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Trait Psychopathy and Job Performance in Leadership Jobs

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Introduction

In a recent meta-analysis, O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, and McDaniel (2012) found a significant negative relationship between trait psychopathy and job performance, however effect sizes were rather low ($r_c = -.10$; O'Boyle et al., 2012). Thus, there is reason to suspect that the dimensions of psychopathy may be differentially related to job performance. Further, interactions with other constructs may warrant closer consideration.

Theoretical Background

According to Lilienfeld and colleagues (e.g., Lilienfeld & Widows, 2006), psychopathy is comprised of three dimensions: self-centered impulsivity, fearless dominance, and cold heartedness.

Self-centered impulsivity:

- thrill-seeking, lacking diligence, unconcerned with deadlines or responsibilities
- struggle to forge meaningful, lasting relationships with others
- lack of loyalty to their employer, supervisor, or coworkers

Hypothesis 1. Self-centered impulsivity will be negatively associated with job performance.

Fearless dominance:

- seeking the attention of others, striving to be the center of social interactions, and wishing to achieve one's will (manipulation)

Vocational performance is optimized by matching an individual's personal characteristics with the situational demands of the job (Holland, 1997)

- enterprising work environments (Holland, 1976):
 - encourage and reward people to manipulate others to attain organizational or personal goals
 - persuade other people, extensive talking, ability to relate to a wide range of individuals

Hypothesis 2. Enterprising job demands moderate the relationship between fearless dominance and job performance. Specifically, if enterprising job demands are high (low), there is a positive (null) relationship between fearless dominance and job performance.

Method

Sample. 160 leader-superior dyads, 85 male (53%) leaders, mean age of 42 years, mean job tenure of 7 years, and mean hierarchical position within the organizations of 60% (0% bottom level, 100% top level)

Measures.

Self-centered impulsivity, Fearless dominance: *Psychopathy Personality Inventory - Revised* (PPI-R; Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005)

Enterprising Job Demands: economic return, variety and career dimensions from Super's work values inventory (1970) plus six items of the enterprising scale of the UST (Umwelt-Struktur-Test; Bergmann & Eder, 1992)

Job performance: Superiors rated leaders' job performance using an overall measure (Blickle, Momm, Schneider, Gansen & Kramer, 2009)

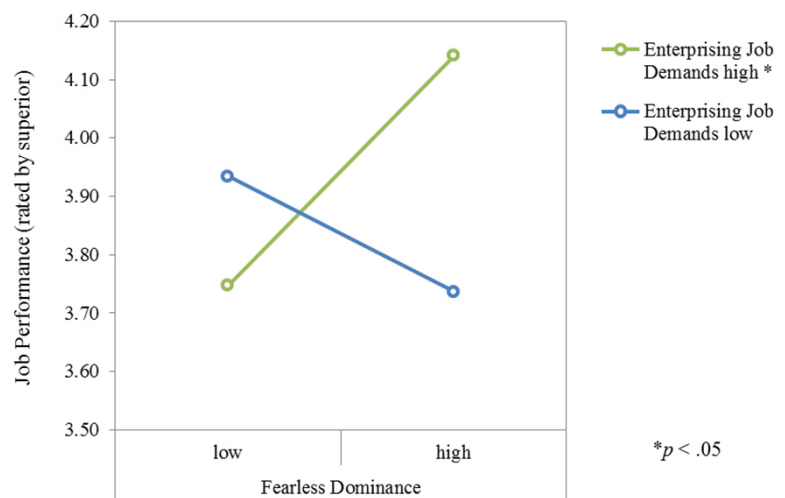
Controls: gender, age, cold heartedness

Results

Our results support the hypothesized negative main effect of SCI as well as the proposed interaction effect of fearless dominance x enterprising job demands on superior rated job performance.

Predictors	DV = Job performance (rated by superior)	
	B (se)	β
Gender	-.33 (.05)	-.05
Age	-.20 (.05)	-.30**
Cold heartedness (CH)	.16 (.14)	.09
Self-centered impulsivity (SCI)	-.47 (.18)	-.21*
Fearless Dominance (FD)	.16 (.14)	.09
Enterprising job demands (EJD)	.11 (.10)	.10
FD ²	-.20 (.29)	-.07
EJD ²	-.07 (.11)	-.05
FD x ED	.64 (.26)	.26*
R ²	.21	
F _(R²) (df1, df2)	4.31*** (9, 150)	

Note. N = 160 leader-superior dyads, Gender (0 = female; 1 = male), control variables and predictors were centered prior to analyses; †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01.



Conclusion

Our findings support the idea that psychopathy is a multidimensional personality construct, and that the dimensions of psychopathy are differentially related to job performance. In certain occupations, some psychopathic personality tendencies (e.g., fearless dominance) may be even useful. Future research should examine the effects of specific job characteristics (e.g., autonomy, task significance) on those individuals with elevated levels of psychopathic personality traits. From a leadership standpoint, research should be conducted to determine *how* individuals with elevated levels of psychopathic personality traits ascend to positions of leadership.

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