

Does striving for a better world justify the use of power? Examining the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile

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Why do some individuals justify morally flexible strategies when pursuing collective welfare? We introduce and empirically tested the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP), defined as a stable disposition to deploy power, influence, and strategic flexibility in the service of transcendental goals. Through two studies, we develop and refine a measure of QMP and examine its distinctiveness from two related constructs: Machiavellianism and Socialized Power. In Study 1, QMP uniquely predicts willingness to engage in ethically ambiguous actions when these are framed as producing a greater good. Study 2 situates QMP within broader personality models, showing that it combines instrumental traits (e.g., low Honesty–Humility, moderate Dark Tetrad associations) with openness and value orientations toward collective benefit. Importantly, QMP predicts preference for ethically flexible means only when aimed at increasing the general welfare, particularly among individuals in positions of influence. These findings suggest that moral flexibility can reflect adaptive realism rather than corruption when aligned with self-transcendent goals.

Keywords: Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile, formality, power, dark tetrad

¿Justifica la búsqueda de un mundo mejor el uso del poder? Examinando el Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quijotesco

¿Por qué algunos individuos justifican estrategias moralmente flexibles cuando persiguen el bienestar colectivo? Presentamos y probamos empíricamente el Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quijotesco (PMQ), definido como una disposición estable para desplegar poder, influencia y flexibilidad estratégica al servicio de metas trascendentales. A través de dos estudios, desarrollamos y refinamos una medida del PMQ y examinamos su distinción respecto a dos constructos relacionados: el Maquiavelismo y el Poder Socializado. En el Estudio 1, el PMQ predice de manera única la disposición a involucrarse en acciones éticamente ambiguas

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cuando estas se enmarcan como productoras de un bien mayor. El Estudio 2 sitúa al PMQ dentro de modelos de personalidad más amplios, mostrando que combina rasgos instrumentales (p. ej., baja Honestidad-Humildad, asociaciones moderadas con la Tétrada Oscura) con apertura y orientaciones valóricas hacia el beneficio colectivo. Importammente, el PMQ predice la preferencia por medios éticamente flexibles solo cuando estos están orientados a incrementar el bienestar general, particularmente entre individuos en posiciones de influencia. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la flexibilidad moral puede reflejar un realismo adaptativo más que corrupción cuando se alinea con metas de autotranscendencia.

Palabras clave: Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quijotesco, formalidad, poder, triada oscura

A busca por um mundo melhor justifica o uso do poder? Examinando o Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quixotesco

Por que alguns indivíduos justificam estratégias moralmente flexíveis ao perseguir o bem-estar coletivo? Apresentamos e testamos empiricamente o Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quixotesco (PMQ), definido como uma disposição estável para mobilizar poder, influência e flexibilidade estratégica a serviço de objetivos transcendentais. Por meio de dois estudos, desenvolvemos e refinamos uma medida do PMQ e examinamos sua distinção em relação a dois construtos relacionados: o Maquiavelismo e o Poder Socializado. No Estudo 1, o PMQ prediz de forma única a disposição para se engajar em ações eticamente ambíguas quando estas são enquadradas como promotoras de um bem maior. O Estudo 2 situa o PMQ em modelos de personalidade mais amplos, mostrando que ele combina traços instrumentais (p. ex., baixa Honestidade-Humildade, associações moderadas com a Tétrade Sombria) com abertura e orientações valorativas voltadas ao benefício coletivo. Importante destacar que o PMQ prediz a preferência por meios eticamente flexíveis somente quando estes visam aumentar o bem-estar geral, particularmente entre indivíduos em posições de influência. Esses achados sugerem que a flexibilidade moral pode refletir um realismo adaptativo, e não corrupção, quando alinhada a objetivos de autotranscendência.

Palavras-chave: Perfil de Maquiavelismo Quixotesco, formalidade, poder, tríade sombria

In November 1519, despite commanding an army that vastly outnumbered the Spaniards, the emperor Moctezuma II received Hernán Cortés in Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire. Cortés did not enter this realm through force but through persuasion. He allowed the belief to grow that he was a potential emissary of gods, foretold in prophecy.

Let's assume that Cortés sincerely believed his mission to be transcendental, then this historical vignette illustrates the interplay between persuasion, power, and purpose that lies at the core of the concept of Quixotic Machiavellianism. Specifically, we claim that both situational and personal factors may lead individuals to be willing to deploy influence and expediency in the service of collective or transcendent goals.

