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Dysfunctional Leadership in Universities: identifying and dealing with sociopaths

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Abstract

Despite there being a 'managerialist' trend in university governance over the last decade with university leaders perceived to be somewhat similar to their counterparts in business organisations, there is a dearth of literature dealing with university leadership, and especially when it comes to the darker side of leadership - sociopaths. Research demonstrates that sociopathic leaders have three problematic personality traits called 'the dark triad' known to have negative associations in commercial organisations with counter-productive behaviour, toxic work cultures and dysfunctional organisational performance.

This chapter examines research undertaken on this phenomenon in the university setting using case study research design. Two cases are examined - one in Europe and one in Australia. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are employed to extract data and within case and cross case analysis used to analyse data and draw implications and conclusions.

The research demonstrates that sociopathic leaders exist in universities and that their actions can cause a toxic work environment leading to dysfunctional outcomes for the institutions. Further, we provide practical assistance for identifying probable sociopaths

and suggestions for university staff working with sociopaths and appointment panels so that they might avoid making dysfunctional leadership appointments. The chapter is an important reference for senior leaders within the university sector wishing to maintain high performance standards for leaders at all levels.

Dysfunctional Leadership in Universities: identifying and dealing with sociopaths

Introduction

Universities around the globe operate in highly competitive globalised environments. There are constant pressures from government, communities, staff, students and other stakeholders placing institutions under pressure to improve performance by becoming more effective and efficient, while unusually experiencing at the same time, decreasing resources. Like organisations from other sectors of the economy, research demonstrates that effective leadership is a vital factor for running all successful organisations (Miller and Dalglis, 2011).

However, in respect of universities, there is a dearth of literature dealing with leadership, despite the fact that there has been a ‘managerialist’ trend in university governance over the last decade with leaders who are perceived to be somewhat similar to business managers leading to ‘the emergence of an academic managerial class that exercises power’ (Aspromourgos, 2012, p. 44; Connell, 2014).

Within the sparse literature on university leadership, a very recent phenomenon in leadership research at universities is a focus on research into leaders who can be identified as psychopaths/sociopaths. In the general business literature, the terms ‘psychopathy’ and ‘sociopathy’, are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this chapter, we have chosen to use the term ‘sociopathy’.

Sociopathic leaders have three problematic personality traits. The three traits are:

- narcissism/self-perceived superiority;
- psychopathy/impetuosity without empathy; and
- Machiavellianism/office politics (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Perry, 2015).

The three traits are called ‘the dark triad’ because of their negative associations - research has shown one or more of these traits are ‘*invariably*’ linked with counter-productive behaviour, and that sociopathic personalities who manifest them ‘*typically derail*’ their organisation (Furnham et al., 2013, p. 206). Examples of organisations led by sociopaths demonstrate how destructive they can be to a business or business unit Stout (2005), Clarke (2005), Babiak and Hare (2007) and (Furnham, 2015).

While general business research on these personality traits is well advanced, it is only very recent that research on sociopaths at universities has emerged and therefore universities are often not practiced on how they might identify sociopathic leaders before their actions lead to toxic organisational cultures and organisational dysfunction.

This chapter aims to demonstrate, drawing on research, that sociopathic leaders exist in universities and that their actions can cause a toxic environment leading to dysfunctional outcomes for the institutions. Further, we provide practical assistance for identifying probable sociopaths and suggestions for university staff working with sociopaths and appointment panels so that they might avoid making dysfunctional leadership appointments.

In order to protect the anonymity of the universities and the managers and staff in the cases cited, the university names and departments are disguised and different terminologies are used for identifying departments than those at the case universities. For the same reason, we have used the gender-neutral ‘their’ and ‘themselves’ when describing the sociopathic leaders. The authors of the chapter are not affiliated with either of the two universities.

Background about the dark triad

Two personality tests are common measures of the triad. The *Dirty Dozen* has 12 questions (Jonason & Webster, 2010), and the *Short Dark Triad* has 27 questions (Paulhus & Williams, 2014). For this case, we selected The Dirty Dozen test.

First we should consider the three dark traits in more detail (following Perry, 2015 and Furnham et al., 2013). The first of the triad, narcissism, could be viewed as the core trait that drives the others. Narcissistic personalities tend to self-perceive that they are superior. For example, when asked to draw shapes of themselves and others, they will draw themselves as a bigger shape than the shapes of others, and they will say ‘I’ more often than they say ‘we’ (Manne, 2013). In more detail, four elements of the trait that these self-perceived superior people tend to:

- want others to admire them;
- want others to pay attention to them through impression management and self-promotion (for example, embellishments of their own curriculum vitae have a higher priority than, say, fostering group collaboration);
- seek prestige or status; and
- expect special favours from others because they think they are superior to others and so are entitled to more than other people are entitled to.

These four elements are based on the four items in the commonly used Dirty Dozen personality test of Jonason & Webster (2010) and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - The ‘dirty dozen’ characteristics of sociopathic leaders

Characteristic	Narcissism/ self-perceived superiority	Psychopathy/ impetuosity with low empathy and remorse	Machiavelli/ office politics
I tend to want others to admire me	x		
I tend to want others to pay attention to me	x		
I tend to seek prestige or status	x		
I tend to expect special favours from others	x		
I tend to lack remorse		x	
I tend to be unconcerned with the morality of my actions		x	
I tend to be callous or insensitive		x	
I tend to be cynical		x	
I tend to manipulate others to get my way			x
I have used deceit or lied to get my way			x
I have used flattery to get my way			x
I tend to exploit others towards my own end			x

Source: Adapted from Jonason & Webster (2010)

Note that a narcissist’s superiority is only *self*-perceived, for objective measures of success show that narcissists perform no better than average - there is ‘no consistent relationship between narcissism and performance’ (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002, p. 519). Indeed, the effect of one person on organisational performance can be over-rated.

