

**Title:** Title: Teaching Managers about the Dark Side of Organizational Life: A case of too much Yang and not enough Yin.

**Session Format:** Roundtable Discussion

### **Abstract**

This session argues the case for a more dedicated, systematic and integrated treatment of the dark side of organizational life in our education of managers. Drawing on the Taoist principles of Yin and Yang I argue that the practice of management may be viewed as a process of balancing the polar forces of the positive and negative dimensions of organizational life. I suggest that there is a seeming imbalance in the mainstream management curriculum in its emphasis on the normative and the positive while providing limited and piecemeal attention to the murkier dark side of organizational life. The dark side will always be with us and managers need to more fully understand its nature, its lure, underlying processes and consequences and be provided with strategies for avoiding, mitigating, or coping with its excesses when it inevitably manifests itself. This session presents a course/module structure aimed at systematically addressing the dark side and helping managers to more successfully understand and engage with it.

**Key Words:** Dark-side, Yin, Yang

### **Introduction**

This is a unique proposal and I have not presented it at any conference before. I had submitted a proposal (and was accepted) for the IMOBTS 20202 but I was unable to raise sufficient funds to travel for those dates.

Bad things happen in our organizations all the time and there is no sign that these negative occurrences are becoming less frequent over time. This proposal focuses on the need to and challenges associated with exposing managers to what I term the “dark side” of organizational life in their business education. In my Business School we attempt to address this issue in a wide range of ways. Directly we have modules on business ethics and corporate governance and modules addressing the impact of business on society. Indirectly, we explore the topic by including short inputs on ethics and organisational misbehaviour in topic specific modules (e.g. Organisational Behaviour, Management of Change). However, my sense is that as a School we are failing to address the core constructs of the “**Good Manager**” and the “**Healthy Organisation**” in a systematic and holistic manner. This paper argues for the need to systematically address the dark side of organizational life and get our students to better understand why individuals do bad things, why groups and teams frequently go off-the-track, why leaders sometimes become toxic and foster neurotic organisational cultures and how these factors can lead to unethical behaviour, corporate corruption, deviance and misbehaviour.

**Intended Outcomes of the session:**

- (a) Provide a theoretical justification and pragmatic framework for systematically addressing the dark side of organizational life in our teaching.
- (b) Open up a dialogue in relation to the challenges of teaching paradox
- (c) Provide participants with a broad outline of the indicative content of a 12 unit Dark Side course/module.

**Target Audience:**

The session is ideally aimed at Business School academics in the fields of OB, Organization Theory or Business and Society. However, its multidisciplinary focus will also make the session of interest to those teaching in the fields of the sociology of organization, industrial and organizational psychology and public administration.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications.**

The theoretical context of this discussion centrally revolves around the challenge of understanding and teaching of paradox and dialectics (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Here I wish to bring a dialectical perspective to bear on how we understand and teach the darker dimensions of organizational life. The dark side of management and organizational life has been an intermittent topic of research and discussion for some time but its role has largely been a minor or back stage one (Vaughan, 1999). Indeed Linstead, Maréchal & Griffin (2014) suggest that research on the dark side has, until recently, been overlooked, ignored, or suppressed within the field of organization and management studies. There is no single disciplinary perspective that can claim ownership of nor any specific method for studying the dark side. This slowly maturing field is representative of a wide range of disciplines including, psychology, organizational behaviour, organizational theory, sociology of organizations, critical theory, and anthropology. Here I draw on Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly's (2004) definition of the dark side as "situations in which people hurt other people, injustices are perpetuated and magnified, and the pursuits of wealth, power, or revenge lead people to behaviours that others can only see as unethical, illegal, despicable, or reprehensible (2004: xv).