Theoretical background

Understanding why people sometimes justify morally flexible means for benevolent ends requires bridging two classic perspectives: value theory and moral motivation. According to Schwartz (1992, 2012), human values are organized in a two-dimensional structure comprising two bipolar axes: self-enhancement (power, achievement) vs. self-transcendence (benevolence, universalism), and openness to change (self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism) vs. conservation (security, conformity and tradition). From a motivational perspective, Batson (1994, 2011) identified four broad prosocial motives—egoism, altruism, collectivism, and principism—each defined by its ultimate goal. Building on this model, Oceja and colleagues (2018, 2019) proposed a fifth motive, Quixoteism, characterized by the pursuit of transcendental change: engaging in challenges (instrumental goal) to improve the welfare of the world (ultimate goal). On the other hand, Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970; Dahling et al., 2009) refers

to the disposition to use manipulation, persuasion, and strategic reasoning to advance personal interests.

Integrating these perspectives, the label of Quixotic Machiavellianism refers to the readiness to use personal power (i.e., persuasion and status) in order to pursue self-transcendent ends. Previous research on the Quixotic Machiavellianism Mindset (Oceja, Bukva, & Stocks, 2026) test whether situational cues can elicit this combination: participants became more willing to act manipulatively when such behavior was framed as serving a global good. The present work advances this framework by examining the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP) as a stable motivational disposition rather than a temporary mindset.

From mindset to profile

Whereas the QM mindset captures a temporary cognitive frame elicited by contextual cues, the QM profile represents a more stable pattern of beliefs that integrates self-enhancing means with self-transcendent goals. Conceptually, the QMP is related to but different from three constructs: Socialized Power (Wang & Xunwei, 2016), which also involves using influence for others' benefit but lacks the pragmatic flexibility; Machiavellianism, which entails manipulative strategy without a prosocial purpose; and Pragmatism, which emphasizes effectiveness and expediency yet remains morally neutral. Therefore, high QMP individuals do not see power and morality as rivals but as complementary tools for achieving collective welfare. In the present research, we aim to capture this orientation empirically by first developing a reliable measure to assess it, and then by situating it within broader personality and value frameworks. In applied terms, QMP may thus contribute to the understanding of ethical leadership, social entrepreneurship, and value-driven management, providing a lens through which moral flexibility can be viewed not as corruption, but as adaptive realism in the service of higher goals.

Overview of the present studies

Across two studies, we examined the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP) as both a measurable construct and a distinctive motivational orientation. In Study 1, we developed and validated a measure designed to assess QMP, comparing it with Machiavellianism and Socialized Power, and testing its potential to predict morally flexible decisions aimed at promoting the greater good. In Study 2, we refine this measure and test it within broader frameworks of personality (HEXACO; Lee & Ashton, 2004; García et al., 2022), socially aversive traits (Dark Tetrad; Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013; Ortet-Walker et al., 2024), value orientations, and moral decision-making.

Study 1

This study provides a first test of an instrument designed to measure the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP), while comparing it with measures of two related constructs: Machiavellianism and Socialized Power. Second, we examined whether the QMP was differentially associated with the tendency to endorse Machiavellian decisions made in the service of the greater good. Our aim was to shed light on the nuanced relationship between values, decision-making, and the ethical considerations inherent in the pursuit of a collective benefit. In this vein, we sought both a theoretical understanding of the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile and a practical tool for measuring it.

Method

Participants

A total of 449 participants completed this study online using Qualtrics software between November 26th to December 14th, 2022.

The sample included 209 psychology undergraduates (89% women) and 239 employed citizens (58% women) at the time of data collection.

