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Illuminating and Applying “The Dark Side”: Insights From Elite Team Leaders

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In contrast to socially desirable behaviors, recent work has implied that effective elite team leadership also relies on socially undesirable behaviors. Accordingly, this study aimed to further explore the authenticity of dark side leadership behaviors, what they look like, and how they may be best used. Via interviews with 15 leaders, behaviors associated with Machiavellianism/mischievousness, skepticism, social dominance, and performance-focused ruthlessness were found. Moreover, these behaviors were enabled by leaders' sociopolitical awareness and engineering as well as their adaptive expertise. Findings promote practitioner sensitivity to dark side leadership and, for leader effectiveness, sociopolitical and temporal features of its application.

As a core performance construct, leadership has long been an area of interest for sport psychologists. However, as most research has focused on coach leadership, and often within nonelite settings, Fletcher and Arnold (2011) recently stated that “performance leadership at the managerial level of [elite sport] organizations has been somewhat overlooked” (p. 223). Although much has still to be explored, one intriguing suggestion from associated work is that leaders at this level use both bright (i.e., socially desirable) and dark (i.e., socially undesirable) traits and behaviors to be effective (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2014; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). As the dark side of elite team leadership has yet to be explicitly explored, and as we are wary that some sport psychologists may be consulting against this issue with little supporting evidence, research is required to elucidate the authenticity of dark side leadership, what it looks like, and how it may be best deployed.

Although Chelladurai's (1980) multidimensional model has guided much work on sport team leadership—promoting a focus on the interface between a leader, their followers, and the context—researchers have also explored a number of other perspectives. In the main, this work has focused on leadership styles and the behavioral correlates of effective leadership. Often adapted from organizational disciplines, examples include transactional, servant,

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passive/avoidant, and paternalistic leadership (Chen, 2013; Lee, Kim, & Kang, 2013; Rieke, Hammermeister, & Chase, 2008; Rowold, 2006; Vidic & Burton, 2011). Based on its standing within business and military fields (e.g., Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2008), however, interest has increasingly centered on transformational leadership. With work on nonelite samples showing repeated links between this style and valued outcomes (e.g., task cohesion; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009), this body of inquiry has reinforced proposals that transformational behaviors are also constructive for elite team leaders (Arthur, Hardy, & Woodman, 2012; Din & Paskevich, 2013). Raising doubt over its ability to fully explain and support success at this level, however, additional recent work has implied that inherently bright leadership styles, such as the transformational approach, may need to be paired with an entirely different, if perhaps complementary, repertoire for optimal effectiveness, namely, that related to the dark side of leadership (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

Although implicated by others (e.g., Conger, 1990), a seminal perspective on the dark side of leadership was provided in the personality-based work of Hogan and Hogan (2001). Advancing beyond the most widely researched traits of the time (i.e., the dark triad of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), these authors generated and validated a measure of the “dysfunctional dispositions known to be associated with failure as a manager [in an organization]” (p. 40). Taking the disorders of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed. [DSM-IV]; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) as their basis, Hogan and Hogan extrapolated parallel but subclinical traits on which to evaluate the working population. These traits, with DSM-IV analog in parentheses, are excitable (borderline), skeptical (paranoid), cautious (avoidant), reserved (schizoid), leisurely (passive-aggressive), bold (narcissistic), mischievous (antisocial), colorful (histrionic), imaginative (schizotypal), diligent (obsessive-compulsive), and dutiful (dependent). As the middle ground between “normal” (e.g., Big Five) and pathological traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), Harms, Spain, and Hannah (2011) have stated that “one might consider them personality quirks that do not greatly inhibit day-to-day functioning, but [that] may cause severely negative outcomes in particular circumstances; such as during leadership social interactions” (p. 496). However, although representing “a gallery of many psychological ills” (Marshall, Baden, & Guidi, 2013, p. 560) and therefore often cited, Hogan and Hogan’s traits are not the universal standard for classifying the dark side of personality in organizational-based work. For example, some continue to use more direct and publicly familiar terms—such as the traits in the dark triad (e.g., Marshall et al., 2013)—whereas a recent review of dark side leader traits, which we encourage the interested reader to source, focused on hubris, Narcissism, social dominance, and Machiavellianism (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). Indeed, this ongoing conceptualization reflects Judge et al.’s (2009) earlier yet enduring point that “dark side traits associated with leadership have been widely ignored [within research]” (p. 864).

However, despite variance in classification and limited empirical work on dark side leadership, organizational scholars do widely agree that dark side traits are socially undesirable and “viewed negatively by most individuals in society” (Judge et al., 2009, p. 864). Accordingly, when leaders possess high levels of these traits, it is also widely agreed that this hinders long-term group performance, as well as their own longevity (Carson et al., 2012; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). For example, Blair, Hoffman, and Helland (2008) discovered that narcissism in a range of organization-based managers was negatively associated with their interpersonal effectiveness and integrity (as rated by their supervisors). Owen and Davidson (2009) also identified links between leader hubris and impaired risk appraisal, a failure to predict undesirable outcomes, and dangerous decision making. Notwithstanding this consensus on the

“dark side of dark traits” (Judge et al., 2009, p. 866), however, socially undesirable aspects of personality are not just apparent in destructive leadership. They also prevail, albeit in lesser concentrations, within inherently constructive approaches. For instance, Davies (2004) found that transformational leadership was linked to the dark side traits of colorful (i.e., wanting to be noticed and the center of attention) and imaginative (i.e., acting and thinking in creative and at times odd or unusual ways). On this basis, an exclusive reliance or overpromotion of transformational behaviors may actually lead to a megalomania and narcissism that derails group performance (Tourish, 2013).

