

Corporate Psychopaths, Conflict, Employee Affective Well-Being and Counterproductive Work Behaviour

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Received: 20 November 2012 / Accepted: 18 March 2013 / Published online: 4 April 2013
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Abstract This article explains who Corporate Psychopaths are, and some of the processes by which they stimulate counterproductive work behaviour among employees. The article hypothesizes that conflict and bullying will be higher, that employee affective well-being will be lower and that frequencies of counterproductive work behaviour will also be higher in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths. Research was conducted among 304 respondents in Britain in 2011, using a psychopathy scale embedded in a self-completion management survey. The article concludes that Corporate Psychopaths have large and significant impacts on conflict and bullying and employee affective well-being; these have large and significant impacts on counterproductive work behaviour. There is no difference between male and female degrees of negative reaction to the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

Keywords Corporate Psychopaths · Counterproductive work behaviour · Toxic leadership · Employee well-being · Conflict · Bullying

Introduction

Research into toxic leadership personalities and counterproductive work behaviour is scarce. A recent call was made for an examination of the links between individual differences, and in particular the role of people with aberrant personality traits, and counterproductive work behaviour (Wu and Lebreton 2011).

These authors note that recent public scandals involving unethical business behaviour have led to an increasing focus in the organisational sciences on counterproductive and deviant behaviour such as aggression and sabotage. A few deviant employees can affect an entire business and the influence of deviant employees such as Corporate Psychopaths is, therefore, worthy of further investigation (Dunlop and Lee 2004). Wu and Lebreton (2011) recommend a review of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy, and the development of research hypotheses designed to spur future research in these and related areas. Others have made broadly similar calls (Board and Fritzon 2005; Boddy 2005). In response, this article begins by defining and discussing Corporate Psychopaths, presents hypotheses related to their presence in organisations and tests them empirically. It concludes by discussing its theoretical implications and future research directions.

Psychopaths

Psychopaths are those one per cent of the population who have no conscience and who, therefore, demonstrate an egotistic and ruthless approach to living (Hare 1994, 1999). They have traits similar to other anti-social personalities and if their lack of conscience is manifested in violence and anti-social acts then their behaviour may be found criminal by courts (Hare et al. 1991). While Widom and others pointed out that they could be studied in other settings, most studies occurred in institutional settings thereby confounding anti-social criminality with psychopathy resulting in popular confusion between the two (Widom 1977; Hercz 2001).

Non-imprisoned psychopaths came to be known by different terms, inter alia Industrial Psychopath, Executive Psychopath, Successful Psychopath, Organisational Psychopath and Corporate Psychopath (Clarke 2005; Babiak

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1995; Morse 2004; Babiak and Hare 2006; Boddy 2006). The latter term is used here.

Corporate Psychopaths

Corporate Psychopaths were initially recognised in Cleckley's book "The Mask of Sanity" (Cleckley 1941/1988) and the recognition developed that sub-clinical psychopaths may have advantages over normal people (Ray and Ray 1982), and that psychopaths live in society (Stout 2005a, b; Hare 1994). The realization then developed that psychopaths may be working in industry and business (Hare 1999; Babiak 1995), at senior levels (Ferrari 2006; Pech and Slade 2007; Cangemi and Pfohl 2009) where they may be theoretically expected to be responsible for corporate misbehaviour of various kinds (Boddy 2006; Morse 2004; Spinney 2004; Board and Fritzon 2005; Clarke 2005; Babiak and Hare 2006; Ramamoorti 2008). These psychopaths working in corporations came to be called Corporate Psychopaths (a comprehensive description is provided in Boddy 2011a). The emergence of this research strand has been described as setting a new direction in leadership research (Gudmundsson and Southey 2011).

Corporate Psychopaths have been described as simply those psychopaths working in the corporate sector, possibly attracted by the potentially high monetary rewards, prestige and power available to those who reach the senior managerial levels of large corporations (Babiak and Hare 2006).

The presence of Corporate Psychopaths is important partly because according to social learning theory people learn vicariously by observing others' behaviour especially when observing influential role models who are credible to the observer (Bandura 1977). This implies that when unethical managers such as Corporate Psychopaths are present (Boddy et al. 2010) then toxic behaviour such as rudeness, conflict and bullying will be magnified as it is learnt, repeated and copied throughout the organisation. Corporate Psychopaths have been identified as possible sources of bullying and other forms of conflict in organisations.

Conflict and Bullying at Work

Interpersonal conflict at work is behaviour involving people imposing their will on others and victimizing them through extra-ordinary behaviour; this can include argumentativeness, yelling, other elements of abusive supervision and bullying (Tepper 2000; Wornham 2003). Conflict is important because it is associated with decreased team working efficiency and lower organisational productivity (Alper et al. 2000; Dunlop and Lee 2004). Job insecurity, workload, frequency of conflict, social support from

colleagues and leadership are all related to bullying (Baillien and De Witte 2009). A higher workload, the frequency of conflict and the existence of abusive forms of leadership have also all been related to the presence of Corporate Psychopaths (Boddy 2011a). This study, therefore, examines the links between conflict and Corporate Psychopaths.

Bullying, as one pernicious form of conflict, may result from destructive organisational cultures (Baillien et al. 2009) and Corporate Psychopaths are hypothesized to create these (Babiak 1995; Babiak and Hare 2006; Clarke 2005, 2007). Such cultures exert an important influence on both organisations and their employees (Kuenzi and Schminke 2009).