The only area where narcissism may be productive is in risky situations. In general, however, they may perform worse than average in organisational roles because narcissism is negatively related to organisational citizenship behaviours and positively related to counterproductive work behaviours (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011). Such counterproductive behaviours by the leader of a team could demonstrate a high power distance culture in the organisation (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), and be allied to the self-perceived superiority of the narcissist. This high power distance of a leader could explain the poor performance of pilots in an Asian airline (Gladwell, 2010) and of surgeons in some hospitals (Gawande, 2010). So, narcissists could actually reduce organisational performance in a university setting where the requirement for team work is not obvious (Perry, 2015).

Narcissists show ‘narcissistic anger’ at those who query their self-perceived superiority (Manne, 2013) and/or make excuses that shift the blame to others (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Furnham, 2010). Their disregard for others’ views about their superiority tends to make them want to set up a supportive ‘court’ (Perry 2015, p. 17) of ‘conformers’ or ‘colluders’ who are ‘selfish, ambitious ... and openly supportive of toxic tyrants’ (Bartel

et al., 2011; Furnham, 2010). In its extreme form, this narcissism can be called grandiosity.

In turn, the second trait of the dark triad, *psychopathy*, is characterised by high impetuosity or impulsiveness with low empathy and remorse (Furnham et al., 2013), Psychopathy could be seen in quick *decision-making* and resulting actions with little regard for consultations with others and even with little concern for others' reactions to the decision or action. So psychopaths give the impression of being decisive, ruthless, unemotional and without room for self-doubt or empathy-triggered procrastination. 'Just do it!' is one of their mottoes (Dutton & McNab, 2014, p. 99).

In more detail, four elements of this trait are that these impulsive people:

- lack remorse;
- are unconcerned with the morality of their actions and so can be involved in fraud (Rijsenbilt and Commandeur, 2013) or simply violate 'conventional ethical standards' (Hare, 1999);
- are callous or insensitive and so thrive in situations where 'toughness' and 'strength' appear to be necessary. For example, when retrenchments and other organisational turmoil appear to be necessary (Kets de Vries, 2012); and
- are cynical (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Perry, 2015).

Such psychopathic traits may become more obvious if the sociopath accumulates more status and material success, because socioeconomic status is associated with characteristics like self-interested cheating, breaking the law, and lying (Piff, 2013). For its behavioural significance, psychopathy can be seen as the most dangerous of the three traits.

The third and final dark trait, *Machiavellism*, focuses on how others are treated in pursuit of dreams of dominance over others. In workplaces, it is often termed 'office politics' or using gossip and other informal means to gain and hold onto the power that fits their self perceived superiority. In short, they kiss upwards and kick downwards (Useem, 2015) (although they do not kick their favourites). In more detail, they flatter and befriend powerful patrons who can help them rise; and they step on passive doormats and marginalise potential opponents (Boddy, 2011). People with this trait are 'characterized by constant, low-level, deviousness' and are 'cynical, unprincipled, believe in interpersonal manipulation as the key for life success' (Furnham, 2010).

Four elements of this trait are that these office politicians tend to:

- manipulate others to get their way;
- use deceit or lies to get their way;
- use flattery to get their way; and exploit others towards their own ends (Jonason and Webster, 2010; Perry, 2015).
- they are adept at ingratiating themselves with their superiors while they 'brutalize their juniors' (Hare, 1999, p. 116).

Because of some common features of the three triads, some researchers think the three traits should not be differentiated (Furnham et al., 2013; Perry, 2015). Indeed, some factor analytic studies have shown the two traits of psychopathy and narcissism overlap,

as have other studies of self and observer reports. But other statistical studies have shown differences as well as significant and positive inter-correlations between measures of the traits, especially between the traits of psychopathy and Machiavellianism, with the lowest inter-correlation between narcissism and Machiavellianism. So the modern position is that the traits *are* different and are worth considering separately. Accordingly, the traits are treated separately in this study.

In summary, Furnham, (2015, p.17) states:

‘Psychopaths are great at climbing the greasy pole of corporate life because they display the exact same characteristics companies seek out in managers: poise, charm, self-confidence and decisiveness.’

According to Furnham, psychopaths are surprisingly common at the top levels large organisations, precisely because the medically-defined symptoms of psychopathy are favoured in modern management culture.

Research design and methodology issues

Because of the lack of existing theories about the research issues justified above, a combination of *qualitative and quantitative* methodologies were adopted in this study. Qualitative methods address theory building rather than theory testing, and the intensity and detail of qualitative data is achieved by getting psychologically close to the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). In particular, the *case research* design was appropriate because the research problem has little extant research about it and involves a series of complex contemporary events in their real life context (Perry, 2013; Yin, 2009). The research design is also appropriate when, as here, the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident – leadership depends on the leader, the followers, and the context/setting (Miller and Dalglish, 2011).

In order to protect the anonymity of the universities and the managers and staff in the cases cited, the university names, departments and titles are disguised and different terminologies are used for identifying departments than those at the case universities. For the same reason, we have used the gender-neutral ‘their’ and ‘themselves’ when describing the leaders. The authors of the chapter are not affiliated with either of the two universities.

Two cases are presented. The use of two single cases is justified by its twofold appropriateness for single case research: an extreme case; and a revelatory case (that was previously inaccessible to researchers) (Perry, 2013; Yin, 2009).

