The Impact of Person-Organization Fit and Moral Disengagement on Machiavellian Leadership: Unveiling Organizational Broken Windows

Emmanouela Mandalaki[1*], Gazi Islam[2], Urszula Lagowska[3], Camila Tobace[4]

1. Department of Organizations, University of Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia.
2. Department of People, Organizations and Society, Grenoble Ecole de Management, Grenoble, France.
3. Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration, Fundação Getulio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
4. Department of Administration, Insper Institute for Education and Research, São Paulo, Brazil.

Abstract

Leadership plays a crucial role in influencing and motivating followers, and the impact of different leadership styles on workplace behavior has been the subject of numerous studies. While much research focuses on positive leadership attributes, the effects of negative characteristics, such as Machiavellianism, have garnered less attention. This study examines whether Machiavellian leadership acts as a precursor to behaviors such as moral disengagement, the phenomenon of organizational "broken windows," and the fit between individuals and organizational culture. The concept of the "broken window" in organizations, an area previously underexplored, is also examined. The study, conducted with 205 employees across the manufacturing and service sectors, uses a quantitative methodology and confirmatory factor analysis to assess the data. The analysis confirms that Machiavellian leadership significantly contributes to moral disengagement, organizational broken windows, and person-organization fit. The results of this study provide insights into the implications of Machiavellian leadership, and suggestions for future research are outlined.

Keywords: Moral disengagement, Organizational broken window, Machiavellian leadership, Person-organization fit

Introduction

Leadership is defined by how power is utilized to influence others, and numerous studies have explored its role in shaping business behavior [1]. The impact of leadership can vary; when a leader's actions are perceived positively, positive outcomes often follow, while negative perceptions can lead to undesirable organizational results. The behaviors of leaders can trigger both expected and unexpected organizational consequences. Research has explored the darker aspects of leadership, particularly concerning personality traits [2], leadership and follower compatibility in terms of honesty [3], and the ethical levels of various leadership styles [4]. Machiavellian leadership, in particular, has been studied in the context of ethical relationships between leaders and followers. Furthermore, scholars have investigated the factors that lead leaders to act unethically, often prompted by administrative scandals [5]. The Machiavellian philosophy, where "everything is fair in the pursuit of a goal," can foster unethical behavior that becomes ingrained in an organization's culture [6]. Although studies on the negative impacts of Machiavellian leadership are limited [5, 7], this research aims to explore how Machiavellian leadership affects moral disengagement, organizational broken windows, and person-organization fit from the employee's perspective.

Additionally, this study seeks to delve into the relatively under-explored concept of the broken window theory in organizational contexts.

Literature review

It is natural for individuals to act based on self-interest. However, for Machiavellians, self-interest takes precedence, and manipulation becomes a behavioral strategy to achieve their goals [8]. According to Belschak *et al.* [9], Machiavellian individuals are highly focused on their goals, employing any means necessary to achieve them. Their actions are strategically planned with long-term objectives in mind [10]. Machiavellians can be seen as rational individuals who prioritize profit-driven behaviors, often manipulating others to reach their aims. This behavior stems from a lack of empathy [11], and such individuals may resort to hypocrisy in pursuit of their objectives. These characteristics disturb the social balance, as noted by Belschak *et al.* [9]. A leader demonstrating these traits can be labeled as a Machiavellian leader.

Life history theory provides a framework for understanding strategic behaviors, particularly those that aim to maximize available resources and enhance life quality. According to the theory, individuals can adopt either a fast or slow life strategy. Machiavellians tend to embrace a fast life strategy [12], which involves making calculated, often ethically questionable decisions to gain resources [13].

Social cognitive theory helps explain social behavior by highlighting the role of environmental factors in shaping actions toward a specific goal. This theory involves evaluating one's behavior by comparing it with others who serve as reference points [14]. Social conformity, within the moral value system, is crucial as it allows individuals to regulate their actions. Morality guides in distinguishing "good" from "bad," and individuals often rely on their moral values to control behavior in social settings. The moral system, formed by norms, values, and rules, facilitates a balanced social life and discourages selfishness [15]. However, moral values are not always adhered to, and individuals may opt to disregard their moral obligations due to external influences. The eight socio-cognitive mechanisms that enable moral disengagement have become widely used in understanding human behavior [16].

