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## **A Phenomenological Review of Machiavellianism in Organizations**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study intended to investigate the phase of Machiavellianism within Sri Lankan organisations. Previous literature supported to the identification of the characteristics of high Mach people in organizations and societies. The objectives of this study highlight the meaning of Machiavellianism, the qualities of high Mach people in organizations especially in Sri Lanka and find out how to handle them for organizational success. A qualitative research method of Phenomenology has been adopted intentionally in this study. Further past literature from reputed research sites has also been reviewed to enhance the validity of the research. Findings showed that high Mach people manipulate others, and deceive others for their own benefit to build relationships. They often speak about others' negative qualities or manipulate bad things to build good relationships, especially with the top management. They spread their attributes quickly within the context and achieve their personal goals using others. The attributes of high Mach individuals in society could be observed in the places like schools, universities, government or private organizations, businesses, and families. It is recommended that the education system should be changed in a way that teachers should teach students to create a broad mind with a healthy competition. The government should open career paths by introducing very constructive curricula and regulations to create good governance everywhere.

**Keywords:** Machiavellianism, Organizations, Phenomenology, Top Management.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Machiavellianism is distinguished by emotional disengagement, limited empathy, and a proclivity to manipulate or abuse others, all of which have a significant impact on social interaction and relationships in both real life and online space (Abell et al., 2016; Láng & Birkás, 2015). Machiavellianism drives people to engage in horrible behavior like bullying, dishonesty, and interpersonal violence in to improve their social standing, limit the power of others, or dominate the social connection or conversation. Simultaneously, they perform actions that reward them at the detriment of others, as well as those that provide the image of

accomplishment when this is not the reality (Dahling, 2009; Geng et al., 2016; Greenbaum et al., 2017). It means people try to achieve accomplishments without thinking good or bad of those behaviors which is spreading as a trend in the whole world. Therefore, that was a negative sign in the society at the current situation. Based on these previous researches, this study intended to investigate on Machiavellianism in Sri Lankan context to find out issues related to this developed concept.

The phrase of Machiavellianism originated from the Niccolò Machiavelli's original work since that has become an unpopular phrase for characterize someone who is dishonest and/or manipulative. However, scholars began to explore the phase of

Machiavellianism during 1970s in the scope of psychology and social psychology (Christie & Geis, 1970). Although Machiavellianism appeared in the 1970s at the earlier, organizations had not faced this personality trait from their employees since the earlier generations developed with their attitudes and attempted to improve everyone without selfishness. However, at present, employees are high Mach due to boosting population in the world leads to huge competition. Huge competition creates distance attitudes among employees within the organization. They have become self-centered in achieving their objectives. They attempt to go ahead and improve by destroying others and their image within the organization for their own benefit. Therefore, this is an existing critical issue within organizations.

Machiavellianism is a personal trait theory. It may be a positive reinforcement in some organizations. Nevertheless, most of the time it has an adverse effect to the organization. In organizational behaviour, Machiavellianism is a vital and famous concept (Jones & Mueller, 2022). Christie and Geis initiated the concept of Machiavellianism in 1970. They defined it as persons who changed other words or wrote things by own selves, they were manipulative, distrustful, and unethical. Niccolò Machiavelli, a Florentine writer, historian, politician, and philosopher who wrote "The Prince", a scientific treatise on amassing and exerting political power and influence in organizations, invented the phrase Machiavellianism in the 16th century (Castille et al., 2018). Machiavelli emphasized the value of pragmatism, emotional distance, and manipulative influence strategies in traversing complicated organizational systems in his prominent book.

The unempathetic, egotistic, and goal-oriented beliefs advocated in Machiavelli's literature prompted researchers to coin the term "Machiavellianism" to describe a personality type that demonstrates concurrence with these views (Mach; Christie & Geis, 1970). It is crucially important in organizational, political, and

administrative settings (Belschak et al., 2018; Christie & Geis, 1970; Furnham, 2010). Hence, researchers are interested to execute this study regarding Machiavellianism within organizations in Sri Lanka.