Social learning theory specifically recognises that human behaviour is learned from observing the behaviour of others and then modelling one's own behaviour on that (Decker 1986). Therefore, managers are recognised as important role models for the employees they lead (Decker 1986). In line with social learning theory which implies that subordinates learn negative and dysfunctional behaviour from observing and emulating their managers, subjects who are bullied and who experience interpersonal conflict at work become involved in the bullying of others (Hauge et al. 2009). This may especially be the case when they observe perceived benefits to bullying such as increased control, ability to manipulate and the gaining of power; but no costs or consequences of bullying such as organisational disciplinary proceeding. This provides a further rationale for the study of conflict and bullying in relation to the presence of Corporate Psychopaths.

Workplace incivility, expressed in such measures as rudeness, is associated with workplace performance (Estes and Wang 2008). The frequency of experiencing rudeness at work was, therefore, measured here. Rudeness in the workplace is a measure of levels of uncivil behaviour and conflict and its presence also decreases levels of employee helpfulness (Porath and Erez 2007).

Workplace conflict is also associated with stress in the workplace (Alper et al. 2000; Abdel-Halim 1978). Andersson and Pearson (1999) describe how workplace incivility has the potential to spiral into increasingly aggressive behaviour, thus establishing the important link between uncivil behaviour like yelling and arguments and outright conflict. Clarke (2005) discusses the conflict that psychopaths can create between employees and how they can manipulate workplace events to cause conflict and bullying. One form of conflict, bullying is also important because it has been associated with the intention to leave an organisation, increasing organisational costs (Djurkovic et al. 2004).

Leaders' moral development can influence an organisation's ethical climate (Schminke et al. 2005) and so it is likely

that immoral leaders will have a negative influence. Corporate Psychopaths as organisational leaders are thought to create a culture in which bullying is practiced, allowed to flourish and even encouraged. Engaging in counterproductive work behaviour is one employee response to some forms of conflict and this is investigated here.

Counterproductive Work behaviour

Counterproductive work behaviour is the deliberate jeopardizing of workplace outcomes and normal functioning and has well-established connections with productivity and efficiency (Dunlop and Lee 2004). The links between counterproductive work behaviour and conflict are also well established (Bruk-Lee and Spector 2006; Penney and Spector 2005; Spector and Fox 2010).

Conflict creates the conditions in which employees seek revenge on the perceived perpetrators of the conflict, such as company managers, in line with social exchange theory (Biron 2010; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Blau 1964/1986; Emerson 1976). Social exchange theory helps explain how and why people create unspecified reciprocal (Gouldner 1960) relationships with others and, at their discretion (Blau 1964/1986), repay in kind those who have helped (or hindered) them (Nord 1969). Revenge is thus an element of reciprocity enacted by employees engaging in counterproductive work behaviour towards the company (Kisamore et al. 2010; Spector et al. 2006). Employees who engage in such behaviour (e.g. sabotage) may, therefore, be seeking revenge against the company for the perceived wrongful actions of their managers viewed as agents of the corporation (Jones 2009; Ambrose et al. 2002).

Researchers have investigated the individual differences of employees in terms of their characteristic responses to stimuli that may include engaging in counterproductive work behaviour (Bowling et al. 2011; Penney et al. 2011). Such stimuli may include stressful situations including those arising from conflict with supervisors and others (Bruk-Lee and Spector 2006) and even from evaluations that co-workers are not performing adequately (Spector and Fox 2010). Events external to the work environment such as the financial stability of individual employees may also influence whether those employees engage in counterproductive work behaviour or not (Oppler et al. 2008). Employees may engage in destructive behaviour and production deviance such as misuses of time and resources (Gruys and Sackett 2003). These are the two types of counterproductive behaviour measured here. In a recent comprehensive review of the literature on psychopathy, Skeem et al. (2011) conclude that virtually nothing is known about the predictive relationship between psychopathy and counterproductive work behaviour. This current research helps to address this lack of knowledge.

Employee Affective Well-Being

Affective, emotional or psychological well-being is a state where a person is content and happy with their life and with the balance of their work, home, emotional and spiritual lives. Individually such a state promotes mental and physical health; collectively it promotes a healthy and stable society. At work it helps promote a stable and efficiently functioning organisation. Employee affective or psychological well-being is important to organisations because it has been found to predict job performance (Wright and Cropanzano 1997). The colloquial version of this is the saying that a happy worker is a productive worker (Wright and Cropanzano 2004). Employee affective well-being is also important because it predicts costly employee turnover (Wright and Bonett 2007). At an individual level, well-being is a forerunner of health including cardiovascular health (Wright et al. 2009) as it precludes stress—a major cause of unhealthiness (Giacalone and Promislo 2010)—and promotes feel-good chemicals in the brain which promote healthiness. The following section ties together the possible links among Corporate Psychopaths, conflict, well-being and counterproductive work behaviour.

Corporate Psychopaths, Conflict, Bullying, Employee Affective Well-Being and Counterproductive Work Behaviour

It has been noted that a few bad or deviant employees can affect entire businesses (Allio 2007) and, therefore, the presence of Corporate Psychopaths requires further investigation (Dunlop and Lee 2004). Corporate Psychopaths manifest their parasitic lifestyles by engaging in such behaviour as claiming the successful work efforts of their colleagues as their own (Clarke 2005). According to equity theory this would infringe on the perceived fairness of the workplace and would, therefore, influence measures of workplace conflict (Janssen 2001). It may also be expected to influence counterproductive work behaviour. Penney and Spector (2005) researched the relationship among job stressors, negative affectivity and counterproductive work behaviour. Designed to investigate the effects of workplace incivility on employee job satisfaction their work revealed that incivility, organisational constraints and interpersonal conflict are negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to counterproductive work behaviour (Penney and Spector 2005; Spector et al. 2006). Other research suggests that employee evaluations that co-workers are not performing well enough may trigger a response involving counterproductive work behaviour from some employees (Spector and Fox 2010). Parasitic employees such as Corporate Psychopaths may be evaluated in this way.