In further contrast to the idea of uniformly negative influence, organizational scholars also widely agree that dark side traits can in fact enhance group functioning and performance. For example, relationships have been found between social dominance and willing followers, hubris and innovation, Machiavellianism and legislative development, and Narcissism and strategic dynamism (Judge et al., 2009). Diverging from the negative impact of consistently demonstrated dark side traits, the suggestion from this work is that intermittent and contextually suitable uses and displays can contribute to effective team leadership (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). For example, although the recurrent self-promotional acts of a highly narcissistic leader may lead to eventual rejection or resistance from followers, transient acts of a narcissistic nature at contextually suitable moments may optimize group performance. Moreover, this contention parallels findings that bright traits can be ineffective in some situations (Judge et al., 2009). Finally, it also implies that the priority for practice-oriented study is not to explore general frequencies and levels of dark side traits in elite team leaders but rather their dark side behaviors (i.e., socially undesirable actions or interactions engaged in precise contexts). In short, exploring how leaders may usefully act in a dark way.

Given the importance of this point for the research presented here, we emphasize that dark side traits are not the same as dark side behaviors. To be explicit, dark side traits reflect stable dispositions and tendencies in personality that lead individuals to behave in a relatively consistent and predictable manner across situations (i.e., so someone high in trait narcissism will frequently act in a narcissistic way). Dark side behaviors, on the other hand, only may be the live enactment of dark side traits (which may or may not be of high levels) but also can be selectively developed and deployed (Pettersson et al., 2006; Yukl, 2006). By taking traits as continuums rather than all-or-nothing characteristics, someone who does not possess high levels of a dark side trait (e.g., a leader with low narcissism) is therefore still capable of engaging behaviors which reflect this trait in certain circumstances; in fact, this behavior may well be both functional and positive. In this way, our focus on dark side behaviors over dark side traits in this study reflects a prime interest in what leaders do rather than who they are. In addition, the emphasis for us as practitioners would be on why or why not such behaviors are used, and how this judgment can be developed for optimum impact (cf. Martindale & Collins, 2010). For clarity, all references to dark side behaviors from here on thereby refer to the overt manifestation of dark side traits; these behaviors are not necessarily the result of high levels of dark side traits but rather a conscious choice to employ such methods, whether for socially desirable or undesirable ends.

Given recent findings on leadership at elite sport’s managerial level (including performance directors, team managers, and head coaches), this focus on dark side behaviors seems timely. For example, it has been briefly stated that best practice as an Olympic sport performance director requires acts that reflect the personality traits of Narcissism, hubris, dominance, and Machiavellianism (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). The use of dark side behavior within professional sport has also been noted (Bennie & O’Connor, 2012) and reinforced by former Manchester United FC manager Sir Alex Ferguson: “You can’t ever lose control—not when you are dealing with thirty top professionals who are all millionaires. . . . If

anyone steps out of my control, that's them dead" (Elberse & Dye, 2012, p. 11). Unfortunately, as none of this prior work aimed to explore the dark side of leadership, with this idea only briefly cited or alluded to in discussion of results, understanding over what dark side behaviors look like across different leadership scenarios is uncertain. In addition, almost no understanding has been gleaned on how leaders may use dark side behaviors to achieve desired goals (e.g., to increase performer effort) but in a way that limits the chance of derailment (as risked by using such socially undesirable behaviors).

Based on these identified gaps and calls within previous research, the purpose of this study was to extend our knowledge on the use of dark side behaviors by those leading elite sport performance teams (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Considered via the lens of team leaders themselves, this work more specifically aimed to (a) unearth further possible evidence on the use of dark side leadership behavior, (b) illuminate what these behaviors look like in a common leadership task, and (c) explore how these behaviors may be used to attain desired outcomes yet minimize the risk of leader derailment. The findings will offer further insight on the potential need for practitioners to address bright and dark side behaviors with elite team leaders, what some of these behaviors look like, and their supporting mechanisms.

METHOD

Research Strategy, Philosophy, and Design

Reflecting the explorative nature of this research, including its pursuit of detailed and descriptive data on dark side leadership behaviors rather than measurement of dark side traits, a qualitative methodology was adopted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Given the apparent role of context in shaping the use of dark side leadership behaviors, this approach also enabled us to probe the details of particular cases and therefore support our intention to explore how these behaviors, if present, were deployed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Indeed, qualitative research does not develop a correct map of the world but rather a useful one (Stearn, 1998).

This approach also importantly aligned with our pragmatic research philosophy, an approach that promotes research questions and methods that create practically meaningful knowledge (Giacobbi, Poczwadowski, & Hager, 2005). Specifically, by collecting data on leaders' use of dark side behaviors during a common and practically meaningful process (see next), our aim was to develop knowledge that reflected tangible applied artifacts rather than generalizable "truths" (as positivists may seek) or representations of individually or socially constructed reality (as constructivists may seek). By rejecting the notion of one observable, measurable, and "correct" reality, as well as the belief that no research finding can be more or less accurate than another (as per the respective tenets of extreme positivism and relativism), pragmatism also considers that researcher biases and prejudices can be used to support novel and practically meaningful insights (cf. Bryant, 2009; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Morgan, 2007). In this regard, interpretation and decision-making processes within this study were supported by our own experiences of leading, assisting, and performing in elite team sport (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005). Although pragmatism has often underpinned mixed methods research (Culver, Gilbert, & Sparkes, 2012), its combination with a purely qualitative approach for this inquiry was deemed apt given our explorative aims and others' prior use of this pairing (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007).

