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Folie à deux? How Mavericks shape the relationship between the dark triad and negative deviant behaviours through malevolent creativity[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study used the trait activation theory to develop a conceptual model that explained how and when the dark triad state influenced negative deviant behaviours (NDB). For that, we tested malevolent creativity as a mediating variable and maverickism as a moderator. Diary data was collected from 54 working adults (324 measurement occasions). The multilevel results showed that (1) all the DT states had a positive relationship with NDB through malevolent creativity, and (2) maverickism moderated the indirect effect of machiavellianism and narcissism, but not for psychopathy. Specifically, the relationship between machiavellianism and narcissism and NDB via malevolent creativity became stronger for those who scored lower on maverickism. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Individuals with high Dark Triad (DT) traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) tend to engage more frequently in NDB (Junça-Silva & Silva, 2022). The positive relationship between the DT and NDB indicates that individuals high in DT tend to incur more NDB, if caught they will suffer social and organisational consequences, and in return have less freedom and more restraints to engage in another NDB. Therefore, creativity plays a key role in this relationship.

The nature of creativity is rule-breaking, unexpected, and unpredictable (Wang, 2019), and for a long time, creativity seemed uniquely positive until Cropley et al. (2013) highlighted the dark side of creativity. Malevolent creativity is defined as a process in which an individual/group develops novel and useful ideas to harm others (mentally, materially, or physically) (Harris et al., 2013). These types of malevolent idealization result in everyday workplace behaviours, like gossip, lying, manipulating, and stealing, but to be considered malevolent creative they need to be harmful but still creative (new and appropriate to the task) (Harris et al., 2013).

Mavericks exhibit a disruptive personality, which leads to creative,

unconventional behaviour and a tendency to bypass organisational norms to achieve personal or organisational goals (Jordan et al., 2022). Maverickism enhances creativity regardless of its levels. When combined with other traits/states, such as DT, it can influence outcomes like malevolent or positive creativity, potentially creating either problematic or beneficial effects within an organization. Therefore, Malevolent creativity seems to be a powerful weapon for both individuals with high DT levels and Maverickism, facilitating the bend of social and organisational rules and norms to attain their goals (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012). However, some studies showed that the relationship between DT and creativity is complex and volatile and may vary based on intraper-sonal and environmental contexts (Lebuda et al., 2021).

Based on the Trait Activation Theory, traits are activated in situations of social, task and organisational constraints (Tett et al., 2013). If individuals with high DT characteristics are confronted with situations that limit their intentions, the need for creativity arises to overcome this constraint. We argue that malevolent creativity can increase the preponderance to incur on NDB for individuals high in DT states, but due to the complex relationship, creativity cannot be always present. In this study, we discuss (1) whether malevolent creativity will mediate the relationship between DT and NDB and (2) if the need for malevolent

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creativity to break rules and get away with it may activate/switch between other traits/states (i.e., *Maverickism*, *Dark Triad*) and if this *folie à deux* may present itself as a guarantee of constant malevolent creativity and therefore an increase of NDB.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Dark Triad and Negative Deviant Behaviours

Paulhus and Williams (2002) defined the traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy as subclinical personality traits called the DT, mostly responsible for detrimental effects within organisations (e.g., Muris et al., 2017). High levels of Machiavellianism are extremely focused on their goals, using techniques of manipulation, lying and exploitation (Wu & Lebreton, 2011) to achieve them. Psychopathy is characterised by impulsivity (Hare, 1999), constant thrill-seeking (Spain et al., 2014) and a belief in their superiority (Lynam & Widiger, 2007), which leads to more criminal behaviour. A narcissistic personality is defined by a lack of empathy, an exaggerated view of oneself and a lack of acceptance of criticism (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013), prompting hostile behaviour towards others to confirm their dominance and superiority (Perri, 2013).

These deviant behaviours are referred to as workplace deviance (Pletzer et al., 2020) and may include counterproductive work behaviour (Zvi & Shtudiner, 2021) and antisocial behaviour (Ternes et al., 2019) having a common core of violation of organisational norms (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). NDB is the result of a person's perceptions of the organisational environment and social interactions within it, leading to revenge-seeking behaviour and harm to others (Liao et al., 2020). Recent research explores the mediating role of several variables, such as perceptions of organisational politics (Mahmood et al., 2021) and workplace spirituality (Lata & Chaudhary, 2020). It is important to continue to expand the current research to examine the moderation and mediation of some individual variables (i.e. personality traits), to have a better understanding of these relationships.