The first case was based on a peer-reviewed journal article written by a staff member in a disguised European business school that had undergone an upheaval. The article could not be described as biased against sociopaths because the term and related terms are never mentioned in the article - the peer reviewed case data appears to be a reasonably balanced description of the case. The writers of this chapter were not involved in the case in any way.

In the second case, participant observation is used. It is defined as ‘an ethnographic research approach where the researcher becomes immersed within the culture that he or

she is studying and draws data from his or her observations' (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2010, p. 656). To guard against bias in this research, and to improve the trustworthiness, dependability and authenticity of the research findings, two research procedures were adopted in the second case.

Firstly, the descriptions of the case leader's behaviours were reviewed by four staff members present in the department during the full tenure of the case leader. As a result of their comments and feedback, minor changes were made to the descriptions to improve clarity and attain a consensus in the wording. Secondly, the same four staff members were then provided with the sociopathic criteria listed in Table 2 and asked to match the department leader's agreed behavioural descriptions with the criteria listed in the table. Criteria were scored as present only if a consensus was achieved by the four staff members. Other individual matches were discarded.

For this second case, there was a need for the sociopathic leadership to be quantitatively defined. Leaders with these personality tendencies will have little or no self-awareness because they lack 'insight concerning themselves and the impact of their behavior on others' (Babiak & Hare, 2007, p.21). So we did not try to interview the leader himself, and our focus included the organisational effects of that leader. To widen this case, we used very similar criteria to the criteria found in the most valid, reliable and widely used clinical sociopathy/psychopathy instrument: the Hare Psychopathy Checklist (PCL_R) (Babiak & Hare, 2007).

The Hare checklist is developed for clinicians but studies have shown that lay people who are *observers* can distinguish the traits involved (Furnham et al., 2013).

There are 20 'characteristics' in the research instrument. The 20 characteristics shown in Table 2 match closely with the criteria in the PCL-R and are adapted from Babiak & Hare (2007), Stout (2005) and Clarke (2005). These checklists were developed to measure 'psychopathy' but can be assumed to cover the three dark traits of sociopathy for this study. As for scoring the PCL-R, two points are awarded to a characteristic when it is judged to have occurred or been observed, so a total score of 0 means no psychopathy and a score of 40 means high psychopathy. All participant observers in the case had to agree that a characteristic applied to the leader before points were tallied.

Table 2 - Criteria to identify sociopathic managers

1. Does not appear to have a conscience	11. Untruthful and untrustworthy
2. Inability to show empathy	12. Undermines others and character assassinate others
3. Lack of remorse or shame	13. Exploits weaknesses and vulnerabilities of others
4. Overuses flattery and ingratiation to influence others	14. Intentionally and methodically sets out to hurt other people
5. Superficial charm and good intelligence	15. Talks behind people's backs
6. Grandiose and feelings of self importance	16. Does not accept responsibility
7. Manipulative and tendency to bully	17. Intense brief enthusiasm for projects and people without commitment or follow up
8. Master of impression management and managing up	18. Tendencies to avoid work if they can
9. Creates conflict between organisational members	19. Likes to gain personal and intimate knowledge of colleagues
10. Closed and secretive	20. Consummate liars

Source: Dalglish and Miller, 2016, pps. 87-88.

Presentation of the cases

Case one: a new dean at a European business school

A new staff member joined the institution, the Euro Business School (a disguised name), soon after the appointment of a new dean 'who was committed to a top-down change project which was to take the school in an even more hierarchical direction' (Parker, 2014, p. 282). The new dean's task was to raise the school's ranking in Europe even higher than it was when they arrived. It is possible to discern a tendency towards dark triad traits in the new dean, based on the 12 items in the Dirty Dozen list noted above (using the information in Parker (2014)). First, the new dean's self-perceived *superiority* was evident in their top-down and hierarchical directions. As well, the new dean gave the impression of being admired; indeed, they arrived with impressive press references. The impression was enhanced by a new website, stationary and signage. The regular School Meeting 'became an information session, with presentations from senior management, followed by an embarrassed silence or forced applause' (p. 284).

The dean expected special favours like a redecoration of their office and displayed narcissistic anger by disciplining a researcher who wondered if the toilets could have been repainted instead. Second, they were *impetuous*, as shown by one of their first acts being the dissolution of all Associate and Deputy Dean positions. The existing committee structure was also dissolved soon afterwards. No empathy or remorse was shown in this restructuring.

Many staff who were at the school before the new dean arrived now decided to leave, and ‘many of those departing were paid off with ‘confidentiality agreements’ (p. 285). These agreements were not deemed to be ‘fraud’ but why were they ‘confidential’ if they were not breaking conventional standards of behaviour as sociopaths do? That is, amid the turmoil, many were repelled away from the university. They followed one researcher’s advice for anyone who works for a sociopathic CEO: ‘your best option is to take your career in your own hands, preserve your self-esteem, and move on to another organization’ (Kets de Vries, 2012, p. 29). Parker (2014) himself followed this option. (Incidentally, the suggestion that an employee should make a record of the sociopathic leader’s behaviour and present it to a more senior leader (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2012) would not work at this case university, because the university headquarters was solidly behind the dean they had appointed.)

