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**In search for authentic leaders: Imposter syndrome or just an imposter?**

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|------------------|---|
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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper explores the concept of strategic imposterism, a phenomenon in which individuals deliberately adopt imposter-like tendencies to gain power, deflect accountability, or manage expectations. This distinction is crucial within the understanding of leadership, workplace culture, and organisational dynamics.

**Design:** To better understand authenticity the design contrasted a conceptual review of the imposter phenomenon with a narrative review of strategic imposterism, dysfunctional/toxic leadership and the Dark Triad. By mapping these contrasting key factors and concepts, the paper provides a novel theoretical contribution to leadership studies and offers practical insights for fostering authenticity within professional environments.

**Findings:** The conceptual review establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors, identifying key factors (or descriptors), contributing to the imposter phenomenon and strategic imposter among organisational team members and leaders. Further, it broadens the discourse on the imposter phenomenon by emphasising that organisations not only harbour individuals who perceive themselves as imposters but also accommodate strategic imposters. This distinction sheds light on a novel conceptual understanding of organisational dynamics.

**Practically:** Delineating distinct factors and behaviours associated with both imposter phenomenon and strategic imposters, provides valuable insights for managing and supporting distinct employee profiles.

**Originality:** The comprehensive conceptual review of the concepts enriches the understanding of the factors influencing the imposter phenomenon within modern organisational contexts; it adds insights into strategic imposterism, impression management and self-presentation techniques and how they relate to professional development, professionalism and the

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3 feedback processes, and our authentic conceptual map can aid the management of employee  
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5 profiles within the workplace and teams.  
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8 Keywords: Imposter Phenomenon, Strategic Imposters, Impression Management, Leadership  
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## 10 11 **Introduction** 12

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14 In contemporary leadership discourse, discussions surrounding the imposter  
15  
16 phenomenon have become increasingly prevalent, particularly in professional settings and  
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18 platforms such as LinkedIn. The term is often used to describe individuals who experience  
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20 persistent self-doubt despite evidence of their competence. However, a critical distinction  
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22 remains overlooked within this discourse: the difference between individuals who genuinely  
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24 suffer from the imposter phenomenon and those who strategically leverage imposter-like  
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26 behaviours to manipulate professional perceptions. This paper explores the concept of  
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28 strategic imposterism, a phenomenon in which individuals deliberately adopt imposter-like  
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30 tendencies to deceive, gain power, deflect accountability, or manage expectations. This  
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32 distinction is crucial for understanding leadership, workplace culture, and organisational  
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34 dynamics.  
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41 Leadership research has long explored the characteristics that differentiate effective  
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43 and ineffective leaders (Rose et al., 2015). Authentic leadership is often framed as the  
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45 antidote to toxic workplace behaviours, including manipulation, impression management, and  
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47 organisational deceit (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2021; Northouse, 2022).  
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49 However, the presence of strategic imposterism complicates this narrative by introducing a  
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51 form of leadership deception that mimics the language and self-presentation of the imposter  
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53 phenomenon while serving different underlying motivations. “Deception is conceptualized as  
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55 a complex social behaviour that takes many forms...to conceal, fabricate and/or  
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57 manipulate...factual and/or emotional information” (Turi et al., 2022, p.1). Therefore,  
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3 understanding strategic imposterism, allows, in contrast, a clearer understanding of  
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5 leadership.  
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8 This paper aims to contribute to leadership studies and organisational behaviour by  
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10 developing a conceptual framework that contrasts the true imposter phenomenon (a  
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12 psychological burden characterised by anxiety, self-doubt, and the inability to internalise  
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14 success) (Clance and Imes, 1978) with strategic imposterism (a manipulative strategy  
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16 designed to create an illusion of humility, lower expectations, or gain professional advantages  
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18 (Michalec et al., 2023, p.908). While both concepts share surface-level similarities, their  
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20 psychological underpinnings, behavioural markers, and organisational impacts diverge  
21  
22 significantly. This distinction has profound implications for leadership development,  
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24 workplace culture, and equality, diversity and inclusion. Therefore, to address the lack of  
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26 clear differentiation between these two concepts, hindering the development of leadership  
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28 studies and practice, this study employs a conceptual and narrative review methodology to  
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30 synthesise existing literature on: the Dark Triad, impression management, and leadership  
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32 deception in contrast to the imposter phenomenon. The conceptual framework is developed  
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34 through a structured review of scholarly sources, drawing on leadership studies,  
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36 organizational psychology, and workplace bullying research. By mapping these contrasting  
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38 concepts, the paper provides a novel theoretical contribution to leadership studies and offers  
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40 practical insights for fostering authenticity within professional environments.  
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48 Our contributions are thus three-fold. First, it advances leadership studies on authentic  
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50 leadership by offering a new conceptual framework that distinguishes between the imposter  
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52 phenomenon and strategic imposterism, addressing the gap in how these concepts are  
53  
54 perceived in professional settings. Second, it broadens discussions on workplace authenticity  
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56 and leadership integrity, illustrating how strategic imposterism can undermine trust,  
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58 transparency, and effective leadership development. Third, it provides practical applications  
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3 for leadership training, HR policies, and EDI initiatives by offering insights into identifying  
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5 and addressing strategic imposterism while fostering supportive environments for those  
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7 experiencing the imposter phenomenon,.  
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### 10 **Theoretical Background**

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14 Authentic leaders “are originals, not copies,” acting in alignment with personal values  
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16 and convictions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p.321). They lead by example, reflect on their  
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18 behavior, take responsibility for actions and adapt to better serve others. Although still an  
19  
20 emerging and debated field (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Northouse, 2022), authentic  
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22 leadership, unlike transactional (Weber, 1947), servant (Greenleaf, 1970) and  
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24 transformational (Burns, 1978) is relatively new and emphasizes a work-related self, echoed  
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26 by this paper. Its core components; self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced  
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28 processing and relational transparency, stand in clear contrast to descriptors of strategic  
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30 imposterism.  
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36 Intrapersonally, it involves self-knowledge, self-regulation and self-concept (Datta,  
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38 2015), especially when navigating conflicting values between leaders and followers (Gardner  
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40 et al., 2022). Interpersonally, authenticity arises in the leader-follower relationship, stressing  
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42 transparency and balanced processing. Developmentally, authenticity may be shaped by  
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44 critical life events (Northouse, 2022) and can help shape self-awareness and one’s moral  
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46 perspective.  
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50 Authentic leadership, therefore, is better understood as a continuum rather than a  
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52 binary trait (Gardner et al., 2022). It correlates with enhanced performance, satisfaction and  
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54 quality of life (Datta, 2015, p.70) and further research suggests it fosters justice, engagement  
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56 and reduced deviance (Liu et al., 2018, p.230). While not a cure-all, authentic leadership  
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58 offers a vital contrast to dysfunctional/toxic leadership. Yet, if authenticity is judged by  
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3 observation, questions remain: how do we distinguish between dysfunctional/toxic leadership  
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5 and strategic imposterism masked as humility?  
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### 8 *A culture of falsity* 9

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11 Our society is increasingly inundated with a pervasive culture of falsity (Abu Arqoub  
12  
13 et al., 2020). This encompasses various forms of deceptive information, commonly referred  
14  
15 to as fake news, including misinformation (Abu Arqoub et al., 2020; Domenico et al., 2021,  
16  
17 p. 330), distorted news (Figueira & Oliveria, 2017, p. 818), and the emergence of deepfakes  
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19 (Albahar & Almalki, 2019, p. 3242). These phenomena not only pose security risks for  
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21 governments and present challenges for large organisations but also foster divisions within  
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23 communities, teams and workplaces. Women are often at the forefront of this onslaught. Nast  
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25 (2024) reports that 98% of all deepfake videos were for pornographic purposes and 99% of  
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27 these targeted women. The parallels with falsity in leadership are stark, and as will be seen  
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29 later, the parallels with the imposter phenomenon demographics are intriguing.  
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35 In the UK, gender disparities persist across sectors. Women hold 41% of part-times  
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37 roles compared to just 10% of men (Close the Gap, 2022), face a 16.2% average gender pay  
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39 gap that widens with age to 23.7% (Unison, 2024), and are underrepresented in leadership  
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41 with only 12.5% on FTSE 100 boards, 7.8% on FTSE 250 boards, 6.9% as newspaper  
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43 editors, 6.7% as media CEOs, 21.9% in the House of Lords, and just 2.3% as local authority  
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45 CEOs (Government Equalities Office, 2012). These inequalities worsen when age and  
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47 ethnicity intersect, with 75% of women of colour reporting experiencing racism at work  
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49 (Fawcett Society, 2022). Gender is, therefore, a significant demographic in the impostor  
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51 phenomenon.  
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57 In male-dominated sectors like healthcare and engineering, women frequently report gender-  
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59 based discrimination in training and career progression (Bernica et al., 2021; Fraszczyk and  
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3 Piip, 2019). While the healthcare workforce is delivered largely by women, leadership  
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5 remains male-dominated (Haines & McKeown, 2023, p360). Whilst research suggests that  
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7 female leadership is more likely to prioritise teamwork and patient-oriented care (Shi et al.,  
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9 2021), women face higher rates of imposterism, unconscious bias and stereotype threat  
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11 (Bernica et al., 2021), often linked to a lack of mentorship (Rajan, 2021; Si et al., 2021).  
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13 Access to supportive networks and female mentors is shown to improve outcomes, including  
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15 in entrepreneurial contexts (Panda, 2018).  
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20 A lack of gender parity in early leadership pipelines limits women's advancement  
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22 (Haines & McKeown, 2023). This is tied to role congruity bias, whereby perceived  
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24 incongruity between gender and leadership roles fuels discrimination. Women in senior roles  
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26 are often undermined by male colleagues or managers, reflecting dynamics of strategic  
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28 imposterism. Singh (2022) describes this as part of an unbalanced organizational ecosystem.  
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30 In higher education, Johnson et al. (2024) highlight the intersecting oppressions of race,  
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32 gender and class, calling for structural reform. This paper argues that strategic imposterism is  
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34 not merely an individual political persuasion but impacts institutional culture and systemic  
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36 design.  
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41 The construction of alternative narratives through the manipulation of facts serves  
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43 social, persuasive, and evasive agendas (Hannigan et al., 2024, p. 10), reminiscent of what  
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45 scholars have termed "bullshitting," a disregard for truth's constraints i.e. falsity and drivel  
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47 (used from here on instead of bullshit). While scholarly inquiry has scrutinised organisational  
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49 "Business Bullshit" (Spicer, 2017) (i.e. business drivel), this paper delves into the individual  
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51 realm, exploring strategic imposters and the concept of the impostor phenomenon, with the  
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53 aim of fostering authenticity within work environments, teams and leadership, especially in  
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55 relation to women, cultivating transparency.  
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## Methodology

