
Fifty Shades of Personality: Integrating Five-Factor Model Bright and Dark Sides of Personality at Work

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Guenole (2014) makes a strong case for considering the recent developments in the abnormal personality literature concerning the conceptualization of maladaptive personality traits. We specifically applaud his effort in bringing the development of the DSM-5 maladaptive trait model under the attention of applied researchers, as this is an issue that has until now remained under the radar of work and organizational psychologists. In light of the increased research attention for maladaptive, aberrant, and/or dysfunctional personality traits in the work context, his plea is certainly timely. Moreover, given the prevalence of personality-related problems in the population—in DSM-5 it is estimated that approximately 15% of U.S. adults qualify for at least one personality disorder (APA, 2013, p. 646), which implies that subclinical tendencies are even much more common—maladaptive traits should be of great interest to all HR professionals involved in employee assessment.

In this commentary, without compromising the importance of the new DSM-5 maladaptive trait model, we will take a closer look at some of his arguments to prefer the new maladaptive trait model above other, more established conceptualizations of maladaptive personality at work. A key issue in this regard is whether normal and abnormal trait models are best conceptualized independent from each other rather than under the umbrella of one overarching personality model. The historical and artificial distinction between research on normal and abnormal trait models leads us to reflect on how different normal (bright side) and abnormal (dark side) traits really are. This commentary is substantiated with the most recent evidence that comes from the personality literature, reporting significant overlap between the five-factor model (FFM) of personality and personality disorders (Widiger & Costa, 2013). In a second section, we evaluate whether the new maladaptive trait model is indeed ready to replace previous conceptualizations of maladaptive personality in the work context as argued in the focal article. Finally, we highlight some critical research questions that need to be addressed in order to substantiate the relevance of the new maladaptive trait model for applied researchers and, eventually, practitioners.

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How Many Personalities Do We Have?

The new DSM-5 maladaptive trait model is presented in Section 3 of DSM-5 as a model for further evaluation and research, in addition to categorically conceptualized personality disorders. As Guenole indicates, this maladaptive trait model is presented as a maladaptive equivalent of the Big Five. Those who are not well acquainted with the broad personality literature may now raise the question: How many personalities do we have? How do these maladaptive or abnormal traits differ from the normal or general traits that we already know relatively well?

At present, there are three studies that empirically examined the relationship of the new maladaptive trait model with the FFM of general personality (De Fruyt et al., 2013; Gore & Widiger, 2013; Thomas et al., 2012). De Fruyt et al. (2013) examined the relationships between the maladaptive personality inventory for DSM-5 (i.e., the PID-5; Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2012) and a comprehensive operationalization of the FFM (i.e., NEO-PI-3; De Fruyt & Hoekstra, 2013) in a Belgian undergraduate sample. A joint factor analysis of the NEO domains and their facets with the PID-5 traits showed that general and maladaptive traits are subsumed under an umbrella of five to six major dimensions that can be interpreted from the perspective of the FFM. In order to further test the generalizability of these findings across cultures and FFM measures, Thomas et al. (2012) tested the correspondence between the higher-order domains of the new maladaptive trait model and FFM trait models in American young adults, using a brief 30-item FFM rating form. The use of a brief rating scale is important because traits, both adaptive and maladaptive, are often rated in applied contexts where brief inventories are often preferred. The results of a conjoint exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated five higher-order factors that reflect the domains of the FFM. Finally, Gore and Widiger (2013) examined the associations between PID-5 maladaptive trait scores

and three measures of alternative FFMs of general personality. Their analyses provided further support for the idea that the structure of the DSM-5 traits corresponds to the structure of the FFM, with DSM-5 negative affectivity aligning with FFM Neuroticism, DSM-5 detachment with low FFM Extraversion, DSM-5 antagonism with low FFM Agreeableness, DSM-5 disinhibition with low FFM Conscientiousness, and DSM-5 psychoticism with FFM Openness.

This overlap between the structure of normal and abnormal personality has important implications. Specifically, this indicates that broad personality trait domains, defined within the FFM, capture salient aspects of both adaptive and maladaptive personality functioning that can be measured within the same conceptual space. In his focal article, Guenole indicates that previous calls for more research into maladaptive personality in the workplace, and the paper by De Fruyt and Salgado (2003) in particular, lacked in advocating an overarching framework to study maladaptive personality. However, already 10 years ago these authors stated that a “spectrum conceptualization of normal and abnormal traits suggests that personality psychopathology and the normal range of differences can be described on a common set of dimensions, with the FFM as a powerful candidate to account for adaptive and maladaptive variance” (p. 129). In light of the recent literature on the convergence between the FFM and the new maladaptive trait model, this call to consider the FFM as a unifying framework for understanding maladaptive personality at work can only be repeated. We further believe that this may lower the barriers for industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists to start considering the maladaptive trait model in their research, given its clear convergence with the general personality model that is already well-established in this domain.

