



# Comparing models of counterproductive workplace behaviors: The Five-Factor Model and the Dark Triad



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## ABSTRACT

Research has examined the relationship of personality traits with counterproductive workplace behaviors, with many studies focusing on the constructs of the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy). The utilization of a general model of personality traits, the Five Factor Model, may provide a more parsimonious explanation for these behaviors. To assess this, the current study used path analysis to determine which personality constructs best describe these behaviors within a sample of undergraduate students working at least 20 hours per week ( $n = 163$ ). Overall, the results indicated that the best-fitting and most parsimonious model for describing counterproductive workplace behaviors was one in which only agreeableness and conscientiousness were included.

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## 1. Introduction

Counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs) result in billions of dollars lost per year (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). One avenue of individual differences related to workplace misconduct is personality traits (Elliot, 2010; Hastings & O'Neill, 2009; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Trevino, 2010). Understanding the relationship of personality traits with CWBs may enable companies to develop better screening methods when hiring, allowing businesses to potentially avoid future conflicts and reduce decreases in productivity. The present study examined two personality models that have been used in studies of CWBs: The Five Factor Model (FFM) and the Dark Triad. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to compare the two models in predicting levels of CWBs.

CWBs lead to several negative outcomes, resulting in both financial losses (e.g., paying or accepting kickbacks, fraud) and damaging the image of the corporation (e.g., discriminating against coworkers; Jones, 1997). The current study investigates one specific type of CWB: social undermining behavior. This is defined as "behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation" (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002, p. 332). These behaviors have been further differentiated with regard to the target of the behavior. Interpersonal CWBs hurt

another individual physically or emotionally (e.g., making fun of or harassing a coworker), whereas organizational CWBs decrease the productivity of the company more directly (e.g., drinking alcohol while working, working slowly).

A meta-analysis by Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) suggests that personality is an area of individual differences that may be important for understanding who may engage in CWBs. Personality traits have been linked to a number of problems (Hopwood et al., 2009; Mullins-Sweatt & Widiger, 2010; Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006), including occupational impairment. One empirically supported model of general personality that may help elucidate this relationship is the Five-Factor Model (FFM). The FFM is a personality model that includes five domains: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The FFM has been used to study work related constructs, including workplace bullying (Lind, Glaso, Pallesen, & Einarsen, 2009), workplace accidents (Clarke & Robertson, 2008), salary earnings (Nyhus & Pons, 2005), and job satisfaction (Jong, Velde, & Jansen, 2001). Therefore, this comprehensive model of personality may be useful in assessing the relationship between personality and CWBs. To date, however, this model is less commonly used, as the Dark Triad constructs are more commonly utilized within this research area.

Paulhus and Williams (2002) coined the term "Dark Triad" to describe three "socially aversive personalities" within the literature: Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy. These constructs tend to be moderately correlated and share the features of egocentricity, callousness, and manipulation (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). Though there is empirical evidence for the overlap of these constructs (Fehr, Samson, & Paulhus, 1992;

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McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998), more recent findings support the perspective of three distinct trait domains (Jones & Paulhus, 2010; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Studies have suggested that agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), interpersonal manipulation, and callous affect (Jones & Figueredo, 2013) were the only common traits shared by the Dark Triad constructs. Interpersonal manipulation and callous affect have been described by others (e.g., Widiger & Lynam, 1998) as facets of the FFM agreeableness/antagonism domain (low straightforwardness and low tender mindedness), providing evidence that the core of the Dark Triad constructs can be described well within a general trait model.

Machiavellianism is characterized by cynical, pragmatic, misanthropic, and immoral beliefs, emotional detachedness, agentic and self-beneficial motives, strategic long-term planning, manipulation and exploitation, and deception (Christie & Geis, 1970; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). Narcissism includes an inflated view of the self, fantasies about control, success, and admiration, and the desire to have self-love reinforced by others (Kernberg, 1989; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Lastly, psychopathy is characterized by glib charm, shallow emotions, parasitic lifestyles, and may include criminal activities (Hare & Neumann, 2009).

Previous research has consistently found relationships with the Dark Triad and CWBs. In a recent meta-analysis, O'Boyle and colleagues (2012) found that traits of the Dark Triad were differentially related with CWBs. Individuals high in Machiavellianism engaged in more interpersonal forms of CWBs (e.g., maltreatment of coworkers and betrayal). Individuals high in narcissism engaged in CWBs such as embezzlement, bullying, and white-collar crimes. Lastly, psychopathy was associated with more violent, dangerous, and aggressive workplace behaviors.

