

Correlation between Machiavellian leadership and emotional exhaustion of employees

Machiavellian
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Case study: Slovenian municipalities

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to examine the impact of Machiavellian leadership and organisational cynicism on the emotional exhaustion of employees.

Design/methodology/approach – Survey data were collected from 463 employees of Slovenian municipalities. Surveys were used to collect Machiavellianism, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion data. Hypotheses were verified by means of three methods: the contingency table, χ^2 test and Pearson coefficient.

Findings – Machiavellian leadership has an impact both on the presence of emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism. According to the results, both Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism have a direct linear impact on the increase of emotional exhaustion.

Research limitations/implications – The findings of the research were formulated on the basis of a survey conducted according to a self-assessment online survey.

Originality/value – Even though the concept of Machiavellianism was developed 500 years ago, the existing literature suggests that it continues to be relevant in modern times, most frequently in terms of examining the way leaders establish their power and adopt (un)ethical leadership practices and the implications their behaviour has on their direct working environment. Only select authors have examined Machiavellianism in correlation with organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion, with an emphasis on the public sector. Due to a lack of research conducted on the subject, the main research challenge was to establish actual correlations between the three factors above.

Keywords Leadership, Emotional exhaustion, Municipalities, Machiavellian leadership, Organizational cynicism

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Leadership is one of the most frequently discussed topics of organisational operation with an increasing body of research (Chughtai *et al.*, 2015; Tang *et al.*, 2017; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010; Kuoppala *et al.*, 2008; Mellor *et al.*, 2009; Arnold *et al.*, 2007) focussing on the impact of leadership on the sensitivities of subordinates and employee well-being. Researchers are frequently interested in the conduct of leaders that result in undesirable consequences. Even though “Machiavellianism” (from which Machiavellian leadership derives) has been widely associated with “ruthlessness”, “dishonesty” and “cunningness” (including several dictionaries, such as Cambridge Dictionary, 2018; Dictionary.com, 2018; English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018) for a period of almost 500 years, the impact of Machiavellian leadership on emotional exhaustion of employees has not been widely researched.

The general definition of a Machiavellian (manipulative, ruthless, conniving and dishonest) leader suggests that Machiavellian leadership could have a significantly different impact on employees than ethical leadership. In particular, because the leadership style or



behaviour of leaders have an impact on the conduct of their employees (Lornudd *et al.*, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2013; Li *et al.*, 2017) and their emotional perception of the situation at the workplace. Positive and optimistic leaders contribute to positive behaviours and good performance of their employees (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016); Greenberg and Arakawa (2006), whereas negatively oriented leaders have an adverse impact on the overall performance of their team (Wu *et al.*, 2010). The effect of negative emotions may lead to a more pessimistic evaluation of the opportunity and a positive emotional state may lead to a more optimistic evaluation of the same opportunity (Grichnika *et al.*, 2010, p. 19).

Inadequate leadership results in increased stress levels of employees (Chen and Kao, 2009), lack of motivation and work zeal and a poorer performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2007). Long-term exposure to negative leadership impacts can result in a cynical attitude which leads to lower satisfaction and work zeal and an increased fluctuation tendency (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). Studies show a negative impact of cynicism on individuals, in particular if it is combined with emotional exhaustion (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). In addition, cynicism can also be regarded as one of the early phases or the predecessor of burnout and marks a response to frustration (Wilkerson *et al.*, 2008) or the way in which individuals seek to tackle the (unwanted) situation (Brandes *et al.*, 2008). As such, cynicism plays a somewhat mitigating and mediational role (Bang and Reio, 2017, p. 223).

Managing job burnout in modern places of employment is of the utmost importance. Not only does job burnout affect job attitude, it also impacts the task performance of individual employees (Won Ho *et al.*, 2017, p. 639). The burnout syndrome is composed of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (depleted emotional energy and resources and the resulting physical and mental fatigue), depersonalisation (indifference to work, colleagues and the organisation as a whole) and a reduced professional efficacy (perceived by the person as a feeling of reduced competency and ability to work) (Maslach *et al.*, 2008, p. 91).