Social behavior is shaped by the traditions and customs that are deemed acceptable by society, and these behaviors become so ingrained that they no longer attract attention. Social conformity, therefore, focuses more on societal acceptance than on the morality of actions—where disorder, as much as order, can be socially accepted. Leaders, while often intellectually and cognitively capable, are distinguished by their moral character [17]. Immoral behavior emerges when leaders accept unethical actions as normal, due to social conformity. In this context, Machiavellian leaders exhibit attitudes that encourage moral disengagement, and such behaviors can permeate the organizational culture.

Hypothesis 1: Machiavellian leadership increases moral disengagement.

The broken window theory explains how the deterioration of physical spaces, such as broken windows, can lead to increased criminal activity in a neighborhood [18]. The theory suggests that when individuals observe deviant behavior, such as vandalism, they may start perceiving it as acceptable and continue engaging in similar actions, leading to a breakdown of social order [19]. This behavior is particularly evident in environments lacking control mechanisms. Leaders, as role models, can significantly influence the behaviors of their followers, including those that contribute to organizational decline.

Machiavellian leaders, known for their unethical behavior, exacerbate this phenomenon [9]. Strautmanis [20] argues that ethical leadership behaviors can help repair the "broken window." Conversely, the presence of a broken window can lead to an escalation of undesirable behaviors, especially when individuals in the same environment fail to view the disorder as problematic [21]. In this way, Machiavellian leadership may foster negative behaviors among employees, causing them to disengage from the organization's interests.

Hypothesis 2: Machiavellian leadership increases broken windows.

Person-organization fit refers to the alignment between an individual and their organization [22]. This fit emphasizes the congruence between the goals of the employee and those of the organization, influencing outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance [23]. Literature suggests that a good person-organization fit promotes positive organizational behaviors, whereas a poor fit can trigger negative behaviors [24]. Leadership behavior plays a crucial role in shaping employees' work experiences [22]. For example, followers tend to feel positive when perceiving their leaders' behaviors in a favorable light [25], but negative behaviors from leaders can lead to adverse emotions and actions [7, 26].

Machiavellian leadership, characterized by manipulation and self-interest, is expected to have a negative impact on employees. Ambrose *et al.* [27] argue that ethical values foster employees' moral integrity and promote a better person-organization fit. As Machiavellianism often disregards ethical values, it is likely to reduce person-organization fit.

Hypothesis 3: Machiavellian leadership reduces person-organization fit.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a relational screening model and is classified as causal research based on its goals. To analyze the collected data, various techniques such as correlation analysis, descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity tests were applied. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was subsequently utilized to examine causal relationships.

The population for this research includes full-time employees working in the manufacturing and service industries in Sakarya. The sample, consisting of 205 individuals, was drawn from employees actively engaged in service and production sectors.

Data was collected using a survey method. The sample size was determined by following the guidelines suggested by Coşkun *et al.* [28] and Hair *et al.* [29], which suggests that the sample size should be at least 5 times the number of items in the questionnaire. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, with 229 responses returned, resulting in a response rate of 76%. After excluding 22 incomplete responses and two extreme outliers, 205 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis using a convenience sampling method.

The participants were primarily male (79.5%), with 20.5% female. A majority of the respondents were married (71.7%), while 28.3% were single. In terms of educational background, 40% had completed high school, 15.1% had an associate degree, 37.6% held a bachelor's degree, and 7.3% had a postgraduate degree. The average years of professional experience among the participants was 12.92. According to Kline [30], data distribution is considered normal when the skewness and kurtosis values for the scale items are below 3 and 10, respectively. The analysis confirmed that the data set was normally distributed, with kurtosis values and skewness falling within acceptable ranges.

Measures

To create the questionnaire scales from existing research with demonstrated reliability and validity were examined. The final questionnaire included sections on the participants' demographic information and the following established scales: the Machiavellian leadership scale, the moral disengagement scale, the organizational broken window scale, and the person-organization fit scale. The response format for all scales was a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Leader Machiavellianism scale: For measuring leader Machiavellianism, the scale used by De Hoogh *et al.* [31] was adopted, containing eight items. The translation of this scale was carried out following Brislin's [32] five-step method. Once the translation was complete, the scale was reviewed and finalized by a team of experts, including two Turkish-speaking and 3 foreign-language specialists.

