

A Comparison of Measures in the Analysis of CEO Psychopathy

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Background

Research on psychopathy has been conducted primarily in forensic settings with measures designed for use with criminal offenders. However, very little scientific inquiry into psychopathy has focused on populations achieving societal success in the workplace and beyond. We will focus on one underrepresented area - psychopathic tendencies of CEOs in the workplace - by examining ratings of psychopathic traits made using two measures—Levenson et al.’s (1995) Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP) and the Triarchic Psychopathy measure (TriPM)—by trained personnel who viewed video clips of a sample of real-life CEOs.

Assessment

The study uses the Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP) and triarchic psychopathy measure (TriPM) as a means to quantify psychopathic traits in the CEO population.

Items and Factor Loadings in the Primary and Secondary Psychopathy Scales	
Item	
Primary Psychopathy	
1. Success is based on survival of the fittest; I am not concerned about the losers.	
2. For me, what's right is whatever I can get away with.	
3. In today's world, I feel justified in doing anything I can get away with to succeed.	
4. My main purpose in life is getting as many goodies as I can.	
5. Making a lot of money is my most important goal.	
6. I let others worry about higher values; my main concern is with the bottom line.	
7. People who are stupid enough to get ripped off usually deserve it.	
8. Looking out for myself is my top priority.	
9. I tell other people what they want to hear so that they will do what I want them to do.	
10. I would be upset if my success came at someone else's expense.	
11. I often admire a really clever scam.	
12. I make a point of trying not to hurt others in pursuit of my goals.	
13. I enjoy manipulating other people's feelings.	
14. I feel bad if my words or actions cause someone else to feel emotional pain.	
15. Even if I were trying very hard to sell something, I wouldn't lie about it.	
16. Cheating is not justified because it is unfair to others.	
Secondary Psychopathy	
1. I find myself in the same kinds of trouble, time after time.	
2. I am often bored.	
3. I find that I am able to pursue one goal for a long time.	
4. I don't plan anything very far in advance.	
5. I quickly lose interest in tasks I start.	
6. Most of my problems are due to the fact that other people just don't understand me.	
7. Before I do anything, I carefully consider the possible consequences.	
8. I have been in a lot of shouting matches with other people.	
9. When I get frustrated, I often "let off steam" by blowing my top.	
10. Love is overrated.	



Bernie Madoff, mastermind of the largest Ponzi scheme in history, worth an estimated \$65 billion.

Methods

The present study aims to investigate statistical reliability between raters in the LSRP and TriPM scores in “thin slice” observation, correlations with LSRP and TriPM ratings overall, clusters defined by distinct rating profiles in the CEO population. The sample consists of 218 CEOs, for whom short (“thin slice”) Fowler et al., 2009) video clips derived from media interviews were available.



Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko in “Wall Street”, 1987

TriPM Trait	Facet	Example Item
Boldness	Courage	This person is afraid of far fewer things than most people.
Boldness	Optimism	This person has a hard time making things turn out the way s/he wants.
Boldness	Persuasiveness	This person has a knack for influencing people.
Boldness	Persuasiveness	This person is not very good at influencing people.
Boldness	Self Confidence	This person believes s/he doesn't stack up well against most others.
Boldness	Tolerance for Uncertainty	This person functions well in new situations, even when unprepared.
Disinhibition	Dependability	This person often has missed things s/he promised to attend.
Disinhibition	Fraud	This person has conned people to get money from them.
Disinhibition	Irresponsibility	This person got into trouble for missing too much school.
Disinhibition	Planful Control	This person has good control over him/herself.
Disinhibition	Problematic Impulsivity	This person gets in trouble for not considering the consequences of his/her actions.
Disinhibition	Theft	This person has taken money from someone's purse or wallet without asking.
Meanness	Destructive Aggression	This person has injured people to see them in pain.
Meanness	Empathy	How other people feel is important to this person.
Meanness	Empathy	This person is sensitive to the feelings of others.
Meanness	Empathy	It does not bother this person when people around him/her are hurting.
Meanness	Physical Aggression	This person enjoys a good physical fight.
Meanness	Relational Aggression	This person sometimes insults people on purpose to get a reaction from them.

Results

Around 200 CEOs will be examined in this study, using a ‘thin slice’ rating procedure in which trained personnel view short video clips of CEO subjects, and rate them for psychopathic traits. We expect that different raters will vary in terms of reliability in their assessment of CEO psychopathy. We also expect distinct clusters, with different profiles of psychopathic traits, to emerge from statistical analyses of the ratings of this CEO sample.

Conclusion

We hope our findings will contribute to understanding the significance of psychopathic traits in workplace leadership.

References

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- Levenson, M. R., Kiehl, K. A., & Fitzpatrick, C. M. (1995). Assessing psychopathic attributes in a noninstitutionalized population. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 68(1), 151–158. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.68.1.151>