

Climbing the Corporate Ladder: Desired Skills and Successful Psychopaths

by

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## Abstract

Many of the characteristics embodied by successful psychopaths, such as superficial charm, cool decisiveness, and a grandiose self-worth, are often treated synonymously with corporate leadership qualities. Consequently, successful psychopaths are actively being selected for corporate positions as they exemplify the perfect candidate. These successful psychopaths, as corporate leaders and recruiters, increase the probability of systemic psychopathy and white-collar crime. The current study will provide a deeper understanding of successful psychopaths while exploring the role of the “Westernized” corporation in recruiting successful psychopaths into their businesses through character descriptions in 25 executive career advertisements using Wexler’s (2008) *Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels*. Results demonstrated that corporations are seeking out characteristics that are synonymous to Factor 1 psychopathic personality traits, which could increase the propensity of successful psychopaths in the workplace. This paper discusses the implications of these findings and identifies some potentially useful approaches for excluding corporate psychopaths from organizations.

*Keywords:* psychopathy, corporations, systemic psychopathy, personality traits, CEO

### Climbing the Corporate Ladder: Desired Skills and Successful Psychopaths

Researchers have been examining the construct of the successful psychopath for decades (Cleckley, 1976; Hall & Benning, 2006; Mullins-Sweatt, Glover, Derefinko, Miller, & Widiger, 2010). Cleckley (1976) originally argued that psychopathy is not a dichotomous disorder, and that it is possible for a psychopath to have all the personality traits relating to the disorder, but to also avoid the aspect of criminal deviance. Consequently, Hall and Benning (2006) operationalize the “successful psychopath” as an individual who embodies the interpersonal and affective characteristics of the disorder (i.e., Factor 1), while effectively avoiding the antisocial behaviours (i.e., Factor 2). In theory, these individuals encompass a wide range of high societal positions (e.g., lawyers, chief executive officers [CEOs], politicians), achieved through their ability to manipulate and deceive others (Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). Successful psychopathic individuals are those who are able to escape conviction for the crimes that they commit. In contrast, the “unsuccessful psychopaths” are more likely to be higher in Factor 2 traits, which may allow their impulsivity and other socially deviant behaviours which can result in a criminal conviction, and are argued to encompass the incarcerated population of psychopaths (Hall & Benning, 2006). Given that the “successful psychopaths” may be able to achieve higher societal positions utilizing their affective and interpersonal traits, it is possible that they are being further assisted by the desired skills of large corporations.

As Wexler (2008) argues, many of the characteristics embodied by successful psychopaths, such as superficial charm, cool decisiveness, and a grandiose self-worth, are often treated synonymously with corporate leadership qualities. Successful psychopaths are particularly attracted to organizations that are hyper-competitive and in-transition, and as we can see in today’s globalized market, numerous businesses have adopted this framework. Therefore,

it is possible that successful psychopaths are actively being selected for corporate positions as they exemplify the perfect candidate. It is not purely that corporate leadership becomes corrupt rather, those without conscious morals are selected as the winners in a series of hypercompetitive contests occurring in a global setting. As a result, Allio (2007) argues that leadership in modern society is falling short in both the private and public sectors of the economy. These successful psychopaths, as corporate leaders and recruiters, increase the probability of systemic psychopathy and white-collar crime. The current study will try to help establish a deeper understanding of successful psychopaths while exploring the role of the “Westernized” corporation in recruiting successful psychopaths into their businesses through character descriptions in job advertisements.

### **What is Psychopathy? Operationalizing Psychopathy using the Two Factor Model**

Psychopathy is recognized as a personality disorder defined by a cluster of interpersonal, affective, and behavioural features (Hare, 1993). Psychopathic individuals are well known for the callousness of their behaviour and their substantial ability to deceive others. The traditional model of psychopathy as proposed by Hare (1993) divides the disorder into two factors. Factor 1 psychopathy reflects the combination of interpersonal and affective traits, such as pathological lying, superficial charm, grandiose self-worth, and callousness, whereas Factor 2 is a combination of unstable and socially deviant traits, such as impulsiveness, need for stimulation, parasitic lifestyle, and a lack of realistic/long-term goals.

### **Does Psychopathy belong in the DSM-IV?**

Psychopathy is arguably the most widely researched and debated personality disorder in the field of criminology and psychology to date. The debates and research surrounding psychopathy have ranged from the proper institutionalization (e.g., prison or a psychiatric

facility) and diagnoses for criminal psychopaths to the personality traits that are encompassed by the disorder (see Hare, 1993 for example). Most scholars and psychiatrists openly discuss the difficulty of operationalizing psychopathy and express that “psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality, nor do they experience the delusions, hallucinations, or intense subjective distress that illustrate most other mental disorders” (Hare, 1993, p. 22), but rather they are rational and aware of the acts they are committing. The rationality of psychopaths and the blatant distinctions from other mental illnesses places clinicians in a conundrum; should the personality disorder be included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV)?

