

RUNNING HEAD: Transformational Leadership and Alexithymia Supervisors

Transformational Leadership: Benefits of Women Management of Machiavellians Supervisors

Jennie Larry Johnson

University of North Texas - Denton

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**Introduction**

Today's headlines bombard readers with shocking headlines about class action lawsuits, ongoing federal investigations, and congressional inquiries against organizations and their leaders because of unethical business practices. Each story infers greed and the relentless pursuits of unprecedented profits is the transactional business model by industrialized economies. High-end organizations, especially those in the communications and technology industries, appear to have detached themselves from the interest of their employees and customers. The apparent lack of empathy demonstrated by some of the world's largest organizations makes it reasonable to assume individuals suffering from dysfunctional alexithymia personality disorders may have taken leadership positions in 21st Century boardrooms. Few would argue that alexithymia individuals in key leadership positions can create a clear and present danger to alexithymia moderation variables that might pose a threat to an organization's culture, long-term sustainability, performance improvement efforts, customer loyalty, and profitability because of ineffectual leadership. (Pilch, 2008). The phenomena raise this question: *Is it possible for alexithymic supervisors that lack the emotional intelligence to identify their feelings and emotions, differentiate the feelings and emotions of others, and express themselves verbally create learning environments that promote adaptive behaviors?* As women begin to take a more prominent role in organizational leadership, questions have been raised regarding if a woman's transformational leadership style can help address negative work environments created by alexithymia and Machiavellianism individuals in supervisory roles. The purpose of this study was to address a gap in literature related to professional development for alexithymia or Machiavellian personalities that lack emotional intelligence and what possible

role women in leadership positions might play in harnessing the strength and talents of alexithymia and Machiavellianism individuals for the betterment of their organizations.

### **Alexithymia and its Social Characteristics**

Alexithymia is a psychological construct associated with neuroticism and extraversion (Kellner, Chew, & Turner, 2018, pg. 47.). Alexithymia, derived from the Greek words “alexis” (no words) and “thymos” (emotion) caused by dysfunctional emotion regulation borderline personality disorder that makes it difficult for individuals to control impulsive behaviors or reflect on past destructive relationship management (Elzinga, Bermond, & Van Dyck, 2002).

While studying the impairments of alexithymic individuals, Zhang et al. (2011) wrote:

*The major defining features of alexithymia are (1) reduced ability to identify and describe one's feelings; (2) difficulty distinguishing between feelings and bodily sensations of emotional arousal; (3) reduced imaginative capacities, as evidenced by a paucity of fantasies; (4) an externally oriented thinking style rather than attending to inner experiences; and (5) social conformity. (Zhang et al., 2011, p. 261).*

Zhang et al. found that individuals with high alexithymia are a threat to themselves because of the increased cardiovascular mortality associated with the condition. But, the researchers also found an association between high alexithymia individuals and dysfunctional and diminished executive functioning. As a result, alexithymic supervisors often respond inappropriately in situations requiring contentious communications, especially conversations that may lead to conflict. Fearing miscommunications and conflict can make employees hesitant to express themselves to managers and prone to suppressing their own emotions or ideas out of fear of what their manager will do or say (Zhang et.a., 2012).

### **Alexithymia, Machiavellianism, Emotional Intelligence, and Social Competence**

Research has shown a positive correlation between alexithymia and Machiavellianism and studies have consistently conducted to explore if manipulative and cold Machiavellians that lack emotional intelligence could become effective supervisors (Wastell & Booth, 2003; Loas, Verrier & Romney, 2007). While studying the Machiavellianism relationship, Pilch (2008) cited literature that found Machiavellian (Mach) traits have been negatively correlated with dysfunctional neuroticism personality traits (Ramanaich, Byranvan, & Detwiler, 1994) because their inherent narcissism is negatively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and the tendency to cooperate (Paal & Bereczkei, 2007). Pilch examined possible correlations between Machiavellianism, emotional intelligence, and social competence. Pilch used an exploratory path coefficient to analyze data to study the hypothesis of the negative correlation between Machiavellians and emotional intelligence and social competencies and the ability to recognize non-verbal facial expressions and emotions. Using 173 male and female students, aged 20-24, from three different departments of the Silesian University in Polan (Pilch, 2008, p. 160). Participants were asked to complete an anonymous survey voluntarily. The survey included measures from the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (INTE) (Jawoowska & Matczak, 2001), Emotional Intelligence Scale – Faces (SIET) (Matczak, Piekarska & Studniarek 2005), and Social Competence Questionnaire (SCQ) (Matczak, 2001) designed to measure an individual's emotional intelligence. The survey measured the level of Machiavellianism using the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) and Allsop's (Allsopp et. Al., 1991) scale designed to measure an individual's level of Machiavellians tendencies. The survey measured participants' ability to correctly recognize emotions from facial expressions using the Emotional Intelligence Scale – Faces (SIET) (Matczak Piekarska & Studniarek, 2005). Pilch used the findings to prove