Procedure

Through Qualtrics, participants first read and signed the informed consent form and then were invited to complete a survey divided into several blocks, within which the order of the items was randomized. First, all the participants completed a 30-item questionnaire comprising three sections measuring Machiavellianism (6 items), Socialized Power (6 items), and QMP (18 items). Additionally, the 239 participants with professional experience completed Job Performance, an 11-item self-report measure reflecting employees' effectiveness in accomplishing achievement objectives and contributing to the organizational environment (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000, O'Boyle et al., 2011); whereas the subsample without professional experience (209 university students) completed four dilemmas designed to assess their willingness to adopt a manipulative strategy to safeguard a greater good. Specifically, participants first read a short introduction explaining that they would face a dilemma and that, although the decision was hypothetical, they should imagine it as realistically and seriously as possible when reporting their choice. The dilemmas described different scenarios (hiring, auditing, reviewing research, or overseeing finances) selected to represent distinct institutional domains while preserving the same core structure: someone in a position of authority must choose whether to take a rule-bending decision in order to promote a collective or humanitarian outcome. In each case, participants indicated on a 7-point scale the extent to which they were willing to take such a morally ambiguous action. To reduce the immediate consistency effects and demand characteristics that might arise from responding to the four scenarios in direct succession, two dilemmas ("hiring for an NGO" and "auditing for an environmental agency") were presented before participants completed the questionnaire, and two ("reviewing a clinical study" and "auditing an animal shelter") immediately after its completion. The full

text of the dilemmas can be requested from the first author. Thus, the survey followed a fixed block order (two dilemmas, questionnaire, two dilemmas), although item order within each measure was randomized.

Hypotheses

For the full sample, we hypothesized that QMP would be related to both Machiavellianism and Socialized Power, which in turn would be independent of each other. For the student sample, we hypothesized that the QMP would better predict the willingness to make a dishonest decision for the sake of a greater good. For the employee sample, we expected QMP to be positively associated with Job Performance.

Results

Measures. We created 18 items as a preliminary measure of the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile. These items were divided into two sections: 10 items reflecting beliefs associated with the profile, plus 8 items adapted from Spanish proverbs potentially related to the meaning of this profile. First, we conducted Cronbach's alpha analysis of the 10 core belief items. The analysis yielded low reliability ($\alpha = .40$), which moderately increased after excluding four items ($\alpha = .52$). We then included two proverb items most strongly correlated with the 6-item set, resulting in an 8-item measure with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .61$). A parallel analysis supported that these 8 items reflect a single underlying dimension, indicating one-factor solution that explained 35.72% of the variance and exceeded the 95th percentile of the eigenvalues obtained from random data (32.03); KMO = .70 and Bartlett test, $\chi^2(28) = 351.40, p < .001$.

Regarding Machiavellianism and Socialized Power, Cronbach's alpha showed that the reliability of the former increased when two items were removed (α from .52 to .60), whereas the latter obtained adequate reliability in its original 6-item composition ($\alpha = .69$). As expected, in both students and employees, QMP was related to both Machiavellianism [$r_s(447) = .39$ and $.45, ps < .001$] and Socialized

Power [$r_s(447) = .13$ and $.14$, $p_s < .01$], which, in turn, were independent of each other [$r_s(447) = -.09$ and $-.06$, $p_s < .001$]. The items of these three scales are presented in the Annex; the remaining items are available from the first author upon request.

Predicting the response to the dilemmas. As shown in Table 1, participants were more willing to endorse morally flexible actions in the two dilemmas that involved clear humanitarian outcomes (the clinical study and the animal shelter). More importantly, and as expected, only QMP showed a consistent association with responses to the four dilemmas. Indeed, regression analysis showed that the composite variable aggregating participants' responses to the four dilemmas ($\alpha = .64$) was predicted by QMP ($\beta = .299$), [$R^2 = .082$, $F(3, 204) = 7.20$, $p < .001$], but not by Socialized Power ($\beta = -.019$) or Machiavellianism ($\beta = .029$).

Table 1

Descriptives and correlations among QMP, Socialized Power and Machiavellianism, and the dilemma choices in Study 1

	NGO	Environment Agency	Clinical study	Animal shelter	Mean	SD
QMP	.234**	.304**	.184*	.133+	4.01	0.84
S. Pow.	-.008	.042	-.012	.022	5.24	0.89
Mach.	.076	.206*	.038	.085	4.09	1.24
Mean	3.92	2.77	5.63	4.89		
SD	1.70	1.70	1.47	1.56		

Note. For the seven measures: 1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely. $p = .05+$, $p_s < .01^*$, $.001^{**}$. Applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple correlations, the significance threshold was $p < .004$ ($.05/12$). QMP = Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile, S. Pow. = Socialized Power, Mach. = Machiavellianism.

