4. How so many toxic employees ascend to leadership

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Introduction

No matter which sector organizations occupy, a generic factor that middle managers identify as being critical to success is effective leadership. Notwithstanding, Hogan puts the base level of ineffective leadership at around 65% (Hogan 1994). This is to the extent that up to 70% of employees would take a pay cut if their immediate superior could be fired (Hogan 2019). Moreover, between 60% to 75% of employees report that the worst part of their job is dealing with their superior (Hogan 1994) who is thus the main influence on employee job satisfaction.

Whilst leadership is acknowledged as being a key determinant of organizational success and employee well-being, it appears that toxic or "dark side" personalities; experts in political, influencing and manipulation skills, are wrong perceived as "having what it takes" to be an effective leader. This can, unfortunately, play a role in determining who rises to leadership. Of note is that toxic leaders tend to be inept because they are promoted above their real ability levels.

Following Lipman-Blumen, we envisage toxic leaders as those individuals who occupy key decision-making positions and who exhibit destructive behavior and dysfunctional personal characteristics incorporating the infliction of serious and enduring harm on the people, groups and nations they lead (Lipman-Blumen 2004). As workplace/corporate (sub-clinical) psychopaths have been described as archetypal toxic leaders they are used as a prime example of toxic leaders in this chapter. However, many toxic leaders may personify elements of the overlapping personalities of the narcissist, psychopath and Machiavellian, referred to as the "dark triad" of personalities (Paulhus and Williams 2002). There is general agreement among scholars that psychopathy is the darkest of those toxic personalities. Whilst Narcissists and Machiavellians may use the same cunning to get ahead, they are not in the same league, in terms of sheer ruthlessness, as psychopaths. To that end, the focus of this chapter is on the sub-clinical psychopathic leader; variously and more-or-less inter-changeably known as a primary, successful, corporate, executive, industrial or organizational psychopath.

Psychopathic leadership is defined as organizational governance by ruthless and manipulative individuals who are without conscience, regret, care, responsibility, empathy, compassion or truthfulness (Boddy 2017a). The sub-clinical psychopathic personality is rapacious, seeking out the power, prestige and money that is offered in the ranks of senior management (Chiaburu et al. 2013). Increasingly fast staff turnover, a common feature of contemporary organizations, makes an ideal environment for this personality type to thrive. In this respect employees only know each other superficially in the workplace and the seemingly charming, but highly manipulative sub-clinical psychopath makes their identification near impossible prior to appointment. Despite their apparent and perceived ability, sub-clinical psychopathic leaders are associated

with incidents of what can only be described as severe bullying, reduced levels of organizational success and declines in shareholder wealth. Sub-clinical psychopathic leaders make poor investment decisions (ten Brinke et al. 2018), are more likely to illegally dump toxic waste materials (Ray and Jones 2011) and are less likely to be viewed as engaging in responsible corporate citizenship behavior (Boddy et al. 2010). The remainder of this chapter examines firstly, the importance of leadership and then the Individual, Organizational, Environmental and Cultural factors which aid these psychopathic toxic leaders in reaching the highest ranks of organizations.

The importance of leadership

Whether toxic and psychopathic employees ascend to leadership positions is important because of the significance of leadership itself and the power of leaders over organizational outcomes. Leadership is also important because it influences organizational culture; organizations are reported to be reflections of the types of people that the organization contains and it is the people within an organization who create the culture; the norms, ways of doing things and the outcomes of organizations (Schneider 1987)

Leaders especially set the "tone at the top" (Weber 2010), the ethical culture of an organization and their behavior and attitudes as role models ripple through an organization in what may be called a "leader multiplier effect" which influences ethics and productivity throughout an organization, for good or ill. Thus, in a paper discussing personal morality and psychopathy, Francis and Armstrong (2008) argue that selection

for senior leaders is important because they set the tone and standards for an organization which mark it as trustworthy or otherwise. Furthermore, moral leadership is consequential for organizational success and longevity (Francis and Armstrong 2008) while organizational decline is associated with dark and psychopathic organizational leaders whose personality characteristics lead to poor leadership decisions, alienated employees and undermined work teams (Kaiser and Hogan 2007).

