

The 'dark traits' of sociopathic leaders

Could they be a threat to universities?

Chad Perry

Some sociopathic personality traits in managers can derail business organisations even though the leaders have been carefully selected and considered 'high flyers'. Three of those traits are narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. These traits are 'socially-averse' because the sociopaths have an ingrained disregard for relationships. We will 'very likely' come into hurtful contact with a sociopath. This study addresses the problem: Could a leader of a university unit with strong levels of the dark triad traits derail their unit? After considering the literature about the dark triad and university leadership, this study argues that a sociopathic leader could degrade the collaborative nature of much of academics' work with other staff, students and society enough to produce mediocrity in their part of a university, but not enough to derail it. Implications for universities selecting non-sociopathic leaders and for individuals being led by sociopaths are suggested.

Keywords: sociopaths, sociopathic leaders, dark traits, university leadership

Introduction

Some sociopathic personality traits in managers can derail business organisations even though the leaders have been carefully selected and may be considered 'high flyers' (Furnham, 2010). Three of those traits are the 'socially-averse' ones of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism.

The traits are called 'dark' 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 (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013, p. 206; italics added). Some professions are more likely than others to attract these dark triad leaders (Dutton, 2012). These professions include business chief executive officers (CEOs) (in Australia, CEOs in finance and mining in particular (Manne 2013, p. 192)), lawyers and media; those professions least likely to attract dark trait people include care aide, nursing and various 'health' therapies. That is, sociopathic personalities typically find their way

into professions where power can be exercised, and people without sociopathy appear more often in those professions linked to feelings and a human connection. Sociopathic managers who derail an organisation do not deliver the required outcomes; for example, they make poor decisions, use poor management practices and put the wrong people into positions (Furnham, 2010, p. viii). Along the way, they leave a trail of used people and, in romance, a 'trail of broken hearts' (Hare, 1999, p. 113).

Australians have seen sociopathic behaviour by a recent prime minister. Arguably, ex-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd illustrates a sociopath's three traits of dominance and self-promotion, impetuosity, and playing office politics; and also illustrates how they go with a lack of empathy. According to what has been reported, he insisted on making most decisions himself or with a small 'court' of three or four ministers. As Marr (2010a, p. 1) noted, 'Leadership, Rudd told me, is always a lonely race.' He would often phone journalists very early in the morning about how he was being presented (Marr, 2010b). He made the very quick decision about the hugely expensive National Broadband

Network (NBN) in a way that an auditor found was 'rushed, chaotic and inadequate' (Hepworth & Bingemann, 2014, p. 1). Politics did not just involve electors on the electoral roll but also involved office politics - 'Tracking down the powerful, picking the people he has to know, began as a diplomatic duty and became a lifelong passion.' He appeared to even leak damaging details to the press about Julia Gillard after she had become leader of his party that he had derailed. He was so lacking in empathy that he appeared to be surprised when his party voted to remove him as leader.

The present study addresses the question of whether a leader of a university unit with strong levels of the dark triad traits could derail their unit. It is argued that a university unit has particular characteristics that lessen the chance of a sociopathic leader derailing it, but raise the chance of a sociopathic leader creating mediocrity.

A note about definitions of three terms is required. First, consider the term 'sociopathy'. Because the three traits include the one trait of psychopathy, the term 'psychopathy' could not be used to comprehensively refer to the three traits together. That is, the term 'sociopathy' is used here to refer to cover the three traits, instead of the term 'psychopathy' that refers to just one the three traits. There is a literature about the changing and confusing use of these terms but this straightforward distinction can do for this non-specialist article (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5, 2013; Furnham, 2010; Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011).

Next, in this study, the term 'leader' refers to any academic who is given responsibility for major outcomes in a part of a university like a department head or a programme head. Finally, the term 'derail' refers to a unit going 'off its rails' because it does not produce required outcomes. For example, the unit has declining enrolments of students or declining rankings and declining Course Experience Questionnaire results. Depending on what these 'required outcomes' are, a leader's sociopathic tendencies may not always derail their unit because the tendencies are dampened or harmless. There is a personality-environment interaction. For example, in stable times a leader with sociopathic tendencies may not cause much disturbance but damaging behaviours and effects may emerge during a period of restructuring, redundancies, high competition, new opportunities (especially for advancement or fame) or rapid change. For example, a narcissist may be spurred into hostile action by a colleague's success combined with opportunities for covert sabotage. This study argues that in many university circumstances, a sociopathic leader will not produce transformational outcomes

and will produce outcomes that are merely mediocre - somewhere between a required transformation and a derailment.