Many executives and employees are confronted with frequent incidents of ethical misbehaviour, manipulation, and self-serving behaviour in organizations (Koo & Lee, 2021). As a result, and unsurprisingly, there is renewed interest in the 'dark' side of organizational behaviour (Liang et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021), the Dark Triads, and their effect on leadership (Liang et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). Narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism are the Dark Triads (Lyons et al., 2019). The first two components have been thoroughly examined (Harrison et al., 2018; Mutschmann et al., 2021). Yet, Machiavellianism is underappreciated (Liyanagamage et al., 2022). Although much research has been conducted on the effects of Machiavellian leaders on employee performance, satisfaction, well-being, and organizational goals (Belschak et al., 2018a; Castille et al., 2018; Koo & Lee, 2021), neither publications evaluation has specifically investigated why Machiavellians engage in unethical behavior in organizations (Liyanagamage et al., 2022).

Based on the above facts in previous literature, researchers identified that there is a critical issue on Machiavellianism within organizations in the world, even in Sri Lanka with the experience of researchers. Therefore, they intended to explore the problem due to the consequence of the concept of Machiavellianism within the organizations in Sri Lanka as a phenomenological study.

### **Research Gap**

Paulhus (2014) explained that future researchers should further explore the personality dark traits. Different constructs frequently examined on Dark Triad such as Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Therefore, researchers are interested to select the theme of Machiavellianism.

Liyanagamage et al., 2022 mentioned in the conclusion, although this may be a naturally occurring phenomenon in this situation, future research could attempt to reconcile high and low Machiavellians. Thus, researchers will discuss Machiavellians as high and low characteristics within organizations. Further, Machiavellianism has an adverse effect on every organization in the world. It has been increasing while increasing the attitude of selfishness among the people in the world. In Sri Lankan context, there is a lacuna for investigating Machiavellianism in organizations. Especially from 2020 onwards World has been facing a lot of challenges and people have changed their work-related attitudes accordingly. Sri Lanka is also no exception to this rule. There was COVID-19 pandemic situation, Economic Crisis, Fuel Crisis etc. People in organizations adopted various mechanisms for their sustainability in the organizations. Therefore, researchers have been captivated to execute this study on Machiavellianism from a phenomenological perspective since the study is a psychology-based one and the Phenomenology is a qualitative method which emphasizes experiential, lived aspects of a particular construct.

### **Research Questions**

This study intended to identify the existence of Machiavellianism in organizations, the characteristics of high Mach and people in. Researchers arise questions to reach the objectives of this study such as what are the characteristics of high Mach people in Sri Lankan organizations and how can the organizations handle high Mach people for their success.

### **Research Objectives**

Researchers endeavor to examine the characteristics of high Mach people in Sri Lankan organizations and recommend how to handle them for the success of the organizations as the research objectives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Researchers followed previous literature regarding Machiavellianism and expected to disclose further practical implications regarding this concept within the organizations in Sri Lanka. In this section, researchers discuss Machiavellianism with practical implications.

### **The Concept of Machiavellianism**

Collison et al., (2021) explained that Mach people use others to attain their individual goals. At present, there are such people in our society (School, University, private or government organizations and other places). They are willing to use others for achieving their personal goals and objectives through them. Initially, Christie and Geis (1970) profoundly introduced the concept of Machiavellianism. They initiated an exploration of the concept of Machiavellianism. They developed Mach – IV based on literature reviews related to Machiavellianism.

