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Can Maladaptive Personality be Assessed in Organizations?

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Can Maladaptive Personality be Assessed in Organizations?

Guenole's (2013) premise that industrial psychology needs to start 'talking to' clinical psychology is one that is overdue and it is still being argued, after more than 60 years, that the former has much to gain from innovations in the latter (e.g., Catano, 2011; Shellow, 1950; Welder, 1947). It is apparent that research frameworks for personality could stand to benefit from progressions in the DSM-5.

Nonetheless, there are also a number of practical issues that might limit the applicability of the DSM-5 maladaptive personality framework in organizational settings.

I present three arguments in relation to Guenole's (2013) propositions. Firstly, I agree with his argument that maladaptive profiles are relevant to organizational settings and that the 'dark side' and 'dark triad' conceptually align with aspects of the broader DSM-5 model. However, and secondly, I argue that since maladaptive trait profiles are rarely used as a basis for decision-making around diagnoses in clinical contexts that they might not be best placed as a basis for decision-making in organizational contexts either. Thirdly, given the potential challenges, I argue that before adopting the DSM-5 model, we need to investigate whether it adds substantive information that is empirically different to that offered by the big five (or five-factor model, FFM).

Narrow Traits Subsumed into a Broad Framework for Maladaptive Personality

Research on the *dark triad* (psychoticism, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) and the *dark side* of personality has revealed links to counter-productivity in the workplace, job performance (O'Boyle Jr, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012), as well as with career derailment (Dalal & Nolan, 2009; Nelson & Hogan, 2009). As such, there is support in the literature for the relevance of subcomponents of maladaptive personality in organizational contexts. However, Guenole (2013) makes the argument that the current research enterprise focuses on narrow aspects of what is really a broader framework of

maladaptive personality according to the DSM-5 (consisting of the broad domains of negative affectivity, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism, see Gore & Widiger, in press). I agree with Guenole that a focus on narrow sub-components of personality is suboptimal when attempting to foster a comprehensive understanding of the drivers underlying maladaptive behavior. A great deal of confusion might be avoided if a common framework were used to incorporate such terms as the dark side, the dark triad, and various descriptions of workplace psychopathology. Even if narrow traits were used in research, reference to a broader framework would likely assist researchers and practitioners to understand how those traits worked within a broader system. With a wider appreciation of the overarching framework, more comprehensive research questions could be formulated around the relevance of maladaptive personality in the workplace.

The transition from research applications on specific attributes to an acknowledgement of the broader framework of maladaptive personality could be fairly seamless. The attributes described under the DSM-5 do not appear to be any more contentious than those described under approaches that have focused on specific traits. However, a move towards the DSM-5 signals a formal association between assessment in industrial psychology and the diagnosis of psychological disorders. It is this association that may act as a barrier to the adoption of the DSM-5 framework in organizational settings.

Application in Clinical versus Organizational Scenarios

The DSM-5 was developed for clinical scenarios and is, therefore, associated with the diagnosis of psychological disorders. This is not to say, however, that it is used exclusively for diagnosis. The instructions for the short form of the personality inventory for the DSM-5 state that such measures should be “used in research and evaluation as potentially useful tools to enhance clinical decision-making and not as a sole basis for making a clinical diagnosis” (Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2013, p. 1). According to these instructions, the results of the personality inventory should be

used to add further information to enhance the diagnosis but not as the sole determinant of the diagnosis. Wright (2011) takes this further and suggests that individuals are almost never diagnosed on the basis of a trait profile. Rather, the trait profile might be used to enhance information surrounding a diagnosis that has already been established. Thus, the order in clinical psychology is (a) the clinical diagnosis followed, in turn, by (b) the assessment, which is used to add further information to the established diagnosis.

Decisions in industrial psychology, however, do not involve clinical diagnoses and, rather, often focus on issues of employability. If maladaptive traits were used in employee selection, this would place the DSM-5 assessment in a potentially higher-impact position to how it would be applied in a clinical scenario. Thus, while it might be appropriate to use the DSM-5 questionnaire in research around “measuring maladaptive personality traits with implications for job performance” (Guenole, 2013, p. 6), taking a step beyond research and using it as a basis for substantive employment decisions would likely present non-trivial challenges. According to Wright (2011), the DSM-5 is not used as a firm basis for decision-making in clinical scenarios. There appears to be no valid reason for applying it as a basis for decisions in organizational scenarios either.

