PSYCHOMETRIC DEVELOPMENT AND METRIC INVARIANCE OF 20-ITEM DARK LEADERSHIP SCALE AMONG PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

NNEDUM, Obiajulu Anthony Ugochukwu, ELEODINMUO, Benson Chika, & EZISI, Jerome Ogochukwu

[1][2][3]Department of Psychology / Industrial-Organizational Psychology Unit,
Faculty of the Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
Corresponding Author Email: oau.nnedum@unizik.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Destructive leadership behaviors pose severe risks to employee well-being, task performance, and systemic organizational integrity. However, psychometrically validated instruments specifically contextualized for Sub-Saharan African workplaces remain scarce. This study adapted and validated the 20-item Dark Leadership Scale (DLS) among public and private sector workers in Southern Nigeria. Employing a cross-validation split-sample design (N = 500), data were gathered from public civil service ministries and private corporate enterprises across key urban centers. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA; n1 = 200) supported a clean five-factor structure comprising Abusive Behavior, Authoritarian Control, Narcissistic Exploitation, Unethical Coercion, and Emotional Volatility, accounting for 67.85% of cumulative variance. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA; n2 = 300) verified superior model fit for the five-factor correlated model ($\chi^2/df = 1.68$, CFI = .968, TLI = .961, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .042) relative to alternative models. Multi-group CFA confirmed full scalar measurement invariance across public (n = 142) and private (n = 158) sector subsamples ($\Delta CFI \leq .005$). Nomological network testing via Structural Equation Modeling revealed that dark leadership significantly predicted increased turnover intentions ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$) and counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), while suppressing organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = -.43$, $p < .001$). Latent mean comparisons indicated that public sector workers reported significantly higher levels of unethical coercion and authoritarian control, whereas private sector workers experienced greater narcissistic exploitation and abusive behavior. The DLS provides I/O psychologists, researchers, and HR policymakers with a robust, contextually sensitive diagnostic instrument for identifying and mitigating destructive leadership in developing economy settings.

Keywords: *Dark Leadership, Psychometric Validation, Public vs. Private Sector, Measurement Invariance, Conservation of Resources Theory, Southern Nigeria, Nnadiebube Journal.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership within contemporary organizations serves as a primary determinant of workplace climate, employee psychological safety, and organizational performance. While traditional management research focused predominantly on constructive and transformational leadership behaviors, the past two decades have witnessed a paradigm shift toward investigating the 'dark side' of organizational leadership (Schmidt, 2008; Tepper, 2000). Destructive leadership constructs—encompassing abusive supervision, tyrannical control, workplace narcissism, and unethical coercion—have been empirically linked to severe employee distress, emotional exhaustion, heightened turnover intentions, and counterproductive work behaviors (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Padilla et al., 2007).

Despite the growing volume of dark leadership research globally, a critical psychometric gap persists within Sub-Saharan African contexts, particularly in Nigeria. Most widely utilized dark leadership scales—such as Schmidt's (2008) Toxic Leadership Scale or Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision Scale—were developed and standardized using Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) organizational samples. When imported directly into developing economy settings without rigorous cross-cultural adaptation and invariance testing, these instruments often fail to capture culturally specific expressions of leadership toxicity, such as systemic administrative coercion or coercive corruption in bureaucratic structures (Nnedum et al., 2024; Ohemeng et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Nigeria's formal economy operates under a pronounced dual structure comprising a heavily bureaucratic public civil service and a fast-paced, target-driven private sector. Public civil service ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in Southern Nigeria are characterized by tenure security, rigid hierarchy, political patronage, and diffuse administrative accountability. Conversely, private sector enterprises—such as commercial banking, fintech, and telecommunications—operate under aggressive market benchmarks, precarious employment conditions, and bottom-line performance pressure. Understanding whether dark leadership manifests differently across these sector environments requires a measurement instrument that demonstrates full measurement invariance between public and private sector employees.

To address these empirical and psychometric gaps, this study undertakes a preliminary validation of the Dark Leadership Scale (DLS) among public and private sector workers in Southern Nigeria. The research evaluates the scale's factor structure, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, multi-group scalar measurement invariance, and nomological network against key organizational outcomes.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

This validation study integrates three complementary theoretical frameworks to conceptualize dark leadership and ground its nomological relationships: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, the Toxic Triangle Framework, and Social Exchange Theory (SET).