Relations with Performance. Employees completed a second questionnaire including the Job Performance measure. Exploratory factor analysis (unweighted extraction, oblimin rotation) revealed two dimensions (3 items each): task-performance (i.e., achievement

of objectives, $\alpha = .80$) and contextual-performance (i.e., contribution to the organizational environment, $\alpha = .74$). Overall, Socialized Power was positively related to both dimensions [$r_s(237) = .25$ and $.31$, respectively, $ps < .001$], and Machiavellianism negatively to contextual-performance, $r = -.19$, $p < .01$. Regarding QMP, though overall it was unrelated to task and contextual performance [$r_s(237) = .03$ and $-.08$, respectively]; interestingly, it was related to task-performance among directors [$r(30) = .36$, $p < .05$], but not among managers [$r(24) = -.02$] or employees [$r(170) = .01$].

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided initial empirical support for the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP) as a distinctive orientation that combines pragmatic means with transcendental goals. Conceptually, QMP shares with Machiavellianism the willingness to use manipulative strategies, and with Socialized Power the pursuit of a higher collective good. This interpretation was supported by the positive associations between the respective measures.

Regarding predictive value, QMP predicted students' endorsement of morally ambiguous tactics when these were framed as serving a greater good. Importantly, this pattern was not observed for Machiavellianism, which emphasizes self-serving ends, nor for Socialized Power, which lacks an explicit link to rule-bending strategies. In a professional setting, QMP was positively related to perceived personal achievement of the objectives (task-performance) only among those with larger responsibility and autonomy for strategic discretion (i.e., directors).

Taken together, these findings support the relevance of QMP but also raise important questions for further development. The current measure shows limited internal consistency and therefore requires substantive content refinement. In addition, it should be replicated in a larger sample, and its convergent validity should be examined using both broad personality and more specific trait measures conceptually aligned with its content. We conducted Study 2 to address these limitations.

Study 2

We designed Study 2 to address the limitations of the previous study and to broaden the analysis of the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP). Our first goal was to refine its measurement. Second, we examined the place of this profile within a wider personality framework. Therefore, we included two complementary models: the HEXACO, which captures personality traits such as Honesty–Humility and Conscientiousness, and the Dark Tetrad, which focuses on socially aversive traits (e.g., Narcissism and Psychopathy). The goal of this examination is to test whether and how the QMP is related to, yet distinct from, these tendencies. Finally, to examine its moral and motivational implications, we included value-based profiles and a dilemma contrasting the preference of manipulative versus transparent means in the pursuit of either personal or transcendental goals.

Method

Participants

The sample includes 680 participants (379 females, 301 males, between 16 and 82 years old) and was divided into 168 university students and 512 professionals at different levels of managerial positions. The study was conducted from October 6th to November 21st, 2023 by administering a physical document that included our questionnaire among other instruments. All the participants included in the study were previously informed and signed the corresponding consent form.

Measurements

The first questionnaire included four measures. First, the 4-item Machiavellianism and 6-item Socialized Power, already used in Study 1, assessed a disposition toward manipulative interpersonal strategies for self-serving purposes ($\alpha = .70$), and the belief that power

should be used to benefit others or protect collective welfare ($\alpha = .67$) respectively. Second, a new 8-item Pragmatism measure that included adapted Spanish proverbs used in Study 1 to capture a mindset oriented toward practical action and effective outcomes rather than cautious deliberation ($\alpha = .67$). Finally, the main purpose of this study was to refine the operationalization of the Quixotic Machiavellianism construct tested in Study 1. Whereas the original measure combined items tapping general beliefs about the legitimacy of using unconventional means for a greater good with proverb-based formulations reflecting a pragmatic outlook, in the present study we developed a more focused measure aimed at capturing the agentic component of the profile. Specifically, we created 8 items to assess the willingness to mobilize personal resources (i.e., persuasion, success, abilities, or social status) to promote a greater good. These 8 items ($\alpha = .77$) are presented in the Annex.

Personality measures. The two questionnaires regarding this aspect were based on the HEXACO model and the Dark Tetrad. The HEXACO comprises six broad dimensions: Honesty–Humility, reflecting sincerity, fairness, and modesty; Emotionality, capturing sensitivity and emotional attachment; Extraversion, associated with sociability and positive affect; Agreeableness, encompassing tolerance, forgiveness, and patience; Conscientiousness, referring to organization, diligence, and self-discipline; and Openness to Experience, which reflects intellectual curiosity, creativity, and aesthetic appreciation. Each of these dimensions was measured through 10 items.