This paper aimed to better understand authenticity by contrasting a conceptual review of the imposter phenomenon with a narrative review of strategic imposterism, dysfunctional/toxic leadership and the Dark Triad. “Guided by an understanding of basic issues rather than a research methodology, the writer of a conceptual literature review is looking for key factors, concepts or variables and the presumed relationship between them” (Frederiksen, Phelps and Kimmons, 2018, no page). As indicated by the conceptual review of 68 papers, sufficient systematic reviews (we found 4) on the imposter phenomenon had already been conducted. What was missing was identifying factors and relationships between the key factors already evident in various reviews and papers. In contrast, and in comparison, “a narrative or traditional review provides an overview of research on a particular topic that critiques and summarizes a body of literature” (Frederiksen, Phelps and Kimmons, 2018, no page). This ensured the key concept (imposter phenomenon) was understood within a broader body of literature related to strategic imposterism and allowed an overview of conceptual links in key factors. These methods enabled a better and deeper theoretical understanding of authenticity related to the imposter phenomenon and strategic imposterism. The same would not be achieved through other reviews. For example, empirical reviews are necessarily narrow, and this can make them less “informative, for such reviews are likely to eliminate studies that introduce new ideas, use new methodologies, or use unique methodologies” (Kennedy, 2007, p.146).

A Round 1 systematic search was conducted using Google Scholar Advanced Search for the term ‘imposter syndrome’ with a date limitation between 2014-2024. This reached data saturation resulting in 814 returns (search conducted on 26/03/2024) and then limited to 192 articles in specific journals as seen in Table I below.

Table I: Round 1 Search Results (Source: Authors work)

| <b>Journal</b>          | <b>Articles</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Springer                | 43              |
| Sage                    | 32              |
| Taylor and Francis      | 34              |
| Wiley                   | 33              |
| Elsevier Science Direct | 38              |
| Emerald Insight         | 12              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>192</b>      |

These journals were selected due to their being part of the 12 largest academic publishers (Musa, 2024) and as the most frequently cited research journals among the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2024). From the 192 articles reviewed, 124 were excluded, as seen in Table II below:

Table II: Round 1 Exclusion Criteria Results (Source: Authors work)

| <b>Exclusion Criteria</b>   | <b>Articles</b> |
|---|-----------------|
| Irrelevant e.g. referring to mental disorders   | 25              |
| No explicit link: may have just used the term 'imposter syndrome' with no explanation or was only in the reference list | 49              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>124</b>      |

The term 'Imposter Phenomenon' is also used (Long et al., 2024; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Imposter Phenomenon was initially coined by Clance and Imes (1978) (Cutri et al., 2021), rather than Imposter Syndrome, as 'syndrome' is not a recognised clinical disorder (Bravata et al., 2020). As such, a Round 2 systematic search was conducted to explore the concept and thus the search term 'Imposter Phenomenon' in Google Scholar's Advanced Search with a date limitation between 2014-2024, also including results for 'impostor'. Reaching data saturation resulted in 1020 returns (search conducted on 05/12/2025). Accessible articles from the same selected journals as Round 1 were then reviewed, as seen in Table III:

Table III: Round 2 Search Results (Source: Authors work)

| Journal                 | Articles   |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Springer                | 94         |
| Sage                    | 41         |
| Taylor and Francis      | 37         |
| Wiley                   | 51         |
| Elsevier Science Direct | 86         |
| Emerald Insight         | 13         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>322</b> |

From these 322 articles reviewed, 292 were excluded as seen in Table IV below:

Table IV: Round 2 Exclusion Criteria Results (Source: Authors work)

| Exclusion Criteria  | Articles   |
|---|------------|
| Irrelevant e.g. cyber imposter, capgras syndrome, imposter content  | 93         |
| No explicit link: may have just used the term 'imposter phenomenon' with no explanation or was only in the reference list | 155        |
| Duplications of Round 1   | 44         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>292</b> |
| <b>Review TOTAL (322-292)</b>   | <b>30</b>  |

Key concepts related to each across research were identified. The conceptual review summary is found in Table V provided within the following section:

#### *Conceptual Mapping Process*

A conceptual and narrative review was chosen due to the need for a conceptual synthesis in the fragmented discussion on imposterism. The aim was to understand concepts related to the strategic imposterism, dysfunctional/toxic leadership and the Dark Triad, in order, in contrast, to understand authentic leadership and the imposter phenomenon within it.

Based on a conceptual review of the articles from the search strategy in Round 1 and Round 2, a conceptual review summary of the Imposter Syndrome can be found in Table V below:

Table V: Conceptual Review Summary (Source: Authors work)

| Key descriptions of Imposter syndrome | Key Concepts                 | Citations  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
|                                       | Anxiety, depression, burnout | Bradley & Suttie, 2023; Couser et al., 2023; Dutta et al., 2022; Edwards-Maddox, 2023; Fawzy et al., 2023; Gilliland et al., 2016; Jolly & Asokan, 2024; Kim et al., 2023; Lingard |

|                          |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
|                          |   | & Colquhoun, 2022; Ménard & Chittle, 2023; Parikh & Leschied, 2022; Setchell et al., 2023; Singh, 2022; Smith & McLellan, 2023; Winderbaum & Coventry, 2024  |
|                          | Lack of belonging, contested identity, marginality              | Campbell et al., 2020; Deutsch et al., 2022; Evans & Kevern, 2015; Fu et al., 2023; Hartman, 2023; Itchuaqiyaq & Walton, 2021; Jach & Rinaldi, 2024; Lightner-Laws et al., 2023; Pennock & Wade, 2015; Piano et al., 2023; Wells, 2020;  |
|                          | Lack of confidence, self-sabotage, self-handicapping            | Cherrstrom & Bixby, 2018; Curlewis et al., 2021; Diggs-Andrews et al., 2021; Fasse, 2021; Gottlieb et al., 2022; Grohnert et al., 2024; Meyerhoff, 2019; Oldham, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021   |
|                          | Feeling like a fraud, inadequate, phony                         | Ashford et al., 2018; Chess and Shaw, 2015; Grass & Latal, 2022; Morris & Shelton, 2020; Plaskett et al., 2018; Song & McCreary, 2020; Witcher & Mullen, 2021;   |
|                          | Low self-esteem, self-doubt, low levels of belief in competency | Bronson & Long, 2023; Carrington et al., 2024; Deiorio et al., 2022; Haines & McKeown, 2023; Hughes & Bowers-Brown, 2021; Margolis et al., 2021;   |
|                          | Perfectionism, high achievers, procrastination                  | Andersson et al., 2021; Collins, 2018; Cordova et al., 2020; Frumau-can Pinxten et al., 2023; Wong, 2020   |
|                          | Luck not merit  | Balakrishnan et al., 2023; Dickerson, 2022; Gottlieb et al., 2020; Kamalumpundi et al., 2024;  |
|                          | Short-term, temporary   | Barrow, 2019; Dancy II & Jean-Marie, 2014  |
| <b>Key study cohorts</b> | Education (students and academics)                              | Ashmore, 2021; Callander et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2021; Cutri et al., 2021; Gajparia, 2017; McGivern, 2023; Morrow-Howell et al., 2022; Pownall et al., 2022; Prestridge et al., 2023; Withorn et al., 2020;  |
|                          | Women   | Ahmadi et al., 2025; Al-Gergawi et al., 2024; Apostolou et al., 2021; Bernica et al., 2021 ; Blackburn, 2023; Chilmeran & Hedström, 2021; Fraszczyk & Piip, 2019; Gullifor et al., 2024; Hemans et al., 2020; Inguaggiato et al., 2024; Irving 2014; Juarez-Campos et al., 2024; Lomáscolo et al., 2024; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021; Masiran et al., 2023; Monteiro et al., 2023; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Shi et al., 2021; Smith & Sinkford, 2022; Weyant et al., 2021 |
|                          | Healthcare  | Childers & Arnold, 2019; Couser et al., 2023; Freeman & Peisah, 2022; Gonzales et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2022 ; Hamilton-Shield et al., 2018; Hariharan & Griffin, 2019; Heaton-Shrestha et al., 2023; Järvinen et al., 2018; Kuhn & Flanagan, 2017; Martin, 2019; McClunie-Trust et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024; Oshodi & Sookhoo, 2024; Passarelli et al., 2024; Tyndall et al., 2021   |
|                          | Minorities, race  | Abel & Gonzales, 2020; Blount-Hill et al., 2022; Collins-Anderson et al., 2022; Corsini et al., 2020; Fletcher et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2024; Knox & Seide, 2023; Mansfield et al., 2022; Nkansah & Amankwah, 2021; Peng, 2024; Stewart, 2016; Torres Acosta et al., 2023;  |
| <b>Key solutions</b>     | Self-awareness  | Langawi et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021  |
|                          | Networks  | Sharma et al., 2021  |
|                          | Mentors, sponsors   | Bellini et al., 2019; Kamalumpundi et al., 2024; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021  |
|                          | Humility  | Michalec et al., 2023  |
|                          | Role models   | Noronha et al., 2022; Panda, 2018;   |
|                          | Growth mindset  | Wolcott et al., 2020   |

