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## Multiple Lights on the Dark Side of Personality

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter reviews key lines in the history of the conceptualization and assessment of dark side personality or dysfunctional personality tendencies, with specific attention of its implications for the employability of persons and how such tendencies are manifested in work behavior. Direct and indirect ways to assess dark traits are reviewed and discussed, including the prevalence of dysfunctional tendencies and their subclinical manifestations. The chapter closes with the identification of key issues that need the immediate attention of both researchers and practitioners to advance this emergent field both scientifically and professionally.*

**Key words:** Dysfunctional Tendencies, Dark Side, Dark Triad, Employment Screening, Employment Risk Assessment

## Introduction

The management and human resources literature and professional practice have been heavily influenced by positive psychology in the past decades. There was huge attention in these fields for successes, with a whole series of ceremonies and awards, highlighting and underscoring the fields' progress and achievements in their recent past. This bright side focus has been overshadowed in the past 10 years by many examples of management derailment or mismanagement that have been widely discussed in the public domain. In many instances, personal factors were clearly central and assumed to have at least contributed to the problematic situations. Traits such as greed or the overly confident and risky mindset of bankers and brokers were vast ingredients explaining the financial crises that hit the world in 2008 and subsequent years. The case of Bernie Madoff, a former NASDAQ president, who fooled and financially misled hundreds of investors including his own children, generated a lot of discussion on corporate psychopathy (Babiak & Hare, 2007) and ethical business practices. Along with these eye-catching and highly mediatized examples, recent organization surveys show that on average 50% of employees are dissatisfied with the leadership they experience (Hogan, Hogan, & Kaiser, in press). A recent Gallup survey (<https://q12.gallup.com>) organized in 142 countries/areas revealed that only 13% of employees on average describe themselves as engaged, 63% as not engaged, and 24% even described themselves as actively disengaged. These findings are more surprising, given the large amounts of money that have been invested in human resources development and leadership training programs in the past years. Reviewing this diversity of alarming findings sharpened the interest of industrial and organizational psychologists during the past decade in studying the dark side of people in organizations, to have a better understanding of how it went wrong in organizations, what we can learn from this history, and how to prevent these phenomena.

Robert and Joyce Hogan were among the first to explicitly call the attention of industrial and organizational psychologists to a broad spectrum of dysfunctional tendencies with their Hogan Development Survey (HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 2001). The HDS distinguishes 11 tendencies that may hinder adequate functioning at work. The HDS scales Skeptical, Reserved, Imaginative, Mischievous, Excitable, Histrionic, Bold, Cautious, Dutiful, Obsessive-Compulsive and Leisurely refer to subclinical manifestations of 11 personality disorders, 10 of which are listed in the DSM-IV nomenclature (APA; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), except for Leisurely. Leisurely refers to the Passive-Aggressive personality disorder, which was listed in the appendix of DSM-IV, though clearly has a history in IO (Industrial/Organizational) psychology. The passive-aggressive behavior pattern was initially described by Menninger to refer to soldiers' reaction to military compliance during World War II.

Although these tendencies were initially considered as weaknesses given their clinical background, more current thinking also considers (some) of them, under specific circumstances, as a kind of strength (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). The employee with cautious characteristics, for example, may suffer from indecisiveness and is risk-averse, probably missing opportunities in competitive job environments, though is generally careful and precise, which means an asset in many job contexts. Likewise, an obsessive-compulsive collaborator is working hard and up to high standards, but may be overly perfectionistic and micro-managing, even at risk of losing the bigger picture and not delivering on time. Indeed, nowadays, coaching and personal development programs are not only about learning to deal with the sharp tendencies of one's personality, though may also be targeted at challenging the notion of 'not enough dark traits', suggesting that there may be a "dark optimum" of these tendencies in some work circumstances or for particular jobs (Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, 2013).