In this essay I utilise the vehicle of the Taoist philosophical principle of the Yin Yang duality as a novel and accessible cognitive frame (Li, 2012) to explore and illustrate a dialectical approach to management pedagogy and how to better engage with the dark side

theme. Within Taoist philosophy all natural and human life is shaped by the continuous interplay of yin and yang. Terms originally coined to denote the dark and sunny side of a hill (Morgan, 2006) The Tao (the way) is underpinned by the flow of complementary yet opposite cyclical energies where everything is in process of becoming something else. This is visualised by the symmetrical symbol *T'ai-chi T'u* as shown in figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Yin and Yang are parts of a oneness forming a dynamic and holistic duality in that one cannot exist without the other and each opposite contains an element of the other. This dynamic and paradoxical “either/and” dialectical framework (Fang, 2011; Li, 2012) suggests contradiction in balance, with the opposite partially in conflict and partially complementary. The more one emphasises the positives of one side the more it accentuates the opposite (Cameron and Quinn, 1988). Each pole of the dialectic requires the other to sustain its presence over time (Clegg, 2002). Within a Yin Yang philosophy all natural phenomena seek variation and harmony to maintain existence. Change (*bian*) requires the dialectical interaction between and integration of Yin and Yang, the dark and the light (G.-M. Chen, 2008; Fang, 2011). Success, herein referred to as harmony (Tao), is reached when human action and situational power are no longer in opposition and a fine balance is attained maintained between these paradoxical forces. As Mintzberg (2011) puts it “In their duality is found the unity: there has to be light in the shadows and shadows in the light” (2011:124). This view is emphasized through the dots in figure 1 which suggest that, in its rotational symmetry, each force, as it reaches its peak, already contains the seed of its opposite. As the Yang attains its maximum it gives place to the Yin.

#### **Teaching Implications:**

Smith and Lewis (2011, p.397) posit the question of what it would entail to teach managers about paradox. Here, through the principles of yin and yang, I offer a proposal to

provide our students with an accessible experience of the paradoxical tensions of managing organizational dynamics. Through a detailed exploration of the dark side of organizational life, I propose a framework that will help students see that within constructs that we teach and that managers may use or tap into to promote effective and productive organizational behavior that there is both a light/positive and dark/negative dimension. However, paradox can't be resolved by eliminating one side. For balance to be achieved one needs equal knowledge and understanding of both sides – the positive/normative and the dark sides. My view is that while we as Business School academics tend to do a good job at addressing the Yang/positive side of organizational life, we tend to neglect or, at minimum, underplay the nature, dynamics and complexity of the Yin or dark side of organizational life. We are particularly poor at exploring the interplay between the positive and negative dimensions of organizational life. As dualities, the Yang/light and Yin/dark side represent contradictory yet interrelated elements that help create each other. In the positive lies the roots of the negative and in the negative lies the roots of the positive. Both require deep understanding and simultaneous consideration. Teaching the student how to manage then becomes a complex struggle of balancing paradoxical opposites.

In calling for new or increased light to focus on the so-called “dark side” my intention is not to valorise or glamorise this dimension but to explore how the essence of goodness is partially rooted in its opposite. So if we as educators are to truly equip our aspiring or practicing managers with the mental skill set to create harmony and balance they need to be able to grasp and manage paradox (not solve it) developing a balanced understanding of both the Yin and Yang side of their own life and organizational realities in general. My aspiration is that through our pedagogy we can expose our students more fully to both the nature and lure of the dark side – to understand its levels and dynamics, explore its damaging effects, forewarning and forearming the student to the frequently nasty realities of organisational life and empowering them to do better and proactively create healthier organisations.

**Session Description.**

Mirroring how I would like to teach this module in practice, I propose adopting a problem-based learning approach (Healey & Jenkins, 2006) and framing the session with excerpts from the 2019 HBO documentary “The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicone Valley”. The intention here is to use this case to get the audience to explore the roots of the Theranos fraud and the central role played by its CEO Elizabeth Holmes – how can we explain what went wrong here? This interactive session will provide a classic illustration of a dialectical view and how within the good (Yin) lies the roots of the bad (Yang). Through the case I would like the audience to systematically develop a layer understanding of the factors (individual, group, organizational and societal) that gave rise to this corporate collapse and explore how we can better encourage our students to understand and explore the multiple layers that need to be considered in comprehending organizational deviance and corporate misbehaviour and the complexity of the dark side of organizational life.

Drawing on the the conceptual and research literature on the dark side of organizational life the module design I present here is a four level design framework as illustrated in figure 2.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

These four levels represent the basic building blocks of understanding for the student of the “dark side” and will ensure a level of curriculum coherence. The main point of illustration to the student will be to understand how each level may operate independently while also deeply embedded in systemic terms playing an important reinforcing and amplifying effect on the other associated layers. While societal level concerns are clearly of influence here I merely flag but do not explore this level. My logic here is to focus attention on social issues over which manager may have some level of direct control. This is not to lessen the

importance of the societal level and the considerable influence of the institutional environment in which a firm operates. Business and Society modules/courses currently address this issue very well.

