MACHIAVELLIANISM AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOR: INTERACTIVE ROLE OF TRAIT ACTIVATING SITUATIONAL MECHANISM

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ABSTRACT--*There is a need to develop the understanding of the functional aspects of Machiavellianism with respect to them in-role behavior tendency at work. Therefore, the current study is not only focusing on the direct association of dark trait and behavior outcome but it also investigates the situational mechanism for predicting such associations. This study extends the TAT (Trait Activation Theory) by investigating the direct association of Machiavellianism with impression management and the moderating role of situational mechanism i.e. role ambiguity in predicting the Machiavellianism and in-role impression management behavior outcome by using the field sample of (N=420) employees working in higher education institutes. The results revealed that role ambiguity is a significant situational mechanism to activate the positive attributes of Machiavellian personality trait for predicting self-presentable behavior. It is also proved that Machiavellianism personality has a significant positive association with managing their soft impressions*

Keywords-- Machiavellianism, Impression Management, Role Ambiguity

I. INTRODUCTION

Personality traits are perceived in according to how people behave. The theoretical perspective advocates that personality is the underlying outlook that is present in every individual until it is activated and shows in the behavior display of an individual. The significance of trait and situation exists when situational based mechanisms allow the manifestation of these traits (Tett and Burnett, 2003). The appearance of one's personality traits through behavior display must be investigated in the particular situational context/mechanism. Such investigations are beneficial for organizations to help them in recognizing the importance of situational factors for trait relevant behavior display (Mischel and Shoda, 1995).

In interpersonal relations, it has been observed that individuals who possess Machiavellianism personality traits may indulge in strategic in-role behaviors (such as positive impression management) for maintaining interpersonal relations (Jonason and Schmitt, 2012), it has also been observed that such individuals are adaptive to impression management behaviors (IM) in order to gain as many resources and benefits as possible from those

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they interact with (O' Boyle et al., 2012) and in doing so, they have less uncertainty to exploit situations for achieving their objectives (Jonason et al., 2012; Hilbig and Zettler, 2015).

Trait Activation Theory emphasizes "on the inter-individual uniqueness's" as a significant factor in Machiavellian personality tendency to behave distinctively in accordance to the situational demands/mechanism (Tett and Guterman, 2000: 398), that means the dormant prospective present in the individuals are expressed only in reaction to trait relevant situational cues which provide room for the expression of such traits. There is a plethora of literature available which reflects that trait-based situational mechanism moderates the association in between Machiavellian personality and its consequent behavior (De Hoogh, Den Hartog and Koopman, 2005; Farh, Seo and Tesluk, 2012).

This study focuses on task and social based cues. Task-relevant cues are based on routine-based job responsibilities (such as role ambiguity). Social level cues arise from the expectations of individual personalities to act in a socially approved manner (Tett and Burnett, 2003). Machiavellianism seems to be significantly influenced by situational mechanisms. The evolutionary point holds that our society is more prone towards getting used to the negative personality traits (i.e. Machiavellianism in this study) (Penke et al., 2007), and that "no personality trait is unanimously adaptive or maladaptive." The presence of Machiavellianistic attributes in individuals is reflective of the fact that this trait has adaptability in certain situations (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) which demands the display of positive self-image (through the positive impression management tactics). For the display of positive self-impression, the job should be based on weak situational factors (such as role ambiguity).

The significant role of the study is to investigate the missing link, which is the logical consideration of trait activation theory (TAT) in the Machiavellianism personality trait and Impression management (IM) behavior association. Activation of desirable traits are the basis to recognize the positive attributes of Mach's at work by investigating the situational indicators. The association between Machiavellianism personality and