Previous researchers denoted characteristics of high Mach people as discussion of. Christie and Geis (1970) began to explore the construct of Machiavellianism with a personality assessment distinguished by four persistent elements, after almost 500 years after the establishment of this famous book. Those attributes are the propensity to ignore ethical standards in pursuit of self-interested goals (amoral manipulation), a pessimistic attitude about other people's motivations and aspirations (distrust of others), a desire to exert control over interpersonal events while undermining the strength of others (desire for control), and a tremendous willingness to obtain exogenous career advancement measures (desire for status). Those four attributes were discussed by prior researchers (Dahling et al., 2009; Wu & Lebreton 2011). Considering such characteristics, Machiavellians are widely assumed to prioritize their personal ends at the detriment of others and the entities wherein they work (Dahling *et al.*, 2009). It means high Mach people reach their own interests with their attribute of selfishness without thinking of others. Sometimes, they destroy others'

selves without any wrong thing of others. Castille *et al.*, (2018) indicate Machiavellians are focused on engaging in unethical conduct to further their own self-serving interests. Machiavellians are extremely motivated to dominate, have a tactical awareness habit, and are skilled at navigating complicated power relationships in organizations using their diplomatic skills (Judge *et al.*, 2009). High Mach people act within the organization as politicians. Politicians also show fantasies to the public till vote for them.

The prior researchers explained Machiavellians do not like to share their knowledge (McHoskey, 1999), also they do not give their support to others or organizations even in their jobs (Moore *et al.*, 2012; Zagenczyk *et al.*, 2014). Researchers contend, then, that the prevalent assumption that Machiavellians are hesitant to engage in contextual performance is oversimplified. Indeed, Machiavellians' utilitarian morality should lead them to do whatever it takes to achieve their own self-serving aims, including engaging in pro-social actions. When their interests coincide with those of the firm, such as when harmful information threatens the company's position, reputation, or even survival, Machiavellians should respond by doing what is economically sensible and in their own self-interests (Gustafson, 2000).

Different scholars explained the behaviours if individuals high in Machiavellianism such as individuals with a high level of Machiavellianism are primarily concerned with instrumental gain and are ready to utilize deceptive strategies to accomplish it (Jones & Paulhus, 2009); Individuals with a high level of Machiavellianism are focused on instrumental objectives such as money, control, and power, and are eager to compete for these matters (Stewart & Stewart, 2006); Machiavellianism-inclined people engage in exploitative and harmful job practices (Nelson & Gilbertson, 1991); individuals with a high level of Machiavellianism bully others, nevertheless, they are not always bully victims (Pilch & Turska, 2015); and also, individuals in high level of

Machiavellianism try to create stress or exhausted of emotions of others (Jones & Mueller, 2022).

An empirical study in this field has discovered that Machiavellian personnel may be a hindrance to organizational performance. Mach, for instance, are much more inclined to perform and unfair workplace behavior (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2017; KishGephart *et al.*, 2010; O'Boyle *et al.*, 2012; Palmer *et al.*, 2017) and, as a result, are often more likely to deviate (Thoroughgood *et al.*, 2012). According to previous studies, Machs have a high rate of turnover and a low degree of job satisfaction (Fehr *et al.*, 1992; Wilson *et al.*, 1996). High Mach individuals are barriers to organizational productivity. They may be cancerous since they spread things that are wrong, manipulative, and deceptive through this negative personality trait within the organization. Doctors treat cancers before spreading the whole body of human beings. Employers or management in the organizations also should manage those Mach individuals like cancer patients before spreading things within the organization. Therefore, employers should identify them and manage them with business intelligence.

High Mach individuals think that they can build a strong friendly relationships with others through this personality trait (Dahling *et al.*, 2009; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Haughtiness, habitual deception, and low degrees of culpability, repentance, and empathy have been described as high Machiavellian qualities (McHoskey *et al.*, 1998). High Mach people talk about their performance by comparing others to superiors with haughtiness in organizations. Then, some employers think that yes, she or he is very good, they have a very good performance within the organization. Some employers make decisions with the statements of people for promotions or salary increments without concerning actual performance and appraisal methods. High Mach employees are very talented to frustrate their supervisors by talking with them. Supervisors do not recommend or inform their subordinates to the management