Similarly, Pearson and Porath (2005) discovered that incivility at work correlates with both an erosion of organisational values and with a depletion of organisational resources. They reveal that employees exposed to incivility and conflict at work decrease their work effort, time spent on the job, productivity and performance.

Job satisfaction and organisational loyalty were found to diminish and turnover was also increased (Pearson and Porath 2005). The article, therefore, hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1 Conflict and Bullying are significantly correlated with counterproductive work behaviour.

As discussed above there are several theoretical reasons why the presence of Corporate Psychopaths may trigger counterproductive work behaviour since they are parasitic, divisive and create conditions of conflict and bullying (Boddy 2011a). It is logical to assume that their presence will correlate with high levels of conflict and counterproductive work behaviour.

Some claim that all forms of workplace incivility, with the exception of sexual harassment, are grounded in organisational chaos (Roscigno et al. 2009). Corporate Psychopaths have been identified as agents of organisational chaos and, therefore, uncivil behaviour like rudeness and levels of conflict would be higher in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths than would otherwise be the case (Roscigno et al. 2009). Corporate Psychopaths could thus be expected to positively influence conflict. The article, therefore, hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 2 Conflict is higher in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

Bullying is here defined as the repeated unethical and unfavourable treatment of one person by another in the workplace. This includes behaviour designed to belittle others via humiliation, sarcasm, rudeness, over-managing, overworking an employee, threats and violence (Dierickx 2004; Djurkovic et al. 2004). Bullying can take the form of name calling, sexual harassment, making the victim a scapegoat and applying undue work pressure (Harvey et al. 2007). Bullying is reportedly undertaken to maintain or increase the power and control of the person doing it (Dierickx 2004).

Bullying in organisations can lead to a variety of dysfunctional and negative outcomes for organisations as well as for individuals within them (Harvey et al. 2007). Bullying is widespread, inherently unfair to its victims and a key ethical problem in modern workplaces (LaVan and Martin 2008; Wornham 2003). Narcissism, lack of self-regulation, lack of remorse and lack of conscience have been identified as some of the traits displayed by bullies. There is an element of theoretical cross-over between

bullies and psychopaths (Harvey et al. 2007). It has been suggested that the definition of bullying should include practices like the taking of credit for another's work, which is reported as a common practice of psychopaths in the workplace (Babiak and Hare 2006). Furthermore, in the literature on psychopathy and bullying it is theorized that bullying can be used to intimidate others and make them afraid to confront the Corporate Psychopath involved, allowing the Corporate Psychopath more leeway. Bullying is also used by Corporate Psychopaths to humiliate (Clarke 2005) subordinates, possibly because many psychopaths enjoy hurting people (Porter et al. 2003).

Bullying is also used as to confuse and disorientate those who may be a threat to the Corporate Psychopath's activities (Clarke 2005). It distracts attention away from the Corporate Psychopath's activities, which may otherwise be noticed by personnel who were functioning normally. It seems likely then, that bullying will be associated with the presence of psychopaths. People with high scores on a psychopathy rating scale were more likely to engage in bullying, crime and drug use than others (Nathanson et al. 2006). In line with this, Hare and Babiak found that of seven Corporate Psychopaths identified within a study of about two hundred high level executives, two of these were bullies as well as being Corporate Psychopaths. They note that this level of incidence (i.e. about 29 % of Corporate Psychopaths also being bullies) is also reported by other researchers (Babiak and Hare 2006). The study, therefore, hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 3 Bullying is higher in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

Employee affective well-being declines with increasing amounts of incivility and mistreatment (Lim and Cortina 2005) and, therefore, it may be that well-being will decrease with conflict and bullying and with the presence of Corporate Psychopaths as managers. Employee well-being declines where a manager is not trustworthy (Kelloway et al. 2012) and as Corporate Psychopaths are characterized as liars, manipulators and deceivers, they can be assumed to be untrustworthy. The study, therefore, hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 4 Employee affective well-being is lower in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

Research on how males and females react to the presence of Corporate Psychopaths has apparently never been reported on. Writers on psychopaths within organisations speculate how women may be emotionally vulnerable to psychopaths and, therefore, it may be that women are more affectively influenced by Corporate Psychopaths than men, giving rise to the hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 Employee affective well-being in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths will be lower among women than among men.

Counterproductive work behaviour has been described as being the deliberate jeopardizing of workplace outcomes and is recognised as being influenced by job satisfaction (Mount et al. 2006; Dunlop and Lee 2004). As Corporate Psychopaths have been found to affect job satisfaction (Boddy 2011b), then counterproductive work behaviour must theoretically also be influenced by Corporate Psychopaths' presence. Furthermore, support exists for the view that ethical leadership would increase the willingness of employees to put extra effort into their work (Brown et al. 2005). Here, the opposite is proposed, i.e. that unethical leaders in the form of Corporate Psychopaths will increase employees' counterproductive work behaviour.

Hypothesis 6 Counterproductive work behaviour is higher in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

As women are reported to be less tolerant of rule breaking than men (Eagly 2005) and more socially and harmoniously oriented, more caring and more concerned about others (Heilman 2001), then it may be hypothesized that under Corporate Psychopaths female counterproductive work behaviour will be lower than for males in the same situation.

Hypothesis 7 Counterproductive work behaviour in the presence of managers who are Corporate Psychopaths will be lower among women than among men.