Moral disengagement scale: The seven-item scale developed by Moore *et al.* and later adapted into Turkish by Erbaş and Perçin [33], was applied to assess moral disengagement in the study.

Organizational broken window scale: This scale, developed by Bektaş *et al.* [19] and consisting of thirteen items, was utilized to explore the concept of broken windows in organizational contexts.

Person-organization fit scale: A four-item scale created by Netemeyer *et al.* and adapted into Turkish by Elçi *et al.* [34], was used to examine the fit between employees and the organization. To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey instrument, a pilot study with 50 participants was conducted before finalizing the questionnaire.

Common method bias test: To minimize common method variance in the study, the recommendations by Podsakoff *et al.* [35] were applied. The dependent variable questions were placed ahead of the independent variable questions in the survey, and the statements were kept concise. Harman's single-factor test was used to assess common method bias [36]. Nine factors emerged from the factor analysis, explaining 56.048% of the variance. When the data was constrained to one factor, it accounted for 24.115% of the variance. Since this percentage is below the threshold of 50%, it indicates that common method variance is not a significant issue in the data.

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability measures, are provided in **Table 1.** The Cronbach's Alpha values for all scales ranged from 0.70 to 0.91, indicating good internal consistency. Correlations showed positive relationships between Machiavellian leadership and both moral disengagement (r = 0.34, P < 0.01) and organizational broken windows (r = 0.24, P < 0.01). Additionally, a strong positive correlation was found between moral disengagement and broken windows (r = 0.54, P < 0.01). Negative correlations were observed between person-organization fit and both Machiavellian leadership (r = -0.30, P < 0.01) and organizational broken windows (r = -0.17, P < 0.05), suggesting that Machiavellian leadership may harm the alignment between individuals and their organizations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and internal consistency coefficients

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1. Leader machiavellianism	2.52	0.74	(0.75)			
2. Moral disengagement	2.25	0.72	0.344**	(0.70)		
3. Organizational broken window	1.84	0.71	0.248**	0.546**	(0.91)	

4. Person-organization fit	3.13	0.97	-0.305**	-0.127	-0.177*	(0.88)	

Note: N = 205; *P < .05; **P < .01; r = Pearson correlation; (Cronbach's alpha).

Measurement model

The measurement model in this research was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) via the AMOS 21 software. The goal was to verify if the data collected adequately supported the hypothesized structures of the scales, with the maximum likelihood method employed for estimation.

The fit of the measurement model was evaluated based on several indices, including absolute fit indices (χ^2/df), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), According to Kline [30], a good-fitting model should exhibit χ^2/df values less than 3, RMSEA and SRMR values under 0.05, and TLI and CFI values above .95, as supported by Byrne [37].

In the initial model test, the TLI and CFI values did not meet the expected criteria. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) for leader Machiavellianism and organizational broken window scales were below the ideal threshold of .50. Moral disengagement's AVE and maximum shared variance (MSV) were also low, and the square root of AVE was smaller than the correlation values between the factors.

To improve the model fit, several items were removed: Items 1, 2, and 6 from the Leader Machiavellianism scale, Items 3, 4, 6, and 7 from the moral disengagement scale, and Items 1, 2, and 6 from the organizational broken window scale. After these modifications, the fit indices improved significantly, and the AVE values for leader Machiavellianism and moral disengagement neared the recommended levels.

Convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated after structural validity was confirmed. For convergent validity, the recommended thresholds were CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50, and CR > AVE. For discriminant validity, the MSV should be lower than AVE, the average shared variance (ASV) should be less than AVE, and correlations between factors should be smaller than the square root of AVE [29].

Based on Fuller *et al.* [38], an AVE lower than 0.50 but with a CR exceeding 0.60 can still support convergent validity. The results of this study show that CR values for all factors were higher than AVE, AVE values exceeded MSV and ASV, and the square root of AVE was greater than the correlation values between the factors.

Ultimately, the measurement model demonstrated sufficient convergent, construct, and discriminant validity, confirming its adequacy for the research **(Table 2)**.