Machiavellians are not stronger because of they are more interpersonally talented, and they do not have specific abilities in their level of social competencies, especially in interpersonal responses to the emotions of others. Pilch also cited literature by other researchers that found Mach tendencies also have a negative correlation with empathy (Watson, Biderman & Sawrie, 1994; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Draheim, 2004). Pilch, therefore, argues that, while the Machiavellian's strategy of deception and manipulation may appear effective short-term, the benefits are not sustainable long-term as the Machiavellian supervisor's manipulative and unethical characteristics can lead to resentment and retaliation from followers long-term (Pilch, 2008). Bouchard (2008) documented the negative correlations between alexithymia and education, Bouchard did find a relationship between alexithymia professions such as engineering and the physical sciences. Bouchard attributed this phenomenon to emotions being of secondary importance in and the "non-helping" fields associated with science (Bouchard, 2008). But, Cilliers (2012) was the only researcher to date that has connected alexithymia and supervisory effectiveness which maps a possible negative correlation between Mach traits and performance (Draheim, 2004; Smieja, 2005).

### **Alexithymia, Emotional Intelligence, and Organizational Behavior and Performance**

Few studies have examined the effectiveness of individuals suffering as organizational leaders (Cilliers, 2012). Kellner, Chew, and Turner (2018) found a gap in literature regarding the correlations between alexithymia and leadership effectiveness and found gaps within the body of knowledge related to this topic. Kellner, Chew & Turner focused on causal links between alexithymia' neuroticism and extraversion and Machiavellianism or how a supervisors's lack of emotional intelligence (EI) impacts human performance and sought to a new framework and new perspectives on alexithymia and EI by exploring the connection between the Mach's

manipulative neurotic narcissism and the alexithymia supervisor' lack the emotional intelligence to identify their feelings and emotions, differentiate the feelings and emotions of others, and inability to express themselves verbally (Kellner, Chew & Turner, 2018). Zettler & Solga theorized a new perspective related to the leadership qualities of Machiavellian supervision and job performance. Their assumption were based on how moderate Machiavellians can instigate improved performance improvements if called upon to resolve challenges related to intense negotiations, gaining support and consensus, articulated a competitive edge, etc. because of their ruthlessness. While acknowledging that Machiavellians may be motivated by self-interest, organizations can create balance between an alexithymic supervisor's destructive behaviors and potential benefits. To prove their point, Zettler & Solga randomly selected 325 people from across Germany to complete two questionnaires. One questionnaire contained nominal and categorical demographic questions, and the other contained a Machiavellianism (Mach) assessment of the participant with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Participants were asked to request that a work colleague complete the Mach assessment anonymously and mail it back to the researchers in the stamped envelope. The 249 surveys returned were coded by moderating effects, the Machiavellian Personality Scale, job performance behaviors, and aspects of organizational behavior. The research tested the hypothesis using an inverted U-shaped relation between Machiavellianism and job performance. The correlations between Machiavellianism and job performance were negative across the spectrum. But, those participants assessed to have intermediate or high Mach were perceived to be stronger and viewed more respectfully by their peers than participants assessed as low Mach. Zettler & Solga interpreted the results to mean that the "dark side" of Mach supervisors could prove detrimental; but, also beneficial during periods of intense organizational change (Zettler & Solga, 2013). Further, Hamilton (2017)

sought to examine the effect of Machiavellian supervision in high-tech industries. He found that many high-technology businesses have ambitious, greedy, emotionless supervisors who are malicious, corrupt and manipulative. A Mach's "cut-throat" behaviors are often needed when an organization is forced to "deal with" tarnished images situations after committing hurtful offenses such as laying off hundreds of workers after mergers and acquisitions, relocations, and pay-cuts for the sake of profits. Hamilton also found, however, that Machs are often scapegoated and fired afterwards and blamed for changes they effected on behalf of others. Therefore, Hamilton warned Machs should balance their behaviors and the expectations. Hamilton also explained that it is common practice for leadership and business management education to advise that Machs be allowed to manage without emotional intelligence because the respect they command can help organizations a competitive edge even if it requires harsh and cruel tactics. Hamilton advises organizations could benefit from investments in applications of the Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS), Toronto Alexithymia scale, and other psychometric measures are warranted to identify high alexithymia individuals (Hamilton, 2017).