Heeding Fletcher and Arnold's (2011) call for researchers to assess "what [elite team] leaders do . . . in specific contexts and situations" (p. 237), as well as the need to explore dark side leadership behavior in specific moments, leader succession was chosen as the

practically meaningful process to frame participant interviews (i.e., the period when a newly appointed leader takes over the running and performance of an elite team's performance department). Beyond providing a contextual backdrop for this study, it was also chosen as the culture change role of incoming elite team leaders has become an area of theoretical and applied interest for sport psychologists (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

Participants

Given the difficulty of acquiring insights from leaders at the managerial level of elite teams, and reflecting the pragmatics of research (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007), a convenience sample was secured by using participants who had agreed to take part in a broader study that was being undertaken by the authors (of which the present study was one part). This sample consisted of 15 leaders: eight were managers or head coaches of United Kingdom (UK) based professional teams (four from Premiership and Championship soccer, two from Premiership rugby union, and two from Super League rugby league) and seven were performance directors of UK Olympic sports teams (one from an individual sport, one from a team sport, and five from individual plus team sports). Adhering to the pragmatic approach (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005), leaders for the wider study were selected on the basis that the overall sample should reflect a range of experiences (i.e., a mix of short and long tenures as well as little to major objective success achieved). Such a basis also acknowledged that simply operating in high-performance sport does not necessarily make a leader high performing.

Although there are differences between professional and Olympic sport, leaders were sampled from both domains given that this was a first exploration into dark side behavior at the managerial level of elite teams and that prior research has implied that such behavior is used in both settings (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). In addition, similarities exist in the challenges of leading change in both environments. For example, leaders must handle powerful performers, the politics of a multidiscipline staff, the regularly used power of results oriented boards (or oligarch owners), and a subversive media (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012).

All interviewees were male, were between 37 and 59 years of age ($M = 50.07$ years, $SD = 6.93$ years), and had held elite sport leadership roles (e.g., manager, head coach, assistant manager or head coach, and performance director) for a total of 147 years ($M = 9.80$ years, $SD = 4.26$ years). As a manager, head coach, or performance director, participants had led teams to 13 major professional team titles and 33 Olympic medals. The shortest and longest tenures ranged from 6 months to 21 years. Eight interviewees were employed in roles at the time of interview (four as managers of professional teams and four as Olympic performance directors). The other seven had all been managers or head coaches of professional sides up to 1 year prior, or performance directors in the two cycles prior to the London Games (2004–2012). To clarify, although some participants were not currently employed as a manager, head coach, or performance director at the time of interview, data were collected only on their time working in these specific roles (i.e., no information was collected or analyzed regarding the actions or experiences of these individuals' within their current or any other previous unrelated roles). Furthermore, at the time of writing, all participants are now currently employed in senior leadership roles either in the UK or abroad. The first author conducted all interviews and had no prior relationship with any participant.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted using a semistructured guide that was mutually developed for the broader research project just described and piloted with three elite team managers. Although the main questions of the guide were not changed by this pilot work, follow-up probes were refined to ensure that the main interviews would effectively meet the aims of this study. For example, reflections of the first author (who conducted all interviews) and feedback from the pilot group were used to refine follow-up probes that explored the social conditions under which dark side behaviors were optimally engaged and the rationale that underpinned the deployment of dark side behavior. Interviews with the main participant pool focused on seven open-ended questions covering the interviewees' initial goals when joining a new team, prechange steps, processes and actions for initiating changes, processes and actions for driving changes through, clarification of any critical personal attributes and skills, processes and actions for evaluating the impact of the changes, and reflections on the ultimate success or failure of their actions. As such, although none of the main questions focused specifically on dark side behavior, they provided a contextually specific frame against which any naturally occurring cases could be elicited and explored. As prior work had only briefly noted dark side behavior in elite team leaders, this approach was deemed a logical first step in exploring the applied relevance of this construct and for enabling an evolution of knowledge (Giacobbi et al., 2005). All interviews were conducted at locations that were convenient to participants, recorded, and lasted between 110 and 165 min. Institutional ethics approval was granted, confidentiality assured, and informed consent provided by all participants.

Data Analysis

As the collected data were grounded in leaders' experiences rather than preexisting theory (cf. structure of interview guide), transcribed perceptions were appropriate for both deductive and inductive analyses. Specifically, to reveal what dark side behaviors were used (and deemed useful) by the participants, qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9) was firstly used to convert relevant quotes into raw data units (i.e., complete sentences that referred to or implicated dark side behaviors). These raw data units were then deductively categorized against the behavioral manifestations of the dark side traits described in Hogan and Hogan (2001) and Judge et al. (2009). These were excitable, skeptical, cautious, reserved, leisurely, bold, mischievous, colorful, imaginative, diligent, and dutiful (as taken from Hogan & Hogan, 2001), and hubris, Narcissism, social dominance, and Machiavellianism (as taken from Judge et al., 2009). These classifications were selected due to their seminal nature and broad integration of prior knowledge respectively. We remind the reader that although these classifications reflect personality traits, this does not necessarily mean that the participants in this study would score highly on these traits if measured. Rather, they simply demonstrate the use of socially undesirable behaviors in specific scenarios.

To meet our third aim, an entirely separate inductive content analysis was undertaken to elucidate how dark side behaviors were effectively used according to the participants. This process involved the transformation of raw data units into thematic hierarchies by creating tags, grouping similar tags to create categories, and then organizing categories into a distinct framework (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993).

Addressing Trustworthiness

As trust and rapport shape the process and outcomes of interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2009), these components were enhanced by (a) gaining an understanding of all participants' careers to demonstrate an understanding of their history, achievements, and challenges and

(b) our awareness of the challenges of elite sport through our previous and continued roles in this setting. The resulting high level of trust and rapport was evidenced by a mean interview length of 142 min. Addressing the trustworthiness of the deductive analysis process, the second author examined samples of meaning units from each leader against the traits to which they had been coded by the first author. In cases where alternate coding was proposed, both authors engaged in critical discussion until an agreement was reached. For the inductive analysis process, constant comparison was used to repeatedly evaluate, modify, and reinforce developing tags and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, transparency of this process was enhanced through the use of qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9). In particular, conceptual memos enabled a trail of the rationale underpinning (and challenging) the first author's interpretation (Davis & Meyer, 2009). The first author also kept a reflexive journal, which provided opportunities for reflection on the research process and how personal experiences and biases were interacting with the interpretation and categorization of the data (Patton, 2002). In addition, the second author acted as a critical friend by questioning and challenging the first author's developing discoveries and explanations (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999). Finally, member checks were conducted over telephone and e-mail to assess the extent to which participants perceived that their quotes used in this article were "accurate, balanced, fair, and respectful" (Sparkes & Smith, 2009, p. 495). No quotes, or the positions of quotes, were changed by this process.