The amount of counterproductive work behaviour present in the form of sabotage behaviour and of production deviance was, therefore, investigated. The theory is that reported levels of both sabotage and production deviance will be significantly higher in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths. Measures of sabotage used here include whether employees have purposely wasted their employer's materials, whether they have purposely damaged equipment or purposely dirtied or littered the place of employment. Measures of production deviance include whether employees have purposely done work incorrectly, worked slowly when things needed to get done or purposely failed to follow instructions.

Methods

In line with previous research on psychopathy in the workplace the psychopathy measure used was treated as both a continuous and a categorical variable. Debate is ongoing concerning whether psychopaths are a discrete group

of people or a continuum of those who score towards the top end of a scale of psychopathy (Board and Fritzon 2005). Psychologists and management researchers sometimes treat them categorically: UK researchers recently examined the distribution of psychopathy among a sample of 638 adults (Coid and Yang 2008). Using the PCL:SV (Psychopathy Checklist Screening Version), a measure of psychopathy used worldwide, Coid and Yang found there to be an exceptional rise in behavioural problems in people who scored beyond 11.8, in line with the recommended cut-off score (12) to identify psychopaths on that particular psychopathy measure. They concluded that psychopathy can usefully be categorically defined because subjects become an exceptional risk for indulging in bad behaviour at a score of 12 and above (Coid and Yang 2008). Psychopathy has become a commonly researched personality construct in psychology (Boddy 2010a). Hervey Cleckley was an early leader in the field who identified sixteen characteristics of psychopaths. Subsequent researchers identified a sub-set of these as measures for identifying Corporate Psychopaths.

They are emotionally shallow, calculating and cold, glib and superficially charming, have a grandiose sense of self-worth, are pathological liars, good at conning and manipulating others and have no remorse about harming others; they are also callous and lacking in empathy and fail to take responsibility for their own actions.

Others agree that these traits are the core elements describing a psychopath (Cooke and Michie 2001; Cooke et al. 2004a, b, 2005; Neumann et al. 2005). This set of characteristics has been developed into a measure of the presence of Corporate Psychopaths within organisations, called the "Psychopathy Measure—Management Research Version" (PM—MRV) (Boddy 2010a).

Respondents were informed that the current research was a survey of management behaviour. To avoid biased responses to the questionnaire, respondents were informed that the survey was anonymous and confidential both in terms of the respondent and the manager(s) they reported on. In order to boost the potential sample of psychopaths in the total sample, the questionnaire contained questions about the respondent's current manager and about a dysfunctional manager, if one had been experienced. The PM—MRV was built into the questionnaire and used to determine the presence or absence of psychopaths in workplaces. In line with this measure, and the items specifically related to Corporate Psychopaths, respondents were asked to rate their current or past managers in terms of whether those characteristics were present, somewhat present or not present.

Typically, subjects who score 75 % or more on common psychopathy measures are judged to be psychopathic. In line with previous research, the PM—MRV measure of

eight types of behaviour was scored as 0 (not present), 1 (somewhat present) or 2 (present). The maximum score possible, therefore, was sixteen (2×8) and the minimum was zero (0×8).

In line with the usual procedures for the classification of psychopathy, scores of 13 and above were taken to indicate the presence of Corporate Psychopaths. Scores of 9–12 were taken to indicate the presence of Dysfunctional Managers (dysfunctional in that some psychopathy was evident) in an organisation. The managers of respondents, who were scored at 8 or less on the scale, were called Normal Managers for our purposes. Cross tabulations of responses were then examined for significant differences in results.

Sample

A self-completion on-line survey of 304, senior (mainly managerial and professional) white collar employees in Britain was undertaken to investigate this subject in 2011. Such self-completion questionnaires are reported to be good for use in management research because their inherent confidentiality encourages, candid, truthful responses among respondents (Buchanan 2008). Respondents were selected from a survey panel of white collar and managerial employees who worked in a very wide variety of businesses. Respondents could rate more than one manager they had worked, providing a total of 446 responses from 304 respondents. Respondents were 53.3 % male. Respondents were all aged 21 and over with 19.4 % being 21–30; 31.3 % were aged 31–40; 20.4 % aged 41–50 and 21.1 % aged 51–60 with the remaining 7.9 % being 61 and over. 45.7 % of respondents worked for a company with 1–50 employees, 25.0 % of respondents worked for a company with 51–250 employees and 29.3 % of respondents worked for a company with over 250 employees.

Instrument Reliability

Psychologists believe that psychopaths can be identified by observation and there is evidence from numerous studies that psychopathic traits are detectable by ordinary untrained people who are well acquainted with the psychopaths concerned (Mahaffey and Marcus 2006; Lilienfeld and Andrews 1996). Fowler and Lilienfeld (2007) speculate that observer ratings from people who are well acquainted with their peers could reveal pockets of incremental validity in terms of identifying psychopaths. There is some consistency of opinion among psychologists on this point.

A reliability coefficient (α) of 0.7 is considered acceptable in research (Radhakrishna 2007; Norland 1990) although some suggest that 0.6 is acceptable (Todd et al. 2004). Using

Cronbach's α as a measure of internal consistency, the coefficient for this research construct of the Corporate Psychopath was very strong at 0.93. This high coefficient was also found in the Australian research (Boddy 2011a) and is unsurprising given the well-established nature of this type of psychopathy measure. In the case of this research, the α levels for the Corporate Psychopaths construct would not be improved by deletion of any of the eight individual items in the construct and the inter-item correlations were all positive. This was again consistent with the finding as in the Australian research using the same psychopathy measure in 2008. That these statistical measures were nearly identical in the British and Australian research studies underlines the reliability of the findings.