For a narrative review, a broader Google Scholar Advanced Search was executed for the terms ‘strategic AND imposterism’ (NOT syndrome OR phenomenon), ‘impression AND management’, ‘self-presentation’, ‘bullshit’, ‘dark AND triad’ and ‘Machiavellianism’, selecting articles relevant to business management published between 2014-2024. To maintain consistency in search strategies, the same journals were selected as in the conceptual review. “A narrative or traditional review provides an overview of research on a particular topic that critiques and summarizes a body of literature” (Frederiksen et al., 2018) and as such, data was not saturated. The narrative review summary is found in Table VI and a visual positioning of strategic imposterism with established leadership models in Figure 1:

Table VI: Narrative Review Summary (Source: Authors work)

| Key descriptions of Strategic Imposter           | Key Concepts                          | Citations  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Bullshit (drivel)</b>                         | Social, persuasive and evasive agenda | Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017; Steinmetz et al., 2017; Vartanian, 2015  |
|  | No concern for truth                  | Ferreira et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2020   |
|  | Pseudo-profound type                  | Ferreira et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2020   |
|  | Evasive type                          | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | Social type                           | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | Truth scale                           | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | Bosses scale                          | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | Language scale                        | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
| <b>Impression management / self-presentation</b> | Tactics                               | Bolino and Klotz, 2015 ; Gottschalk, 2024; Kimura, 2014; Leary et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017; Roulin et al., 2014 |
|  | Not anxious, no stress                | Lee et al., 2022   |
|  | Positive emotions                     | Lee et al., 2022   |
|  | Not high standards                    | Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | No procrastination                    | Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017   |
|  | Perspective taking                    | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |

|                                     |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
|                                     | Hubris                              | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
|                                     | Humblebragging                      | Michalec et al., 2023; Steinmetz et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Hypocrisy                           | Bolino and Klotz, 2015; Leary et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2022; Steinmetz et al., 2017 |
|                                     | Backhanded compliments              | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
| <b>Dark Triad: Narcissism</b>       | Self-centred                        | Steinmetz et al., 2017; Zheng and MacCann, 2023                                      |
|                                     | Self-aggrandizing                   | Brownell et al., 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Arrogant                            | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
|                                     | Antagonising                        | Muris et al., 2017; Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
| <b>Dark Triad: Machiavellianism</b> | Sneaky, cunning, lacking in morales | Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023; Turi et al., 2022; Zheng and MacCann, 2023            |
|                                     | Power and control                   | Brownell et al., 2021; Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023                                 |
|                                     | Manipulation and exploitative       | Dinić and Jevremov, 2019; Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023; Muris et al., 2017          |
|                                     | Psychopath and narcissism           | Jones & Mueller, 2022  |
| <b>Dark Triad: Psychopathy</b>      | Deceptive                           | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Turi et al., 2022   |
|                                     | Reckless                            | Dinić and Jevremov, 2019; Jones & Mueller, 2022                                      |
|                                     | Callous                             | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Muris et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Antisocial                          | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Zheng and MacCann, 2023                                       |

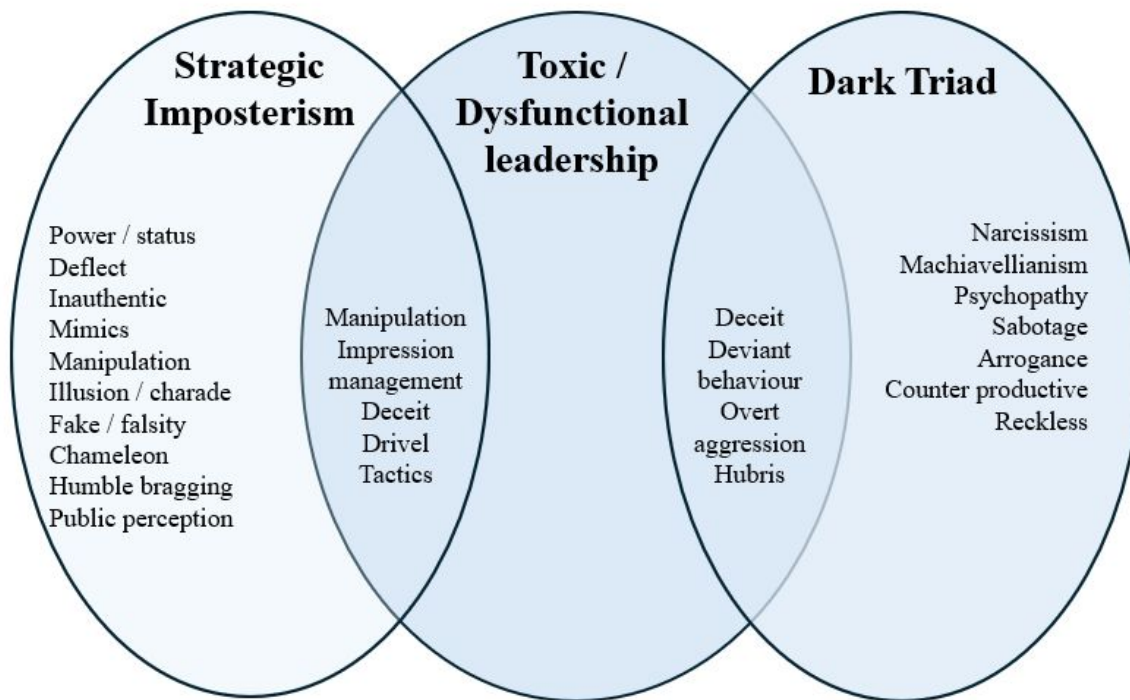


Figure 1: Strategic Imposterism and Other Leadership Models (Source: Authors work)

Figure 1 indicates some overlap between strategic imposterism and toxic/dysfunctional leadership but indicates a clear distinction with the Dark Triad. In some ways, it will be argued, strategic imposterism is less obvious than toxic leadership and the Dark Triad, hence the necessity to analyse it more carefully. This analysis not only refines our understanding of what constitutes an authentic leader but also highlights the manipulative tactics that can masquerade as humility or self-doubt in professional settings. The contrast of key descriptors seen in Table V (the imposter phenomenon) and Table VI (strategic imposterism, toxic leadership and the Dark Traid) helps leaders and followers to identify and distinguish between genuine imposter phenomenon and strategic imposters. The following section begins by examining the literature on strategic imposterism, followed by an exploration of the imposter phenomenon, before presenting a comparative analysis that underscores their fundamental distinctions and implications for leadership and organizational culture. Thus, through this multi-faceted methodology, we delineate the stark contrast

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2  
3 between strategic imposterism and the true imposter phenomenon, providing both a  
4  
5 theoretical extension of authentic leadership studies and practical insights for organizations  
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7 navigating the complexities of leadership authenticity.  
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## 10 Findings