RESULTS

The aims of this work were to (a) unearth possible further evidence on the use of dark side leadership behaviors by those at the managerial level of elite teams, (b) illuminate what these behaviors look like in a common leadership task, and (c) explore how these behaviors were used to achieve desired outcomes yet minimize the risk of derailment. To address the first two of these aims, the dark side behaviors described by elite team leaders are presented first. The way in which these behaviors were used is presented second. Supporting quotes from leaders of professional teams are indicated by PM and those of Olympic teams by PD. Table 1 details the type of team led by each participant.

Exemplar Dark Side Leadership Behaviors Used During the Delivery of Change

Machiavellian/Mischievous behaviors

Given the contested and political nature of elite team settings, Machiavellian (as per Judge et al., 2009) or mischievous behaviors (as per Hogan & Hogan, 2001; including "manipulative,

Table 1
Type of Sports Team Managed by Participants

Participant identifier	Managed sports team type
PM1, PM7	Professional rugby union
PM2, PM4	Professional rugby league
PM3, PM5, PM6	Professional soccer ^a
PD1, PD2, PD4, PD5, PD7	Olympic individual plus team sport
PD3	Olympic team sport
PD6	Olympic individual sport

^aSince the interview, one professional soccer team manager requested that their data not be quoted in this article due to changes in their employment circumstances; this participant's data were, however, still used in the analysis.

deceitful, cunning, and exploitative” acts) were evident across all participants’ accounts. Including tactics to shape interpersonal and political relationships in a way that furthered the team’s interests and performance, one PD provided a telling insight on how they used Machiavellian behaviors to shape the focus of their system:

[To instigate a] focus on [new event] I put up [in a presentation] what it would take to ... medal [in historically targeted event] and ... 95% of [the performers] said, ‘Well, I can’t do that!’ So [new event] made sense because ... it was achievable. ... It was clever, I didn’t say ‘you’re going to do [new event]’ ... [but I knew] very well at that point ... no one was going to ... medal in [historically targeted event]. ... What I was trying to do was also say: ‘Coaches; you need to step up. You have to show that you’re raising the game, because ... an athlete will leave you if they’ve got a bigger goal than you [i.e., medal success in new event].’ (PD5)

As conveyed by this quote, the ability to strategically manipulate as well as directly address, challenge, or confront the choices made by powerful performers and staff was perceived to be a vital behavior for elite team leaders to call upon.

From a psychosocial perspective, participants also discussed the importance of being able to manipulate performer and support staff decision making through the construction and reconstruction of “normal” behaviors. For example, take the actions of one incoming leader who wanted his players to engage with new early morning conditioning sessions:

[The change] came ... at the same time as Ryan Giggs’ [yoga] DVD. ... [So I just] made a point of, ‘have you seen this?’ ... Three or four players [then] came to see my analyst ... and he got the DVD. ... [Then when] even the most ardent of [cynics] ... sees four then six or seven people doing it ... and getting results, ultimately something is going to click. ... So from having three or four in the gym before training all of a sudden eight or nine were in [without any overt demand]. (PM6)

Although this quote seems to resemble the transformational behavior of inspirational motivation, it is important to note that the leader in this instance was not actively developing, articulating, or inspiring their vision for the future through positive and reassuring dialogue (cf. Bass, 1985; Callow et al., 2009) but rather encouraging behavior change via an inherently darker manipulation of group norms. Clarifying this as a socially undesirable act, consider the perceptions of the performers had they known that they were being manipulated. Focused again on performer manipulation, another leader described a more overt approach to facilitating acceptance and uptake of new behaviors:

It’s a matter of the subtle sell to tell you the truth. ... In a team sport players are quite selfish, they look after themselves. ... I felt that the way for them to get ownership [and prioritize the group] was for them to feel that they are being consulted. Now, your degree of consultation might vary from group to group but they have got to feel that they have had some input. In all honesty they don’t because you can sell them a certain bias, but if they feel they’ve been consulted they are more receptive than otherwise. (PM4)

Of interest, another interviewee also noted how peer review processes were introduced and discreetly manipulated to expose and consequently suppress particularly troublesome performers:

[Each] player would ... fill a sheet in ... [with] three words [on] how you think the group would describe you, three words how you want to be described, and then what ... you need to

stop doing, start doing, and keep doing. . . . The group would [then] directly deliver feedback [to the player on their perceptions]. . . . This became pretty uncomfortable for some. . . . It was like the bullies being bullied. (PM2)

Skeptical behaviors

Evident in those who are “cynical, distrustful, and doubting others’ true intentions” (Hogan & Hogan, 2001, p. 42), the need for behaviors that reflected skepticism when leading elite teams was also revealed. Given the high potential for support staff conflict and the need to interact with a powerful performer group, a level of suspicion over others’ actions was described by many interviewees. This was particularly the case for those closest to the leader:

[For] developing a good team . . . you can start through the [senior players]. . . . With some senior players [however] . . . it’s your old enemy isn’t it; keep your friends close but . . . keep your bloody enemies even closer! . . . [Failing to do so] may well have been a mistake that I made at [previous team] and perhaps is something that I’ve learned from. (PM4)