**Plan for the session (60 mins in total):**

**(a) Opening Questions for the audience? (15 mins)**

- Who here covers material related to the “good organization: and the “good manager”? – how (module? Topic)?
- Who here addresses any aspects of the dark side of organizational life? – how (Module/topic)?
- Who here exposes their students to the issue of paradox and duality? - how?

**(b) A case study of corporate deviance – Theranos and the stewardship of Elizabeth Holmes. (20 mins in total)**

Ideally participants will have viewed the HBO documentary “The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicone Valley” in advance of the session.

- Show selected clips and personal commentary (5/7 mins?)
- How can we explain such events happen to our students?
- What levels of explanation are needed here?

**(c) My suggested approach – A Multidisciplinary Dark Side Course/Module (15 mins)**

- Guiding philosophy - On Yin and Yang
- Levels of analysis (individual, group, organizational and societal) (see Figure 2)

- Indicative content (handout of indicative module structure and content – see Appendix A) and associated assessment strategy.
- Audience comment, feedback and suggestions thereon.
  - Additional topics to be included. Optimal readings and cases?
  - Possibly breaking the participants into individual, group and organizational level sub-groups to aid better analysis and feedback. Note: The intention would be to gather this additional data and feed it back to participants via post-session email or on-line posting.

**(d) Open forum – embracing the dark side (10 mins)**

- Longer term – How to best integrate the Yin and Yang of organizational life in our pedagogy and curriculum?
- Benefits and risks?
- Is there a counterpoint?
- Alternative views?



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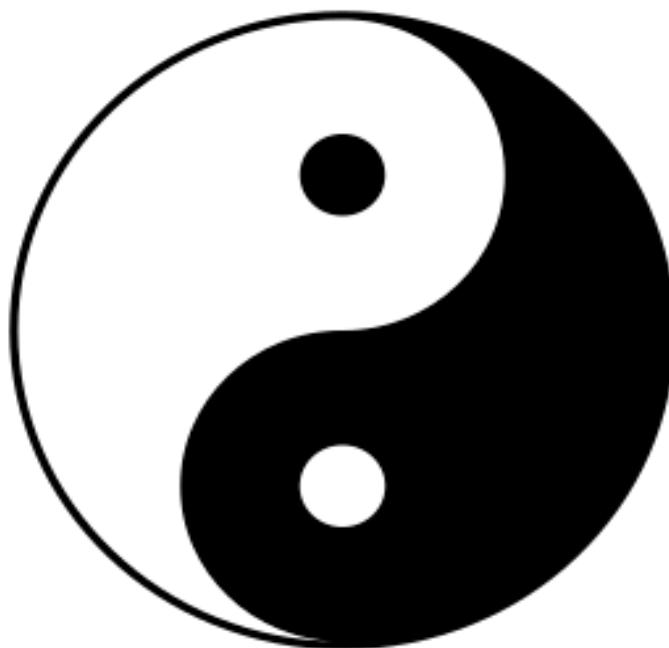
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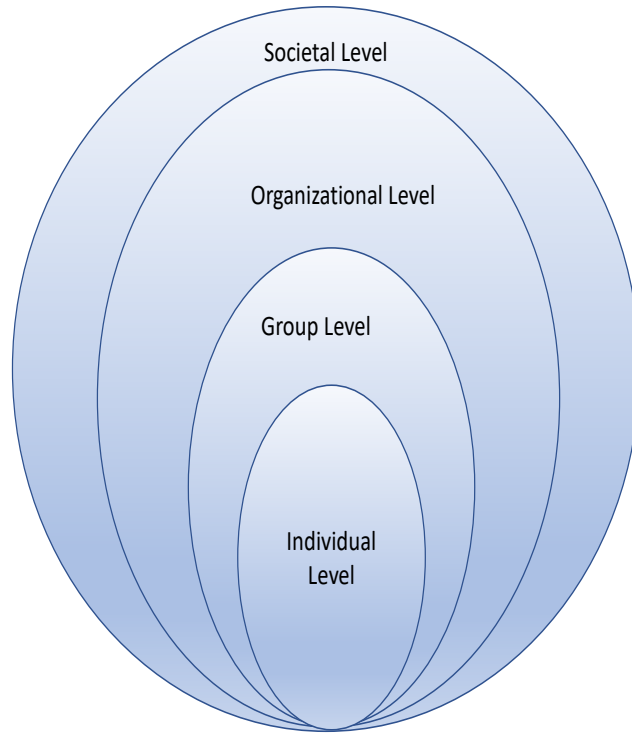
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**Figure 1: The Duality of Yin and Yang**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin\\_and\\_yang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang)

