

The Impact of the Leader's Light Triad Personality Traits on Innovative Work Behavior: The Mediating Role of Employees' Creative Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the clear triple role of the leader's personality on innovative work behavior with the mediating role of creative self-efficacy of employees. The research method is correlation with the approach of the Structural equation model. The statistical population of this study included the employees of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, an estimated number of 500 people, of whom 210 people were selected as a sample using the simple random sampling method and the Krejci and Morgan volume determination table. To collect information, the Jonasson and Webster's Clear Triple Role Questionnaire (2010), the Lee's Standard Creative Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (2008), and the Mismam and Mulder's Innovative Work Behavior Questionnaire (2012) were used. Content validity was used to determine validity, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability. The data were analyzed using SPSS software and LISREL software. The research findings showed that the clear leader personality triad had a direct effect on creative self-efficacy with a coefficient of 0.84, the clear leader personality triad had a direct effect on innovative work behaviors with a coefficient of 0.96, and the creative self-efficacy of employees had a significant effect on innovative work behavior with a coefficient of 0.95. Also, the clear leader personality triad had a direct and indirect effect of 0.89 on the creative self-efficacy of employees.

Introduction

During the past decades, studies in personality psychology have predominantly focused on investigating personality traits and the darker aspects of leadership character, conceptualized under traits such as psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism, collectively known as the "Dark Triad" (Ebrahimi, 2020). A psychopathic personality exhibits antisocial characteristics, including physical aggression and a lack of empathy; a Machiavellian personality reflects an individual's inclination toward cunning, manipulation, and exploiting any means necessary to achieve desired goals. Furthermore, a narcissistic personality characterizes individuals who are self-centered and constantly seek the admiration of others (Overton, 2022). However, the growing body of research on the malevolent and reprehensible tendencies of individuals increasingly highlights the gap in examining more positive and beneficial traits, indicating that less emphasis has been placed on the positive aspects and behaviors of human personality (Kaufman et al., 2019).



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This general tendency to overlook the positive attributes of human personality has been rectified in recent years, as there has been a growing shift in the field toward exploring positive personality psychology. In the context of educational management, positive personalities are described as possessing positive intuition and positive emotional experiences (as cited in [Cesinger et al., 2022](#)).

In this regard, researchers have analyzed various personality traits that were previously somewhat neglected empirically, including intrinsic personality motivations, curiosity, emotional intelligence, gratitude, love, and forgiveness. Accordingly, [Kaufman et al. \(2019\)](#) conceptualized the term "Light Triad" to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the personality of leaders and managers.

The Light Triad concept is a construct that encompasses the benevolent personality traits of leaders, including "Humanism", "Faith in Humanity", and "Kantianism". Examining personalities categorized under humanism requires recognizing the inherent worth of each individual; for instance, someone who consistently appreciates the successes of those around them is considered to possess high levels of humanism.

In the second category, faith in humanity, there is a fundamental belief that humans are inherently good; for example, an individual who quickly forgives those who have wronged them is viewed as having high faith in humanity. The third category of leadership personality, Kantianism, involves refraining from treating others merely as a means to an end ([Overton, 2022](#)). Consequently, the role of the leaders' Light Triad personality in their performance can be investigated.

Research findings have demonstrated that improving employee performance in organizations can be achieved through effective human resource leadership. By investing in their human resources, organizations can increase their performance in various areas, especially in innovation, because innovative and creative employees are the main factors and drivers of organizational innovation. In this context, innovation is fostered by employees who exhibit innovative work behavior - a behavior characterized by three dimensions: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation (Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2019., Shiri et al., 2016; Raquel & Jiménez, 2018). This behavior has a multidimensional structure that refers to behaviors that contribute to the innovation process in organizations (Reyhani Shukkatabad et al., 2022., Jahangir et al., 2023).