assertive impression management tactics provided with weak job role situation (such as role ambiguity) is yet to be explored. The curvilinear effect between the Machiavellianism and situational factors needs to be explored, as linear models are not appropriate to study the complex association in between dark personalities such as Machiavellianism and in-role behavior outcomes. The multiplicative models provide the new theoretical outlook. The objective of this study is to advance the personality-Impression management literature in several ways which includes the positive association between Mach personality and soft taxonomy of impression management (IM). Secondly, by examining the multiplicative effects of situational mechanism i.e. role ambiguity and Machiavellianism to activate the in-role behavior expression (such as soft IM) of Mach's personality.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Machiavellianism is regarded as an antisocial behavior which avoids social interaction and one of its inherent traits is inadaptability. However, the recent researches focus on its adaptability factor and have revealed its positive aspects which includes popular characteristics of in-role behavior such as impression management (IM) skills. Belschak et al. (2013) observe that Mach's behave in a highly cooperative manner when they have self-benefits to achieve. Impression management is the willingness of an individual to exert effort for managing the impressions that others form of them (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Machiavellianism is a wide concept which is studied in the context of both intelligence and personality. Machiavellianism trait means the same as

manipulation, and those individuals who strongly possess this trait are known for utilizing strategic behaviors (such as impression management) that serve their purpose.

A delicate scientific categorization of impression the executives conduct created by Jones and Pittman (1982) incorporates ingratiation (utilizing favors, honeyed words and steady of assessments to be viewed as agreeable), self-advancement (overemphasizing achievements to be viewed as able) and epitome (execution of errands by making a special effort to be perceived as a devoted laborer by the bosses and subordinates). As Machiavellian character is equipped for dealing with their positive impressions, they can use in-role behavior tactics (such as IM) effectively in different work situations for achieving constructive consequences. Evidence has proven that soft impression management behaviors have a more profound impact than hard impression management tactics (such as intimidation) when individuals present themselves either to a superior or a colleague (Wayne and Liden, 1995).

Rauthmann (2011) observed that Machiavellianism reflects assertive in-role behavior by creating a positive self-impressions for fitting in the organization and to avoid criticism. Sherry et al.,(2006) argued that Machiavellians enhance their self-image by being motivated to avoid disappointing others. Machiavellianism is also having a tendency to control others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Jones & Paulhus, 2009) and appear noticeable for the self-beneficial gains (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Therefore, it may well be interrelated with the use of soft Impression management behavior.

A Machiavellianism personality trait is somehow convinced that to engage in the organization sponsored in-role behavior (i.e. IM) is in their best interest to appear supportive and dedicated employee. For example the in-role behavior of "ingratiation" and giving and taking favors may be helpful in creating workplace friendships. These friendships, in the long run, may be used and exploited to fulfill the work obligations. The demonstration of the in-role IM behavior by Mach's leaves the exploitation undetectable by the coworkers because they consider it doing a favor to a friend (Farmer, Maslyn, Fedor, and Goodman, 1997).

As suggested by some of the researchers that the functional attributes of Machiavellianism personality activate at the strategic level for behaving in a socially acceptable manner. It is hard to detect the successful manipulation of situations by Mach's, as they make use of socially influencing behavior (such as positive IM) (Jonason and Webster, 2012). Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka (2012) further indicated that positive persuasion appears to be strongly dependent on Machiavellianism personality. Machiavellianism linked more strongly to a "self-presentation and self-protective" orientation which is typically demonstrated by compliance with the standards and avoiding disapproval. The self-presentable behavior covers a wide variety of human behaviors which form the basis for social functioning of Mach's (Schlenker, 1980; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary, 1995; Sadler, Hunger & Miller, 2010). Machiavellianism is such a personality attribute that characterizes an effective tendency to uphold their resources and public privileges with the strategic display of IM behaviors, therefore, a Machiavellianistic personality is logical, rational and pre-emptive in nature" (Christie and Geis, 1970; Jones & Paulhus, 2009). The research of Gu et al. (2017) proposes that the service-oriented autonomous positions possessed by the Mach's prompt them to have a self-beneficial in-role behavior display (i.e. assertive IM).

H1: There is a positive association between Machiavellianism and IM behavior.

TAT (trait activation theory) has been suggested to investigate the multiplicative impacts of personality and job-related situational mechanism (i.e. Machiavellianism x role ambiguity) to predict in-role behavior (such as impression management) (Lievens, Chasteen, Day and Christiansen, 2006). Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970)

state that role ambiguity is the absence of job-related information which includes performance expectations and job responsibilities. When the job roles are not strictly defined then there is much freedom for Machiavellian personality to enhance their job roles as per their characters (such as power, entitlement and self-serving instinct) (Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger & Hemingway, 2005), such ambiguity in job roles provides opportunity for Mach's to display their positive image especially when they try to amend their malevolent impressions into positive self-image for attaining the self-set broader roles.

