Profiling Possible Perpetrators: Beyond the ‘Big Five’ to the Dark Side of Personality

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ABSTRACT

Given the high cost of workplace deviance it is not surprising that research has directed energy towards determining the factors that influence its occurrence. Yet, one question remains unanswered – ‘what is the profile of possible perpetrators?’ This paper summarises what previous research has found in terms of the personality profile of deviants before discussing key reasons that the relationships found to date have not been particularly strong, including the influence of situational factors, self report biases as well as the potential underestimation of the incidence of acts of deviance. The paper then asks whether ‘normal’ personality traits, such as the Big Five, are useful in predicting possible perpetrators of deviant behaviour. The concept of destructive narcissism, a ‘dark’ personality trait, is presented as a potential personality trait of interest to understanding who may commit deviant acts in organisations. Preliminary empirical evidence to support this suggestion is provided.

Keywords: personality, interpersonal behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviance, or ‘voluntary behaviour of organization members which violates significant organizational norms and in doing so threatens the wellbeing of the organization or its members’ (Robinson & Bennett 1995: 565) can have enormous costs for organisations (Bacharach, Barnberger & Sonnenstuhl 2002) with the cost of theft alone estimated at $200 billion each year in the United States (Greenberg 1997). Based on Robinson and Bennett’s (1995) research, workplace deviance can be divided into four different categories depending on the target (i.e. organisational or interpersonal) and the severity of the deviant act (i.e. minor or severe). Examples of behaviours within each of the four categories include leaving early and calling in sick when not (Production Deviance); sabotaging merchandise and misusing the expense account (Property Deviance); blaming others for mistakes and showing favouritism (Political Deviance); sexual harassment and endangering others with reckless behaviour (Personal Aggression). Robinson and Greenberg’s (1998) process model begins with the perpetrators of deviance. However, we know little about the personality profile of people who are likely to be deviant. The purpose
of this paper is to explore this issue. The paper is divided into three main sections. Firstly, previous research on personality and deviance will be summarised. Secondly, potential reasons why researchers have not found stronger relationships between personality traits and deviance will be put forward. Thirdly, we will propose that research should focus more on the investigation of so-called ‘dark’ personality traits, such as narcissism and Machiavellianism, providing theoretical arguments and empirical evidence that people high in these traits are possible perpetrators of deviance.

PROFILING THE PERPETRATORS – DOES PERSONALITY PREDICT DEVIANCE?

As the interest in deviance has increased, there has been considerable discussion about the perpetrators that instigate it. Personality traits, in particular, have been examined as potential precursors to deviant behaviour. Personality is defined as ‘the unique and relatively stable patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and emotions shown by individuals’ (Greenberg & Baron 1997: 109). The vast majority of studies of personality and deviant behaviour have focused on the ‘Big Five’ (e.g. Liao, Joshi & Chuang 2004; Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt and Barrick 2004; Marcus, Lee & Ashton 2007). More recently, research has touched on four other personality traits – 1) Honesty-Humility (i.e. honest, fair, sincere and loyal, or greedy, conceited, pretentious and sly, Marcus, Lee & Ashton 2007), 2) Negative Affect (i.e. sensitive to minor frustrations and experience negative emotions such as anxiety and anger, Penney & Spector 2005), 3) impulsivity (i.e. reckless, uninhibited and incautious, Henle 2005); and 4) socialisation (i.e. considerate, tactful and able to conform, Henle 2005). In the next few paragraphs we review the research that has examined the Big Five and various forms of workplace deviance, as well as its relationship with other personality traits such as Honesty-Humility.