On the other hand, research has shown that creative self-efficacy is a factor capable of influencing the relationship between organizational innovation and employee creativity. Creative self-efficacy is defined as the degree of an individual's belief in their own ability to produce creative outcomes ([Akradlou et al., 2021](#)). Self-efficacy represents employees' judgments of their capabilities to attain specific goals and anticipates their self-adequacy regarding effort, persistence, and job task execution, thereby providing the foundation for formulating the necessary strategies to achieve those goals. In fact, creative self-efficacy is the extent to which an individual believes in their capacity for creative production ([Mousavi & Koulak, 2022](#)).

In organizations and educational centers, particularly administrative-educational environments within higher education institutions, creativity and innovation often fail to materialize in their early stages due to various reasons, such as insufficient resource allocation, lack of adequate time to bring ideas to fruition, and the absence of appropriate management to cultivate creativity and innovation.

Consequently, these types of organizations may encounter greater survival challenges compared to other businesses. Enhancing employees' innovative work behavior and creative self-efficacy requires establishing mutual trust, nurturing employee identity, and instilling a sense of creative self-efficacy. This induces employees to view creativity and innovation as an integral part of their organizational duties and to continuously engage in innovative endeavors with the ongoing support of their managers ([Reyhani Shukkatabad et al., 2022](#)). Through this mechanism, universities and higher education centers can overcome existing obstacles, manage crises, and elevate their organizational standing among competitors.

Furthermore, a review of domestic literature indicates that, to date, no research has been conducted in institutions such as Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences to investigate the impact of the leader's Light Triad personality traits on innovative work behavior through the mediating role of university employees' creative self-efficacy. Therefore, the present study aims to explore whether university managers, by leveraging the leader's Light Triad personality traits, can influence the innovative work behavior and creative self-efficacy of their employees, an endeavor that necessitates applied research

in this domain. In the following section, the relevant domestic and international literature related to this study is reviewed.

[Mousavi and Koulak \(2022\)](#) conducted a study investigating the impact of employees' creative self-efficacy on innovative behavior, considering the mediating role of organizational entrepreneurship. Their findings revealed that employees' creative self-efficacy did not significantly affect the innovative behavior of education department employees in Mohr county. However, creative self-efficacy did significantly influence the organizational entrepreneurship of these employees. Furthermore, organizational entrepreneurship exerted a significant impact on their innovative behavior.

[Ebrahimi \(2020\)](#) analyzed the leader's Light Triad personality traits and their impact on followers' perceived organizational support, incorporating the moderating role of leader-member exchange (LMX). The results indicated that the leader's Kantianism and humanism had a significant effect on employees' perceived organizational support; however, the significant impact of the leader's faith in humanity on perceived organizational support was rejected. The moderating role of leader-member exchange in the relationship between the leader's Kantianism and humanism with perceived organizational support was confirmed, but this moderating variable was not significant in the relationship between the leader's faith in humanity and employees' perceived organizational support.

[Jalali and Heidarifar \(2019\)](#) examined the effects of employees' creative self-efficacy on innovative behavior, incorporating the role of entrepreneurial leadership. Their findings demonstrated that contemporary leaders can stimulate their followers' creativity. For instance, by enhancing employee self-efficacy through increased participation in decision-making, providing feedback, and fostering employees' psychological capital (such as self-confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience), organizational goals can be successfully achieved.

In international literature, [Cesinger et al. \(2022\)](#) investigated the consequences of senior executives' Dark Triad personality traits (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) on their organizational commitment. In this applied descriptive study, data were collected from 394 French senior executives and analyzed using correlation tests. The results showed that leaders' narcissism positively influences their continuance and normative commitment.

[Fodor et al. \(2021\)](#) explored the mediating role of leader-member exchange (LMX) and collective narcissism in the relationship between supervisors' Dark Triad traits (SDT) and team innovation as reported by both supervisors and team members. The findings indicated that leader-member exchange mediates the relationship between supervisors' Dark Triad traits (SDT) and team innovation by supervisors and team members. Additionally, it was established that supervisors' Dark Triad traits are positively related to team innovation by both supervisors and team members.

