



Bright aspects to dark side traits: Dark side traits associated with work success

Adrian Furnham^{a,*}, Geoff Trickey^b, Gillian Hyde^b

^a Department of Clinical, Educational, and Health Psychology, University College London, London, UK

^b PCL, Tunbridge-Wells, TN4 8AS, UK

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ABSTRACT

Dark side traits have been associated as much with success as failure in specific occupations. This study examines the possibility that some “dark side” traits may be advantageous in particular occupations by focusing on the relationship of eleven dark side traits with six, self-report, validated measures of occupational behaviour and potential. Nearly 5000 British adults completed the Hogan Development Survey (HDS), and the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) which has six criterion-based measures of occupational scales. Whilst some disorders (i.e. Excitable, Sceptical) seemed consistently associated with low work outcome and potential ratings, others seemed either neutral or positively associated (Bold, Diligent). Some dark side traits were highly variable being positively associated with some occupational scales, but not others (Mischievous, Colourful). The total ‘potential’ index of three potential measures showed most positive correlations with dark-side traits. The present results suggest that the manifestation of specific dark side traits may not always lead to work problems.

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1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years there has been a great deal of work trying to reconcile and integrate the overlapping work of psychologists and psychiatrists working on personality traits and disorders (Costa & Widiger, 2005). Differential and clinical psychologists have attempted to introduce the personality disorders concepts and categorisation to a wider audience changing the terms to make them more accessible (Miller, 2008).

The DSM manuals (DSM-III-R; DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 1994, 2000) note that personality disorders all have a long history and have an onset no later than early adulthood. The essence of the difference between normal traits and disorders is: “Personality Disorders must be distinguished from personality traits that do not reach the threshold for a Personality Disorder. Personality traits are diagnosed as a Personality Disorder only when they are inflexible, maladaptive, persisting, and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 633). Whilst the definition of personality disorders has not changed there have been recent changes into the classification of the disorders to five types (Skodol et al., 2011).

This study uses the Hogan Developmental Survey to assess “dark side traits” in a normal population (Hogan & Hogan, 1997a). Technically the HDS is not a clinical measure, but rather measures dysfunctional personality in the working population but using a similar taxonomy to the classical personality disorders.

The HDS assumes a dimensional model, appropriate to trait concepts whilst the disorders model is essentially categorical. The test measures dysfunctional dispositions, underpinned by DSM-IV, Axis 2 personality disorders.

The aim of this study was to look at the idea that for some specific work processes certain dark side traits are positively, rather than negatively, associated with work success. It explores the idea of Judge and LePine (2007) that socially undesirable traits can in some (work) situations have positive implications. This measure has been used in various studies to investigate dysfunctional behaviour at work (Carson et al., in press; Zibarras, Port, & Woods, 2008).

Whilst there are a host of studies on management failure (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010; Newton, Khanna, & Thompson, 2008; Pelletier, 2010) there are also studies that suggest that some disorders, like Narcissistic Personality Disorder may be at times positively associated with leadership success (Bollaert & Petit, 2010; Ouimet, 2010; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Board and Fritzon (2005) found that senior business managers scored highly on many of the dark side traits showing that the behaviour which deviates from a prescribed norm is not necessarily indicative of a pathological psychological condition in an executive.

Various published works exist which give different labels to comparable disorders. Writers have changed the names to make them more “understandable” (Dotlich & Cairo, 2003; Miller, 2008; Oldham & Morris, 1991). These are shown in Table 1 along with DSM-IV-TR terminology (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). These personality disorders were grouped along different axes or different clusters. When clustering three are usually made: A: Odd/Eccentric (Paranoid, Schizoid, Schizotypal); B: Dramatic/Emotional/Erratic (Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, Narcissistic)

* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Clinical, Educational, and Health Psychology, University College London, 26 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AP, UK.

E-mail address: a.furnham@ucl.ac.uk (A. Furnham).

Table 1
Different labels for traits associated with similar disorders.