Originally, psychopathy was not included in the DSM-IV primarily due to the lack of diagnostic tools to measure the characteristics expressed in the personality disorder (e.g., superficial charm). Despite the creation of multiple psychopathic personality inventories, psychopathy remains on the outskirts of the DSM-IV primarily due to the inclusion of anti-social personality disorder (APD; Hare, 1993). Although many professionals consider APD and psychopathy synonymous, there are vast differences in their expression. For instance, APD, as listed in the DSM-IV, includes a wide range of socially deviant behaviours that the individual is likely to engage in, however, they do not express similar interpersonal and affective characteristics to psychopaths. The range of socially deviant behaviours indicates that individuals with APD are more likely to engage in crimes that are reckless and they are also more likely to be incarcerated in comparison to psychopaths. Psychopathy, on the other hand, is a personality disorder overwhelmed by a combination of interpersonal, affective, and behavioural aspects. The core elements of psychopathy center around a genuine lack of a conscience, as psychopathic individuals have few emotions and display an inability to empathize with others (Boddy, 2011).



While psychopaths represent approximately 25 percent of the prison population, they also incorporate approximately one percent of the public population (Hare, 1993). These statistics suggest that there are individuals with psychopathy who are more likely to use their interpersonal characteristics to commit less reckless crimes (e.g., white collar crimes) while avoiding police detection and incarceration. Given these personality traits and behavioural features, DeLisi (2009) suggests that psychopathy should be included in the DSM-IV, and the instructional book of every practitioner in the juvenile and adult criminal justice system. Consequently, diagnostic tools, such as the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) that specifically outline the characteristics of psychopathy, have been created and utilized in psychiatric facilities and penitentiaries.

### **The Etiology of Psychopathy – Nature vs. Nurture**

**Nature.** The common argument of nature versus nurture rings true with the academic discussion surrounding psychopathy. There has been increasing evidence of a biological and genetic explanation of psychopathy that has demonstrated some promising results (Boddy, Miles, Sanyal, & Hartog, 2015). Neuropsychological research surrounding the biological explanation for psychopathy has often centred dysfunction in the frontal lobe (Perez, 2012). According to the research in this area, impairments in the orbital frontal cortex (OFC) may be associated with psychopathy. The OFC is the part of the brain involved in cognitive processes, including decision-making processes. Additionally, the OFC is associated with decision-making in relation to rewards, punishments, emotions, social cues, and rule learning. Boddy (2011) furthers the argument presented by Perez (2012) by suggesting that abnormal brain connectivity, specifically to the amygdala and the frontal cortex, is the leading cause of the callous and socially deviant behaviours displayed by psychopaths. Unsurprisingly, psychopathic individuals have

demonstrated significant impairment to the OFC and associated circuitry (Boddy, 2011; Perez, 2012).

In addition to the impairment to the executive functions of the brain, neurotransmitter imbalances have been suggested as a potential etiological explanation for psychopathic tendencies (Perez, 2012). Psychopathic individuals exhibit a need to act on their impulses and disregard behavioural inhibition, which could be the result of a neurotransmitter imbalance (Perez, 2012). According to Gunter, Vaughn, and Philibert (2010) antisocial personalities and psychopathic individuals tend to have lower serotonin (5-HT) levels than others. Additionally, the above-mentioned population has demonstrated lower norepinephrine (NE) and epinephrine (adrenaline) levels, which could explain their need for stimulation (Gunter et al., 2010; Perez, 2012). Overall, structural and functional damage to the OFC alongside imbalances in neurotransmitters has led to a potential cheater-strategy explanation to psychopathy.

Some scholars argue that psychopathy is not necessarily a maladaptive disorder, rather, it is suggested that psychopathy is an adaptive cheater-strategy resulting from an abundance of mutations from ancestral environments that have proven to be successful in the past (Book & Quinsey, 2004; Glenn, Kurzban, & Raine, 2011). Glenn et al. (2011) suggest that there is not one theory that may explain the development of psychopathy; for instance, it could be that psychopathy can be conceptualized as an alternative strategy for solving reoccurring adaptive issues (e.g., callousness, instrumental aggression, short-term jobs, and relationships). It is also possible that psychopathy is the result of the accumulation of mutations that have been passed down through generations because they do not significantly disrupt the individual. In other words, these Darwinian influenced theories argue that psychopathy does not present the similar

distressful impacts on the individual, therefore it is possible that psychopaths use their callous and manipulative behaviours to climb a social hierarchy.

**Nurture.** In contrast to the biological etiology framework of psychopathy, Blanchard and Lyons (2016) examine the influences of negative parenting styles (i.e., cold and controlling mothers and fathers) in relation to primary (i.e., interpersonal and affective traits) and secondary (i.e., anti-social behaviour) psychopathic traits. According to Blanchard and Lyons (2016), there are sex differences present in the development of primary and secondary psychopathy. More specifically, controlling mothers and avoidant attachment was positively associated with primary psychopathy in men; whereas, low-care fathers and anxious/avoidant attachment style were positively associated with primary psychopathy in women. Interestingly, secondary psychopathy was positively associated with anxious attachment, uncaring mothers, and low-caring fathers in men; however, there was no association found in women. Blanchard and Lyons (2016) provide support for the sex differences evident in the development of both factors of psychopathy. In sum, it is suggested that adverse home environments, namely parenting styles, are a source of influence in the expression of primary and secondary psychopathy in criminal and community samples. Although there are arguments for a dichotomous explanation of psychopathy, namely, nature or nurture, it has been proposed that there are influences of both in the development of psychopathy.