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) serves as the primary theoretical anchor. COR theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and foster valued resources—encompassing psychological energy, self-esteem, autonomy, and emotional stability. Stress occurs when individuals experience resource loss, the threat of loss, or a failure to gain resources following investment. Dark leadership acts as a chronic workplace stressor that actively depletes subordinates' emotional and cognitive resources (Grandey et al., 2012). When employees endure public humiliation, authoritarian dominance, or unethical coercion, they must expend vital psychological energy on emotional regulation and self-preservation. To halt resource depletion, workers engage in defensive mechanisms, such as physical withdrawal (turnover intentions) or resource-conserving behaviors (withholding discretionary extra-role effort).

The Toxic Triangle Framework

To contextualize destructive leadership within Nigerian administrative and business environments, this study draws on the Toxic Triangle Framework (Padilla et al., 2007). Padilla and colleagues argue that dark leadership is not solely an individual trait phenomenon; rather, it manifests through the confluence

of: (1) Destructive Leaders possessing narcissistic or tyrannical orientations; (2) Susceptible Followers comprising conformers (driven by fear or job security needs) and colluders; and (3) Conducive Environments characterized by institutional instability, high power distance, and weak regulatory checks. In Southern Nigeria, institutional differences between public civil service ministries and private corporations create distinct 'conducive environments' that shape the expression of dark leadership behaviors.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Complementing COR theory, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) explains the reciprocal dynamics governing leader-subordinate relationships. SET posits that workplace interactions depend on psychological contracts and norms of reciprocity. When leaders engage in abusive or exploitative behaviors, they breach the psychological contract. Subordinates respond by restoring psychological equity through reduced Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) or active engagement in Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB; Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

2.2 Hypotheses Development

Based on theoretical literature and psychometric domain mapping, Dark Leadership is conceptualized as a five-factor correlated construct comprising: Abusive Behavior (AHB), Authoritarian Control (ATC), Narcissistic Exploitation (SNE), Unethical Coercion (UC), and Emotional Volatility (EVU).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The Dark Leadership Scale (DLS) is best represented by a five-factor correlated model comprising Abusive Behavior, Authoritarian Control, Narcissistic Exploitation, Unethical Coercion, and Emotional Volatility.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The five-factor measurement model of the DLS demonstrates full measurement invariance (configural, metric, and scalar) across public and private sector workers in Southern Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Perceived Dark Leadership is positively related to employee Turnover Intentions.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Perceived Dark Leadership is positively related to Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB).

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): Perceived Dark Leadership is negatively related to Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB).

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There are significant latent mean differences in Dark Leadership sub-dimensions between sectors, with public sector workers reporting higher Unethical Coercion and Authoritarian Control, and private sector workers reporting higher Abusive Behavior and Narcissistic Exploitation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Sampling Strategy

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional psychometric validation design. To prevent capitalizing on chance and ensure rigorous scale validation, a split-sample cross-validation approach was implemented (Hinkin, 1998; Kline, 2016): Sample 1 (n1 = 200) was utilized for preliminary item analysis, communality screening, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Sample 2 (n2 = 300) was utilized for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), multi-group sector measurement invariance testing, convergent/discriminant validity evaluation, and structural equation modeling (SEM).

The target population comprised full-time workers in public civil service ministries/parastatals and private sector enterprises across key commercial and administrative capitals in Southern Nigeria (including Port Harcourt, Enugu, Benin City, Asaba, and Calabar). A stratified non-probability quota sampling technique was employed to achieve balanced representation across economic sectors.

Out of 550 distributed questionnaires, 500 fully completed and usable responses were retained (90.9% usable response rate). The total sample (N = 500) comprised 240 public sector workers (48.0%) and 260 private sector workers (52.0%). The sample included 268 males (53.6%) and 232 females (46.4%), with a mean age of 37.4 years (SD = 8.6, range = 21–59 years) and a mean organizational tenure of 6.8 years (SD = 4.2).

3.2 Measures and Instrumentation

Dark Leadership Scale (DLS): The initial pool comprised 25 items adapted across five theoretical sub-dimensions (AHB, ATC, SNE, UC, EVU) rated on a 5-point Likert agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Each subscale initially contained one reverse-coded item.

Turnover Intentions: Measured using Colarelli's (1984) 3-item scale (e.g., 'I frequently think about quitting my current job'; $\alpha = .88$).

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB): Assessed using Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 10-item workplace deviance measure ($\alpha = .91$).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB): Measured using Lee and Allen's (2002) 8-item OCB-Organization scale ($\alpha = .86$).

3.3 Ethical Considerations & Common Method Bias Control

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Common Method Bias (CMB) was addressed procedurally through item counterbalancing, spatial separation of measures, and assurances of anonymity (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Preliminary Diagnostics & Common Method Bias

Missing data (< 1.2%) was completely at random (Little's MCAR test: $\chi^2 = 42.15$, df = 38, $p = .296$) and imputed via expectation-maximization. Harman's single-factor test revealed six factors with eigenvalues > 1.0, with the single largest factor accounting for only 28.42% of variance (< 50%). An unmeasured latent method factor (ULMF) specified in Sample 2 yielded marginal fit changes (ΔCFI = .008, ΔRMSEA = .003), confirming that method bias did not distort findings.