Using the two target categories of deviance outlined by Robinson and Bennet (1995) Liao et al. (2004) found that conscientiousness was negatively related to both organisational and interpersonal deviance (r = -0.38 for both), as also was agreeableness (r = -0.30, -0.40). Openness to experience was negatively related to organisational deviance (r = -0.12), and neuroticism was positively related to both organisational and interpersonal deviance respectively (r = 0.20, 0.17). Absence behaviour, a form of organisational deviance, has been found to be negatively predicted by conscientiousness and positively predicted by extraversion, though in total the Big Five accounted for only 18% of the variance in absence behaviour (Judge, Martocchio & Thoresen 1997). Colbert et al. (2004) found that interpersonal deviance significantly correlated with agreeableness (r = -0.5) and that withholding effort (a form of production deviance) was negatively related to conscientiousness (r = -0.21). Regression models showed that when four of the five personality traits were used as control variables (in addition to gender), the amount of variance they predicted in interpersonal deviance was significant, ranging from 0.22 to 0.36. Mount, Ilies and Johnson (2006) report significant relationships between conscientiousness and agreeableness with both organisational and interpersonal deviance ranging from -0.16 to -0.47. The direct effect of agreeableness on interpersonal deviance was strong as also was conscientiousness on organisational deviance. Finally, Levine and Jackson (2002) found that theft (a form of organisational deviance) was
negatively related to extraversion \(r = -0.41\) and neuroticism \(r = -0.32\). Collectively, these studies suggest that of the Big Five, conscientiousness may be the strongest predictor of organisational deviance and agreeableness of interpersonal deviance.

Marcus et al. (2007) studied a ‘sixth factor’ Honesty-Humility in addition to the Big Five, finding that counterproductive work behaviours were significantly and negatively related to Honesty – Humility, agreeableness, emotional stability and conscientiousness \(r = -0.38, -0.10, -0.13\) and \(-0.35\) respectively) in a German sample. These findings were also replicated in a Canadian sample with the exception of agreeableness which was non-significant. Hierarchical regression showed that the addition of the Big Five added up to a further 4\% of explained variance, compared to Honesty - Humility which added another 5\%. The Big Five plus Honesty - Humility explained between 27.4 and 47.4\% of the total variance in counterproductive work behaviours. Lee, Gizzarone and Ashton (2003) investigated the relationship between personality variables and the ‘likelihood to sexually harass’. It was found that in addition to the moderate negative relationship with agreeableness \(r = -0.23\), a moderate relationship with intellect / imagination (openness to experience) \(r = -0.28\) and a marginal relationship with conscientiousness \(r = -0.17\) was found. Honesty – Humility \(r = -0.50\) was the most significant predictor of likelihood to sexually harass. The finding in regards to Honesty-Humility is understandable because individuals high in this personality trait tend not to be exploitative or take advantage of others, both of which commonly occur in incidents of sexual harassment. However, the influence of openness to experience is less clear and the authors suggested that future research should explore this relationship. Results from these studies suggest that the personality factor of Honesty-Humility may provide some additional insight to conscientiousness and agreeableness when profiling the personality of possible perpetrators of workplace deviance.

Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield (1999) examined the relationship between negative affect and deviance and found mixed results. Negative affect was significantly related to interpersonal deviance \(r = 0.31\) but not organisational deviance. It was the single best predictor of interpersonal deviance though it only explained approximately 10\% of the variance. Given the small effect size there are clearly other factors that account for the majority of variance. Henle (2005) looked at two additional personality traits and found that impulsivity and socialization were strongly related to deviance. Impulsivity had a positive relationship \(r = 0.37\) and socialisation a negative relationship \(r = -0.29\). However, the use of an overall deviance score meant that the relationship between the different types of deviance (organisational and interpersonal) could not be determined. While these findings suggest a relationship, albeit a weak one, between workplace deviance and the personality traits of negative affect, impulsivity, and socialisation it is difficult to draw conclusions from only two studies.

In summary, a number of researchers have attempted to ‘profile’ perpetrators using personality traits. Prior research has found that there are positive and negative relationships between the Big Five, honesty-humility, negative affect, sociability and impulsivity, and various forms of deviance. The results show however, that in terms of direct effects and the Big Five as a whole, personality plays a part in
predicting deviance, but perhaps as more of a supporting actor rather than a lead role. This is clear from the strength of the correlations reported which, despite being statistically significant, are moderate at best, and weak in some cases. Conscientiousness and agreeableness appear to be the most well supported of the Big Five in the research conducted to date. Outside the Big Five, the relationships between alternative traits (Honesty-Humility, negative affect, socialisation and impulsivity) and deviance tend to be slightly stronger than some of the Big Five, with honesty-humility being the most substantial in strength. Thus, in concluding this first section on personality factors, it would appear that there may be other factors and more complex relationships at play as the following section will outline.