Addressing this problem of leadership in Australian universities is important. University units are not like the business organisations that are transaction-focused and attract dark triad managers. In contrast to businesses, universities are usually heavily-regulated, government-subsidised organisations. Yet there has been little examination of the effect of the dark traits in universities. There is only one mention of dark triad trait academics and academe in Furnham (2010, p. 103) and only two in Hare (1999) where they are said to be similar to other white-collar psychopaths within the ranks of doctors, police officers and writers (Hare, 1999); but no examples of academic sociopaths are provided and their leadership of other academics is not discussed there. Nevertheless, there has been a 'managerialist' trend in university governance in Australia, with leaders who are perceived to be somewhat similar to business managers - some even have 'executive' in their title - with 'the emergence of an academic managerial class that exercises power' (Aspromourgos, 2012, p. 44).

Concomitantly, the number of Australian universities in the Times HE 200 index has declined from 17 in 2005 to eight in 2014 (Burdon, 2014; The World University Rankings, 2014). There are proposals to deregulate the university sector even further. International students reputedly bring into Australia revenues exceeding \$15 billion, so higher education is the country's third largest gross export earner after iron ore and coal, and before gas, gold, tourism, oil or wheat (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014). Its domestic students represent the future of the country in a skills world. To our knowledge, the dark traits are not considered in the selection processes for senior roles at any Australian university; although they should be in businesses (Furnham, 2010). So should they be considered in universities? In brief, to the extent that are moving in a 'business-like' direction, looking at dark traits might also be important for university management.

There are three delimitations of this study. The first is that the discussion is restricted to the Australian context that is, to that country's universities' regulations and size. As well, it is about 'subclinical' people in the university community rather than extreme 'clinical' people who are often under clinical supervision (Furnham *et al.*, 2013). In other words, the university leaders are 'subcriminal' who do not usually break the law like clinical sociopaths often do, but they do break ordinary standards of behaviour while

violating 'conventional ethical standards' (Hare, 1999, p. 114). Thus the finding that extreme or clinically diagnosed psychopathy has been found in only about four per cent of corporate professionals does not mean that this study is about only a small number of people (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010). Indeed, we will 'very likely' come into hurtful contact with a sociopath (Hare, 1999, p. xii). These sub-clinical sociopaths can exhibit different intensities of each of their three dark traits, and so the positions reached in this study have to be probabilistic. The final delimitation is that the leaders discussed are the middle-level leaders responsible for academic leadership of university units like departments that are directly responsible for some student outcomes. These department-level managers make up to 80 per cent of the administrative decisions in a university (Brown & Moshavi, 2002). So administration staff and vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors are not included. Going beyond these delimitations can and should be done in later research.

Literature review

For the present work, the definitions and descriptions of the traits that make up the dark triad are drawn from modern research such as Furnham (2013). The first of the triad, narcissism, could be viewed in this organisational context as the core trait that drives the others. Narcissistic personalities are likely to perceive inequality in power between themselves and others. For example, when asked to draw shapes of themselves and others, they will draw themselves as a bigger shape than the shapes of others (Manne, 2013). They say 'I' more often than they say 'we'. So they are characterised by self-confidence, and the social aversion that is associated with 'entitlement, dominance and superiority' (Furnham *et al.*, 2013, p. 200). In its extreme form, this narcissism can be called grandiosity without any empathy or remorse. They seek prestige and call attention to themselves by self-promotion. So they dress well and often give favourable first impressions.

In turn, psychopathy (Furnham *et al.*, 2013) is characterised by high impulsivity that could even be viewed as thrill-seeking and low empathy. In the organisational context of this research, psychopathy could be seen in quick decision-making and actions with little regard for consultations with others and even with little concern for others' reactions to the decision or action. In its extreme form, this psychopathy can be called

impetuosity. 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 catch cries (Dutton & McNab, 2014, p. 99). For its behavioural significance, psychopathy can be seen as the most dangerous of the three traits.

Finally, Machiavellism focuses on how others are treated by the sociopath in pursuit of their dreams of dominance over others. In workplace organisations, it is 'office politics' or using gossip and other informal means to advance personal rather than organisational ends or those of someone else. In short, people with this trait are 'characterised by constant, low-level, deviousness' and are 'cynical, unprincipled, believe in interpersonal manipulation as the key for life success' (Furnham, 2010, p. 18, 200). They can use behaviour like smiling and using

a person's first name to send their own message on the other person's 'frequency' (Dutton & McNab, 2014), but do not receive the other person's message.