Thirdly, referring to the third dark triad member of *office politics*, the new dean’s superiors in the university seemed to agree with and support the dean even when staff reviews and departures showed his juniors were being brutalised. The new dean’s impression management had fitted the selection panels’ and his superiors’ requirement for someone who appeared to be ‘good in the seminar room and good in the boardroom’ (Parker, 2014, p. 284). They were impressive in the university’s boardroom, for the university’s support was steadfast despite what was happening within the school. One business school member described the situation on a blog: ‘there’s a sense of things being completely out of control and the University just washing its hands of it’ (p. 286). Another, more independent reader of the blog, agreed: ‘I have just stumbled on this thread. I have no connection with the EBS whatsoever and never have. I have never before witnessed such an outpouring of perturbation and angst associated with an organization of such high standing.’ (p. 287)

So there does seem to be at least a *prima facie* case that the new dean had some sociopathic tendencies. And what were the results of this upheaval? The new staff that the new dean appointed to senior positions (that is, their court) seemed to agree with his methods because, as they said, ‘change was required’, while some older staff did not do so and left. Severe disagreements between pro and anti-change camps emerged – ‘The divides were very clear ... some people defended a hard working Dean who was shaking up a series of vested interests whilst others saw narcissism and autocratic management’ (Parker, 2014, p. 287). The new dean and their court emphasised publications of articles in top journals as the *only* measure of a staff member’s worth – one old staffer who left had won every award for teaching excellence at the university.

But what was the outcome of all this apparently sociopathic upheaval? Was the outcome the mediocrity hypothesised in (Perry, 2015) – somewhere *between* a desired transformation and derailment? Two well-regarded rankings of business schools are available from this comparison, from *Financial Times* and *QS Global 200 Business Schools Report*, for the three years of the case and for two years afterwards – a total of four years after the new dean’s arrival, and they are shown in Table 3.

The first ranking of whole business schools is the *Financial Times*’ and that shows a slight improvement in standing in the business school’s ranks after the new dean’s arrival in 2010 (but there was a fall in standing in 2013), as seen in the annual rankings, but the three-year smoothed averages showing a reasonably smooth trend. Some of the school’s individual degree programs rank well, but the school’s overall performance has

been ‘mediocre’. A ranking by the QS Global 200 Business Schools Report shows a falling trend in standing over the period (but an improvement in 2014). In short, the overall picture over the period is that the outcome of all the upheaval was mediocrity. How much longer must one wait for a positive outcome?

Table 3 - Business school rankings for the European business school

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<i>Times</i> : Year’s rank	20	19	16	11	29	17
<i>Times</i> : Average of the year’s and the two previous years’ rankings		18	18	15	19	19
QS: Year’s rank	11	11	15	15	18	11

Sources: *Financial Times* from <http://rankings.ft.com/>
 QS Intelligence Unit’s *QS Global 200 Top Business Schools* reports from <http://www.topmba.com/why-mba/publications/200-global-business-schools-report-> [for the various years]

Notes:

1. The new dean arrived in 2010, and the case covers 2010 to 2012 shaded above.
2. This table was developed with no information or data at all from Parker (2014). All the rankings in this table have been changed by a constant amount for each source to preserve the school’s anonymity without changing the *trend* in its rankings.

In turn, has the school’s new emphasis on *research* produced a transformation of its research output? The UK government’s Research Excellence Framework compared research outputs of all UK universities in 2014; as did the earlier in the slightly different Research Assessment Exercise in 2008. In 2014, more than about 75 percent of the school’s research output was judged ‘world leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’, up slightly more than the 70 percent or so earlier in 2008. That is, the 2014 figure is a slight improvement on the 2008 figure, but the result is essentially just mediocre. Note the Times Higher Education’s analysis of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework put the university’s ‘business and management studies’ subject area at a respectable but not superior place of about 10 in the United Kingdom (Times Higher Education, 2014); and its analysis of the earlier 2008 Research Assessment Exercise had put the school at about an equal 6 place with several others (making 11 or so the next available place) - essentially a slightly better but essentially similar position as that attained in 2014. So no transformation in research output had occurred between 2008 and 2014.

In brief, upheaval at a school led by a dean with apparent sociopathic tendencies did not produce a transformation of the school.

Case two: an Australian university department

This section describes the case’s academic work unit that was at a *department/school* level within a higher-level *faculty* within an Australian university. Before the appointment of the leader, the department had had a long history of success in terms of financial performance, graduating numbers of students, research publications, quality outcomes and working environment. It was viewed highly amongst other academic work

units within the university and by teaching support units. Benchmarking with similar academic units from other universities showed the unit to be in the top quartile for all academic outputs, including research grants, publications and doctoral completions. Teaching success, measured in student feedback and number of graduations, was also significant. The department offered only graduate courses.

Staff were located on two geographically separated campuses. At one campus (called campus A), there were a smaller number of mostly long term tenured junior level academic staff who were not research active and some administrative positions. There was a plan to relocate all staff at this campus to the other campus once it was possible to do so. At the other campus (called campus B), tenured staff were more senior, research active and there were some administrative staff. The working environment was harmonious and a collegial culture had been developed with little differentiation between academic and administrative staff. All on-campus students attended campus B. There were some distance education students, too.

The case leader's behavioural descriptions

Now consider the leader of the department. A notation in *italics* will be made throughout this section where the case manager's behaviours match the criteria for sociopathy listed in Table 2. The matches of the behaviours with the criteria for sociopathy were reached by consensus by the four participant observers.

The leader was not initially appointed to head the department upon the resignation of the position by the incumbent. The vacated position was not advertised externally and the case leader was the only applicant for the position when internal applications were called for.

On their appointment, the leader created some confusion amongst staff when it was decided to locate the head of the department's office at campus A where there were no students and where only a few, junior academic staff worked. Within months, it became obvious during discussions amongst staff that an earlier proposed move and consolidation of the work unit to campus B may not eventuate. The leader rarely attended campus B where all of the teaching and research in the work unit was being undertaken, preferring to 'work' at the other campus despite the paucity of staff at that campus and that there were no students there (*example of criterion 18. Tendencies to avoid work if they can*).