### **Transformational Leadership and Supervisor Professional Development**

Synthesized, the research infers precautions should be taken when individuals with Machiavellian tendencies are given leadership authority so as not to allow these individuals to negatively impact to employee morale, work performance, and organizational culture and values (Cilliers, 2012; Draheim, 2004; Kellner, Chew, & Turner, 2018; Hamilton, 2017; Loas, Verrier & Romney, 2007; Smieja, 2005; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Zettler & Solga, 2013). But, gaps in the literature do not answer the question: *How could the negative culture alexithymic and Machiavellian supervisors bring to the workplace be harnessed for benefit an organization?* Rosener's (2011) seminal work regarding the differences between how men and women suggest

women in leadership roles might provide a possible answer. Rosener conducted study for the International Women's Forum (IWF) in 1989 during which survey all the organization's male and female members. The 37% response rate included respondents with similarities across demographics including age, occupation, and educational attainment, which infers the sampling was generalizable. Based on the responses, Rosener defines the difference as, male leaders viewing their interactions with their subordinates as transactions based on rewards and punishments. By contrast, Rosener explains females have transition from this traditional model toward the more emotionally intelligent option of enticing subordinates to "transform" their self-interest and broader their goals as responsible members of a group (Rosener, 2011). Rosener notes women are more apt to see personal "charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or personal contacts" (p. 20) as being the strength of their leadership style than men who have the tendency to rely on leadership by power. Rosener argues it is the female leader's associated and participative interactive leadership styles that enables them to transform self-interested egotistical individuals into effective and high-performing supervisors and team leaders.

### **Discussion**

This paper explored the challenges Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors can create to organizational performance and health and how the transformational leadership style employed by some female leaders might best be suited to harnessing the power and creativity of Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors can bring to the table instead of punishing these individuals or pushing great talent out of the door. The relationship between alexithymia and Machiavellianism was examined and the lack of emotional intelligence often has negative impacts on employee morale and their job performance. Empirical evidence appears consistent in marking the positive correlation between alexithymia and Machiavellianism and the negative

correlations between these two personality dysfunctions and agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional performance intelligence, and workplace cooperation. Important implications raised are that individuals suffering from alexithymia are not effective long-term and therefore lack the emotional intelligence to create learning environments that promote adaptive behaviors.

Research infers transformational management, which is most often associated with female leaders, could ensure the proper levels of sensitive oversight and management of alexithymic need to become more aware as to how their inflexible autocratic and typical reward-and-punishment criteria affects. The suggestion is that women demonstrate those leadership characteristics that could be implement emotional intelligence development strategies that could best mitigate alexithymic supervisors from becoming detrimental to the organization, its culture, or employees long-term. Finally, additional research is needed to explore other alexithymia moderation variables that might pose a threat to an organization's culture, long-term sustainability, performance improvement efforts, customer loyalty, and profitability due to ineffectual supervision. Additional research is needed to determine if alexithymia individuals, through intervention, can learn to demonstrate the levels of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills, most associated with effective leadership (Kellner, Chew, & Turner, 2018.). Additional study is also needed to measure the correlations between alexithymia and Machiavellian given the effects of these related personality disorders within complex adaptive systems. Such research is particularly needed to examine the phenomena in technology-enriched organizations, and high-tech scientific professions where emotional intelligence may not be as valued – but is still necessary to promote the levels of adaptive behaviors required for employee creativity and innovation.

## **Conclusion**

While Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors are often the source of subordinate complaints, supervisors that lack emotional intelligence also command the level of respect required to improve performance in high-pressure work environments. Rosener found that female leaders use a transformational, participatory, and interactive leadership style that enhances the self-worth of others. This approach to management allows females to energize co-workers and subordinates despite sometimes being hard on a person's ego (p. 24). The resultant enthusiasm can help lead Machiavellian alexithymia supervisors and their subordinates toward improved work environments because of a free flow of power and information sharing. This study was significant because it attempts to address a gap in the literature related to the opportunities and challenges of supervising Machiavellian alexithymia supervisors. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge regarding how organizational leaders could possibly increase their competitiveness and returns from by encouraging their women in leadership positions to cultivate the strengths of Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors instead of stifling or ostracizing these supervisors because of their weaknesses. The limitation of this study was the gap in literature related to professional development for Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors that lack emotional intelligence. Future research is needed to determine what approaches organizational leaders might take to support Machiavellian and alexithymia supervisors as they strive to demonstrate emotional intelligence and the role female leaders might play during their transformation. Such research would be significant because such research would guide organizations toward making informed decisions regarding situations and circumstances where alexithymic Machiavellian supervision could prove beneficial.

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