The coefficient for the construct of counterproductive work behaviour was also strong at 0.93 for all respondents in the current British sample. The α levels for the construct of counterproductive work behaviour would not be improved by the deletion of any of the individual items in the construct and the inter-item correlations were all positive. The coefficient for the construct of employee affective well-being was 0.91 for all respondents. This could also not be improved by item deletion.

Similarly, the coefficient for the construct of conflict was 0.89 for all respondents which could also not be improved by item deletion. The items detailed below relate to the hypothesis that employees who work in workplaces where managers are perceived to demonstrate the traits associated with high levels of psychopathy will report lower levels of counterproductive work behaviour, than those who do not. Following Spector and Jex (1998) descriptions, the items measuring counterproductive work behaviour in relation to sabotage and production deviance were whether respondents had ever:

- (1) Purposely wasted their employer's materials or supplies.
- (2) Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property.
- (3) Purposely dirtied or littered their place of work.
- (4) Purposely done their work incorrectly.
- (5) Purposely worked slowly when things needed to get done or
- (6) Purposely failed to follow instructions.

Following a modified (Boddy 2011a) version of Spector and Jex (1998) interpersonal conflict at work scale, the items measuring conflict asked respondents how often they ever:

- (1) Got into arguments with others at work.
- (2) Experienced people yelling at them at work.
- (3) Experienced people being rude to them at work.
- (4) Witnessed the unfavourable treatment of one employee by another at work (used as a measure of bullying).

This construct (conflict) achieved a Cronbach's α of 0.78 when it was used in Australian research in 2008 and was judged to have good face validity in use. In this current research, it again achieved a good α of 0.89. Employee-affective well-being was measured using a modified sub-set of the job-related affective well-being scale (Van Katwyk et al. 2000) and by asking respondents whether their job made them feel:

- (1) Angry.
- (2) Anxious.
- (3) At ease.
- (4) Bored.
- (5) Calm.
- (6) Content.
- (7) Depressed.
- (8) Discouraged.

Analysis

Cross-tabulated by the three groups (Normal Managers, Dysfunctional Managers and Corporate Psychopaths), results were analyzed for significant differences using *T* test measures of statistical significance (Kinnear and Gray 2000; Harris 2000; Garner 2005). The presence of both Dysfunctional Managers and Corporate Psychopaths was found to significantly affect perceptions of levels of conflict and counterproductive work behaviour in organisations.

Table 1 below demonstrates that all the elements of conflict and of the counterproductive work behaviour constructs were highly significantly different, in a negative direction, when Corporate Psychopaths were present. Using *T* tests as the significance test (Taplin 2008), results show that nearly all results were significantly different at the 99 % ($P < 0.01$) or 95 % ($P < 0.05$) levels.

Means in Table 1 above and Table 2 (below) are mean frequencies of experiencing behaviour in the past year.

The scale used went from 'Never', coded as 0 times per year, to 'once to eleven times per year' coded as 6 times per year 'once to three times per month, coded as 24 times per year 'once to four times per week' coded as 120 times per year and 'every day' coded as 240 times per year. Frequencies were based on 240 working days per year.

Table 2 shows differences between males and females in terms of mean frequencies of indulging in counterproductive work behaviour under a Corporate Psychopath manager.

In the following part of the analysis, a calculation to uncover the extent of the influence of Corporate Psychopaths as they are currently to be found in the working population is made.

Therefore, in Table 3, only ratings of current managers are used to establish the numbers in the distribution of managers across the three groups analyzed. The second

row in Table 3 shows the mean number of incidents per year of displaying the behaviour in question. This mean was computed based on all responses (to ensure that means are based on robust sample sizes) using numerical values, in terms of times per year that each type of behaviour was reported by respondents. For example if a respondent reported that they had never witnessed the unfavourable treatment of others at work then, then this was given a numerical value of 0. If they reported that they had witnessed this every day then this was given a value of 240.

The third row shows the number of cases per year of displaying the behaviour in question. This is simply the number of people in each sub-group of managers multiplied by the mean number of times per year of the behaviour. By computing the total number of cases involved in the sample, the percentage of total cases associated with each group can be established. The last row in Table 3 thus shows the percentage of the total cases per year of the behaviour in question, which are accounted for by each of the three sub-groups, i.e. this last row (row 4) shows row, not column percentages. It can be seen (i.e. in column four, fourth row) that of all cases reported of ever witnessing unfavourable treatment of others (bullying) at work, 35.2 % of them were associated with the presence of Corporate Psychopaths. This figure is a measure of the magnitude of the influence of Corporate Psychopaths. Significant differences in means are indicated in the table, using *T* tests.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced various measures of conflict, including bullying. The results are shown in Table 4. These percentages indicate the pervasiveness of Corporate Psychopaths' influence. The mean frequencies shown in Table 1 illustrate the mean number of times per year that behaviour such as bullying, for example, was observed.

The percentages below show how many people experienced each type of behaviour. The figures add qualitatively to understanding of the phenomenon. The difference in proportions test for two proportions was applied to the percentages in Table 4 to test for significant differences. The percentages for Dysfunctional Managers were compared to those for Normal Managers, and the percentages for Corporate Psychopaths were also compared to those for Normal Managers.

Means in Table 5 are mean scores on a five-point scale consisting of Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Quite Often (4) and Extremely Often (5). Thus, the higher the score the higher the attribute is associated with the presence of the (normal, dysfunctional or psychopathic) manager concerned.

Table 6 shows differences between males and females in terms of mean levels of reported affective well-being under managers who are Corporate Psychopaths.