### 11 A Conceptual Review: Imposter Phenomenon/Syndrome

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16 Catanzano et al., (2023, p.131) defined the imposter phenomenon as “a strong belief  
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18 of personal inadequacy in spite of success” (Butler, 2014; Chassangre & Callahan, 2017), a  
19  
20 discrepancy between confidence and achievement (Stankov et al., 2015). The Imposter  
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22 Syndrome, or Imposter Phenomenon (Bravata et al., 2020), due to societal norms,  
23  
24 predominantly affects women and those from minority ethnic groups, potentially due to  
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26 feelings of marginality, a lack of belonging and contested identity (Heslop et al., 2023; Hsiao  
27  
28 et al., 2018; Lee & Morfitt, 2020; ). The Clance Impostor Scale is used to identify the  
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30 imposter phenomenon and has been validated for its reliability (Chrisman et al., 1995).  
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36 The imposter phenomenon, then, is multifaceted, with distinct psychological and  
37  
38 behavioural dimensions as seen in Table V. Koch (2023) argued that the Impostor  
39  
40 Phenomenon has intrapersonal costs such as burnout (Hanna & Koo, 2024; Hsu et al., 2024)  
41  
42 but interpersonal benefits. The review summary identified through several studies that  
43  
44 affected groups are those who are perfectionists and high-achievers (Andersson et al., 2021;  
45  
46 Flett et al., 2022 ), those in healthcare and academia due to feelings of intellectual phoniness  
47  
48 ( McClunie-Trust et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024), women (Al-Gergawi et al., 2024;  
49  
50 Gullifor et al., 2024; ) and those from minority ethnic groups (Knox, & Seide, 2023; Peng,  
51  
52 2024) some citing younger people within these categories as well (Price et al., 2024). A  
53  
54 combination of these affected groups leads to higher Imposter Phenomenon among minor  
55  
56 ethnic high achieving women.  
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1  
2  
3 Key characteristics of Imposter Phenomenon include feelings of inadequacy,  
4  
5 incompetence, and self-doubt (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021), and the inability to internalize  
6  
7 successes (Bernard & Neblett, 2018). These feelings lead to fear, anxiety and depression, and  
8  
9 are attributed to burnout and poor mental health (Catanzano et al., 2023; Manongsong &  
10  
11 Ghosh, 2021). If unchecked, this feeling of being a fraud can lead to self-sabotage and self-  
12  
13 handicapping behaviour ( Dancy II & Jean-Marie, 2014; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021), not to  
14  
15 mention being manipulated by imposters. Typical responses include procrastination and  
16  
17 overpreparation (Catanzano et al., 2023). Any achievement is seen as luck rather than merit  
18  
19 (Catanzano et al., 2023; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Catanzano et al., (2023, p.131),  
20  
21 therefore, define Imposter Phenomenon as “a strong belief of personal inadequacy in spite of  
22  
23 success”, a “chronic” (Michalec et al., 2023, p.905), “psychological pattern rooted in intense,  
24  
25 concealed feelings of fraudulence...” (Walker & Saklofske, 2023, p.2162). Stewart (2016)  
26  
27 contends that fear, low confidence and the imposter phenomenon hinder women and  
28  
29 especially women of ethnicity to proactively pursue senior roles. As has already been  
30  
31 discussed, more women in senior roles is needed to address the tide of women suffering from  
32  
33 the imposter phenomenon and gender-based discrimination.  
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40  
41 Although many solutions and strategies abound, solutions include increasing self-  
42  
43 awareness, engaging in professional networks, having role models, mentors and sponsors,  
44  
45 and cultivating a growth mindset and humility, facilitated by shared leadership and humble  
46  
47 leadership (Son and Yang, 2023) i.e. authentic leadership. Within such leadership and teams,  
48  
49 Dancy II & Jean-Marie (2014) suggest that imposter phenomenon could decrease (Barrow,  
50  
51 2019), suggesting that it can therefore be temporary.  
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55 A final conceptual map has been created for the concept ‘Imposter  
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57 Syndrome/Phenomenon’ as seen in Figure 2 below:  
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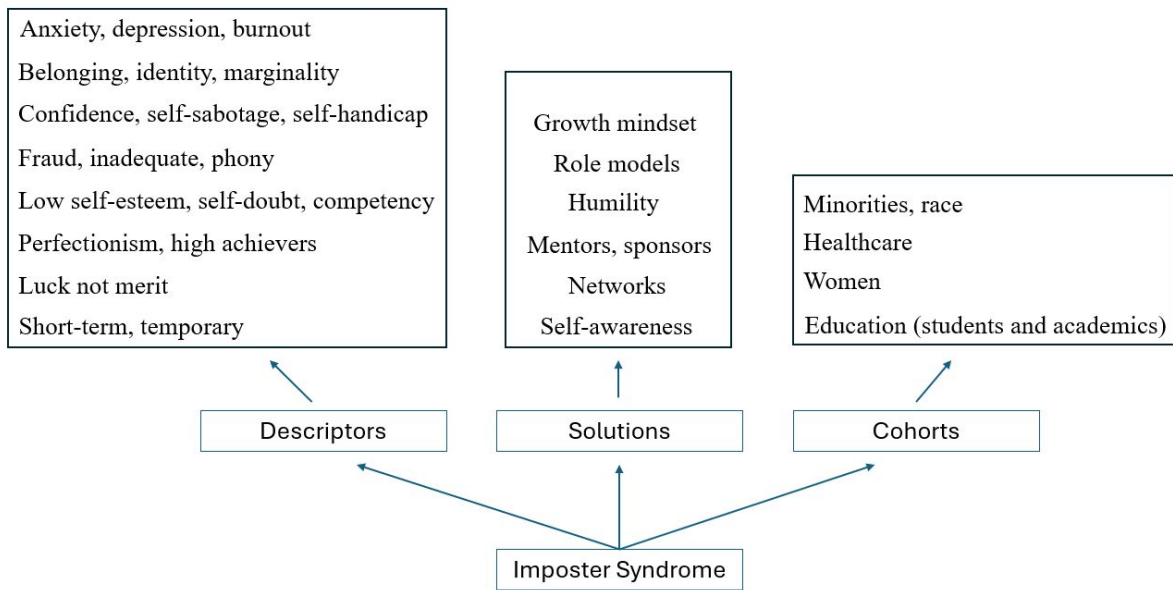


Figure 2: Imposter Syndrome/Phenomenon Conceptual Map (Source: Authors work)

It is unclear whether all of the descriptors are required to be identified as someone with the imposter phenomenon. For example, could someone suffer from the imposter phenomenon if they are successful yet feel fraudulent, but are not high achievers? Furthermore, it is also not clear whether the high frequency of the imposter phenomenon among minority ethnic women is due to systemic culture and therefore, if the latter is changed or addressed, whether these demographics would shift and change.

### A Narrative Review: Strategic Imposters

Strategic Imposterism is defined as a charade of success, to hide actual failure, “not necessarily burdened by authentic self-doubt...to appear more modest and to keep others’ expectations concerning one’s abilities as low as possible...and to turn out successful despite their assumed incompetence” (Michalec et al., 2023, p.908). Additionally, Anderson-Zorn (2022, p.61) define the Strategic Imposter, in contrast to the imposter phenomenon, as not having “high anxiety, negative emotions, or...prone to perfectionism...not being under stress”. Silverman (2024, p.3) suggests strategic imposters include chameleon imposters, con artist imposters, lucky duck imposters, procrastinating imposters and workaholics.

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2  
3 Strategic imposterism is best understood as a deliberate leadership strategy designed  
4  
5 to manipulate perceptions and control narratives within professional settings. In contrast to  
6  
7 the imposter phenomenon, which is marked by self-doubt and psychological distress,  
8  
9 strategic imposterism functions as a purposeful tactic of deception. The Strategic Imposter  
10  
11 Conceptual Summary displayed in Table VI, deconstructs its core components, details the  
12  
13 key descriptors, highlighting how strategic imposterism differs from genuine self-doubt, and  
14  
15 explores its connections to workplace dysfunction, impression management, and leadership  
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17 deception.  
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22  
23 Strategic imposterism is the anthesis of authenticity and truth. One is ‘true’ and the  
24  
25 other is ‘strategic’ (Lee et al., 2022) or ‘drivel’ (Ferreira et al., 2022). As noted in Table I,  
26  
27 **drivel** is a key concept when considering Strategic Imposterism, with drivel being both a  
28  
29 verb (the act of communicating with no regard for the truth) and a noun (the information  
30  
31 contained in that which is communicated with no regard for the truth) (Ferreira et al., 2022,  
32  
33 p.3). Drivel has several similarities with strategic imposterism: not knowing what you are  
34  
35 actually talking about, a lack of accountability, deceit and the abuse of power, status or  
36  
37 position, misrepresenting “by being appealing or convincing, or by distracting, exhausting, or  
38  
39 disengaging colleagues, so that agendas can be pursued with little or no resistance”  
40  
41 (McCarthy et al., 2020, p.257).  
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46  
47 Strategic Imposterism behaviors, which demonstrate the drivel agenda are  
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49 “interpersonal strategies designed to convey a particular social identity to other people rather  
50  
51 than truly held self-perceptions... claiming to feel like an “impostor” transfers some of the  
52  
53 responsibility for potential failure away from oneself and onto others’ expectations” (Leary et  
54  
55 al., 2000, p.733). This is done for deference, power, compliance and support (Lee et al.,  
56  
57 2022), unaffected by psychological impairments (Leonhardt et al., 2017). “Conversely,  
58  
59 humble bragging often conveys achievement and accomplishments (thinly) shrouded in a veil  
60