The Dark Tetrad encompasses four socially aversive yet distinct personality traits: Machiavellianism, reflecting a manipulative and strategic interpersonal style aimed at personal gain; Narcissism, denoting grandiosity, self-importance, and a strong need for admiration; Psychopathy, involving impulsivity, emotional coldness, and a lack of empathy or remorse; and Sadism, capturing the tendency to derive pleasure from inflicting or observing others' suffering. Each of these dimensions was measured through 7 items.

Values Personal Profiles. Based on Schwartz's (2012) Values Model, we created a questionnaire composed of 12 short profiles depicting different value-based orientations (available upon request). Participants rated, on a 6-point measure, how similar each description was to their own personality. For the purposes of the present study, four profiles were of particular interest: one representing the pursuit of a greater good without reference to any specific means (universalism); another reflecting the use of personal status to improve the lives of close others (socialized status); and two additional profiles depicting the pursuit of a greater good through either persuasive influence (QM persuasion) or one's own accomplishments (QM achievement), respectively.

Dilemma. At the end of the survey, participants were presented with a scenario in which a decision-maker had to choose between recommending one of two potential markets for investment: one maximizing economic benefit and the other prioritizing greater social welfare. The recommendation could also be made in two different ways: either by transparently sharing information about both markets or by omitting information about one of them. Participants were then asked to rank five options resulting from the combination of goal (economic vs. social market) and means (more vs. less transparent). The fifth option consisted of sharing information without recommending any market. This design allowed us to assess participants' willingness to pursue a greater good through ethically flexible means.

Procedure

The participants completed a general survey that included a set of instruments to cover different aspects. In this study, we focus on the following: one questionnaire concerning the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile and three related constructs, two questionnaires regarding personality (HEXACO, and Dark Tetrad), one 12-item questionnaire about social values, and one dilemma.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that QM Power would correlate with: (H1) pragmatism and socialized Power due to the instrumental and transcendental orientation, respectively; (H2) Openness to experience and (negatively) Honesty–Humility, reflecting the combination of strategic flexibility to curb restrictions when pursuing a greater good; (H3) Machiavellianism and Narcissism from the dark tetrad, reflecting shared elements of strategic agency and goal-directed self-enhancement; (H4) the two value profiles that emphasize the pursuit of a greater good through personal achievement or persuasion skills; and (H5) in the dilemma, a preference for ethically flexible means when the ultimate goal is to promote a greater good.

Results

Internal structure

Regarding our main measure (QMP), a parallel analysis supported that the 8 items reflect a single underlying dimension, indicating one-factor solution that explained 48.11% of the variance and exceeded the 95th percentile of the eigenvalues obtained from random data (33.00); KMO = .80 and Bartlett test, $\chi^2(28) = 1207, p < .001$. When the other three measures (Socialized Power, Machiavellianism, and Pragmatism) were included, parallel analysis suggested four-factor solution that explained 49.33%, KMO = .83 and Bartlett test, $\chi^2(351) = 4364.3, p < .001$. As shown in the Annex, the pattern matrix obtained from this four-factor EFA (unweighted extraction, oblimin rotation, KMO = .82, Bartlett test, $\chi^2(351) = 4517, p < .001$) revealed a structure consistent with our theoretical proposal.

The pattern of correlations between the four measures was similar to that found in Study 1: QM Power correlated with Socialized Power, Machiavellianism and (now) Pragmatism ($r_s = .396, .314$ and $.431, p_s < .001$); Socialized Power correlated with Pragmatism ($r = .146,$

$p < .001$) but not with Machiavellianism ($r = .066$), and the latter two correlated with each other, $r = .362$, $p < .001$.

We then tested the association of the four variables with the personality measures. As shown in Table 2, QM Power presented a pattern of correlations with the HEXACO dimensions that was coherent with our approach. Similar to Pragmatism and Machiavellianism, QM Power correlated negatively with Honesty–Humility, reflecting a willingness to deviate from strict moral norms when pursuing goals. However, QM Power showed a positive association with Openness to Experience, suggesting greater cognitive flexibility and receptiveness to new ideas. This combination of low humility and high openness may capture the *strategic idealism* that characterizes the Quixotic Machiavellian orientation. By contrast, Socialized Power correlated positively with traits consistent with a genuinely prosocial and cooperative disposition: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

Table 2

Descriptives and correlations of the four variables (1-7 scale) with the HEXACO dimensions (1-5 scale) in Study 2

