# Tell me who you are, I'll tell you how you lead: Beyond the Full-Range Leadership Model, the role of corporate psychopathy on employee attitudes

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The role of corporate psychopathic traits in supervisors on employee attitudes has yet to be studied. The goal of the present study is to test the impact of corporate psychopathy in leaders on their employee's attitudes and its impact above and beyond the influence of leadership styles associated with the Full-Range Leadership Model (Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership). A total of 74 supervisors and 423 subordinates participated in this study. Employees completed self-report measures of job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect. They also rated their immediate supervisor on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the B-Scan 360 (a corporate psychopathy measure). Hierarchical linear regressions indicated that the B-Scan 360 total score was the best predictor of employee's job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect (beyond the influence of the Full Range leadership Model). These results indicate that, for our sample, the B-Scan 360 is a stronger predictor of employee attitudes than the three leadership styles comprising the Full-Range Leadership Model. These results represent a stepping stone for future research trying to unravel the factors associated with dark leadership and its impact on employee attitudes.

## 1. Introduction

Employee attitudes are important predictors of an organization's performance (Riketta, 2002) and effectiveness (Laschinger, Finegan & Shamian, 2001). Early research has reported that unsatisfied employees show lower job performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001) and leave their jobs more often than satisfied employees (Hellman, 1997). Reichheld, Markey and Hopton (2000) explain how employee retention, through job satisfaction, reinforces customer retention, and conclude that, in most industries they have studied, retention (both employee and customer) explains profits better than market share or any of the variables traditionally associated with competitive advantage. Clearly, voluntary employee turnover can be harmful to organizational performance (Glebbeek & Bax, 2004) and the cost of replacing an employee can range from a few thousand dollars to double the employee's salary (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

Saari and Judge (2004) report that "The major practitioner knowledge gaps in HR area are (1) the causes of employee attitudes, (2) the results of positive or negative job satisfaction, and (3) how to measure and influence employee attitudes." Recent research suggests that

employee well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are related to perceived supervisor leadership style (Bligh et al., 2007; Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006), supporting Saari and Judge's contention that understanding the relationship between leadership style and employee attitudes, as well as the ability to influence this relationship, is critical to human resource management.

This study proposes to measure the simultaneous influence of supervisors' Full-Range Leadership Model styles (Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership and Laissez-Faire leadership) as well as the potentially incremental influence of psychopathic traits in leaders on employees' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, motivation and job neglect.

### 1.1. Positive leadership and employee attitudes

The impact of leadership on organizational and employee performance is often studied; however, studies measuring the influence of leadership style on employee attitudes are relatively scarce. Nevertheless, there is evidence that *employee-oriented* leadership has a more direct effect on employee job satisfaction than does *task-oriented* leadership (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006), and that *supportive* supervision lowers work–family conflict (Frye & Breaugh, 2004). Bono, Foldes, Vinson, and Muros (2007) reported that employees with supervisors high on Transformational leadership (a leadership style defined

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by *individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence*; Avolio & Bass, 2004) experienced more positive emotions throughout the workday and were less likely to experience decreased job satisfaction, than were those with supervisors low on Transformational leadership (Bono et al., 2007). In fact, Transformational leadership has been associated with reduced stress in employees (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000) and with improved psychological well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway & Mckee, 2007). A study by Kidwell and Bennett (2001) showed that employees who perceived their supervisors as exhibiting expertise as well as consideration were less likely to neglect their work. It thus seems that positive leadership styles have a positive influence on employee attitudes. Lately however, researchers have developed an interest in the debilitating effects of negative leadership styles or "Dark Leadership."

### 1.2. Negative leadership and employee attitudes

Abusive supervision (hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, indifference and rudeness) is related to lowered levels of job satisfaction, less normative and affective commitment, and increased psychological distress (Tepper, 2000). Bligh et al. (2007) also reported that perceptions of aversive leadership were positively related to employees' resistance to change and negatively related to employees' job satisfaction. As concluded by Martin and Schinke (1998), it is not surprising that employees experience psychological distress when their leaders engage in sustained verbal and non-verbal hostility or deliver harsh criticism.