**PROBLEMS WITH RESEARCHING PERSONALITY IN ORGANISATIONS**

Despite support for a relationship between some personality traits and deviance, to date there has been no agreement on a ‘deviant personality type’. Indeed, it has been concluded in some reviews that personality traits offer little by way of explanation or prediction of workplace deviance on their own (Arbuthnot, Gordon & Jurkovic 1987; Robinson & Greenberg 1998). There are at least two possible reasons why the relationship between personality traits and deviant behaviour is typically weak, which will be put forward in this section.

One issue is the impact of the situational context, which can influence whether personality traits manifest or not. Bono and Judge (2004) argue that organisations possess strong situational strength which can deter or encourage behaviour, rendering it difficult to examine the influence of personality variables within organisational settings. Therefore, whilst an individual may be prone to deviant behaviours in terms of personality, their perceptions of the work situation may either further provoke action or reduce it. Prior research supports an interaction between situational factors and individual differences, with justice perceptions and personality being found to influence deviance in several studies, including Skarlicki, Folger and Tesluk (1999) and Kickul (2001). This is further supported by Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield (1999) and Colbert et al (2004), who found that positive perceptions of the work environment were negatively related to deviance, with personality moderating this effect. These findings suggest that whilst there may be a direct relationship between personality traits and deviance, contextual and organisational factors may also affect whether personality manifests as deviance.

It has been proposed that organisational factors may provide the opportunity for employees to misbehave (Vardi & Weitz 2004). These factors include ethical climate (Appelbaum, Deguire & Lay 2005; Kidwell & Kochanowski 2005); work group variables such as possible ‘imitation’ deviant acts by other members of the group (Dunlop & Lee 2004; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly 1998), and dissimilarity in the personality of group members (Henle 2005); as well as organisational constraints such as bureaucracy (Zimmerman 2001), faulty equipment, interruptions by others and misinformation or lack of it (Penny & Spector 2005). Direct effects have also been found between organisational factors and deviance. For example, Henle (2005) and Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke (2002) both found that deviance was directly related to justice perceptions. In summary, researchers in the organisational behaviour fields have
been convinced that behaviour is a function of both individual differences and situational or contextual factors for decades. Thus, it is recommended that an interactionist approach that takes into account both situational and personal factors be followed when examining workplace deviance (Henle 2005).

The second issue is related to the use of predominantly self report measures to gather data from deviants, and typically from only a single source. It is well known that social desirability may result in a person failing to report accurate data, instead providing a response that they feel is more socially acceptable. Impression management while responding is another problem (Vardi & Weitz 2004). This may lead to the respondent under-reporting their involvement in deviance, resulting in the underestimation of perpetrator acts of deviance. This in turn makes the examination of relationships between personality factors and deviance difficult, given that the numbers of reports of the behaviour are limited, the ability to find a significant relationship is diminished. Spector (1994) acknowledges the pitfalls of this method but also states that it is an evil necessity – after all, it is the most convenient and popular research method used in this area and alternative methods are also not without limitations. Peer reports for example can be inaccurate due to biases and individual perceptions presenting another methodological difficulty. Low base rates of some of the more serious deviant behaviours also contribute to this problem (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly 2004).

In summary, at this point three observations can be made. Firstly, research that considers personality as an antecedent of workplace deviance tends to focus on the ‘Big Five’. Even though Honesty – Humility has found some support as a key personality trait, it has not received the same amount of attention as the Big Five. Secondly, the direct effects of personality (particularly the Big Five) on deviance are arguably weak to moderate, at best. Thirdly, the importance of personality may be in part obscured by two things – 1) interactions with situational factors, and 2) underestimating of deviant behaviours due to self report data. By way of introduction to the final section of this paper, it is noteworthy that since deviant behaviours violate organisational norms they might be considered outside the realm of normal behaviours. This opens up debate as to whether it is useful or appropriate to be trying to predict such behaviours using ‘normal’ personality traits.

