

The Influence of Personality Traits on Employees' Creative Deviance: The Mediating Role of Job Crafting and the Moderating Role of Contextual Ambidexterity

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Abstract. Based on Self-Determination Theory, this study reveals the internal mechanism by which the Dark Triad personality traits stimulate creative deviance through job crafting, and identifies the critical boundary role of contextual ambidexterity. An analysis of 1,117 employee survey responses from across China indicates that the Dark Triad positively drives creative deviance, challenging the traditional view that it solely suppresses constructive behavior. Employees with Dark Triad traits proactively reshape their tasks, relationships, and cognitive boundaries, thereby securing essential resources and operational cover for creative deviance. A high level of contextual ambidexterity significantly enhances the conversion efficiency from job crafting to creative deviance—effectively suppressing the potential destructiveness of such traits while fully unleashing their capacity for breakthrough innovation. This study uncovers the intrinsic pathway linking the Dark Triad to creative deviance via job crafting and establishes contextual ambidexterity as a key boundary condition. The findings suggest that organizations should reconsider their management strategies toward employees with Dark Triad traits, focusing on fostering a high-contextual ambidexterity environment to systematically channel their traits toward valuable, disruptive innovation while mitigating associated risks.

Keywords: Job, Crafting Dark Triad, Contextual Ambidexterity

1. Introduction

With China's economy transitioning from high-speed growth to high-quality development, active integration into global open innovation networks has become a key strategy for implementing innovation-driven development and achieving innovation catch-up (Reypens et al., 2021; Recket al., 2022). In the ongoing pursuit of innovation, more than 80% of enterprises have experienced covert creative deviance. Notable examples include the success of WeChat and the growth of Sogou Browser—both of which were not the outcomes of formal product innovation planning and management, but rather the results of persistently advancing creative ideas in defiance of leadership intentions and organizational rules. In real-world innovation practices, the existing stock of resources often falls short of meeting all innovation needs. When companies are unable to adopt every innovative idea, some may be excluded from formal implementation. If employees strongly believe their ideas can generate value for the organization, they may resort to informal channels to realize them (Mainemelis, 2010). Such behavior has the potential to produce disruptive products, lead industry trends, and drive societal progress (Huang et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

Research on creative deviance has largely focused on the influence of external driving factors on employees' deviant innovation behaviors. In contrast, studies from the perspective of individual perception—particularly those examining the impact of personality traits on creative deviance—remain relatively limited. The Dark Triad personality traits are typically regarded as negative characteristics and are often associated with self-serving and antisocial behaviors aimed at achieving personal career goals (Palmer et al., 2017). However, their potential positive effects in specific contexts have not been fully explored.

This study aims to examine the direct impact of Dark Triad traits on creative deviance. The Dark Triad refers to a set of individual psychological traits, including narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. We explore how these traits relate to creative deviance in order to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which individual traits influence behavioral choices. The study seeks to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for organizational management, promote the development of an innovative organizational culture, and enhance both the normative and creative aspects of employee behavior—ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of enterprises.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Dark Triad

The Dark Triad is a cluster of socially undesirable and self-centered personality traits, first proposed by Paulhus and Williams (2002). It comprises three distinct yet interrelated traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Garcia, 2020). While these traits are conceptually independent, they are often empirically correlated.

Machiavellianism, a psychological construct introduced by Christie and Geis (1970), is named after the political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). It is characterized by manipulative behavior, emotional detachment, insincerity, and callousness (Jones & Mueller, 2022). Individuals scoring high on Machiavellianism are more likely to engage in deceit and manipulation for personal gain (Monaghan et al., 2020). Narcissism, according to Kohut (1971), is considered a part of normal human nature and was thus incorporated into the fields of personality and social psychology.

Narcissistic individuals typically exhibit traits such as egocentrism, vanity, self-admiration, dominance, superiority, arrogance, and self-righteousness. Although such individuals may have interpersonal difficulties, they often perform well in academic and professional settings due to their exceptionally high self-expectations (Krizan & Herlache, 2018).

Psychopathy was originally defined as a personality disorder marked by antisocial thoughts and behaviors. Hervé (2017) argued that subclinical psychopathy should be viewed as a personality trait.

Not all individuals with psychopathic tendencies are criminals or patients—ordinary people may also exhibit psychopathic tendencies and behaviors. As a personality trait, psychopathy is generally associated with impulsive behavior, sensation-seeking, lack of empathy, irresponsibility, and low anxiety. Psychopathic individuals tend to show low empathy and anxiety, rarely feel guilt or remorse, and display emotional detachment and impulsivity (Salekin, 2019). In psychopathological literature, psychopathy is characterized by high impulsivity, low remorse, and a strong need for stimulation (Patrick, 2022).

Existing research has shown that the Dark Triad is associated with a higher frequency of counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). However, if individuals high in psychopathy or narcissism perceive their work environment as supportive, the likelihood of such behaviors may decrease (Palmer et al., 2017). Castille et al. (2017) found that individuals high in Machiavellianism are more prone to CWBs only in highly competitive work environments. Organizational psychology research also indicates that individuals may engage in retaliatory behavior when they feel unfairly treated by supervisors or organizations (Jones, 2009). Giammarco and Vernon (2014) found that individuals high in psychopathy and Machiavellianism (but not narcissism) tend to be more vengeful. These findings suggest that individuals with Dark Triad traits are not necessarily “toxins” in the workplace in the traditional sense. Their behavioral expressions are influenced by contextual factors such as the organizational environment and job characteristics.

2.1.2. Creative Deviance

Knight (1967) was the first to introduce the concept of creative deviance into the field of management studies, describing it as employees privately implementing their innovative ideas and disclosing them formally only at an opportune later stage. Augsdorfer (2005) made the first attempt to conceptualize creative deviance, defining it as a bottom-up innovation behavior carried out by employees without explicit authorization from superiors, but with the intention of benefiting the organization. While organizations often encourage employees to propose innovative solutions, the implementation of these ideas is frequently constrained by limited resources (Mainemelis, 2010). Even when proposals are rejected, some employees persist covertly in pursuing their ideas, firmly believing in their feasibility and potential value to the organization. This kind of behavior, where individuals secretly advance innovation despite rejection, is referred to as creative deviance (Gao et al., 2024).

Augsdorfer (1994) was also among the first to investigate creative deviance at the individual level, using qualitative methods to identify a set of personality characteristics common among deviant innovators. As personality traits are significant factors influencing individual behavior, the traits of creative deviant individuals have attracted scholarly attention. Prior research has shown that self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity, creativity, psychological empowerment, and prosocial motivation can trigger creative deviance (Globocnik & Faullant, 2021; Shukla & Kark, 2020). Individuals with high self-efficacy believe they can succeed and thus tend to set higher goals and persist in pursuing them compared to those with low self-efficacy (Martocchio & Judge, 1997; Walumbwa et al., 2011). Highly creative individuals are often persistent, devoting significant time and effort to solving problems and exploring new possibilities (Shafi et al., 2020). Such individuals dislike maintaining the status quo and tend to challenge authority, especially when they disagree with existing practices and processes (Teng et al., 2022). Extraverted individuals actively seek promotion opportunities, and those with high risk-taking tendencies focus more on the potential positive outcomes of their actions, often overestimating the likelihood of success (Baer et al., 2021; Stewart & Roth, 2001).