2.2. The mediating role of malevolent creativity in the relationship between Dark Triad and Negative Deviant Behaviours

Although creativity has been analysed as a purely positive aspect, Cropley et al. (2013) proposed Malevolent Creativity as a dark side of creativity that is created and used with the intent to harm, as opposed to other types of creativity (Hao et al., 2020). Malevolent Creativity manifests on the workplace, for example, as creative lies to simplify a problem situation or excuses to justify the wrongdoings (Hao et al., 2016). Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of creativity are more likely to engage in dishonest behaviour (Gino & Ariely, 2012), empowering them to justify their behaviour and thus enhancing its incidence.

Since individuals with high levels of DT tend to become darker when focusing on their objectives and gains (Smith et al., 2015), creativity will be required to bend the norms and rules allowing to incur in a greater number of NDBs.

However, both DT and Malevolent Creativity have a more cohesive core - sharing an absence of moral values and violence - creating a positive relationship between them (Gao et al., 2022; Kapoor & Kaufman, 2022). Recent studies have begun to explore the relationship between DT and Malevolent Creativity within several domains (Lebuda et al., 2021) to analyse and understand the internal mechanism that regulates this relationship (Gao et al., 2022), but not the consequences. Narcissists and their need to be admired may engage in behaviours to receive personal attention (i.e., fame, admiration), and if this attention is not achieved, they may retaliate. This revenge may take the form of Malevolent Creativity and consequent NDB via bullying, harassment, or sabotage (Perchtold-Stefan et al., 2021). Psychopaths exhibit high levels of aggression connected to high levels of malevolent divergent thinking

(Lee & Dow, 2011). Due to being unchained from morals, social norms and rules, they have more potential for Malevolent Creativity due to higher levels of impulsive and criminal behaviours (Kapoor & Khan, 2019). Machiavellians are not more creative, they just have more malevolent ideas (Kapoor, 2015). Their high rate of Malevolent Creativity is mainly measured by their webs of lies to camouflage their tracks (Jia et al., 2020).

Given the shared values between DT and Malevolent Creativity, we expect that DT influences NDB through Malevolent Creativity.

H1. : Malevolent creativity mediates the relationship between (a) Machiavellianism, (b) narcissism, (c) and psychopathy and NDB.

2.3. The moderating role of Maverickism

Mavericks are characterised by a disruptive personality trait, translating into creative, unconventional behaviour, thinking outside the box and an apparent disregard for organisational norms and policies (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012) while often circumventing organisational norms to achieve goals set either by the individual or the organization (Jordan et al., 2022).

The shared core of self-focus and disrupted behaviour between DT and Maverickism may be constrained by organisational norms, which leads them to challenge some of these norms and block others to avoid retaliation and conflict (Becker, 1982; O'Boyle et al., 2012). A common value conflict between DT and mavericks arises from the desire to achieve personal/organisational goals (Jordan et al., 2022) to gain psychological resources (e.g., achieve goals, and status). On the other hand, Maverickism traits can present themselves as socially competent (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012), passionate and loyal employees with long-term objectives often aligned with organisational and third-party objectives aimed at global benefit (Jordan et al., 2022) in contrast to DT, who have medium/long-term social dysfunction (Moor & Anderson, 2019), focus solely on their own goals (O'Boyle et al., 2012) and a fast life model, focused and planned in the short term, disabling their ability to plan for the long term (Jonason et al., 2010).

High-maverick traits tend to achieve success through creativity, risk-taking, and bending rules, whereas low-maverick traits achieve success by following the rules and being conventional. Mavericks' tendency to achieve high/low levels is likely influenced by their personality (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012). Sharing a core of breaking rules, disregard for rules and organisational norms and focus on self-goals (Muris et al., 2017; Jordan et al., 2021) the interaction between traits will enable a common focus, leading to DT to benefit from the Maverickism creativity despite the levels, since creativity is the core of Maverick's personality (Jordan et al., 2021). On the other hand, Maverickism type of creativity may be influenced by the personality that coexists with maverickism (e.g. DT leads to Malevolent Creativity while Light Triad might result in positive creativity).