Table 7 shows the Pearson's correlations between the different constructs used.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and significance scores for frequencies of items in the constructs of counterproductive work behaviour and conflict

Means, standard deviations and significance scores for frequencies of items in the constructs of counterproductive work behaviour and conflict ($N = 446$)	NM	NM	DM	DM	CP	CP	T test	T test
	\bar{X}	Sd	\bar{X}	Sd	\bar{X}	Sd	NM/DM	(NM/CP)
Purposely wasted employer's materials or supplies	6.1	22.9	20.5	45.4	22.5	54.7	0.01***	0.01***
Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property	3.3	14.0	9.9	32.8	8.4	26.7	0.10*	0.10*
Purposely dirtied or littered their place of work	3.0	15.5	6.3	28.1	11.6	33.0	NS	0.05**
Purposely did their work incorrectly	3.7	20.2	6.7	28.2	14.9	47.0	NS	0.05**
Purposely worked slowly when things needed to get done	2.2	9.1	14.2	37.8	19.6	51.7	0.01***	0.01***
Purposely failed to follow instructions	3.3	15.4	13.7	36.1	17.8	50.8	0.01***	0.01***
Got into arguments with others	8.9	23.1	37.9	61.3	59.7	68.4	0.01***	0.01***
Experienced others yelling at them	9.4	33.7	32.3	62.5	42.4	66.4	0.01***	0.01***
Experienced people being rude to them	11.5	34.8	36.6	50.1	63.5	76.7	0.01***	0.01***
Witnessed unfavourable treatment of one employee by another	13.2	38.2	52.1	75.1	84.4	88.7	0.01***	0.01***

Statistical key: *NS* not significant; 99 % level of confidence *** $P < 0.01$; 95 % level of confidence ** $P < 0.05$; 90 % level of confidence * $P < 0.10$

Table 2 Male and female mean frequencies for counterproductive work behaviour under corporate psychopaths

Mean frequencies in counterproductive work behaviour by gender ($N = 97$)	Corporate psychopaths present		T test
	Male employees ($N = 53$)	Female employees ($N = 44$)	Males/females
Purposely wasted employer's materials or supplies	24.5	20.1	NS
Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property	7.1	9.8	NS
Purposely dirtied or littered their place of work	13.1	9.7	NS
Purposely did their work incorrectly	16.1	13.4	NS
Purposely worked slowly when things needed to get done	23.9	14.5	NS
Purposely failed to follow instructions	25.3	8.9	*

Statistical key: *NS* not significant; significant at 80 % level of confidence * $P < 0.20$

Table 3 Reported frequency of witnessing unfavourable treatment of others at work

Reported frequency of witnessing unfavourable treatment of others at work (bullying)	Normal managers present ($N = 231$)	Dysfunctional managers present ($N = 40$)	Corporate psychopaths present ($N = 33$)
Mean frequency per year	13.2	52.1***	84.4***
Cases per year computed from above figures (total = 7,918)	3,049	2,084	2,785
Cases per year associated with each group expressed as a percentage of all cases	38.5 %	26.3 %	35.2 %

Statistical key: 99 % level of confidence *** $P < 0.01$

Correlations Between Current Manager Psychopathy Scores and Counterproductive Work Behaviour

The internal consistency of the 6 items comprising the current counterproductive work behaviours scale was high: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$. As predicted, current manager psychopathy total scores were significantly correlated with total counterproductive work behaviours ($r = 0.29$, $P < 0.001$).

Correlations Between Current Manager Psychopathy Scores and Conflict

The internal consistency of the 4 items comprising the conflict scale was high: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$. As predicted, current manager psychopathy total scores were significantly correlated with total conflict ($r = 0.50$, $P < 0.001$).

Table 4 Reported incidence of experiencing conflict and bullying

Reported incidence of experiencing conflict and bullying Base: all respondents ($N = 304$)	Normal managers present ($N = 231$)	Dysfunctional managers present ($N = 40$)	Corporate psychopaths present ($N = 33$)
Ever got into an argument with others at work	44.6 %	80.0 %***	100.0 %***
Ever experienced people yelling at respondent at work	21.6 %	52.5 %***	78.8 %***
Ever experienced people being rude at work	37.7 %	80.0 %***	93.9 %***
Ever witnessed unfavourable treatment of others at work (bullying)	38.5 %	87.5 %***	97.0 %***

Statistical key: 99 % level of confidence *** $P < 0.01$

Table 5 Means, standard deviations and significance scores of items in the construct of employee affective well-being

Means, standard deviations and significance scores for items in the construct of employee affective well-being Base: all responses ($N = 446$)	NM \bar{X}	NM <i>Sd</i>	DM \bar{X}	DM <i>Sd</i>	CP \bar{X}	CP <i>Sd</i>	<i>T</i> test NM/DM	<i>T</i> test NM/CP
Angry	2.39	1.03	3.52	1.03	3.68	1.03	***	***
Anxious	2.48	1.08	3.34	0.98	3.67	1.06	***	***
At ease	3.59	1.08	2.67	0.97	2.42	0.93	***	***
Bored	2.35	1.03	3.15	1.27	2.92	1.23	***	***
Calm	3.24	1.08	2.54	0.97	2.33	1.04	***	***
Content	3.46	1.04	2.63	0.82	2.40	1.04	***	***
Depressed	2.19	1.02	3.22	1.15	3.48	1.19	***	***
Discouraged	2.28	0.98	3.42	1.06	3.68	0.93	***	***

Statistical key: 99 % level of confidence *** $P < 0.01$

Table 6 Male and female means for employee affective well-being

Male and female means for employee affective well-being Base: all responses where corporate psychopaths were present ($N = 97$)	Corporate psychopaths present		<i>T</i> test Males/ females
	Male employees ($N = 53$)	Female employees ($N = 44$)	
Angry	3.75	3.59	NS
Anxious	3.62	3.73	NS
At ease	2.45	2.39	NS
Bored	2.81	3.05	NS
Calm	2.40	2.25	NS
Content	2.47	2.32	NS
Depressed	3.40	3.59	NS
Discouraged	3.58	3.80	NS

Statistical key: NS not significant (even down to levels of 80 % confidence, $P < 0.20$)

Correlations Between Current Manager Psychopathy Scores and Employee Affective Well-Being

The internal consistency of the 8 items comprising employee affective well-being was high: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$. As predicted, current manager psychopathy total scores were significantly correlated with total employee affective well-being ($r = 0.29$, $P < 0.001$).