**NARCISSISM – A NEGLLECTED PERSONALITY VARIABLE?**

It is somewhat surprising that the research into workplace deviance has focused primarily on personality traits that are considered ‘normal’. Given that deviance is often referred to as the ‘dark side of organisational behaviour’ (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly 2004), it may be worthwhile to explore some of the darker, or more destructive personality traits, such as narcissism. Whilst narcissism is discussed in the management and leadership literatures, less is known about its relevance to deviance. Griffin and O’Leary Kelly (2004) mention it as a potential cause of aggression in organisations, however, the Vardi and Weitz (2004) summary of misbehaviour research does not refer to it. This section of the paper explains why narcissism may be of interest when profiling possible perpetrators of deviance.
Unlike the Big Five, narcissism can exist at different levels, including normal, destructive and pathological. Table 1 overleaf outlines the key characteristics for each of these levels (Lubit 2002; Brown 1997; Sedikides, Gregg, Rudich, Kumashiro & Rusbult 2004). Clinical narcissism is a personality disorder, diagnosed using criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-IV) where an individual meeting all criteria (more than required for diagnosis of the disorder) is ‘prototypic’. Sub-clinical narcissism, or destructive narcissism, means that the individual meets clinical criteria but is considered ‘subthreshold’ (just below diagnosis). Normal narcissism (a personality trait) meets only one to three of the clinical criteria and is characterised by a secure sense of self esteem and reasonable confidence, part of being a functional adult (Trull, Tragesser, Solhan & Schwartz-Mette 2007). What makes people who are destructively or clinically narcissistic so interesting to the deviance domain is that the very pathological nature of their personality may actually counter some of the issues previously discussed in regards to research in this domain. It is plausible that narcissists may defy situational strength because they are so innately preoccupied with preserving their fragile (or inflated) sense of self esteem that they may well be less affected by situational influences. Various definitions of narcissism reflect this - for example, Akhtar and Thomson (1982) refer to it as a concentration of psychological interest in the self and Westen (1990) calls it a cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self. In other words, it is possible that a perception of injustice (as an example of a situational force) may not be required to provoke their behaviour as they protect themselves *at all times*, regardless of the situation. This notion is consistent with evidence that narcissists are less bound by organisational rules of propriety (Soyer, Rovenpor & Kopelman 1999).

Table 1: Levels of Narcissism and Their Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy</th>
<th>Destructive / Sub-clinical</th>
<th>Pathological</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Relatively secure self esteem</td>
<td>▪ Grandiosity: inflated sense of self importance, arrogance, preoccupation with power, wealth, excessive seeking of power and admiration, frequently arrogant, fragile self esteem, seek partners that admire them, vanity</td>
<td>▪ Interpersonally exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Possess self confidence</td>
<td>▪ Sense of entitlement, often at detriment of close others: willingness to exploit others, lack of attachment to values, seeks excitement despite risks</td>
<td>▪ Exhibits lack of empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Failure to attain goals, criticism and seeing success of others may cause disappointment but does not threaten self image</td>
<td>▪ Lack of concern for, envy of and devaluation of others: lack of empathy, unable to understand others in depth, disregard for slighting others, interpersonally dismissive and abrasive, derogate unfavourable evaluators, unable to take criticism, exploitative, manipulative, low commitment to relationships, superiority</td>
<td>▪ Envious and believes others envy them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Shows concern for rights and wellbeing of others</td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Has a sense of entitlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Enjoys wealth, power and</td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Seeks and requires admiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Exhibits grandiose self image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Believes themselves to be special and unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, beauty or romanticized love</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
admiration but is not obsessed with them complex
- Relish direct competition with others, argumentative and hypersensitive
- Exhibitionists
- Blame others for their faults / personal plight (attributinal egoism)
- Distaste of mentoring, inability to listen
- Unable to trust others
- Denial of reality, rationalize their actions
- May have paranoid streak, may show Machiavellianism tendencies
- Displays arrogant, snobbish disdainful attitude