Besides these broader conceptualizations of dysfunctional tendencies, considerable attention has also been paid to the configural dark side patterns. One that achieved probably most attention is the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Wu & Lebreton, 2011) cluster, referring to the traits of Machiavellianism, Antisocial tendencies and Narcissism. Related, though probably best kept conceptually distinct, is the literature on the corporate psychopath (Babiak & Hare, 2007). In the popular human resources literature, the terms antisocial and psychopathy are sometimes used interchangeably, though given its strong negative connotation, it is probably best to use the term psychopathy with caution. Traits associated with psychopathy include insincerity, pathological lying, egocentricity, unreliability, lack of remorse and an inability to experience empathy or concern for others. Psychopathy is further characterized by a pattern of callous-unemotional traits (Decuyper, De Caluwe, De Clercq, & De Fruyt, 2014), reflecting coldness and indifference to what other people feel. Finally, psychopaths often use superficial charm to get what they want. The prevalence of "clinical" psychopaths in the general population is very low (around 1%). Many psychopaths show antisocial characteristics, though roughly only 1 in 4 persons with antisocial tendencies exhibit psychopathic features. To conclude, the dark side of personality at work has many shades, including the previously described tendencies, but also

encompasses counterproductive behavior, integrity problems, grey absenteeism (being present at work, though becoming passive and not productive), aggression towards colleagues and customers, and workplace bullying.

## **The Bright And Dark Continuum**

In addition to the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) and Dark Triad measures, there have only been a few additional attempts to conceptualize and assess dark side tendencies in the workplace, beyond the clinical field. The conceptually probably most challenging and promising one is considering extreme positions (either low or high) on general personality traits as indicative of a risk for exhibiting dark side behavior, pending on contextual factors. In addition, some new broader but also more specific measures were introduced to assess derailment risk, beyond the DSM-5 trait set (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) to help assess dysfunctional manifestations of traits.

Utility of FFM personality disorder compounds. The categorical conceptualization and operationalization of personality disorders has been heavily questioned for almost 3 decades, though finally remained unchanged in the most recent version of DSM-5. Criticisms are multiple and refer to the heterogeneous nature of the symptoms per disorder, the fact that patient samples often qualify for multiple disorders, the lack of clear demarcation points for personality disorder symptoms, and the large number of patients diagnosed as Personality-Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PD NOS). Together these criticisms show that the current taxonomic system is inadequate to describe personality pathology in patients (Widiger & Clark, 2000; Widiger & Trull, 2007). Several dimensional models describing dysfunctional personality were introduced, as alternatives to the categorical approach, with the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of general personality as a prominent replacement candidate (Widiger, Livesley, & Clark, 2009; Widiger & Mullins-Sweatt, 2009; Widiger, Trull, Clarkin, Sanderson, & Costa, 2002). The proposition of a general model of personality perfectly aligns with the notion that personality disorders are disorders of personality. Samuel and Widiger (2008) conducted a meta-analytic review of the relationships between FFM facets and personality disorders, to be in a better position to describe personality disorders in terms of high and low scores on the 30 facets of the FFM assessed with the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Miller and colleagues (2005) introduced a practical way to describe personality pathologies in FFM terms, showing that an additive FFM personality disorder (FFMPD) compound based on selective (reversed scored) FFM facets was as good a proxy for personality pathology as more complex profile analysis techniques comparing a patient's FFM scores with different personality disorder FFM configurations. For example, the dependent FFMPD compound is computed as the sum of the scores on the following NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) facets: N1: Anxiety + N4: Self-Consciousness + N6: Vulnerability + E3r (Assertiveness – reverse scored) + A1: Trust + A4: Compliance + A5: Modesty. Miller et al. (2005) suggest flagging people as 'at risk' who score 1.5 standard deviation above the mean on a particular FFMPD compound, and recommend to follow these individuals further up with structured interviews. The FFMPD technique hence functions as a kind of screening instrument. Bastiaansen, Rossi and De Fruyt (2013) provided further empirical suggestions to refine the set of FFM facets that go into the FFM PD compound to make these more discriminant ones valid. Given that this technique uses a general personality descriptive model (and inventory), the technique opens up a series of other assessment applications beyond just clinical use, where the identification of subclinical manifestations of personality dysfunction is important, for example to prevent inadequate functioning at work.