Rumours began to be spread by the leader about the working conditions and performance of staff at each campus. It was evident that the newly appointed leader was spreading untruths (*example of criterion 20. Consummate liars*) about individual staff relating to workloads, expense claims, mobile phone costs and teaching performance (*example of criterion 11. Untruthful and untrustworthy; criterion 12 Undermines others and character assassinates others; and criterion 15. Talks behind people backs*). Many of the rumours included personal information about staff and were not work-related (*example of*

criterion 19. Likes to gain personal and intimate knowledge of colleagues). As a result, the two groups of staff at the two campuses were beginning to experience an atmosphere of hostility, lack of trust and confusion (*example of criterion 9. Creates conflict between organisational members*).

The leader frequently praised a staff member in glowing terms to their face or in public forums, but then criticised the staff member about their performance to other colleagues behind their back (*an example of 4. Overuses flattery and ingratiation to influence others and criterion 14. Intentionally and methodically sets out to hurt other people*). In the beginning, long standing, good relationships between staff at both campuses enabled at least some disclosure about what the leader was saying about each group behind their backs. A number of staff on campus B reported to other staff they were being bullied by the leader (*example of criterion 7. Manipulative and tendency to bully*). Indeed, one staff member at campus B reported being bullied to the human resources section of the university but the formal complaint was dismissed with no action taken (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*).

The developing toxic culture was further fuelled when teaching and workload documents that were traditionally open and transparent to all staff became secretive and confidential (*an example of criterion 10. Closed and secretive*). When documents were sighted, it became clear that staff at campus A were being given lower teaching loads than staff at campus B, special travel arrangements, more expense allowances for conferences outside policy guidelines, and other questionable methods were being used to reduce their teaching workloads or to make special payments. For example, teaching load allowances were being given for ‘special projects’, ‘reviews’ and ‘roles’ that appeared to be non-existent. Over time, many of the full time academic staff at campus A reduced their full duties to merely marking assignments of distance education students. (*example of criterion 9. Creates conflict between organisational members*).

The special treatment of these staff meant that staff at campus A became quite loyal to the leader and displayed sycophant-like behaviours, becoming informers for the leader, believing their conditions as deserving when the conditions were not collegial or equitable (*example of criterion 13. Exploits weaknesses and vulnerabilities of others*). In other words, the leader was grooming a ‘court’ of supporters. As these staff had exposed themselves to potential disciplinary action because of knowingly receiving questionable payments, they maintained a secretive culture.

Then, for the first time, staff on campus A (who were not research active and did not have doctorates) suggested openly at staff meetings that ‘research takes money away from teaching’ and so they created a research and teaching divide between the two campuses. Indeed, traditional research outcomes like competitive research grants, publications and doctoral completions were openly disparaged and devalued by junior academic staff from campus A. Productive and well regarded professors at campus B were openly criticised at staff meetings by junior academic staff from campus A as ‘not

sufficiently contributing to teaching' of the department (*example of criterion 9. Creates conflict between organisational members*). The leader appeared to support this conflict between staff at the two campuses - a typical Machiavellian divide and conquer strategy (Machiavelli, 1985).

As time went on, when challenged by more senior staff over the constant and unethical behaviour, the leader resorted to denials (*example of criterion 20. Consummate liars*), turned on staff over minor performance issues or when pressed with evidence by one particularly strong senior academic, asked for pity which is the last resort of an exposed sociopath (Stout, 2005) (*example of criterion 16. Does not accept responsibility, criterion 3. Lack of remorse or shame and criterion 1. Does not appear to have a conscious*).

While the leader verbally supported proposals for continuous improvement innovations raised by staff at campus B, the initiatives were not supported with resources even though the initiatives would have improved the quality and performance of the department (*example of criterion 17. Intense brief enthusiasm for projects and people without commitment or follow up; and criterion 10. Insincere in dealing with others*). Notwithstanding this lack of support, the leader later claimed responsibility for some initiatives after they were financially supported from outside the department and successful, included the initiatives on their CV and used them later for promotional purposes (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up and criterion 1. Does not appear to have a conscience*).

Over a period of some 18 months, the unethical behaviours by staff at campus A flourished. Although many were reported with evidence to more senior managers, the reports and evidence were ignored and no investigations were undertaken (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*). The leader had regular access to more senior leaders and almost total control of communications with them. Some of the more senior leaders in the university mistakenly attributed the ability of the case leader to manipulate staff as 'leadership ability'.

Questioning of leaders at any level at the university was not tolerated, especially by the human resource section. When complaints were made about the leader, the human resources section did not adhere to its own policy on grievance procedures or confidentiality. Staff from campus B who reported issues to the section were treated with disrespect. Questioning of leaders at the university usually led to an examination of the work performance of the person doing the questioning, by the human resources section in conjunction with the leader. For example, one staff member at campus B, after enduring bullying, criticism and shouting from the case leader for some months (*example of criterion 7. Manipulative and tendency to bully*), sought the formal involvement of the human resources section using a confidential grievance procedure. The outcome of the procedure was that the staff member was directed to attend psychological counselling and also directed to report to another senior staff member outside the department but within the faculty, for their day-to-day supervision. The leader ensured everyone in the

department were aware of the outcome. No actions were taken against the leader (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*). Two other staff members were undergoing psychological counselling over conflict with the leader of the department

After some years, the leader was promoted by an internal process to a senior faculty position (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*). The faculty position was originally advertised externally but not filled and the leader, who was one of the initial applicants, was deemed not appointable by the external selection panel. But then the position was advertised internally only and the case leader, the only applicant, was successful and was promoted into the role (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*).