**Both?** In recent years the possibility of a combination of nature and nurture in bringing psychopathy to fruition has been discussed. For instance, Salekin and Lochman (2008) discuss the stability of psychopathic traits across time and identify the variables that could potentially impact this stability and could pose as potential risk and protective factors to the personality disorder. More specifically, the literature focuses on a combination of (1) genetic, (2) peer

influence, (3) parental dynamics, (4) internalizing, and (5) externalizing symptoms. The authors consider these variables and their association to psychopathy using longitudinal studies, in order to pinpoint particular points in an individual's lifetime that are salient in the development of psychopathic traits. According to this study, psychopathic traits appear to remain stable over time and psychopathic characteristics are most influenced by affective and interpersonal style in adolescence to adulthood. Although there is evidence of a biologic component to the development of psychopathy, the authors suggest that family dynamics, such as warm and involved parenting may serve as a protective factor from the development of the affective characteristics of psychopathy. Peer influence may also serve as a protective factor from the development of psychopathy; for instance, positive peer influence, social competence, and the ability to make friends can reduce the need to participate in antisocial behaviours. Although etiology is an important avenue of research in psychopathy, the current study will focus exclusively on the developed personality disorder categorized as either successful or unsuccessful.

### **The Nomenclature of Psychopathy: The “Successful” and the “Unsuccessful” Psychopaths**

Recent literature on psychopathy has linked the ability for a psychopath to avoid incarceration and lead a successful lifestyle (Wexler, 2008). Initially identified by Cleckley (1976) in *The Mask of Sanity*, the differentiation between these two groups of individuals are known as the unsuccessful and the successful psychopaths. Essentially, unsuccessful psychopaths are characterized as those who engage in a wide range of socially deviant behaviours and as a result, they become incarcerated. However, Cleckley (1976) discussed the possibility of a non-incarcerated population of psychopaths as a group of individuals who are able to adjust their maladaptive behaviours in an advantageous way.

These successful psychopaths are in pursuit of high societal positions and personal gains, therefore they utilize their interpersonal traits (e.g. manipulative, pathological lying, and glibness) to obtain these goals. Unlike unsuccessful psychopaths, successful psychopaths are able to devise complex, and manipulative plans using others, demonstrate loyalty and trust to the ones they deem useful to their plans, and they tend to be more opportunistic rather than sadistic in their actions (Cleckley, 1976; Wexler, 2008). Additionally, the key identifier of a successful psychopath is their uncanny ability to make an outstanding first impression on their peers, coworkers, hiring managers, etc. (see Babiak & Hare, 2006 for example). It is suggested that the presentation of good first impressions is a contributing factor to the tendency for successful psychopaths to be considered for high-level occupations.

### **The Impact of Globalization and Transitional Workplaces**

Globalization is a term that was coined during the 20th Century to describe an economic process that encourages the networking and collaboration between companies and governments on an international level. This globalized networking and collaboration of institutions are fuelled by trade, outsourcing, investments, transportation, and technology (Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007). Following World War II, globalization was pushed by governments and companies for open domestic and international economies across the globe. The push for open domestic and international economies has led to the adoption of “free-market” economic systems looking to increase mass production and consumption potential (Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007). Governments across the globe have attempted to maintain their financial stability by increasing their international trade agreements. In line with the emergence of trade liberalizations, large Western corporations can outsource stages of production to cheaper labour markets across the world, or they can build entire factories in foreign countries (Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007).

Originally, globalization was advertised by Western societies as a form of economic development that would abolish poverty, increase education, promote gender equality, and improve health on a global scale (Friday, 2005; Viano, 2010). However, this process has proven to have adverse effects on the environment, culture, economic development, and politics within societies around the globe (Barrow, Didou-Aupetit, & Mallea, 2003). Friday (2005) argues that globalization is rooted in a century-long process of elitist interests and that the success of globalization has marked the triumph of global *McDonaldization*, which emphasizes that “efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control [of social systems]... have been exported from the United States to much of the rest of the world” (Ritzer & Malone, 2000, p. 100). Consequently, the benefits that are being accumulated by the law-abiding businessmen and women of society are also advantageous for successful psychopaths (Viano, 2010).

Prior to the surge of globalized economies, large corporations were relatively stable, unhurriedly changing, and the climbing of corporate ladders was reliant on a combination of education and seniority (Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Glavin, 2010; Boddy, 2011). Following the introduction of globalization, globalized economies and transient environments abolished the idea of employment stability, as corporate takeovers, mergers, and outsourcing began to take place. According to Babiak and Hare (2006), in response to the globalized economy, many companies eliminated their “old-style, bureaucratic policies and structures for a flatter, more free-form, faster-paced environment” (p. XII). Correspondingly, the corporation as an entity is now characterized as greedy, narcissistic, and powerfully self-serving (Wexler, 2008). Accordingly, many of the potentially problematic impacts of the corporation as an entity have been discussed. For instance, following the global financial crisis of 2008, the activities and tax affairs of major financial corporations have re-emerged as an object of significant public interest,

discourse, and calls for enriched regulation (Veldman & Willmott, 2013). Unfortunately, fast-paced and constantly changing corporate environments can highlight psychopathic personality traits (e.g., confidence and strength) as ideal leadership traits and the answer to the company's problems (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Thus, the unwarranted traits of a psychopathic individual (e.g., no conscience) become bearable under the circumstance that the business gets the talent and skills necessary to survive the callous business world.