A key component of selecting and developing future leaders is to design processes that will positively impact on the organization achieving its long-term goals. Criteria used for selection and development should be informed by values, cultures and preferred leadership styles that will influence employee behavior. Contemporary leadership approaches focus on behaviors that are fundamentally different from those associated with psychopathic leaders and adopting servant (Spears 2010) or transformational (Bass and Avolio 1993) leadership could provide a mechanism to reduce the likelihood of appointing those with psychopathic personality.

With recent findings that psychopathy facilitates personal hierarchical success in the workplace (Pavlić and Međedović 2019) but is associated with unethical and sub-optimal decisions (Shank et al. 2019; Van Scotter and Roglio 2018) employee bullying (Valentine et al. 2018) and burnout (Oyewunmi et al. 2018); the topic of leader psychopathy has been re-emphasized as an important area of study in management. The influences on the rise of psychopathic leadership are outlined below.

Individual factors

Psychopathic personality is marked by features commonly recognized as including; lack of empathy, guilt, and remorse, emotional shallowness, glibness, egocentricity, and pathological lying (Cleckley 1941/1988). Whilst criminal (unsuccessful) psychopaths score higher on anti-social characteristics (Mullins-Sweatt et al. 2010) core psychopathic personality traits do not differ between successful and unsuccessful psychopaths (Benning et al. 2003). In particular, the deficit in affective processing is shared (Osumi et al. 2007). Several studies reveal that empathic and affective dysfunction in clinical psychopathy can be generalized to sub-clinical psychopaths (Seara-Cardoso et al. 2012). Both groups are found to have significant problems in accurately detecting and discerning facial expressions of fear. Recent work in this respect, reports problems for both clinical and sub-clinical samples with affective but not cognitive empathy (Tamura et al. 2016). This manifests as having little interest in other people and a general failure to feel, identify and lend any importance to emotional events whatsoever. Thus, corporate psychopaths are callously indifferent to what happens to their colleagues, employers or to society. However, propelled by a lack of inhibitions, a willingness to mislead people, a manipulative and ruthless personality and the desire for power and prestige, psychopathic leaders appear charismatic by promising a positive and persuasive vision of unlimited success. Cases in point being the organizational leader Bernard Madoff, who promised investors unending growth in financial returns or the political leader, Adolf Hitler who promised a thousand years of glory (Rees 2012). With no conscience, psychopathic leaders have no qualms in promising what they cannot realistically hope to deliver. Nonetheless, because of people's desire for security, inclusion and acceptance some people are prepared to follow a toxic leader who appears

strong, authoritative, knowledgeable and determined. Thus, toxic leaders can gain some measure of popular organizational or political support.

Psychopaths are thus the apparently charming, totally ruthless people who lack emotion and empathy and comprise about one percent of the general population (Kiehl and Buckholtz 2010). A minority of people (e.g. circa 23% of men in one sample) also have psychopathic traits while not being categorically psychopathic (Levenson et al. 1995) and these traits may predispose them to selfishness. Disposed to lie to and manipulate others to accomplish self-oriented aims and self-serving behavior (Barelds et al. 2018), they camouflage their emotional deficit with their engaging allure and complete lack of self-doubt, neuroses or fear (Kiehl and Buckholtz 2010). Facilitating their apparent sociability, sub-clinical psychopaths are able to feign emotions more convincingly than other people (Porter et al. 2011).

It has been hypothesized that this ability to lie convincingly and feign emotions are two of the skills which allow sub-clinical psychopaths to excel in job interviews and gain promotion over other people (Boddy 2011a). This in turn is theorized to explain the increased incidence of corporate psychopaths at the top of organizations relative to the bottom (Boddy 2011a). Being emotionless they do not appear to suffer from the minor neuroses, depressions, pangs of conscience and self-doubt that many people experience from time to time. This makes them look confident and poised and they can be viewed as embodying leadership potential.