Of note here, it is telling that this leader had learned to behave in a more skeptical manner, therefore reinforcing our earlier suggestion that individuals do not need to have high levels of dark side traits to act in a dark manner. In addition, it is also interesting to note that it was the absence of a dark side behavior (i.e., doubting and protecting oneself from the potentially ulterior motives of influential performers) that was deemed detrimental to this leader’s effectiveness and survival. Indeed, one highly successful PD described how skeptical behaviors pervaded their approach to managing their support staff:

We have a formal feedback process after every championship . . . [where] each performance manager will . . . [conduct] one-on-ones with all staff, all [performers], and [external partners], *and then I also speak to a few people and just check that what I’m getting from the performance managers is au fait* [emphasis added]. (PD1)

Again, the “darkness” of this behavior lies in the view that the performance managers would likely hold if they knew the PD was speaking to others to verify their feedback without their awareness. Reflecting their ability to constrain and even control a leader’s actions, behaviors of a skeptical nature were further evident in scenarios relating to powerful board members:

[A key board figure] left [*n*] months ago and . . . one of the things that we did . . . was to say [to our funding agency] that there is actually now a real risk of somebody new coming in halfway through the Olympic cycle and throwing everything upside down. . . . [We were] very upfront. . . . Actually almost making a preemptive strike. (PD2)

While highlighting this PD’s cynicism and doubts over the possible intentions of an incoming powerful board member, this quote also effectively shows how dark side behaviors could be combined to achieve multiple goals simultaneously; in this case, pairing actions of a skeptical nature with the manipulation of a powerful external partner so that the PD would be more likely to be favored by this body in any potential struggle. Again, a lack of skepticism-related behavior in one professional team manager—when they were being provided with little insight on board-level plans and reviews—was felt to be a key factor in the eventual derailment of their culture change program:

I think at times [not having sufficient doubts over a lack of communication with the CEO] was detrimental to understanding where we were trying to be because there were cases where we

were ... getting on with ... a really important part of our ... plan only to learn that there was some real hardship behind the scenes. (PM1)

Social dominance behaviors

Evident in preferences for hierarchy, achievement, and control, as well as projection as a highly and consistently competent figure, interviewees also described the importance of socially dominant behavior when attempting to establish and sustain a high performing team (Judge et al., 2009). For instance, many participants noted the importance of ensuring that support staff did not deviate from the leader's agenda once this had been set:

We had a few issues with [performance lifestyle staff] ... because all the time they're trying to get our athletes on college courses ... [during] core time. [I said], 'these guys need to train, the Olympics is here, stop ***** off with them!' ... It's as hard as that because all the time I knew [nation] were training here and doing this [type of work] and we were ***** around giving them this and this to do. (PD3)

In a further notable example, another participant pointed to the expression of ultimate control by even exerting influence over players away from the team setting:

I find out what players are doing off the pitch. I went to some places in [city] where [X] was drinking and said to the [owner], 'if you let [X] back in here. ... I'll ban all the players from coming in here.' And he tells me when he's been in. (PM5)

Corroborating these quotes, another PD reflected that they may have achieved greater success had they been more dominant, in this case over negotiations with an external support partner:

All of a sudden I said [to the English Institute of Sport], 'I don't want to be ... in [region] anymore.' 'Oh, what will we do with our Centre?' 'I don't ***** care. ... I don't want the service done like this.' ... What I should have done I think was to have been even more bloody ... instead of being, [as I eventually was], slightly more corporate and going, 'well ok, we can adjust this and do that.' (PD4)

Of interest, some professional team managers who had intentionally refrained from acts of social dominance in their first jobs reflected that such behavior, at contextually apt moments, would also have significantly increased their chances of role survival and team success:

Sometimes you don't want [players] to question everything, you just want them to do what we want them to do because we are the ones that have spent the hours looking at film and deciding the best way [to approach a game]. ... There might have been times where we really encouraged their participation ... but we probably just needed to tell them [in other instances], "this is the way we are doing it; end of!" (PM2)

Performance-focused ruthlessness behaviors

Extending an idea briefly noted in Collins and Cruickshank (2012), perceptions were provided on socially undesirable acts that did not fit neatly with the traits of Hogan and Hogan (2001) and Judge et al. (2009). Specifically, and despite links with Hogan and Hogan's reserved (i.e., aloof, detached, uncommunicative) and Judge et al.'s social dominance (as earlier), leaders described their use of behaviors that reflected a performance-focused ruthlessness. Part of a "no compromise" take on certain challenges, this behavior did not relate to exerting command

or influence (as per social dominance: Judge et al.) or wholly dismissing the feelings of others (as per Hogan & Hogan's reserved), but rather to a robust promotion of the team's vision, values, and standards:

[I had to] tell a [n] times world champion their career is over . . . unless they change. . . . [But] he's troublesome . . . strong willed . . . [and] I can't change him, so I am going to have to face him down and . . . be prepared when he . . . disrupts my next team meeting . . . to say, 'seriously . . . if you don't want to do this that's not a problem. There's the door. Leave'. And maybe [other] people will walk behind him and maybe they won't. . . . It sounds a bit crude but it's the only way. (PD6)

As shown here, although performers' reputation and prior achievements may have influenced the precise manner in which leaders enacted such cold bloodedness, these factors did not provide immunity from failing to meet evolving standards, a point echoed by another participant who stated that "you keep chipping away at [athletes who won't engage] . . . but ultimately one of two things will happen: they will perform and they'll get selected; they won't perform and we kick them off the program" (PD7).