**Figure 2: Levels of Analysis of the Dark Side of Organizational Life**



## Appendix A: [Draft] Structure and Indicative Content of a “Dark Side” Module

CLASS	TOPIC	READINGS
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction to the Dark Side:</b>  Opening problem-based learning case study: Elizabeth Holmes and the Theranos failure.	Case questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the positive attributes of Holmes?</li> <li>• What went wrong and why?</li> <li>• Could the failure have been avoided? How?</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Opening Case Study: Theranos and the case of Elizabeth Holmes</b>	Case study discussion – what went wrong, why and how might it have been avoided?
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Dark Personalities: Exploring the Dark Tetrad and beyond</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paulhus, D.L. (2014). Toward a taxonomy of dark personalities. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i>, 23, 421– 426.</li> <li>• Spurk, D. Keller, A. and Hirschi, A. (2016) Do Bad Guys Get Ahead or Fall Behind? Relationships of the Dark Triad of Personality With Objective and Subjective Career Success, <i>Social Psychological and Personality Science</i>, Vol. 7(2) 113-121</li> <li>• Jonason, P. K. (2012). The Dark Triad at work: How toxic employees get their way. <i>Personality and Individual Differences</i>, 52: 449-453.</li> <li>• Lubit, Roy. 2002. The long-term organizational impact of destructively narcissistic managers. <i>Academy of Management Executive</i>, Vol. 16 Issue 1, p127.</li> <li>• Furnham, A., Trickey, G., &amp; Hyde, G. (2012). Bright aspects to dark side traits: Dark side traits associated with work success. <i>Personality and Individual Differences</i>, 52, 908–913.</li> </ul> <p><b>Psychometrics to be used:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narcissism: NPI-16 (Ames, Rose, &amp; Anderson, 2006)</li> <li>• Mach VI measure (Jones &amp; Paulhus, 2009)</li> <li>• Self-Report Psychopathy (SRP-III) scale Dirty Dozen (Jonason &amp; Webster, 2010)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b> Wed 3 Oct	<b>When and Why Leaders Go Bad</b>  Here we explore how leaders may develop the propensity to do bad things – how and when can positive leadership attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conger, J.A. (1990) The dark side of leadership, <i>Organization Dynamics</i> pp. 44-55.</li> <li>• Maccoby, M. (2004). Narcissistic leaders: The incredible pros, the inevitable cons. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 82, 92–101.</li> <li>• Mark Stein (2007) Oedipus Rex at Enron: Leadership, Oedipal struggles, and organizational collapse, <i>Human Relations</i>, 60(9): 1387–1410.</li> <li>• Padilla, A., Hogan, R. and Kaiser, R.B. (2007) The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. <i>The Leadership Quarterly</i>, 18, 176-194.</li> </ul>