1  
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3 of humility - the focus is on ability” (Michalec et al., 2023, p.909) and backhanded  
4  
5 compliments aim to “communicate superior status and garner liking” (Steinmetz et al., 2017,  
6  
7 p.14). These are clear examples of *drivel* as a verb and noun and link to self-presentation and  
8  
9 impression management, and the language used is often excessive acronyms, trendy jargon,  
10  
11 flaky logic and shallow arguments (Ferreira et al., 2022).  
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15  
16 When these behaviours are apparent among leaders, not only do they create  
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18 challenges for others under their leadership, but they also creates dysfunctional cultures. A  
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20 review of the concepts suggests the following are counter measures: Confront ‘drivel’ ‘facts’,  
21  
22 create and encourage a culture of critical thinking, clarify evidence vs opinion (McCarthy et  
23  
24 al., 2020), prohibit jargon (Ferreira et al., 2022), eliminate pointless meetings (McCarthy et  
25  
26 al., 2020) and instead increase collaboration (Callanan, 2004). These solutions, however, can  
27  
28 create awkward and uncomfortable work environments.  
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32  
33 In addition to its connection with *drivel*, our review identified a relationship between  
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35 strategic imposterism, self-presentation, and impression management (Michalec et al., 2023),  
36  
37 aspects found in toxic/dysfunctional leadership (cf. Figure 1). As Michalec et al. (2023, p.  
38  
39 909) explain, “both represent tactical efforts to dupe peers and colleagues into embracing  
40  
41 (and supporting) an inauthentic and inaccurate version of ourselves.” Impression  
42  
43 management, according to Steinmetz et al., (2017, p.6), “occurs when people attempt to  
44  
45 conceal their self-presentation intent.” This does not always have a malicious intent such as  
46  
47 trying to blend-in or to strategically stand-out (Sun, Fang and Zhang, 2021) or develop  
48  
49 political skill through behaviour modification and monitoring to achieve a certain public  
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51 image (Kimura, 2014) or reveal or conceal stigma in identity management (Jones and King,  
52  
53 2013) or what is common among job applicants (Potočnik et al., 2021).  
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3 In contrast, malicious self-presentation can involve specific tactics, such as  
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5 *ingratiation*, “soft persuasion in which one overcompliments others to elicit favours by  
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7 appearing agreeable” or *intimidation* which is “strong persuasion in which one frightens  
8  
9 others in an effort to elicit compliance by appearing powerful” (Steinmetz et al., 2017, p.2).  
10  
11 Appearing to be modest can lead to higher hierarchical positions (Kimura, 2014). In addition,  
12  
13 “self-aggrandizing displays” can be exhibited by leaders can be displayed to maintain the  
14  
15 charade and lack of authenticity (Steinmetz et al., 2017, p5; Rose et al., 2015).  
16  
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19

20 Leary et al. (2000) differentiate true imposterism from self-presentation by  
21  
22 highlighting that the former occurs both privately and publicly, while strategic imposterism  
23  
24 focuses on public perception, aiming to “to profit from an advantage of attribution”  
25  
26 (Leonhardt et al., 2017, p.8). Impression management, in this context, is therefore defined as  
27  
28 the attempt “to create particular impressions in others’ minds”, often lacking authenticity  
29  
30 (Roulin et al., 2014, p.142; Vartanian, 2015), but not always with a malicious intent. If used  
31  
32 strategically, for malicious intent, it represents intentionally deceptive behaviour, and when  
33  
34 done to cause harm, can be associated with counterproductive work behaviour similar to  
35  
36 characteristics within the Dark Triad (Bolino and Klotz, 2015).  
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41 The Dark Triad; Narcissism, Machivellianism and Psychopathy, describes socially  
42  
43 aversive personality traits involving manipulation and exploitation for personal gain (Paulhus  
44  
45 & Williams, 2002; Turi et al., 2022; Zheng & MacCann, 2023). These traits manifest in  
46  
47 deceptive behaviors’ such as self-promotion, credit-stealing, manipulation and bullying, with  
48  
49 damaging effects on individuals and organizational culture. When present in both leaders and  
50  
51 followers, these traits create especially toxic environments.  
52  
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56 “**Narcissism** is characterized by a self-centred, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and  
57  
58 scheming interpersonal orientation... arrogance and antagonism come to the fore” (Steinmetz  
59  
60

et al., 2017, p.4), egocentricity and excessive self-love (Turi et al., 2022). **Machiavellianism**, coined in 1970 by Christie and Geis, (before the 1978 term Imposter Syndrome), describes “an individual difference variable associated with duplicity, cynicism, and amorality” (Jones & Mueller, 2022, p.535). Machiavellianism behaviour includes exploitation and counterproductive tactics i.e. sabotage, creating stress and mistrust (Jones & Mueller, 2022), and high levels of organisational cynicism and emotional exhaustion (Liyangamage & Fernando, 2023). Liyangamage & Fernando (2023) suggest it is more prominent in younger managers. “Machiavellian approaches are counterproductive, and are a greater threat to one’s irrelevance” (Callanan, 2004), leading to dishonesty, bullying, burnout and low trust (Liyangamage & Fernando, 2023). “**Psychopathic** individuals are deceptive, reckless, and callous...lack...impulse control” with “...antisocial behaviour” (Jones & Mueller, 2022, p.538). Interestingly, Zheng and MacCann (2023) found that of the Dark Triad, only higher levels of narcissism were significantly associated with higher happiness. In their research, Muris et al., (2017) found no evidence to support the idea that the Dark Triad traits are linked to more positive outcomes. Therefore, more commonly, when these behaviours are apparent among leaders, not only does this create challenges for others under their leadership, but it also creates dysfunctional cultures. It can manifest as a potential implicit workplace discrimination towards women. They are the worst of toxic behaviours and create systemic issues.

#### Case Vignette: Norwegian Police (Gottschalk, 2024)

The Norwegian central police unit for fighting economic and environmental crime faced a scandal due to a tax fraud acquittal in a Norwegian court appeal in 2014. Impression management was applied through press releases to return to a state of regained social license. However, this was construed as manipulative and deceptive by the public. Press releases by the police received reactions by the media and public and this motivated the police to monitor

and to respond to reduce discrepancies in their image. However, the case identified that impression management in this case was fraudulent, covering up incompetence and using deterrence strategies. Failures were not due to the imposter phenomenon, and press responses did not reveal toxic leadership or Dark Triad traits. In this case, there was a clear lack of authentic leadership and strategic imposterism – strategic deceit.

Using “studies by Leary et al, (2000), Leonhardt et al, (2017), and Lee et al., (2022)” (cited in Michalec et al., 2023, p.905), and others, Table I represents the conceptual framework summary which created the conceptual map displayed in Figure 3 below, which has been developed for the “form of imposterism that is strategically used by individuals to minimise the implications of poor performance” (Michalec et al., 2023, p.905).

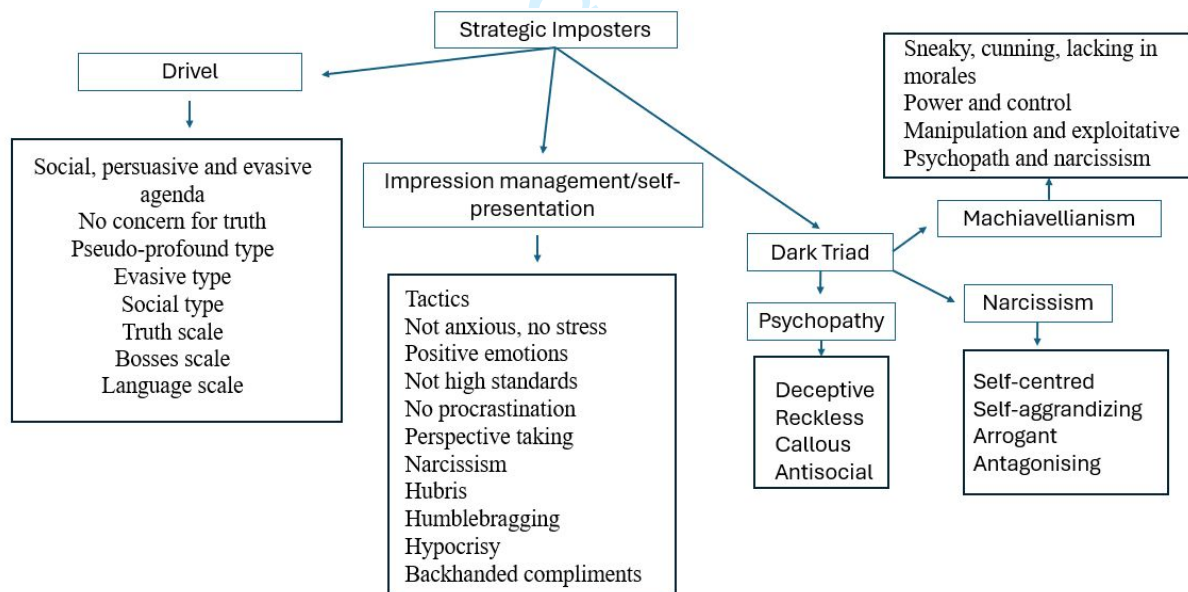


Figure 3: Strategic Imposter Conceptual Map (Source: Authors work)

Strategic Imposterism and related concepts add no value to the organisation or the person concerned i.e. short-term gain for long-term dysfunctionality. Silverman (2024) distinguishes strategic imposters from the imposter phenomenon by stating that the former

1  
2  
3 does not experience anxiety or negative emotional states compared to the latter. The former  
4  
5 as we have discussed is motivated by other intentions. However, a deeper understanding of  
6  
7 the latter, in comparison, is required to which we now turn.  
8  
9