Table 2. Measurement model

Variable	Items	Factor load	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	√AVE
Leader Machiavellianism	LM3	0.79	0.76	0.45	0.08	0.06	0.67
	LM4	0.62***					
	LM5	0.67***					
	LM8	0.58***					
Moral disengagement	MD1	0.67	0.72	0.46	0.44	0.16	0.68
	MD2	0.77***					
	MD5	0.58***					
Organizational broken window	OBW3	0.73	0.92	0.53	0.44	0.14	0.73
	OBW4	0.70***					
	OBW5	0.66***					
	OBW7	0.59***					
	OBW8	0.80***					
	OBW9	0.64***					
	OBW10	0.79***					
	OBW11	0.74***					
	OBW12	0.75***					
	OBW13	0.83***					
Person-organization fit	POF1	0.70	0.88	0.65	0.08	0.05	0.80
	POF2	0.95***					
	POF3	0.74***					
	POF4	0.72***					

Fit Indices (Before Item Deletion):
χ^2/df = 2.30; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.07; TLI = 0.78; CFI = 0.79
Fit Indices (After Item Deletion):

$\chi^2/df = 1.91$; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.05; TLI = 0.91; CFI = 0.92

*Note: **$P < 0.001$; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; MSV = maximum shared squared variance; ASV = average shared squared variance*

Structural model

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to evaluate the research hypotheses. The standardized path coefficients, along with the standard deviation, t-values, and p-values for the research model **(Table 3; Figure 1).**

Table 3. SEM Results

Hypotheses	Standardized β	Standard deviation	t-value	P-value	Results
LM → MD	0.24	0.11	2.52	0.01**	Accepted
LM → OBW	0.28	0.08	3.21	0.001***	Accepted
LM → POF	-0.32	0.09	-3.54	0.000***	Accepted

Note: **$P < .01$; *$P < .001$; LM = leader Machiavellianism; MD = moral disengagement; OBW = organizational broken window; POF = person-organization fit

The analysis of **Table 3** shows that leader Machiavellianism has a positive and significant influence on both moral disengagement and organizational broken window ($\beta = 0.24$, $P < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.28$, $P < 0.001$, respectively). Additionally, leader Machiavellianism is found to have a negative and significant effect on person-organization fit ($\beta = -0.32$, $P < 0.001$). Based on these results, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 of the study are confirmed.
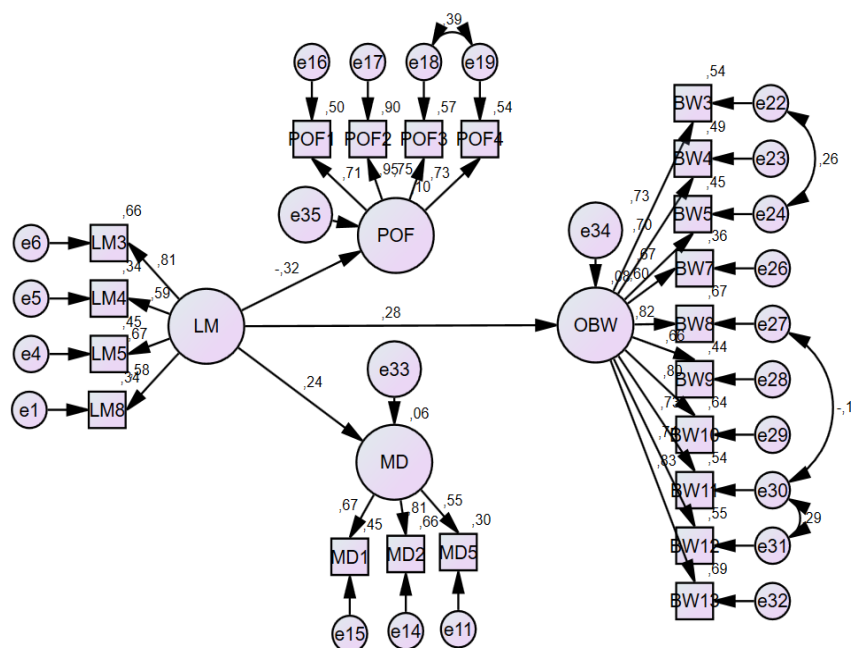

Figure 1. Structural model

The measurement model was assessed using the AMOS program, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) led to the removal of items with low factor loadings. After performing repeated analyses, construct validity was established, and the values for both divergent and convergent validity were within acceptable limits. Reliability was confirmed through the calculation of Composite Reliability (CR), which exceeded Cronbach's Alpha values. Additionally, no common method variance error was detected.