Taken together, these findings suggest an overlap between the triggers of creative deviance and the behavioral tendencies associated with the Dark Triad personality traits. Whether the Dark Triad traits trigger creative deviance among employees is therefore one of the core research questions of this study.

2.1.3. Job Crafting

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) first introduced the concept of job crafting, defining it as self-initiated

physical and cognitive changes made by employees in the tangible boundaries of their job roles and their intangible perceptions of those roles. Job crafting consists of three dimensions: task crafting, relational crafting, and cognitive crafting. Through these three forms of crafting, employees revise their work identity and enhance the meaningfulness of their work (Chang et al., 2020). This study adopts the definition of job crafting proposed by Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013), viewing it as a self-initiated behavior in which individuals proactively adjust their job tasks, ways of thinking, and social interactions to optimize work experiences, enhance job meaning, and better align with personal needs.

Job crafting is a proactive, self-directed process through which individuals modify job characteristics to better fit their personal traits and dynamically changing work environments (Wang et al., 2018). An empirical study by Bakker et al. (2016) showed that employees with proactive personality traits are most likely to engage in job crafting. Bakker et al. (2012) also found that a proactive personality is associated with increased job resources and challenge-seeking behavior. Self-efficacy has been shown to have a significant and positive impact on job crafting (Kanten, 2014). Numerous studies have emphasized that job crafting is fundamentally driven by proactive employee behaviors (Geldenhuis et al., 2021; Kooij et al., 2017; Kooij et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022; Zhang & Parker, 2022). At the same time, social factors such as positive leadership styles and coworker support are positively associated with employee job crafting (Wang & Chen, 2020). Job crafting plays a vital role in organizations (Tims et al., 2013), as it has been shown to improve work engagement (Zhang & Li, 2020), perceived job meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013), job satisfaction (Li et al., 2023), and individual innovation levels (Bindl et al., 2019).

2.1.4. Contextual Ambidexterity

Gibson (2004) introduced the concept of contextual ambidexterity, referring to the behavioral capacity to simultaneously achieve both alignment and adaptability across an entire business unit. Alignment refers to the coherence among all patterns of activities within the unit—consistent business activities aimed toward common goals, also known as exploitation. In contrast, adaptability refers to the ability to rapidly reconfigure activities within the business unit to meet changing demands in the task environment, which corresponds to exploration (Turner et al., 2013).

Contextual ambidexterity is achieved by establishing a business unit context that encourages individuals to use their own judgment in determining how best to allocate their time and efforts between the competing demands of alignment and adaptability (Gibson, 2004). It implies the simultaneous presence of both exploitation and exploration within the same organizational unit, supported by a particular combination of social support, performance management, structure, and capabilities tailored to the context. This enables the unit to achieve both alignment (i.e., consistency among patterns of activities) and adaptability (i.e., the capacity to reconfigure activities quickly in response to changing environmental demands) (van Assen, 2020). It is widely acknowledged that pursuing both exploitation and exploration simultaneously is critical for building competitive advantage and ensuring long-term business sustainability (Luo et al., 2018). Equal emphasis on both activities is considered essential for enhancing a firm's market competitiveness and fostering enduring growth (Chakma et al., 2021; Vahlne & Jonsson, 2017).

2.2. Research Hypothesis

2.2.1. Dark Triad and Employees' Creative Deviance

Dark personality traits are often associated with creative behaviors, including the generation, promotion, and implementation of original ideas (Abrrow & Thajil, 2020). The traits within the Dark Triad—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—are characterized by high self-confidence, non-conformity, and emotional detachment, all of which have been identified as components of the creative personality (Feist, 1998). Core characteristics of the Dark Triad, such as defiance, behavioral instability,

inflated self-confidence, and social manipulation, are also considered central to the creative personality profile (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Some scholars even suggest that socially aversive traits and creativity share a common neuropsychological basis (Galang et al., 2016).

Empirical studies have shown a positive correlation between the Dark Triad traits and general creativity (Sordia et al., 2022). Lebuda et al. (2021) conducted a systematic literature review and meta-analysis on the relationship between Dark Triad traits and creativity, concluding that while these traits are often linked to negative outcomes, they are also positively associated with certain aspects of creativity. Tariq et al. (2021) further noted that the Dark Triad may facilitate specific types of innovative behavior. Augsdorfer (2012), using empirical methods, identified several characteristics of employees who engage in creative deviance, including a willingness to take risks, the ability to voice dissenting opinions, strong organizational loyalty, sociability, self-confidence, quick thinking, enthusiasm, optimism, friendliness, and high energy levels. These findings suggest that while the Dark Triad traits align with the creative personality, they also partially overlap with the personality traits commonly observed in employees who engage in creative deviance.

Individuals with high creativity typically possess unique ways of thinking and problem-solving abilities, which lay a solid foundation for innovation (Sternberg, 2006). Crysel et al. (2013) found that the Dark Triad personality traits are associated with impulsivity, sensation-seeking, and risk-taking behaviors. The dark side of individuals may influence the extent to which they engage in deviant behaviors in the workplace (Peral, 2019). During the innovation process, individuals or teams may break through traditional thinking frameworks and existing rules to achieve novel solutions. Such breakthroughs may be perceived as deviant behavior, especially in conservative or strictly managed environments (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). LeBreton et al. (2018) indicated that individuals with Dark Triad traits are more likely to exhibit risky and unconventional behavior in the workplace. Therefore, this study proposes:

H1: The Dark Triad has a positive impact on employees' creative deviance.

H1a: Narcissism has a positive impact on employees' creative deviance.

H1b: Machiavellianism has a positive impact on employees' creative deviance.

H1c: Psychopathy has a positive impact on employees' creative deviance.

2.2.2. Dark Triad and Job Crafting

Personality traits are considered strong predictors of work behavior (Furnham, 2008). Personality plays a crucial role in how employees choose to design their jobs (Roczniewska & Bakker, 2016), and individual characteristics may serve as important antecedents of job crafting (Bindl et al., 2019). Bakker and Costa (2014) proposed that personality influences how individuals perceive their work environment, which in turn affects how they deal with job demands and resources. The availability of job resources triggers employees' proactivity (Massei et al., 2022), and job crafting relies on such proactive behavior (Berg et al., 2013). This suggests that employees may actively engage in job crafting.

Job crafting is based on employees' proactive behavior and self-initiative (Zhang & Parker, 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Kooij et al., 2017; Kooij et al., 2020; Geldenhuys et al., 2021). Since job crafting involves the manipulation of job demands and job resources (Bakker, 2016), personality traits influence the extent to which individuals engage in job crafting. Roczniewska and Bakker (2016) found that narcissism is positively related to seeking social job resources, seeking challenging job demands, and reducing hindering job demands; Machiavellianism is positively associated with seeking job resources. Weseler and Niessen (2016) described job crafting as a self-serving proactive behavior composed of various behavioral and cognitive strategies. Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013) defined job crafting as an informal process in which employees reshape their job practices to better align with their specific interests, such as personality and personal values.