In light of the above, the paper seeks to verify the impact of inappropriate leadership on the emotional exhaustion of employees, whereby "inappropriate leadership" in this paper shall be deemed as leadership exhibiting the traits of Machiavellian leadership. Sources at our disposal showed only one more study discussing a similar case, in which it was found that Machiavellian leaders play an important role in enhancing emotional exhaustion in employees of Greek private-owned hospitals (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2015). This paper seeks to establish whether a similar impact can also be identified in local self-government. As such, it was decided to use an identical set of variables for the hypothetical variable model by creating a significant difference in the foreseen direction of effects and by using organisational cynicism as an independent variable. Machiavellian leadership and organisational cynicism are thus intercorrelated and have an impact on emotional exhaustion. Three hypotheses were made:

- H1. There is a correlation between Machiavellian leadership and emotional exhaustion.
- H2. There is a correlation between Machiavellian leadership and organisational cynicism.
- H3. There is a correlation between emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism.

In our research, we wanted to contribute to the literature on several points. The purpose of our study was to establish the scope of Machiavellian leadership, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion as perceived by the employees and to confirm the hypotheses that there is a positive correlation between Machiavellian leadership and organisational cynicism on one hand and the emotional exhaustion of local self-government employees on the other. The introductory chapter will be followed by a list of literature associated with the definitions of basic terms included herein (Machiavellian leadership, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion). This is followed by a chapter on the research methodology and a chapter on the results obtained. The conclusion presents the significance of the study's findings.

2. From inappropriate/Machiavellian leadership to emotional exhaustion

Leaders and their leadership style impact the mental well-being of their workers (Arnold *et al.*, 2007, p. 195) and the organisational climate (Zohar, 2002, p. 157) or a specific leader can also potentially cause stress in employees (Kelloway *et al.*, 2000, p. 146). Various positions have specific properties and stressors. Leaders can either cause stress in their employees or they can have a positive impact that results in satisfaction and a positive working environment (Bass, 1990, pp. 94-97). A lack of communication between a leader and their employees can result in a lack of trust in the leader, frequently combined with fear and insecurity which also impacts the perception of stressful situations of employees and their relationship with their leader (Bass, 1990, pp. 100-103).

According to Tepper (2000, pp. 186-187), an appropriate attitude of leaders towards employees and exhibition of their authority also play an important role in reducing burnout of the latter because leaders with inappropriate attitudes towards their employees who abuse their authority reduce satisfaction of employees and increase their frustration. Grandey *et al.* (2007, p. 78) agree with their argument by finding that a hurtful and contemptuous attitude and exhibition of authority towards employees is correlated with indisposition of employees that can also result in burnout. Machiavellian leadership leads to a lack of self-esteem (Burton and Hoobler, 2006, p. 354) and reduced work zeal (Duffy *et al.*, 2002, p. 349) in employees.

The leadership style of leaders also contributes significantly to their impact on employees. An examination of the impact of various types of leadership styles on employees found that tyrannical leadership styles are associated with mobbing (Hauge *et al.*, 2007, pp. 240-242). In contrast, transformational leadership indirectly reduces stress at the workplace by transforming the leader into a motivator and confidant of employees who resolves problems on a one-on-one basis and listens to every single individual (Sosik and Godshalk, 2000, p. 385). A positive correlation between transformational leadership and well-being of employees was established also by Nielsen *et al.* (2008, pp. 474-475). Taking into consideration the facts above, Machiavellian leadership is assumed as a case of inappropriate leadership.

Machiavellian leadership is defined as a leadership style that follows the basic principles of Machiavellianism which is considered (jointly with narcissism and psychopathism) a negative and dark personal trait. Machiavellian personalities include a number of negative traits and associated negative impacts on the environment. Machiavellian individuals frequently take immoral action for their own benefit. They may also act contrary to the interests of their loved ones and are known as individuals with an extremely cynical view of the world and society (Sakalaki *et al.*, 2007, p. 1186). According to Winter *et al.* (2004, p. 275), Machiavellianism is a quantitative trait of an individual. Even though everybody has an inherent ability to manipulate others, only some are great masters of manipulation. Machiavellians are focussed people who stand out in society and who are willing to use all measures at their disposal to reach their goals even by disempowering others (Dahling *et al.*, 2009, p. 221).