about their talents. They earn marks from superiors for their tasks. It is also an attribute of high Mach people. Researchers can call it deception. It is self-evident that high Machiavellians are more inclined to participate in unethical behaviour in different settings, including business. In the competitive context of business, where it is incredibly simple to excuse immoral conduct as required for economic growth or existence, Machiavellianism may be especially prone to affect strategic planning (Simmons et al., 2013). There are Mach people in different contexts such as schools and academic institutions, organizations (manufacturing, agricultural, services, industrial, & others), businesses, and every context within the society. Researchers also experienced, there were students who caused conflicts with each other, passing gossip to teachers and principals to demolish the reputation and status of others within the schools. At present even in the families, researchers observe Machiavellians. With the competition, elder siblings try to get more attention from the parents than their younger sisters and brothers by using the qualities of high Mach people. Since childhood, students inspire the qualities of Machiavellians with the completion. They started to be Machiavellians from the schools. Thereafter, they continue those negative personality traits when they become as matured people in the society and within their organizations. Therefore, it affects to make decisions within the organization. However, if employers are intelligent, they try to make effective decisions based on the evidence without considering gossips.

High Machiavellians are far less involved with morals or ethics; they are free to concentrate on "victory" in competitive circumstances (Geis *et al.*, 1970). Interpersonal antagonism is a core characteristic of those persons who are Mach. It means always high Mach individuals present opposite things for others. Most of the times, they do not agree with others' opinions. They want to stand out through others by adopting any tactics those may be good or bad for others. Sometimes they suggest wrong practices to highlight

among others. However, they want to take initial place among others. Nevertheless, it is an unethical personality trait. Unless the organizations identify these matters, they cannot manage Mach individuals properly. Mach individuals achieve their personal goals on those negative personality traits. Organizations cannot identify the right people and talented people or optimized people or suitable people for the vacancies for promotions. Therefore, it is also evident that organizations should identify the right employees for the right positions to obtain optimized productivity and profit.

Christie and Geis (1970) explained Machiavellianism people as individuals who have traits in calculating, manipulative, and long-term strategists. If individuals have long-term plan or long-term strategies, it is good in common. Nevertheless, there is a problem from the Machiavellianism perspective. They plan to achieve their goals by decreasing the status of others without any wrong practices towards others. Therefore, this is not good for organizations or society as a whole. For instance, if there are five executives in Human Resources (HR) department, there is an opportunity for one person to be the senior executive in HR department. Thus, one employee among them collects information about others very well. He/ She does not do best in his/her other performance. If he/she finds information from HR manager about his preferences, favourite foods, drinks or things, then that employee is very friendly with the HR manager and shares personal details within a few weeks. After that, she informs about others to him as she knows others. The situation apparently shows that the person plans very well to achieve his/her goal. Planning is good for organizational and personal success however achieving those goals should be done in an ethical way. Therefore, top management of the organizations should identify individuals very well with their responsibilities and accountabilities to achieve the organizational performance or organizational productivity.

Various matrices highlight distinct features of Machiavellianism such as MACH IV,

Dirty-Dozen, Short Dark Triad (Christie & Geis, 1970; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus & Jones, 2015). However, there is widespread agreement that Machiavellianism characterizes a self-centered, power-hungry, selfish mindset (Miller et al., 2019) manifested in a dishonest personality (Muris et al., 2017). Different researches emphasized various determinants whether they are changed with life span or not. That problem was explored by Götz et al., (2020). Based on their findings, the maturity from late infancy to adolescence, while Machiavellianism occurred, was marked by a substantial rising trend in Machiavellianism. It showed a consistent declining trend throughout adulthood, reaching an all-time low at the age of 65. Machiavellianism was found to be more prevalent among men and high-income participants over their lifetime.

