
The Dark Side of Service Leaders

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Abstract

The rapid growth of service economies calls for effective service leaders. According to Po Chung (Co-founder of DHL International and Chairman Emeritus of DHL Express (Hong Kong) Limited), effective service leaders should possess competence, character and care (3Cs). In addition, a lack of these qualities constitutes the dark side of service leadership. In this chapter, the dark side of service leadership is examined at three levels. First, “viruses” in leadership are examined through the lens of the Service Leadership Theory. Second, attributes of the dark side of leadership with particular reference to problems in competence, character and care based on the existing scientific literature are outlined. Finally, the dark side of service leadership with reference to Confucian virtues is addressed.

Keywords: dark side of leadership, Service Leadership Theory, Confucian values, viruses in leadership

1. Introduction

Humans work in networks. We run large-scale cooperative networks that link individual, communities and organizations. The most successful networks are characterized by good leadership, which unites people to work together and better. Good leaders have become increasingly vital to organizational success because they keep the group focused and united. However, the dark side of leadership can damage a person, a team, an organization and even the whole society.

Because of its prevalence and role in causing organizational failure, there is a growing interest in the dark side of leadership in the scientific literature on leadership. Researchers have used different terms, such as destructive leadership, toxic leaders and abusive supervision to describe the dark side of leadership [1].

According to the Service Leadership Theory developed by Chung [2], the dark side of leadership in an organization is like a “virus” in a computer system, which is often tiny, but contagious and fatal. The viruses in leadership often emerge when there are problems with the three essential qualities underlying effective service leadership, which include competence, character and care. Similar to destructive computer viruses, viruses in leadership also lead to organizational dysfunction and ineffectiveness. According to the Service Leadership Theory, viruses in leadership are anti-virtues, which repel the followers, destroy the relationship and undermine the organization benefits [3].

Existing empirical studies have demonstrated the negative outcomes of the dark side of leadership in terms of a lack of essential qualities. Incompetence of leaders often causes organizational ineffectiveness [4]. Immoral and uncaring leadership behavior are considered more destructive, and often negatively related to individual outcomes, such as employees’ working attitudes, task performance, and psychological well-being [5], as well as organizational outcomes, such as commitment, relationship and performance [6, 7].

Besides these harmful effects, the dark side of leadership is also contradictory to social and cultural values. In Asian cultures, where Confucian values play a leading role in shaping organizational climate and interpersonal relationship, the dark side of leadership is generally sanctioned. For example, Confucianism suggests that a “superior man” (“jun zi”, 君子) should be benevolent, kind and loyal. On the contrary, a person possessing dark dispositions, such as uncaring, disloyal and unkind attributes, is considered an “inferior man” (“xiao ren”, 小人).

The overarching aim of this chapter is to explore the dark side of leadership. There are three sections in this chapter. First, “viruses” in leadership are examined through the lens of the Service Leadership Theory. Second, the dark side of leadership with particular reference to problems in character and care is examined based on existing literature. Finally, the dark side of service leadership is addressed with reference to Confucian virtues in the Chinese culture.

2. The dark side of service leadership according to the Service Leadership Theory

The twenty-first century is the era of service age [8]. Different from manufacturing economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, service economy requires companies to be service providers. As the service is delivered through people, stronger leadership to lead, motivate and involve people has become the key to organizational success.

Po Chung, the co-founder of DHL International, proposed the concept of “service leadership” and the Service Leadership Theory based on existing leadership theories, contextual philosophies and his own experiences [9]. The Service Leadership Theory has responded to the global call for service leaders, integrated the advanced notions from existing leadership theories and emphasized specific contextual values in practicing leadership. According to Chung, service leadership means “satisfying needs by consistently providing quality personal service

to everyone one comes into contact with, including one's self, others, groups, communities, systems, and environments" [2]. Strong service leadership brings more harmony and competitiveness which are the key to personal, tribal, team and organization's success. In this section, we review Chung's work on the dark side of leadership based on existing literature [3, 10] and an interview with Po Chung [11].

2.1. Basic tenets of the Service Leadership Theory

According to the Service Leadership Theory, successful service leaders possess competence, character and care [2]. Competence means having the right skills and abilities to do the job well, and to inspire followers to do the same. Character means having a good set of moral values that allows an individual to build trust in others, dispel distrust and function well among other people. Care means having an emotional, unselfish bond that communicates respect, concern and a willingness to act, as well as pride and ownership in the things that they do.

Service leaders should possess all of the three fundamental characteristics. A lack of any of these indispensable qualities constitutes the dark side of leadership. A lack of competence signals an inability to perform or compete in the open marketplace. In a competitive environment, an incompetent leader fails to convince followers why he/she should be followed. For example, a lack of spiritual well-being would mean a lack of meaningful direction for the team [8]. A lack of character means a lack of values which fosters distrust in a leader's moral fiber. When a follower has reasons not to trust a leader or to disrespect them in return, then they are more likely to leave. A lack of care shown to one's followers signals a lack of interest or empathy, or even a willingness to abandon followers. Lacking care erodes confidence among followers, and gives them less of a reason to keep following the leader. Imbalance of the 3Cs can also lead to failure, and the more extreme it is, the more critical may be the consequence. For example, very competent but seriously unethical leaders can cause more damage the higher they move up in the organization.