De Fruyt and colleagues (2009) were among the first to apply and demonstrate the utility of the FFMPD technique for industrial and organizational applications. Given that it is likely that respondents will provide a favorable description of their personality in development (mid stakes) or selection assessments (high stakes), these authors suggested new FFMPD compound cut-offs that were computed on normative samples that were administered the NEO-PI-R in respective contexts of career development or selection questions. De Fruyt et al. (2009) further examined the utility of this technique to screen job applicants for different jobs, including public transport staff (drivers, administrative and technical personnel, and security staff) and police recruits. An attractive feature of the compound technique for industrial and organizational psychologists is that it adds an additional way to analyze the personality facets of the NEO-PI-R, when this inventory is used to get a personality picture of an applicant in the course of selection assessment. Besides a description of the applicant's general personality, the FFMPD compounds provide an additional personality derailment risk assessment. It is important to underscore that those flagged as at risk, are not necessarily pathological nor dysfunctional per se. Potential for

dysfunction relying on general personality inventories will always have to be evaluated against the characteristics of a particular job or environment (see further in this chapter). The technique only helps in identifying individuals that may need additional assessment and interviewing, before considered eligible for the job.

Wille, De Fruyt and De Clercq (2013) demonstrated the utility and validity of the FFMPD compounds in a 15-year longitudinal study following a large sample of university undergraduates in the exploration phase of their unfolding careers. Participants were administered the NEO-PI-R prior to graduation and also after 15 years on the labor market. Subjective (perceived job and career satisfaction) and objective (income, hierarchical position, number of subordinates) indices of career success were examined after 15 years on the labor market. Specific FFMPD compounds were predictive of subjective and objective career advancement indicators concurrently, but some also predicted across the 15 year time span. The avoidant FFMPD compound, for example, was consistently negatively associated with career satisfaction, managerial level, number of subordinates, and income across both assessment occasions, separated by 15 years. FFM PD counts were not only negatively associated with outcomes (dark side effects), but the narcissistic and antisocial FFMPDs were also concurrently positively associated with managerial level and the antisocial FFMPD with number of subordinates, underscoring also positive effects of FFMPD traits.

Finally, De Fruyt, Wille and Furnham (2013) analyzed personality data obtained from a large sample of middle and senior managers (N= 6774; 21.1% females, mean age = 41.64 years, SD = 7.05) administered both the NEO-PI-R and HDS in the context of a development center. Data were collected across multiple companies over several years, to have a large enough sample available for analyses per industrial/vocational sector. De Fruyt et al. (2013) first examined the correspondence between FFMPD compounds and their corresponding HDS scales. In addition, the data set was split according to industrial/vocational sector, describing the percentage of flagged individuals when applying the 1.5 standard deviation above the mean cut-off rule. Prevalence rates were compared to percentages of clinically diagnosed personality disorders in the NESARC study in the US (Ettner, Maclean, & French, 2011). In the entire sample, 3.8% of the sample was flagged as at risk for the schizoid pattern and 11.6% for the obsessive-compulsive personality pattern, with the other tendencies providing percentages in-between those. In the subgroup “Legal sector”, for example, 12.4% of the group was identified as having avoidant personality patterns and 10.6% as exhibiting dependent FFMPD patterns. Across all other sectors (banking, accounting, engineering, telecom, retail, ...), prevalence rates for these two specific patterns were all below 5%. The dependent and avoidant personality patterns do not align with the function requirements for working in this type of environments, underscoring their utility for the selection process. In the “Retail” subgroup, on the other hand, 15.5% qualified for the histrionic pattern, which is probably more an asset for working in a flashy and hip designer and sales environment.

**Specific measures and approaches.** In addition to using models capturing general personality trait measures to assess potential derailment, also more comprehensive and specific measures to assess maladaptive traits were developed. Mathieu, Hare, Jones, Babiak, and Neumann (2013) recently introduced the B-scan 360, a corporate psychopathy measure, useful in 360 degree development assessment exercises. Rolland and Pichot (2007) developed *Tendances Dysfonctionnelles (TD-12)*, an inventory to identify 12 dysfunctional personality styles hindering work performance. TD-12 assesses the 10 dysfunctional personality patterns included in DSM-IV, supplemented with passive-aggressive and depressive personality dysfunctional tendencies. De Fruyt and Rolland (2003) used this inventory in a study in military personnel.