10  
11 *Comparative analysis*

12 By placing the two conceptual maps together (Figure 2 and Figure 3) as contrasts, a  
13 clear distinction between ‘true’ and ‘strategic’ ‘drivel’ verb and noun imposterism can be  
14 seen, allowing an easier identification of authenticity. This can be seen in Figure 4 below  
15 with a summary of the differences seen after:  
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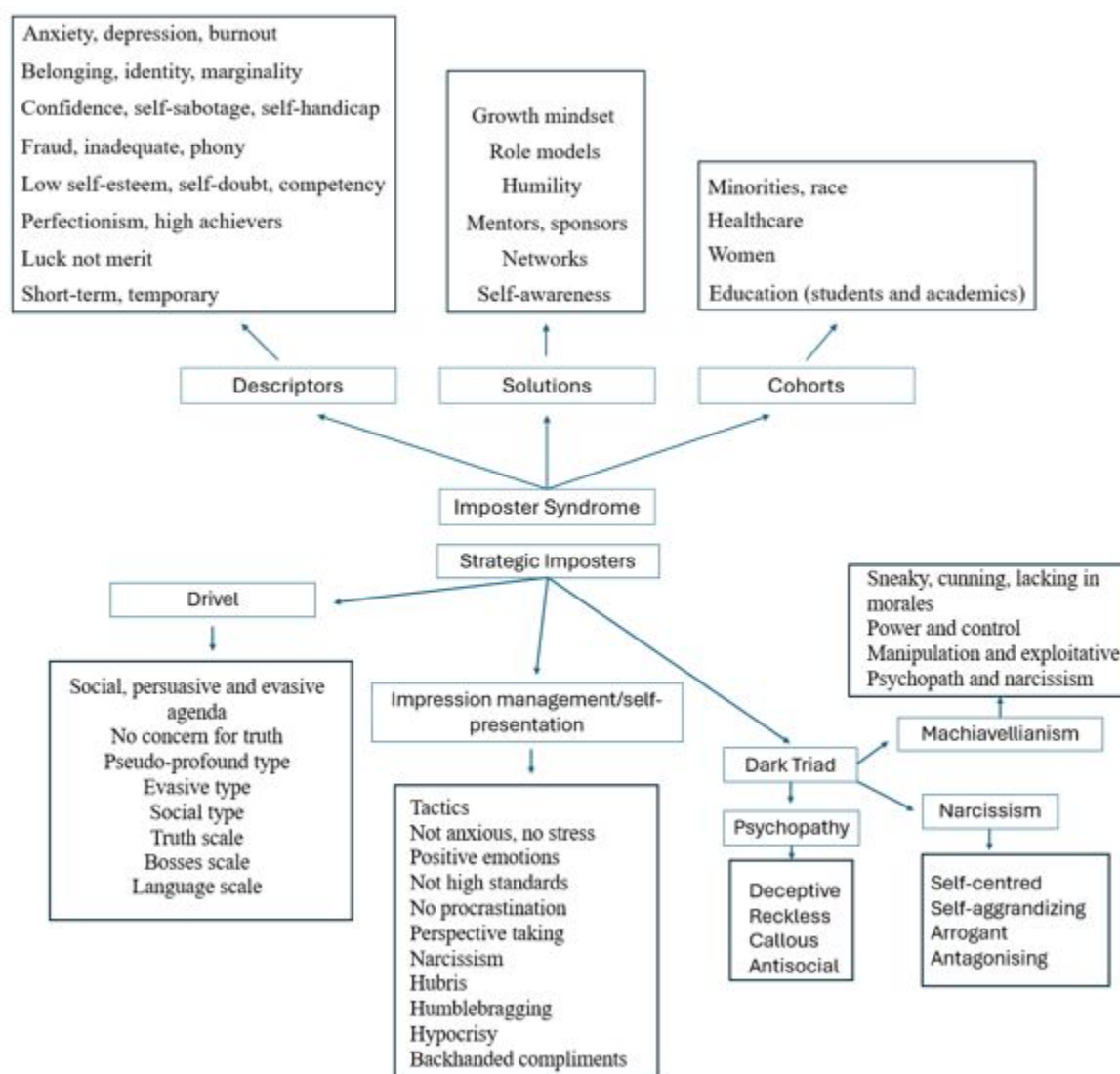


Figure 4: Authentic Conceptual Map (Source: Authors work)

Callanan (2004) argues that management literature focuses on tactics to increase power and hoard it for leadership status (Bolino and Klotz, 2015). However, this paper argues that it is detrimental to workplace motivation and retention, and hampers the recovery of the imposter phenomenon especially among women. It does not appear that the Imposter Phenomenon impacts the organisation as negatively, i.e. it is more an unrecognised potential (personal), in contrast to Strategic Imposterism, which is counterproductive (public). The former is personally deceptive and destructive and void of public 'drivel'. The latter is publicly deceptive, arrogant and destructive, awash with 'drivel' and among leaders has a detrimental impact on the workplace, and those who suffer from the imposter phenomenon, especially women.

### Discussion

From two different reviews, this paper endeavoured to introduce conceptual framework's addressing both the impostor phenomenon and strategic imposters, arguing the latter could be detrimental to individuals (especially women suffering from the imposter phenomenon) and create dysfunctional workplaces. It is clear that citing the impostor phenomenon as strategic impostorism is not viable, as it does not deliver the same intentions or have the same descriptors.

The contribution is therefore three-fold. First, the conceptual review establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors, identifying key antecedents (or descriptors), contributing to the imposter phenomenon and strategic imposter among organisational team members and leaders. Second, it broadens the discourse on the imposter phenomenon by emphasising that organisations not only harbour individuals who perceive themselves as imposters but also accommodate strategic imposters. This distinction sheds

1  
2  
3 light on a novel conceptual understanding of organisational dynamics . Third, this paper  
4  
5 holds practical relevance for organisations by delineating distinct descriptors and behaviours  
6  
7 associated with both the imposter phenomenon and strategic imposters. By elucidating these,  
8  
9 it provides valuable insights for managing and supporting these distinct employee profiles  
10  
11 within the workplace and teams.  
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14  
15 Our first contribution lies in conducting a comprehensive conceptual review of the  
16  
17 concepts, thereby enriching the understanding of the factors influencing the imposter  
18  
19 phenomenon within modern organisational contexts. By pinpointing key descriptors and  
20  
21 identifying demographic cohorts predisposed to experiencing the imposter phenomenon, our  
22  
23 research empowers individuals to recognize and acknowledge their own encounters with this  
24  
25 phenomenon, reassuring them that they are not alone in grappling with it. Given the  
26  
27 detrimental effects associated with the imposter phenomenon, such as feelings of  
28  
29 fraudulence, diminished confidence, and heightened anxiety and burnout, it becomes  
30  
31 imperative for individuals, managers, and organizations alike to proactively delve into  
32  
33 understanding and implementing HR practices and policies, and team dynamics, aimed at  
34  
35 mitigating these challenges. It is unclear whether those who suffer from the imposter  
36  
37 phenomenon are the common victims of strategic imposters, although cases seem to lean in  
38  
39 this direction.  
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46 Secondly, based on calls for insights into strategic imposterism (Leonhardt et al.,  
47  
48 (2017) we broaden the discourse on the imposter phenomenon. Our exploration underscores  
49  
50 the symbiotic relationship between individual experiences of the imposter phenomenon and  
51  
52 organizational and team dynamics. We argue that where individuals grapple with feelings of  
53  
54 imposterism, organizations are likely to harbour individuals who actively engage in deceptive  
55  
56 practices to advance their positions. Thus, our conceptual framework on strategic  
57  
58 imposterism illuminates critical aspects of individuals who manipulate their professional  
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3 circumstances, often resorting to Machiavellian strategies and impression management  
4  
5 techniques.. While this phenomenon may present challenges for organizations and teams, our  
6  
7 framework proposes actionable strategies to address and mitigate its effects. These include  
8  
9 fostering a culture of transparency (humbleness and authenticity), promoting collaborative  
10  
11 environments, and discouraging the excessive use of technical jargon. By prioritizing these  
12  
13 interventions, organizations and teams can cultivate an environment conducive to authenticity  
14  
15 and ethical conduct. By illustrating the tangible effects of these two phenomena, this research  
16  
17 advances theoretical understanding of authentic leadership by clarifying what it is not.  
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19 Leadership is inherently fraught with contradictions and ambiguities, yet our findings  
20  
21 emphasize that true authenticity stems from a genuine alignment between personal values and  
22  
23 professional responsibilities. This means upholding moral integrity in decision-making,  
24  
25 actively seeking diverse perspectives rather than shaping environments to suit personal  
26  
27 agendas, and engaging in open, transparent communication rather than crafting misleading  
28  
29 narratives. Authentic leadership is about demonstrating self-awareness, sharing personal  
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31 experiences honestly, and welcoming constructive feedback, not fabricating an image or  
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33 cultivating an ecosystem of deception. In contrast, strategic imposterism, much like the  
34  
35 impression management operates through manipulation, calculated self-presentation, and the  
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37 deliberate construction of a misleading leadership persona. By exposing these contrasts, we  
38  
39 sharpen our understanding of authentic leadership as a practice rooted in ethical consistency,  
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41 accountability, and relational transparency. Practically, the presence of falsity and especially  
42  
43 toxic leadership, noticed by HR professionals and team managers, indicate issues in work  
44  
45 culture and systemic design. Regarding the perpetrator, drive must be confronted and jargon  
46  
47 prohibited. Appropriate training could develop deeper critical thinking and collaboration by  
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49 all. For victims of deceit and falsity, including the imposter phenomenon, appropriate training  
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3 could develop deeper self-awareness, growth-mindset dispositions, support by mentors and  
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5 sponsors, networks and role models.  
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9 Thirdly, it is evident that we are in a society filled with fakery and the influence on  
10 and within organisations is still poorly understood, with Ferriera et al., (2022) suggesting that  
11 research into 'drivel' is in its infancy. Our contribution, therefore, is the practical relevancy  
12 for organisations and teams, through our authentic conceptual map, which can aid the  
13 management of employee profiles within the workplace and teams. Using the collated  
14 solutions, an authentic culture can be cultivated in leaders, teams and workplaces by  
15 increasing self-awareness, engaging in professional networks, having positive role models,  
16 mentors and sponsors, cultivating a growth-mindset and humility, confronting 'drivel facts',  
17 creating and encouraging a culture of critical thinking, clarifying evidence vs opinion,  
18 prohibiting jargon, eliminating pointless meetings and instead increasing collaboration and  
19 focusing on authenticity in the workplace and in leadership is possible and adds better value  
20 than strategic imposterism.  
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37 The limitations of this research include the authors selection of journals from which  
38 the conceptual and narrative review were drawn. This may limit further key factors and thus  
39 relationships evidenced in other publications. Furthermore, using only published literature  
40 means that we have undoubtedly missed many diverse and interesting examples of practice  
41 that have not been formally documented. As such, again, there may be further key factors and  
42 relationships among these factors excluded from our conceptual maps. Future research could  
43 saturate all databases for a systematic review and include practice-based research. Future  
44 work could further develop the contribution that authentic leadership as a style and concept  
45 can make to supporting the imposter phenomenon but also how it can confront and neutralize  
46 strategic imposterism.  
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Figures