Through the lens of the Trait Activation Theory, traits are activated in situations of social, task and organisational constraints (Tett et al., 2013). Employees seek and find intrinsic satisfaction in work environments that facilitate the effortless expression of their distinct personality traits (Manteli & Galanakis, 2022), the failure triggers stress and consequently the activation of traits and behaviours, typically the dark side of personality traits (Nübold et al., 2022). Trait activation occurs in response to situational cues that challenge core personality traits, such as adversity, interpersonal conflict, workplace incivility, and organisational constraints (Tett & Burnett, 2003). For instance, when faced with an organisational constraint like limited access to work tools, individuals with high DT traits may perceive it as an ego threat, leading to counterproductive behaviours, while Mavericks may respond creatively and disruptively, staying within organisational norms.

We argue that Maverick traits may interact with the DT states, influencing Malevolent Creativity. Given the inner characteristics of the Mavericks such as thinking-outside-the-box, and going against the *status*

quo, we believe that high levels of maverickism will maintain the same levels of Malevolent Creativity regardless of the levels of DT. Therefore, we hypothesise (Fig. 1):

H2. : Maverickism moderates the relationship between (a) Machiavellianism, (b) narcissism and (c) psychopathy and NDB through malevolent creativity, such that the relationship becomes stronger for those who score lower on maverickism (versus higher levels).

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

This study was composed of 54 Portuguese participants. They worked in different activity sectors (industry and services). The sample was composed of 48 % males, with an average age of 38.6 years (SD = 10.18). Most had a degree (36.9 %), worked for three or fewer years (37.2 %), and were considered to have a medium-low or low socio-economic level (87.1 %).

We contacted randomly selected human resources managers from organisations in Portugal's business fabric, who were invited by email to take part in a study on "individual behaviour in the organisational sphere", in which their participation was voluntary and they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. After that, they signed an informed consent form and received another email from the researchers' team explaining the daily data collection procedure. Then, each participant received a daily email, for six days, with the hyperlink for the daily survey. Participation consisted of answering a daily survey over a week (Monday to Saturday) uninterruptedly. Of the 75 emails sent, 54 were answered (response rate:72 %). The overall number of observations was 324. All methods were carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations, and all experimental protocols were approved by the ethics committee of the university of the second author. Moreover, we used the same daily survey across the six days.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dark Triad

To measure the DT, the Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010) was used and it was measured as a state and not as a trait. It included 12 items that measure psychopathy (e.g., "Today, I tended to have no remorse"), narcissism (e.g., "Today, I tended to seek prestige or status") and Machiavellianism (e.g., "Today, I tended to manipulate others to get my way"). Multilevel reliability indices were good ($\alpha_{\text{between}} = 0.85$, $\omega_{\text{between}} = 0.86$; $\alpha_{\text{within}} = 0.88$, $\omega_{\text{within}} = 0.89$). Questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "totally disagree" and 5 "totally agree".

3.2.2. Negative workplace deviance

To measure the NDB we used the 19-item Workplace Deviance Scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) (e.g., "Today, I took something from work without permission"). Multilevel reliability tests were good ($\alpha_{\text{between}} = 0.88$, $\omega_{\text{between}} = 0.89$; $\alpha_{\text{within}} = 0.90$, $\omega_{\text{within}} = 0.90$). Responses were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 "never"; 5 "daily").

3.2.3. Maverickism

The 7-item Mavericks scale was used (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012; e.g., "Today, People told me that I am a 'maverick'"). Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 "totally disagree"; 5 "totally agree") ($\alpha_{\text{between}} = 0.91$, $\omega_{\text{between}} = 0.90$).

3.2.4. Malevolent creativity

To measure malevolent creativity, we used the 13-item Malevolent Creativity Behaviour Scale (Hao et al., 2020; e.g., "Today, I thought about new ways to punish people."). Multilevel reliability indices were good ($\alpha_{\text{between}} = 0.94$, $\omega_{\text{between}} = 0.94$; $\alpha_{\text{within}} = 0.96$, $\omega_{\text{within}} = 0.97$). Questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 "never"; 5 "frequently").