Machiavellian personalities reflect positive traits in the job settings where they can set the benchmark for their self-specified roles and have the liberty to deal with the challenges related to role interpretation (Abdel-Halim, 1978). In such role ambiguous situations Mach's feel highly motivated and practice better options in decision-making and personal judgment particularly when it comes to the projection of their own role, which can be the triggering force for them to refine their self-impression.

Machiavellianism does not necessarily directly relate to the outcomes associated with behavior. The situational context seems to play a significant role in the association between Mach's and the outcomes. Mach's are low on conscientiousness and flourish in unstructured roles, where guidelines are not clearly conveyed, such job relevant situational mechanism can shape up the positive impressions of Mach's (Jones and Paulhus, 2009; Becker and O'Hair, 2007). The evidence holds that the Mach's behave intimidatingly in highly controlled job roles (O'Connor and Morrison, 2001). A weak situational mechanism (such as ambiguous roles) build psychological pressure on an individual to be involved in positive in-role behavior and refrain from undesirable behavior display (Beaty, Cleveland, & Murphy, 2001). The undertaken study investigates the weak situational mechanism of ambiguous role expectations to activate the functional attributes of Machiavellianism for self-presentable behavior expression.

H2: Role ambiguity moderate the association in between Machiavellianism and IM, the relation will be greater in the existence of high role uncertainty and vice versa.
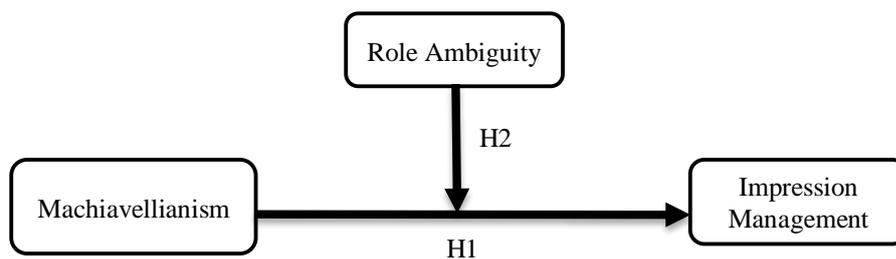
III. PROPOSED RESEARCH MODEL

Figure 1: Interactive effects of Mach and role ambiguity on impression management

IV. METHOD

Population

The research population is comprised of the service sector which includes higher education institutions. Machiavellianism personality performs extraordinary in jobs which involve influencing others (such as in higher

educational institutions) due to their ability to effectively employ situations for achieving self-presentable behaviors (i.e. soft impression management behavior) (Van der Linden et al., 2017).

Sample Size and Procedure

A time-lagged procedure was adopted for data collection. According to Kumar, Talib and Ramayah (2013) causal studies based on behavior phenomenon can be analyzed efficiently with the assistance of time-lagged data. IV (Machiavellianism) and MV (role ambiguity) answers were collected at Time 1. The data of outcome variable (i.e. soft IM behavior) was collected at Time 2 with 30 day time interval. This study overcomes the common method bias by collecting the data at two points in time (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Five hundred survey forms were dispersed out of which 420 useable forms were returned. 50 questionnaires was not returned and 30 were having incomplete answers. The final response rate was 84% which consist 37% females and 63% males. The mean age of responders was 26.4 years (SD = 14.3).

Structural equation modeling (SEM) software was used to conduct the Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA was performed to fulfill the conditions of model fit indices, factor loadings, both discriminant and convergent validities and composite reliability of measures. SPSS v21 was used to analyze the data. For finding the association in between the variables, the Pearson Correlation test was applied and direct effects were analyzed through regression analysis. Hayes (2013) "PROCESS" method in SPSS was used to investigate the moderation effects. Interaction plots and slope test was also conducted as per suggestion of Aiken and West (1991). The internal consistency of the items was also measured by Cronbach alpha (α) value.

V.   MEASURES

Machiavellianism

9-items developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014) was used to measure Machiavellianism personality trait. Likert scale based on 5 options ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree was used to gather the responses. The sample statement is "Avoid direct conflict with others because they may be useful in the future".