Indeed, such a ruthless approach to protecting desired values and acceptable behaviors in the performance environment was clear across participants, including the following manager who experienced difficulties with challenging young performers:

[Young modern players are] moaning away behind the scenes, and that's what you're going to get these days. . . . Society's made it, for every young man or young person, to have an excuse for failing; there is an excuse for everything now. There's a syndrome for people being lazy, rude. You come from a broken family? I don't give a ****. . . . I come from X; people getting stabbed and smacking each other so don't give me that ****. I've never been in trouble in my life, and all my mates have never been in trouble with the police. (PM5)

Beyond application with performers, one highly successful PD also attested to the importance of, when required, adopting similar behavior in interactions with support staff:

We had a physiotherapist who . . . couldn't come [to Olympic training camp] for some poxy reason. . . . [After further problems, I had to say], "sorry, you're not committed: you're gone." And it's as simple as that. He had some personal problems, which is fine, but we're not prepared to bring that into the program. (PD3)

Recognized by another particularly successful PD, such apparently unforgiving actions were at times deemed mandatory given the number and scale of external distractions that leaders faced:

[At the start of my tenure] the . . . athletes and the coaches and the staff were all at one and heading in the same direction, and if folk weren't then I was fairly ruthless that we weren't going to be working together because there were too many challenges outside to have people inside that didn't see . . . where the [program] was going. (PD7)

Deploying Dark Side Behavior: Mechanisms for Optimizing Impact and Minimizing Risk

To address the third aim of this research, focus now turns to the way leaders used dark side behaviors to achieve desired goals yet concurrently reduce the threat or scale of follower

suspicion, challenge, resistance, or rejection (as socially undesirable behaviors run the risk of invoking). Specifically, findings from the inductive analysis revealed that interviewees used two metaskills to facilitate their use of dark side leadership behavior: sociopolitical awareness and engineering and an adaptive expertise.

Sociopolitical awareness and engineering

As leading an elite team is a socially complex and contested task, interviewees described how they relied on their awareness of and ability to engineer beneficial social and political conditions when using dark side behaviors. With links to Hogan and Hogan's (2002) notion of sociopolitical intelligence, or the ability to read reactions in others, this metaskill was frequently dark in its own right. For example, one leader worked to establish early political support from influential players so that, when later required, his dark side behavior would be largely supported by this key group (or deemed as desirable or acceptable as it possibly could be):

When you take over . . . focus on three of the better, older players and . . . get them on your side. . . . And then [when I had to take socially undesirable actions], 'I've got a problem with [X]; what am I going to do lads?' . . . 'Get rid of him.' . . . I was going to do it anyway but it keeps them [onside]. They think they're doing it. Then they . . . spread it round the dressing room: 'The gaffer's got it under control.' (PM5)

Beyond engineering internal contexts, this leader also noted how the impact of their dark side leadership behavior was further enhanced by jointly engineering contexts outside of the team environment. For instance, when internally exposing a group of older and influential players who did not fit with his values, this individual worked to dampen any negative repercussions (both internally and externally) by proactively and positively speaking about these players in the media: "Oh, he's doing great . . . he's fantastic."

Further demonstrating the foundations needed to make the use of socially undesirable behaviors less undesirable, and ideally acceptable, one PD also described how the power of a key political ally was used to soften their (relatively) ruthless decision to introduce a new and culturally controversial selection system:

We moved to a very subjective selection process because I knew who the best players were and I wanted them at the Olympics . . . but that unfortunately [only agreed with] a tiny minority. . . . [We had to] explain that [funding agency] was extremely anxious about the [current one-off selection event so] I got a guy from [the funding agency to say], 'this is the [new] system. . . . Ask the questions now . . . [as] ultimately there is a big degree of subjectivity.' . . . And you'd get two, three guys stand up and go, 'I think that's ****.' . . . [However], in the time I was there . . . plenty of them were unhappy [when not selected] . . . but not one athlete made an appeal. (PD3)

Similarly, and albeit in lighter tone, another PD revealed how he engineered organizational structures in a way that would ensure his authority but without overt displays of dominance:

It doesn't take brains . . . to work out areas . . . we can tweak within [the program]. . . . [So] instead of twelve of us getting round a table . . . I made up some working groups with three or four people on each . . . [and asked them to] report back in three to four months. . . . Because you never really decide anything do you [with twelve people]. A good committee is three with one in hospital, one absentee and me! (PD1)

As a final example, another leader stated how their desired control over performance-related issues without appropriate political sensitivity likely contributed to their eventual sacking:

[To upgrade] all three [training] pitches would cost something like £65,000 ... [and] it was decided [by the Board] to do one pitch. ... Yet they built one of the corners up of the [stadium] as a media center and ... restaurant for £1M. ... I don't see the logic in it ... and I made my feelings known. ... I'm not saying that cost me, but maybe ... banging on about [it] was something that didn't help. (PM6)

Adaptive expertise

Beyond appreciating what general behaviors could elicit general outcomes in general scenarios (e.g., in times of conflict, acts of social dominance may stop issues from escalating), optimal use of dark side behavior was also found to rely on knowing precisely when, where, why, and how specific behaviors could be shaped and combined to deliver specific outcomes in specific scenarios (e.g., how to use acts of social dominance and manipulation during “live” conflict with a performer who has recently been dropped from the team but cannot be isolated due their status within the squad). Termed adaptive expertise, this skill reflects an ability to perform effectively, flexibly, and innovatively in unstructured and unpredictable situations (Fazey, Fazey, & Fazey, 2005; Tozer, Fazey, & Fazey, 2007); in short, supporting the ability to act effectively in very different ways in very different contexts. For instance, one leader noted that “there are times when you’ve got to lose it ... call it staged call or not, for the right reaction [at that moment]” (PM3). Another leader provided a particularly eloquent example of opportune Machiavellian behavior with two players who were not regularly playing in the team but who remained key proponents of his desired culture:

‘Listen, you two [are] good ... players but as lads you’ve made this training area far, far better.’ I know ... that’s stuck with [X]. ... I did believe that though, I wouldn’t tell a lie. *I’d just tell them the truth at the right time* [emphasis added]. (PM5)

Implying that the impact of dark side behaviors was greatest when these were strategically molded and deployed at particular moments, such expertise appeared to be underpinned by a strong declarative understanding of interpersonal dynamics and context. Indeed, knowing when and when not to use dark side behavior was also supported by PDs:

You have to be ... clear on what you ... expect of [British Olympic Association] and be pretty damn quick to say ... ‘I think that’s very ****.’ ... [But] I suppose you have to taper ... so when you are three years out from the Games you can be dealing in strategic stuff, telling [the BOA] what you think. Three months from the Games that’s all irrelevant. You’ve got to get on and deal with whatever’s there. (PD1)

Similarly, another leader noted how perceptions of those outside the performance department were targeted and manipulated via the media at precise moments during a team’s evolution:

[When you are successful] people are wondering, ‘Well, how are you doing it?’ ... And slowly those questions are asked [by the media] and sometimes we didn’t answer them directly [to maintain advantage] but there were other times when we were very clear [as] we wanted people to know ... *this* is what we are doing. (PM1)

As implied by the preceding quotes, the coherence of a leader's action with his or her short-term and longer-term plans underpinned the effective use of dark side leadership behaviors according to participants, a process aided by creating and working against nested agendas (cf. Abraham & Collins, 2011). Indeed, greatest impact was felt to arrive when dark side behavior (in the following case, behavior related to performance-focused ruthlessness) was tied to the leader's core values and their program's ultimate direction:

I never quite did it but someone said [remove a problematic or incompatible player] a year early rather than a year late. [Sir Alex Ferguson went] . . . a year early rather than a year late. No matter how big a personality [or] how talented you are. . . [You need to be] close enough to care but detached enough to make tough decisions. (PM7)

DISCUSSION

Based on recent suggestions that best practice as an elite team leader involves the use of dark side leadership behaviors (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Collins & Cruickshank, 2012; Cruickshank et al., 2014; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), this study aimed to (a) unearth possible further evidence on the use of dark side leadership behaviors by those operating at the managerial level of elite teams, (b) illuminate what these behaviors look like in a common leadership task, and (c) explore how these behaviors may be applied to achieve desired outcomes yet minimize the risk of leader derailment. Findings showed that dark side behaviors were used (and deemed useful) by our interviewees and were supported by the key metaskills of sociopolitical awareness and engineering and adaptive expertise.

Most fundamentally, these findings corroborate recent suggestions that the enactment of dark side traits (or use of dark side behavior as defined in this article) is a tangible feature of elite team leadership. Specifically, our sample reported that skeptical, social dominance, Machiavellian/mischievous, and performance-focused ruthlessness behaviors were all employed during leaders' efforts to deliver change in their teams. Given the stigmatized nature of socially undesirable actions, as well as their links to destructive forms of leadership when overrepresented (Hogan & Hogan, 2001), it was notable that these leaders also felt that these behaviors, when appropriately engaged, were important and effective parts of their repertoire. Indeed, although a causal relationship cannot be inferred and the negative impact of inappropriately used dark side leadership is well documented (cf. Judge et al., 2009), these behaviors were applied by highly successful interviewees within our sample (as based on objective success) and acknowledged as something that could have been used to prevent derailment in others. As prior work has provided little description of the dark side behaviors used by elite team leaders, this research has also provided a timely depiction of what dark side behavior can look like during a commonly undertaken leadership activity. Taken against the inherently bright approaches to leadership often applied in sport psychology, most notably the transformational approach given its continued exposure and influence in sport psychology, it would therefore seem that theories need to be developed which need to better account for the bright and dark side of leadership at the elite performance team level.

As usefully pointed out by one reviewer of this article, some of the dark side behaviors used by participants in this study could be interpreted as working toward some of the same goals as those espoused within the transformational approach. For example, some quotes on Machiavellian/mischievous behavior presented earlier could possibly be interpreted as a form of inspirational motivation (although also note that many of reported actions were primarily aimed at furthering the leader's agenda). However, contrary to the entirely bright items used to measure inspirational motivation in many transformational leadership questionnaires (e.g.,

Callow et al., 2009), it would appear that these dark pathways have not yet been sufficiently considered or accounted for (at least for elite team environments). In addition, although some of our findings shared similarities in terms of the ultimate goal of leadership behavior (e.g., to inspire or stimulate), they were often completely nontransformational at the same time. For example, take the PD who removed the physiotherapist for not committing due to personal issues: This figure might be deemed to have high performance expectations and be fostering acceptance of group goals and teamwork in others (as per transformational leadership theory; Bass, 1985; Callow et al. 2009), but he also completely overlooked aspects of individual consideration and intellectual stimulation (as per transformational leadership theory; Bass, 1985; Callow et al., 2009) to be effective (in his view at least) in the given scenario. Moreover, rather than create a new vision, engage in inspirational exchanges, and develop followers to their full potential (as per the key tenets of transformational leadership theory; Bass, 1985), some reported behaviors were used to protect the status quo and undermine or expose followers at specific times (e.g., the preemptive strike to gain funding agency support before the arrival of a new board member; the peer review process that bullied the bullies).

In this manner, our findings support prior research and imply that elite team leaders cannot be entirely transformational (or entirely bright) if they are to be optimally effective. Given the power of modern performer groups, the self-serving politics in multidiscipline staff, the regularly wielded power of results-consumed boards (or oligarch owners), and subversive acts of the media (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2012), it is perhaps unsurprising that elite team leaders cannot adopt an entirely positive, inspirational, and attentive approach (at least not all the time). Rather, our findings imply that, for delivering change at least, successful leaders empower and inspire yet retain ultimate control over those who deliver or assist performance. As such, we hope that our results trigger a more balanced consideration of dark side behaviors within leadership approaches, including those which are inherently but not exclusively bright. In addition, it would seem that future models of elite team leadership also need to better account for behaviors related to “managing upwards” (e.g., to boards) and “managing outwards” (e.g., to the media) as well as the historical top-down perspective (i.e., leadership targeted at performers and, to a lesser extent, support staff).