The three dimensions of Dark Triad are associated with exploitative social strategies (O'Boyle et al., 2012), and the Dark Triad is linked to a higher frequency of counterproductive work behaviors

(Palmer et al., 2017). Individuals high in Dark Triad traits tend to pursue personal goals while disregarding the balance of social exchange. O'Boyle et al. (2012) found that all three components of the Dark Triad are positively correlated with counterproductive work behavior. These traits lead employees to behave in ways that violate basic social norms in the workplace, as their actions are primarily aimed at achieving personal goals (Roczniewska & Bakker, 2016). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: The Dark Triad has a positive impact on job crafting.

H2a: Machiavellianism has a positive impact on job crafting.

H2b: Narcissism has a positive impact on job crafting.

H2c: Psychopathy has a positive impact on job crafting.

2.2.3. Job Crafting and Employees' Creative Deviance

Tims et al. (2013) found that many positive individual and organizational outcomes may result from job crafting. Through job crafting, individuals may gain a new sense of meaning at work and experience a sense of achievement through an enhanced work identity (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Vogt et al. (2016) found that, over time, job crafting positively influences psychological capital and work engagement. When employees are highly engaged in their work, they are more motivated to solve problems and challenges and to propose novel solutions. This high level of engagement may lead them to be more willing to engage in creative deviance in pursuit of better performance.

Cheng et al. (2016) found that job crafting is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance. Job crafting can be a response to adverse or negative circumstances, or a proactive strategy when employees' needs and preferences do not match their work conditions (Ghazzawi et al., 2021). Through job crafting, individuals can actively improve their working conditions, explore new ways of doing things, and advocate for change and improvement—all of which are expressions of employee creativity (Zhou & George, 2001). When employees are more creative, they are more likely to propose innovative solutions that deviate from traditional approaches, thereby exhibiting creative deviance.

In Bakker's (2018) multilevel model of employee well-being, personality is considered a higher-order variable influencing the types of job resources and demands employees choose. When individuals perceive a mismatch between their needs and what the job provides, they may engage in job crafting (Lu et al., 2014), tailoring their work to better suit their personal needs and expectations. The three dimensions of the Dark Triad involve exploitative social strategies (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Individuals high in Dark Triad traits tend to pursue personal goals while ignoring the balance of social exchange. O'Boyle et al. (2012) found that all three components of the Dark Triad are positively associated with counterproductive work behavior. These traits lead employees to act in ways that violate basic workplace norms because their actions are aimed at personal gain (Roczniewska & Bakker, 2016). Therefore, employees with high levels of Dark Triad traits are more inclined to engage in job crafting.

According to person-job fit theory, need – supply fit refers to the degree to which employees' needs match what the workplace provides (Edwards & Cooper, 1990; Edwards & Van Harrison, 1993). The more a job meets an individual needs or desires, the higher the level of need – supply fit. Job crafting, as described by Slemp & Vella-Brodrick (2014), is a process in which employees reshape their work practices to better align with their individual interests, such as personality and personal values. When work fails to meet their needs, employees may engage in job crafting to improve their person-job fit.

In summary, Dark Triad personality traits motivate employees to engage more in job crafting, and job crafting in turn promotes the occurrence of creative deviance.

H3: Job crafting has a positive impact on employees' creative deviance.

H4: Job crafting mediates the relationship between the Dark Triad and employees' creative deviance.

2.2.4. The Moderating Role of Contextual Ambidexterity in the Relationship Between Job Crafting and Employees' Creative Deviance

In highly ambidextrous environments, employees are more likely to identify and seize innovation opportunities (Ossenbrink et al., 2019). In such environments, employees may be more willing to engage in new innovative behaviors because they know the organization supports exploration and change (Li et al., 2018), which may increase their willingness to engage in job crafting. During job crafting, employees are more likely to encounter a variety of situations, including gaining more resource support, enjoying greater autonomy, and receiving positive feedback from colleagues and management.

When organizational culture and structure support contextual ambidexterity, the organization creates a tolerance-for-error environment that encourages employees to take risks and learn from failures during the innovation process (Lu & Sun, 2022), thereby increasing their psychological capital for engaging in job crafting and subsequently creative deviance. Contextual ambidexterity emphasizes the balance between maintaining organizational stability and promoting change and innovation (Jianlin et al., 2024). Thus, when organizations support contextual ambidexterity, employees' creative deviance is more likely to be accepted and recognized.

Employees' personal characteristics—such as creativity, risk-taking tendency, and self-efficacy—may have different effects on creative deviance under conditions of contextual ambidexterity (Ikhsan, 2017). In an environment that encourages both exploration and exploitation, the organization's emphasis on innovation and change strengthens employees' job crafting behavior and significantly promotes creative deviance.

H5: Contextual ambidexterity positively moderates the relationship between job crafting and employees' creative deviance.

2.2.5. The Moderating Role of Contextual Ambidexterity in the Relationship Between the Dark Triad and Employees' Creative Deviance

Contextual ambidexterity enables organizations to maintain balance in dynamic environments (Jacobs & Maritz, 2020). Adaptive behaviors aim to seek new knowledge, technologies, markets, and opportunities (Clauss et al., 2021), while alignment behaviors promote innovation within existing systems, creating new growth opportunities for organizations (Shafique et al., 2020).

For employees with Dark Triad traits, adaptive behaviors may amplify their innovation tendencies by providing an environment that encourages experimentation and challenges the status quo. Their confidence and willingness to take risks may lead them to engage in creative deviance, even if it means breaking existing rules. Exploratory behaviors emphasize challenging and transcending established norms and routines, which align with the intrinsic motivations of individuals high in Dark Triad traits—especially those unwilling to be constrained by traditional rules.

On the other hand, alignment behaviors focus on optimization, efficiency, and effective resource utilization. They emphasize making improvements within existing frameworks, ensuring controllable risk and maximizing resource use (Hwang et al., 2023). In such environments, the high-risk and uncertain nature of creative deviance may not be encouraged. Exploitative behaviors focus more on refining existing resources and technologies (Anzenbacher & Wagner, 2020) rather than pursuing entirely new, potentially disruptive innovations. These environments may suppress the risk-taking tendencies of employees, particularly those inclined toward creative deviance.

Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) argued that organizations need to strike a balance between alignment and adaptability to effectively respond to complex environmental changes. For employees with high levels of Dark Triad traits, increased exploratory behavior may reinforce their creative deviance, while increased exploitative behavior may inhibit it to some extent.

H6: Contextual ambidexterity moderates the relationship between the Dark Triad and employees' creative deviance.