### **Successful Psychopaths and the Corporation**

Although, successful psychopaths may have the ability to contribute to increased profits for corporations, successful psychopaths in the workplace are also a significant concern for many reasons. Primarily, psychopathic individuals in corporate positions have the ability to hurt their coworkers and the corporation emotionally, financially, and physically through their lack of morality and empathy (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Within some corporations, the CEO will be responsible for making all of the decisions, in other corporations, responsibility for decision making may rest on an entire board of directors as well as the CEO (Adams, Almeidaa, & Ferreira, 2005). It is suggested that in businesses where the CEO has repertoire of influencing the board of directors or has the power to make decisions without the help of other executives will increase the likelihood of either very good or very bad decisions (Adams et al., 2005). To further investigate the potential damage of psychopaths in the workplace, Pletti, Lotto, Buodo, & Sarlo (2017) examined the influence of emotion on morality in everyday situations (i.e., moral judgments towards coworkers and executives) for individuals with high psychopathic traits and low psychopathic traits. Everyday moral dilemmas are important to examine because they are “exactly the kind of moral transgressions in which individuals with psychopathy are prone to engage in to pursue success in their career or life achievements” (p. 354). As expected,

individuals categorized as having high levels of psychopathy were more likely to negate emotions and act in moral dilemmas over and above individuals who were categorized as having low levels of psychopathy. The inclination to make tough decisions in moral transgressions without concerning themselves with emotions alludes to the potentially harmful acts that psychopaths can commit in corporations.

Furthering the research on the consequences of successful psychopaths in the workplace, Lingnau, Fuchs, & Dehne-Niemann (2017) examine the malicious traits of successful psychopaths in relation to their acceptance of different forms of white-collar crime. Lingnau et al. (2017) found that personality traits that are associated with successful psychopaths, primarily cold-heartedness, was positively related to the acceptance and propensity for white-collar crime. Drawing connections to the current global financial crisis, Lingnau et al. (2017) suggest a preventative system to block the rise of successful psychopaths in the corporate context as well as policies that effectively target these individuals to enhance the ethical climate of the corporate world. Consistent with previous research, it is suggested that recruiting successful psychopaths to be the front-runners of corporations can be financially detrimental.

The work of Babiak and Hare (2006) further investigate the potential harm that psychopaths can cause in the workplace. According to this study, successful psychopaths in the workplace initiate a set of manipulative phases within the organization, beginning with selection. Selection refers to the psychopath being hired by the organization, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment for the psychopaths' manipulative skills. Ultimately, the psychopath has successfully charmed their way into the organization by creating a façade that meets the company's needs. However, recent literature has suggested that the ability for successful psychopaths to enter the corporation is not independently due to the manipulative and charming



characteristics that they encompass, rather, it is suggested that corporations bear some responsibility as an entity that is profit-obsessed and treats white-collar scams as “business as usual” (Wexler, 2008).

As a result, it is suggested that successful psychopaths are not simply a few bad apples in the barrel; they are a part of a collective action, often referred to as systemic psychopathy. The transient and greedy nature of the globalized economy serves as a breeding ground for psychopaths as companies are actively searching for individuals who are quick decision-makers, risk-takers, visionaries, and confident; traits which are synonymous with many psychopathic characteristics (Wexler, 2008). While in a position of higher authority, successful psychopaths are able to create a network of individuals to carry out their plans of deception and manipulation. Systemic psychopathy places the successful psychopath in a position of legitimate authority supported by the corporation. While there is abundant literature on psychopaths and traditional forms of crime, such research is scarce in the context of systemic psychopathy, which alludes to the connection between the corporation and the individual as psychopaths. Thus, we examine if the malicious traits of successful psychopaths are related to the character requirements put in place by corporations.

### **Research Question**

Given the existent literature on psychopaths in the workplace, it is clearly demonstrated that once the initial act of being recruited is complete there is an avenue of potential for the individual to cause harm to their coworkers in a number of ways. Additionally, when psychopathic individuals are given careers of high social status, such as CEO positions, the potential for harm drastically increases. Nevertheless, there are several studies to suggest that psychopathic individuals enter the workforce, typically in positions of power; the question

remains, how are these individuals obtaining these positions? The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the hiring managers for positions of higher social status, namely, CEO, president, chairmen, and superintendent, positions are inadvertently seeking out psychopathic individuals to run their companies using similar characteristics in their job advertisements.

### **Outcomes**

The current study's research on successful psychopaths within corporations will be the first to test the model proposed by Wexler (2008), while building and filling in gaps within the limited research that currently exists on the topic. The current study hopes to identify correlations between Factor 1 psychopathic personality traits and desired skills from established businesses. Furthermore, the current study will allow a criminological perspective towards the concept of successful psychopathy by highlighting the increased potential for corporate scams and white-collar criminality.

## **Methods**

### **Design and Procedure**

The current study is grounded in both qualitative *and* quantitative methods by conducting a combination of directed *and* summative content analyses of 25 executive career advertisements collected from *The Globe and Mail*. The objective of a directed approach to a content analysis, also known as the deductive category application, is to "[conceptually] validate or extend...a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Prior research helps to target the focus of the research question and provide the variables of interest to determine the initial coding scheme. Further, "a study using a summative approach to qualitative content analysis starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content" (p.1283). Accordingly, the goal of

the study is to get a deeper understanding of successful psychopaths while exploring the role of the “Westernized” corporation in recruiting successful psychopaths into their businesses using Wexler’s *Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels (PPDPRCL; 2008)*. By assessing and quantifying the aforementioned facets, the current study will be able to provide insight into the concept of systemic psychopathy and the propensity for white-collar crime. Furthermore, the current study will be able to provide adequate policy recommendations and recognize systemic psychopathy as a serious threat worthy of research attention.