Discussion

As literature suggested, there are high and significant correlations between conflict (including bullying) and counterproductive work behaviour. The first hypothesis is supported. Conflict, including a single measure of bullying within the construct, has a Pearson's correlation of 0.418 with the construct of counterproductive work behaviour. However, as found previously and as predicted above, there is also a high and significant correlation between the presence of Corporate Psychopaths and conflict at 0.504, supporting the idea that Corporate Psychopaths are key contributors to conflict and bullying and through this to low employee affective well-being and high counterproductive work behaviour.

A simple numerical calculation of the total number of incidences of witnessing unfavourable treatment (bullying) of others, broken down by type of manager, reveals that 35.2 % of all bullying was associated with the presence of Corporate Psychopaths. The same calculation from an Australian study provided a figure of 26 % of all bullying being associated with the presence of Corporate Psychopaths.

These findings support Babiak, Hare and Clarke's theoretical contention, that Corporate Psychopaths are major organisational instigators of bullying, and of the

Table 7 Pearson's correlation matrix for constructs, based on all respondents ratings of their current managers ($N = 304$)

Pearson's correlations	Scale means	Standard deviation	Corporate psychopathy	Conflict	Employee affective well-being	Counterproductive work behaviour
Corporate psychopathy	12.68	4.92	1			
Conflict	7.21	3.65	0.504	1		
Employee affective well-being	20.63	6.91	0.291	0.445	1	
Counterproductive work behaviour	8.05	3.95	0.285	0.418	0.524	1

development of a culture of bullying. To modify a phrase developed from Brown and Treviño's work, it appears from the findings that unethical leadership (in the form of Corporate Psychopaths) is not only a question of behaving incorrectly but also of setting a bad example and motivating others to behave badly (Treviño et al. 2006).

As shown in Table 1 where Corporate Psychopaths were not present the average number of incidents per year of witnessing unfavourable treatment of others (bullying) at work was 13.2 (about once every 4 weeks) whereas it was 84.4 (about 1.6 times per week) when Corporate Psychopaths were present. It is a similar situation for the other elements of conflict.

For example, in organisations where Corporate Psychopaths were not present the average number of incidents per year of getting into arguments with others at work was 8.9 times whereas it was 59.7 times when Corporate Psychopaths were present. The second hypothesis is, therefore, supported as the presence of Corporate Psychopaths is strongly associated with the existence of conflict in an organisation. Table 3 showing that Corporate Psychopaths account for 35.2 % of all bullying also provides strong support for this hypothesis. Table 3 shows that where there were no Corporate Psychopaths present 38.5 % of employees reported ever witnessing unfavourable treatment of others (bullying) at work compared to the significantly greater figure of 97 % for employees in organisations where Corporate Psychopaths were present.

In other words, when Corporate Psychopaths are present conflict and bullying occurs more frequently and affects more employees than when they are not present.

In terms of employee-affective well-being, when Corporate Psychopaths are present then employees are significantly ($P < 0.01$) more likely to feel angry, anxious, bored, depressed and discouraged and significantly less likely to feel at ease, calm or content. The fourth hypothesis that employee-affective well-being is lower in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths is, therefore, supported. The fifth hypothesis that employee-affective well-being in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths will be lower for females than for males is not supported. The mean scores of females working under Corporate Psychopaths in terms of employee-affective well-being were not significantly

different to those of males working under Corporate Psychopaths and this held true even down to an 80 % level ($P < 0.20$) of confidence. Furthermore, there was no consistency in the pattern of results: males scored higher on some items, females on others. This suggests that the overall negative effect on well-being of having a Corporate Psychopath present applies equally to male and female employees. However, within this there may be a differential effect but this requires further investigation. Under Corporate Psychopaths on average both men and women feel angry, anxious, depressed and discouraged.

The research supports the view that toxic and unethical leadership, as embodied in Corporate Psychopaths, is negatively related to subordinates attitudes and behaviour, i.e. as expressed in manifestations of counterproductive work behaviour. This supports social learning theory which implies that a subordinate learns negative behaviour from their unethical managers (Bandura 2006; Rotter et al. 1972).

It also supports social exchange theory (Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964/1986; Emerson 1976), which implies that employees will respond negatively to unfair treatment. Of the ten individual items in the construct of counterproductive work behaviour, seven were significantly higher in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths at a 99 % level of confidence ($P < 0.01$), two at a 95 % level ($P < 0.05$) and the remaining one at a 90 % level of confidence ($P < 0.10$). The sixth hypothesis that counterproductive work behaviour is higher in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths is, therefore, supported.

Under Corporate Psychopaths female respondents consistently (in five out of six measures) reported lower frequencies of counterproductive work behaviour across the board, than males did. This was not significant at 95 % ($P < 0.05$) levels of confidence. In this research, the mean scores for counterproductive work behaviour for females working under Corporate Psychopaths were not significantly different than those for males in the same situation except for one item (Table 2, item: purposive failure to follow instructions) at a low (80 %, $P < 0.20$) level of confidence. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis that counterproductive work behaviour in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths will be lower among females than among

males is not supported. Nevertheless, because of the consistent pattern of female response in terms of lower levels of counterproductive work behaviour than males in the presence of Corporate Psychopaths and bearing in mind the small sample sizes for this part of the analysis, it may be that the sample sizes were too small to pick up a significant difference. This result, therefore, could usefully be further researched.