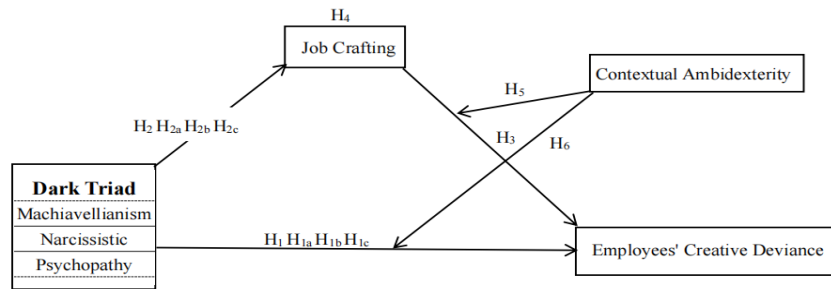


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework

3. Method

3.1. Measurement Instruments

All scales used in this study were originally developed in English. Dark Triad was measured using the 12-item scale developed by Jonason and Webster (2010), which consists of three dimensions: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, each measured by four items. Creative Deviance was measured using a 9-item scale developed by Lin et al. (2016). Job Crafting was also measured using a 9-item scale developed by Lin et al. (2016). Contextual Ambidexterity was measured using a 6-item scale developed by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. To ensure cultural and linguistic equivalence of the instruments in the Chinese context, this study adopted the translation and back-translation procedure recommended by Wu Shufang (2006) and Jones et al. (2001).

A pilot survey was conducted with 200 corporate employees from Lanzhou and Kunming. Reliability analysis, validity analysis, and item discrimination tests were performed. The results showed significant differences between high and low scoring groups for all items, indicating good discriminative power. No items needed to be added, deleted, or revised.

3.2. Data Collection and Sample Distribution

This study aims to explore how the Dark Triad personality traits influence employees' creative deviance, using corporate employees in China as the research sample. Given China's vast territory and large population, five provinces were selected to ensure the representativeness of the sample and improve the accuracy of generalizing the findings. Specifically, Sichuan, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Hunan, and Hebei were chosen to represent the western, southern, eastern, central, and northern regions of China, respectively. These provinces are considered economically active and regionally representative. According to 2023 GDP data, innovation plays a critical role in economic activity in these regions, making them suitable for sampling.

This study adopted a purposive sampling method. Given that Dark Triad traits are relatively covert and not easily observable, it was necessary to ensure that the sample effectively included individuals exhibiting such traits while minimizing irrelevant or invalid responses. To improve the screening efficiency, a self-screening mechanism was implemented. A screening question was placed at the beginning of the questionnaire, encouraging potential participants to determine their eligibility before continuing. The item was as follows: "If none of the following descriptions apply to you in the workplace, you may choose not to participate in this survey: I tend to adapt my behavior flexibly to achieve my goals (Machiavellianism); I see myself as unique and worthy of recognition in the team (Narcissism); Under pressure, I focus on results without being influenced by emotions (Psychopathy); None of the above apply to me." If respondents selected "None of the above apply to me," the survey would automatically exit without continuing to the main questionnaire.

A total of 4,500 questionnaires were distributed. 1,564 respondents entered and completed the

formal questionnaire. After screening for validity, 1,117 valid responses were obtained, yielding a valid response rate of 24.82%. Overall, the sample size was relatively large and geographically diverse, enhancing the representativeness of the data. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study are considered to have a high level of credibility and generalizability.

3.3. Analysis Method

This study adopts a quantitative empirical research approach. To verify the rationality and validity of the research hypotheses, the data analysis is conducted through four main procedures: Reliability and validity analysis of the measurement instruments; Descriptive statistics of the variables; Correlation analysis among variables; Structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships, along with mediation analysis to examine the underlying mechanisms. All data analysis and model estimation were conducted using SPSS 26.0 and Mplus 8.3 statistical software.

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Bias and Non-Response Bias

Since this study collected data from the same group of respondents using a single questionnaire, common method variance (CMV) may pose a threat to internal validity (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess the severity of CMV, the Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976) was conducted. The results of the unrotated exploratory factor analysis showed that the first principal component accounted for only 25.973% of the total variance, which is below the 40% threshold. This indicates that common method bias is not a serious concern in this study (Wu, 2010).

To assess non-response bias, the comparison method proposed by Armstrong and Overton (1977) was applied. Chi-square (χ^2) tests for demographic variables between early and late respondents ranged from 0.001 to 10.203 with p-values greater than .050. Similarly, the independent-sample t-tests showed no significant differences in the means (all p-values > .050 and confidence intervals included zero), suggesting that there were no significant differences between the early and late respondents. These results indicate that non-response bias is not a major issue in this study.

4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

This study employed Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC), Cronbach's α , and Cronbach's α if item deleted to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the scales and their subdimensions. According to the guidelines proposed by Wu (2010), the following criteria were used: Cronbach's α should be greater than 0.700, CITC should be greater than 0.400, and if deleting an item increases the overall Cronbach's α while the item's CITC is below 0.400, the item should be considered for deletion. If all three criteria are met, the scale is considered to have acceptable reliability in the pilot study and can be used in the formal study.

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α values for Dark Triad (including Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy), Job Crafting, Contextual Ambidexterity, and Creative Deviance are all above 0.900, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability. Validity analysis includes content validity and construct validity. Content validity refers to whether the items appropriately represent the construct being measured (Ansari & Khan, 2023). All the scales used in this study were mature instruments that have undergone repeated reliability and validity testing in previous studies.

Construct validity was assessed through convergent validity and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, the Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.875 to 0.938, all exceeding the threshold of 0.700. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values range from 0.579 to 0.749, all above the recommended value of 0.500. Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE values are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, indicating good convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Variable	Dimension	Item	Mean if Deleted	Var if Deleted	Corr-Total	α if Deleted	Cronbach's α
Dark Triad	Machiavellianism	MJ1	12.744	15.567	0.774	0.820	0.874
		MJ2	12.743	15.499	0.744	0.834	
		MJ3	12.760	17.240	0.697	0.851	
		MJ4	12.683	17.568	0.711	0.847	
	Narcissistic	ZL1	12.611	20.560	0.799	0.872	0.905
		ZL2	12.625	20.803	0.793	0.874	
		ZL3	12.658	20.901	0.782	0.878	
		ZL4	12.689	20.938	0.769	0.883	
	Psychopathy	JS1	12.821	18.470	0.809	0.897	0.919
		JS2	12.775	18.260	0.812	0.896	
		JS3	12.755	18.431	0.814	0.895	
		JS4	12.789	20.663	0.842	0.892	
Job Crafting		CS1	59.452	227.436	0.761	0.951	0.954
		CS2	59.440	229.012	0.731	0.952	
		CS3	59.401	228.393	0.760	0.951	
		CS4	59.417	228.141	0.753	0.951	
		CS5	59.455	228.639	0.764	0.951	
		CS6	59.450	225.920	0.742	0.951	
		CS7	59.417	228.571	0.720	0.952	
		CS8	59.421	226.559	0.747	0.951	
		CS9	59.444	227.656	0.723	0.952	
		CS10	59.362	226.563	0.709	0.952	
		CS11	59.392	227.936	0.746	0.951	
		CS12	59.411	228.608	0.748	0.951	
		CS13	59.423	228.352	0.752	0.951	
		CS14	59.327	227.851	0.774	0.951	
		CS15	59.388	228.894	0.756	0.951	
Contextual Ambidexterity	Consistency	YZ1	9.501	7.360	0.785	0.860	0.896
		YZ2	9.411	7.276	0.810	0.839	
		YZ3	9.351	7.481	0.790	0.856	
	Adaptability	SY1	9.729	7.284	0.743	0.854	0.881
		SY2	9.739	7.170	0.784	0.817	
		SY3	9.728	7.005	0.779	0.821	
		CX1	39.200	84.108	0.812	0.936	0.944
		CX2	39.308	86.253	0.741	0.940	
		CX3	39.365	85.535	0.760	0.939	
Employees' Creative Deviance		CX4	39.285	85.428	0.761	0.939	
		CX5	39.244	85.018	0.758	0.939	
		CX6	39.258	83.657	0.805	0.937	
		CX7	39.258	84.208	0.793	0.937	
		CX8	39.285	85.288	0.787	0.938	
		CX9	39.359	84.981	0.831	0.935	