Machiavellianism is a crucial indicator for the development of aberrant behaviours as early as late childhood, and it may foretell psychopathology (Allroggen et al., 2016; Jonason et al., 2009). During childhood, Machiavellianism is attributed to abuse (Allroggen et al., 2016), relational aggression (Kerig & Stellwagen, 2010), coercive methods, and a lack of moral consciousness and empathy (De Clercq et al., 2017). Machiavellianism is linked to violence, externalizing difficulties, and criminality among juveniles (Klimstra et al., 2014). Through adult people, Machiavellianism has been associated with moral disengagement (De Clercq et al., 2017), norm-violating, transgressive behaviours and antisocial tactics (Muris et al., 2017), diminished empathy (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; Paulhus, 2014; Schimmenti et al., 2017), poor mental health (Jonason et al., 2015). Based on the previous literature, different attributes were expressed throughout the life span nevertheless, everyone should try to avoid this negative personality trait from their lives as an attitude.

High Machiavellianism people are in every place. They try to act as *“I am the best in the organization, others are lazy, not dynamic”* and blaming with other negative aspects. Moreover, they try to complicate others’

mindsets when others are stressful with the job or job environment. High Machiavellianism individuals always try to create unethical environment within organizations. They are selfish. They try to get their own benefit without thinking of others. Researchers explained those matters regarding high Machiavellianism based on previous literature (Carré & Jones, 2017; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Jones & Mueller, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

Researchers adopted different organizational situations experienced by them and reviewed the articles of Machiavellianism in Indexed Journals in the sites of Emerald, Research Gate and other reputed research sites. Researchers pointed out their opinions with the understanding of previous researchers’ findings and experience in this study. This study was carried out based on previous literature. Machiavellianism is not a new concept. However, it is a developed concept which needs more understanding and clarification. Thus, researchers face difficulty in measuring that concept in organizations. Therefore, researchers decided to investigate Machiavellianism based on the practical scenarios and their experience in careers as an initial step in this study. With the support of the phenomenological review approach, researchers investigated this concept furthermore in the future. Seventy-five articles were reviewed by researchers to understand the concept of Machiavellianism. Finally, researchers presented numerous findings based on the real-world cases and experiences they gained in different organizational settings in locally and through the literature in globally which is considered as one of the qualitative research methods of phenomenology.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

At present, researchers could see those attributes from the high Mach individuals in the society. Society includes the places like schools, universities, government or private

organizations, businesses, and families. High Mach people spread their attributes speedy within the context and achieve their personal goals by using others. In Sri Lankan context, this study further investigated the high Mach people's attitudes in different organizations

It is observed that this situation is in the context of a country, village, town or any other place. For instance, some government university students do not like to share their knowledge with private or diploma students in their organizations, some people do not like to share their experiences and knowledge with their peers. Furthermore, if anyone joins a new organization as a trainee, the majority of employees do not like to share their knowledge, and experience with youngsters and fear guiding or advising them. Despite that, it is the responsibility of all to create a new generation with innovative and strategic thinking which will lead them to high development in the world. These findings are somewhat more elaboration when compare with other foreign literature. Further, the Sri Lankan Literature of Liyanagamage et al., 2022 proposed to do a further study on this area to find out high Mach and low Mach People. This study found the reasons for becoming as high Mach people and how to eliminate these characteristics among them.

High Mach personnel manipulate others, deceive others for own benefits to build relationships with their superiors. It is a major characteristic of them. They often speak with others about others' bad qualities or manipulate bad things to build good relationships especially with the top management. By this way, they endeavor to obtain promotions, salary increments or any other financial or non-financial benefits. Therefore, the top management should listen carefully and take actions properly to avoid this negative personality trait within the organization. According to researchers' perspective, the top management should have a clear awareness about Machs when they make decisions. The performance evaluation methods and other genuine and unbiased mechanism should be followed by them to avoid the Machs.