The theory of self monitoring is also relevant to the discussion here. Essentially, self monitoring is the extent to which a person may adapt their behaviour based on how that behaviour may be perceived by others within a given social situation, thus engaging in a form of impression management (Gangestad & Snyder 2000), a notion that aligns with the argument of situational strength outlined earlier. Individuals that are low in self monitoring (i.e. they do not alter their behaviour as a function of the social situation) can behave in ways that are not only socially unacceptable but offensive and damaging to others. For example, a high self monitor is only likely to express a prejudiced view of homosexuality if they are in the company of others that are perceived to also be prejudiced. Low self monitors on the other hand, will express their prejudiced view regardless of whether the group is prejudiced or tolerant of homosexuality (Klein, Snyder & Livingstone 2004). According to these authors, a person’s response to situational norms is thought to vary as a function of how internalised these norms are, with individual differences in sensitivity to situational cues or concerns about social appropriateness of behaviour. In terms of the current discussion on narcissism, this personality trait is characterised by low self monitoring, as the narcissist is obsessed with their point of view and a pervasive need for attention. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that narcissists engage in less impression management and thus may be more prone to behave in ways that are unacceptable in social situations.

In terms of self report problems, research has shown that narcissistic individuals are less concerned with social desirability (Raskin, Novacek & Hogan 1991; Watson & Morris 1991) and so they do not possess the same motivations to provide a socially acceptable response. Narcissists may be more likely to exaggerate than underestimate their participation in deviance, though this may create its own problems. Finally, contrary to popular belief that people with personality disorders cannot function in a workplace, destructive and clinical narcissism (i.e. pathological behaviour) may manifest in organisations more often that we would think (Board & Fritzon 2005). These individuals are very exploitative and clever, managing to progress up the corporate ladder with ease (e.g. Clarke’s (2005) workplace psychopaths and Lubit’s (2004) work on toxic people). Indeed, as Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) have observed these individuals appear to possess an innate understanding of how to manipulate others and are not averse to doing so. Hence, the argument being put forward here is that ‘abnormal’ levels of
narcissism in individuals may result in deviance because the perpetrator is not deterred by the usual inhibitory factors.

Some clinicians have used their training in Freudian analysis and consulting experiences to theorize and explain the issues that arise in workplaces. For example, Jorstad (1996: 4) states ‘in my experience as chief physician, university lecturer and psychiatrist as well as organisation consultant, I have repeatedly found narcissism to be a contributory factor to the emergence of conflicts and problems within organisations’. Maccoby (2004) summarizes the pro’s and cons of the narcissistic leader using examples from companies such as GE, Scandinavian Airline, SAS, AT & T and Oracle, highlighting the differences in practice of constructive and destructive narcissistic leaders. Kets DeVries (1992; 2004) does much the same, as does Sankowsky (1995) and Lubit (2002). Using the criteria that characterise destructive narcissism it is possible to consider the potential for a link between this personality trait and workplace deviance. By way of illustration, a list of examples of narcissistic behaviours exhibited at work was formed from previous case studies of narcissistic leaders and compared with Robinson and Bennett’s (1995) classifications of deviance. It is apparent from the results shown as Table 2 that narcissists may engage in behaviour that crosses all four categories of deviance, production, property, political and personal aggression.

Table 2: Common Narcissistic Behaviours and Types of Deviance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Narcissistic Behaviour</th>
<th>Potential Deviance Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sankowsky (1995)</td>
<td>With-holding or concealing evidence or information</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disguising a personal agenda as a vision or philosophy</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requesting extra effort from staff to test loyalties</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining away aberrant behaviour</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making self serving attributions about others behaviour masquerading them unbiased analysis</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glorifying contributions to work</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kets DeVries (1992)</td>
<td>Embarking on projects for personal gain</td>
<td>Production / property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using company funds inappropriately</td>
<td>Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making unnecessary change</td>
<td>Property / Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refusing to listen to what others are trying to say</td>
<td>Political / Personal Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extravagant use of funds to hold unnecessary events</td>
<td>Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubit (2002)</td>
<td>Attempting takeovers that are risky</td>
<td>Property / production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misusing company funds</td>
<td>Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting rid of people that threaten prestige</td>
<td>Personal aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undercutting talented people</td>
<td>Political / personal aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firing people with no reason or warning</td>
<td>Personal Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slandering others - making up rumours about their performance</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treating boards to unnecessary lavish meetings</td>
<td>Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking people away from workplace unnecessarily</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving office to home so working unsupervised</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewing financial data</td>
<td>Property</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using deceptive accounting practices to improve their reputation</td>
<td>Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive risk taking</td>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienating employees</td>
<td>Personal aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending more time chatting about themselves than working</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making false claims about skills then not doing tasks</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking credit for work they didn’t do but should have</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly critical of subordinates</td>
<td>Personal aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing / stealing equipment to prevent others working</td>
<td>Property / production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing others to work until injured</td>
<td>Personal aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying about work completed and about others</td>
<td>Production / personal aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating subordinates in abusive manner</td>
<td>Personal aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kets DeVries (2004)