Machiavellians are extremely rigid people who have adopted the firm belief that only their actions are correct and, as such, are hard to collaborate with and unwilling to adapt to other people (Jones and Paulhus, 2009, p. 96). The study conducted by Dahling *et al.* (2009, pp. 226-228) shows that Machiavellian leaders compromise the welfare of the entire organisation. Their cynical nature has a negative impact on their employees who mistrust them, resulting in a heavily compromised leader-employee relationship (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002, p. 626). While seeking new and new ways to increase their impact on their employees, Machiavellian leaders exert an increasing amount of pressure in their organisations, resulting in additional burdens to the work environment and increased stress at the workplace (Dahling *et al.*, 2009, pp. 226-228).

Zettler and Solga (2013, pp. 551-553) examined the positive and negative correlations between Machiavellianism and performance which were found. In some cases, it was found

that the tendency to exhibit Machiavellian leadership traits can prove beneficial in cases such as negotiations or meeting the objectives of the leader. However, Machiavellianism can have also a negative impact on performance by compromising the climate at the workplace and having an adverse effect on interpersonal relationships which, in the long run, can lead to dissatisfied employees, poor performance and inability to meet the desired objectives.

Machiavellian leadership is associated with (lack of) trust and organisational cynicism which mean two very different things. Organisational trust is defined by the mostly positive expectations of employees towards the organisation and the organisational policy that has an effect thereon (Lewicki *et al.*, 1998, pp. 440-441). Lack of trust is frequently associated with current developments whereas cynicism results from past events (Andersson, 1996, p. 1370). Organisational cynicism is associated with seeking information from two points of view and the tendency of employees to seek parameters which reflect or confirm their belief of the organisation on the level of the entire organisation. In such a case, employees are attentive to all actions of their leader, their leadership style, their ability to work autonomously and by applying their own mindset or if they serve solely as the puppet of the organisation's management. These findings led to important conclusions suggesting the important role played by leaders in reducing the cynicism of their employees (Neves, 2012, p. 976). With their unethical stance, Machiavellian leaders engender scepticism and have a negative impact on the entire organisation which can increase the risk of organisational cynicism (Lee and Ashforth, 1996, p. 130).

Organisational cynicism reduces (particularly emotional) organisational loyalty of employees. Individuals with a cynical mindset mistrust their organisation, reducing their emotional dedication or attachment to their work or organisation in a way that their behaviour can have a negative impact on the organisation. According to Andersson (1996, pp. 1372-1375), employees exhibiting organisational cynicism are apathetic, disaffected, distrustful, frequently feel disappointed and unappreciated, which has a negative effect on interpersonal relationships and significantly contributes to lower professional efficiency and increased burnout levels in employees. A negative attitude towards the organisation and work contributes to lower satisfaction of employees at their workplace (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013, pp. 192-193) and has an adverse effect on their performance (Dean *et al.*, 1998, p. 351) and levels of trust (Stanley *et al.*, 2005, p. 248). On the other hand, organisational cynicism results in increased levels of absenteeism and complaints of employees, which, in turn, lead to tensions, arrogance, unethical conduct (Andersson and Bateman, 1997, p. 450) and organisational alienation (Abraham, 2000, p. 278).

Cropanzano *et al.* (2003) and Johnson and Q'Leary-Kelly (2003) draw attention to the presence of emotional burnout of employees as a result of organisational cynicism and, as such, the correlation between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion has an effect on the behaviour and satisfaction of employees at their workplace. It also includes feelings of powerlessness, resignation and entrapment, whereby individuals develop a negative attitude towards themselves, their work and life as a whole. People experience exhaustion after six to eight weeks of intense stress that leads to physical fatigue and the loss of the ability to manage situations which are all symptoms of burnout (Youngs, 2001, p. 16). Because emotional exhaustion creates more powerful and consistent effects compared to the other two components of burnout (depersonalisation and reduced professional efficacy), it marks the most prominent factor of burnout.