[Andreas et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the impact of Dark Triad leadership and Level 5 leadership on employees' innovative work behavior. Furthermore, they investigated whether the Dark Triad personality—comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—influences the likelihood of demonstrating Level 5 leadership. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that humility, even more than both Level 5 virtues (humility and professional will), effectively enhances employees' innovative work behavior. Although the impact of dark personality traits on Level 5 leadership presented a mixed picture, evidence suggested that narcissistic tendencies and humble behavior can co-exist.

Based on the theoretical foundations and literature review, the conceptual model of the research is presented in Figure 1.

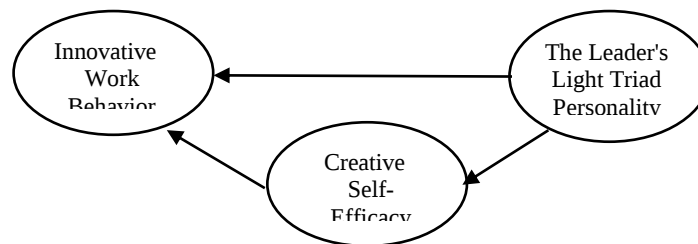


Figure 1. The Conceptual Model of the Research

Method

The present study is applied in terms of its objective, and descriptive-correlational in terms of its strategy, utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The target population of this research consists of all personnel at Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences who are employed in various vice-presidencies (including Education, Research and Technology, Administration and Support, Health and Treatment, Student Affairs, and Cultural Affairs) or within the faculties of this university. At the time of this study, the total population was estimated to be approximately 500 individuals. Utilizing sample size determination formulas, the sample size was established at 210 participants.

Data Collection Method and Measurement Tools

Data collection for this study involved both library and field research methods. The library method was employed to review the literature and background of the study, while the field method, utilizing questionnaires, was used to gather primary data from the participants. The data collection instruments used in this study are as follows:

1. **Jonason and Webster's (2010) Light Triad Personality Traits Questionnaire:** This scale measures the three clear characteristics of the leader's personality in the organization based on 12 items and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The first draft of the measure of interest and benevolent orientation towards others was designed by Kaufman et al. (2019). It consists of three subscales: Kantianism (4 items: 12, 11, 10, 9), humanity (4 items: 8, 7, 6, 5), and faith in humanity (4 items: 1, 2, 3, 4). The internal reliability coefficients observed for these subscales, faith in humanity, humanity, and Kantianism, were 0.82, 0.79, and 0.72, respectively, and the internal coefficient for this scale as a whole was estimated to be 0.84 (Kaufman et al., 2019). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate reliability. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Kantianism component was 0.71, humanity 0.79, and faith in humanity 0.69, indicating that this questionnaire can be used in Iranian society. Content validity was used to assess validity. This tool was presented to subject-specific professors at Arvand University of Abadan, and content validity was confirmed.
2. **Lee's (2008) Standard Creative Self-Efficacy Questionnaire:** To measure employees' creative self-efficacy, the Creative Self-Efficacy Scale (2008) is used, which has 8 items and is designed with a five-point Likert scale. The validity and reliability of this scale have been evaluated and confirmed in numerous domestic studies. Cheng, Shiu, and Chang (2012) used Cronbach's alpha method to determine the validity of the scale and reported the reliability of

the instrument as 0.92. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate reliability, which was 0.85, indicating very good reliability. Content validity was used to measure validity. This tool was presented to expert professors at Arvand University of Abadan and content validity was confirmed.