	and traits create bad outcomes for organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U tube resource: The Dark Side of Leadership - <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp3KczF4kDA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp3KczF4kDA</a></li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Watson, D. and L. Clark, L. (1984) <b>Negative affectivity: The disposition to experience aversive emotional states.</b> Psychological Bulletin, 96, pp. 465-490.</li> <li>Gill MJ and Burrow R (2018) The function of fear in institutional maintenance: Feeling frightened as an essential ingredient in haute cuisine. <i>Organization Studies</i> 39(4):445-465.</li> <li>Lindebaum D and Fielden S (2010) 'It's good to be angry': Enacting anger in construction project management to achieve perceived leadership effectiveness. <i>Human Relations</i> 64(3): 437-458.</li> <li>Frost, P. (2004) Handling toxic emotions: New challenges for leaders and their organization, <i>Organizational Dynamics</i>, 33(2), 111-127.</li> <li>Case study: Inside Hell's Kitchen – Gordon Ramsey in action</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b>	<p><b>When and Why Teams Go Bad</b></p> <p>Here we explore how group can team dynamics can cause teams to derail and do bad things.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levy, Paul, (2001) "The Nut Island effect: When good teams go wrong," <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, March: 5–12.</li> <li><b>Stein, M. and Pinto, J. (2011) "The dark side of groups" A 'gang at work' in Enron" <i>Group and Organization Management</i>, 36(6):692-721.</b></li> <li>Janis, I. L. (1971) Groupthink. <i>Psychology Today</i>, 84-90.</li> <li>Sinclair (1992) "The Tyranny of a Team Ideology", <i>Organization Studies</i>, 13/4:611-626.</li> <li>Robinson, S.L., &amp; O'Leary-Kelly, A.M. (1998). Monkey see, monkey do: The influence of work groups on the antisocial behavior of employees. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>, 41(6), 658–672.</li> <li>Case: Challenger Disaster</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8</b>	<p><b>The Dark Side of Organisational Forms and their environments: From iron cages to a brave new world?</b></p> <p>Org forms as reflective of their environments Bureaucracy – irrationality of rationality and creation of rigid behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bart, V. and Stephens, C. (1994) The Dark Side of New Organizational Forms: An Editorial essay. <i>Organization Science</i>, 5(4):479-482.</li> <li>Granovetter M. 1985. Economic action and social structure. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 91:481-510 (see p.491-93) bright and dark – embeddedness view – prevailing values and beliefs institutionalized in org forms and behaviour</li> <li>Merton, R. (1957) Bureaucratic structure and personality (available at <a href="http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/courses/MERTONR2.HTML">http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/courses/MERTONR2.HTML</a>)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Week 9</b> Wed. 7 Nov</p>	<p><b>Dysfunctional and Toxic Cultures:</b></p> <p>Here we explore how the prevailing culture within an organization can have a profound impact on the behaviour of employees. We explore how cultures get created and give examples of organizations with bad cultures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R. Simms and J. Brinkmann (2003) Enron Ethics (Or culture matters more than codes), <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>, <b>45</b>: 243–256.</li> <li>• Greve, H.R., Palmer, D. and Pozner, J. (2010) Organizations gone wild: The Causes, processes and Consequences of Organizational misconduct, <i>Academy of Management Annals</i>, 4(1): 53-107.</li> <li>• Fleming, P. (2012) Down with big brother: The End of corporate culturism, <i>Journal of Management Studies</i>,</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 10</b> Wed. 14 Nov</p>	<p><b>Dirty Politics:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Morgan Images Chapter ?</b></li> <li>• Buchanan, David (2008) “You Stab My Back, I’ll Stab Yours: Management Experience and Perceptions of Organization Political Behaviour”, <i>British Journal of Management</i>, 19/1: 1-101</li> <li>• Pinto, J. (2000), “Understanding the role of politics in successful project management”, <i>International Journal of Project Management</i>, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 85-91. –</li> <li>• Perrewe, Pamela L. 2000. Political skill: An antidote for workplace stressors. <i>Academy of Management Executive</i>, Vol. 14 Issue 3, p115</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 11</b></p>	<p><b>Student Team Case Presentations: Lessons from the Field</b></p>	<p>Students present on their case studies (analysis of a dark side situation)</p>
<p><b>Week 12</b></p>	<p><b>Module Review and Recap</b></p> <p>Learning from failure and negative events Coping with paradox</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gabriel Y (2012) Organizations in a State of Darkness: Towards a theory of organizational miasma. <i>Organization Studies</i> 33(9): 1137-1152.</li> <li>• Smith, W. and Lewis, M. (2011) “Towards a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium of organizing” <i>Academy of Management Review</i>, 36,2:381-403.</li> <li>• Waldman, D. and Bowen, D. (2016) 30(3):316-327. Learning to be a paradox-savvy leader. <i>Harvard Business Review</i></li> <li>• Kets de Vries, M. (2001) “Creating authentizotic organizations: Well functioning individuals in vibrant companies” <i>Human Relations</i>, 54(1):101-111.</li> </ul>