	Humi.	Emot.	Extr.	Agre.	Cons.	OE	Mean	SD
QM Pow.	-.369**	-.106**	.073	-.099**	-.046	.188**	4.10	0.91
S. Pow.	.110**	.103**	.128**	.168**	.129**	.246**	5.26	0.80
Prag.	-.302**	-.085*	.047	-.101**	-.186**	.019	4.09	0.82
Mach.	-.323**	.033	-.245**	-.250**	-.099**	-.044	4.10	1.16
Mean	3.57	3.40	3.30	3.27	3.76	3.35		
SD	0.67	0.68	0.63	0.59	0.55	0.70		

Note. $ps < .01^*$, $.001^{**}$. Applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple correlations, the significance threshold was $p < .002$ (.05/24). QM Pow. = Quixotic Machiavellianism Power, S. Pow. = Socialized Power, Prag. = Pragmatism, Mach. = Machiavellianism, Humi = Humility, Emot = Emotionality, Extr = Extraversion, Agree = Agreeableness, Cons = Conscientiousness, OE = Openness to Experience

With respect to the Dark Tetrad, QM Power, Pragmatism, and Machiavellianism displayed a consistent pattern of positive and moderate correlations with the four components (Table 3). This suggests that individuals willing to either use personal power to promote a greater good (QM Power) or focus on effectiveness over moral deliberation (Pragmatism) or tend to employ manipulative strategies for self-serving purposes (Machiavellianism) share the instrumental and self-confident tendencies typical of these traits. By contrast, Socialized Power showed no meaningful associations, underscoring its conceptual distance from manipulative or self-serving tendencies.

Table 3
Descriptives and correlations of the four variables with the Dark Tetrad (1-5 scale) in Study 2

	Mach. DT	Narc.	Psyc.	Sadi.
QM Power	.399**	.465**	.324**	.366**
Socialized Power	.054	.140*	.009	.002
Pragmatism	.349**	.317**	.352**	.358**
Machiavellianism	.357**	.194*	.280**	.387**
Mean	3.13	2.55	1.79	1.97
SD	0.59	0.69	0.59	0.72

Note. $ps < .01^*$, $.001^{**}$ Applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple correlations, the significance threshold was $p < .003$ (.05/16). Mach. DT = Machiavellianism Dark Tetrad, Narc. = Narcissism, Psyc. = Psychopathy, Sadi. = Sadism

The pattern of correlations of the four variables with the four value profiles was highly consistent with our theoretical framework. The QM Power measure was not directly associated with the pursuit of a greater good *per se* (universalism), but rather with doing so through using personal persuasion and achievement. In contrast, Socialized Power reflected a genuinely prosocial-driven stance by correlating with the pursuit of improving either others' lives (socialized status) or a greater good (universalism). Conversely, both Pragmatism and

Machiavellianism were negatively related to the pursuit of a greater good and showed (weaker) links with using personal persuasion, highlighting their primarily self-serving and utilitarian nature (Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptives and correlations of the four variables with Valued Personal Profiles (1-6) in Study 2

	Universalism	Socialized Status	QM Persuasion	QM Achievement
QM Power	.010	.090*	.368**	.195**
Socialized Power	.296**	.233**	.043	.106
Pragmatism	-.122**	-.018	.132**	-.008
Machiavellianism	-.065**	-.051	.084*	.020
Mean	4.61	3.63	2.09	3.51
<i>SD</i>	1.13	1.39	1.44	1.51

Note. $p < .01^*$, $.001^{**}$. Applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple correlations, the significance threshold was $p < .003$ (.05/16)

Regarding the dilemma, we hypothesized that QMP would predict a preference for ethically flexible means only when the ultimate goal was to promote a greater good. To test this hypothesis, we focused on the two options referring to the recommendation of the *prosocial market*. Because rankings encode relative preferences among alternatives, they can be transformed into pairwise contrasts between options (Marden, 1995), we therefore created an index by subtracting the rank assigned to the *manipulative* option (i.e., direct recommendation while omitting information) from that assigned to the *transparent* option (i.e., sharing all the information). Positive scores therefore indicated a greater preference for the manipulative over the transparent option. Accordingly, we expected QM Power to be positively associated with this index.

To examine this hypothesis, we divided the sample according to company size (large, medium, and small) and managerial level (executives, managers, workers, and students). The results showed that for the

executives working in large companies, higher QM Power was associated with a stronger preference for the manipulative option, $r(32) = .364$, $p < .05$. This association was not found among managers, workers, or students [$r_s < .173$, $p_s > .07$], nor was it for Socialized Power, Machiavellianism and Pragmatism [$r_s < .269$, $p_s > .12$].

