



# The relationship between psychopathy and the Full Range Leadership Model

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## ABSTRACT

While emerging research suggests psychopathic traits and leadership behaviors may be linked, this proposition requires further empirical investigation. This study aims to examine the relationship between psychopathic traits and the Full Range Leadership Model which includes transformational, transactional, and passive leadership styles. Using a cross-sectional design, survey data was collected from 115 students who reported having management experience. Measures included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-Revised. A four-factor structure of psychopathy *positively* correlated with passive leadership behavior, namely passive-management-by-exception and laissez-faire, but *negatively* correlated with individual consideration. This study addresses a research need, and is one of the first to empirically examine the relationship between psychopathic traits and the Full Range Leadership Model. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Concern regarding unethical and criminal behavior of business leaders has increased in recent years fuelling interest in this “dark side” of leadership (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Sankowsky, 1995). Indeed, researchers have suggested that some of these business leaders may actually display psychopathic behaviors (Babiak, 1995; Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010) which are associated with immense personal, social, and economic costs (Barrett et al., 2009). Despite these claims, little empirical research has been conducted into the linkages between psychopathic traits and leadership behaviors to date (Babiak et al., 2010; Boddy et al., 2010). The present study proposed to address this gap in the literature and provide theoretical and practical contributions for employees and organizations by examining the relationship between psychopathy and the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM; Avolio & Bass, 1991) which includes transformational, transactional, and passive leadership components and, in recent times, is the dominant leadership model (Bono, Hooper, & Yoon, 2012).

## 2. Psychopathy

Psychopathy is a clinical personality disorder estimated to occur in 1–3% of the adult male and 0.5–1% of the adult female

populations (Hare, 2006). It is described as a “socially devastating disorder defined by a constellation of affective, interpersonal, and behavioral characteristics, including egocentricity; impulsivity; irresponsibility; shallow emotions; lack of empathy, guilt, or remorse; pathological lying; manipulateness; and, the persistent violation of social norms and expectations” (Hare, 1996, p. 25). This definition refers to a four-factor model of psychopathy consisting of interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial factors.

The interpersonal domain reflects how the psychopath is viewed by others, such as superficially charming, manipulative, arrogant, or deceitful. The affective domain relates to the emotional components of psychopathy. Psychopaths are described as unemotional, callous, and lacking empathy, guilt, or remorse. The lifestyle domain captures the psychopath’s tendency to be impulsive and irresponsible. Finally, the antisocial domain relates to the psychopath’s propensity to display poor behavioral control which may manifest in criminal behaviors (Hare & Neumann, 2008).

All psychopaths appear to share these common traits, but psychopathy is viewed as existing on a continuum (Hare & Neumann, 2008), and it is suggested that these variations across the continuum may distinguish the “successful” (or noncriminal) psychopath from the criminal psychopath. Successful psychopaths live and work within the community and are able to avoid interaction with criminal justice or mental health systems (De Oliveira-Souza, Moll, Ignácio, & Hare, 2008; Hall & Benning, 2006). While research into the differences between successful and criminal psychopaths is still in its infancy, prior studies indicate that antisocial behavior and impulsivity may be key differentiators between the two groups.

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Gustaffson and Ritzer (1995) suggested that successful psychopaths (whom they labeled as aberrant self-promoters) may have a subclinical form of psychopathy in that they display relatively lower degrees of antisocial behavior. Similarly, Board and Fritzon (2005) compared personality profiles of 39 male senior business managers from several leading British companies with the profiles of patients diagnosed with mental disorders. They found that while the managers equaled or exceeded the mentally disordered patients on some characteristics related to psychopathy such as superficial charm, lack of empathy, and manipulativeness, the managers scored lower on deviant lifestyle characteristics such as impulsiveness. Finally, Mullins-Sweatt, Glover, Derefinko, Miller, and Widiger (2010) proposed that successful psychopaths may be distinguished from their criminal counterparts because they have higher levels of conscientiousness. Thus, the successful psychopath's higher conscientiousness may assist in balancing the impulsivity and anti-social behavior of the criminal psychopath, thereby allowing the successful psychopath to function acceptably within the community. While research into the differences between successful and criminal psychopaths is ongoing, we do know that successful psychopaths can effectively function in many different occupations and can obtain high status positions, including leadership positions (Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010).