Because of some common features of the three traits, some researchers think

they cannot really be dealt with separately (Furnham *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, some factor analytic studies have shown the two traits of psychopathy and narcissism do indeed overlap, as have other studies of self- and observer-reports, for instance. 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-correlations between narcissism and Machiavellianism. So the modern position is that the traits are different and are worth considering separately - 'The lion's share of research in this review suggests that any apparent equivalence of the dark triad members is illusory' (Furnham *et al.*, 2013). For this research that has not measured personality traits in university subjects using psychological tests, it is important that observers can distinguish between the three traits in people. Consequently, the traits are treated separately in this article.

Two personality tests are the most common measures of the triad. The Dirty Dozen has 12 questions (Jonason & Webster, 2010), and the Short Dark Triad has 27 questions (Jones & Paulhus, 2014); neither is clearly superior to the other although the longer test has slightly better predictive power (Furnham *et al.*, 2013). For this research academics could not actually be asked to fill in either personality test

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after they were told about the topic, and so the shorter Dirty Dozen has been used as the basis for understanding each trait in a workplace context. Observer-reports were used in assessing the cases below, and such reports have been used before in dark triad research.

The Dirty Dozen's 12 items could perhaps be used by a reader to get an initial estimate of how intensely sociopathic they or their leaders are. The items describing people with the dark triad are (from Jonason & Webster, 2010):

- Narcissistic leaders tend to: want others to admire them; want others to pay attention to them; seek prestige or status; and expect special favours from others
- Psychopathic leaders tend to: lack remorse; be unconcerned with the morality of their actions; be callous or insensitive; and be cynical
- Machiavellian leaders tend to: manipulate others to get their way; use deceit or lies to get their way; use flattery to get their way; exploit others towards their own end.

In brief, the dark triad are three distinct but related personality traits that help explain some socially-averse behaviour in many organisations. How they could affect the leadership of parts of universities is examined next.

Higher education and other organisations' leadership

Higher education

'Managerialism' has become more evident in Australian universities (Aspromourgos, 2012). The new types of leaders have the financial power to dominate others in their part of the university; for example, the term 'Executive Dean' is becoming more common. The similar, power-changed situation in the United Kingdom has been summarised in these words: 'So management ideologies do seem to serve the interests of manager academics and help cement relations of power and dominance, even in contexts like universities which were not traditionally associated with the dominance of management' (Deem & Brehony, 2005, p. 217). But this power and dominance must serve the requirements of leadership. There are many different leadership practices, and it will be argued here that the core of all of them is relationships between the leaders and followers.

This leadership in a university is different from leadership in other types of organisations, and it has been likened to 'herding cats' (Brown & Moshavi, 2002). The concept of academic freedom within a class room or laboratory limits much 'executive' power. One Harvard ex-dean thought that it was laughable that he could over-

rule that freedom. 'Professors, especially tenured ones at places like Harvard, answer to nobody' (Wood, 2014, p. 57). So this concept of academic freedom may limit the 'executive' power of sociopathic leaders. Paradoxically, it may also foster the development of sociopathy among academics who are non-leaders and who may become leaders in the medium to long term. Their freedom could mean there are few constraints on the rise of narcissism among them, and so the emergence of sociopaths among academic leaders may actually be more pronounced than in business settings. Only the relationships/team spirit developed by a non-sociopathic leader may slow this development of sociopathic academics in the medium to long term.

This difference between a university and a business can be explained by external and internal forces operating on a university that do not operate on a business. The external forces on universities include the increasing competition for students and prestige as seen in the widely-read rankings in Australia's *Good Universities Guide*. Another external force is the regulation of universities by governments that are the main source of funds for the universities in Australia. Another external force is private universities and training centres, as well as MOOCs - 'massive open online courses' - and other internet-related influences. In turn, internal forces are university staff, especially tenured or near-tenured staff, who are inward- and discipline-looking. They are concerned with protecting what entitlements they have against leaders and, through what remains of collegial governance, they influence hiring and promotions and so 'end up cloning themselves' (Lohman, 2002, p. 5). Facing these forces, some leaders can think the deliberation and consensus of the old collegial governance systems can produce gridlock instead of transformation.