As a result of the leader's promotion, the head of the department position was vacant. The leader advised staff at a staff meeting that a decision had been made to appoint one of the long term junior level academics at campus A to the position in an acting capacity for some months until the position was advertised. The appointee did not have a doctorate, was unpublished, was not research active and had not faced an on-campus class as a lecturer for many years. Staff at campus B were outraged because there were full professors and senior lecturers in the department who previously held university leadership roles and who were prepared to act in the role. Their concerns were dismissed without any explanation given by the leader (*example of criterion 2. Inability to show empathy and criterion 10. Closed and secretive*).

As a consequence, one of the senior staff in the department wrote on behalf of all the staff at campus B to the Vice Chancellor, briefly explaining their concerns at the proposed acting arrangements for the department head. The Vice Chancellor subsequently met with a representative of campus B staff. At the commencement of the meeting, the VC advised that the decision had been made to support the acting arrangements proposed by the leader (*example of criterion 8. Master of impression management and managing up*).

Somewhat surprised by the VC taking such a position without hearing a word from the representative, the representative then outlined why the junior academic from campus A was not appropriate to act in the work unit head role due to their lack of qualifications, experience and long term poor academic performance. Documents supporting the position were provided by the representative. The VC appeared to be shocked by the evidence of the dysfunctional nature of the staff member's performance and also the dysfunction in the department and the documented questionable work practices of staff at campus A. After a short break (possibly to consult with the human resources section), the VC reversed the decision to support the leader's proposed appointee. The leader was humiliated and angry that the acting head decision had been overturned and later was particularly abusive to some campus B staff.

During the leader's short tenure in the more senior faculty role, policy prescriptions were issued to faculty staff that conflicted with long standing university-wide policy and legislation. Complaints were made by faculty staff to the VC but no action, or even a response from the VC was forthcoming. Settlement of the dispute only occurred when a government agency from outside the university intervened, instructing the university to abide by accepted community standards and threatening legal action if they did not. Ketola (2006) suggests that the breaking of human rights conventions and the laws of employment are typical for sociopaths.

After a short period in their faculty role, the leader resigned from the university. It is not known whether the leader resigned willingly or was pushed out by the senior managers who made the appointment in the first place. One might ask why the VC and human resources section did not act earlier on documented complaints from staff and why did they continue to refuse offers of exit interviews from the many staff in the department who left?

There was a tradition in the faculty of a farewell gathering of staff for a resignation and a collection for a gift. However, when the leader left the faculty, there was no gathering and no collection. The week after the leader had left, staff at campus B did gather to celebrate the departure. Hogan (2007) notes that sociopaths 'get ahead' but not necessarily 'get along with' colleagues. The senior staff member who represented the allegations of campus B staff to the VC was later treated by the human resources section and senior management as a 'whistle blower' and resigned after receiving a financial payment substantially more than their entitlements. The university attempted to force a confidentiality agreement on them. Eventually, the department was disbanded and merged with other units of the university. That is, it became derailed by the sociopathic leader.

In the following sections, within case analysis of each case will be detailed. Following the within case analysis, a cross case analysis will be undertaken.

Within case analysis and discussion of case one

The case produces two contributions to the sparse literature about sociopathic leadership in universities. The first is that apparently sociopathic leadership can occur at the level of a faculty/department/school level within a university, just as it can do at various levels in a business. The second contribution is that empirical support now exists for the position that sociopathic leadership in a university will probably not produce an outcome of transformation. It is more likely that it will produce an outcome of mediocrity (Perry, 2015).

Furthermore, the case has implications about sociopathic leadership in a university. The first implication is that appointment panels should not appoint leaders with apparent sociopathic tendencies. This implication is often presented in the literature about other settings. For instance, (Babiak & Hare, 2007) spend more than 40 pages on how selection panels could avoid making this mistake, and (Kets de Vries, 2012) makes it his first step

in stopping their malignant influence. One procedure that should be used is to have semi-structured interviews with people who have worked with or for an potential appointee, and not just read the references they provide (Furnham, 2015a). Perry (2015) also makes suggestions for university panels in particular. This implication is important because an appointed sociopathic leader will set up a court of colluders who support whatever they are doing. Even when an appointment panel wants a transformation of a university or a faculty/department/school, it should not appoint an apparent sociopath to do it.

The second implication of the case arises from the finding that cleavages between pro and anti-change camps will appear when a sociopathic leader is appointed (Hare, 1999). Presumably, the leader's impetuosity produces sudden changes that do not allow time for staff to gradually evolve their thinking about change. In the business school example, the leader and their pro-change camp emphasise the importance of research and the anti-change camp does not. The pro-change camp is aware that the rankings are based on several criteria and not only on the one criterion of research outputs, but the camp presumably assumes that an increase in research outputs will drag along an improvement in the other criteria. But the anti-change camp does not agree on this one-criterion emphasis even though they may recognise the need for measures of institutional and staff effectiveness (Clarke, Knight, & Jarvis, 2012). From the reports of the case, neither camp seems to have time to gather evidence for their entrenched position. But that evidence does exist.

A US research study confirms that a business school's research output raises the reputation of its MBA program (Mitra & Golder, 2008). So the gulf between teaching and research may widen into the future; but should not a leader bridge the gulf rather than pushing it wider?

The final implication of the two camps in the case arises from the growing awareness that leadership is a *group* phenomenon (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2010) that requires collaboration, even in a university (Jones, Lefoeb, Healy, & Rylanda, 2012). That is, transformational leadership is *not* the top-down phenomenon that is inappropriately taught in some business schools (Tourish, Craig, & Amernic, 2010, p. S54) and presented in the press; that is, it is actually a 'co-constructed phenomenon between leaders and followers.'