DSM-IV Personality disorder		Hogan & Hogan (1997a, 1997b) HDS themes		Oldham and Morris (1991)	Miller (2008)	Dotlich and Cairo (2003)
Borderline	Inappropriate anger; unstable and intense relationships alternating between idealisation and devaluation	Excitable	Moody and hard to please; intense but short-lived enthusiasm for people, projects or things	Mercurial	Reactors	Volatility
Paranoid	Distrustful and suspicious of others; motives are interpreted as malevolent.	Sceptical	Cynical, distrustful and doubting others' true intentions	Vigilant	Vigilantes	Habitual
Avoidant	Social inhibition; feelings of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism or rejection	Cautious	Reluctant to take risks for fear of being rejected or negatively evaluated	Sensitive	Shrinkers	Excessive caution
Schizoid	Emotional coldness and detachment from social relationships; indifferent to praise and criticism	Reserved	Aloof, detached and uncommunicative; lacking interest in or awareness of the feelings of others	Solitary	Oddballs	Aloof
Passive- Aggressive	Passive resistance to adequate social and occupational performance; irritated when asked to do something he/she does not want to	Leisurely	Independent; ignoring people's requests and becoming irritated or argumentative if they persist	Leisurely	Spoilers	Passive resistance
Narcissistic	Arrogant and haughty behaviours or attitudes, grandiose sense of self-importance and entitlement	Bold	Unusually self-confident; feelings of grandiosity and entitlement; over valuation of one's capabilities	Self-Confidence	Preeners	Arrogance
Antisocial	Disregard for the truth; impulsivity and failure to plan ahead; failure to conform	Mischievous	Enjoying risk taking and testing the limits; needing excitement; manipulative, deceitful, cunning and exploitative	Adventurous	Predators	Mischievous
Histrionic	Excessive emotionality and attention seeking; self dramatising, theatrical and exaggerated emotional expression	Colourful	Expressive, animated and dramatic; wanting to be noticed and needing to be the centre of attention	Dramatic	Emoters	Melodramatic
Schizotypal	Odd beliefs or magical thinking; behaviour or speech that is odd, eccentric or peculiar	Imaginative	Acting and thinking in creative and sometimes odd or unusual ways	Idiosyncratic	Creativity and vision	Eccentric
Obsessive- Compulsive	Preoccupations with orderliness; rules, perfectionism and control; over- Conscientiousness and inflexible	Diligent	Meticulous, precise and perfectionistic, inflexible about rules and procedures; critical of others	Conscientious	Detailers	Perfectionistic
Dependent	Difficulty making everyday decisions without excessive advice and reassurance; difficulty expressing disagreement out of fear of loss of support or approval	Dutiful	Eager to please and reliant on others for support and guidance; reluctant to take independent action or to go against popular opinion	Devoted	Clingers	Eager to please

and C: Anxious/Fearful (Avoidant, Dependent and Obsessive–Compulsive). Various factor analytic studies of the HDS have also yielded three factors but rather different from the above (Furnham & Trickey, 2011). These three clusters have also been described as moving against (Bold, Mischievous, Colourful, Imaginative), toward (Diligent, Dutiful), and away from (Excitable, Cautious, Skeptical, Reserved, Leisurely) others (Hogan & Hogan, 1997a).

This study used the Hogan ‘dark side’ measure now extensively used in organisational research and practice to measure dysfunctional personality in the ‘normal population’ (De Fruyt et al., 2009; Furnham, 2006, 2008; Furnham & Crump, 2005; Hogan & Hogan, 1997a). Its aim is partly to help selectors and individuals themselves diagnose how they typically react under work stress. It has the advantage of being psychometrically valid; of measuring all the personality disorder categories in DSM-IV and being appropriate for a “normal” population.

The HDS focuses only on the core construct of each disorder from a dimensional perspective (Hogan & Hogan, 2001, p. 41). It has been cross-validated with the MMPI personality disorder scales. Correlations ($n = 140$) range from 0.45 for Mischievous to 0.67 for Excitable (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Fico, Hogan, and Hogan (2000) report coefficient alphas between 0.50 and 0.70 with an average of 0.64 and test–retest reliabilities ($n = 60$) over a three-month interval ranging from 0.50 to 0.80, with an average of 0.68. There were no mean-level differences between sexes, racial/ethnic groups, or younger versus older persons (Hogan & Hogan, 2001) though Furnham and Trickey (2011) did find evidence of sex differences. Various relatively small-scale studies have used the HDS and have shown it to be a robust, reliable and valid instrument (De Fruyt et al., 2009; Furnham, 2006; Furnham & Crump, 2005; Rolland & De Fruyt, 2003; Khoo & Burch, 2008).

Over the past few years there have been a number of papers on dark side traits in the work place (Board & Fritzon, 2005; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). The dark side traits are often seen to moderate the relationship between emergence as leaders and leadership effectiveness (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). Thus Khoo and Burch (2008) in a study of 88 business leaders found three disorders predictive of measures of transformational leadership: Cautious and Bold negative, but Colourful positively predictive of leadership success.