3. Research methodology

The research is based on the idea of Gkorezis *et al.* (2015, pp. 620-626) who used organisational cynicism as an indirect variable to explain the impact of Machiavellian leadership on emotional exhaustion, assuming that Machiavellian leadership increases organisational cynicism which, in turn, leads to emotional exhaustion. The three authors

established a positive correlation between Machiavellianism, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion, leading to the development of a hypothetical variable model that correlates Machiavellian leadership, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion. Their research was based on the assumption that business scandals and unethical conduct of leaders increase cynicism of employees in an organisation (Bommer *et al.*, 2005; Naus *et al.*, 2007), which is true but is far from the only factor leading to organisational cynicism. According to Naus *et al.* (2007, p. 717), organisational cynicism is a response of employees to novelties in organisations resulting from various external factors, such as privatisation, globalisation and competitiveness, that the organisation has to adequately adapt to by improving its productivity and efficacy. In our research, organisational cynicism appears as a direct variable which is, in our opinion, affected by a variety of factors, leading to the conclusion that employees can assume a cynical attitude towards changes in their organisation even if they have a good relationship with the leader.

The research was conducted on the basis of a self-assessment online survey on the 1 ka website that respondents opened by clicking on the link they received via e-mail. The questionnaire sent to head offices of 212 Slovenian municipalities (100 per cent) and to their employees was completed by 463 employees (9.81 per cent), out of which 166 questionnaires were completed only in part and were thus excluded from further analysis. The remaining 297 completed questionnaires were completed in full and could be used for further analysis. The sample includes 297 employees of Slovenian municipalities, out of which 75 men (25.3 per cent) and 222 women (74.7 per cent). The average age of respondents is 47, whereby the majority of respondents form part of the 36–45 (36.4 per cent) and 46–55 age group (27.9 per cent). The majority of respondents completed ISCED level of education 7 (37.0 per cent), 6 (27.9 per cent) and 5 (14.8 per cent). A higher level of education was completed by 7.1 per cent of respondents and a lower level of education by 13.1 per cent respondents. In total, 21.1 per cent of respondents work in one of the 11 urban municipalities (with minimum 20,000 inhabitants and 15,000 jobs), and 78.8 per cent in “regular” municipalities. On average, the respondents have 12.5 years of service in their current organisation. In total, 77.8 per cent of respondents have worked in their organisation for more than six years and almost one half of respondents (47.8 per cent) for more than ten years. All data were collected in July 2017.

Machiavellism and organisational cynicism were measured by means of a five-point Likert scale, whereby 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. Emotional exhaustion was measured in a similar way, only by using a seven-point Likert scale, whereby 0 = never, 6 = every day.

Machiavellianism was measured by using the questionnaire developed by Allsopp *et al.* (1991) which contains 10 general statements and 20 statements contained in the Mach IV questionnaire (Machiavellianism test) developed by the first Researchers of Machiavellianism in 1970, Christie and Geis. The questionnaire was somewhat adapted to our research in a way that it had respondents make an estimate of Machiavellianism of their leaders. An example of a statement is: “My leader would agree that it is better to be humble and honest than important and dishonest”.

Organisational cynicism was measured by means of the Organisational Cynicism Scale, developed by Brandes *et al.* (1999). It composed of 13 statements that measure three dimensions of cynicism: the cognitive, behavioural and emotional (affective). There are five items in cognitive, four items in behavioural and four items in emotional dimensions. Belief items reflect cognitive evaluations that employees have about the integrity and sincerity of their employing organisation. Behavioural items reflect critical and disparaging behaviours associated with organisational cynicism. The emotional items reflect negative emotions such as distress–anguish, anger–rage and disgust–revulsion. The questionnaire was taken from the empirical studies on the effects of organisational cynicism on employees of Egyptian hospitals (Nafei, 2013).

Emotional exhaustion was measured by using the first nine questions contained in the Standard Burnout Measurement Questionnaire (Lamovec, 1994, based on Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey; Maslach and Jackson, 1981).

Control variables are demographic variables (gender, age, level of qualification, number of employees, municipality type and length of service).

Using Excel and SPSS, the obtained results underwent a detailed analysis by variable and included also an analysis of the hypothetical variable model. Correlations between the three main research variables (Machiavellianism, emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism) were examined by means of contingency tables, followed by Pearson's χ^2 tests that serve to establish a correlation between two variables. The statistically significant value of the test ($p < 0.05$) suggests a statistically significant correlation between variables.