| Arriving late to important meetings | Production |
| Taking phone calls when should be working | Production |
| Leaving important meetings prematurely | Production |

While case study evidence seems to suggest that narcissists can be deviant, surprisingly there are very few studies that have empirically examined this relationship. Furthermore, it has only been examined at ‘normal levels’. Just recently, Judge, LePine and Rich (2006) found that narcissism was related to workplace deviance as rated by others, but not by self \( r = 0.24 \). The strength of the relationship between narcissism and deviance is similar to some of the aforementioned studies of the Big Five. However, since the Judge et al. study also included the Big Five and none of these correlated with workplace deviance, the impact of narcissism should be duly noted. It should also be noted that the results go against our earlier suggestion that narcissists would be more likely to self report deviance, with peer reports of such behaviour notedly higher than the narcissists reported themselves. A few years earlier, Penny and Spector (2002) also found that narcissism was positively related to counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) \( r = 0.27 \). Given these studies were of so-called normal levels of narcissism, studies of subclinical or pathological narcissism and workplace deviance may be a promising avenue for future research.

Whilst there are few studies that focus specifically on the deviance-narcissism relationship, there is some evidence to suggest that narcissism may be related to behaviour that would be referred to as interpersonal deviance, such as aggression, violence and hostility. South, Oltmanns and Turkheimer (2003) looked at how personality may be related to the derogation of others using a sample that had been pre-screened using the PIPD (Peer Inventory for DSM-IV Personality Disorders) and were identified as having pathological traits. They found that of the 10 personality disorders, narcissism was the best predictor of derogation of others in response to negative feedback. This finding is consistent with that of a number of previous studies. Rhodewalt and Morf (1998) found that as high narcissists attribute success to their ability, failure results in extreme anger and anxiety. This is a similar finding to Bushman and Baumeister (1998) who found that narcissists reported more aggression towards the source when insulted than when receiving positive evaluations. Smalley and Stake (1996) also found narcissism had a
significant effect on levels of hostility after a negative evaluation. The narcissism had a significant effect on how the evaluator (the person giving the negative feedback) was rated, but not the test itself, suggesting that narcissists are more likely to direct their hostile feelings towards the person giving the feedback than criticising the task at hand. In contrast, Kernis and Sun (1994) found in their study that the evaluation technique itself was criticized as well as the competence of the person delivering it. Results from these studies suggest that narcissists may respond to negative feedback with displays of interpersonal deviance directed at the source of that feedback.

The role of self esteem in explaining negative behaviour has been known for some time. More recently, Baumeister, Boden and Smart (1996) provided a sound conceptual argument that, contrary to popular belief, a tendency towards violence can be explained using an egoist approach (where people with an inflated sense of self that have their ego threatened are most likely to react with aggression or violence). These authors argue that while some people believe that low self esteem is predictive of violence, they argue that high self esteem is actually a better explanation as to why violence occurs. After analysing several survey studies, they found support for this high self esteem theory with studies of hostility, murder, assault, and domestic violence towards partners. Given that there are two theories of narcissism, one that is centred on a low self esteem and one that centres on an inflated self esteem, where the behaviour originates is not of importance – the relationship found between narcissism and these behaviours (not all of which occur within the workplace but all of which are otherwise deviant) however, is noteworthy.