3.2.5. Control variables

We used sex and time from the data collection as control variables. Personality traits show differences between genders (Semenyina & Honey, 2015). Time (Monday to Friday) was a daily-level control variable since it may influence both the mediator and the criterion variable (Maneiro et al., 2020).

3.3. Data analysis

This study used a multilevel analysis to examine the proposed model under study. The analysis of variance showed significant variation in daily DT traits (ICC =0.37), daily malevolent creativity (ICC =0.83), and daily NDB (ICC =0.64). Significant variation at both within and between-person levels allowed us to proceed to a multilevel analysis.

Both hypotheses were tested through the macro-Multilevel Mediation (MLMed), in SPSS, which is particularly useful for level-2 moderators (Rockwood, 2020).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1.

4.2. Confirmatory factor analyses

Five multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were tested using R. The results showed that the hypothetical six-factor model (daily DT: Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism, daily malevolent creativity, daily negative deviant behaviours and maverickism) fitted the data well (at both within-and-between-person level: ($\chi^2 = 3.19$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = 0.93 TLI = 0.91, SRMRwithin = 0.06, SRMRbetween = 0.05). On the other hand, the single factor-model (at both within-and-between-person levels) showed an unacceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 15.51$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.21, CFI = 0.59 TLI = 0.54, SRMRwithin = 0.14, SRMRbetween = 0.13). Thus, these results showed additional evidence for the validity of the measures.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

As hypothesized, Malevolent Creativity mediated the relationship

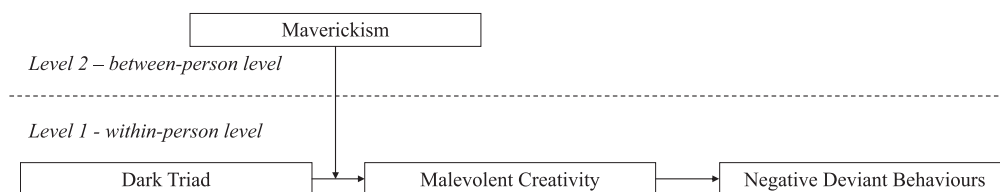


Fig. 1. The multilevel conceptual model.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and zero-order and person-centred correlations.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Malevolent Creativity	2.37	1.27	(0.96)					
2. Machiavellianism	1.63	1.02	0.482**	(0.96)				
3. Psychopathy	1.95	0.99	0.493**	0.700**	(0.78)			
4. Narcissism	2.15	1.14	0.465**	0.737**	0.601**	(0.90)		
5. Negative Deviance	2.00	1.01	0.447**	0.705**	0.614**	0.650**	(0.91)	
6. Maverickism	3.22	0.84	0.154**	-0.036	-0.084	0.074	0.013	(0.89)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Notes: $N = 54$ (measurement occasions: 324); Cronbach's α are in brackets.

between all traits of the DT (Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) and NDB. Machiavellianism ($\gamma = 0,67$; $p < .001$) (95 % CI = [0,03; 0,14]); narcissism ($\gamma = 0,44$; $p < .001$) (95 % CI = [0,04; 0,15]) and psychopathy ($\gamma = 0,43$; $p < .001$) (95 % CI = [0,06; 0,17]) had a positive effect on NDB's at a within-person level, supporting Hypothesis 1 a, b and c.

For Hypothesis 2, we found a positive moderation of Maverickism in the relationship between DT (Machiavellianism and narcissism) and Malevolent Creativity (Estimate = -0.03 , 95 % CI = [-0,09; 0,01]), however, data for psychopathy were not statistically significant (Fig. 2).

Moreover, maverickism buffered the relationship between Machiavellianism and malevolent creativity. As Fig. 3 shows, high levels of Maverickism, regardless of the levels of Machiavellianism showed high levels of Malevolent Creativity. On lower levels of Maverickism, high levels of Machiavellianism showed higher levels of Malevolent Creativity (versus lower levels). Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported by the data.