However, poor leadership is not only related to abusive leadership behaviors, it could also be associated with *avoidance* of the leader to intervene, referred to as Laissez-Faire leadership style (defined as the "absence of leadership;" Bass & Avolio, 1994) when, in fact, active leadership is needed. Only a few empirical studies have looked into the impact of Laissez-Faire leadership on employee attitudes. So far, studies have found it associated with lower job satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) and lower satisfaction with one's immediate supervisor (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Yammarino, Spangler & Bass, 1993). A study by Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland and Hetland (2007) has shown that Laissez-Faire leadership also influences employees' psychological distress through the increase in conflict with coworkers, bullying, role conflict, and role ambiguity. It thus seems that absent leaders who, as described by Avolio and Bass (2004), delay making decisions and do not give feedback or reward employee performance, have a similar impact on their employees as dark or abusive leaders do. Frequently in the literature, Laissez-Faire leadership is studied separately from abusive leader behavior. We hypothesize that abusive or dark leaders would score high on Laissez-Faire leadership based on recent findings of a positive relationship between Laissez-Faire leadership and corporate psychopathy (Mathieu, Neumann, Babiak & Hare, 2014b; Westerlaken & Woods, 2013).

### 1.3. Corporate psychopathy and leadership

Psychopathy is a clinical construct defined by a cluster of personality traits and dispositions, including grandiosity, egocentricity, deceptiveness, shallow emotions, lack of empathy or remorse, irresponsibility, impulsivity, and a tendency to ignore or violate social norms (Hare & Neumann, 2008). Ten Brinke, Black, Porter and Carney (2015) found, in a sample of business students, that individuals presenting psychopathic traits were selfish and unfair when negotiating distributive issues, leaving their partner with less than they took for themselves. Black, Woodworth and Porter (2014) also found that psychopathic individuals have a negative view of others. Their lack of fairness and a negative view and evaluation of others are likely to be associated with negative leadership style as well. In fact, Babiak et al. (2010) found that psychopathy scores were *positively* associated with in-house ratings of Charisma/Presentation Style (creativity, good strategic thinking

and communication skills) but *negatively* associated with ratings of Responsibility/Performance (being a team player, management skills, and overall accomplishments). Mathieu et al. (2014b) found perceived psychopathic traits in leadership to be positively correlated with employee ratings of the supervisor on Laissez-Faire leadership style and negatively correlated with employees' ratings of the supervisor on Transformational and Transactional leadership styles. Using a self-report measure, Westerlaken and Woods (2013) also report that psychopathic traits are associated with higher levels of passive leadership behaviors (Management-by-Exception-Passive and Laissez-Faire leadership) and with lower levels of individual consideration (a subscale of Transformational leadership). Furthermore, Mathieu et al. (2014a) found that corporate psychopathic traits in leaders lead to lower levels of employee job satisfaction and higher levels of psychological distress and work-family conflict in employees. It thus seems that while corporate psychopathy traits may positively influence ratings of how one is perceived on social skills, they seem to have a negative influence on ratings associated with how they actually perform as leaders.

Whether it is associated with dark leadership or absence of leadership, the human and financial costs of "bad bosses" are considerable (Quick, Quick, Nelson & Hurrell, 1997). Whatever their exact nature and style, such bosses have a significant impact on employees' mood, psychological well-being, and job performance (Spector, 1997). Supervisors also contribute to work-family conflict, which in turn is strongly related to higher psychological distress (De Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman & Bongers, 2003; Simon, Kümmerling & Hasselhorn, 2004), lower job satisfaction (Bruck, Allen & Spector, 2002; Grandey, Cordeiro & Crouter, 2005), and higher levels of job neglect (Kidwell & Bennett, 2001). In fact, Lim (2002) suggests that when employees think that their contributions to the organization or their daily work is not being recognized by their supervisor, they may retaliate by spending more work time on non-work behaviors, an outcome referred to as job neglect.

Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière and Raymond (2015) found that person-oriented leadership (as opposed to task-oriented leadership) had a significant effect on employee turnover intentions through its influence on employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In essence, they found that supervisors' negative interactions with their employees had a greater impact on employee attitudes than task-oriented leadership behavior, a fact noted by Hogan and Hogan (2001) who observed that "…we believe [managerial] failure is more related to having undesirable qualities than lacking desirable ones." Miner, Glomb and Hulin (2005) conducted a study on the links between employees' mood and supervisor behavior. Their findings revealed that employees rated their interactions with their supervisor as 80% positive and 20% negative, yet the 20% negative interactions affected the employees' mood five times more than the positive interactions. It thus seems reasonable to hypothesize that negative leadership behavior may have a more significant impact on employees than positive leadership behaviors or even absence of leadership (as is the case for Laissez-Faire leadership style).