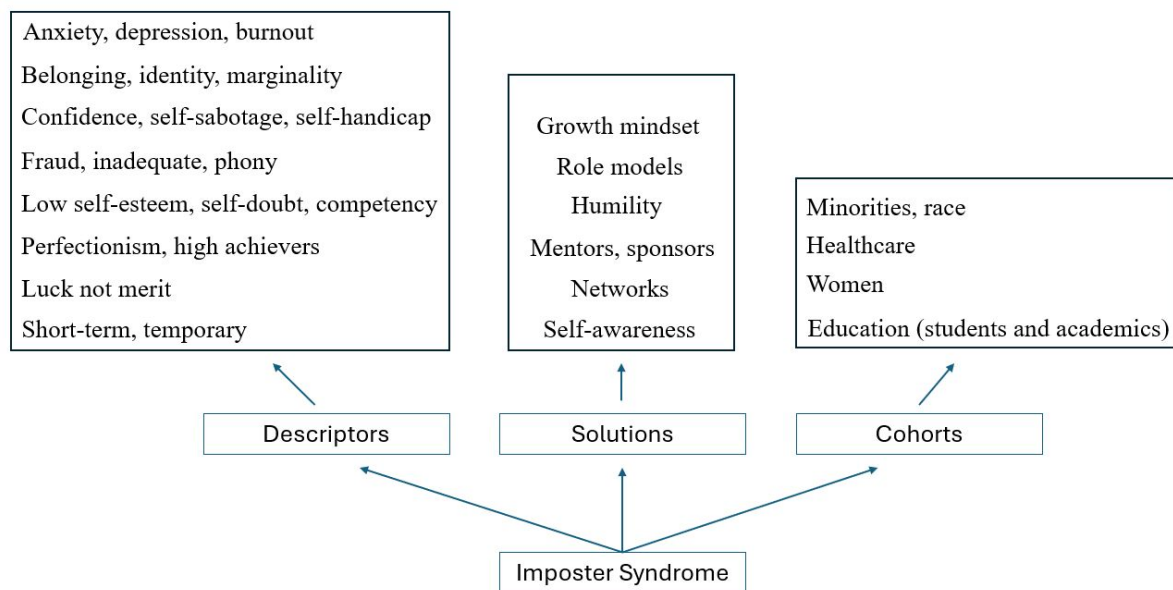


Figure 1: Imposter Syndrome/Phenomenon Conceptual Map

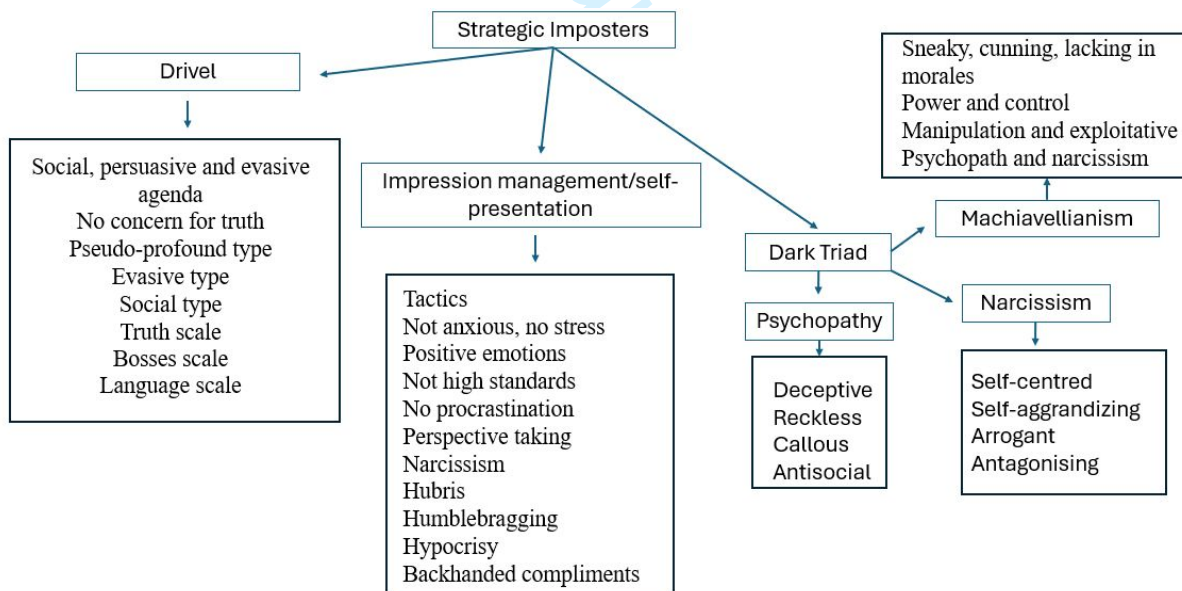


Figure 2: Strategic Imposter Conceptual Map

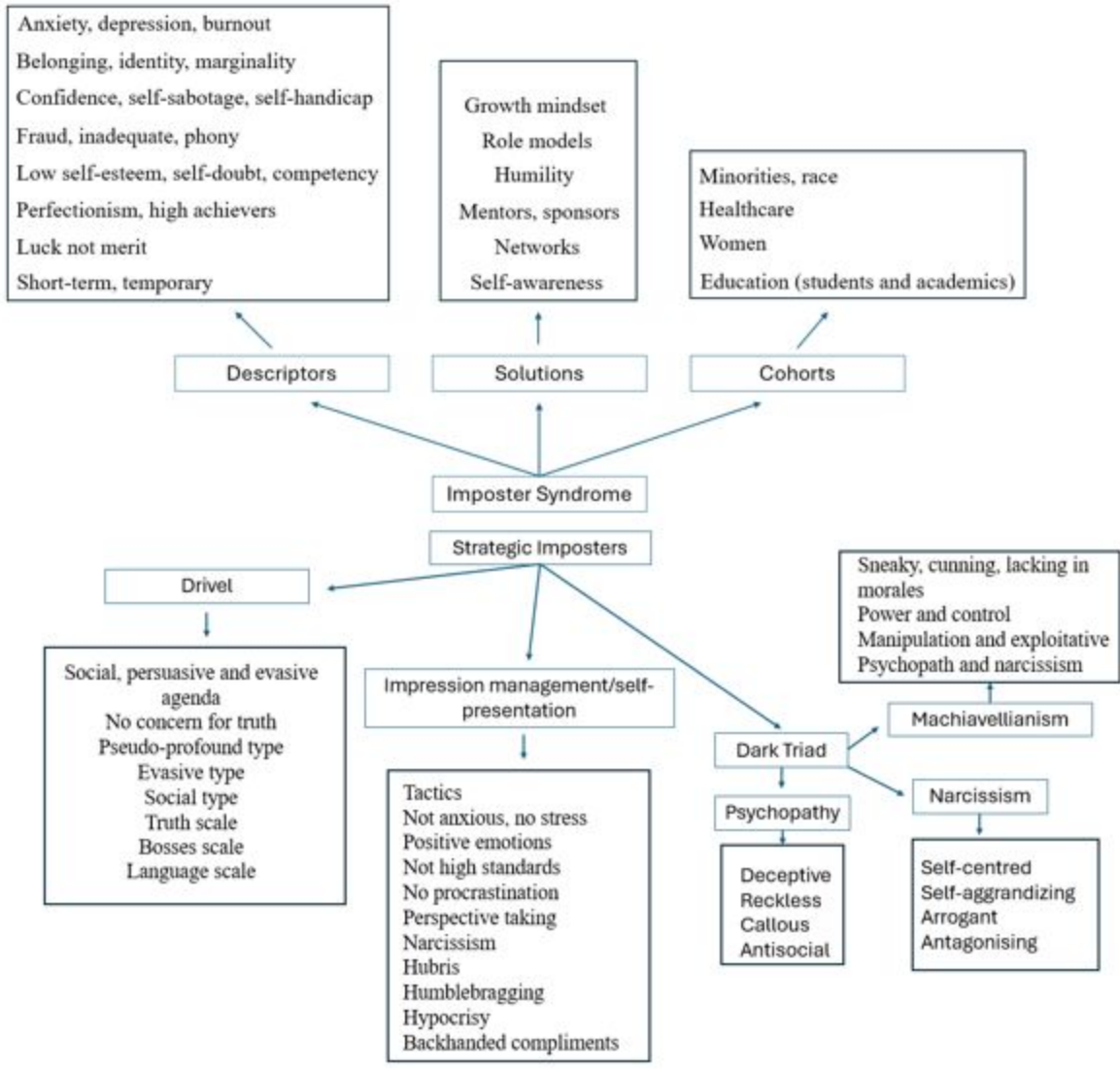


Figure 3: Authentic Conceptual Map

## Tables

Table I: Round 1 Search Results

| <b>Journal</b>          | <b>Articles</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Springer                | 43              |
| Sage                    | 32              |
| Taylor and Francis      | 34              |
| Wiley                   | 33              |
| Elsevier Science Direct | 38              |
| Emerald Insight         | 12              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>192</b>      |