Table 2. Validity Analysis

	Machiavellianism	Narcissistic	Psychopathy	Consistency	Adaptability	Job Crafting	Employees' Creative Deviance
Machiavellianism	.799						
Narcissistic	.620**	.839					
Psychopathy	.646**	.655**	.866				
Consistency	.136**	.089**	.117**	.861			
Adaptability	.133**	.093**	.123**	.457**	.844		
Job Crafting	.252**	.262**	.262**	.146**	.152**	.761	
Employees' Creative Deviance	.261**	.254**	.269**	-.078**	-.079**	.393**	.809
AVE	0.638	0.705	0.749	0.742	0.712	0.579	0.655
CR	0.875	0.905	0.923	0.896	0.881	0.938	0.945

¹ * $p < .050$, ** $p < .010$, *** $p \leq .001$; bolded values indicate the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

² Data source: compiled by the authors based on this study.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1. Direct Effect Testing

This study employed Mplus 8.3 to test the research hypotheses. Model fit was evaluated according to the thresholds recommended by Hu and Bentler (1995) and Hair et al. (2010): $\chi^2/df < 5$; TLI > .90; CFI > .900; RMSEA < .080; SRMR < .080. These indices collectively indicate an acceptable level of fit between the data and the measurement model.

The fit indices for Model 1 (direct effect model) are as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.442$, less than 5, indicating good fit; CFI = .992, TLI = .992, both above .90, indicating strong model fit; RMSEA = .019, below the .080 threshold; SRMR = .021, also below the .080 threshold. These results demonstrate that Model 1 exhibits a good overall fit. In terms of specific path coefficients: The effect of Machiavellianism on Job Crafting was $\beta = .193$, and statistically significant ($p = .000 < .050$), indicating a significant positive effect. The effect of Narcissism on Job Crafting was $\beta = .204$, also statistically significant ($p = .000 < .050$), indicating a significant positive effect. The effect of Psychopathy on Job Crafting was $\beta = .168$, statistically significant as well ($p = .000 < .050$), suggesting a significant positive effect. Therefore, these findings support the hypotheses regarding the positive impact of the three Dark Triad traits on Job Crafting.

The model fit indices for Model 2 are as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.310$, which is less than 5, indicating a good model fit; CFI = .993, TLI = .992, both greater than .900, meeting the acceptable thresholds; RMSEA = .017, below the .080 threshold, indicating acceptable fit. SRMR = .021, also below the .080 threshold. These values indicate that Model 2 exhibits a good overall fit to the data. In terms of path coefficients: The effect of Machiavellianism on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .148$, statistically significant ($p = .003 < .050$), indicating a significant positive effect. The effect of Narcissism on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .113$, also significant ($p = .020 < .050$), indicating a significant positive effect. The effect of Psychopathy on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .149$, significant as well ($p = .002 < .050$), indicating a significant positive effect. Additionally, the effect of Job Crafting on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .301$, with high significance ($p = .000 < .050$), suggesting a strong positive effect. Therefore, the results support the hypotheses that the three dimensions of the Dark Triad—as well as Job Crafting—positively influence employees' Creative Deviance.

The model fit indices for Model 3 are as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.637$, which is less than 5, indicating good model fit; CFI = .991, TLI = .990, both greater than .900, meeting the recommended thresholds;

RMSEA = .024, below the .080 cutoff, indicating acceptable model fit. SRMR = .019, also below the .080 threshold. These indices indicate that Model 3 demonstrates a good overall fit. Regarding the path coefficient: The effect of the Dark Triad personality traits on Job Crafting was $\beta = .571$, and the effect was statistically significant ($p = .000 < .050$), indicating a strong positive relationship between the Dark Triad traits and Job Crafting. Thus, the hypothesis that the Dark Triad positively influences Job Crafting is supported.

The fit indices for Model 4 are as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.414$, which is below the threshold of 5, indicating an acceptable model fit; CFI = .992 and TLI = .992, both exceeding the recommended cutoff of .900, suggesting excellent fit; RMSEA = .019 and SRMR = .020, both below the .080 threshold, further supporting good model fit. Overall, these indices demonstrate that Model 4 fits the data well. Regarding the path coefficients: The effect of Dark Triad personality traits on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .426$, which was statistically significant ($p = .000 < .050$), indicating a strong positive relationship. The effect of Job Crafting on Creative Deviance was $\beta = .167$, likewise statistically significant ($p = .000 < .050$), indicating a positive effect. These results provide empirical support for the hypotheses that Dark Triad traits, Job Crafting have a significant positive impact on Creative Deviance.

Table 3. Summary Table of Direct Effect Hypotheses and Path Results

Model	Hypothesized Path	β	SE	t	p	R^2
Model 1	Machiavellianism \rightarrow Job Crafting	.193	.048	4.036	.000	.307
	Narcissism \rightarrow Job Crafting	.204	.047	4.374	.000	
	Psychopathy \rightarrow Job Crafting	.168	.047	3.573	.000	
Model 2	Machiavellianism \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.148	.050	2.978	.003	.267
	Narcissism \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.113	.048	2.328	.020	
	Psychopathy \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.149	.049	3.063	.002	
	Job Crafting \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.208	.033	6.227	.000	
Model 3	Dark Triad \rightarrow Job Crafting	.571	.039	14.809	.000	.343
Model 4	Dark Triad \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.426	.039	1.849	.000	.287
	Job Crafting \rightarrow Employees' Creative Deviance	.167	.036	4.640	.000	

4.3.2. Mediation Effect Testing

To test the mediation effect proposed in this study, the widely used and statistically robust bootstrap method (Wen & Ye, 2014) was employed. A total of 5,000 resamples were drawn to estimate the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect.