### 3. Leadership

There are many different leadership theories (see Yukl, 2010 for a review); however, this study focuses on the FRLM, a nine factor model consisting of transformational, transactional, and passive leadership components (Avolio & Bass, 1991). The FRLM is derived from Bass' (1985) conceptualization of transformational and transactional leadership which is the most studied approach to leadership in the past 30 years, and has been widely adapted by organizations due to its success in framing and developing effective leadership practices (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bono et al., 2012). Described as an integrative form of leadership in that it is influenced by many variables such as individual traits and behaviors, as well as situational factors (Yukl, 2010), transformational leadership was first proposed by Burns (1978) due to a perceived need to expand views of leadership and employee motivation beyond the traditional focus on transactional leadership.

Transactional leadership uses tangible rewards and punishment (contingent on compliance and attainment of desired outcomes) as control mechanisms to externally motivate followers. However, Burns (1978) proposed that it was also necessary to consider transformational leadership which he described as using moral and intrinsic rewards to increase followers' motivation and commitment to pursue higher-order common goals. While Burns (1978) viewed leaders as transformational or transactional, Bass (1985) argued that transformational leadership is unlikely to be as effective in the absence of transactional behaviors, hence the "Full Range Leadership Model". Variations of Bass' (1985) model have been proposed over the years, but a nine factor FRLM which consists of transformational, transactional, and passive leadership styles has been widely used (Avolio, 2011).

Transformational leadership behaviors are identified as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Idealized influence is a type of personal charisma displayed by leaders that assists in providing a future vision and mission, instills collective pride, is transcendent, and gains respect and trust from followers (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Inspirational motivation involves articulating a compelling vision through words, symbols, and imagery (Bass, 1985) in order to inspire followers to act (Bass & Steidlmeier,

1999). Intellectually stimulating leaders typically engage in behaviors such as intellectual risk-taking, challenging assumptions, encouraging followers to ask questions and express ideas, using intuition, and expressing seemingly foolish ideas in order to identify better ways to stimulate innovation and execute tasks (Parry, Avolio, & Bass, 2003). Finally, individual consideration involves treating followers as unique individuals by providing personal attention, coaching, mentoring, and growth opportunities (Bass, 1985) that satisfy followers' needs for self-worth, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment (Parry et al., 2003).

Transactional leadership behaviors were initially posited to include contingent reward, and active and passive management-by-exception (Bass, 1985). However, Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999) and Bono and Judge (2004) have since suggested that passive management-by-exception should actually be considered a passive leadership component alongside *laissez-faire*. Thus, transactional leadership behaviors include contingent reward and active management-by-exception. Contingent reward leadership, also termed "avoidance of penalties" (Yammarino & Bass 1990, p. 152), uses recognition and rewards for goal achievement as motivating forces for followers. This approach involves the leader assigning or obtaining follower agreement about the expected standards for followers' performance, as well as the rewards to be offered, if performance expectations are met (Avolio et al., 1999). Active management-by-exception leadership involves actively monitoring task execution for any mistakes, errors, or complaints that may occur and providing ongoing corrective criticism, negative reinforcement, and guidance (Bass, 1999).

Conversely, rather than actively monitoring, passive management-by-exception leaders simply "wait-and-see" and take action only after mistakes are made or problems arise (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999). Similarly, *laissez-faire* leadership is defined as involving "non-commitment, laziness, complacency, avoidance, and abdication of responsibility", (Sarros & Santora, 2001, p. 390). Such leaders typically delay decisions, withhold rewards, fail to motivate followers, and do not attempt to satisfy individual needs (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996).

In summary, implementation of the FRLM involves directing or influencing followers toward a clear result, goal, or objective through reward or discipline (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Generally, these directive or influential actions are viewed positively, particularly in relation to transformational leadership, and the optimal leadership profile is said to include someone who displays higher frequencies of transformational leadership behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Meta-analyses by Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996), Dumdum, Lowe, and Avolio (2002) and Judge and Piccolo (2004) showed that transformational leadership is positively related to follower commitment, loyalty, satisfaction, and leader effectiveness. However, theorists have also identified a dark side of transformational leadership, termed pseudo-transformational leadership, that involves charismatic leaders using dominance, aggression, exploitation, threats, and punishment in order to manipulate followers for their own personal gain (Conger, 1990; Sankowsky, 1995).

Similarly, prior research has linked these dark side leadership behaviors to narcissism and Machiavellianism, constructs which share common features with psychopathy (Board & Fritzon, 2005; Hogan, Raskin, & Fazzini, 1990; House & Howell, 1992; Howell, 1988; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Therefore, it is suggested that although psychopathy and the FRLM are uniquely different constructs, they may have conceptual overlap. An increasing amount of research, although still very limited in scope, has recently emerged to support claims of an association between psychopathy and general leadership behaviors.

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