3. **Messmann and Mulder's (2012) Innovative Work Behavior Questionnaire:** The innovative behavior questionnaire of Misman and Mulder (2012) consists of 30 questions that measure employees' innovative work behavior and is scored on a five-point Likert scale. This tool has 5 dimensions: opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea promotion, idea realization, and idea sustainability. The reliability of this questionnaire has been confirmed by various studies. For example, the study by Mofaq et al. (2014) reported the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire as 0.78 and confirmed its validity with exploratory factor analysis. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the opportunity exploration component was 0.69, idea generation was 0.73, idea promotion was 0.88, idea realization was 0.76, and idea sustainability was 0.80, indicating acceptable validity. Content validity was used to measure validity. This tool was presented to subject-specific professors at Arvand University of Abadan, and its content validity was confirmed.

To ensure the validity of the instruments in this study, content validity was employed (where the questionnaires were reviewed and approved by expert professors in the field). To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all three questionnaires were found to be above 0.70. Consequently, the validity and reliability of the instruments utilized in this research are deemed acceptable.

For data analysis, both descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, etc.) and inferential statistics (Structural Equation Modeling) were applied using SPSS and LISREL software.

Findings

The tested conceptual models of the research are presented in Figures 2 and 3. To evaluate and test the structural and measurement models, LISREL software was utilized.

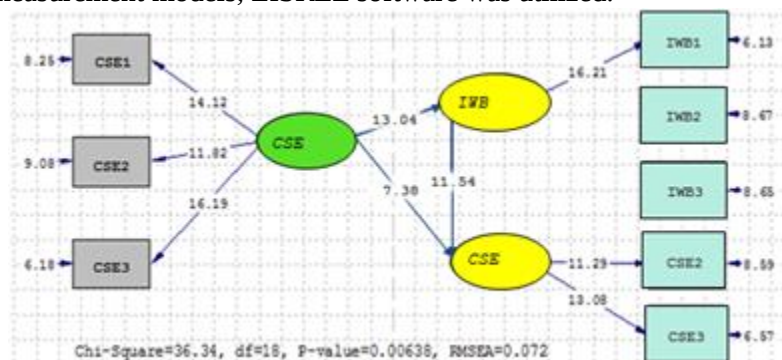


Figure 2. The structural model of the research in the state of significant coefficients

Figure 2 illustrates the t-values for the structural paths. All paths yielded t-values exceeding the critical threshold of ± 1.96 , indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, the structural model demonstrated a robust fit, as evidenced by the calculated p-value ($p < 0.01$)."

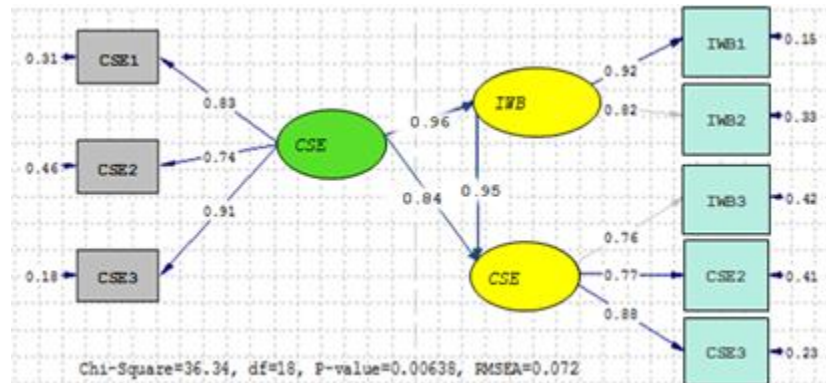


Figure 3. The structural model of the research in the state of standard effect coefficients (standardized estimates).

Goodness-of-Fit of the Tested Research Model

To evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the structural model, several fit indices were utilized. The following table displays the most critical fit indices. The results presented in the table indicate that the conceptual model of the research exhibits an acceptable and appropriate status in terms of explanation and goodness-of-fit.

The goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model of the research are presented in Table 1.

