frame may be found within the broader leadership literature. More recently, the field is moving towards a relational view of leadership as a dynamic social process (Zhu *et al*., 2019; Dinh *et al*, 2014). Thus, a theoretical basis for understanding 'dark leadership' could be SET (Blau, 1964) and psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995) which may offer useful insights into the mitigating effects identified through the moderating effects of organisationally related interventions. Similarly, the effects of LMX could be explained with reference to SET. A significant number of the studies identified mitigation effects through the moderating impact of follower differences (e.g., self-esteem, proactive personality, core self-evaluation). These can be explained in terms of COR theory.

Gaps/Areas for Future Research

Based on our analysis, we propose an agenda for future research to include:

i. Understanding the impact of tenure on the relationship between dark behaviours and outcomes through exploring its moderating/mediating effects, ideally using longitudinal research.
ii. Consideration of the moderating or mediating effects of perceived breaches of the psychological contract.
iii. Exploring actions to avoid or ameliorate the effects of dark leadership.
iv. Addressing the confounding of dark leadership traits/characteristics with behaviours. There is a need to understand the nature of the relationships between these traits and behaviours as well as exploring their interrelationship.

v. Exploring cross-cultural variation and contextual nuance. Future research should investigate how dark leadership antecedents and outcomes vary across cultural (e.g. Anglo vs Confucian Asian culture, Vogel *et al.,* 2015), geographical, sectoral, and institutional (private/public) contexts. Differences in cultures may influence both the expression and interpretation of dark behaviours, while organisational norms may further shape how such behaviours are perceived, tolerated, or addressed. Additionally, there is scope to examine how dark leadership manifests in emerging or understudied settings such as the gig economy, remote and hybrid work environments, or precarious employment contexts, indicating the need for more comparative, context-sensitive inquiry.

vi. The unclear mechanisms underpinning the relationships between dark leadership and outcomes justify the wide range of moderator/mediators employed in studies. Future qualitative research could offer clarity to understand the nature of these mechanisms (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995).

Overall, growing interest in dark leadership highlights the need for further research to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon.

Towards an Integrated Model

From our review, the key points are:

i) Dark triad traits and dysfunctional personality are antecedents of dark leadership behaviours.

ii) Dark leadership behaviours lead to negative outcomes at both individual and organisational levels.

iii) These negative outcomes may be ameliorated by individual and organisational-level moderators.

iv) There is an absence of a shared theoretical base for studying dark leadership, though an underlying pattern is observed when examining the studies together. We suggest that these relationships could be integrated into a model presented in Figure 3, where the dotted line highlights the mediating role of styles/behaviours between antecedents and outcomes.

INSERT FIGURE 3 AROUND HERE

Our model incorporates LMX as a moderator of both; i) the relationship between leader traits/characteristics and ii) the relationship between dark leader behaviours and outcomes. Although LMX's moderating role was only identified in a few studies (Bellou and Dimou, 2022; Xu *et al.,* 2015), its inclusion appears justified given the growing focus on leadership as a relational process (Zhu *et al*., 2019).

In our model, we also integrate psychological contract breach as a moderator (Bulkan and Higgs, 2018, 2019), consistent with the adoption of SET as a theoretical underpinning. We propose that this model could be tested and explored in future research.

Conclusions and Contributions

Dark leadership is an area of growing interest to both academics and practitioners. This review highlights the extensive and diverse nature of research into the topic, indicating an emergent stage of understanding (Higgs, 2022). Research is dominated by quantitative studies, with little agreement on variables or theoretical underpinnings. The variety of potential future research areas reinforces the emergent state of the literature. There is, however, a broad consensus that the effects of dark leadership are largely damaging to individuals and organisations. Given this, it is important to prioritise understanding how the phenomenon can be avoided. We suggest that challenges that need to be addressed to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon are related to:

i) avoiding confounding leader traits/characteristics and behaviours,

ii) establishing a clear theoretical base for future studies,

iii) clarifying the nature and measurement of dark leadership traits/characteristics,

iv) developing a shared and simplified typology for dark leadership behaviours,

v) identifying actions that organisations can take to avoid the emergence of dark leadership or ameliorate its effects.

The diverse nomenclature for dark leader behaviours in the literature has been shown above to cover very similar aspects of negative leadership behaviour (see Table 1). Indeed, the current typology of dark leadership behaviour could be seen to be a type of "Jangle Fallacy" (Kelley, 1927). For example, the constructs of narcissistic, pseudo-transformational, and exploitative leadership all focus on behaviours relating to the leader's self-interest. Similarly, abusive supervision, aversive leadership, leader bullying, and negative leadership all relate to behaviours having a negative impact on employees. Given the perceived positive aspects of some of the dark leadership traits and characteristics avoiding its emergence may well require intervention at the most senior level (Furnham, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative studies may be required to understand practical intervention strategies.

This review makes a number of significant contributions to the literature. Importantly, a distinctive contribution of this paper is the identification and detailed analysis of personality traits – specifically the 'dark triad' of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy- as antecedents to dark leadership. This focus deepens the understanding of how individual differences predispose leaders toward destructive behaviours, which then interact with organisational and individual-related factors to produce dark leadership outcomes. Secondly, it integrates two decades of dark leadership research and identifies the major developments and challenges, providing a point of reference for future researchers. Thirdly, it presents a

comprehensive model integrating the main strands of research and providing a framework for future work, including underpinning theoretical lenses. Fourthly, it analyses measures of dark leadership traits/behaviours, identifying possible changes that could aid further work. Finally, the review explores the gaps identified by previous researchers and indicates an agenda for future research.

Our review is subject to a few limitations. Firstly, despite a systematic process, we may have missed papers addressing some of the gaps we have identified. Secondly, although following a structured analytic process, we have added our interpretation of the results which may not be free from bias.

Leadership is of critical importance to organisations, particularly in today's context. However, to fully understand the role, nature and consequences of leadership, it is important to consider not only "good" leadership, but also its dark side which can cause the longer-term damage to both organisations and individuals (Higgs, 2022). Developing a clearer understanding of dark leadership is of both academic and practitioner importance. Addressing the issues associated with dark leadership will improve the quality of work experiences of employees and foster sustainable organisational performance.

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