The Pearson correlation coefficient indicating the correlation between two variables, whose value varies between -1 and 1 , indicating a positive or negative correlation between two variables, was used as further confirmation. The statistical power of variable correlation is established by means of a separate coefficient value scale. The Pearson correlation coefficient only suggests a correlation between two variables but not also the effect of one variable on the other (Šušter and Južnik, 2013, pp. 195-196). The coefficient of correlation and determination and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were calculated before estimating the regression coefficient and constant (intercept).

4. Research results and discussion

Hypotheses were verified by means of three methods: the contingency table, χ^2 test and Pearson coefficient. The results of the Mach VI questionnaire (Machiavellianism test) of 170 or 57.3 per cent respondents were higher than 60 points, which means that these employees found a high level of Machiavellianism in their leaders and perceived Machiavellian principles in the workplace. A contingency table of Machiavellianism or Machiavellian leadership and emotional exhaustion showed a correlation between the two variables, whereby 16 per cent of respondents with a high level of emotional exhaustion believed their leaders to exhibit a high level of Machiavellianism. The correlation was established also subject to the value of the χ^2 test for Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion (73.05). The coefficient is statistically significant with a less than 1 per cent risk, leading to the conclusion that a high level of Machiavellianism has an effect on a high level of emotional exhaustion. The value of Pearson coefficient (Table I, 0.346) also confirmed a weak positive correlation between Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion. Subject to the findings above, the first hypothesis that Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion were correlated was confirmed.

The second hypothesis was confirmed by analysing the correlation between Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism. As shown by the contingency table, 107 respondents (36 per cent of the population) with a high level of organisational cynicism also

	Machiavellianism	Emotional exhaustion
<i>Machiavellianism</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.346**
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000
<i>n</i>	297	297
<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.346**	1
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	
<i>n</i>	297	297

Table I.
Correlation between
Machiavellianism and
emotional exhaustion

Note: **Statistically significant correlation at 0.01 (two-tailed)

believed that their leaders exhibited a high level of Machiavellianism, whereby the majority of the remaining 127 respondents (81.8 per cent) who believed that their leaders exhibited a low level of Machiavellianism also exhibited a low level of organisational cynicism. The value of the χ^2 test for organisational cynicism and Machiavellianism was 161.85, the coefficient is statistically significant with a less than 1 per cent risk, suggesting the conclusion that a high level of organisational cynicism has an effect on a high level of organisational cynicism and vice versa. The calculated Pearson coefficient (0.612) demonstrated a moderately positive correlation between Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism.

The analysis also established a correlation between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion, thus confirming the final hypothesis. The contingency table showed that 49 respondents (16.5 per cent of the population) with a perceived moderate or high level of organisational cynicism also exhibited a high level of emotional exhaustion. The value of the χ^2 test for organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion (85.80) also suggested the conclusion that a high level of organisational cynicism has an effect on a high level of emotional exhaustion (with a 1 per cent risk). A weak positive correlation was also demonstrated by the calculated Pearson correlation coefficient which amounts to 0.388 for organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion, as illustrated in Table II.

The correlation coefficient estimate (R^2) for the selected three variables amounted to 0.412, which suggests a moderate positive correlation. The determination coefficient estimate (R^2) amounted to 0.169. Subject to the assessed value, it can be established that 16.9 per cent of the variability of emotional exhaustion of respondents can be explained by a linear effect of Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism. The standard error of the model estimate amounts to 5.2 per cent, meaning that the sample value of the model varies by 5.2 per cent compared to the expected value (Tables III and IV).

	Organisational cynicism	Machiavellianism
<i>Organisational cynicism</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.612**
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000
<i>n</i>	297	297
<i>Machiavellianism</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.612**	1
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	
<i>n</i>	297	297

Note: **Statistically significant correlation at 0.01 (two-tailed)

Table II.
Correlation between Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism

	Organisational cynicism	Emotional exhaustion
<i>Organisational cynicism</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	1	0.388**
Sig. (two-tailed)		0.000
<i>n</i>	297	297
<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>		
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.388**	1
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	
<i>n</i>	297	297

Note: **Statistically significant correlation at 0.01 (two-tailed)

Table III.
Correlation between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion

The ANOVA (Table V) of the model showed that organisational cynicism and Machiavellianism statistically significantly predict the value of emotional exhaustion of employees: *F*-test: 29.977, precise level of significance: 0.000 ($p > 0.05$).