Discussion

Overall, the results supported the refined measurement of Quixotic Machiavellianism Power tested in this study. First, parallel, factorial, and correlational analyses showed that QMP captures a single motivational disposition that blends influence-oriented means with a transcendental orientation, being related to but distinct from Socialized Power, Machiavellianism and Pragmatism.

Second, when embedding within broader personality frameworks, QM Power showed the combination of instrumental flexibility (low Honesty–Humility) and consideration of wider and novel perspectives (high Openness), pointing to a form of “strategic idealism.” In addition, the moderate correlations with the Dark Tetrad revealed that, unlike Socialized Power, QM Power reflects the possible coexistence of pragmatic agency and transcendental goals.

In the same vein, the relationships with the value-based profiles revealed that QM Power is not linked either to the pursuit of a greater good per se (as Socialized Power) or to a purely self-serving instrumental orientation (as Machiavellianism and Pragmatism), but rather to the use of the latter in the service of the former, confirming its distinctive blend of self-enhancement and self-transcendence.

Finally, the results regarding the dilemma showed the association between QM Power and preference for ethically flexible means in a context where influence and moral trade-offs are expected to be more salient: among executives in large organizations. The other measures did not show this pattern.

General Discussion

In this research, we proposed that individuals vary in their willingness to strategically employ influence or moral flexibility in the pursuit of collective benefit and sought to develop and test a measure of that disposition. The findings of two studies converge in supporting this paradoxical yet coherent pragmatic idealism that we term the Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile (QMP).

The results of Study 1 provided the first empirical validation of the QMP as a measurable construct. Despite moderate reliability, the measure showed a consistent pattern across two samples. Specifically, QMP correlated positively with both Machiavellianism and Socialized Power while these two constructs remained unrelated to each other. In the university context, the QMP measure predicted participants' willingness to employ morally flexible strategies when these served a greater good. In professional contexts, QMP was positively associated with perceived achievement of work objectives (task performance) among the directors of a company, suggesting a potential link between organizational behavior and the pragmatic use of influence in the pursuit of collective goals.

In Study 2, we refined this measurement by better specifying the meaning of QMP through the QM Power measure and testing it alongside three conceptually related constructs: Socialized Power, Machiavellianism, and Pragmatism. When embedded within broader personality and value frameworks, QM Power displayed the expected combination of instrumental flexibility (low Honesty–Humility) and cognitive openness (high Openness to Experience), consistent with a form of strategic idealism. Unlike Socialized Power, QM Power also showed moderate positive associations with the Dark Tetrad, suggesting that an orientation toward influence and moral risk-taking can coexist with prosocial purpose.

The results of the moral dilemma further reinforced this interpretation. Among the executives in large organizations, a group for whom issues of influence and moral trade-offs may be particularly salient, those high in QM Power preferred ethically flexible means when pursuing a prosocial goal.

Theoretical and Applied implications

QMP challenges conventional dichotomies in value theory and moral psychology. According to Schwartz's model (1992, 2012), self-enhancement and self-transcendence values are typically placed at opposite poles of the motivational continuum. The QMP demonstrates that these values can, under certain conditions, act in concert rather than conflict. In this sense, the QMP expands the notion of Quixoteism (Oceja et al., 2019) by incorporating a pragmatic dimension: whereas Quixoteism emphasizes challenge as the instrumental goal, QMP emphasizes the use of one's own persuasion skill, achievement or status.

From an applied perspective, QMP connects motivational and moral psychology to organizational behavior. Like Machiavellianism and other Dark Tetrad traits, it might involve political sensitivity, strategic competence, and tolerance for ambiguity; however, unlike those variables, it is not inherently exploitative or ego-driven. Instead, it might channel these capacities toward prosocial ends, offering a new approach for understanding ethical leadership, social entrepreneurship, and organizational influence.

Limitations and Future directions

First, though internal structure, convergent and discriminant validity improved across studies, the psychometric refinement and cross-cultural validation remain ongoing process. Second, the reliance on self-report measures and scenario-based designs raises the possibility of common method bias and consistency effects. Though the relationships examined were not obvious and the measures were embedded in long questionnaires, future research would benefit from multi-source or behavioral indicators, alongside experimental or longitudinal approaches. Third, cultural and contextual moderators warrant systematic exploration. The balance between pragmatic and idealistic motivations may vary across societies differing in moral norms, power distance, or institutional trust.