The idea that dark side traits maybe beneficial in certain occupations has been observed by many writers (Furnham, 2010; Hogan, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2006) particularly those using clinical case studies. Whilst some disorders are rarely associated with success in any jobs (Borderline, Avoidant, Dependent) other have been implicated as potentially beneficial (Bold, Mischievous, Diligent). This study will explore the extent to which the dysfunctional personality traits predict various validated measures of occupational measures like service orientation, reliability and managerial potential. The occupational measures in this study were all “criterion-focused, self-report occupational scales” which according to Ones and Viswesvaran (2001) have four characteristics: they look like self-report personality tests; they were developed to access constructs of relevance for work environments; they are designed for use with job applicants; they were designed to predict work behaviour. They concluded from their review that these measures (including the ones used here) were significant predictors of general and specific work behaviour as well as supervisor ratings.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In total 4943 British working adults took part in this study of which 2828 were females and 2115 males. Their mean age was

37.59 years ($SD = 13.57$ years) with the range being between 17 and 71 years. In all 60% were between 30 and 50 years old. They were nearly all (over 95%) graduates and in middle management roles with English as their mother tongue. They came from both private and public sector jobs particularly the finance and health industries.

3. Materials

3.1. Hogan development survey

(Hogan & Hogan, 1997a) has 154 items, scored for 11 scales, each grouping 14 items. Respondents are requested to ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ with the items. The HDS has been cross-validated with the MMPI personality disorder scales as well as “normal traits” (Furnham & Crump, 2005). The eleven traits are fully described in Table 1. The manual reports internal reliabilities for the scales varying from .50 to .78 with an average of .67. The three month test–retest reliability ranged from .58 to .87.

3.2. Hogan personality inventory

(HPI) (Hogan & Hogan, 1997b) This measure has six established criterion related scales called the occupational scales: Service orientation (being attentive, pleasant, and courteous to clients and customers), Stress tolerance (being able to handle stress; low scores are associated with absenteeism and health problems), Reliability (integrity (high scores) and organizational delinquency (low scores), Clerical potential (the ability to follow directions, pay attention to details, and communicate clearly), Sales potential (energy, social skill, and the ability to solve problems for clients), and managerial potential (leadership ability, planning and decision making skills).

4. Procedure

Participants were tested by a British based psychological consultancy over a 10-year period. Each participant was given personal feedback on their score. They were nearly all employed as middle to senior managers in British companies. They took this test as part of an assessment exercise, run by an external psychological consultancy. Inevitably this could have affected their results because of issues such as impression management and dissimulation. However the HDS has a “social desirability” which can be used to control for this problem. In this study we controlled for social desirability in the hierarchical regression analyses.

5. Results

Table 2 shows the correlational and regression analyses results for the six occupational categories. Regressions were all hierarchical with demographics entered first, then social desirability, and finally the dark side traits. Table 2 shows the results from the third step. Results showed sex and age together never accounted for more than 3% of the variance. Further, social desirability never added more than one percent of the variance except in the case of stress tolerance, where it accounted for just over three percent of the variance.

Table 2 shows that all six regressions were highly significant and the dark side traits highly predictive of all the occupational scales. It also shows that most, but not all, of beta weights were negative. Significant **positive** beta weights are in bold to make the pattern clearer to see. Table 2 shows that for some dark side traits (i.e. Excitable) there was either no, or a strong negative association with all the occupational scales. However, of the other dark

Table 2
Results of Regressions for Six Occupational Scales.