Beyond these conceptual insights and implications, this study has also extended prior work by developing understanding on how dark side leadership behaviors may be effectively applied by elite team leaders. Taking sociopolitical awareness and engineering first, the first element of this metaskill (i.e., sociopolitical awareness) resonates strongly with contingency approaches to leadership (e.g., contingency theory, situational leadership theory, path-goal theory; Seyranian, 2010). In this way, dark side behavior was reported to be best engaged in socially and politically conducive conditions. The second element of this metaskill (i.e., sociopolitical engineering), however, implies that such situations were not just responded to but also proactively shaped. As précised by one PD, surviving and succeeding in one’s role involved “creating situations before they create you” (PD4), a finding that resonates with Hogan and Hogan’s (2001) view that the dark side of personality is protected and masked by strong social skills. As such, dark side behaviors were considered most effective when contexts had been earlier molded in a way that meant support staff and performers would be more likely to perceive them as appropriate, acceptable, or normal for the given situation.

With similar links to contingency based approaches to leadership, reliance on adaptive expertise also implies that effective use of dark side behaviors is ultimately a test of decision making. However, although contingency-based approaches often judge leader behavior against immediate situations, the present research has extended prior work by revealing that optimal impact was felt to occur when dark side behaviors were locked into a leader’s short-, medium-, and long-term plans. Enabled by a clear understanding of their program’s ultimate direction,

coherence across the leader's short-, intermediate-, and long-term behavior may therefore help followers to grasp why such socially undesirable behavior was (and will continue to be) used to promote and protect performance.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

To support judgments on research quality, it is useful to consider some characterizing traits of this study (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Specifically, and beyond strategies to enhance trustworthiness (cf. Method section), methodological coherence was demonstrated in that our pragmatic approach guided our practice-based research questions, use of theories (i.e., Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Judge et al., 2009) as tools to develop practically relevant insights rather any "truths" about "reality," participant selection, data collection (i.e., framing interviews against a practically relevant task), and data analysis (i.e., a focus on the process and mechanisms of dark side behaviors: Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Giacobbi et al., 2005; Gould et al., 2007). As the major goal for pragmatic research is to develop novel and useful ways of addressing applied challenges (Giacobbi et al., 2005), we also ask the reader to apply the "So what?" principle (Bryant, 2009). In short, what difference to practice-oriented theory and consultancy have our findings made if they do relate to tangible applied artifacts?

Despite such strengths, this research was of course not without limits that future work should address. First, scholars should seek to assess the extent to which dark side behavior is implicated in other specific and practically meaningful leadership challenges, for example, in the lead up to major events (e.g., the Olympics). Certainly, it is not impossible that dark side behaviors are particularly used when delivering programs of change or that our interviewees were particularly disposed to dark side behavior. This work should further focus on specific settings to create bespoke theory and practice (e.g., professional vs. Olympic sport; soccer vs. rugby) and would also sensibly explore the extent to which dark side behaviors reflect the manifestation of underlying traits or learned behaviors (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Future work should also seek to incorporate support staff and performer perceptions. It is likely that some behaviors linked to traits not reported here but elsewhere (e.g., Narcissism; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011) will emerge from such investigation and offer a more complete picture of leaders' dark side repertoire. Including these "followers" (as well as other stakeholders; e.g., board members, media, fans) and pairing their perceptions with performance and outcome data would also allow for an assessment of the actual impact of dark behaviors on those who such action is targeted; particularly given the well-reported negative impact of inappropriately deployed dark side behaviors (cf. Judge et al., 2009). Indeed, Hogan and Hogan (2001) already argued that the observer's view is needed to fully elucidate dark side leadership. Such inquiry would also fit with growing awareness that leader effectiveness is shaped by follower characteristics (Arthur, Woodman, Ong, Hardy, & Ntoumanis, 2011). Last, researchers should also seek to develop expertise-based models of dark side (and wider) leadership. Extending beyond competency-based approaches, which detail what general behaviors leaders should be able to exhibit, expertise-based models would include aspects of why, when, where, and how specific behaviors are used (and in what combination) to deliver a specific impact for a specific challenge (cf. Collins, Burke, Martindale, & Cruickshank, 2014). For this purpose, case studies that assess leader behaviors against their short-, medium-, and long-term goals would be a useful pursuit.

Concluding Comments

Responding to recent suggestions in sport psychology and more established trends in organizational literature, this study has presented further evidence of the use of dark side

behaviors by elite team leaders, illuminated what some of these behaviors look like during a common leadership task, and revealed mechanisms through which they were considered to be effectively applied. Theoretically, these findings provide a platform upon which researchers may continue to explore both the bright and dark side of elite team leadership. Moreover, our findings also encourage the development of elite team leadership models that are underpinned by expertise (i.e., knowing why, when, where, and how to use specific behaviors) rather than competence (i.e., the possession of, or ability to call on, general behaviors). On a practical level, and although great care is required given the potential for negative implications if misused, the appropriate use of dark side behaviors by elite team leaders is supported by their reported use and usefulness by participants in this study. More specifically, elite team leaders and supporting consultants are advised to (a) critically assess and engineer the sociopolitical contexts in which dark side behavior is to be used and (b) develop and work from clear and coherent long-term plans so that, when needed, dark side behavior is viewed by followers as sufficiently appropriate, acceptable, or normal for optimizing performance.

FOOTNOTES

¹The broader research project used Corbin and Strauss (2008) grounded theory methodology to explore perceptions of elite performance team leaders. As such, the interview guide was not structured around any formal theory and instead allowed for an essentially open-ended discussion on a practically meaningful process.

²Space precludes the provision of details on the behavioral manifestations of all of these dark side traits as described by Hogan and Hogan (2001) and Judge et al. (2009). However, details are described for those presented within the Results section.

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