Further work should also clarify the boundaries of moral flexibility. At what point does strategic idealism become self-serving rationalization? Investigating emotional and cognitive mediators, such as moral justification, empathic concern, or awe-related transcendence, could illuminate how individuals navigate this tension. Finally, exploring QMP in organizational and leadership domains may offer practical insights for promoting a transcendental use power.

Conclusion

Across these studies, those with a high Quixotic Machiavellianism Profile may be portrayed as individuals who, like Cervantes' knight armed with Machiavelli's realism, strive to improve the world not through purity, but through purposeful strategy. By showing that instrumental power can serve a greater good, this research invites a reconsideration morality as a dynamic equilibrium between idealism and influence, rather than as a rigid opposition between virtue and expediency. In other words, this research might be labelled as an attempt to examine the possible bright side of Machiavellianism.

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Annex

Table 1

Items of the scales analyzed in Study 1

Machiavellianism	Socialized Power	QMP
It is possible to be good in all respects. (reversed)	In my opinion, I would take others' well-being into consideration at first if I owned power.	Being in a position of power is the most efficient way to achieve a greater good. (B)
Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.	The meaning of power is to make more people's life better.	I enjoy standing out and being admired for having achieved great things. (B)
It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.	To me, owning power means taking the responsibility of the society.	If it's for the greater good, it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission. (B)
It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.	I would try to make a better world when I had power.	It is good to achieve a high social status if it can be used to promote the common good. (B)
Not included in the final measure:	I want to control the resources to help others.	Almost anything goes if the goal is to improve the world. (B)
Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.	I often dream to have power to contribute to the society.	Manipulation (of information or of people) is sometimes necessary to protect the common good. (B)
Most people are basically good and kind.		Out of sight, out of mind. (P)
		It's okay to take justice into your own hands. (P)

Note. In QMP: Beliefs (B) and proverbs (P).

Table 2

Pattern matrix from the exploratory factor analysis (EFA): four-factor (all items) and one-factor (QMP items), using unweighted extraction and oblimin rotation EFA

	F1	F2	F3	F4	One factor
QM23_Persuasion_welfare_QMP	.671	.000	.024	-.033	.654
QM25_Achievement_welfare_QMP	.406	.332	-.116	.077	.415
QM34_Doing_Whatever_World_QMP	.321	-.205	.106	.288	.409
QM35_Persuasion_others_QMP	.688	.024	-.111	.087	.682
QM41_AchievementEfficiency_welfare_QMP	.394	-.063	.227	-.012	.472
QM40_Manipulative_world_QMP	.449	-.261	.239	.097	.517
QM45_Influencing_others_welfare_QMP	.652	.050	-.041	-.033	.651
QM47_Highstatus_generalgood_QMP	.429	.216	.205	-.058	.535
QM5_Power_otherswelfare_first_SP	.089	.524	-.095	.042	
QM7_Power_improve_otherslife_SP	.026	.705	.096	-.020	
QM14_Power_betterworld_SP	.110	.642	.074	.063	
QM16_Power_social_responsibility_SP	.024	.598	.055	.049	
QM22_Control_helping_others_SP	.392	.228	.057	.044	
QM30_Powerdream_society_SP	.420	.090	-.060	.104	
QM3_No_trust_Mach	-.014	.079	.640	-.063	
QM19_Malicious_Mach	.063	-.010	.610	-.011	
QM21_Success_shortcut_Mach	.125	.005	.521	-.051	
QM39_Being_good_ruinyourself_Mach	-.055	-.011	.599	.023	
QM33_Take_a_leap_PRAG	.074	.055	-.157	.600	
QM36_Not look back_PRAG	-.077	.049	.064	.633	
QM37_Better_be_daring_PRAG	.044	-.012	-.104	.641	
QM46_Fight_battles_PRAG	.158	-.141	.281	.151	
QM50_Out_of_sight_PRAG	-.107	-.028	.315	.258	
QM52_Better_be_bold_PRAG	.117	-.041	.093	.399	
QM53_Take_justice_own_hands_PRAG	.285	-.355	.193	.159	
QM48_No_bread hard_PRAG	-.057	.139	.237	.282	