Role Ambiguity

6-items scale was used to measure the role ambiguity which is developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). Five-point Likert scale was used to gather the responses ranging from 1 which is "definitely not true" to 5 is "extremely true". All the items are reverse scored therefore high values reflect a high level of role ambiguity and vice versa. The sample statement is "I know my responsibilities very well".

Impression Management

Bolino and Turnley (1999) 12-items based scale was used to gather the responses. The scale is based on Jones & Pittman (1982) soft self-impression management taxonomy which includes 4 items of exemplification, 4 items of ingratiation and 4 items of self-promotion. Impression Management (IM) is taken as an overall construct on a theoretical basis in this study, which is associated with the prior study of Brouer et al. (2015). Responses are rated on 5-point likert scale ranging from 1= never behave this way to 5 = always behave this way. The sample items are "Let other realize that you are very valuable to the organization" and "Reach at work early to show dedication".

VI. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the standard deviation and mean values, Pearson correlation tells the direction and strength of the association in between variables (Cohen, West, and Aiken, 2014). Machiavellianism shows a positive association with impression management (r = .25, p value<.01), the results are according to the previous study of Hogue, Lavashina and Hang (2013). IM is negatively related with gender (r = -.09, p<.05) and age (r = -.10, p<.05). Machiavellianism has a significant association with age (r = .09, p<.05). Role ambiguity has a significant positive association with Machiavellianism (r = .16, p<.01) and age (r = .09, p<.05), prior studies also support the positive association of role ambiguity and Machiavellianism (Hollen, 1983).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation and Internal Consistency

	Mean	**SD**	**Gender**	**Age**	**IM**	**Mach**	**RA**
Gender	-	-	-				
Age	-	-	-.05	-			
IMT2	3.02	.68	-.09*	-.10*	**(.88)**		
MachT1	3.49	.81	-.07	.09*	.25**	**(.82)**	
RAT1	3.90	.75	.05	.09*	-.01	.16**	**(.85)**

*Note: N=420; IMT2=Impression Management Time2, MachT1=Machiavellianism Time1, RAT1=Role Ambiguity Time1; * Correlation is significant at less than 0.05 level; ** Correlation is significant at less than 0.01 level*

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of Measurement Model

To investigate the association of the total arrangement of factors CFA was directed. It expresses the association in the middle of the estimation variable and its foremost idle builds alongside its measurable essentialness. Most extreme Likelihood strategy was acted in CFA for investigating the factor loadings and validities of the embraced factors. Model fit records were likewise accomplished which incorporates the level of opportunity and chi-square worth Cmin/Df = 2.15 (edge is in the middle of 1 and 5), supreme fit measures (RMSEA) = .05 and SRMR = .05 against the satisfactory estimations of under .09, steady fit lists CFI = .92 which is as indicated by the adequate estimation of more prominent than .90 and in conclusion the miserliness files of model fit AGFI = .87 (edge esteem > .80) (Gaskin and Lim, 2016). The outcomes are appeared in Table 2.

Table 2: Model Fit Indices for Complete Measurement Model

	Cmin	**Df**	**Cmin/Df**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**	**SRMR**	**AGFI**
Complete Measurement Model CFA	631.6	293	2.15	.92	.05	.05	.87

AVE is the measure of convergent validity against the acceptable value of greater than .5 and discriminant validity of the constructs are measured with MSV which should be less than AVE (Malhotra et al., 2012). Composite reliability (CR) is also analyzed as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The factor loadings of Machiavellianism items range from .53 to .75, Role Ambiguity item loadings range from .68 to .77 and Impression Management (as single latent factor) item loadings range from .65 to .79. The validity (MSV and AVE), (CR) composite reliability and internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) values are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Factor Loadings, Composite Reliabilities, and Validities

Variable Names	Factor Loadings Range	CR	AVE	MSV	Alpha (α)
MachT1	.53-.75	.86	.51	.21	.82
IMT2	.65-.79	.86	.56	.20	.88
RAT1	.68-.77	.85	.50	.11	.85

Note: N=420; MachT1=Machiavellianism Time1; IMT2=Impression Management Time2; RA=Role Ambiguity Time1