As shown in Table 4, the mediation path “Dark Triad \rightarrow Job Crafting \rightarrow Creative Deviance” was significant. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval was [0.148, 0.035], which does not include zero, indicating the presence of a significant mediation effect. Since the independent variable still has a significant effect on the dependent variable after including the mediator, this suggests a partial mediation effect.

Table 4. Summary of Mediation Effect Analysis Results

Hypothesized Path	β	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCL	R^2
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Dark Triad → Job Crafting	.554	.030	18.180	.000	.490	.609	.343
Dark Triad → Creative Deviance	.426	.052	8.170	.000	.325	.527	
Job Crafting → Creative Deviance	.167	.053	3.160	.002	.061	.266	.287
Total Effect							
Dark Triad → Creative Deviance	.335	.042	7.969	.000	.249	.414	
Direct Effect							
Dark Triad → Creative Deviance	.426	.052	8.170	.000	.325	.527	
Indirect Effect							
Total Indirect Effect	.091	.032	2.811	.005	.155	.027	
Dark Triad → Job Crafting → Creative Deviance	.092	.029	3.176	.001	.035	.148	

4.3.3. Moderation Effect Testing

This study employed the latent moderated structural equations (LMS) approach to examine the moderating effects. Since LMS can only be computed using specific estimation procedures, the analysis was conducted using Mplus 8.3, which supports LMS-based moderation testing within structural equation modeling.

A significant standardized coefficient of the interaction term ($p < .05$) indicates a statistically significant moderation effect. Therefore, if the interaction term is significant, it can be concluded that the moderating variable has a meaningful influence on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 5. Path Coefficients for the Moderation Effect Model

	β	SE	t	p
Dark Triad	0.405	0.030	13.474	0.000
Contextual Ambidexterity	-0.209	0.037	-5.590	0.000
Dark Triad × Contextual Ambidexterity	0.280	0.046	6.040	0.000

As shown in Table 5, the standardized path coefficient of the interaction term between the Dark Triad and contextual ambidexterity on creative deviance is 0.280, with a t -value of 6.040 and $p = .000 < .05$, indicating that the interaction term has a significant moderating effect on employees' creative deviance.

To further examine this moderating effect, a moderation effect graph was generated based on the results of the structural equation modeling. As shown in Figure 1, the slope of both lines—representing high and low levels of contextual ambidexterity—shows an upward trend, suggesting that as Dark Triad traits increase, creative deviance also increases. Moreover, the slope under high contextual ambidexterity is steeper than that under low contextual ambidexterity. This indicates that as contextual ambidexterity increases, the positive effect of Dark Triad traits on creative deviance becomes stronger. In other words, when the level of contextual ambidexterity is high, the influence of Dark Triad traits on

creative deviance is amplified.

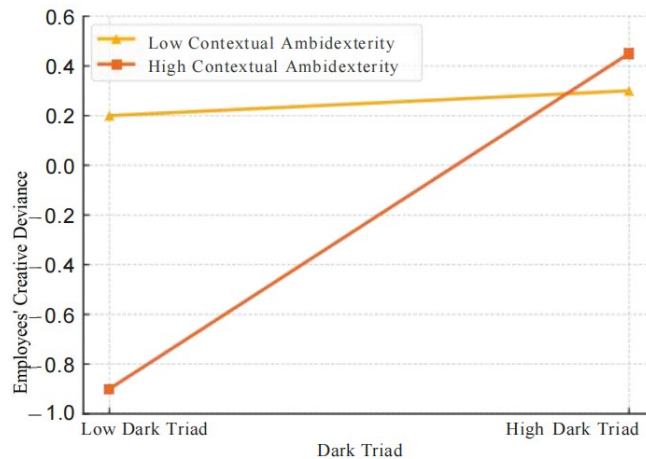


Fig.1: Moderation Effect Plot

Table 6. Path Coefficients for the Moderation Effect Model

	β	SE	t	p
Job Crafting	.536	.037	14.504	.000
Contextual Ambidexterity	-.254	.042	-5.981	.000
Job Crafting \times Contextual Ambidexterity	.196	.039	5.079	.000

As shown in Table 6, the standardized path coefficient for the interaction between job crafting and contextual ambidexterity on creative deviance is 0.196, with a t -value of 5.079 and $p = .000 < .050$, indicating that the interaction term has a significant moderating effect on employees' creative deviance.

To further examine this moderating effect, a moderation effect plot was generated based on the structural equation modeling results. As illustrated in Figure 2, both regression lines—for high and low levels of contextual ambidexterity—show an upward trend, suggesting that as job crafting increases, creative deviance also increases. Moreover, the slope of the line under high contextual ambidexterity is steeper than that under low contextual ambidexterity. This indicates that with increased contextual ambidexterity, the positive effect of job crafting on creative deviance becomes stronger. In other words, when contextual ambidexterity is high, job crafting has a greater positive impact on creative deviance.

These findings confirm that contextual ambidexterity positively moderates the relationship between job crafting and creative deviance, thereby supporting the proposed hypothesis.

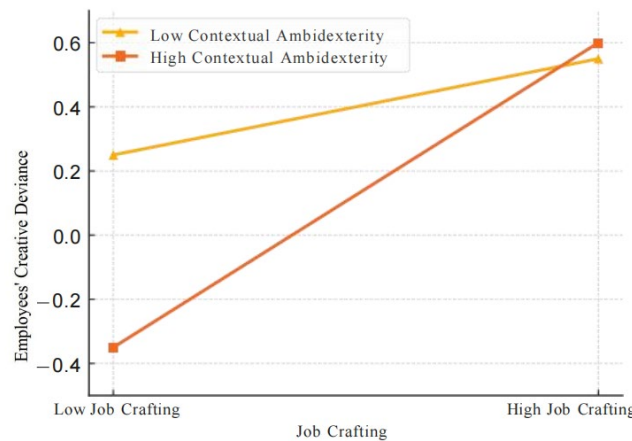


Fig.2: Moderation Effect Plot

5. Discussion

5.1. The Impact of Dark Triad Traits on Employees' Creative Deviance

This study confirms the direct and positive effect of Dark Triad personality traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—on employees' creative deviance (H1). This finding aligns with previous arguments that dark personalities may drive non-conventional behaviors (Jonason et al., 2012), suggesting that individuals with high levels of dark traits are more likely to violate organizational norms in pursuit of innovation.

The results are consistent with earlier studies (Jonason & Tost, 2010), which found a significant association between Dark Triad traits and creative behavior. Narcissists' self-enhancement tendencies (Campbell et al., 2011) and psychopaths' low risk perception (Furnham et al., 2013) may lead them to disregard formal constraints and engage in deviant innovation to achieve personal or organizational goals.

Employees exhibiting narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy may be more motivated to engage in creative deviance in order to gain greater autonomy or to challenge traditional innovation pathways. However, such innovation often comes with ethical risks (O'Boyle et al., 2012), which requires careful managerial consideration to balance potential benefits against organizational norms and ethical boundaries.