2.2. The essence of viruses in leadership

"Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". This famous quote by Leo Tolstoy was introduced by Jared Diamond as the Anna Karenina principle. Chung applied this principle in the field of leadership [10]. More specifically, successful leaders are "all the same" because they have been able to pin down all the requisite characteristics of being a leader. On the contrary, unsuccessful leaders failed because they were unable to attract followers, providing the level of care, character or competence required of them. Chung claimed that the failure is often attributed to the fundamentally repulsive "viruses" of leaders, which repel followers from the very beginning. According to Chung, viruses possess negative, repellant qualities, which are anti-virtues, and the antithesis of what makes people good, moral beings.

Chung has adopted purposely the IT language to explain the problem of moral failings in leadership so as to make it more readily recognizable to young people. The term "virus" is borrowed from the context of computer programming, which in turn is taken from the biological

sciences. To explain the viruses in leadership, Chung proposed the notion of Personal Operating System (POS). Human brains are like personal bio-computers with an operating system, collecting and processing information and taking actions [3, 12]. Like a computer virus, a virus can corrupt an individual's POS as well [3]. Similarly, leadership works best in workplace when all parts function together in harmony, which enables the best of an organization to come to the fore. However, viruses destabilize the harmonious and proper functioning of a system, and ultimately work to push its constituent parts apart.

In the computer and biology analogies, viruses are often small and malignant elements which attack their hosts by making copies of themselves. In the leadership context, viruses can also start small, such as treating an employee unkindly and dealing with integrity issues lightly. Left unchecked, these viruses replicate and reinforce themselves through repeated behavior, becoming bad habits and, ultimately, moral flaws. Once these moral flaws take root in a significant way, they actively repel followers. The example of treating employees unkindly, for instance, could manifest and grow to treating all perceived subordinates unkindly, whether in the organization or not. This then spreads and becomes arrogance and general nastiness, which is certainly not a good way to encourage people to follow the leader.

However, it is not always easy to identify when exact behaviors are viral under specific situations. For example, people also make mistakes, particularly when they are one-off. However, mistakes do not necessarily reflect corrupted character. Something is done wrongly does not mean that there is an active intent to do it that way. Different from mistakes, viruses refer to deeper set values, which are the opposites to virtues. When someone acts and is motivated by one of these viruses, for instance, by being disrespectful because they believe that the other person deserves no respect, then this type of behavior is considered repellant and viral.

For leaders, being free of viruses is a minimum requirement on the road to leadership, because leaders are foremost free of the negative values—the viruses—that repel followers. Leaders attract followers not only by exhibiting characteristics that are attractive, but also provide something to followers in return. For one thing, being free of the repellant qualities of viruses means that leaders are able to attract, and more importantly retain, followers. For another thing, the process of removing viruses is an important step to becoming a leader with upstanding moral virtues, such as character and care.

2.3. Virus in leadership and Confucian thoughts

As mentioned earlier, the Service Leadership Theory highlights three fundamental characteristics, namely competence, character and care. These qualities provide lessons on how to make oneself a better person, how to treat others well and ultimately how to achieve a harmonious and functional society. They are at the heart of many of the world's philosophical and religious teachings, and can be considered global values. Consequently, a lack of these fundamental characteristics has also been criticized by global values and cultures.

In the Chinese context, the dark side of leadership often reflects the opposites of Confucian virtues. According to Chung [11], viruses are behaviors, attitudes and values that repel followers, peers and people in general. They are the “negatives”, contradictory to virtues, which

attract people, and signal high moral character. Chung has listed 13 virtues and their corresponding “negatives” or viruses (shown in **Table 1**). According to Chung, it can be more effective today to teach moral and ethics by encouraging “double negatives”, such as “do not be unkind”, than to inculcate virtues.

Chung believed that the notion of “double negatives” has a very long history in Chinese thoughts. Confucius advocated “do not do unto others, as you would not have them do unto you” (“ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren”, 己所不欲,勿施于人). The principle is not doing things that would repel other people, if ones would not like to have those things done to themselves. For example, if one does not want to be lied to, does not lie in the first place. The concept of dark side of leadership with reference to Confucian values will further be discussed in the third part of the chapter.

2.4. Origins and consequences of viruses in leadership

Chung [11] argued that the origins of “viruses” are multifaceted. Sometimes individuals come to their new job already “infected” with some corrupt ethics. It is possible that they never had a solid belief about being an ethical person, or the environment they have been living in has given tacit consent to unethical behaviors [3]. In addition, a person who lives an unexamined life and does not take steps to constantly enlighten or improve oneself is more prone to falling victim to viruses. Chung [11] suggests that the continuous learning, feedback from others and self-improvement could help to remove viruses and develop virtues, while doing the opposite will allow viruses to take root and multiply. Companies which pursue profits at all costs, use it to justify all means and neglect the things not directly increase profits, are more than likely to be morally corrupted.

