

Everything in Moderation? A Review of the Organisational Success of Individuals with Personality Dysfunction.

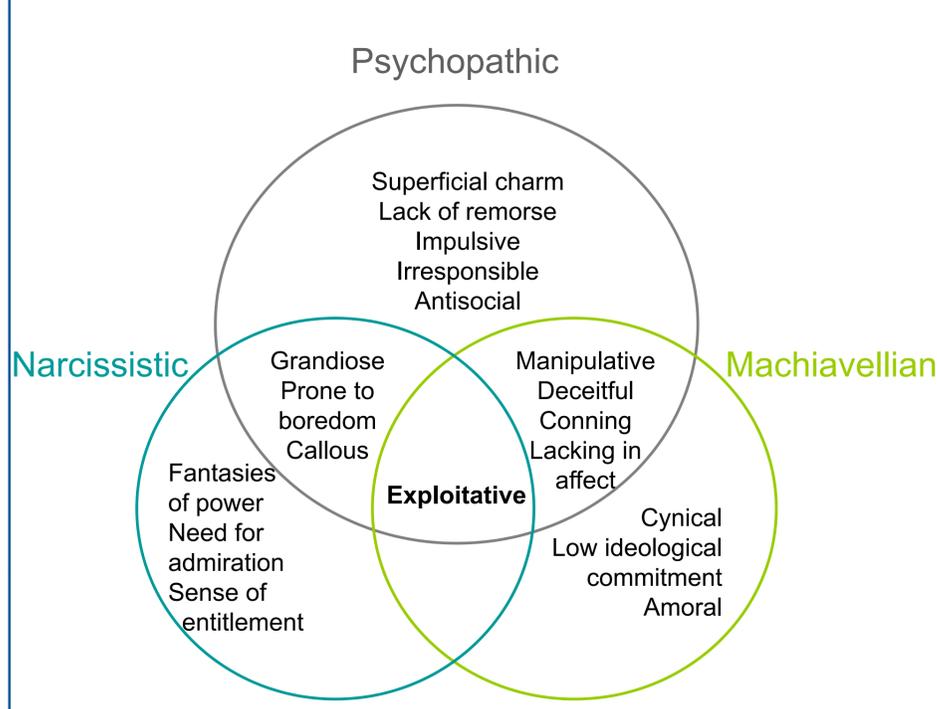
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Abstract

Possession of psychopathic, narcissistic and Machiavellian traits is related to attraction to organisations and job roles that provide opportunities for rewards, autonomy and stimulation. Such individuals are likely to appear as good candidates and therefore be selected. Different perspectives on performance reveal different relationships to dysfunctional traits. Some aspects of performance (e.g. sales) appear to be aided by dysfunctional traits whilst others are hampered (e.g. contextual performance). Organisational structure also appears to impact upon the success of those with dysfunctional traits. These traits appear to be associated with a rise to leadership positions, but inbuilt character weaknesses are likely to become salient and may lead to career derailment.

Traits



Attraction

The following organisational features are proposed to be attractive to those high on psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Soyer, Rovenpor & kopelman, 1999):

- Opportunity to exploit/manipulate others
- Potential for high rewards including money, status and power
- Few constraints and high autonomy
- Stimulation

Selection

Dysfunctional personality traits can often be mistaken for desirable traits. Those with dark side traits may appear as ideal candidates, with potential for leadership positions.

Desirable Trait	Dysfunctional Trait
Charismatic	Superficial Charm
Self-Confidence	Grandiosity
Ability to influence	Manipulation
Persuasive	Exploitative
Visionary Thinking	Fantasies of power
Ability to take risks	Impulsive
Action oriented	Poor planning
Ability to make hard decisions	Lack of affect

Performance

Type of dysfunction and performance	Organisational structure
Psychopathic performance appears to be poor across task, contextual and overall performance (Moscoso & Salgado, 2004). Psychopaths complete little work personally and create conflict within teams (Babiak & Hare, 2006). In contrast, narcissistic and Machiavellian characters appear to be able to perform conceptual, task-related elements of a job but not contextual elements (Moscoso & Salgado, 2004; Blair, Hoffman & Helland, 2008; Ricks & Fraedrich, 1999). Machiavellian individuals appear able to perform well in sales roles (Aziz, May & Crotts, 2002; Ricks & Fraedrich, 1999), whereas no relationship was found between narcissism and sales performance (Soyer et al, 1999).	Low levels of structure within an organisation appears to benefit those with dysfunctional personality styles. Schultz (1993) found that individuals high in Machiavellian characteristics performed better than those who were low when the organisation's structure was loose, but worse within highly structured companies. Babaik & Hare (2006) proposed that psychopaths prosper in less bureaucratic organisations, particularly those undergoing chaotic change with poor structure.



Rating Source

Whether performance is assessed via self-report, subordinate or superior ratings or objective data has an impact upon the effect of dysfunctional traits on performance. Self-report performance appears to be positively related to dysfunctional traits (e.g. Aziz et al, 2002). Subordinate ratings appear unrelated to dysfunctional traits, whereas managers' ratings of performance correlate negatively with dysfunctional traits (Blair et al, 2008). With a psychopathic employee, positive ratings are given by those under the psychopath's manipulation and negative ratings are given by those who have seen the "true" psychopath (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Interestingly, Machiavellian characteristics have been shown to correlate with objective sales performance but negatively with managerial ratings of performance (Ricks & Fraedrich, 1999).

Leadership and Derailment

Dysfunctional personality styles appear to be related to leadership. Research suggests that these styles may be more beneficial for rising to a leadership position than performing as a leader however. Brunell et al (2008) found that narcissism was associated with leadership emergence but not leadership performance. Okanes & Stinson (1974) found that in a management simulation, high Machs were more likely to be identified as leaders by their peers at the beginning of the task, but not after the group had been performing together for 20 hours. To explain this, Hogan & Kaiser (2005) state that dysfunctional personality styles have short term strengths but long term weaknesses. For example, they identified that those with traits akin to psychopathy are willing to take risks and are charming, which may be functional in the short term, but over longer periods of time their propensity to lie, defy rules and authority and exploit others emerge as weaknesses.

The above suggests that narcissistic, psychopathic and Machiavellian managers will ultimately derail. There is some evidence to support this. Characteristics of narcissistic leaders, such as increasing isolation, devaluation of subordinates, creation of internal competition and failure to learn from or teach others, have been linked to derailment (Lubit, 2002; Maccoby, 2000). Ullrich, Farrington & Coid, (2008) found psychopathic traits were negatively related to status and wealth, suggesting failure or derailment. Having no dysfunction may not be ideal either. Kaplan & Kaiser (2003) found optimal performance in managers was associated with moderate scores on measures of dysfunction. Also, certain organisational cultures may create conditions where leaders with dysfunctional personality traits can prosper (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Pech & Slade, 2007) and in times of turbulence those with dysfunction may be the best leaders (Maccoby, 2000).