4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (Sample 1, n1 = 200)

KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .892 ('meritorious') and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(300) = 2845.60$, $p < .001$). During initial PAF iterations with Promax rotation, the five reverse-coded items (AHB_4, ATC_4, SNE_5, UC_4, EVU_4) exhibited low communalities (< .35) and severe cross-loadings (> .35) and were removed. Re-running PAF on the remaining 20 items produced a clean 5-factor structure accounting for 67.85% of total variance (Table 1).

Table 1: EFA Factor Loadings, Communalities, and Variance Explained (Sample 1, n1 = 200)

Item Code	F1: AHB	F2: ATC	F3: SNE	F4: UC	F5: EVU	Communality (h^2)
AHB_1	**.78**	.12	.08	.05	.11	.68
AHB_2	**.82**	.09	.04	.10	.14	.73
AHB_3	**.75**	.14	.11	.02	.08	.64
AHB_5	**.71**	.10	.05	.15	.06	.58
ATC_1	.11	**.81**	.06	.12	.05	.71
ATC_2	.08	**.76**	.10	.08	.09	.65
ATC_3	.14	**.74**	.08	.04	.12	.62

ATC_5	.05	**.69**	.14	.11	.07	.55
SNE_1	.09	.05	**.84**	.08	.10	.75
SNE_2	.12	.11	**.79**	.14	.05	.68
SNE_3	.06	.08	**.73**	.05	.11	.59
SNE_4	.15	.12	**.70**	.10	.08	.57
UC_1	.04	.10	.11	**.85**	.06	.76
UC_2	.11	.08	.09	**.81**	.10	.72
UC_3	.08	.14	.15	**.78**	.04	.67
UC_5	.10	.06	.07	**.72**	.09	.58
EVU_1	.12	.09	.05	.08	**.83**	.73
EVU_2	.14	.11	.10	.04	**.79**	.69
EVU_3	.07	.08	.12	.11	**.75**	.63
EVU_5	.09	.15	.06	.07	**.68**	.53
Eigenvalue	**5.82**	**2.94**	**2.15**	**1.48**	**1.18**	—

Note. Promax rotation. Primary factor loadings bolded. Cumulative variance explained = 67.85%.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Sample 2, n2 = 300)

CFA evaluated the 20-item 5-factor model against alternative models in Sample 2. As shown in Table 2, Model C (Proposed 5-Factor Correlated Model) demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.68$, CFI = .968, TLI = .961, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .042), supporting H1.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Fit Comparisons (Sample 2, n2 = 300)

Model Structure	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR
Model A: 1-Factor Unidimensional	1085.42	170	6.38	.682	.645	.133 [.125, .141]	.118
Model B: 3-Factor Consolidated	542.18	167	3.25	.868	.850	.087 [.079, .095]	.074
Model C: Proposed 5-Factor Correlated	**268.80**	**160**	**1.68**	**.968**	**.961**	**.048 [.039, .057]**	**.042**

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

4.4 Reliability, Convergent, and Discriminant Validity

Cronbach's alpha (.85–.91), McDonald's omega (.86–.92), Composite Reliability (.85–.91), and AVE (.58–.72) exceeded standard cutoffs. HTMT ratios (all < .85) and Fornell-Larcker criteria confirmed discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 3: Reliability, Convergent Validity, and HTMT Matrix (Sample 2, n2 = 300)

Construct	α	ω	CR	AVE	1.AHB	2.ATC	3.SNE	4.UC	5.EVU
1. AHB	.90	.91	.90	.69	**(.83)**	.52	.48	.38	.58
2. ATC	.87	.88	.87	.63	.45	**(.79)**	.55	.50	.42
3. SNE	.89	.90	.89	.67	.41	.48	**(.82)**	.44	.49
4. UC	.91	.92	.91	.72	.32	.42	.38	**(.85)**	.36
5. EVU	.85	.86	.85	.58	.51	.36	.42	.30	**(.76)**

Note. Bold diagonal values represent √AVE. Values below diagonal are inter-construct correlations; values above diagonal are HTMT ratios (< .85).

4.5 Multi-Group Measurement Invariance Across Sectors

Multi-group CFA supported configural, metric, and full scalar measurement invariance across public (n = 142) and private (n = 158) sectors (ΔCFI ≤ .005, ΔRMSEA ≤ .002), supporting H2 (Table 4).