There are other context-specific challenges that practitioners and researchers might face when using the DSM-5 framework in organizational settings. Guenole (2013) raises the notion that DSM-5 maladaptive personality items bear relevance to the workplace and differ from those used in the diagnosis of psychological disorders. However, the threat of litigation, particularly in employee selection applications, might raise heightened sensitivity to item content (Barrett, 2008). Case examples relevant to this issue include *Karraker v. Rent-A-Center* (2005) where the Seventh Circuit Federal Court ruled that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) contained items that could reveal a mental disability and was therefore deemed to be an illegal pre-employment medical examination. Likewise, in *Soroka v. Dayton Hudson* (1991) the California Court of Appeals found that MMPI items

were not job-related and were in breach privacy. Two example items from the short form of the DSM-5 personality inventory (Krueger et al., 2013) include 'I have seen things that weren't really there' and 'I steer clear of romantic relationships'. Respectively, these items appear to invoke concerns regarding the diagnosis of mental disorders and privacy, which could translate into ethical and legal concerns. For practitioners, these issues might also extend to threatening client or key stakeholder relationships.

Thus, while the DSM-5 framework could be useful for fostering our understanding of maladaptive personality in the workplace, specifics relating to item content may require consideration and adjustment. One approach could be to reformulate the DSM-5 so that its content is better suited to organizational contexts. This approach would not be setting a precedent because other personality questionnaires have been developed with a view to application in organizations (e.g., the Occupational Personality Questionnaire, see Saville, Sik, Nyfield, Hackston, & MacIver, 1996). Here, the theoretical framework would be retained but specifics relating to item content would be adjusted for appropriateness. Another course of action could be to expand the scope of existing questionnaires relating to the dark side or dark triad such that they reflect the broader DSM-5 framework whilst taking concerns around privacy and job-relatedness into account during item-writing. Given that research has already found evidence for relationships between the dark side/dark triad traits and organizational outcomes (Dalal & Nolan, 2009; O'Boyle Jr et al., 2012), assimilating these concepts into a broader framework might present a logical progression. Given the potential challenges here, however, it would also need to be shown that the DSM-5 personality factors added unique explanatory variance over and above those already in regular use in organizational research and practice.

Are the DSM-5 Factors Empirically Different from the FFM Factors?

Guenole (2013) describes the DSM-5 personality trait model as the "maladaptive counterpart to the big five" (p. 2) but that the content of each model differs such that "big five based profiles will not

be the same as maladaptive profiles” (p. 11). This raises questions, however, about the types of profiles that might arise in clinical populations versus those that might arise in organizational populations. Is it possible that, in organizational populations, the FFM might provide adequate information without the raising the necessity to utilize the DSM-5 framework? The answer to this question would result from research that investigates (a) intercorrelations among DSM-5 and FFM traits as well as (b) variance explained in work outcomes by the DSM-5 over and above such variance explained by the FFM.

In clinical psychology, as Guenole (2013) alludes to, there is a move to incorporate DSM-5 factors into the FFM framework (Thomas et al., 2013). In studies of clinical populations, facet-level measures based on the FFM have shown correspondences with measures of psychological disorder (Reynolds & Clark, 2001). Also, clinician ratings of personality disorders based on DSM-5 criteria have been found to function similarly to those based on the FFM framework (Miller et al., 2010). Moreover, Thomas and colleagues compared a structure based on the DSM-5 with that of the FFM on a non-clinical sample and found higher-order convergences between the two frameworks. Given the correspondences between the FFM and the DSM-5, it seems that further research is necessary on whether the DSM-5 framework can add information that is different from that already available through the FFM in non-clinical populations. This is particularly so given the potential for concerns around privacy and job-relatedness.

Summary

Guenole (2013) suggests that research on the dark side and dark triad of personality can be subsumed into a broader framework of maladaptive personality reflected in the DSM-5. This approach would assist in terms of developing coherence in the research database on maladaptive personality in the workplace. Moreover, it would present a step towards fostering a more comprehensive understanding of how maladaptive personality functions in relation to organizational settings. However,

given concerns around privacy, job-relatedness, and possible litigation, adoption of measures relating to the DSM-5 framework would need to be audited and adjusted in accordance with requirements specific to the organizational context. Moreover, given the potential challenges, such DSM-5 measures would also need to be evaluated in terms of whether they added incremental validity over and above measures based on the FFM. Preliminary research has suggested a correspondence between the DSM-5 and the FFM, which requires further investigation in non-clinical populations.

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