Table – 1: Goodness-of-fit indices for the research model

Optimum	Fit limit	Optimum	Fit Indices
Very Good	1 to 3	2	χ^2/df
Very Good	Close to zero	0.011	RMR
Very Good	More than 0.9	0.98	NFI
Very Good	More than 0.9	0.99	NNFI
Very Good	More than 0.9	0.99	CFI
Very Good	More than 0.9	0.98	RFI
Very Good	More than 0.9	0.99	IFI
Good	Less than 0.08	0.072	RMSEA

The results of the goodness-of-fit indices for the structural model presented in Table 1 indicate an appropriate fit and high adequacy of the research model.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Testing

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to analyze the research questions. To examine the main hypothesis of the study—namely, the impact of the leader's Light Triad personality traits on innovative work behavior through the mediating role of university employees' creative self-efficacy—the structural model of the research was evaluated. Specifically, the indirect effect method was employed to assess the role and impact of the independent variable on the target factor(s) through the mediator.

Table – 2: Evaluation of direct effects

Variable	Innovative Work Behaviors	Creative Self- Efficacy
	Direct Effect	Direct Effect
The Leader's Light Triad Personality Traits	0.96	0.84

Table – 3: Standardized Indirect Effects between Research Variables

Variable	Innovative work behaviors Indirect effect
The Leader's Light Triad Personality Traits	0.98

As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, the leader's Light Triad personality traits exert a direct effect of 0.84 on employees' creative self-efficacy, as well as an indirect effect of 0.89 on employees' creative self-efficacy.

Sub-Hypothesis 1: The leader's Light Triad personality traits have a significant impact on the innovative work behavior of the employees at Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences.

Table – 4: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results for the First Sub-Hypothesis

Indicators and test results			
The path between the Light triad of leader personality and innovative work behavior of employees	Impact factor	T-VALUE	test result
	0.96	13.04	Reject H0

As observed in Table 4 and demonstrated by the structural equation modeling (SEM) results, the significance coefficient (t-value) for the path between the leader's Light Triad personality traits and employees' innovative work behavior is highly significant (13.04). Furthermore, the path coefficient indicates that the leader's Light Triad personality traits exert a significant impact on employees' innovative work behavior, with an effect size of 0.96.

Sub-Hypothesis 2 : The leader's Light Triad personality traits have a significant impact on the creative self-efficacy of the employees at Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences.

Table – 5: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results for the Second Sub-Hypothesis

Indicators and test results			
The path between the Light triad of leader personality and employees' creative self- efficacy	Impact factor	T-VALUE	Test Result
	0.84	7.38	Reject H0

As observed in Table 5 and demonstrated by the structural equation modeling (SEM) results, the significance coefficient (t-value) for the path from the leader's Light Triad personality traits to employees' creative self-efficacy is highly significant (7.38). Furthermore, the path coefficient indicates that the leader's Light Triad personality traits exert a significant impact on employees' creative self-efficacy, with an effect size of 0.84.

Sub-Hypothesis 3: Employees' creative self-efficacy has a significant impact on the innovative work behavior of the staff at Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences.

Table – 6: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results for the Third Sub-Hypothesis

Indicators and test results			
Creative self-efficacy and innovative work behavior of employees	Impact factor	T-VALUE	Test Result
	0.95	11.54	Reject H0

As observed in Table 6, the significance coefficient (t-value) for the path between employees' creative self-efficacy and their innovative work behavior is 11.54. Consequently, the structural model results demonstrate that employees' creative self-efficacy exerts a significant impact on their innovative work behavior, with a path coefficient of 0.95.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of the leader's Light Triad personality traits on innovative work behavior, through the mediating role of creative self-efficacy among employees at Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results indicated that the significance coefficients (t-values) for innovative work behavior were greater than 1.96, confirming statistical significance. In this study, employees' innovative work behavior was measured through three components: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. The findings revealed that all three dimensions demonstrated high stability and reliability in measuring innovative work behavior, exhibiting substantial factor loadings ranging from 0.61 to 0.87 (specifically, 0.65, 0.87, and 0.61), all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.40.