Table 4: Measurement Invariance Across Public (n = 142) and Private (n = 158) Sectors

Invariance Level	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA	Decision
Configural Invariance	412.50	320	.962	.051	—	—	**Supported**
Metric (Weak) Invariance	430.15	335	.959	.052	-.003	+.001	**Supported**
Scalar (Strong) Invariance	452.80	350	.954	.054	-.005	+.002	**Full Invariance**

Note. ΔCFI ≤ .010 and ΔRMSEA ≤ .015 confirm measurement invariance (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

4.6 Criterion-Related Validity & Sector Latent Mean Comparisons

SEM confirmed that DLS predicted Turnover Intentions (β = .51, p < .001; H3a), CWB (β = .56, p < .001; H3b), and OCB (β = -.43, p < .001; H3c). Latent mean comparisons supported H4: Public sector workers reported higher Unethical Coercion (d = 0.57) and Authoritarian Control (d = 0.39), whereas Private sector workers reported higher Narcissistic Exploitation (d = 0.50) and Abusive Behavior (d = 0.44).

5. DISCUSSION

This study successfully adapted and validated the 20-item Dark Leadership Scale (DLS) among public and private sector employees in Southern Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that dark leadership is a robust, multidimensional construct that operates consistently across different sector environments while displaying distinct behavioral nuances across public civil service and private corporate settings.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, this study addresses the WEIRD bias in I/O psychology by providing a psychometrically validated dark leadership scale tailored for Sub-Saharan Africa. Second, by incorporating Workplace Corruption & Unethical Coercion (UC), the scale captures administrative coercion dynamics common in developing economies. Third, the study reinforces COR Theory (Hobfoll, 2001) by proving that dark leadership acts as a major resource depletion vector driving turnover intentions, counterproductive behaviors, and citizenship erosion.

5.2 Practical & Policy Implications

Public Sector MDAs: State civil service commissions across Southern Nigeria must institute independent whistleblower protections and 360-degree feedback systems to dismantle autocratic and corrupt coercion practices.

Private Sector Enterprises: Corporate HR leaders must establish zero-tolerance policies for abusive supervision and credit-stealing, balancing aggressive performance metrics with leadership ethics.

5.3 Limitations & Future Research

Limitations include the cross-sectional design and self-report measurement mode. Future research should utilize multi-source longitudinal designs and expand sampling to Northern Nigerian geopolitical zones.

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APPENDIX: THE FINAL 20-ITEM DARK LEADERSHIP SCALE (DLS)

Instructions: Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree that each statement describes your immediate supervisor's behavior at work (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Dimension 1: Abusive & Hostile Behavior (AHB)

- AHB_1: My leader publicly belittles or ridicules subordinates when mistakes occur.
- AHB_2: My leader uses intimidating language or shouts at staff in the workplace.
- AHB_3: My leader attacks subordinate personally rather than addressing actual work performance.
- AHB_5: My leader uses subtle threats of administrative punishment or job loss to keep employees in line.

Dimension 2: Authoritarian & Tyrannical Control (ATC)

- ATC_1: My leader demands absolute obedience and does not allow subordinates to question decisions.
- ATC_2: My leader strictly micromanages routine tasks, leaving zero room for employee autonomy.
- ATC_3: My leader discourages staff from suggesting new or innovative ways of performing tasks.
- ATC_5: My leader uses official position power primarily to restrict and control employees.

Dimension 3: Self-Serving & Narcissistic Exploitation (SNE)

- SNE_1: My leader takes credit for successful projects and ideas completed by subordinates.
- SNE_2: My leader uses official organizational resources for personal gain or prestige.
- SNE_3: My leader shifts personal blame onto subordinates whenever departmental targets are missed.
- SNE_4: My leader grants promotions or favorable tasks based on personal loyalty rather than competence.

Dimension 4: Workplace Corruption & Unethical Coercion (UC)

- UC_1: My leader pressures subordinates to bypass official procedures or regulations for administrative convenience.
- UC_2: My leader expects subordinates to conceal administrative or financial irregularities.
- UC_3: My leader compromises organizational ethics to achieve short-term results or personal ambitions.
- UC_5: My leader penalizes or isolates employees who refuse to participate in unethical workplace practices.

Dimension 5: Emotional Volatility & Unpredictability (EVU)

- EVU_1: My leader's mood shifts so unexpectedly that it is difficult to predict how they will react.
- EVU_2: My leader has sudden emotional outbursts that create a tense, fearful working atmosphere.
- EVU_3: My leader's administrative decisions are inconsistent and change frequently without explanation.
- EVU_5: Employees in my unit feel like they are 'walking on eggshells' around my leader.