5.2. The Impact of Dark Triad Traits on Job Crafting

This study confirms that Dark Triad personality traits positively influence job crafting (H2), and that job crafting, in turn, positively affects creative deviance (H3), serving as a mediating mechanism between the Dark Triad and creative deviance (H4). These findings align with Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) view that job crafting is a key proactive strategy through which employees adapt to their work environments.

Narcissistic individuals, driven by excessive self-confidence, are more likely to disregard the risk of failure and frequently engage in new tasks (Liu et al., 2021). Psychopathic individuals, due to emotional detachment, are less concerned about the social costs of reshaping their roles (Laurijssen et al., 2024). Machiavellians, characterized by strategic calculation, tend to pursue high-return job crafting strategies (Gao et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports these distinctions: for instance, Nevicka and Sedikides (2021) found that narcissism significantly predicts task crafting; Aplin-Hout et al. (2024) reported a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and relational crafting; and Kranefeld and Blickle (2022) observed that psychopaths engage in task crafting more frequently, especially in high-pressure roles.

The positive effect of job crafting on creative deviance (H3 supported) challenges traditional assumptions that frame job crafting as exclusively constructive (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This study reveals that, under specific conditions, job crafting can act as a "latent driver" of deviant innovation. Job crafting is typically regarded as a strategy through which employees reshape their task, relational, and cognitive boundaries to meet basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Tims & Bakker, 2010). However, when individuals high in Dark Triad traits fail to effectively engage in job crafting (as supported by H5a–H5c), the deprivation of basic needs—particularly autonomy—may compel them to resort to creative deviance as a compensatory mechanism (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, narcissists who refuse to reprioritize tasks (i.e., low task crafting) may directly violate organizational procedures to fulfill self-imposed innovation goals.

This study further demonstrates that the Dark Triad influences creative deviance through job crafting (H4 supported). In contrast to prior studies suggesting that dark personality traits suppress constructive behavior (Tims et al., 2016), this research suggests that individuals high in dark traits may

strategically use instrumental job crafting to reshape their task, relational, and cognitive boundaries. In doing so, they construct a façade of legitimacy and accumulate resources for creative deviance.

Narcissists may expand their responsibilities (task crafting) or build supportive networks (relational crafting) to enhance their core self-concept (Campbell et al., 2011), behaviors that reflect impression management strategies (Leary et al., 2014) aimed at reinforcing their unique position within the organization. Machiavellians view job crafting as an extension of power games (Dahling et al., 2009), manipulating work structures to gain influence. Psychopaths, characterized by low anxiety and high sensation-seeking (Furnham et al., 2013), may engage in radical forms of job crafting to create uncertainty and derive stimulation.

5.3. The Moderating Role of Contextual Ambidexterity

This study finds that contextual ambidexterity significantly moderates the relationship between Dark Triad traits and creative deviance (H6 supported). This conclusion extends traditional ambidexterity theory (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008) from its strategic organizational roots to the domain of individual behavior management. By enabling trial-and-error experimentation, contextual ambidexterity can channel the risk-seeking tendencies of psychopathic individuals into productive, experimental innovation (Lee et al., 2019). Simultaneously, by clearly delineating innovation boundaries, it can suppress the opportunistic behaviors typical of Machiavellians (Agarwal, 2023). This micro-level regulatory mechanism offers new empirical support for the cross-level application of ambidexterity theory.

Contextual ambidexterity enhances the innovation value of job crafting through "adaptability", while ensuring strategic alignment through "consistency." The findings indicate that contextual ambidexterity significantly moderates the relationship between job crafting and creative deviance (H5 supported). High adaptability—in autonomy-supportive environments—facilitates the transformation of instrumentally motivated job crafting by individuals high in Dark Triad traits into organizationally sanctioned breakthrough innovations (Zibarras et al., 2008). This supports Mom et al.'s (2009) theory of "adaptive empowerment," which argues that flexibility enhances the legitimacy of crafting behavior by granting access to resources. High consistency, by contrast, ensures accountability and procedural transparency, constraining crafting behavior within the organization's strategic goals (Ingrams, 2018). This aligns with O'Reilly and Tushman's (2011) "consistency anchoring" principle, which posits that control mechanisms prevent deviation through institutional boundaries. Contextual ambidexterity thus operates via a "flexibility amplification – control correction" synergy, transforming the potential deviance risk of job crafting into a manageable force for innovation.

Furthermore, contextual ambidexterity moderates the direct relationship between Dark Triad traits and creative deviance (H6 supported) by balancing "adaptability" and "consistency" to suppress destructive tendencies while activating breakthrough potential. Adaptive mechanisms—such as establishing "innovation test zones" and tolerating nontraditional decision-making—can redirect the unethical impulses of individuals high in dark traits toward experimental innovation (Zibarras et al., 2008). For example, Wibisono et al. (2024) demonstrated that high-risk projects can be effectively executed within resource-constrained frameworks, simultaneously satisfying sensation-seeking needs and reducing organizational risk. Conversely, consistent mechanisms—such as rigid rules and transparent surveillance—narrow the space for opportunistic exploitation by individuals with Dark Triad tendencies (Czarna & Zajas, 2018; Travis et al., 2024).

This dual-process model is consistent with O'Reilly and Tushman's (2013) "structural separation" strategy, which advocates institutional safeguards during exploratory efforts to manage associated risks. Through this dynamic balance of "adaptive stimulation and controlling constraint," contextual ambidexterity transforms the "double-edged sword" of the Dark Triad into a productive force, providing organizations with a systematic approach to leveraging dangerous personalities for innovation while minimizing risk.

6. Theoretical Implications

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study explores the mechanisms and contextual boundaries through which Dark Triad traits influence employees' creative deviance. The theoretical contributions are reflected in the following four areas:

6.1. Expanding the Outcome Domain of Dark Triad Traits: Revealing Their Role in “Constructive Deviance”

Previous research on the Dark Triad has predominantly focused on its negative behavioral outcomes, such as counterproductive work behavior (Cheng, 2021), or on conventional innovation (Mehraein, 2022). However, creative deviance, a behavioral construct that embodies both rule-breaking and constructive intent, has received limited attention. By positioning creative deviance as a core outcome variable, this study uncovers that the “dark” traits of narcissism (self-centeredness), Machiavellianism (strategic manipulation), and psychopathy (impulsivity) do not uniformly lead to destructive outcomes. Instead, when channeled through job crafting, these traits can facilitate employees' engagement in creative deviance. This finding enriches the emerging literature on the “bright side” of dark traits (Constantin & Florin, 2023), and broadens the theoretical boundary of outcome variables associated with the Dark Triad. It offers a more nuanced understanding of how these traits may also drive constructive yet nonconforming innovation.