Virtue	Virus
Kindness (“ren”, 仁)	Unkindness
Righteousness (“yi”, 义)	Unrighteousness
Respectfulness (“li”, 礼)	Disrespectfulness
Wisdom (“zhi”, 智)	Being unwise
Trustworthiness (“xin”, 信)	Untrustworthiness
Loyalty (“zhong”, 忠)	Disloyalty
Courageousness (“yong”, 勇)	Cowardice
Incorruptibility (“lian”, 廉)	Corruptibility
Having a sense of shame (“chi”, 耻)	Shamelessness
Filial piety (“xiao”, 孝)	Being unfilial
Brotherly love (“ti”, 悌)	Having no brotherly love
Self-correction (“gai”, 改)	No self-correction
Forgiveness (“shu”, 恕)	Unforgiving

Table 1. A list of 13 virtues of Confucianism and the corresponding viruses.

Viruses reside within certain people and their POS [3]. For leaders, the simplest and most unavoidable consequence is that viral leaders repel peers, followers and customers. When an organization is losing good employees, it can scarcely hope to maintain competitiveness and excellence. In addition, like a computer virus, unethical behavior can spread quickly through a habitat and undermine the achievements, because unethical people exploit the rusting nature of healthful business habitat [3]. When even a few employees fall into the trap of unethical behavior, the company environment begins to suffer and collapse. Even in the cases that these behaviors have not been imitated by people widely, the reputation of the organization or the leader is undoubtedly undermined. The virus has caused great damage from the perspective of customers [3].

2.5. Ways to prevent and reduce viruses in leadership

Considering the tremendous negative effects caused by viruses, Chung [11] proposed several ways to prevent viruses in individuals and organizations. For individuals, education and a good family upbringing, particularly in the formative years of your youth, are very important to prevent viruses, as these environments set the scene for how moral and immoral behavior are learnt and dealt with in later life. In addition, surrounding oneself with people, communities and tribes that possess a strong sense of moral values will help reinforce one's own sense of moral values, and better ward off potential viruses. It is important to understand and learn in the context of being moral. For organizations, sincerity and dialog among people should be valued, particularly when it comes to values and viruses. When people disagree that certain viral characteristics are viral, it is likely that they possess these viral characteristics.

For the people and organizations already possessing viruses, Chung suggested that the habitats can exercise a renovating effect and restore its moral fiber [3]. There are some active steps that people can take to remove the viruses. The first step is to understand one's own qualities and the way to interact with others. This involves a great degree deconstruction, self-reflection and understanding of thoughts, intentions and actions. The second step is to start sowing the seeds of becoming a better person, and to start the process of removing the viruses. This involves articulating who you want to become, what values you would like to live by and redesigning habits, mindsets and behaviors that reinforce virtuous behavior. For example, stopping toxic behaviors like being rude, abrasive or exaggerating to the point of dishonesty immediately cleans up the viruses that may have been corrupting one's personal brand [8]. The last step is to repair the relationship with other people. After understanding how viral traits in an individual can impair relationships and repel others, one can rebuild these relationships that are achieved through virtuous behavior.

For organizations wishing to clean the viruses and restore the moral fiber, the process is similar to the case of individuals. First, there must be an awareness and a commitment by those in positions of leadership to change. Then there must be a process of discovery and awareness of the viruses that exist, including their origins, forms and potential negative influence on culture and performance. The second step is about to change these viral behaviors, habits and cultures after reflection and understanding. Finally, the organization must be able to prove to its clients, competitors and potential collaborators outside that it has truly restored its moral fiber, and is ready to prove itself as an organization with care, character and competence.

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- Tenet 1: Leaders without competence, such as emotional quotient and spiritual quotient are problematic leaders, because they show an inability to perform or compete in the open marketplace.
 - Tenet 2: Leaders without character such as integrity and honesty are problematic leaders, as they lack values which foster trust in a leader's moral fiber.
 - Tenet 3: Leaders without care are problematic leaders, as they lack interest and/or empathy for followers and/or even show a willingness to abandon followers.
 - Tenet 4: Competence, character and care are global values, and also have their foundation in Confucianism.
 - Tenet 5: Using a computer analogy, every leader has a Personal Operating System (POS). Viruses in leaders' POS reflect undesirable qualities that are anti-virtues, and constitute dark side of leadership.
 - Tenet 6: The origins of "viruses" are multifaceted. The POS can be infected from previous habitat or peers, or due to an unexamined life one lives.
 - Tenet 7: Leaders with viruses in their POS repel peers and exploit the nature of a habitat.
 - Tenet 8: Education and positive environment will help to prevent virus infection. Moral fiber can be restored by reflection, taking action and repairing relationship. However, deeply infected POS should be removed.
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Table 2. Dark side of leadership based on the Service Leadership Theory.

Chung [11] further recalled the health analogy to understand this renovating process from another perspective. It should be noted that preventing all sickness is not possible and undesirable. The process of falling sick helps the body strengthen its immune system, and to grow stronger as a result. The same is true with the POS and the presence of viruses. The process of identifying one's viral traits, understanding them and embarking on a process to rectify them involves developing the ability to understand oneself, critically reflect and improve. However, if those bad behaviors are embedded in the POS, a company should remove the virus by dismissing the person who got significantly corrupted. Therefore, one should always keep alert to the possibility of virus infection. As Confucius indicates "only after improving yourself, can you manage your household; only after managing your household, can you govern the country; only after governing the country can you bring harmony to the world". In short, the concept of virus in leadership and its nature is summarized in **Table 2**.