The *Globe and Mail* was selected as the primary source of data collection because of its reputability in the Canadian business industry for executive career advertisements. Although larger corporations often head-hunt for lead executive positions, they often purchase advertisements in the *Globe and Mail* to promote the position's vacancy. For the purpose of this study, a large-level corporation is operationalized as a company or group of people authorized to act as a single entity and are deemed separate legal entities from their owners (Veldman & Willmott, 2013). The data for the current study was accumulated from the final half of the 2014 *Globe and Mail* publications (i.e., daily newspapers from July 1st - December 31st). The year 2014 was selected for accessibility reasons, specifically, the 2014 digital copies were the most recently available via ProQuest historical newspapers database. The keywords used to select the career advertisement data set included: chief, chairman, board of directors, president, and superintendent. The aforementioned keywords were selected to promote the inclusivity of all senior level executive positions that are known to be the front-runners of corporations.

The 25 companies included in the analyses were from various sectors of the economy, including, medical (6), education (5), public sector (3), technology (2), transportation (2), media

(1), financial (2), utilities (2), and social services (2; see Table 1). Correspondingly, to refine data collection and ensure the advertisements were from larger-level corporations, the search was limited to the display advertisements in the business section of the periodical. Additionally, the selected advertisements were required to fill a minimum of a quarter of the page to ensure that a character description for the career advertisement was provided. Career advertisements were excluded if they did not provide a character description in their advertisement as analyses would not be possible without it. In total 31 advertisements were available, however, following the selection criteria only 25 met the criterion. Other news media sources were also not included in the data collection due to a geographic restriction, many well-known newspapers with career advertisement sections were not accessible to Canadian residents (i.e., *The Washington Post* and *The Wall St. Journal*). Additionally, other Canadian newspapers, such as *The Financial Post*, were not used for the current study to ensure consistency and ease of access among data collection.

Next, the content relating to character descriptions from the 25 chosen executive career advertisements was coded using the positively reinforced corporate labels provided by Wexler (2008; see Table 2) as the predetermined codes. This comparative tool incorporates the personality characteristics desired by corporations synonymously linked with the personality traits from the dual-model Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), specifically Factor 1 traits. Incorporating predetermined codes for the career advertisements provides a structured approach to the exploratory analysis of the data. Furthermore, the data that could not be coded was identified and analyzed to determine if they represent a new category or subcategory of an existing code. By using a directed *and* summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), we are able to address whether or not large-scale Canadian companies are searching for individuals

higher in Factor 1 traits (i.e., successful psychopaths) to be the front-runners of their corporations, and if so, *which* personality traits are the most desired.

## Results

### The Wexler Test

The directed content analysis methodology is brought to fruition using Wexler's PPDPRCL (see Table 3; 2008). This table introduces a collection of common corporate labels included in career advertisements with a list of synonymous psychopathic tendencies. As previously discussed, the corporate labels presented in this table were used as the codes for the analysis. The following results will discuss the frequencies of these corporate labels with additional findings.

**Strategically-minded.** Following the content analyses of the 25 executive career advertisements, results revealed that the most desired character trait amongst these executive career advertisements was a "strategically-minded" individual. Items were coded as "strategically-minded" if the job advertisement mentioned the need for an individual who can implement a strategic plan, provide a big picture strategy, develop strategies, demonstrates strategic initiatives, or the need for an individual who is a strategic thinker.

**Visionary & Networks Well.** Two corporate labelled character traits were found to be equally the second most sought-after, (1) visionaries and (2) individuals who network well. Both of the aforementioned traits were present 10 times respectively throughout the advertisements. Items were coded as "visionary" if the job advertisement included the need for a candidate who thinks about the big-picture, is a visionary leader, or who is a visionary thinker. Utilizing Wexler's (2008) comparison tool, the PPDPRCL, recruiting candidates who are visionaries would be desirable for a psychopathic individual. Specifically, the Factor 1 psychopathic trait

that accompanies a visionary individual is an individual who promises the sky, or in other words, make use of deceit and manipulation to develop a promising success story to others.

Further, items were coded as “networks well” if the job advertisement included the necessity for an individual to have exceptional interpersonal skills, strengthens relationships with stakeholders and partners, relationship building skills, at ease working with a wide range of people, and strong relationships with the senior leaders. When analyzed using the *PPDPRCL*, a candidate who networks well could correspond to the psychopathic personality trait of glibness and superficial charm. Successful psychopaths are particularly drawn to this characteristic because of their need to present a façade and provide an outstanding first impression.

**Courage.** Results demonstrated that courage was a valued trait among four corporations. Further, items were coded as courageous if corporations requested an individual who is strong, has courage, or who takes bold steps. Correspondingly, the psychopathic personality trait that accompanies courage is the lack of fear. The characteristic of courage may be appealing to successful psychopaths because they lack emotional intelligence, further translating to the lack of a fear response.