Regression Analysis

Hayes (2013) PROCESS method has been used to investigate the direct effects. Only significant demographic variables should be controlled as per suggested by Becker (1998). Therefore, age has been controlled for impression management (β = -.13, p = .00). The proposed Hypothesis 1 depicts the positive significant association of Mach and IM behavior. The result shows the positive association of Machiavellianism with impression management (β = .26, p = .00). 26% variance is explained by the Machiavellianism personality trait in impression management which is the outcome variable. The stated results are similar with the previous studies (Corral and Calvete, 2000; Rauthmann, 2011). Hence H1 is supported as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression Results of the Direct Effects

	R	ΔR^2	B	S.E	t	p
Step 1						
Age	.10	.00	-.13	.02	-2.80	.00
Step 2						
Mach → IM	.28	.07	.26	.05	5.66	.00

Note: N = 420, Age is used as control (covariate). Standardized Regression Coefficients. S.E = Standard Error, Mach = Machiavellianism, IM = Impression Management
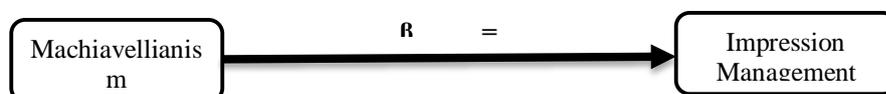
Machiavellianism → β = → Impression Management

Figure 2: Direct Effects

5.3 Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the RA (role ambiguity) moderates the association in between Mach and IM, the relation is greater in the occurrence of high role uncertainty and vice versa. The latest Macros PROCESS technique has been used for moderation analysis. It reports the R2 change along with the slope test values. The multiplicative effects of Mach x RA are significant ($\beta = .27$, p value $< .01$, $\Delta R2 = .02$, p value $< .01$) as reflected in Table V. In table VI the slope test shows the significant slope at high ($\beta = .38$, p value $< .001$) and at the average ($\beta = .19$, p value $< .05$) value of role ambiguity and insignificant at low ($\beta = .00$, p $> .05$) value of role ambiguity (RA).

Table 5: Bootstrap Moderating Analysis (95% CI)

	β	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI
1st Step				
Mach	0.19*	.09	.00	.38
RA	-0.02	.08	-.19	.13
2nd Step				
Mach x RA	0.27**	.11	.05	.49
ΔR^2 due to interaction term	**.022****			

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; Boot SE = Bootstrap Std Error, LLCI = Lower level confidence interval, ULCI = Upper level confidence interval.

Table 6: Slope Test

Role ambiguity (Moderator)	Effect	Boot S.E	LLCI	ULCI
- 0.75	.00	.13	-.27	.25
.00	.19*	.09	.00	.38
+ 0.75	.38***	.11	.15	.61

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; Boot SE = Bootstrap Standard Error, LLCI = 95% lower level confidence interval, ULCI = 95% upper level confidence interval.

The interaction plots presented in Figure 3 shows that the significant positive interactive effects on impression management are stronger when roles are ambiguously defined as compare to lack of ambiguity which proved insignificant in this study. Hence H2 is fully supported.
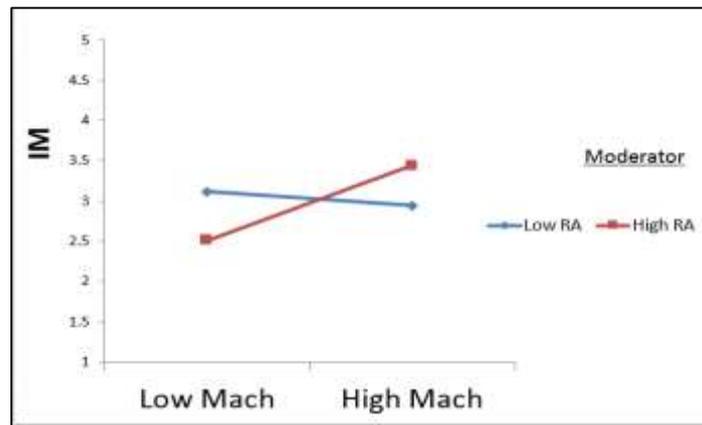
Figure 3: Interaction Plots of Machiavellianism (Mach) and role ambiguity (RA) on impression management (IM)