Variables	Service orientation			Stress tolerance			Reliability			Clerical potential			Sales potential			Managerial potential		
	r	Beta	t	r	Beta	t	r	Beta	t	r	Beta	t	r	Beta	t	r	Beta	t
Age		00	.59		01	1.19		05	4.83**		05	4.83**		03	2.65**		03	2.65**
Sex		05	3.94**		-08	8.43**		-04	3.76**		-06	5.43**		-09	9.33**		-02	2.13*
Social desirability		20	16.37**		00	0.45		09	7.26**		00	0.32		01	1.34		00	0.40
1. Excitable	-.54	-52	35.81**	-.69	-51	43.36**	-.42	-34	24.41**	-.57	-32	23.81**	-.25	-02	-54	-.54	-31	22.69**
2. Skeptical	-.33	-15	10.84**	-.30	-03	3.08**	-.38	-13	9.89**	-.29	-10	8.28**	-.55	-05	-49	-.22	-06	4.49**
3. Cautious	-.27	-04	2.68*	-.60	-03	24.94**	-.11	00	0.34	-.60	-31	21.95**	-.52	-23	18.26**	-.54	-28	19.41**
4. Reserved	-.29	-10	7.83**	-.19	-07	6.57**	-.18	-06	4.55**	-.28	-02	1.59	-.39	-22	21.09**	-.28	-04	3.12*
5. Leisurely	-.16	03	2.14*	-.30	-05	5.24**	-.24	-06	4.51**	-.27	-04	3.41**	-.11	-02	1.72	-.24	-06	5.15**
6. Bold	.00	-02	0.77	.08	02	1.98	-.20	03	1.86	-.19	-10	7.82**	.36	00	0.19	-.24	-15	11.56**
7. Mischievous	.09	05	3.41**	.08	05	4.26**	-.43	-28	20.82**	-.10	-02	1.48	.51	23	19.86**	.06	-06	4.48**
8. Colourful	.02	-11	6.89**	.11	-05	4.06**	-.23	-05	3.79**	.27	12	8.82**	.62	32	25.47**	.23	11	7.88**
9. Imaginative	-.08	01	0.99	-.11	-09	9.14**	-.43	-23	18.45**	-.06	-11	9.11**	.38	16	16.30**	-.08	-11	9.88**
10. Diligent	.04	-02	1.86	-.02	00	0.81	.15	09	7.60**	.00	03	3.02**	-.09	00	0.82	.18	20	17.83**
11. Dutiful	.10	1	10.04**	-.24	-07	8.52**	.04	02	1.81	-.21	-05	4.58**	-.10	-05	4.82**	-.17	-08	5.75**
F(14, 4942) =	221.76**		529.04**			284.06**			342.62**			522.94**			321.99**			
Adj R ²	.39		.60			.45			.49			.60			.47			

* p < .05.
** p < .01.

side traits, Mischievous and Colourful were positively associated with various measures. For Sales Potential, three of the dark side traits were particularly strongly implicated showing that the higher the Bold, Colourful and Imaginative the person scored the better their sales potential.

We also computed a total score which may be taken as an indicator of occupational agility and potential. We repeated the regression: Age, sex and social desirability accounted for just 2% of the variance and the PD factors 65%. The two highest Betas were Cautious (Beta = -.33, $t = 27.45$, $p < .001$) and Colourful (Beta = .13, $t = 11.99$, $p < .001$). Three other factors had significant positive beta weights: Diligent (.08), Bold (.07) and Imaginative (.05).

Then the three potential scales were combined to give an overall business potential index and the regression repeated. Sex, age and social desirability accounted for 3.7% of the variance and the dark side variables 65.5%. All of the dark side beta's were significant and many negative particularly Reserved. However the beta weights for the remaining five (excluding Dutiful) were all positive. The two highest positive beta weights were for Colourful (Beta = .27, $t = 12.74$, $p < .001$) and Mischievous (Beta = .13, $t = 6.26$, $p < .001$).

We then did factor analyses on both the independent variables (dark side traits) and the dependent variables (occupational scales) to reduce the possibility of making type II errors. Table 3 shows the Varimax factor analysis which is strikingly similar to that of Hogan and Hogan (1997a) and Furnham and Trickey (2011). Following those studies the factors were labelled *Moving Against People*, *Moving Away From People* and *Moving Toward People*. Table 4 shows the results from the factor analysis of the 6 occupational scales: the three potential scales loaded on the first factor (which in part justifies the above analysis of the combined score), service orientation uniquely on the second factor and the third factor had stress tolerance positively and reliability negatively loaded.

Two further regressions were performed. The first on the total potential scale score was computed for the three potential ratings. This was the criterion score and predictor variables were sex and age, social desirability and the 3 PD factor scores. The regression was significant with the first three variables only accounting for 2% of the variance, $F(6, 4936) = 874.36$, $p < .001$. The three factors accounted for 52% of the variance with all three being significant: Factor 1 (Beta = .44, $t = 41.02$, $p < .001$), F2 (Beta = -.63, $t = 61.64$, $p < .001$) and F3 (Beta = .07, $t = 6.36$, $p < .001$). Thus *Moving Against People* was positively associated with management potential.