Personal explanations for toxic leadership ascension are associated with individual personality traits and the desire to gain money, power and prestige, alongside a ruthless

willingness to acquire these by any means available. The sub-clinical psychopath's lack of moral agency includes; a willingness to be untruthful about career accomplishments and academic qualifications, including falsely claiming to have originated the good work of others (Torrie 2014). These ruthless individuals are adept at upward impression management, giving those above them a misleading perception of their true character, experience and abilities (Babiak 1995).

These personal characteristics enable the toxic leader to ascend, regardless of their toxic identification by peers and subordinates (Boddy 2011b). Thus, these sub-clinical psychopaths may not be incarcerated, yet the consequences of their reported behavior in leadership roles is pernicious.

Corporate psychopaths spend their time networking, grandstanding and promoting themselves rather than trying to be effective at their jobs. This use of impression management techniques gets them noticed and getting noticed helps them get promoted. Corporate psychopaths are thus adept at reaching senior hierarchical management positions more frequently than their incidence in the population would indicate (Babiak et al. 2010) and their fearlessness and lack of neuroses (Dutton 2016) together with a lack of conscience helps them get there. Their initial charm is also advantageous and psychopaths can be so engaging that they are named "Man of the Year" at Chambers of Commerce (Kiehl and Buckholtz 2010).

The sub-clinical psychopaths' ability to gain leadership positions amplifies their negative influence on organizations and on society because of the financial and social power of the organization. Finally, being emotionally detached means that they attach no

importance to relationships and so psychopathic employees do not have the affective claims on their time from family and friends, that others have. They can thus devote themselves entirely to their careers and this perceived dedication again aids their progression.

Organizational antecedents

Organizational causes of toxic leadership ascension incorporate insufficiently thorough and relatively shallow personnel selection processes and a reliance on the job interview as a main tool for selection (Hogan and Hogan 2001). Psychopathic candidates' use of impression management tactics and the researching of corporate plans, documents and the speeches/writings of key executives, permits mirroring behavior of key words and phrases and even copying styles of dress. This allows the unemotional psychopathic personality to ostensibly outperform other contenders via their unflappable presentation styles (Ray and Ray 1982), apparent sartorial and intellectual suitability and untruthful claims of competency. In shallow selection processes the untruthful nature of qualification and experience claims remain unchecked. This shallowness allows CV fraud and fallacious competency claims to go undetected (Boddy et al. 2015). Their entry into organizations and rise within them is thus expedited. Furthermore, some organizations unwittingly or deliberately use psychopathic traits as descriptors of the types of employees they want to attract. For example, a broadcast and media agency reported that it wanted psychopathic people as new recruits (Rodionova 2016) supposedly because such people are deeply driven and will do whatever it takes to be good salespersons. In another example, a corporate bank was reported to have used a

measure containing psychopathic traits to attract new recruits during the events leading up to the 2007 global financial crisis (GFC) (Basham 2011). Recent research supports this because corporations have been found to be recruiting successful psychopaths into their businesses via the use of psychopathy related character descriptions in executive career advertisements. This helps to explain the outstanding levels of greed, risk taking with other people's money and lack of integrity that characterized employees in the corporate banks involved in the GFC. Findings demonstrated that corporations were seeking the characteristics that are synonymous to the personality traits of the primary psychopath, which would tend to increase the propensity of successful psychopaths being present in the workplace (Hill and Scott 2019).