6.2. Uncovering the Mediating Role of Job Crafting: Linking Personality Traits to Deviant Innovation via Motivational Pathways

Self-Determination Theory posits that the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs is the psychological foundation for intrinsic motivation and positive behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Song et al., 2023). This study reveals that employees high in Dark Triad traits engage in job crafting—modifying tasks, social interactions, or cognitive frames—in ways that satisfy their fundamental psychological needs. For example, narcissistic individuals expand their role scope to satisfy autonomy needs; Machiavellians engage in strategic resource integration to reinforce their competence. This mediating mechanism clarifies the motivational pathway linking dark personality traits to creative deviance, addressing the long-standing “black box” problem in existing literature (Rahmi, 2024). It also contributes to the growing understanding of the motivational antecedents of creative deviance (Long et al., 2024), providing new empirical support for the application of SDT in personality–innovation research.

6.3. Introducing Contextual Ambidexterity as a Moderator: Extending the Boundary Conditions of SDT

Contextual ambidexterity, composed of adaptability and consistency, reflects the simultaneous presence of organizational flexibility and stability (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996; Shi et al., 2023). This study demonstrates that adaptability strengthens the positive effect of Dark Triad-driven job crafting on creative deviance. For example, in R&D contexts, autonomy-supportive environments allow narcissistic individuals to fulfill their needs through job crafting, thereby encouraging deviant innovation. Conversely, consistent environments with strict rules may inhibit psychopathic employees from engaging in impulsive crafting behaviors during routine operations. This verified moderation effect contributes to the literature on situational influences in personality–behavior relationships (Wu et al., 2025; Wen et al., 2024). It extends the situational boundary conditions of SDT, offering a refined theoretical perspective on how personality traits interact with organizational context to shape employee behavior.

6.4. Integrating Self-Determination Theory to Elucidate the Motivational Processes of the Dark Triad: Addressing the Neglect of Underlying Mechanisms

Prior research on the Dark Triad has largely focused on behavioral outcomes, while insufficiently examining the motivational processes underpinning such behaviors (Iqbal, 2023). This study addresses this gap by employing Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a theoretical lens to interpret how individuals with dark personality traits are motivated through the fulfillment of core psychological needs. Specifically, it demonstrates that: Narcissistic employees engage in job crafting to fulfill their autonomy needs, striving to maintain control over their tasks and gain recognition through expanded role scope (Zhang et al., 2023); Machiavellian individuals utilize job crafting to satisfy their competence needs, deliberately manipulating work structures and resources to enhance their sense of mastery and influence (Wang et al., 2024); Psychopathic employees, driven by impulsivity and stimulation-seeking, engage in temporary or disruptive forms of job crafting to fulfill short-term autonomy needs (Rahman & Muldoon, 2020).

By unpacking these trait-specific motivational pathways, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how Dark Triad traits operate not merely as behavioral predictors, but as motivational systems shaped by underlying psychological needs. This reframing helps rectify the behavioral determinism that has dominated previous research on dark personalities and offers a novel theoretical framework for applying SDT within the field of dark personality and organizational behavior (Song et al., 2023).

7. Practical Implications

7.1. Identifying and Differentiating the Management of Employees with Dark Triad Traits to Harness Deviant Innovation Potential

Organizations can enhance innovation by proactively identifying employees with Dark Triad traits through standardized personality assessments. Traits such as narcissistic self-enhancement, Machiavellian strategic manipulation, and psychopathic impulsivity can be leveraged—not merely controlled—by designing targeted job crafting opportunities that align with these individuals' psychological needs and behavioral tendencies.

For narcissistic employees, organizations should provide greater autonomy and decision-making authority, especially in high-visibility or exploratory projects. This satisfies their need for control and recognition, motivating them to expand their role boundaries through job crafting, thereby fueling constructive deviant innovation (Liu et al., 2024).

For Machiavellian individuals, clearly defined, goal-oriented tasks involving complex problem-solving are most effective. Managers can encourage strategic job crafting behaviors by positioning them in cross-functional roles that require resource integration and coordination, thus reinforcing their sense of competence and driving deviant innovation.

For employees high in psychopathy, offering structured but flexible work boundaries allows them to operate with a degree of autonomy without compromising organizational norms. Managers should guide their job crafting behaviors through well-defined yet dynamic objectives, helping redirect their impulsivity into innovation while minimizing potential harm (Long et al., 2024).

This differentiated approach not only mitigates the destructive potential of Dark Triad traits but also channels their risk-taking and boundary-pushing tendencies into valuable innovation outcomes. By aligning personality-specific motivations with carefully designed job roles, organizations can maximize the constructive potential of employees who are often overlooked or marginalized in traditional management frameworks.

7.2. Guiding the Direction of Job Crafting and Defining the Boundaries of Deviant Innovation

Organizations should encourage employees to engage in job crafting as a means of fulfilling their needs for autonomy and competence. However, it is equally important to clearly define the acceptable boundaries of deviant innovation, in order to mitigate ethical risks and maintain organizational integrity

(Dong et al., 2023).

To this end, companies can implement a “forgiveness list” or tolerance framework—a formal guideline that delineates which rule-breaking behaviors are acceptable (e.g., bypassing inefficient procedures) and which are prohibited (e.g., actions that harm organizational interests or violate legal standards). This reduces employees’ perceived risk of engaging in innovation-related rule-bending by clarifying what constitutes constructive versus destructive deviance (Wang et al., 2022).

Additionally, organizations should offer innovation coaching mechanisms, such as mentorship programs and targeted training, to help employees align their job crafting efforts with the firm’s broader innovation goals (Song et al., 2023). This reduces blind or misdirected deviance and transforms potentially risky behaviors into strategically valuable innovation practices.

7.3. Creating Contextual Ambidexterity to Enhance the Positive Effects of Dark Triad Traits

Organizations should cultivate differentiated ambidextrous environments based on the nature of the task or project. In exploratory contexts such as new product development, firms should foster adaptive environments that tolerate failure and encourage risk-taking. Such environments amplify the positive influence of Dark Triad traits—particularly when these traits motivate employees to engage in job crafting that leads to deviant yet constructive innovation (Shi et al., 2023).

Conversely, for exploitative contexts such as process optimization or production efficiency projects, organizations should foster consistency-oriented environments that emphasize structure, efficiency, and compliance. These settings help suppress the impulsive or opportunistic deviance often associated with Dark Triad traits, particularly psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Xu et al., 2024). Thus, contextual ambidexterity acts as a behavioral filter, magnifying the functional aspects while neutralizing the dysfunctional potentials of dark personalities.

7.4. Building a Supportive Organizational Culture to Enhance Motivation and Psychological Safety

Fostering a supportive and psychologically safe organizational culture is critical for encouraging constructive deviance among employees with Dark Triad traits. Leaders should adopt inclusive leadership styles, actively listening to employee voices and tolerating divergent views, thereby enhancing employees’ psychological safety and willingness to engage in proactive job crafting and deviant innovation (Bian et al., 2024).

Additionally, organizations should implement error-tolerant mechanisms, where deviant innovation that results in valuable outcomes is not punished but rewarded. This helps reduce employees’ fear of failure and fosters a sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Song et al., 2024). A culture that balances tolerance with accountability allows organizations to channel dark traits toward high-impact innovation while minimizing ethical and operational risks.

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