3. The dark side of leadership in the scientific literature

Leadership theories have tended to adopt a one-sided view of leadership, focusing on its bright, positive and constructive aspects [13, 14]. Early research in leadership traits and research trying to unveil the managerial success and organizational effectiveness often adopt this perspective [15]. In contrast, the dark side of leadership has not been given enough attention in leadership research until recent decades [16].

There are several reasons for the growing interest in the dark side of leadership. First, destructive forms of leadership behavior are highly prevalent nowadays [14]. As revealed by Hogan and Kaiser [15], 65–75% of the employees report that their immediate boss is the worst part of their job. In addition, leaders behave in a destructive manner often costs organizations a lot in legal, personnel and property expenses [5]. Second, increasing research on the dark side

of leadership has deepened the understanding of organizational effectiveness [17, 18]. On the one hand, organizational failure is more related to possessing undesirable qualities than lacking desirable qualities [17]. In other words, the presence of dark qualities alone is enough to cause organizational failure. On the other hand, organizational success requires not only the presence of positive leadership characteristics, but also the absence of the “dark” characteristics of leadership [18].

If we look back into the history, “dark leaders” are not uncommon. Adolf Hitler is a typical example, who possessed the charisma, manipulated people and eventually led the world into war. Another example is Charles Keating, who was the Chairman of the Lincoln Savings and Loan Association, a famous financier, banker, lawyer, but later caught in the center of the unprecedented financial scandal in the 1980s for being convicted of fraud, racketeering and conspiracy [16]. These examples may lead to a conclusion that “dark leaders” tend to have a strong need for power and they are harmful to people and the society.

In fact, conceptualization of the dark side of leadership is not as clear as that of its bright side. As the research in this field is still in the early stage, the major problem is the inconsistency of the terminology [14]. The concepts and terms used include destructive leader [1], negative leadership [4], abusive supervision [5], supervisor undermining [19], toxic leadership [20], tyrannical leadership [21], supportive-disloyal leadership [1], derailed leadership [22] and unethical leadership [23].

Some researchers have developed frameworks in this rather scattered landscape to better capture the nature of the dark side of leadership [1]. When defining the dark side of leadership, researchers often see this concept as the opposite of positive or constructive leadership. Schilling [4] argued that the dark side of leadership includes ineffective leadership and destructive leadership. The former is often characterized by incompetence. The latter, however, is often closely related to problems in ethics of a leader [4]. This argument is supported by Krasikova et al. [24], who claimed that incompetence of leaders shows their inability to achieve organizational goals or lead people to achieve the goals, but without possessing the harmful intention. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck [25] further pointed out that unethical leadership center on actively destructive leadership attributes, which are different from ineffective leadership. Ethics is considered the essential distinction between constructive and destructive leadership [4]. This classification echoes Chung’s ideas that lack of competence, character and care constitutes the dark side of leadership. The terms used in existing literature, the undesirable leadership qualities and the lack of corresponding characteristics are summarized in **Table 3**. **Table 3** also shows the negative attributes with reference to the Service Leadership Theory.

As to ineffective leadership, it is often associated with incompetence that does not contribute to organizational improvement. Ineffective leadership presents a leader’s natural incompetence, low level of motivation and indifference. Kelloway and colleagues [26] used the term passive leadership to describe the leaders possessing poor managerial skills and employing passive management. As a typical form of ineffective leadership, laissez-fair leadership is also seen as the least harmful form of dark side of leadership [4].

As shown in **Table 3**, most destructive leadership behaviors constitute unethical and uncaring attributes. Brown and Mitchell [23] pointed out that though many existing literature has

Term	Author(s)	Dark leadership qualities	Conception in the Service Leadership Theory
Destructive leadership	Einarsen et al. [1]	Violate interest, undermine effectiveness and satisfaction	Character and care problems
Negative leadership	Schilling [4]	Undermining, bullying, abusing, commanding, lying, humiliating, disloyal, unethical	Character and care problems
Abusive supervision	Tepper [5]	Hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact	Competence and care problems
Supervisor undermining	Duffy et al. [19]	Negative emotion (anger, dislike), criticism	Care problems
Toxic leadership	Frost [20]	Noxious, drains vitality; incompetence, infidelity, insensitivity	Competence, character and care problems
Tyrannical leadership	Ashforth [21]	Use power oppressively, capriciously and vindictively	Character and care problems
Laissez-fair leadership	Lewin et al. [27]	Incompetence, abdicated from the responsibilities and duties designated	Competence and character problems
Derailed leadership	McCall and Lombardo [22]	Insensitive to others, abrasive, intimidating and bullying style	Competence, character and care problems
Unethical leadership	Brown and Mitchell [23]	Illegal or violate moral standards	Character problems

Table 3. Terms used in the scientific literature on the dark side of leadership.

not explicitly described destructive leader behavior as “unethical”, but in fact these behaviors are immoral and vicious. They defined unethical leadership as “behaviors conducted and decisions made by organizational leaders that are illegal and/or violate moral standards, and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers” [23]. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck [25] further provided a collective definition of unethical leaders: dishonest, unjust, egocentric and manipulating others. Some unethical behaviors are easy to identify, such as deviant acts of leaders, which include theft, sabotage, fraud and corruption. Other unethical behaviors may be less distinguishable. For example, supportive-disloyal leadership often exaggerates interest in the welfare of subordinates but neglects or undermines the interest of the organization (e.g. ignore followers’ absenteeism) [1]. It focuses on short-term results, encouraging or allowing low work ethics, misconduct and inefficiency [1]. Therefore, supportive-disloyal leadership is also unethical.