On the other hand, research which investigated workplace accomplishment and psychopathy determined that employers should embed a tool for assessing psychopathy into employee selection procedures to keep psychopaths out of key positions because of the excessive risks involved in appointing them (Blickle et al. 2018). Commentators write that as people who are high in psychopathic traits are to be found in management (Board and Fritzon 2005), psychopathy measures designed for use in corporate settings could be utilized in suitable recruitment and screening procedures (Fritzon et al. 2016). Similarly, in considering psychopaths for the financial sector, a somewhat understated recommendation has been made for finance firms to be more adroit at hiring people with good morals (DeCovny 2012). Furthermore, reviewers of the literature on workplace psychopathy conclude that due to the chaos created by such unethical people in management, it is necessary for organizations to use selection tools aimed at identifying psychopaths (Spencer and Wargo 2010). In particular for those in potentially high positions, it is even more important to screen candidates for psychopathy.

Suggestions from psychopathy researchers are that candidate choice procedures should try and attempt to identify the psychopathic and screen out people who embody such traits. For leadership scholars Kaiser and Hogan (2007) the easiest way to minimize the impact of toxic leaders is reportedly to identify them in employee selection processes. This may entail the use of extensive checks into candidate backgrounds, including getting references from previous subordinates (Kaiser and Hogan 2007) because these are the people who typically first notice that a psychopathic supervisor has abusive, bullying and unscrupulous characteristics.

Whilst Highhouse and Brooks (2017) argue that senior and critical positions in organizations are often filled using informal procedures with low validity in terms of recruiting the best people, other commentators have explored methods used to assess people for high potential programs involving accelerated development to executive positions. The major factors used were past and current performance, assessment centers and level of mobility. The performance evaluations were largely drawn from senior managers who tend to value short term outcomes and rely on information provided by the psychopaths themselves. Assessment centers can advantage people who are extroverted and adept at using impression management tactics (Posthumus et al. 2016). As psychopaths use techniques to inflate their contribution to team success, group exercises in assessment centers are also likely to produces results favoring them. Also, as psychopaths are highly ambitious, they exhibit high levels of mobility to fast-track their careers. Such high levels of mobility also mean that they can move position before the negative impacts of their bullying and toxic behavior become evident to their superiors.

More recently, Rotolo et al. (2018) discussed how areas such as talent management for employee development are replete with fads, fashions and new terminology. Psychopaths use mirroring behavior and language as part of impression management, being early adopters of the latest fads and language being used by CEOs and other executives. This increases visibility and increases the probability of being identified as high-potential and thus being selected as part of key projects and being given preferential staff development such as secondments and places in international executive programs.

Environmental influences

Environmental influences which permit sub-clinical psychopaths to occupy leadership positions include a rapidly changing workforce where personnel are not adequately acquainted with co-workers to recognize and alert others to the more hidden and unsavory characteristics of some of their number (Boddy 2011a). Additionally, as large numbers of colleagues quit the affected work environment (Webster et al. 2016), there are decreasing numbers of employees who are sufficiently aware of the personality of the toxic leader to give accurate assessments of their workplace efficiency. All these factors aid the toxic, sub-clinical psychopaths' ascent to a leadership position.

Toxic leaders such as sub-clinical psychopaths are reportedly often promoted but rarely challenged in their climb to senior organizational levels (Pech and Slade 2007). They are promoted because they are wrongly perceived as being committed to an organization

and due to their finely tuned upward impression management skills which lead senior managers to believe they are exemplary productive and attractive employees who are ideal for leadership positions. Such toxic leaders are rarely challenged because they manipulate their workplace environment and use a bullying persona to discourage closer examination of what they are doing. In particular, through abusive supervision and extreme bullying (Boddy et al. 2015), they generate a culture of fear in the workplace environment they rule, with the result that most employees do not dare challenge them (Boddy 2017b).

Recent employee recruitment research indicates that initial impressions are important in selection processes as they make an impact on the final impressions that selectors have of candidates (Carnes et al. 2019). Thus, the ability of the psychopathic to create favorable initial impressions through self-promotion and ingratiation facilitates their hiring and ascendance.