These old collegial governance systems were developed in the West to allow deep discipline specialisation (into 'silos') and to protect academics' independence from outside distortions of their research and teaching (Lohman, 2002). But small departments/'tribes' could compete with each other for resources, and could 'Balkanise' a university. An alternative is a large multidisciplinary department or to make the smaller departments into semi-autonomous bodies within the loose federation of a faculty. Another alternative is to have distributed leadership (Harking & Healy, 2013).

Solving these problems of governance could require non-sociopathic leaders at different strata within a university. These strata all require collaboration within teams operating concurrently within and between strata,

and a sociopathic leader is unlikely to develop this collaboration because of their disregard for the empathy that is the core of long-term collaboration. For example, there could be different leaders for the level of a faculty/school that could itself be a mix of different disciplines in the discipline strata (like marketing and finance). These disciplines could contribute to programmes for different student segments (like an MBA and a bachelor of finance degree, for example). The contributors to a programme from each discipline need to collaborate in order to develop effective assessment and mix of content (the ideal size for a team is only about five or six (Thompson, 2003)). If academics at each level do not share insights and processes for fear that others will competitively 'steal my ideas', the programme will falter. So if a sociopathic leader at any level cannot understand how collaboration is developed, the outcomes at that level and others will be mediocre.

There has been some research about the effectiveness of middle-level university leaders investigated here. One review found 12 traits were necessary for transformational leadership, with 9 of them clearly associated with how the leader relates to the group and marked with an asterisk in this list of traits (Bryman, 2007, p. 697):

1. Clear sense of direction/strategic vision.
2. *Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set.
3. *Being considerate.
4. *Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity.
5. *Being trustworthy and having personal integrity.
6. *Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/ encouraging open communication.
7. *Communicating well about the direction the department is going.
8. *Acting as a role model/having credibility.
9. *Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department.
10. Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so.
11. Providing feedback on performance.
12. *Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research.
13. Making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation.

Another survey of the literature concluded that, in universities, a people-oriented leadership style is more likely to lead to staff satisfaction, group cohesiveness, and improved performance results (Osseo-Asare, Longbottom, & Murphy, 2005). A survey of 440 university academics

in 70 US academic departments found that relationship-oriented leaders were considered to be the most effective – 'The unique characteristics of the employment arrangements and psychological contract between faculty and their institutions may make charismatic, relationship-oriented leadership a key determinant of department chair effectiveness' (Brown & Moshavi, 2002, p. 79). Relationships are the core of collaboration within groups that improves their teaching. Even one hour of collaborative discussion per week between all the sessional staff and the unit coordinator helped improve their effectiveness staff at one Australian university – 'they matter for the motivation of individual sessional staff members and the overall quality and cohesiveness of course delivery' (Byers & Tani, 2014, p. 13). Such collaboration among staff can improve teaching at schools (Mosle, 2014) and it could improve teaching at universities because such social learning through role-modelling and the evolution of expectations are hallmarks of the development of professionals (Hilton & Slotnick, 2005; Swanwick, 2010). The modern requirement for collaboration in Australian universities makes a model of 'distributed leadership' in discipline management necessary (Harking & Healy, 2013). Finally, even the collaboration among the few authors of co-authored research articles is useful because it results in publications that are more frequently cited (Harzing, 2008).

This need for collaboration is not limited to the staff in a unit (as noted in Burdon, 2014), for it extends to students and to people in society. A history of the digital revolution covered success and failures, and failures did not succeed because they could not form teams – they could not collaborate (Isaacson, 2014). Relatedly, Australia ranks 11th on innovation inputs but is only the 32nd (out of 33 OECD countries) for innovation outputs. According to the Chief Scientist, Australia is also placed 32nd for collaboration between higher education and business. So Australian academics are rewarded for producing citable publications where Australia ranks 11th; for impact on society, the rank is a low 66th. Note that co-author collaboration on citable publications is often a 'digital' rather a face-to-face relationship with co-authors at different institutions rather than the longer-term, non-sociopathic, relationship-rich collaboration involving frequent reciprocity with other organisations in society and with students. Leaders in universities who value and practise such collaboration are needed.

Given the above considerations, it is possible to imagine what a unit led by a sociopath looks like. First, how could narcissism be apparent in a university workplace?