Destructive leadership behaviors are also often associated with a lack of care toward people. Many studies have used care (e.g. concern for people or pro-subordinate behaviors) as a dimension to distinguish constructive and destructive leadership [1, 28]. According to Einarsen et al. [1], pro-subordinate behaviors include listening to subordinates, praising, showing respect and appreciation. On the contrary, uncaring leaders tend to derogate, undermine the subordinates’ well-being through ridiculing, blaming and being rude to them [5, 29]. An example of uncaring leadership is tyrannical leadership, referring the oppressive, capricious and vindictive use of formal power and authority [21]. It is often characterized by belittling subordinates, displaying little consideration and using punishment to achieve

organizational goals [5]. Another example is abusive supervision, which means “sustained forms of nonphysical hostility perpetrated by managers against their subordinates” [5, 30]. Obviously, the lack of care may also happen as a result of lack of competence, such as the lack of communication and reflective skills. The worst case would be a leader that is unethical and uncaring. McCall and Lombardo [22] indicated that derailed leaders are cold, unreliable, and fail to staff effectively due to their insensitivity to others. Similarly, toxic leaders use extremely harsh and malicious managerial tactics which cause serious and enduring harm to subordinates [31]. They are doubtfully the opposites of ethical and caring leaders.

Several authors have discussed the negative effects of the dark side of leadership on individuals and organizations [4, 5, 16, 30]. Incompetent leaders may avoid leading, or fail to find the right direction to lead the followers [32]. Laissez-fair leadership contains behaviors, such as indifference, that neither help to increase followers’ satisfaction and performance, nor fulfill the organizational goal achievement [4].

Unethical leadership often hampers effective processing and viability of organizations [23]. Existing research shows unethical leadership negatively influences employees’ work attitudes [5, 6], task performance [33] and psychological well-being [5, 30]. Unethical behavior inconsistent with moral norms would increase followers’ stress and work conflicts, especially when subordinates have a strong moral identity [1]. The permission of unethical behavior tends to undermine leaders’ trustworthiness perceived by followers. Moreover, acting as negative role models, unethical leaders tend to directly increase the occurrence of unethical behavior of followers by facilitating, rewarding or just ignoring this kind of behavior [7]. Subordinates may believe that such unethical behaviors are appropriate or acceptable, and consequently engage in them as well [23].

Uncaring leadership involves behaviors of mistreatment of subordinates, such as bullying and harassment [1]. Many studies have shown that uncaring leadership behaviors have directly negative influence on subordinates’ health outcomes, such as decreased well-being, increased depression, stress level, insecurity and fear [5, 30, 34]. Chi and Liang [35] argued that subordinates’ emotional exhaustion at work tends to be higher when they are chronically mistreated by leaders. This is because abusive supervision demands additional coping recourses on subordinates. In addition, it undermines subordinates’ work motivation and job satisfaction. Employees suffering from abusive supervision tend to report a higher level of dissatisfaction, stronger turnover intentions, decreased leader-follower relationship and increased work conflicts [21, 29, 33]. Uncaring leadership has been found to indirectly increase deviant behaviors of subordinates. Tepper and colleagues [6] have found that abusive supervision reduces subordinates’ affective commitment, and consequently increases organization deviance. Moreover, the negative implication of uncaring behavior is far-reaching. Hoobler and Hu’s [13] research reported that uncaring behaviors of leaders may have negative effects on subordinates’ personal life, like marriage, work-family conflict and even parent-child relationship.

Recently, there is a growing call for the awareness of the destructive power of the dark side of leadership [31, 36], though the picture is still unclear [14]. As Lipman-Blumen [31] has pointed out, leadership is a relation built between the leader and followers rather than simply imposed by the leader. For one thing, toxic leaders exploit the followers’ basic needs and fears. For another thing, human naturally propels people who offering grand visions and strong leadership. However, the cost of following an alluring toxic leader is often high. Baumeister and

Level of the negative impact	Areas of the negative impact	Examples of the negative impact
Individuals	Work-related	Negative influence on employees' working attitudes, such as motivation [5, 6] Increased depression, stress level, insecurity and fear [5, 30, 34] Decreased task performance [33] Decreased satisfaction and psychological well-being [5, 30]
	Life-related	Marriage problem, work-family conflict and parent-child relationship problem [13]
Organizations	Relationship-related	Poorer leader-follower relationship [29] Increased work conflict [33]
	Climate-related	Increase in deviance behavior [7] Intensification of unethical climate [23]
	Effectiveness/performance-related	Increased turnover rate or intentions [21] Decreased organizational commitment [6]

Table 4. The negative impact of the dark side of leadership on individuals and organizations.

colleagues' review [36] has revealed that negative events in social relationships often cause a stronger psychological effect than positive events do. In the field of leadership research, Fors Brandebo et al. [37] also confirmed the power of destructive leadership. They found that destructive leadership behaviors are positively related to negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, while the relation is negative for constructive behaviors. However, the power of the relation for destructive leadership is stronger than that of constructive leadership. Further research is still needed to deepen the understanding of the comparison between constructive and destructive leadership attributes.

