

Charm, Charisma and Catastrophe: The psychopath at Work

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The existence of so-called “successful” psychopaths is becoming an increasing focus of psychological research. Successful psychopaths are distinguished from other psychopathic individuals as, although they have the same constellation of personality characteristics, they have avoided the associated history of arrest and incarceration (Lynam et al, 1999). Preliminary evidence suggests that these individuals prosper in organisational settings. Psychopaths have been identified working successfully as senior managers, politicians, doctors, psychiatrists and scientists to name but a few (e.g. Board & Fritzon, 2005; Hare, 1993; Cleckley, 1941; Babiak, 1995, 1996). Psychopaths appear to have skills and personal characteristics that help them to become successful; charm, the ability to manipulate, ruthlessness, self-confidence and fearlessness (Board & Fritzon, 2005). As a consequence they can rise quickly through the ranks to positions of power and influence. This can have disastrous consequences for the organisation, its employees and society as a whole (Boddy, 2006). Further research is sorely needed to build upon the scant evidence available at present, the majority of which is anecdotal in nature, and identify the true extent of psychopathy in the workplace.