The structural overlap between normal and abnormal personality models does not imply that we do not need a maladaptive trait model like the one presented in DSM-5

nor that there is no need for adequate operationalizations of maladaptive personality traits. Specifically, it can and it has been argued that general trait measures such as the NEO-PI-R do not include enough maladaptive personality content to adequately describe abnormal personality, even at a subclinical level. The question at hand is whether the personality inventory for DSM-5 is the right, let alone the only, tool to expand the FFM predictor space for work and organizational applications. Guenole indicates that items measuring the maladaptive trait model, such as “breaks agreements,” have high relevance to the workplace. However, other items, such as “seems to have trouble telling the difference between dreams and waking life” are probably much less related to workplace functioning. Clearly, this brings up the issue of instrument contextualization (see further on in this commentary).

Taken together, what we wanted to illustrate here is that this new maladaptive trait model shows strong convergence with the existing general personality model that applied personality researchers already know well: Different assessment instruments complement each other in assessing various parts of the broader FFM framework.

The End of Dimensionalized DSM-IV Research?

As Guenole indicates, much of the previous work on maladaptive personality traits in work contexts has used a dimensionalized DSM-IV conceptualization of abnormal personality. These studies either used contextualized measures that were derived from the DSM-IV disorder prototypes (e.g., The HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 2001) or, more recently, aberrant personality compounds based on a general FFM trait measure (Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, 2013). It needs to be stressed that this line of dimensionalized DSM-IV research has drastically augmented our knowledge on maladaptive and/or aberrant personality tendencies in the work context and still has a lot of potential. Although the dimensionalized DSM-IV

approach has its limitations, we believe that those discussed in the focal article are not as critical as they are portrayed.

Guenole first notes that dimensionalized DSM-IV traits are essentially compound traits that are underpinned by two or more personality traits and that measuring the compound trait does not allow us to reduce a profile to its constituent elements. This is, in most cases, true, although we do not think this is necessarily problematic. Dimensionalized DSM-IV trait measures are designed to assess maladaptive personality profiles (narcissistic or bold, borderline or excitable, antisocial or mischievous, etc.) that are characterized by a specific and recognizable pattern of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that is relatively well described in the literature. Moreover, as research on dimensionalized DSM-IV traits in the work context accumulates, the concrete manifestations of these maladaptive personality profiles, with attention for both negative and positive aspects, will be further delineated. Thus, although the underlying personality profile of these dimensionalized DSM-IV traits may consist of a broad array of traits, what we are primarily interested in is the resulting manifestation at work in terms of maladaptive/aberrant patterns of behavior, thinking, and feeling. This does not mean, however, that we should be completely blind for the variability between persons who score high on a certain DSM-IV compound. Therefore, the compound technique that was recently presented by Wille et al. (2013) allows the inspection of the individual's standing on each of the contributing traits, the NEO PI-R facets in this particular case, which are readily observable from the general personality profile.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the new DSM-5 maladaptive trait model will also be used to recapture the DSM-IV personality disorders. For example, Wright et al. (2013) recently investigated how narcissism, a frequently investigated maladaptive personality tendency in the I–O literature, can best be represented in terms of the DSM-5 maladaptive trait model. Results pointed to

strong associations with PID-5 antagonism scales across narcissism measures, consistent with the DSM-5's proposed representation of narcissistic personality disorder. However, for some measures, notable associations also emerged with PID-5 Negative Affectivity and Psychoticism scales, which further indicates that maladaptive trait tendencies, relevant for the work context, are compound traits, even within the framework of the new maladaptive DSM-5 trait model. Although it is true that all three aspects of the Dark Triad (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) will probably demonstrate the highest loadings on the Antagonism factor, it is clear that we will also need additional trait information to be able to further differentiate between these clearly different dark side tendencies.

In a similar vein, Guenole notes that research into narrow aspects of maladaptive personality, including measures of the Dark Triad, does not offer "the promise of a complete understanding of maladaptive personality at work" (p. 88). Our suggestion would be to continue studying these and other narrow maladaptive personality tendencies, using both normal and maladaptive trait models. The fact that the FFM can serve as an overarching framework can help to better understand the precise meaning of the different compound scales. If there is one thing that personality research in the applied domain has taught us, it is that narrow predictors are necessary to predict specific work behaviors (e.g., Tett, Steele, & Beauregard, 2003). In summary, the availability of a broad maladaptive trait model has the potential to enrich this intriguing line of research rather than *replace* the study of dimensionalized DSM-IV traits in the work domain. Below, we provide some concrete avenues for future research through which the new maladaptive trait model can find its way into the I–O literature on maladaptive or aberrant personality traits and resort true added value there.