An appointment panel must consider the existing group's values before appointing a new leader for the followers-to-be in that group. Otherwise, cleavages between two camps among staff will weaken the collaboration between them that is required for effectiveness (Perry, 2015). These cleavages will repel many staff in the anti-change camp away from the university, when they eventually realise that their preference for collaboration over the non-empathy of sociopathy will not be recognised by the new leadership team (Parker, 2014). So it is likely that an appointment panel should appoint a leader who can bridge the two camps rather than a leader who will belong to one camp or another.

Within case analysis and discussion of case two

In order to make a judgement as to whether the case manager fits the profile and can be classified as a psychopathic/sociopathic leader, the four participant observers of the leader's behaviours, compared the behaviours with the criteria listed in Table 2 that

represent known behaviours of sociopathic managers. In an identical way to the awarding of points when psychologists use the PCL-R, 2 points were scored when a consensus was reached by participant observers that the case data matched one of the criteria in Table 2. A score of 0 equates to no psychopathy and a score of 40 means high psychopathy. In clinical settings, a cut-off of 75% and above (that is, 30 out of 40 points on the PCL-R) is used to define sociopathy (Herve et al., 2001; Blair et al., 1995; Richell et al., 2003). Results are listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – Scoring of behaviours observed

Behaviour	Score	Behaviour	Score
1. Does not have a conscience*	2	11. Untruthful and untrustworthy	2
2. Inability to show empathy	2	12. Undermines others and character assassinates others	2
3. Lack of remorse or shame	2	13. Exploits weaknesses and vulnerabilities of others	2
4. Overuses flattery and ingratiation to influence others	2	14. Intentionally and methodically sets out to hurt other people	2
5. Superficial charm and good intelligence		15. Talks behind peoples backs	2
6. Grandiose and feelings of self importance		16. Does not accept responsibility	2
7. Manipulative and tendency to bully	2	17. Intense brief enthusiasm for projects and people without commitment or follow up	2
8. Master of impression management and managing up	2	18. Tendencies to avoid work if they can	2
9. Creates conflict between organisational members	2	19. Likes to gain personal and intimate knowledge of colleagues	2
10. Insincere in dealing with others	2	20. Consummate liars	2
Points scored	16	Points scored	20
Total points scored			36/40

Source: Dalglish and Miller, 2016, pps. 87-88.

Note: * - it was agreed between observer participants that this criterion is inferred from the behaviours rather than observed or demonstrated.

As the table demonstrates, the case leader's score of 36/40 shows very high sociopathy. Now consider the outcomes of this sociopathic leader's behaviours. As shown in the case description above, relationships between campus staff that were once collegial and warm did deteriorate during the tenure of the case leader, causing stress and anxiety amongst the staff. It was noticeable that individual performance levels of staff were decreasing and academic staff that once came into their office regularly to work, preferred to 'work from

home to avoid the office politics'. The corridors of the department became ghostly. Students found it difficult to consult with academic staff that were not there, or were casual staff and not paid to be there. So complaints from students significantly increased.

The sociopathic leader successfully polarised the two geographically separated groups creating conflict (Machiavelli's divide and conquer) and a lack of trust *between* the two groups. This lack of trust had the effect of strengthening the relationships and trust *within* each of the two groups. The case data demonstrates that the sociopathic leader's behaviours lead to a degrading of the collaborative nature of the academic work unit, the arousal of a toxic work culture, and, as a consequence, academics found their work less rewarding and became disengaged or left the university.

Academic work units are only as strong as the academic staff profile of the work unit. The combined profiles of individual academics within the work unit give the work unit a public profile and credibility and with it, an important part of its 'brand'. Important academic work unit performance indicators like the 'average publication output per academic staff member', grants received, teaching awards and graduate completions are critical measurement factors for benchmarking with other academic organisational units within the university and with other similar work units in institutions outside the university. Over the period of the case leader's tenure in the head of department role, the statistics on each of these criteria trended down, due mainly to the resignations of productive senior staff.

Because of the toxic work environment caused by the sociopathic leader, many staff at campus B resigned to take up positions elsewhere in the university system around the country. Almost all of those who left cited the leader's style of management and the 'toxic' culture as the primary reason for looking for work elsewhere. In such a situation, Kets de Vries (2012, p. 29) advises 'your best option is to take your career in your own hands, preserve your self-esteem, and move on to another organisation' and Stout (2005), Clarke (2005) and Babiak & Hare (2007) all advise those who work with psychopaths/sociopaths to 'run'. Despite the exodus and offers by some resigning staff to the VC and to the human resources section of the university to undertake an exit interview, exit interviews were not conducted to ascertain why so many staff were leaving. Exit interviews would have identified the dysfunctional nature of the leader's style and the declining work performance indicators in the department.

The case leader replaced these departing and highly respected senior staff with mostly lower paid staff, predominantly contract or casual junior level academics who were not research trained (no doctorate) or published, despite the department teaching only graduate students. Lower level contract staff are more easily manipulated and controlled due to the lack of tenure and lack of security of their employment. Often when exiting staff were replaced, their replacements did not take up the position after it was offered or remained for only a short period and left the university as they found the environment of the work unit dysfunctional.

Staff costs were around 90 percent of the costs in the department. When senior and more highly paid staff are replaced with junior and lower paid staff, average and overall staff costs are significantly pushed down creating the illusion in the department's accounts of greater profitability. Performance of the department (and the performance of the department head) was measured solely by the senior management group at faculty and university level by financial performance of their departments. Financial performance can be manipulated by changing staffing levels and profiles to create an illusion of a quality productive academic work unit, and this illusion provided the manager with sufficient time and cover to seek their next promotion. Some more senior leaders can easily be deceived by short term results when the only criterion used for measuring the success of an academic work unit is a financial one, rather than using a more balanced scorecard including academic and quality criteria to measure success.