At present, high-income people obtain comfortable facilities through manipulation or another personality trait of Machiavellianism. High income people already have enough money, they have power hungry. Therefore, they persuade to attain power through some right or wrong matters. Studies found the Machiavellians among the middle age in organizations. Moreover, adults also do not inspire to use these negative tactics for their own goals or objectives. The majority of youths inspire to do those incorrect practices due to their huge dreams and achieve them by using a shortcut. They want to live in a fantasy world with luxury facilities. Therefore, they try to achieve or reach their dreams in a short term. Thus, they are being and becoming as high Mach people spontaneously. Few people understand the situation and plan everything to achieve their goals and objectives without hurting others. However, the majority of people in middle age are eager to achieve their targets without thinking of others. Sometimes, they misuse others to achieve their targets. This is widely seen in Sri Lanka as well. Therefore, all leaders or top managers in every organization should be aware of Machiavellianism and quickly identify high Mach people and take corrective actions to eliminate this unethical behavior to encourage ethical people to stand up in the world.

At present, employees, students, and the majority of people need only be winners. However, they want to win ethically or unethically. They do not concern about ethics, attitudes and any other things related to their tasks. This habit emerged from people since childhood of the competition in the world. Therefore, teachers should create or build students with knowledge, skills and especially, attitudes to society. Then, every person intends to win in a genuine way. They will concentrate on their attitudes, culture, ethics and others. Today most of the Sri Lankans do not have any ethics related to their tasks. They only think about themselves. Therefore, society should promote right people to come out right practices. Organizations should spread cooperation with a healthy competition.

Then, every Sri Lankans will be able to see their dream Sri Lanka without any conflicts.

Collison et al., (2021) found the outcomes of their study support the idea that gender disparities in Machiavellianism are not due to measurement bias. As a result, the study of Collison et al., (2021), measurement invariance alone may not be adequate to distinguish new alternatives in which DT conceptions could be expressed equally or differently in men and women; Nevertheless, it does provide evidence that men and women accept Machiavellianism elements in a comparable way. Eissa et al., (2019) profound that Mach people are more inclined to adopt an undesirable competitive climate in the existence of a perceived bottom-line mentality in an organization. Current research also supports this literature. Therefore, HR Managers should consider this personality trait at the interviews when recruiting and hiring employees to the organization by considering the clinical outlook of the employees. According to the findings of Castille et al., (2018), Machiavellians are more willing to take part in unethical pro-organizational behaviour, although bottom-line mentality climate perceptions may have little effect on their willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviour. Shafer and Lucianetti (2018) found that both age and experience exhibited highly significantly adverse relationships with Machiavellianism and strong positive correlations with stakeholder views and support for sustainability reporting.

Researchers have done this study regarding Machiavellianism and unethical organizational behaviour with the supporting literature and observed several similarities in the Sri Lankan perspective as well. It is also observed that the findings of the present study proved the high Mach people's behaviour more than the literature from other countries.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Current study intended to investigate the phrase of Machiavellianism within the organizations in Sri Lanka. Previous literature supported to identify the characteristics of high Mach people within the society (Christie, & Geis, 1970; Geis et al., 1970; McHoskey et al., 1998; Miller et al., 2019). In this study, researchers properly explained the features of high Mach people with examples on their experience. Finally, this study revealed that Machiavellianism is a huge problem within organizations for promotions, salary increments and other financial and non-financial benefits. Therefore, organizations must identify this term and the characteristics of high Mach people to eliminate them. Researchers recommend that organizations could be able to avoid this situation when they are aware of Machiavellianism. Top management and responsible persons in the organizations like HR department are responsible to monitor Mach behaviours among the employees. Researchers believe since there is a lacuna in this area of research in Sri Lanka, this research would be a milestone for future researchers to do further study about Machiavellianism. Nowadays, competition is boosted among young people and due to that they try to reach their goals and objectives in correct or incorrect ways. Thus, the researchers also recommend that the education system should be changed in a way that teachers should teach the students to create a broad mind with healthy competition. According to this, Sri Lankans can spread attitudes among everyone in a positive manner to support all and stand up with others without suppressing them. Further, the government should open career paths by introducing very constructive curricula and regulations to create good governance everywhere.



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