In summary, empirical studies have shown the negative outcomes of the dark side of leadership, echoing Chung's argument that incompetence, unethical and uncaring behaviors constitute the dark side of leadership, which directly or indirectly lead to negative work- and life-related outcomes at both the individual and organizational level. As appealed by Einarsen et al. [1], preventing the dark side of leadership is as important, if not more important, as improving the bright side of leadership. The negative outcomes of undesirable leadership qualities are summarized in **Table 4**.

4. The dark side of service leadership and Confucian virtues

Contemporary literature on organization and leadership has widely acknowledged the importance of social norms and cultures in understanding organization processes. In many

Asian countries, Confucianism is considered the dominant ideology guiding organizational, managerial and leadership practice [38].

With particular reference to the Chinese culture, Confucian virtues include different virtues, such as “ba de” (eight cardinal virtues) and “si wei” (four pillars of society). Shek and colleagues [39] have thoroughly discussed 11 virtues covered by “ba de” and “si wei” under the framework of leadership, including loyalty (“zhong”, 忠), filial piety (“xiao”, 孝), benevolence (“ren”, 仁), affection (“ai”, 爱), trustworthiness (“xin”, 信), righteousness (“yi”, 义), harmony (“he”, 和), peace (“ping”, 平), propriety (“li”, 礼), integrity (“lian”, 廉) and shame (“chi”, 耻). These virtues cover the most important principles in Confucianism that one should follow to become a “jun zi” (superior man).

On the contrary, a person lacking these virtues will be regarded as “xiao ren” (inferior man) and should be avoided by people who want a healthy interpersonal relationship. For leaders or organizations, a lack of these virtues constitutes the dark side of leadership. As Chung and Elfassy [8] clearly pointed out, no one would sincerely like to follow a person who is disloyal, dishonest, unethical or shameless. In the following paragraphs, we will briefly introduce each virtue and the corresponding anti-virtue quality, as well as the undesirable outcomes.

4.1. Loyalty (“zhong”, 忠)

Loyalty means “do one’s utmost in keeping one’s heart unbiased upon making a decision” [39]. Confucian leaders continuously reflect their loyalty and work to fulfill the whole organization’s long-term interests [38]. Loyalty reflects the commitment to the organization and the followers. Wu and Wang [40] found that followers’ loyalty was positively related to their perception of the leader’s charismatic leadership and their own work performance. Chung and Bell [3] suggested that disloyalty is a “virus” to be avoided in one’s conduct. Disloyal people refer to the ones who make fake promises, solely aim for the benefits without any fulfillment in action. This misbehavior is called “being disloyal in giving counsels to others” (“wei ren mou er bu zhong”, 为人谋而不忠) [39]. Disloyal leaders or followers tend to misbehave in workplace, such as neglecting or undermining the achievement of organization goals [1].

4.2. Filial piety (“xiao”, 孝)

Filial piety originally refers to the respect toward one’s parents, but it also includes key relationships outside the family, such as respect for authority. According to Confucian values, the followers are expected to show “filial love” to the leader [41]. Shek et al. [39] has pointed out that filial piety has a close relationship to loyalty. People are educated to be loyal to the authority, emperor and the country as the way they are filial to their parents and older people. In addition, as respecting rituals and obeying authority are critical virtues in Confucianism, people would like to follow the leaders who obey rituals and social norms regarding ancestor veneration [38]. In modern term, leaders having filial piety and taking care of the seniors are also role models for followers. However, leaders without filial piety may greatly challenge the followers’ ethical standards, and gradually lose their respect, supports and commitment. These leaders may have a weak bond with their organizations, reflecting a low level of commitment.

4.3. Benevolence (“ren”, 仁) and affection (“ai”, 爱)

Benevolence is often paired with affection in Confucianism [39]. Benevolence means “a feeling of humanity towards others and self-esteem for oneself” [39]. Its simplified interpretation is to love people, reflecting the core concept of affection. According to McDonald [42], benevolence can be understood as the integration of empathy and excellence. Guided by these two concepts, benevolent leaders do the very best for collective benefits [42]. In line with the virtue of piety, benevolent leaders act like parents of their followers and care for followers’ welfare and development [43]. Reciprocally, their followers should obey, be loyal and show piety to the leaders. Similarly, people with affection treat one’s interpersonal relationship with care, respect and humanity. Zhang et al. [44] stated that benevolent leaders allow followers to correct mistakes, teach and mentor them and promote their professional development. This echoes Chung’s work of care [10].

According to Chung and Elfassy [8], being caring means being able to be empathetic. As a leader in overseeing groups of people, it is important to care for the peers and organization. Moreover, it is also important that the leaders care about how people interact with others outside the organization. Being unable to care or lacking feeling is a viral trait that deeply violates Confucian values. The carelessness or indifference of leaders toward others will break the bonds between them, undermine the leaders’ authority and trustworthiness, and jeopardize the achievement of organizational goals. Leaders without the quality of benevolence or affection would impair their followers’ well-being, such as increasing their depression and stress [5, 30, 34]. Chung [11] suggested that uncaring leaders or organizations cannot sustain long-term health and survival of their tribe. He argued that these leaders are probably good in ordinary manufacturing organizations where the top-down model works instead of organizations with distributed leadership in the service age.