The implications of these research findings for employees are that counterproductive work behaviour such as sabotage and the deliberate slowing of productivity may be manifestations of employee anger, anxiety, depression and discontent (low well-being) due to the presence of Corporate Psychopaths causing a toxic work environment as evidenced by a culture of conflict and bullying. Employers should recognise that ignoring conflict and bullying perpetuates it and probably, in line with social learning and exchange theories, exacerbates and facilitates it. Social actions may have equal and opposite reactions and bullying in a toxic environment, if not dealt with by the organisation, may result in counterproductive work behaviour as well as low levels of employee well-being and the consequences of lowered firm success that this is already associated with.

Limitations

This research was constrained by resources and was based on a medium sized sample ($N = 304$) of representative respondents in one state (the United Kingdom). Ideally, a strictly random and much larger sample of corporate employees could be used to generate findings which were more statistically robust. A random sample across more states/countries would allow for the increased ability to generalise from the findings. A larger sample would allow for increased levels of certainty regarding some of the sub-analysis performed, for example in examining the issue of the male versus female experience of working under a Corporate Psychopath.

Future Research

Future research into Corporate Psychopaths could investigate the differences, if any, between the male and female experiences of working with or for Corporate Psychopaths. Also, other unexplored areas, as mentioned in the article, include investigating possibly important links between the presence of Corporate Psychopaths and employee stress and healthiness.

Implications for Business Ethics Education

The need for and value of ethics education in business schools has been called for and recognised by business

ethics theorists and commentators, particularly in view of the multiple recent ethical lapses in businesses (Jennings 2004; Boddy 2010b; Poff 2007; Yoo and Donthu 2002; Bloodgood et al. 2010; Tang and Chen 2010). However, in the light of the emerging evidence concerning the unethical practices of Corporate Psychopaths in business this need for training and education may be even greater than anticipated. This is because there is both theoretical speculation and increasing empirical evidence that more unethical characters such as Machiavellians, psychopaths and narcissists are attracted into business (and into business schools) than into other areas of organisational life (Wilson and McCarthy 2011; Boddy 2011b) and furthermore, that the incidence levels of such egotistical personality trait are rising (Webster and Harmon 2002; Westerman et al. 2012). Those working in business are thus increasingly likely to come across such individuals and increasingly likely to have to make ethical business decisions in the face of pressure to do otherwise.

Businesspeople arguably need to be equipped with the awareness of this, with knowledge of the strategies that are adopted by people with unethical personalities and with the intellectual ability to make their own ethical assessments. Such education may also be seen by students as being more relevant, practical and involving than other, more abstract education in ethical issues in business can be (Pamental 1991).

Conclusions

Research into toxic leadership, as embodied in Corporate Psychopaths, and counterproductive work behaviour is scarce and this study helps to fill this gap thereby making an important contribution to the literature. Findings support the idea that the presence of Corporate Psychopaths is predictive of counterproductive work behaviour. This adds to our understanding of Corporate Psychopaths as it is the first such published finding.

Furthermore, this study reports on research that for the first time, examines differences between male and female behavioural reactions in the form of counterproductive work behaviour and employee affective well-being, to the presence of Corporate Psychopaths in management. This adds to the literature on psychopathy and gender. The article thus makes a contribution to the ethical leadership and psychopathy literature by examining the influence of toxic and unethical leaders, in the form of Corporate Psychopaths, on counterproductive work behaviour.

The theoretical expectation that Corporate Psychopaths will cause conflict in the workplace is strongly supported, as it was in a past (2008) study in Australia. In particular, Corporate Psychopaths are associated with bullying to a large and significant extent. As a contribution to theory the

results from this and the previous research in Australia support social learning and social exchange theory and also suggest that the presence of Corporate Psychopaths may be the biggest single contributor to conflict and bullying in any organisational setting. This finding suggests that further research into the mechanisms by which psychopathy, conflict and bullying are linked would be illuminating.

In this current research, conflict is associated with high levels of counterproductive work behaviour including all the elements measured of sabotage and production deviance. The arguments around the calls for the screening of Corporate Psychopaths in senior positions within corporations are thereby strengthened. Corporate Psychopaths are demonstrably disruptive to the effective running of organisations. Corporations that wish to maximize the well-being of their employees and to minimize conflict and bullying will have to minimize their employment of Corporate Psychopaths or carefully manage their behaviour. Similarly, corporations which desire to minimize wasted materials, property damage, dirtied work environments, incorrectly undertaken work, slow production and employee failure to follow instructions will have to minimize their employment of Corporate Psychopaths or carefully manage them. Arguably, the greater the seniority of the position within a corporation, the greater the capacity there is for constructive behaviour that benefits the corporation and its stakeholders.

However, this simultaneously presents a greater capacity for destruction. Therefore, it is logical to propose that the higher the position that is to be filled by new recruitment, the more beneficial it would be to screen job applicants for psychopathy. This raises multiple and extensive ethical issues which have partially been discussed elsewhere (Boddy et al. 2010; Boddy 2011b) but which revolve around balancing the individual rights of the person with no conscience, the psychopath, with the rights of other employees, stakeholders and the corporation itself. In other words doing more social good for the corporation, in line with some views on ethical theory directed at bringing about general well-being at a practical level (Hodgson 2001), may result in lesser good for the Corporate Psychopath.

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