**Can Live with Tough Decisions.** The ability to live with tough decisions was present among two executive career advertisements. Correspondingly, items were coded as “the ability to live with tough decisions” if the job advertisement requested a candidate that could make tough decisions or who is results-oriented.

**Analytical/Objective.** A candidate who is analytical/objective was also a desired trait among the career advertisements. Items were coded as “analytical” if the advertisement demonstrated the need for an individual who is strongly analytical, objective or a problem solver.

**Confident.** Results also revealed that confidence was a desirable corporate trait in two career advertisements. Items were coded as “confident” if the advertisement demonstrated the need for an individual who has sound governance or who is decisive. According to the *PPDPRCL*, the Factor 1 psychopathic personality trait that corresponds to an individual who is confident is one who has a grandiose self-image or self-worth.

**Risk-taker.** Being a “risk-taker” was a desired corporate characteristic by two of the 25 executive advertisements that were analyzed. Traits were coded as “risk-taking” if the advertisement demonstrated the need for a candidate who is willing to take risks and can capitalize on opportunity. According to the *PPDPRCL*, the Factor 1 psychopathic personality trait that corresponds to an individual who is a risk-taker is one who is thrill-seeking.

**Gets the Hard Jobs Done.** “Getting the hard jobs done” was a desired corporate characteristic from two of the 25 companies that were analyzed. Traits were coded as “getting the hard jobs done” if the advertisement displayed the need for someone who has a proven track record of achieving results.

### **Additional Findings**

Throughout the analyses of the 25 executive career advertisements, there were characteristics identified that were not included in the *PPDPRCL* that are noteworthy in relation to successful psychopaths.

**Persuasiveness.** Strategic communicator, influencing skills, and a gifted and compelling communicator were all incorporated in the character descriptions of four executive career advertisements. These characteristics all correspond to the personality trait of persuasiveness. Interestingly, persuasiveness is an intriguing characteristic for a successful psychopath, as the ability to manipulate others is a predominant Factor 1 psychopathic personality trait. In the

*PPDPRCL*, there is no corporate label or psychopathic personality trait that could categorize the characteristic of persuasiveness. In further analyses, it would be useful to include the psychopathic characteristic of manipulation and the corporate label of persuasiveness (see Table 4).

**Undesirable Traits for Successful Psychopaths.** Throughout the analyses, there were characteristics identified as undesirable to successful psychopaths and could function as potential protective factors during recruitment. These traits include: (1) values human dignity, (2) integrity, (3) passionate, (4) safety, (5) authentic, (6) values positive change, and (7) high-compassion. In further analyses, it would be useful to identify corporations that utilize these protective factors.

**Employment Sectors.** Interestingly, the corporation working in the medical industry, specifically the neuroscience division, did not request any characteristics that could be attributable to psychopathic personality traits. Furthermore, this particular corporation's job advertisement focused primarily on experience of the individual rather than their personality traits. As discussed previously, experience in the workplace is rarely valued following the globalization of corporations and now transient workplaces. Further, the corporation located in the social services sector of the economy was ranked as the highest for requesting psychopathic-like characteristics in their CEO career description with a total of seven characteristics. Specifically, the corporation was requesting a candidate who is strategically-minded, takes bold steps, a visionary, a risk-taker, a gifted and compelling communicator, objective, and who has sound judgment. Remarkably, the corporation ranked as the second highest for requesting psychopathic-like characteristics was also from the social services division with a total of six



characteristics. Specifically, the character description requested a candidate that has courage, who is a visionary, progressive, strategic, networks well, and has influencing skills.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to determine whether or not corporations searching for candidates for positions of higher social status, namely, presidents, chairmen, board of directors, and chief positions, are inadvertently seeking out psychopathic individuals to run their companies using similar characteristics in their job advertisements. This paper seeks to extend the scarce literature on psychopathic personality characteristics in the corporate world, particularly in the context of high-status positions. I chose the captivating research domain of corporate psychopathy because numerous scholars (e.g., Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2011; Wexler, 2008) have appealed to academia to further explicate the often stated but rarely publicized influence of these malicious traits on organizations. Although there is abundant evidence demonstrating the impact of psychopathy in traditional forms of crime (e.g., assault, murder, robbery), there is minimal research on the effect of the personality traits of successful psychopaths and the propensity for non-traditional forms of crime, namely, white-collar crime.

Interestingly, results demonstrated that 96 percent of the executive career advertisements did include characteristics that are synonymous with Factor 1 psychopathic personality traits. Furthermore, the corporate labels for the desired personality traits and their corresponding psychopathic traits included an individual who: (1) networks well – glib and superficial charm, (2) strategically-minded – lies and schemes, (3) visionary – promises the sky, (4) analytical – cold-hearted, (5) gets the hard jobs done – no conscience, (6) can live with tough decisions – feels no guilt or remorse, (7) confident – grandiose self-image, (8) courage – no fear, and (9) risk-taker – thrill-seeking.