The second regression was done on service orientation with the three factors as the predictor scores (after sex, age and social desirability). Here neither the demographic variables, nor social desirability were significant however the total regression with the three dark side factors scores was significant, $F(6, 1451) = 97.30$; $p < .001$. Two of the three factors had significant betas: *Moving Against People* (Factor 1) negative (Beta = -.49, $t = 21.60$, $p < .001$) but *Diligence* (Factor 3) positive (Beta = .11, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$).

6. Discussion

This paper explored the possibility that certain dark side variables might be positively associated with occupational success. This issue has been explored before on very much smaller populations like the 39 business managers studied by Board and Fritzon (2005) or the 80 business leaders studied by Khoo and Burch (2008).

The correlational and regression analyses showed three things. First, that some dark traits are consistently and highly negatively correlated with work success. Thus, for instance it may be expected that moody, mercurial, volatile, Excitable personalities

are very difficult to work with or for, and hence the strong negative association with all six occupational measures. The same is true of those with Sceptical people who are likely to be distrustful, suspicious, and cynical; Cautious types whose inhibition and risk aversion could prove problematic, as well those who are Leisurely and self-centred.

Second, there seem some types of jobs where manifestations of disorders maybe beneficial. Thus, Diligent predicts a person's high integrity and low counterwork productivity scores. Third, some of the dark side traits may be particularly important in that they are negatively productive of certain work behaviours but positive of others. Thus high scorers on Imaginative behaviour (manifest in eccentricity, idiosyncrasies) are strongly negatively correlated with reliability at work but positively associated with sales potential. Indeed there is considerable evidence that Imaginativeness is related to creativity (Batey & Furnham, 2008; Gibson, Folley, & Park, 2009; Nelson & Rawlings, 2010).

Some of the dark side traits were positively associated with all three (and the total) self-report potential scale scores. The first was Bold which may be seen by others positively and as a manifestation of self-confidence and courage to act. There are many studies which have shown that Boldness is indeed associated with business success and indeed found in many successful CEOs (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). There is also speculation that Boldness/Narcissism increases with those in power over time turning from a positive to a negative advantage among leaders (Owen & Davidson, 2009).

The dark side trait Colourful was also positively related to all measures of potential. The expressiveness and emotionality associated with these "colourful" personalities may make them seem attractive to others, even if only for short periods.

The dark side trait Diligent was positively associated with two of the potential ratings. Indeed, mild obsessiveness being associated with conscientiousness, orderliness, precision and perfectionism is clearly an advantage in many areas of work such as quality control, internal audit etc.

Perhaps the most interesting finding was the regression analysis onto sales potential. It showed that Bold, Mischievous, Imaginative, traits were associated with success in this area. This finding does fit with the extant literature on personality correlates of sales performance and of the regular derailment of successful sales staff.

Furnham and Fudge (2008) found Agreeableness negatively correlated with sales success arguing that sales people have to face rejection and also sell people things they neither really want, nor often can afford. The results seem to suggest that sales success is

Table 3
Factor analysis of the 11 scale.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Excitable	-.02	.78	-.04
Skeptical	-.39	.69	.23
Cautious	-.12	.66	-.27
Reserved	.41	.61	.15
Leisurely	.22	.57	.29
Bold	.77	-.02	.15
Mischievous	.76	.03	-.15
Colourful	.74	-.25	-.15
Imaginative	.66	.16	-.10
Diligent	.02	.00	.77
Dutiful	.22	.08	.67
<i>Extraction sums of squared loadings</i>			
Component	Eigenvalue1	% of variance	Cumulative%
1	2.68	24.35	24.35
2	2.32	21.12	45.48
3	1.26	11.48	56.90

Table 4
Factor analysis of the 6 occupational scales.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Service orientation	.18	.95	.02
Stress tolerance	.30	.16	.87
Reliability	.41	.44	-.68
Clerical potential	.91	.20	.11
Sales potential	.81	.30	.05
Management potential	.93	.06	.02

associated with unusually high self-confidence (Bold); risk-taking and cunning (Mischievous) as well as emotionality (Colourful) and attention seeking. In this sense successful sales people may be very difficult to manage and prone to derailment.

A clear limitation of the study is method invariance, which is particularly problematic with occupational studies. Restricting a study to self-report has two problems: first it tends to increase the reported size of relationships (correlations) and also there are problems associated with social desirability. The second issue is easily dismissed in this study because we were able to control for social desirability in the dark side measures and the six occupational variables have been shown not to have their validity threatened by social desirability problems (Ones & Viswesvaran, 2001). However it would always be most desirable to have observation data (multi-source data) or better still behavioural data as work success criteria.

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