Avenues for Future Research

At least six important directions for future research on the maladaptive trait model can

be identified to further illuminate the dark side of personality at work. First, it is essential to gain further insight into how exactly the maladaptive trait model relates to existing conceptualizations of dark side and aberrant personality tendencies at work. As indicated above, the personality literature has recently started investigating the associations between this maladaptive trait model and the general FFM model. Work and organizational psychologists could significantly broaden this line of investigation by adding work-related Dark Triad tendencies, dimensionalized DSM-IV traits, and/or FFM aberrant compound traits to the research scope.

Second, more inquiry is needed on how to best operationalize the maladaptive trait model in applied contexts. In order to stimulate research, the APA has made the PID-5 freely available on their website (<http://www.psychiatry.org/practice/dsm/dsm5/online-assessment-measures#Personality>) and also provides a 25-item short form that assesses only the domains at the five level. However, in connection with our call to consider the FFM as an overarching framework to integrate adaptive and maladaptive trait models, one could also consider departing from general FFM instruments and use Item Response Theory (IRT) methodology in order to extend such instruments with additional items that capture more maladaptive variance. In other words, drawing on the conceptual basis of the new maladaptive trait model, researchers could start to focus their attention on the development of new instruments that span the full range of adaptive and maladaptive personality functioning at work.

Third, building on the perspective that the DSM-5 traits are extreme and maladaptive variants of general FFM traits, tapping into unique variance of day-to-day functioning, it follows that the criterion domain also needs to be expanded. Guenole singles out counterproductive work behavior as an area of research where the maladaptive trait model could be particularly promising, but we should also look beyond that. In order to be maximally valuable for work and organizational psychologists, applications

of the maladaptive trait model should be deployed in settings where the focus is on identifying employee's weak spots and developmental needs, for instance in training and coaching contexts.

Fourth, this new line of research on the maladaptive trait model should keep track of and incorporate important insights from the existing personality literature applied in I–O psychology. For instance, there is now consensus that observer ratings of normal personality yield incremental validity above self-ratings (Connelly & Ones, 2010), and this could also be explored for maladaptive trait variants. Markon, Quilty, Bagby, and Krueger (2013) recently reported on the development, psychometric properties, and external validity of an informant-report form of the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (the PID-5-IRF). The PID-5-IRF replicated the factor structure of the self-report form and demonstrated relationships with other measures (including the PID-5 self-report form and a widely used Big Five measure) that are consistent with theory. In general, the self-informant scale correlations were similar in magnitude or slightly larger than what is typically observed in the personality literature (Connelly & Ones, 2010) and comparable with what is typically observed in the psychopathology literature (Achenbach, Krukowski, Dumenci, & Ivanova, 2005). To date, we have no knowledge on the relative importance of self-versus informant ratings of these maladaptive personality traits with regard to pertinent criteria, let alone with regard to organizationally relevant outcomes.

In a similar vein, I–O investigators interested in adopting the new maladaptive trait model in their research are recommended to consider issues concerning instrument contextualization. As indicated earlier, there is room for debate on whether all the items in the DSM-5 operationalization of the new maladaptive trait model are appropriate for the work context. Future research could experiment with contextualizing PID-5 items by (a) clearly indicating in the instructions and/or in the items that the presented behaviors, thoughts, and feelings

need to be rated in the context of work, or (b) by writing an alternative set of items that are specifically formulated in a work context and that are designed to tap into the proposed maladaptive variants of the FFM.

Finally, we cannot disregard the role of the situation in our research on the new maladaptive trait model in organizational settings. First, more knowledge is needed on the specific situational characteristics that may trigger maladaptive or aberrant tendencies, for instance using trait-activation theory as a guiding framework. As a first step in that direction, De Fruyt, Wille, and Furnham (in press) recently examined the distribution of aberrant personality tendencies across different employment sectors. Second, the situation always needs to be taken into account when assessing the value of a given behavior associated with certain personality tendencies. To give one example, eccentricity and unusual beliefs, characteristic for psychoticism in the new maladaptive trait model, will be valued differently in bureaucratic, conventional work environments compared to highly unconventional, artistic occupations. Finally, given the increasing evidence that specific occupational characteristics are related to personality trait change (e.g., Wille, Beyers, & De Fruyt, 2012), future research might investigate whether toxic work conditions might also contribute to the development of maladaptive personality tendencies.

Conclusion

In summary, we agree with Guenole that the DSM-5 maladaptive trait model has considerable potential to enrich our thinking about personality at work. Recall however, that also for clinical assessment and decision making, it is still a model considered to require additional research and evaluation. This current status should not be seen as a handicap but rather be considered as an opportunity for clinical and I–O psychologists to join forces in exploring the model's potential to understand how people feel and function in their daily jobs, a key life domain in both disciplines.

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