4.4. Trustworthiness (“xin”, 信)

Trustworthiness means honesty, reliability and faithfulness. Guided by Confucian virtues, leaders should win the trust from their followers first before governing their followers and acting as a role of leader [42]. On the contrary, the subordinates will not sincerely follow a reliable leader who cannot keep his or her words. As Chung has pointed out, a high degree of trust is required in organizations with distributed leadership, because it is the trust guiding the people but not the contract does in these organizations [10]. However, dishonesty is also a reality that every company has to take seriously, because dishonesty reflects a lack of character, and is considered a virus in people’s POS [3]. Bass and Steidlmeier [32] discussed pseudo-transformational leaders, who see themselves honest and trustful, but are deceptive and unreliable in their behavior. Their behaviors are immoral because the leaders exhort their followers to trust them but deliberately conceal the information harmful to followers from them, offer bribes, practice nepotism and abuse authority [32].

4.5. Righteousness (“yi”, 义)

Righteousness means the ability to “fitting” or do the “right” things. The principle of righteousness guide people to abide social orders and moral principles, while law and punishment

shall only serve as secondary instruments in maintaining social stability [39]. McDonald [42] stated that righteousness underlies the moral capacity of Confucian leadership. This virtue requires leaders to adopt respectful approaches to lead the followers and facilitate their development. Leaders without the virtue of righteousness may chase short-term or personal benefits at the cost of others, lead the organization to the wrong directions, and eventually harm the organizational and the followers' long-term interests. Righteousness is related to social responsibility and justice in leadership [43].

4.6. Harmony (“he”, 和) and peace (“ping”, 平)

Harmony means to keep balance in general. Peace refers to a quiet state of mind or a sense of calmness and peace. These two concepts are closely related to each other as they both emphasize the peaceful and balanced status in oneself or in the relationship. The virtue of harmony requires leaders to listen to different opinions of people and maintain a harmonious work environment [42]. Cheung and Chan [43] concluded that Chinese leaders are required to maintain harmony with their subordinates and peers because of the emphasis on conformity in the Chinese context. Leaders who are unable to keep a good balance would increase work conflicts. Moreover, Confucian leaders should control their emotion and mind well, show forgiveness to the followers, and educate them patiently to improve their virtues. If a leader is easily overwhelmed by extreme emotions and fails to keep calm, the leader may be driven by the burst of emotion, and consequently make biased decisions.

4.7. Propriety (“li”, 礼)

Propriety means the rules of proper action, the guides to relationships and the principles of social and life order [39]. Propriety emphasizes the importance of ceremonial and ritualistic requirements. Confucian leaders should show reverence, respect, listening and consideration in interpersonal relationships, and to comply with social norms [42]. Chung and Bell [3] argued that for managers trying to build the team, the best first step is to show respect, including active listening, idea solicitation and appreciation for the individuals one supervises. Respect is one of the “hidden ingredients” that distinguish a successful service leader from an unsuccessful one [10]. However, irreverent leaders often use disrespectful approaches to lead their subordinates, which will reduce their motivation and efficacy, and increase their stress and dissatisfaction. Being inappropriate or rude is considered viruses in the POS according to Chung and Bell [3]. This kind of behavior will harm the social relationship with others. Chung and Elfassy [8] explained that the danger of not having a strong social relationship dimension is that leaders push people away or people will drift apart from leaders.

4.8. Integrity (“lian”, 廉)

Integrity refers to a sense of moderation in material goods and in emotion, and also a frugal way of living [39]. The leader without the virtue of integrity would be extravagant and greedy, which may lead to deviant behaviors or corruption. González and Guillén [45] argued that ethical leaders with integrity can sustain a positive influence over their subordinates. Being

corrupt reflects a lack of character, and should be taken as a virus according to Chung [3]. In the Chinese context, “guanxi” is defined as a special relationship or particularistic ties. The dark side of business “guanxi” leads to corruption or social loss [46]. Though corruption exists in all economic systems, “guanxi-related” corruption reflects unique Chinese characteristics [46].

4.9. Shame (“chi”, 耻)

The sense of shame requires people to have self-awareness and self-reflection regarding unethical conducts. Confucianism suggests that even a sage makes mistakes. Therefore, the sense of shame is a critical virtue of a superior man. Without this virtue, leaders will not look back and learn their lessons. They may also tend to blame others for their own faults. Chung [11] suggested that to clean viruses in leadership need a sense of self-reflection. Self-reflection can raise leaders’ moral perspectives through increasing their self-awareness and moral judgment exercises [47]. According to Chung, shame is the abstract platform of sins. Since the Chinese do not have god as Judeo-Christians do, the self-enforcement power comes from “shame”, which can be regarded as a social sin. Some scholars suggested that shamelessness may contribute to an increase in unaccountability [48].

Some researchers have adopted an integrative framework to analyze the relation between Confucian virtues and leadership behavior. For example, Chan [41] argued that Confucian ethics shares some core values with contemporary Western leadership ethics. Similarly, Ma and Tsui [38] concluded that Confucianism is one of the cultural-philosophical roots of contemporary leadership practices.