Fig. 4 shows that high levels of Maverickism moderated the relationship between narcissism and Malevolent Creativity, regardless of the levels of DT (versus lower). For lower levels of Maverickism, higher levels of narcissism revealed higher levels of Malevolent Creativity versus lower levels of narcissism.

5. Discussion

The findings show that all the DT states are positively related to Malevolent Creativity. In turn, Malevolent Creativity is positively related to NDB.

It is also possible to verify that high maverickism traits are positively related to Malevolent Creativity regardless of the levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism (high vs slow), with psychopathy not showing a significant relationship. The non-significant relationship between psychopathy and Malevolent Creativity may be due to their nature of impulsivity and lack of self-control (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They tend to prefer practical, realistic activities over the deviant and imaginative thinking typically involved in creative processes (Jonason et al., 2014). This agrees with previous studies that found a relationship

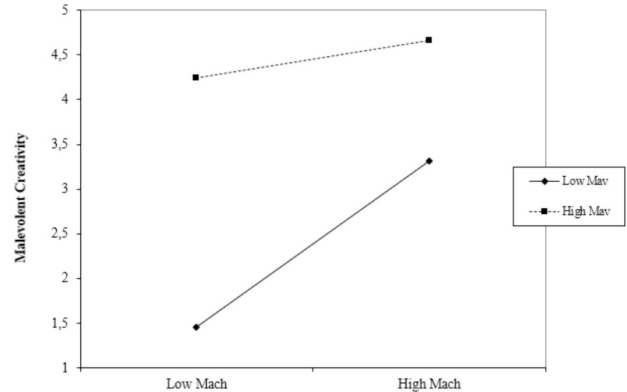


Fig. 3. Moderation of Maverickism in the relation between Machiavellianism and Malevolent Creativity.

between Machiavellianism and narcissism with creativity but not with psychopathy (see Lebuda et al., 2021). At low levels of maverickism, only high Machiavellianism and narcissism states reveal high levels of Malevolent Creativity.

The positive relationship between DT and Malevolent Creativity is in line with the results of previous studies that report that individuals with high DT states tend to develop Malevolent Creativity (Gao et al., 2022), also dishonest individuals (e.g., DT) tend to be more creative to justify their behaviours and avoid social and organisational reproach (Ayal & Gino, 2011).

6. Theoretical implications

In addition, the study shows that Malevolent Creativity mediates the relationship between DT and NDB, to the extent that the higher the levels of Malevolent Creativity, the more likely it is that individuals with high DT states will incur NDB. Such results are in line with those verified in previous studies (Junça-Silva & Silva, 2022) which indicate that

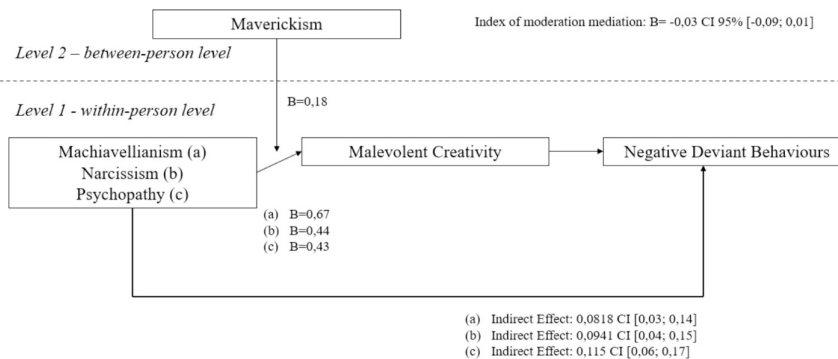


Fig. 2. Estimated paths in the full multilevel moderated mediation model.