The empirical studies of personality factors and workplace deviance cited in this section appear similar in terms of strength as the Big Five and other traits discussed earlier. However, three important distinctions should be made here. First and foremost, the measurement of narcissism in organisational research has been generally limited to what would be described as normal (i.e. the personality trait as measured by for example the NPI), rather than pathological or ‘maladaptive’ levels of narcissism. Perhaps this is why the relationships cited above may not be as strong as the conceptual argument proposes and case study evidence suggests. For example, the Leadership / Authority dimension of narcissism can be considered ‘adaptive’ and is related to lower distress and greater social responsibility, whereas the ‘maladaptive’ exploitative/entitlement dimension results in less empathy, more distress and less social responsibility (Watson & Morris 1991). Secondly, it could be that due to their fragile or inflated sense of self, narcissists engage in high levels of impression management just as people high in Machiavellianism do (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly 2004), leading to lower tendencies to report deviant behaviour (as suggested by Judge et al 2006). Thirdly, there may well be a proportion of variance within the Big Five traits that is co-explained by characteristics of narcissism. For example, reflecting on the characteristics listed in Table 1, it can be at least conceptually argued that narcissists are more likely to be extroverted (like to be the centre of attention), more neurotic (obsessive on many fronts including self image), and more open to experience (in terms of being less risk averse than normal). They are also less likely to be conscientious (preoccupied with ‘preening’ and self esteem activities) and less likely to be
agreeable (exploitative of others, degrade others). This may well be the reason why the majority of the relationships between the Big Five and deviance disappeared when narcissism was also included (see Judge et al. 2006). Certainly, further research that explores multiple personality traits simultaneously and then uses appropriate statistical techniques (e.g., hierarchical regression) to determine which factors explain the most variance would be useful in clarifying whether ‘overlap’ with narcissistic characteristics is in part responsible for the relationships reported between the Big Five and deviance.

Overall, with only two direct studies having been conducted and these both using ‘normal’ narcissism, a strong theoretical argument that narcissism could be related to deviance and evidence from indirect studies of behaviour that could be referred to as deviant, future research is warranted into this proposed relationship. This is not to say that narcissism is the only personality trait that could be of interest to the deviance domain. Additional traits to explore include other ‘dark personality traits’ such as psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder and Machiavellianism. For example, Giacalone and Knouse (1990) explored Machiavellianism and hostility and their relationship to sabotage behaviour. A significant relationship was found between hostility and the justification of production and information sabotage. An interaction between hostility and Machiavellianism showed that high Mach / high hostility individuals are the most likely to justify their deviant behaviour. Aziz (2004) also found that Machiavellianism was positively related to absenteeism, a form of deviance. Hence, in light of the evidence and arguments presented in this section of the paper, deviance research should be prompted to extend their efforts beyond the Big Five in order to better identify personality traits that may influence individuals to commit deviant acts. Concentrating on finding ways to explore the subclinical and pathological levels of these traits so that the relationship proposed at this ‘abnormal’ level can be fully investigated would be of key benefit as would the investigation of potential ‘overlap’ between the Big Five and narcissism in relation to predicting deviance. The possible personality factors presented in this paper and potential situational factors that may provide the opportunity for employees to engage in organisational and interpersonal forms of workplace deviance are summarised as Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Possible Personality Factors and Situational Influences on Workplace Deviance**
CONCLUSION

A significant proportion of deviance research to date has focussed on identifying personality traits that may be prone to deviance. As this paper has highlighted, the Big Five have a weak to moderate relationship with deviance. Research in the area is made difficult due to the influence of situational factors and reporting issues. This paper has put forward the argument that deviance may be better explained by other personality traits such as destructive / clinical narcissism and Machiavellianism. The proposition that the characteristics of narcissists would make them prone to deviance has been put forward with preliminary evidence to support this notion. There is a need for researchers to more fully explore the relationship between dark personality traits such as narcissism and workplace deviance, especially at the ‘abnormal’ levels of these traits. Such research will help in profiling the possible perpetrators of deviant behaviours within organisations.
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