In the Chinese context, the judgments of leaders reflect some unique contextual and cultural characteristics. In general, the expectation of leaders is relatively high because Chinese people believe that “sage” can be cultivated. As suggested in *Di Zi Gui* (弟子规), neither be harsh on oneself, nor give up on oneself; to be a person of high ideals, moral standards and virtue can be gradually attained (“wu zi bao, wu zi qi; sheng yu xian, ke xun zhi”, 勿自暴, 勿自弃; 圣与贤, 可驯致). Leaders should serve as role models of their followers to promote virtues in the society. Second, leaders are expected to apply the doctrine of the mean (“zhong yong zhi dao”, 中庸之道). In addition, Chinese people expect leaders to keep a good balance between law, reason and affect (“fa, li, qing”, 法, 理, 情). Therefore, the importance of negotiation and compromise is widely acknowledged (“wan shi you shang liang”, 万事有商量). As such, harmony and the dialogs between leaders and followers are highly emphasized in the Chinese context.

In the Chinese culture, while people judge the quality of a leader in terms of his/her intention, it is more often to judge their qualities in terms of competence, character and care about the followers. Whether a leader is considered destructive or to have dark side greatly depends on social judgment, which is apparent in the hearts of people rather than solely rely on leader’s and followers’ perceptions (“gong dao zi zai ren xin”, 公道自在人心). Chinese people also have a faith in justice (“gong li”, 公理) and the truth of the sky (“tian dao”, 天道), which a leader should not be against. In addition, extreme leadership behaviors (such as over-demanding or over-protective) are undesirable. Chinese people believe that there is no perfect person, just like there is no absolute pure gold (“jin wu zu chi, ren wu wan ren”, 金无足赤, 人无完人).

Chinese people believe that “sages” can be cultivated through self-reflection and deliberate practice if one strives for excellence.

Moreover, the dark side of leadership can be more harmful in Asian cultures than that in Western cultures. This is because how people react to the dark side of leadership differs across different cultures. A recent study by Zhuang et al. [49] revealed that Chinese tend to be unwilling to report the unethical behavior of leader than peers. The authors suggested that a low tolerance of the unethical acts of peers may be attributed to collective loyalty to the organization, while the unwilling to report the unethical behaviors of leaders may be due to the respect for authority [49]. As stated earlier, the respect for authority has been linked to paternalistic leadership, which is a legacy of Confucian values and prevalent in Chinese cultures [38]. More specifically, the norms of individual behaviors and relationships are ruled by five cardinal relationships of Confucianism, which include emperor-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-young and friend-friend relationships. As such, Chinese followers seldom challenge their leaders. An extreme case is that Chinese would even tolerate the corrupted leaders in late Qing dynasty. We could argue that the absence of fatherly benevolence, authoritarian supervision and moral integrity will deeply disappoint the followers in a Confucian society. Meanwhile if the followers obey destructive leaders possessing authorities, they may experience strong moral conflicts [38]. In **Table 5**, we summarize the Confucian virtues with reference to the related work in the leadership literature.

Confucian virtues	Related leadership literature
Loyalty (“zhong”, 忠)	Organization loyalty [40] Committed to organization [50]
Filial piety (“xiao”, 孝)	Respect of authority, paternalistic leadership [38, 44]
Benevolence (“ren”, 仁)	Paternalistic leadership [44], servant leadership [51]
Affection (“ai”, 爱)	Paternalistic leadership [44], authentic transformational leadership [32]
Trustworthiness (“xin”, 信)	Reliability [52] Integrity [42]
Righteousness (“yi”, 义)	Fairness and justice [53]
Harmony (“he”, 和)	Harmony [42] Conformity [43]
Peace (“ping”, 平)	Agreeableness (tendency to be peaceful and gentle) [54]
Propriety (“li”, 礼)	Propriety, politeness [42]
Integrity (“lian”, 廉)	Integrity [45]
Shame (“chi”, 耻)	Self-reflection and social emotion [48]

Table 5. Summary of Confucian virtues with reference to the western scientific literature.

5. Conclusion

According to Chung and Bell [10], the Anna Karenina principle makes clear that no quantity of “good deeds” can make up for or prevent the consequences of one devastating error. Hence, a lack of any of the three fundamental qualities, namely competence, character and care, can constitute the dark side of leadership. Viruses arising from the POS also constitute to the dark side of leadership.

In the scientific literature, there are different conceptions of the dark side of leadership. Interestingly, most of the conceptions are related to the lack of competencies, character and care, echoing the emphases of the Service Leadership Theory, which highlight the lack of these qualities as well as the emergence of viruses as the dark side of leadership. Empirically, the negative outcomes brought by the dark side of leadership have also been well discussed in research studies. Finally, through the lens of Confucian virtues, one can further understand the dark side of leadership. In particular, linking the dark side of leadership to Confucianism allows us to understand this issue in a specific cultural and social context. Sim [55] argued that Confucian ethics can supplement Aristotle’s insufficient discussion on human relations. In addition, the framework of the Service Leadership Theory addresses the limitations of many contemporary leadership theories, which often neglect the importance of cultural values [56].

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