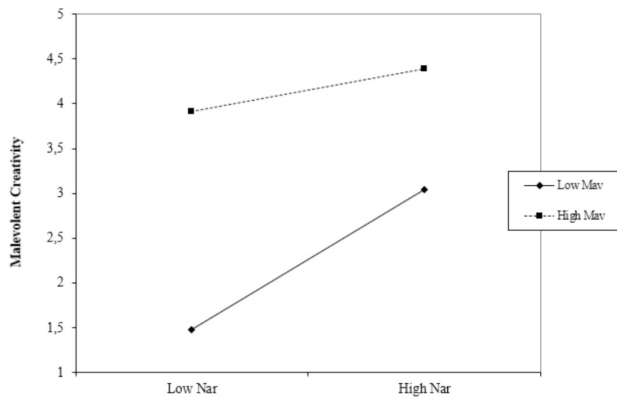


Fig. 4. Moderation of Maverickism in the relation between Narcissism and Malevolent Creativity.

individuals with high DT states tend to incur NDB and that creativity leads to an increase in dishonest behaviours (i.e., NDB) (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Thus, Malevolent Creativity allows individuals with high DT to find new alternatives to circumvent the social and organisational rules that present themselves as obstacles, achieve their goals, and justify them, allowing for increased NDBs.

The present study also reveals that individuals with high maverickism traits have a greater preponderance in incurring Malevolent Creativity, regardless of levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism, however as for low levels of maverickism the preponderance changes. For low levels of maverickism and low levels of Machiavellianism and Narcissism, the preponderance of incurring in Malevolent Creativity presents the lowest levels. This was expected since individuals with low levels of maverickism present lower levels of creativity following conventional and already tested methods (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012). However, data show that for low levels of maverickism and high levels of machiavellianism and narcissism, Malevolent Creativity increases exponentially. Previous studies revealed that the traits of Machiavellianism and Narcissism show a positive relationship with creativity (Sordia et al., 2020). Creativity is a central feature of Maverickism, resulting in higher creativity levels even at low trait expression compared to those without it. When combined with the creative tendencies of individuals high in DT states, this synergy leads to a marked increase in Malevolent Creativity. One explanation may lie in Trait Activation Theory (TAT). Through the lens of TAT (Tett et al., 2013) personality traits are activated based on three factors - from task, social and organisational (Manteli & Galanakis, 2022) and when there is a perception of the intrinsic gains involved (Luria et al., 2019). Since both DT and maverickism traits share the individual characteristic of focus on purpose and self-gains (Jordan et al., 2022) the perception of intrinsic gains may lead to the activation of Machiavellianism and Narcissism traits/states and their creative aspect, hence the increase in Malevolent Creativity.

7. Practical implications

This research is important for managers to understand that creativity and a dark personality can negatively impact and lead to counterproductive behaviours. In addition, managers may also consider creating a positive creativity section to suppress intentions that elicit malicious creativity while promoting a spirit of togetherness and common creative goals, reducing NDB.

8. Limitations and future research

Despite the positive aspects of this study, it is not immune to limitations. First, we used self-reported measures, which in the case of the states of Machiavellianism and narcissism, through self-report creativity

methods, may present higher values than the real ones given their exaggerated view of self (Lebuda et al., 2021). Second, we only focused on NDB. The reason for focusing only on the negative aspect is justified by the complexity seen in studies between personality states and NDB, demonstrating variation based on various contextual and individual factors (LeBreton et al., 2018). Third, the sample size is small so results should be interpreted with caution.

For future lines of research, we suggest introducing intelligence as a moderating variable in the relationship between DT and Malevolent Creativity. Although the relationship between intelligence and creativity is complex and does not meet consensus, for some authors intelligence is a prerequisite for creativity (Karwowski et al., 2016). The relationship between the DT and intelligence is equally complex (see O'Boyle et al., 2012) so it would be interesting to verify its role in the present model under study. It would be interesting to investigate why Maverickism shows high levels of Malevolent Creativity even at low DT levels and whether overlap between DT and Maverickism contributes to this.

9. Conclusion

This daily study demonstrates that malevolent creativity leads individuals with high DT states to incur a greater number of NDB. However, maverickism moderates the relationship between DT and Malevolent Creativity behaviours, in such a way that the relationship becomes stronger for lower levels of Maverickism. This study reveals that the *folie à deux* (mavericks and DT) may allow for a constant preponderance in developing Malevolent Creativity behaviours, representing an enormous risk in organisations.

Compliance with an ethical standard statement

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Daniel Silva: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ana Junça-Silva:** Methodology, Software, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Paulo Pinheiro:** Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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