Babiak and Hare (2006), commenting on the role of management development programs in organizations, suggested that the negative behaviors of some supervisors are often simply due to a *lack* of leadership skills and therefore capable of remediation. However, they added that negative supervisory behaviors that are manifestations of an *underlying personality disorder*, in this case psychopathy, are especially problematic and difficult to both identify and change. In consideration of the above findings, we hypothesize that Laissez-Faire leadership will have a stronger influence on employee attitudes than Transformational and Transactional leadership styles, but that employee ratings of psychopathic traits in their supervisors will have an even stronger impact on their job satisfaction, turnover intentions, job neglect and work motivation than their ratings of their supervisor on the Full-Range Leadership Model.

## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 423 employees from public and private organizations were asked to participate in this project by completing a measure of corporate psychopathy traits in their supervisor as well as self-report measures of job satisfaction, turnover intentions, intrinsic motivation and job neglect. The 423 employees were then matched with their supervisors (total of 74 supervisors), yielding a participation rate of 88.5%. Of the 425 employees, 52.5% were men (n = 222) and 47.5% women (n = 201). Employees' ages ranged from 19 to 63 (mean = 44.53). On average, employees were in their current jobs for 8 years and had been employed by their company for 14.6 years (minimum = 1 month and maximum = 39 years). Supervisors had a minimum of 1 employee and a maximum of 19 employees with a mean of 5.75. Of the 74 supervisors, 70.3% were men (n = 52), and 29.7% were women (n = 22). Supervisors' ages ranged from 30 to 61 (mean = 47.37). Supervisors had been in their current job for a minimum of one month to a maximum of 32 years (mean = 6.80). Supervisors had been employed by their company for a minimum of 7 months to a maximum of 38 years (mean = 19.64).

This project was part of a larger study on personality in the workplace for which the first author has received ethics approval. The survey, including all of the measure for the larger project, took about 45 min to fill-out. Employees completed the questionnaire during their work hours.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Corporate psychopathy

Participants rated their immediate supervisor on each of the 20 items on a new measure of corporate psychopathy in others, B-Scan 360 (Babiak & Hare, 2015). The B-Scan 360 was developed and based upon a widely used instrument for the assessment of psychopathy, the *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (PCL-R; Hare, 2003). Preliminary studies indicate that the B-Scan 360 has the same four-factor structure as the PCL-R (Mathieu et al., 2013, 2014b). The four factors (scales) on the B-Scan 360 are *Manipulative/Unethical* (Uses charm and deceit to manipulate others); *Callous/Insensitive* (Cold disregard for the feelings of others); *Unreliable/Unfocused* (Lacks commitment to goals and objectives); *and Intimidating/Aggressive* (Generally intimidating in the workplace). For the present study, we used the B-Scan 360 total score using a 5 point Likert-like scale (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly. Alpha coefficient for the B-Scan 360 was .82.

#### 2.2.2. Full-Range Leadership Model

Participants rated their immediate supervisor on the full 45 item version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Avolio & Bass, 2004). The MLQ measures Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership using a 5-point Likert-type scale. For leadership styles, alpha coefficients were: Transformational leadership (.91); Transactional leadership (.59) and Laissez-Faire leadership (.80).

#### 2.2.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using a short version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ; Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967). This well validated instrument includes 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = very low level of satisfaction and 6 = very high level of satisfaction). Alpha for the present study was .91.

#### 2.2.4. Turnover intentions

Turnover intention was measured with an adaptation of Simon, Kümmerling and Hasselhorn (2004) instrument. The instrument is composed of four items using a five point Likert-type scale measuring

how often participants think of leaving their job 1—to do the same job in another department, 2—for another type of job within the same organization, 3—to do the same job for another organization, or 4—for a career change (1 = Never to 5 = Every day). Alpha in the current study was .81.