Table VI contains estimates of the regression coefficient and constant, showing that the estimated regression constant amounts to 1.409, meaning that 1,409 respondents are emotionally exhausted if Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism are 0. The first partial regression coefficient for organisational cynicism amounts to 0.187, meaning that emotional exhaustion of employees increases by 0.187 on average (mean value) if organisational cynicism and Machiavellianism increase by one employee. The second partial regression coefficient amounts to 0.85, meaning that emotional exhaustion of employees increases by 0.85 employee if Machiavellianism increases by one employee and organisational cynicism remains the same. The partial correlation coefficient for organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion amounts to 0.238, meaning that the dependence of emotional exhaustion on organisational cynicism is weak and positive if Machiavellianism is excluded. Emotional exhaustion is also weakly and positively dependent on Machiavellianism in the absence of organisational cynicism (partial correlation coefficient = 0.149).

In addition to the analyses above, all research variables were also analysed by gender, age, level of education, number of employees, type of municipality and length of service. The results obtained showed that the presence of the main research variables is also affected by certain demographic variables. Age and level of education have a significant effect on the perception of Machiavellianism. The perception of Machiavellianism in the work environment of an employee increases with age. The analysis of results on the perception of Machiavellianism by level of education showed that employees with a higher level of education are more likely to perceive Machiavellian conduct of their leaders than employees with a lower level of education. During the research, it was found that the length

Table IV.
Calculation of the coefficient of correlation and determination for the variable model

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	SE of the estimate
1	0.412	0.169	0.164	0.5256

Table V.
Analysis of variance of the model

Model 1	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Regression	16.560	2	8.280	29.977	0.000
Residual	81.205	294	0.276		
Total	97.764	296			

Table VI.
Regression coefficient and constant estimates

Model 1	Un-standardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity statistics	
	<i>B</i>	SE	β			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
Emotional exhaustion	1.409	0.095		14.847	0.000					
Organisational cynicism	0.187	0.044	0.282	4.195	0.000	0.388	0.238	0.223	0.625	1.599
Machiavellianism	0.085	0.033	0.173	2.579	0.010	0.346	0.149	0.137	0.625	1.599

of service also has an effect on a higher perception of Machiavellianism since high levels of Machiavellianism are more likely to be perceived by employees with a greater length in service than by employees with a shorter length of service.

Demographic variables also have an effect on organisational cynicism but to a lower degree than on Machiavellianism. During the research, it was found that the presence of organisational cynicism is partially affected by the number of employees and type of municipality because the level of organisational cynicism in urban municipalities, which employ a large number of individuals, was found to be higher than in smaller municipalities with a smaller number of employees. A correlation between the length of service and organisational cynicism was also found. The longer an employee is employed, the higher the level of organisational cynicism.

Subject to analyses of demographic variables and emotional exhaustion, it was found that demographic variables have the smallest effect on emotional exhaustion. The only correlation found was the correlation between the type of municipality and emotional exhaustion and, as a result, between the number of employees and emotional exhaustion because employees in urban municipalities perceive higher levels of emotional exhaustion than employees in smaller municipalities.

Cronbach's α was used to measure reliability. The value of the Cronbach coefficient between the variables of Machiavellianism, emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism is in our case was 0.691. This suggests a moderate reliability, since the value of the coefficient is within the range of $0.6 \geq$ to ≥ 0.7 (Šušter and Južnik, 2013, pp. 215-217). Gkorezis *et al.* (2015) used bootstrap analysis – 1,000 bootstrap samples with 95 per cent confidence intervals – in SPSS using macro, developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004). However, both results showed that organisational cynicism partially mediates the relationship between Machiavellian leadership and emotional exhaustion.