Table II: Round 1 Exclusion Criteria Results

| <b>Exclusion Criteria</b>   | <b>Articles</b> |
|---|-----------------|
| Irrelevant e.g. referring to mental disorders   | 25              |
| No explicit link: may have just used the term 'imposter syndrome' with no explanation or was only in the reference list | 49              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>124</b>      |

Table III: Round 2 Search Results

| <b>Journal</b>          | <b>Articles</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Springer                | 94              |
| Sage                    | 41              |
| Taylor and Francis      | 37              |
| Wiley                   | 51              |
| Elsevier Science Direct | 86              |
| Emerald Insight         | 13              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>322</b>      |

Table IV: Round 2 Exclusion Criteria Results

| <b>Exclusion Criteria</b>   | <b>Articles</b> |
|---|-----------------|
| Irrelevant e.g. cyber imposter, capgras syndrome, imposter content  | 93              |
| No explicit link: may have just used the term 'imposter phenomenon' with no explanation or was only in the reference list | 155             |
| Duplications of Round 1   | 44              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>292</b>      |
| <b>Review TOTAL (322-292)</b>   | <b>30</b>       |

Table V: Conceptual Review Summary

| <b>Key descriptions of Imposter syndrome</b> | <b>Key Concepts</b> | <b>Citations</b> |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
|  |                     |                  |

|                          |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
|                          | Anxiety, depression, burnout                                    | Bradley & Suttie, 2023; Couser et al., 2023; Dutta et al., 2022; Edwards-Maddox, 2023; Fawzy et al., 2023; Gilliland et al., 2016; Jolly & Asokan, 2024; Kim et al., 2023; Lingard & Colquhoun, 2022; Ménard & Chittle, 2023; Parikh & Leschied, 2022; Setchell et al., 2023; Singh, 2022; Smith & McLellan, 2023; Winderbaum & Coventry, 2024   |
|                          | Lack of belonging, contested identity, marginality              | Campbell et al., 2020; Deutsch et al., 2022; Evans & Kevern, 2015; Fu et al., 2023; Hartman, 2023; Itchuaqiyag & Walton, 2021; Jach & Rinaldi, 2024; Lightner-Laws et al., 2023; Pennock & Wade, 2015; Piano et al., 2023; Wells, 2020;  |
|                          | Lack of confidence, self-sabotage, self-handicapping            | Cherrstrom & Bixby, 2018; Curlewis et al., 2021; Diggs-Andrews et al., 2021; Fasge, 2021; Gottlieb et al., 2022; Grohnert et al., 2024; Meyerhoff, 2019; Oldham, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021   |
|                          | Feeling like a fraud, inadequate, phony                         | Ashford et al., 2018; Chess and Shaw, 2015; Grass & Latal, 2022; Morris & Shelton, 2020; Plaskett et al., 2018; Song & McCreary, 2020; Witcher & Mullen, 2021;   |
|                          | Low self-esteem, self-doubt, low levels of belief in competency | Bronson & Long, 2023; Carrington et al., 2024; Deiorio et al., 2022; Haines & McKeown, 2023; Hughes & Bowers-Brown, 2021; Margolis et al., 2021;   |
|                          | Perfectionism, high achievers, procrastination                  | Andersson et al., 2021; Collins, 2018; Cordova et al., 2020; Frumau-can Pinxten et al., 2023; Wong, 2020   |
|                          | Luck not merit  | Balakrishnan et al., 2023; Dickerson, 2022; Gottlieb et al., 2020; Kamalumpundi et al., 2024;  |
|                          | Short-term, temporary   | Barrow, 2019; Dancy II & Jean-Marie, 2014  |
| <b>Key study cohorts</b> | Education (students and academics)                              | Ashmore, 2021; Callander et al., 2024; Chakraborty et al., 2021; Cutri et al., 2021; Gajparia, 2017; McGivern, 2023; Morrow-Howell et al., 2022; Pownall et al., 2022; Prestridge et al., 2023; Withorn et al., 2020;  |
|                          | Women   | Ahmadi et al., 2025; Al-Gergawi et al., 2024; Apostolou et al., 2021; Bernica et al., 2021 ; Blackburn, 2023; Chilmeran & Hedström, 2021; Fraszczyk & Piip, 2019; Gullifor et al., 2024; Hemans et al., 2020; Inguaggiato et al., 2024; Irving 2014; Juarez-Campos et al., 2024; Lomáscolo et al., 2024; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021; Masiran et al., 2023; Monteiro et al., 2023; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Shi et al., 2021; Smith & Sinkford, 2022; Weyant et al., 2021 |
|                          | Healthcare  | Childers & Arnold, 2019; Couser et al., 2023; Freeman & Peisah, 2022; Gonzales et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2022 ; Hamilton-Shield et al., 2018; Hariharan & Griffin, 2019; Heaton-Shrestha et al.,   |

|                      |                   |   |
|----------------------|-------------------|---|
|                      |                   | 2023; Järvinen et al., 2018; Kuhn & Flanagan, 2017; Martin, 2019; McClunie-Trust et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024; Oshodi & Sookhoo, 2024; Passarelli et al., 2024; Tyndall et al., 2021   |
|                      | Minorities, race  | Abel & Gonzales, 2020; Blount-Hill et al., 2022; Collins-Anderson et al., 2022; Corsini et al., 2020; Fletcher et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2024; Knox & Seide, 2023; Mansfield et al., 2022; Nkansah & Amankwah, 2021; Peng, 2024; Stewart, 2016; Torres Acosta et al., 2023; |
| <b>Key solutions</b> | Self-awareness    | Langawi et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021   |
|                      | Networks          | Sharma et al., 2021   |
|                      | Mentors, sponsors | Bellini et al., 2019; Kamalumpundi et al., 2024; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021   |
|                      | Humility          | Michalec et al., 2023   |
|                      | Role models       | Noronha et al., 2022; Panda, 2018;  |
|                      | Growth mindset    | Wolcott et al., 2020  |

Table VI: Narrative Review Summary

| <b>Key descriptions of Strategic Imposter</b>    | <b>Key Concepts</b>                   | <b>Citations</b>  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Bullshit</b>                                  | Social, persuasive and evasive agenda | Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017; Steinmetz et al., 2017; Vartanian, 2015   |
|  | No concern for truth                  | Ferreira et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2020  |
|  | Pseudo-profound type                  | Ferreira et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2020  |
|  | Evasive type                          | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
|  | Social type                           | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
|  | Truth scale                           | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
|  | Bosses scale                          | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
|  | Language scale                        | Leary et al., 2000; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
| <b>Impression management / self-presentation</b> | Tactics                               | Bolino and Klotz, 2015; Gottschalk, 2024; Kimura, 2014; Leary et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017; Roulin et al., 2014 |
|  | Not anxious, no stress                | Lee et al., 2022  |
|  | Positive emotions                     | Lee et al., 2022  |
|  | Not high standards                    | Leonhardt et al., 2017  |
|  | No procrastination                    | Lee et al., 2022; Leonhardt et al., 2017  |

|                                     |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
|                                     | Perspective taking                  | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
|                                     | Hubris                              | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
|                                     | Humblebragging                      | Michalec et al., 2023; Steinmetz et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Hypocrisy                           | Bolino and Klotz, 2015; Leary et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2022; Steinmetz et al., 2017 |
|                                     | Backhanded compliments              | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
| <b>Dark Triad: Narcissism</b>       | Self-centred                        | Steinmetz et al., 2017; Zheng and MacCann, 2023                                      |
|                                     | Self-aggrandizing                   | Brownell et al., 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Arrogant                            | Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
|                                     | Antagonising                        | Muris et al., 2017; Steinmetz et al., 2017   |
| <b>Dark Triad: Machiavellianism</b> | Sneaky, cunning, lacking in morales | Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023; Turi et al., 2022; Zheng and MacCann, 2023            |
|                                     | Power and control                   | Brownell et al., 2021; Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023                                 |
|                                     | Manipulation and exploitative       | Dinić and Jevremov, 2019; Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023; Muris et al., 2017          |
|                                     | Psychopath and narcissism           | Jones & Mueller, 2022  |
| <b>Dark Triad: Psychopathy</b>      | Deceptive                           | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Turi et al., 2022   |
|                                     | Reckless                            | Dinić and Jevremov, 2019; Jones & Mueller, 2022                                      |
|                                     | Callous                             | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Muris et al., 2017  |
|                                     | Antisocial                          | Jones & Mueller, 2022; Zheng and MacCann, 2023                                       |