#### 2.2.5. Job neglect

Job neglect was measured using four items from Kidwell and Robie (2003) Withholding Effort Scales. The instrument uses a five point Likert-type scale measuring the frequency with which participants carried out the behaviors presented in the items (1 = Never to 5 = All the time). Example item: "I take more and longer breaks than I should". Alpha coefficient for the present sample was .68.

#### 2.2.6. Work motivation

Work motivation was measured using the Motivation at Work Scale (Blais, Brière, Lachance, Riddle & Vallerand, 1993). It is a 7 point scale that presents reasons why employees do their job (1 = Does not correspond at all to 7 = Corresponds very highly). We used the "Amotivation," [i.e., low motivation], 4 item subscale which is the lowest type of motivation within their self-determination motivation theory. Alpha coefficient for our sample was .90.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Correlations among study variables

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations among corporate psychopathy, the Full-Range Leadership Model, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect.

In the present sample, employees' job satisfaction was positively associated with perception of supervisor's psychopathic traits and Laissez-Faire leadership and negatively associated with Transformational leadership. Employee turnover intentions were positively associated with Transformational and Transactional leadership and negatively associated with Laissez-Faire leadership and perception of supervisor's psychopathic traits. Employees' levels of Amotivation (low motivation) was positively associated with perception of supervisors' psychopathic traits and Laissez-Faire leadership and negatively associated with Transformational leadership. Finally, employee job neglect was positively associated with perceptions of their supervisor's psychopathic traits and Laissez-Faire leadership and negatively associated with Transformational leadership style.

### 3.2. Regressions Full-Range Leadership Model and corporate psychopathy on employee attitudes

To determine the role of the Full-Range Leadership Model and corporate psychopathy on employee attitudes, we conducted hierarchical linear regressions. As can be seen in Table 2, Model I tested the influence of the three leadership styles on each of the employee attitudes (job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect). Results indicated that Laissez-Faire leadership had the strongest influence on all four employee attitudes. In fact, for job satisfaction and job neglect, Laissez-Faire leadership was the only significant relationship. However, for work motivation and turnover intentions, results indicate a significant negative relationship with Transformational leadership. For Model II, we added employees' perception of the supervisor's psychopathic traits (the B-Scan 360) to the Full-Range Leadership Model as predictors of all four employee attitudes. We found corporate psychopathy to be the best predictor of employees' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect, even when controlling for the Full-Range Leadership Model. The adjusted $R^2$ were all increased when we added the B-Scan 360 to the model. Finally, note that in the final models, only two measures were significantly associated with all four employee attitudes: the B-Scan 360 and Laissez-Faire leadership.

**Table 1**
Correlations between employees' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation, job neglect and B-Scan 360 (corporate psychopathy) and scores on the Full-Range Leadership Model (N = 423).

|  | Means | SD | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Job satisfaction | 73.46 | 10.94 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Turnover intent. | 6.83 | 3.15 | −.50** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Anubis-Research | 8.06 | 4.77 | −.30** | −.19** |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Job neglect | 2.42 | 2.11 | −.34** | .28** | .14** |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Transformational | 44.75 | 16.30 | .39** | −.18** | −.18** | .10* |  |  |  |
| 6. Transactional | 14.94 | 4.99 | .25* | −.13** | −.07 | −.04 | −.58** |  |  |
| 7. Laissez-Faire | 10.28 | 5.70 | −.40** | .30** | .18** | .27** | −.19** | .06 |  |
| 8. B-Scan 360 | 44.22 | 11.67 | −.52** | .34** | 35** | .30** | −.42** | −.27** | .49** |

Note : *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

## 4. Discussion

The first goal of the present study was to test the simultaneous influence of Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership styles on employees' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect. We found that Laissez-Faire leadership had the strongest influence on all employee attitudes. In fact, for job satisfaction and job neglect, Laissez-Faire leadership was the only significant predictor. For work motivation and turnover intentions, Transformational leadership was also significantly associated, although to a lesser extent than Laissez-Faire leadership. These results are in-line with what was previously found by Skogstad et al. (2007) to the effect that Laissez-Faire leadership is a form of destructive leadership that has a negative impact on employees. Furthermore, the present study builds on the few articles that measured the impact of Laissez-Faire leadership on employee attitudes by controlling for the two other leadership styles composing the Full-Range Leadership Model. Thus, our results support the contention that negative leadership has more impact on employee attitudes than positive leadership.