Additionally, the personality traits of a top-level executive that were most desired by corporations include a strategic-mindset, the ability to network well and a visionary. The ability to network well was present in 10 of the career advertisements that were examined, indicating that glibness and superficial charm are highly valued in the corporate world. This personality trait is attractive to a successful psychopath because of their ability to use these traits to create the façade of an intelligent leader with exceptional interpersonal skills. Correspondingly, the desire for an individual who is a visionary can potentially result in the recruitment of a psychopathic candidate as they continuously create schemes and outrageous, often unattainable, promises. As Allio (2007) points out, many CEOs begin as visionaries with a resilient picture of how to progress their organization into the future. However, successful psychopaths who portray the would-be visionary, seduced by power and a growing sense of confidence, first become isolated and then become submerged in their outlandish plans. Interestingly, the desire for the aforementioned characteristics fit quite well to the concept of corporate and systemic psychopathy, alluding to the organization as a psychopathic entity looking for individuals who are quick to make tough decisions and increase profits in a short period of time. As previous research has suggested, successful psychopaths are already attracted to the model of new-age corporations, which are transient and hyper-competitive, the potential recruitment of these individuals is further heightened by character descriptions that portray the psychopathic personality type as the ideal candidate.

As discussed, we found evidence that persuasiveness was a desired personality characteristic among the examined advertisements. Although not included in Wexler's (2008) comparison tool (*PPDPRCL*), persuasiveness is a factor that must also be considered as an attractive attribute for successful psychopaths. Our reasoning as to why persuasiveness should be

included as a trait is as follows: “lying, deceiving, and manipulation are natural talents for psychopaths” (Hare, 1993, p. 46). Successful psychopaths are often prideful in their ability to deceive and manipulate others; therefore, it is not surprising that they often con, defraud, and cheat people without remorse. As academics have identified, psychopaths are often straightforward in labelling themselves as manipulators and conmen, revealing that the world is made up of prey and predators and it would be irrational not to exploit the weak (Book & Quinsey, 2004; Hare, 1993).

While results demonstrated that corporations are including personality characteristics that are potentially equivalent to psychopathic tendencies in their career advertisements, results also revealed the inclusion of characteristics that could potentially serve as protective factors during the recruitment of new candidates. These traits include: (1) values human dignity, (2) integrity, (3) passionate, (4) safety, (5) authentic, (6) values positive change, and (7) high-compassion. We suggest that these characteristics can be accounted for by a requirement to display either emotional intelligence or empathy.

**Emotional IQ & Empathy.** High emotional intelligence is the ability to distinguish one’s own emotions and those of others. Specifically, a high level of emotional intelligence allows an individual to label their feelings and those of others appropriately while using the information to conduct social interactions. It is suggested that a requirement for a high emotional IQ may serve as a protective factor against successful psychopaths due to their lack of emotional recognition and lack of empathy. Distinct from emotional intelligence, empathy focuses solely on the ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others. It is also suggested that the desire for a candidate who displays empathy could serve as a protective factor against the recruitment of successful psychopaths. Empathy and a high emotional IQ are requirements put in

place by some corporations, indicating that as a top-level executive one needs to have the ability to be understanding of others' emotions. These characteristics are undesirable for successful psychopaths, as they do not have the capability to be empathetic, solve issues as a team, or care about the feelings of others. Building off of the work of Lingnau et al. (2017), corporations can demand strong leadership in the workplace, however, it is important to also demonstrate the need for a leader who is able to understand and respect their coworkers' emotions. While this can take the form of a character description in a job advertisement, Lingnau et al. (2017) suggest that corporations should employ an "explicitly social environment that is highly unattractive for corporate psychopaths" (p. 1217). One way this can be achieved is by lessening and replacing incentive-based promotions with incentives that promote care and respect for one another. More specifically, promotions should not be solely based on monetary goals, rather, an individual should be rewarded for an array of skills, such as empathy and care for others. This way, the likelihood for an individual who is both empathetic and strives to increase profits for the business will be rewarded. Similarly, Boddy (2011) stresses the contribution of successful psychopaths to the global financial crisis and suggests that the measures that exist to identify corporate psychopaths (e.g., B-SCAN) should be utilized.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

The current study contains some limitations. First, 25 executive career advertisements collected from the *Globe and Mail* were analyzed for their character descriptions. Although the sample was representative for the current study, the sample size is minimal. Further, most companies in the sample were taken from the public sector. Given the implicit sample bias, the results and conclusions must be interpreted with caution. Future research should expand the relationship between psychopathic personality traits and corporate labels in a broader context.

Here, research on particular sectors of the economy can be further investigated. Second, the current study was geographically specific in terms of data collection, particularly in a Canadian context. Although restricting the geographic location gave insight to the desired traits by companies that advertise in a Canadian newspaper, future studies should explore the link between psychopathic traits and corporate labels in other Western contexts (e.g., United States) by utilizing other social media outlets. Here, conversations about the impacts of globalization and systemic psychopathy can be enhanced as well as comparisons between geographic locations.

One further limiting aspect of the current study is the initial utilization of a comparison tool in a qualitative context, which imposes some methodological restrictions. As previously discussed, there were variables found within the advertisements' character descriptions that were not included in Wexler's (2008) comparison tool, primarily persuasiveness. Furthermore, there were variables that could be considered as protective factors against recruiting an individual with a psychopathic personality, such as integrity and compassion. Future research should add to the comparison tool and test in amongst other high-status corporate careers to establish validity of the measure in a qualitative context. Lastly, there is some theoretical latitude being taken with regard to the "synonymous" nature of the PCL-R Factor 1 personality traits and the positively reinforced corporate labels. For instance, confidence and narcissism are not the same thing. Similarly, as Cleckley (1976) argues, people who are charming and people who are glib and superficial are not the same thing. It is suggested that a factor-analysis could be conducted to determine the validity of the variables and their ability to conceptualize corporate labels and psychopathic traits.

### Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine whether or not the recruitment for positions of higher social status, namely, president, chief, superintendent, board of directors, and chairmen, positions are inadvertently seeking out individuals with psychopathic tendencies to run their companies using similar characteristics in their job advertisements. The aforementioned research question was explored through a directive and summative content analysis of 25 executive career advertisements using Wexler's *PPDPRCL* (2008). In this analysis, it became evident that the desired characteristics for these executive positions from Wexler's *PPDPRCL* (2008) were highly incorporated into the career advertisements. It was argued that the evidence of potential psychopathic personality traits in the corporate world could stem from a form of systemic psychopathy which flourished in the new-age globalization with transient and ever-changing organizations who believe that an individual who exhibits a bold and psychopathic personality is the ideal candidate to run a corporation.

Furthermore, the current study allows for an interdisciplinary perspective towards the concept of successful psychopathy by highlighting the increased potential for corporate scams and white-collar criminality. Specifically, the current study introduces a psycho-social criminological perspective by incorporating the behavioural and personality characteristics of psychopathy and analyzing them in a social context via a criminological lens. As the behaviour and personalities of successful psychopaths are being deemed as "business as usual", the ability for a successful psychopath to climb the corporate ladder is exacerbated. Additionally, using previous research, the likelihood for a successful psychopath to have low moral standards and participate in white-collar crimes is increased. While the inability for the public to conceptualize white-collar crime as a true form of crime conducted by powerful individuals is apparent, it is

suggested that change should begin with public awareness and academia. With additional research on psychopathy in the field of criminology and organizational psychology, public awareness can be amplified.

Results also allude to potential protective factors that could be put in place by corporations during their hiring process. These factors include measures for empathy and emotional IQ. Beyond the hiring process, it is suggested that incentive-based promotions should be lessened and replaced with incentives that promote care and respect for one another. Without utilizing these protective factors and pursuing further research, it is not purely that corporate leadership becomes corrupt but, those without conscience and morals will continuously be selected as winners in a globalized setting.

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Table 1

*Sample Categorized by Employment Sector, Company, and Position Title*

Sector	Company	Position
Medical	Markham Stouffville Hospital	President & CEO
	Ontario Brain Institute	President & Director
	Ontario Institute for Cancer Research	CFO
	Canadian Patient Safety Institute	CEO
	World Federation of Hemophilia	CEO
	Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care	Board of Directors
Education	Victoria University in the University of Toronto	President & Vice-Chancellor
	Ottawa-Carleton District School Board	Superintendent of Instruction
	Saint Mary's University	President & Vice-Chancellor
	Ryerson University	President & Vice-Chancellor
	St. Clair College	President
Public Sector	City of Winnipeg	CAO
	Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries	CEO
	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada	President
	StarTech	CSO
Technology	Sustainable Development Technology Canada	President & CEO
	Air Canada Pilots Association	CEO
Transportation	City of Windsor Transportation	CAO
	National Film Board	CEO
Media	Credit Union Central of Manitoba	CEO
	ATB Financial	CFO
Financial	Emera	CIO
	Enersource	Board of Directors
Utilities	Catholic Children's Aid Society	Board of Directors
	CUSO International	CEO

Table 2

*Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels*

Psychopathic Personality Traits	Corporate Labels
No conscience	Gets the hard jobs done
Aberrant self-promoter	Makes an excellent first impression
No fear	Shows courage and steadfastness
Lies and schemes	Strategically-minded
Thrill-seeking	Risk-taker
Feels no guilt or remorse	Can live with tough decisions
Grandiose self-image	Confident, knows self-worth
Cold-hearted	Objective, analytical
Glib and superficial charm	Networks well
Severs ties with those who no longer benefit them	Move up the hierarchy without being slowed down by loyalties
Promises the sky	Visionary

*Note.* The Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels are from Wexler (2008).

Table 3

*Corporate Labels and Frequencies*

Corporate Labels	Frequency
Gets the hard jobs done	2
Makes an excellent first impression	-
Shows courage and steadfastness	4
Strategically-minded	16
Risk-taker	2
Can live with tough decisions	2
Confident, knows self-worth	2
Objective, analytical	1
Networks well	10
Move up the hierarchy without being slowed down by loyalties	-
Visionary	10

*Note.* The Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels are from Wexler (2008).

Table 4

*Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels: Revised*

Psychopathic Personality Traits	Corporate Labels
No conscience	Gets the hard jobs done
Aberrant self-promoter	Makes an excellent first impression
No fear	Shows courage and steadfastness
Lies and schemes	Strategically-minded
Thrill-seeking	Risk-taker
Feels no guilt or remorse	Can live with tough decisions
Grandiose self-image	Confident, knows self-worth
Cold-hearted	Objective, analytical
Glib and superficial charm	Networks well
Severs ties with those who no longer benefit them	Move up the hierarchy without being slowed down by loyalties
Promises the sky	Visionary
Manipulation	Persuasiveness

*Note* The Psychopathic Personality Dimensions and Positively Reinforced Corporate Labels are from Wexler (2008) with the addition of manipulation – persuasiveness.