Narcissistic leaders and their cultures of dominance would emphasise the importance of their individual achievements, and how significant they believe these accomplishments will appear to others. It is about looking good, as against doing good, and much less about being good. They like to self-promote as a corollary to their perceived dominance. For instance, their names would often appear often in university communications and other media, even in situations when their influence was small. Their names could appear on letterheads or notice boards, etc. That their position is clearly above others in the unit could be shown in an honour board of previous holders of the position. Their titles would appear to be important to reflect their prestige. Narcissistic people expect special favours, and so they expect perks like bigger salaries, types of car, and offices.

Next, how could psychopathy be apparent in a university workplace? Psychopaths like to make decisions impulsively, with limited consultation with others and without regard for the longer-term effect of those decisions on unit members. Meetings of unit members would be few, with the leader clearly running the meeting towards an end that they and their small 'court' had decided on beforehand. Indeed, sociopathic leaders who derail or nearly derail an organisation need their supportive court to do so. Some staff in the court are 'conformers' or 'colluders' who are 'selfish, ambitious ... and openly supportive of toxic tyrants' (Furnham, 2010, p. 24). The existence of this court may be somewhat similar to the Stockholm Syndrome, where alliance with one's captor may make survival more probable. In the sociopathic workplace, social events for staff would be scarce because relationships are not important to the leader. For that reason, too, staff would not be in their offices outside of student contact times, and would try to avoid conflict by minimising contact with the leader and their court (Furnham, 2010). Incidentally, staff could also avoid studying the trail of sociopaths. Studying them may dehumanise a staff member because subclinical sociopaths may not exhibit every trait of an extreme sociopath:

There's a terribly seductive power in becoming a psychopath stalker. It can really dehumanise you ... It kind of turns you into a bit of a psychopath yourself in that that you start to shove people into that box. It robs you of empathy and your connection to human beings (Bercovici, 2011, p. 1).

Finally, how could Machiavellianism be apparent in a university workplace? Machiavellianism would flourish under the high power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede

& Minkov, 2010) of a dark triad university setting, with members wanting individual advancement within the organisation and having to use manipulation, deceit and flattery for that purpose, exploiting others in the process.

Non-university settings

Modern research about leadership in non-university settings confirms the importance of groups relative to leadership by one person. For example, *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power* cites over 400 studies of leadership from 1840 to 2010, and concludes that leadership is about followers, too (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010) – it is the followers who 'confer' leadership on the leader who 'is one of us' and not 'one of them' (Bartel, 2011, p. 478) or a sociopathic 'one of them self'. Leadership is about engaging followers to work with the leader to advance towards the organisation's goals and aspirations. It is about the context of the group, and about the contingency of matching leader(s) and the group of which they are a part. There are many examples that demonstrate that the individual leader is not crucial. For example, to build good-to-great companies did not require 'a genius with a thousand helpers' but an executive team who set the direction (Collins 2001, p. 52). Similarly, studies of randomly selected leaders versus leaders selected in the usual systematic way show randomly selected leader teams are superior! The reason for the former's superiority supports an emphasis on the team because systematically selected leaders 'often undermine group goals because they assert their personal superiority at the expense of developing a sense of shared team identity' (Thompson, 2003, p. 235; italics added).

These considerations suggest that dark triad leaders may not be effective because they lack the empathy required to allow members of groups to work together and with the leader.

In brief, the ingrained disregard of relationships of sociopathic leaders should be a cause for concern in any organisation. Parts of a university have particular characteristics such as academic freedom that lessen the chance of a sociopathic leader derailing it, but raise the chance that a sociopathic leader will create, or continue to drive, a mediocre part of a university.

Implications

There are implications of this position that sociopathic leaders do not benefit a part of a university even though they may not derail it. First, consider what universities could look at when selecting leaders for units. Sociopaths

can quickly 'read people' for their own personal purposes, and they lack the social inhibitions that are needed to develop truly visionary statements with a group in complex situations. Presumably it would be difficult to arrange for shortlisted applicants to complete a Dirty Dozen test, or a similar test like the give and take test of Grant (2013). Perhaps one could ask them to explain what 'leadership' is and checking later whether their answer coincides with these four characteristics of group-centred leadership (Haslam *et al.*, 2010): the leader is 'one of us' shares the qualities of the group; who champions the group's interests; who helps craft the understanding of what the group shares; and so makes 'us matter' (Bartel, 2011, p. 478). Or ask the interviewee to predict what other people would do in an interdependent work situation (they will explain what they would do) (McKinsey & Company, 2014). References from superiors or supervisors would be unreliable because sociopaths treat them differently from how they treat others. Recall that sociopaths are adept at office politics and so they are adept at ingratiating themselves with their superiors while they 'brutalise their juniors' (Hare, 1999, p. 116). And ask referees by phone to explain how the applicants had led groups in the past is another alternative, or ask about their self-confidence (narcissism), determination (psychopathy) and awareness of office politics (Machiavellism). Note that some level of the dark traits can be useful in a leader. Few of us would want to be led by an indecisive, dithering, shrinking violet who does not listen to any office gossip at all (Dutton & McNab, 2014). Another possibility is to seek comments from an applicant's subordinates at previous jobs.