Regarding the first sub-hypothesis, the structural model analysis indicated a highly significant path between the leader's Light Triad personality traits and employees' innovative work behavior ($t = 13.04$). The path coefficient ($\beta = 0.96$) further demonstrated that the leader's Light Triad traits exert a remarkably strong and positive impact on innovative work behavior. These high coefficients indicate the vital importance and direct impact of the leader's personality on the educational environment. This finding aligns with and supports previous literature, specifically the studies conducted by [Fodor et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Andreas et al. \(2019\)](#).

For the second sub-hypothesis, the SEM results showed a significant significance coefficient ($t = 7.38$) for the path leading from the leader's Light Triad personality traits to employees' creative self-efficacy. The corresponding path coefficient ($\beta = 0.84$) indicated that the leader's Light Triad traits significantly enhance employees' creative self-efficacy. Notably, this specific relationship had not been explored in prior empirical research, making a direct empirical comparison with earlier studies unavailable.

In evaluating the third sub-hypothesis, the significance coefficient for the structural path between employees' creative self-efficacy and their innovative work behavior was found to be 11.54. Consequently, the structural model demonstrated that creative self-efficacy has a powerful and significant impact on innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.95$). This outcome is consistent with the findings of [Jalali and Heidarifar, \(2019\)](#) and [Newman et al. \(2018\)](#). However, this result contrasts with the study by Mousavi and Kolek (2022), which reported that creative self-efficacy had no significant effect on the innovative behavior of education department employees in mohr county. This conflict can be due to "differences in the nature of organizations" (University of Medical Sciences vs. Department of Education) or "differences in organizational culture."

Ultimately, the investigation of the main research hypothesis revealed that the leader's Light Triad personality traits exert a direct effect of 0.84 and an indirect effect of 0.89 on employees' creative self-efficacy. This overarching finding is consistent with and corroborates the empirical evidence provided by [Fodor et al. \(2021\)](#), [Andreas et al. \(2019\)](#), [Newman et al. \(2018\)](#), and [Jalali and Heidarifar, \(2019\)](#). Collectively, these results highlight the pivotal role of a leader's positive personality traits (the Light Triad)—and the broader influence of leadership character—in fostering innovative work behavior and enhancing creative self-efficacy among workforce members.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Light Triad personality traits of leaders significantly enhance innovative work behaviors within the university of medical sciences, both through a direct impact and by positively influencing employees' creative self-efficacy. In other words, Light Triad leaders not only directly encourage employees to innovate, but they also foster deeper and more sustainable innovative behaviors by strengthening individuals' intrinsic belief in their own creative abilities (creative self-efficacy). The findings confirms that creative self-efficacy plays a pivotal mediating role in this relationship. Consequently, promoting a Light Triad leadership style, alongside implementing targeted interventions designed to boost employees' creative confidence, serves as a key strategic approach for driving and elevating innovation within complex organizational environments such as medical science universities.

Research Limitations

The limitation of this study is the use of a questionnaire in the data collection stage, and the possibility of generalizing the findings to other medical universities should be considered with caution.

Suggestions

Based on the empirical findings of this study, the following actionable recommendations are proposed to enhance organizational innovation within healthcare and academic institutions:

Medical and academic institutions should design and implement specialized training programs aimed at developing positive leadership traits (Light Triad attributes) among hospital and educational administrators. These programs should focus on cultivating empathy, compassion, and transparent communication, which were proven in this study to be strong drivers of workforce innovation. Also Organizations are recommended to integrate a comprehensive annual evaluation system for supervisors and department heads. This system should assess indicators of positive leadership and ethical behavior, ensuring that leaders continuously exhibit traits that nurture a supportive work climate. To leverage the verified mediating role of creative self-efficacy, human resource departments should organize targeted workshops and psychological interventions for non-faculty and administrative staff. university should explicitly incorporate metrics such as "the number of successful participations in innovative problem-solving" into employees' performance appraisal and promotion criteria. Linking tangible or intangible rewards to innovative efforts will actively reinforce continuous creative engagement.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

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