An interview provides an environment in which psychopaths can excel as they are discussing their favorite subject; themselves. Therefore, they are likely to perform comparatively well, particularly providing socially desirable responses (Nikolaou and Georgiou 2018). Research on people with psychopathic tendencies found a positive correlation between narcissism, and socially desirable responses (Kowalski et al. 2018). Further, literature on the impact of impression management suggests that decisions in interviews are typically made in the first 5 minutes and that untrained interviewers are drawn to intuitive conclusions in the opening minutes of an interview (Board 2016). Furthermore, interviewers are typically unable to accurately perceive when candidates are using impression management tactics and thus the manipulativeness of corporate

psychopaths goes undetected at the selection stage. This lack of depth in employee selection procedures aids the ascension of psychopaths.

Corporate psychopaths can also manipulate their environment via organizational re-structuring and re-staffing exercises which are used as camouflage for replacing potential opponents with compliant colleagues and obedient followers. Boards of strong, independent directors are replaced with friends, favorites and collaborators.

Cultural influences

Cultural factors influencing toxic leadership ascension comprise of the value some organizations and societies attach to individualism and the pursuit of profit (Bakan 2004). Further, a relative unawareness of the presence of individual employee malevolence allows toxic employees to remain unrecognized and unchallenged until large damage becomes evident (Kaiser et al. 2008). Psychopathic and other related personalities dress to impress (Holtzman and Strube 2013) and this image of a smartly dressed and apparently successful individual appeals to the organizations' image of itself as thriving and victorious.

Psychopaths, conclude Holtzman and Strube (2013), construct their personal image, via the effective adornment of high-quality clothing, which acts as a signal or "social lure" (p. 1) towards the unwary. Cultural influences also include the development of what has been described as "a culture of fear" within organizations managed by toxic leaders. Fear induces cognitive paralysis in subordinates and reduces the effectiveness of

intellectual and emotional responses to the presence of the toxic leader (Webster et al. 2016). This facilitates their maintenance of power.

Corporate psychopaths present themselves as people with traits that are viewed as desirable by HR specialists. Qualities such as coolness under pressure, confidence and persuasiveness are regarded as desirable within employees whereas other psychopathic traits such as untruthfulness may simultaneously be present but are less easy to spot at interviews (Hill and Scott 2019; Tudosoiu et al. 2019). This results in the hiring of corporate psychopaths, their continued ascension within organizations and their eventual attainment of leadership position. Woodrow and Guest (2014), found that HR departments are reluctant to challenge behavior such as bullying as the culprits are in strategically important positions as well as being perceived as being popular and protected by more senior executives.

Cultures which encourage and celebrate individuality, self-promotion and a heroic view of leadership tend not to notice when these become pathological. Aggression is written off as competitiveness and bullying as forcefulness. Thus as Levenson and colleagues reported in 1995, the commonplace nature of psychopathic attitudes in a minority of the population is easily overlooked (Levenson et al. 1995).

Conclusions

Toxic leaders ascend to leadership aided by the extent of their psychopathic characteristics. Such sub-clinical psychopaths at work progress to the top because they

are determined to obtain the power, money and prestige that these positions can offer. Ruthlessly, they lie, cheat, manipulate and thereby out-maneuver their colleagues in the competition for advancement. This is unwittingly abetted by the shallow and ineffective selection, recruitment and promotion practices that organizations follow and by the unwillingness of HR departments to challenge abusive and bullying behavior in some managers.

Furthermore, the rapid turnover of personnel in modern workplaces make it easier for the psychopath to hide in plain sight. Typically, many of their colleagues do not get to know them well enough to realize that something is seriously amiss with their attitudes to their fellow employees, corporate social responsibility and the legal requirements for engaging in commerce. Corporate psychopaths look and sound successful and, to those above them, appear to be "star" managers and employees who are worthy of further promotion. Arguably, the result of all this is the crisis of leadership and sustainability that the World is now facing.

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