Each of the Dark Triad constructs has been related to specific FFM domains. Furnham, Richards, Rangel, and Jones (2014) provide a summary of 11 studies that assessed the FFM in relation to the Dark Triad. There is strong evidence for a relationship between the Dark Triad constructs with low agreeableness and neuroticism. Additionally, Machiavellianism and psychopathy show strong relationships with low conscientiousness while narcissism and psychopathy relate to high extraversion. This indicates that the FFM may be able to simplify the multifaceted constructs of the Dark Triad by dismantling the constructs (and explaining their common variance) into the domains of general personality functioning. In fact, a recent meta-analysis by O'Boyle and colleagues (2014) suggests that the domains of the FFM accounted for much of the variance in the constructs of the Dark Triad.

To date, however, the relationship of the FFM with CWBs has received little investigation. Berry, Ones, and Sackett (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of CWBs and FFM personality traits. The findings indicated neuroticism relates to organizational and interpersonal CWBs, agreeableness strongly relates with interpersonal CWBs, and conscientiousness strongly relates with organizational CWBs. Therefore, the FFM may be a useful and applicable theory to employ as it is both parsimonious and comprehensive.

The current study examines the relationship of the FFM and the Dark Triad with CWBs. Path analysis was chosen to analyze the data as a parsimonious way of simultaneously estimating several regression models as well as evaluating competing models in predicting CWBs. The current study had three specific hypotheses. First, interpersonal CWBs would be significantly related to low agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low conscientiousness, while organizational CWBs would be significantly related to low conscientiousness. Both types of CWBs would be significantly positively related to all three Dark Triad constructs. Second, the FFM would provide a better fit to the data in predicting CWBs. Third, the model with the best fit would be one in which agreeableness and conscientiousness are the two sole predictors for interpersonal and organizational CWBs.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were undergraduate psychology students at a Midwestern university recruited using an online system. Only those who endorsed that they were currently working at least 20 h a week on a prescreener questionnaire were invited to complete the study. A total of 191 participants completed the study, with 28 participants dropped due to invalid responses. Participants ( $n = 163$ ) had an average age of 20.89 years ( $SD = 4.01$ , range = 18–53), and were primarily female ( $n = 117$ ; 71.8%) and Caucasian (74.8%; with 8.6% Native American/Alaskan Native, 6.1% Black/African American, 2.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.5% Hispanic).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Elemental psychopathy assessment (EPA; Lynam et al., 2011)

The EPA is a 178-item self-report measure of psychopathy, based on the perspective of the FFM. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The EPA has a total score and 18 subscale scores. In the current study, the EPA total psychopathy score had an internal reliability coefficient of .95 (subscales ranged from .65—Arrogance to .89—Thrill-Seeking).

#### 2.2.2. Five factor narcissism inventory (FFNI; Glover, Miller, Lynam, Crego, & Widiger, 2011)

The FFNI is a 130-item self-report measure of narcissism from the perspective of the FFM. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The FFNI has a total narcissism score with an internal reliability coefficient of .90. The scale has 15 subscales, with reliability coefficients ranging from .62 (Shame) to .89 (Exploitativeness) for the current study.

#### 2.2.3. Machiavellianism personality scale (MPS; Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009)

The MPS is a 16-item self-report measure designed to assess the personality facets of Machiavellianism. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The MPS is comprised of a total Machiavellianism score and four subscales. For the current study, the MPS total score had an internal consistency coefficient of .84, with the subscales ranging from .74 (Distrust of others) to .85 (Amorality).

#### 2.2.4. Revised NEO personality inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992)

The NEO-PI-R is a 240-item measure designed to assess an individual's general personality functioning. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The NEO-PI-R is comprised of five domains and six narrower facets within each domain. Internal consistency coefficients for this study ranged from .83 (openness to experience) to .93 (conscientiousness).

#### 2.2.5. Workplace deviance scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000)

The workplace deviance scale (WDS) is a 19-item self-report measure assessing how often an individual has engaged in a number of CWBs in the workplace in the past year (e.g., made fun of a coworker, falsified a receipt to get more money reimbursed). Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never engaged in the behavior) to 7 (engaged in the behavior daily). The scale has an overall deviance scale and two subscales.

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