Parallel to these specific developments, DSM-5 was published in 2013, including in its Section III a trait system to describe personality disorders that needs further evaluation and research. Krueger and colleagues (2012) developed an inventory, entitled the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5), assessing these 25 traits, subsumed under five higher-order trait factors: *Negative Affectivity*, includes Emotional lability, Anxiousness, Separation insecurity, Submissiveness, Hostility, and Perseveration; *Detachment* encompasses Withdrawal, Intimacy avoidance, Anhedonia, Depressivity, Restricted affectivity, and Suspiciousness; *Antagonism* includes Manipulativeness, Deceitfulness, Grandiosity, Attention seeking, and Callousness; *Disinhibition* entails Irresponsibility, Impulsivity, Distractibility, Risk taking, and Rigid perfectionism; *Psychoticism*, finally, includes the scales Unusual beliefs and experiences, Eccentricity, Cognitive and Perceptual dysregulation. Guenole (2014) has argued that this trait system could also be useful in the workplace, and recently developed the G-50 (Guenole, 2015), relying on this taxonomy, with 50 items to assess these broad five dysfunctional factors in the work context.

## Prospects and challenges

The previous review made it clear that interest in the dark side has steadily been growing in the past years (Wille & de Fruyt, 2014). A tentative agenda is outlined below describing the key themes that deserve the attention of both practitioners and academics to move this field further.

Integrating the bright and dark side. The meta-analytic research by Samuel and Widiger (2008) and the strong associations between FFMPD compounds and their clinical counterparts make it clear that there is substantial overlap between general and maladaptive trait models. Indeed, extreme levels of general traits have been considered as potentially maladaptive, but may also be a desired characteristic, dependent on the situational characteristics. Conditional on the nature of the job or context, dark tendencies are sometimes considered an asset. Except for the FFMPD compounds, the bright and the dark side of personality are usually assessed separately from each other, implying that the practitioner needs two methods or inventories to administer to applicants or incumbents. Given the strong interrelationship between general and maladaptive traits, this is probably not the most optimal and efficient assessment scenario for an applied psychologist. Ideally for professional assessment practice, general and maladaptive item content are represented in a single inventory. Such new scales can be constructed using item response theory, to assure sufficient coverage by different items across the latent continuum of each trait construct (Samuel, Simms, Clark, Livesley, & Widiger, 2010; Suzuki, Samuel, Pahlen, & Krueger, 2015).

Predictive validity. A legitimate and crucial concern is whether dark trait measures predict outcome variance considered important on the labor market beyond general traits. Although dysfunctional tendencies might be interesting to study in their own right, from a practitioners' point of view, it is important to demonstrate incremental validity beyond FFM personality assessment as usual. The demonstration of predictive validity is already challenging, because outcomes are usually determined by multiple factors, including (dysfunctional) personality. Rolland and De Fruyt (2003), for example, showed that, when looking at too broad outcomes, maladaptive models do not predict variance beyond general traits. Maladaptive trait models probably best demonstrate their utility examining specific professional criteria, beyond the classic three, i.e. task, adaptive and contextual performance. Potentially interesting alternative and additionally important criteria might be counterproductive behaviors, work efficiency, micro-managing, careless risk-taking, and issues of integrity, just to list a few examples. The demonstration of incremental validity should hence be preceded by a careful analysis of the criteria maladaptive measures are assumed to predict beyond the big five. If necessary, new scales to assess these outcomes will have to be constructed.

Triggering the dark side. People usually show themselves from their best side, building a reputation in their personal networks. Hogan (Hogan et al., in press; 2000) argues that the dark side of personality is manifested when people get out of their comfort zone, in situations of stress or when fatigued, or in the absence of external control mechanisms, when they think they are not observed (De Fruyt et al., 2013). Specific situational characteristics seem to trigger something in the person(-ality), giving expression to either bright (desirable) or dark (undesirable) behaviors affecting their life or professional outcomes. The key issue becomes then to examine those situational triggers that are (co-)responsible for the manifestation of dysfunctional trait patterns, dark side behavior or (un)desirable outcomes. This line of reasoning is clearly spelled out in Tett and Burnett's trait activation theory (2003). Trait-activation theory has been taken as a basic framework to study the emergence and development of personality disorders (De Fruyt & De Clercq, 2014) or psychopathology in general (De Fruyt, De Clercq, De Clauwé, & Verbeke, 2016).