5. Discussion

The research showed a high level of Machiavellianism, emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism in Slovenian municipalities. As many as 57 per cent of the population feel that their leader exhibits a high level of Machiavellianism. In total, 70 per cent of respondents also exhibit moderate and high levels of organisational cynicism. This is a highly problematic result on the organisational level because Machiavellianism is associated with lower satisfaction at the workplace and has a negative effect on organisational behaviour of employees (Dahling *et al.*, 2009, p. 228). In addition, Machiavellian leaders have a negative impact on their employees by promoting negativity and negative emotions with their cunning and immoral conduct. With their unethical stance, Machiavellian leaders engender scepticism and have a negative impact on the entire organisation. According to Aryee *et al.* (2008, p. 409), abusive leaders increase emotional exhaustion of employees which can increase the risk of organisational cynicism (Lee and Ashforth, 1996, p. 130) and can also lead to emotional exhaustion. Taking the above into consideration, the results show that the current situation is critical. The high share of moderate and high levels of emotional exhaustion also gives rise to unexpected concern. As many as 88 per cent of all respondents completed the questionnaire in a way that suggests a moderate or high level of emotional exhaustion, meaning that the majority of employees working for municipal administrations are emotionally exhausted. The finding that Machiavellian leadership has a positive correlation with organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion is similar to findings of previously mentioned past research, which also demonstrated a correlation between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2015, pp. 620-626). Nevertheless, in past research, organisational cynicism was used an indirect variable and in ours it was used as a direct variable.

There is a danger that those staff member that are predisposed to cynicism and emotional exhaustion answered the survey. In addition, this could be addressed as a

possible limitation. However, previous research has addressed this issue in a similar way (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2015; Nafei, 2013).

In addition to an assessment of the current situation in Slovenian municipalities, the essence of our research is marked by established correlations between research variables. The research was able to demonstrate a weak positive correlation between both Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion and between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion, whereas organisational cynicism and Machiavellianism have a moderate positive correlation, demonstrating that organisational cynicism cannot only be seen as an indirect variable between Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion, but that it has a significant effect on both. The coefficient of determination showed that 16.9 per cent of emotional exhaustion can be attributed to the direct linear effects of Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism. The results of this research serve as a contribution to the literature seeking to establish correlations and dependencies between Machiavellianism, organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion of employees.

6. Conclusion

The existence of a correlation in Slovenian municipalities between Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion on one hand and between organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion on the other has led to important findings both for practical work and future research. These results can contribute to a greater understanding of mutual collaboration between leaders and their subordinates and any practical implications of this relationship, by taking into consideration the restrictions of the research which is preliminary and was conducted on a small sample of employees. The obtained results can thus serve as a good starting point for future research by highlighting the presence of organisational cynicism as a weighting factor for Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion. In addition, the research provides major potential for further research and seeking factors that impact the presence of all variables and measures that can eliminate the effects of Machiavellian leadership, emotional exhaustion and organisational cynicism.

Machiavellian leadership can have many negative impacts on both the organisation and employees. As such, great attention should be paid to the selection of correct leaders, in particular by timely “identifying” either personality disorders or behavioural traits of an individual that have negative effects on both the organisation and employees. In addition, adequate action should be taken to reduce or discontinue long-term exposure of negative leadership impacts on employees when deviations in a real work situation are identified. There are many ways to prevent negative impacts of leaders on employees, including continuous development of interpersonal relationships between co-workers. The development of leadership skills can also contribute to a more professional performance of the leader’s tasks and duties, reducing the likelihood of negative conduct in the organisation and a negative attitude towards employees, which also reduces the likelihood of cynicism that leads to lower satisfaction and devotion to work and a higher emotional exhaustion of an individual.

Even though the research demonstrated a correlation between Machiavellianism and organisational cynicism on one hand and Machiavellianism and emotional exhaustion on the other (Machiavellian) leaders should not be seen as the sole culprits for a negative work environment in organisations because all individuals in an organisation make a significant contribution to the presence of organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion therein. As a result, all individuals in organisations are also personally responsible to eliminate the factors that lead to a higher level of emotional exhaustion with their conduct and lifestyle in general (including taking care of their physical and mental health and promoting good interpersonal relationships and enough sleep). All parties involved in an organisation should be willing to contribute to a harmonious work environment.

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Further reading

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