VII.   CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the strategic side of Machiavellian personality and its association with the positive impression management behavior which includes the attributes of exemplification, ingratiation and self-promotion in the presence of job-based situational mechanism under the Trait Activation Theory. The proposed model proved that even though the Machiavellian personality is quoted as a dark personality in literature but the demands of the social context is helpful in suppressing their negative predispositions for achieving positive impressions. The moderating effect of role ambiguity in the association between Machiavellianism and impression management has been proved significant. When the role ambiguity is high (means roles are not strictly defined) within the jobs that requires frequent social interaction, the Machiavellianism and IM relation would be stronger. Therefore, role ambiguity is proved to be a significant situational mechanism for activating Machiavellian traits to carry positive self-impressions under the practical premise of Trait activation theory.

VIII.   DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Machiavellian personality utilizes self-impression management quite often because they perceive such in-role behaviors as a social mechanism, which is useful for triggering their achievement-oriented attributes to constructive outcomes. Rauthmann (2011) studied that Machiavellianism is mainly associated with the positive presentation of self, such social orientation helps them to fit in the organizational environment and to evade criticism. Mach's are able to manage their soft impression management taxonomies in different interpersonal/social situations for effective accomplishment of their objectives. Moreover, according to Sherry, Hewitt, Besser, Flett, and Klein (2006) Machiavellian personalities avoid to disappoint others that is why they develop their aptitude to exhibit socially acceptable self-promotable behaviors (such as positive self-impression management).

Mach's count on others for fulfilling their self-seeking interests and in doing so they must retain the sociability in their association. Certainly, a dark trait of Machiavellianism is related to the projection of an appealing self-impression that others hold of them for building strategic alliances (Jonason et al., 2012; Rauthmann, 2012). The persons who possess the attributes of Mach's can manipulate the social situations to fulfil their self-serving desires

(Paulhus and Williams, 2002). In line with the Paulhus and Williams argument, this study proves that Machiavellian personality does make use of their inter-individual behavior propensity to control their encounters with others in different social situations by managing their soft impressions. The causal association between Mach and in-role IM behavior is significantly vindicated through role ambiguity (i.e. job relevant situational mechanism) under the disguise of TAT (trait activation theory).

Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the dark personality and in-role behavior literature by hypothetically proving the positive association between Machiavellianism and soft IM behavior. The outcomes are in-line with the earlier study of Hogue, Lavashina, and Hang (2013). Secondly, the results reveal that situational mechanism of role ambiguity activates the socially acceptable attributes of Machiavellianism which leads to positive association with soft impression management behavior. The role ambiguity does prove itself a significant situational trigger to activate the responsible side of Machiavellianism (when they set extraordinary job roles) which helps them to manage the socially acceptable impressions. The study proved the theoretical significance of Trait Activation Theory as a triggering force to activate the functional attributes of Machiavellianism in the collectivist culture. In a collectivist culture, the social context demands that individuals behave in a presentable way by displaying positive self-impressions, especially when their job roles are loosely defined.

Practical Implications

The emphasis of the undertaken study is on the planned and positive side of Mach personality by investigating the situational mechanisms that can prevent the Machiavellian personality from performing their negative abilities in the HEIs where such personality trait are directly engaged infrequent social relations. In a collectivist culture like ours, to carry positive self-impression is the social demand of society, which is the activating force behind Machiavellian personality to act in their best outline for attaining self-focused objectives. The educationist indulges in frequent interactions with others so they are likely to set their own roles. As Machiavellian personalities are very ambitious so they go for challenging roles, which can only be achieved if they will carry the impression of being a capable, accomplished, achievement-oriented and likable employee. This study gives a good insight into the top management of universities for channelizing the strategic side of Machiavellian personality by using the situational mechanisms as a driving force to accomplish through them.

Limitations and Future research directions

The limitation of the study was the self-reported responses of Machiavellian personality. The peer reports of dark personality might give a different insight of such traits and can minimize the self-report bias. Since the Machiavellian personality has some of the attributes similar to a psychopath, so there is also a need to investigate the display of psychopathic personality in-role behaviors and to explore the other work and environment-related situational mechanisms that may activate the positive aspects of such dark personalities. In future, the impression management may be investigated as a dimensional construct with respect to dark personality traits instead of addressing it as an overall construct.

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