The systematic study of situational triggers was substantially hampered in the past by the absence of comprehensive and carefully developed taxonomies of situations, indicating the key variables characterizing situations. In the recent past, two situational taxonomies have been proposed that can move this field of triggering factors of dysfunctional traits forward. Relying on extensive empirical work, Rauthmann et al. (2014) recently proposed the DIAMONDS model, suggesting that everyday human situations can be broadly described by eight psychologically meaningful dimensions, i.e. Duty, Intellect, Adversity, Mating, pOsitivity, Negativity, Deception, and Sociality, summarized in the acronym DIAMONDS. This comprehensive taxonomy seems particularly useful to study situational trait triggers. An alternative has been the CAPTION-ing the situation model, a lexically-derived taxonomy of psychological situation characteristics developed by Parrigon, Woo, Tay and Wang (2016). This model distinguishes psychological situations relying on their Complexity, Adversity, Positive Valence, Typicality, Importance, Humor and Negative Valence. The availability of these two situational taxonomies opens a broad range of perspectives to study situational triggers of dark traits. These two models provide unique opportunities to investigate



under what circumstances dysfunctional tendencies appear and cause potential harm. In addition, these situational models may help to study how maladaptive traits and dark tendencies develop. At present, there is barely any knowledge on how dysfunctional tendencies develop.

Screening and interview. Dark side self-administered personality inventories are ideally accompanied by a behaviorally-oriented interview to additionally examine individuals flagged as at risk relying on their inventory scores. Inventories are ideal for a comprehensive screening, checking whether someone qualifies for one or more dysfunctional tendencies. Rather than selecting-out these persons a priori, these individuals need extra and specific interviewing. The development of an inventory-based assessment of dysfunctional personality should go hand-in-hand with the development of an adequate interview further exploring these specific tendencies, and evaluating these in situational contexts. Conducting such interviews with all applicants would be probably best, though it will be too time-consuming, making it financially unfeasible. The inventory-based first screening should help identify those individuals that require additional investigation and reduce substantially the interviewing workload.

Comprehensiveness. Although measures like TD-12 or HDS are examining multiple dysfunctional patterns, this does not mean that these tools provide the most comprehensive assessment of dysfunctional tendencies observable in the workplace. Future research should re-examine whether the tendencies that are currently assessed are prevalent and important enough to retain, whereas others may be missing in the available measures. Imposter tendencies, for example, may be a good candidate to add to the current set of dysfunctional tendencies. Imposter behaviors, turned out to be sufficiently prevalent, important for understanding individual's daily professional (dis)functioning and to be rooted well in people's personality (Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, De Fruyt, & Anseel, 2015). Likewise, 'selective memory' or 'denying/twisting' one's own words or commitments, is another frequently occurring dysfunctional tendency, which strongly affects interpersonal behaviors at work. Both phenomena may be potential expansions of current models of dysfunctional tendencies.

From select-out to development. Finally, and probably most important is that the assessment of dysfunctional tendencies is making a quick transition nowadays from a tool to select-out people to a method that is used to coach individuals who are already in the organization. This shift will have implications for the way these measures will be used and elaborated, but also for their accompanying reporting tools. This new form of application aligns with current coaching practices focusing on both strengths, but also targeting the employee's weak points. In this respect, one can expect more bottom-up evaluations of dysfunctional tendencies.

## Epilogue

The present chapter has provided an overview of different ways to assess personality difficulties from a broad and applied perspective. It is clear that this is a scientifically emerging and challenging field with a potentially large impact on the world of professional psychological assessment. Moreover it is a field where different disciplines of psychology (personality, psychometrics, IO, clinical, developmental, ...) will have to work together to achieve useful results for both theory and practice. We hope this chapter is a first step in this direction.

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