**Table 2**
Hierarchical linear regression of psychological distress, job satisfaction, work–family conflict and turnover intentions (N = 423).

|  | Model I Std.β | Model II Std.β |
|---|---|---|
| *Job satisfaction* |  |  |
| Transformational leadership | −.106 | −.047 |
| Transactional leadership | .082 | .099 |
| Laissez-Faire leadership | .184*** | .097* |
| B-Scan 360 |  | .205*** |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .264 | .338 |
| N | 423 | 423 |
| *Turnover intention* |  |  |
| Transformational leadership | −.171** | −.112 |
| Transactional leadership | −.004 | .013 |
| Laissez-Faire leadership | .238*** | .149** |
| B-Scan 360 |  | .217*** |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .101 | .130 |
| N | 423 | 423 |
| *Amotivation (low job motivation)* |  |  |
| Transformational leadership | −.169** | −.076 |
| Transactional leadership | .047 | .073 |
| Laissez-Faire leadership | .145** | .006 |
| B-Scan 360 |  | .338*** |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .047 | .120 |
| N | 423 | 423 |
| *Job neglect* |  |  |
| Transformational leadership | −.081 | −.025 |
| Transactional leadership | .009 | .026 |
| Laissez-Faire leadership | .258*** | .172** |
| B-Scan 360 |  | .206*** |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .075 | .101 |
| N | 423 | 423 |

Note : *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

The second goal of the present study was to measure the influence of employee's perception of their supervisor's corporate psychopathy traits on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, work motivation and job neglect above and ascertain its contributions beyond the influence of the three leadership styles composing the Full-Range Leadership Model. We found that the B-Scan 360, a new measure of corporate psychopathy, outperformed the MLQ in predicting all four employee attitudes.

These findings are innovative in a couple of ways. First, they further indicate that negative leadership style and behaviors have a stronger impact on employee attitudes than positive leadership style. Moreover, for our sample, results indicate that psychopathic traits of the leader are a better predictor of negative (and therefore counterproductive) employee attitudes than the supervisor's leadership style. From a practitioner's standpoint, the selection process of leaders is a crucial step to influence (positively or negatively) employee attitudes and, ultimately, organizational success or failure. That being said and in light of the results found in this study, it is prudent to utilize a selection process that goes beyond the traditional assessment of desirable job-specific experience, task-oriented skills and interpersonal skills, and also includes assessing behaviors, attitudes and judgments associated with bad leadership. We suggest that HR personnel make a list not only of what they want to see but also what they do not want to see in a candidate applying for a leadership position.

### 4.1. Limitations and future directions

This study had some limitations. First, the Transactional MLQ scale achieved rather low alpha coefficient. This may be due to issues found in previous research with the factor structure of the MLQ (Carless, 1998; Heinitz, Liepmann & Felfe, 2005; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998; Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994). Hence, the low alpha values are consistent with previous research rather than specific to our study. Nevertheless, the MLQ is one of the most widely used leadership instruments and although Transactional leadership is not as often studied as Transformational and Laissez-Faire leadership, we decided to keep it in the study in order to evaluate the three components of the Full-Range Leadership Model. Second, employees provided the information used to score the study variables, raising the possibility that some of the results were a reflection of common-method variance. Although some commentators have suggested that the effects of common-method variance may be overstated (Brannick, Chan, Conway, Lance & Spector, 2010), nonetheless, it is important to minimize its effects as much as possible (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). In the present study, participants remained anonymous, providing them latitude to express their "true" perceptions, attitudes and intentions. We used robust measurement scales and made sure that the MLQ and B-Scan 360 were placed in different sections of the questionnaire than the dependent variables.

Overall, our study seems to indicate that possession of negative personality traits and a negative leadership style has more impact on employee attitudes than positive leadership styles. Put differently, having a bad boss has more impact on employees' work attitudes than having a good one. This finding is important for future research and practice

as both have primarily focused on identifying leadership traits that lead to employee wellness and productivity. It seems that focusing on identifying and reducing bad leadership behaviors could have a stronger, more positive impact on employee attitudes and ultimately their performance on the job. While some may suggest that corporate psychopathic traits have a "bright side," our study clearly indicates that it is certainly not associated with positive outcomes on employees. In the long-run, unhappy employees will lead to significant costs to the organization.

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