A holistic examination or more balanced approach to measuring the performance of the work unit would have demonstrated: the dramatic change in staff profiles making the academic unit less attractive to students and potential staff; the increasing dominance of junior contract and junior casual teaching positions; and the decline of research outcomes in the form of publications, doctoral completions and successful research grants that once dominated the performance of the work unit. Teaching performance ratings by students also demonstrated a downward trend in their perception of teaching quality. Graduate students are increasingly demanding academic organisational units to hold an international reputation and/or accreditation and without a well published and qualified staff profile with traditional research outcomes, the department's plans for international accreditation had to be abandoned.

Finally, as a consequence of the lack of appropriately qualified and experienced senior academic staff, the highly-regarded doctoral program could not be sustained and new enrolments were suspended because there were too few academics qualified to supervise the doctoral students. Because the doctoral program could not be sustained with the remaining staff profile and there were insufficient qualified staff to have credibility for the masters program, the department was de-established and amalgamated into the larger faculty. Remaining staff were dispersed and long term junior level academics were required to teach in the faculty undergraduate program. The work unit was therefore 'derailed' and thousands of dollars invested on developing its brand over decades was lost. The research confirms that sociopathic leaders do not deliver the required outcomes; they make poor decisions, use poor management practices and put the wrong people into positions (Furnham, 2010). Along the way, they leave a trail of exhausted and used people (Hare, 1999).

The second case makes three contributions to the literature. The first is that the study includes an insider's view from a consensus of several participant observations, thus avoiding single observer bias. The second contribution is that the case shows how a ratings scale drawn from the literature and similar to the PLC-R, can be used by non-

psychologists, adding to the dirty dozen method (Perry 2015). It also offers additional insights into how a sociopath can create their 'court' at a university and some specifics on how sociopaths reward and manipulate members of their court to keep them loyal.

Cross case analysis

The two cases can be compared to demonstrate similarities between the two cases. In the two cases, distinct cliques or courts were formed around the teaching and research outcomes of a university – one case highlighting the high esteem held for research and publications while in the other, research and publication outcomes are degraded and held as taking resources away from teaching. On each occasion, the leader used the divide to separate the pro and against groups and to use it to manipulate them.

The following sociopathic behaviours, found in the literature when sociopaths operate in commercial organisations, are evident in both cases:

- self perceived superiority of the leader
- the leader wanting to be admired
- excellent impression management by the leader to more senior leaders
- control of information flow to more senior leaders
- establishment of a 'court' of followers for the leader
- special favours to the staff in the 'court' of the leader
- narcissistic anger
- impetuous behaviour by the leader
- no displays of empathy or remorse
- well qualified and productive staff leaving the organisation
- use of confidentiality agreements to keep secret what had happened
- using Machiavellian techniques to divide and conquer groups

Furthermore, the cases are an example of the depressing picture of how incompetent senior management in a university can be. The senior management in case one turned a blind eye to the upheaval in a business school that was not altering the rankings that the new sociopathic leader was supposed to bring about. The university Council only acted on the sociopath when a new Council chair was appointed and a staff member complained to a government body. In the second case, the faculty's and the university's senior management, aided by the human resources section, did nothing to control the leader, put their head in the sand and behaved savagely against anyone raising complaints about the leader's sociopathic behaviour. Even though substantial documentary evidence was given to senior management nothing was done. It is assumed the more senior leaders were embarrassed to acknowledge it as they were the ones responsible for the appointment of the sociopath in the first place.

This picture suggests that, in a university, sociopathic leadership is not about an individual as portrayed in much of the literature about non-university situations. Sociopathic leadership in a university setting is an *organisational* phenomenon. If this picture is correct, then the general advice to ‘get out’ given to people working for sociopathic leaders is even more appropriate for university settings.

Limitations of the research

Case research design has many advantages, but it also has some limitations. For example, case research often results in narrow idiosyncratic theories (Parkhe, 1993). This research overcomes this limitation by using prior theory from the commercial business sector and developing a theoretical framework to guide the research in the higher education sector (Yin, 2009 and Flyvbjerg, 2006). This initial disciplined process provided an ongoing focus on the research issues.

A second possible limitation is that case research design may lack external validity (Larsson, 1993). To mitigate this concern, triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple participant observers, in particular in case 2 (Yin, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated, drawing on case research, that sociopathic leaders exist in universities and that their actions can cause a toxic environment leading to dysfunctional outcomes for the institutions.

Leadership in a university is different from leadership in other types of organisations, and it has been likened to ‘herding cats’ (Lohman, 2002, p.1). The concept of academic freedom within a class room or laboratory once limited ‘executive’ power within universities. However, in more recent times, when tenured academic staff appointments are rare, this concept might be outdated. Old collegial governance systems have been replaced with management power and authority and a new class of ‘managerialist academics’ has emerged. The new managerialist philosophy in universities could mean there are fewer constraints on its managers allowing the emergence of sociopaths among academic leaders – that may actually be more pronounced than it is in business settings.

The sociopathic behaviours of university leaders identified in the research are aligned with the literature on sociopaths in commercial organisations. Like their counterparts in business organisations, sociopathic leadership in a university will probably not produce an outcome of transformation – the case studies demonstrating that sociopathic leadership will produce an outcome of mediocrity or one of derailment of the organisational unit.

Further, the chapter provided practical assistance for identifying probable sociopaths and suggestions for university staff working with sociopaths and appointment panels so that they might avoid making dysfunctional leadership appointments.

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