The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). The research tested the hypotheses concerning the dependent variables: moral disengagement, organizational broken window, and person-organization fit as antecedents of Machiavellian leadership. The analysis revealed that Machiavellian leadership significantly influenced moral disengagement ($\beta = 0.24$, $P < 0.01$), organizational broken window ($\beta = 0.28$, $P < 0.001$), and person-organization fit ($\beta = -0.32$, $P < 0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 were accepted.

The findings can be understood through the lens of Life History Theory, which suggests that Machiavellian leaders often utilize more resources to achieve their objectives. These leaders are willing to engage in unethical behavior to reach their goals [13, 39]. The environment created by their behaviors also influences their colleagues [40]. Belschak *et al.* [41] emphasize

the interaction between Machiavellian leader and their followers, highlighting the importance of relational leadership in shaping ethical behavior. This interaction, in turn, influences person-organization fit [4, 42].

Conclusion

Personality is a factor that cannot be changed immediately but determines the direction and framework of social relations. Therefore, it affects people's relationships with other individuals in their environment. Understanding the consequences of personality to analyze business behavior is significant. The manipulation success of Machiavellianism, which is examined under the concept of personality, may alter at a level that contradicts social values and organizations [8]. In this research, it was determined that the followers of the Machiavellian leader had a maladaptive effect on the person-organization fit when it was remembered that Machiavellian leaders had a lower level of ethical value than other leaders [4].

It was seen that ethical values protect moral integrity [27]. The fact that Machiavellianism does not take notice of ethical values [13, 39] and the Machiavellian leader disrupts moral integrity and causes moral indifference has also been proven by this research.

According to the results of the research, the issue of preventing Machiavellian followers or leaders from working together should not be ignored. It is recommended that the tests which can identify such personalities, and choose from the results for human resources professionals in the selection of people who will adapt to manager and teamwork.

It has been determined that personal and organizational values affect person-organization fit [43]. In this point, it is perfectly normal that the followers of the Machiavellian leader negatively affect the person-organization fit if the personal value chain involves focusing on individual purposes.

Behaviors, which individuals consider unethical, can be used to comply with the social order. Compatible with the research results, Machiavellianism encourages breaking windows to achieve its goals. The broken window starts to increase when there is a lack of control [44]. The supervisory mechanism is expected to be the leader in organizations. Managing unapproved employee behaviors depends on the execution process in which the organizations pursue an effective control, manager, leader, employee, and organizational culture policy.

Limitations and dimensions for future research
The research was limited to broken windows, moral disengagement, and person-organization fit, and Machiavellian leadership was examined as an antecedent of employee attitudes and behaviors. Whether the employees were Machiavellian or not has not been contained in the research. The Machiavellian leader from the perspective of an employee has been examined in this research. Relations include production-oriented business employees. The research sample consists of participants living in Turkey. The data were collected online.

The broken window, which is researched within the scope of criminology, has not been researched much in organizations. This research focuses on the broken window in organizations and reveals the existence of only one antecedent regarding the concept.

Longitudinal research, which allows the effects of Machiavellian leadership to be re-measured over some time, may be conducted in the future. Intermediary or regulatory roles that can reduce or increase the level of influence can be looked at by the outputs of Machiavellian leadership. Whether the leaders at the administrative level are Machiavellian leaders with their perceptions can be analyzed. The relation between the five-factor personality structure and political behaviors can be examined. Broken windows cause people to isolate themselves from the outer world and interact [44]. Behaviors such as cynicism, intention to leave, work stress, abnormal workplace behaviors, and whistle-blowing may also be outputs of Machiavellian leadership.

Machiavellian leadership may not result in completely negative work behaviors or attitudes when that Machiavellian people act rationally is taken into consideration [10]. It can also offer outputs that can be welcomed from an organizational or personal point of view, such as Robin Hood-style [45].

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