So there are difficulties in selecting appropriate leaders. Nevertheless, a university should be careful to select non-sociopathic leaders. The entitlement beliefs of sociopathic leadership practices breed on themselves. Seeing their position on unit displays or in the size of their car or room or salary makes sociopaths think that their circle should be even bigger (Manne, 2013). For example, researchers at intersections and crosswalks have found that drivers in more expensive, high-status cars give way less often than those in less expensive cars (Piff, 2013). For example, Mercedes drivers were three to four times more likely to break the law than drivers of lower-status cars. Indeed, there is experimental evidence from more than 30 studies that rich people are more likely to: take lollies meant for

children, cheat in a game of chance, lie during negotiations and endorse unethical behaviour like stealing at work (Brown, 2013). They attribute success to their own individual skills and talents, and less to the other things that contributed to that success. Individualism breeds further inequality. Narcissists believe their superiority entitles them to even more unequal rewards. But their belief is wrong for 'there are a lot of new data that show, if you're generous, and charitable, and altruistic, you will live longer, you will feel more fulfilled, you will feel more expressive of who you are as a person' (Brown, 2013, p. 1). Inequality breeds narcissism that breeds inequality. Thus there is a benefit in having senior roles in hierarchies for a set, limited number of years, for both the university and for the senior person.

Inequality breeds narcissism that breeds inequality. Thus there is a benefit in having senior roles in hierarchies for a set, limited number of years, for both the university and for the senior person.

There are implications for individuals as well as those for universities. How individuals can deal with sociopathic managers has been studied (Furnham, 2010; Payson, 2002; Stout, 2006), but academic freedom would limit the destructive forces that can be unleashed upon a person in a university who does not want to be a courtier of the leader. Possibly, a non-sociopathic individual should look towards a transfer to another university. And a non-sociopath who is thinking about becoming a leader of a unit should look at the unit's staff to check if they are the type of people they want to be 'one of'. Derailment is caused by bad followers as well as by bad leaders. It bears noting that sociopathic behaviours of non-leaders can also be damaging. Finally, the implications for individual academics who are sociopathic need not be discussed in detail here because sociopathy is often more an ingrained personality disorder than a mental illness that can be easily cured. Perhaps they could concentrate the relatively solitary career route of research? But sociopaths are usually so self-confident that they do not think they need to change whatever they do or to get help (Furnham, 2010, p. 257). So preventing their appointment is better than trying to cure them. In contrast to sociopathic leaders, other leaders can learn about themselves; they seek feedback and other means of self-improvement through coaching and personal development.

Considerations like these, of the implications of an understanding of sociopathy in universities, are becoming more important. Narcissism is becoming more common in our consumer capitalist society and it may even

be becoming an 'epidemic' (Manne, 2013, p. 25). And sociopathy may be more common among academics than one expects (Hare, 1999). So detecting it and guarding against its effects is hard but necessary.

Conclusion

In summary, this study addressed the problem: Could a leader of a university unit with strong levels of the dark triad traits derail their unit? This study argued that a sociopathic leader fosters less collaboration in the unit of a university and so the unit may be mediocre rather than excellent. The study first noted that sociopathic leaders can derail other types of organisations like businesses because these leaders place little value on most relationships. It then argued that there are managerialist forces operating in Australian universities that may enhance sociopathy, but the unusual characteristics of the parts of a university suggest that leaders with some sociopathic dark traits cannot derail them. That is, a sociopathic leader could degrade the collaborative nature of much academics' work with other staff, students and society enough to produce mediocrity in their part of a university, but not enough to derail it. In short, sociopathic leaders can probably create mediocrity but not much else.

In conclusion, Australian universities need to become more aware of the need to have 'we-oriented' leaders. The management thinker and writer, Peter Drucker, summed up this required position:

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I'... They don't think 'I'. They think 'we'; they think team. They understand their function is to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit (quoted in Manne, 2013, p. 191).

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