Antisocial Personality, Leadership Selection, and Coworker Outcomes

Final report to Työsuojelurahasto

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Työsuojelurahasto on osallistunut hankkeen rahoittamiseen.

Tiivistelmä

Hanke tutkii, miten ennen työuran alkua mitatut epäsosiaaliset persoonallisuuspiirteet liittyvät johtajaksi valikoitumiseen ja työtovereiden työmarkkinatulemiin. Aineisto yhdistää Puolustusvoimien persoonallisuus- ja kognitiivisia testejä Tilastokeskuksen ja muiden rekisterien pitkittäistietoihin. Ura- ja johtajavalikoitumista analysoidaan joustavilla regressiomalleilla ja työtovereiden vaihtuvuutta yksilö-, työpaikka- ja vuosivakioihin perustuvalla asetelmalla. Tulosten mukaan korkeampi *psychopathic deviance* -pistemäärä liittyy keskimäärin heikompaan johtajaksi valikoitumiseen, mutta yhteys muuttuu selvästi epälineaariseksi, kun muut ominaisuudet huomioidaan. Samankaltainen epälineaarisuus havaitaan suurituloisuudessa. Korkeammat pistemäärät liittyvät lisäksi suurempaan työtovereiden vaihtuvuuteen. Tulokset osoittavat, ettei epäsosiaalisten piirteiden ja uramenestyksen välinen yhteys ole yksinkertainen ja että yksilön urakehitys voi eriytyä hänen työyhteisölleen aiheutuvista vaikutuksista. Tuloksia voidaan hyödyntää johtamisen, henkilöstöriskien ja työyhteisöjen rakenteiden kehittämisessä. Tässä vaiheessa työtoverien lopputulemia koskevat tulokset ovat tulkittavissa kuvaileviksi, eikä niistä voi vielä johtaa syy-seuraus -tulkintoja.

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1 Background, objectives, and novelty

Managers affect not only firm performance but also the careers and well-being of the people who work around them. A central question for personnel economics and working-life research is therefore whether characteristics that are compatible with individual career advancement may at the same time impose costs on coworkers.

This project examines one such characteristic: *psychopathic deviance*, measured in personality assessments administered by the Finnish Defence Forces before individuals have accumulated substantial labor-market experience. Throughout this report, the measure is treated as a continuous pre-labor-market personality measure, not as a clinical or psychiatric diagnosis.

The project was motivated by two gaps in the existing literature. First, personality is known to predict labor-market outcomes, and managers are known to differ substantially in their effects on workers, but personality is rarely observed before labor-market entry together with long-run outcomes for both the focal individual and the coworkers later exposed to that individual (Heckman et al., 2006; Borghans et al., 2008; Lazear et al., 2015). Second, evidence on destructive leadership has often relied on surveys, self-reports, laboratory settings, or selected firms, which limits the scope for population-level and causal analysis (Tepper, 2000; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Schyns and Schilling, 2013).

The funded project had three closely related aims:

- to construct a linked population-based research dataset combining pre-labor-market personality measures with long-run administrative labor-market records;
- to examine how psychopathic deviance is related to later career advancement, especially managerial attainment and high earnings; and
- to examine whether higher psychopathic deviance is associated with outcomes among coworkers, with particular emphasis on coworker turnover.

The main novelty is that leadership selection and coworker outcomes can be studied within the same linked population-based framework while the focal personality measure is observed before the career outcomes under study. This makes it possible to distinguish more clearly between the characteristics associated with reaching positions of influence and the outcomes observed among workers around those individuals.

2 Data

The project combines Finnish Defence Forces personality-test data with longitudinal administrative records from Statistics Finland and other Finnish registers. The military assessments provide psychopathic-deviance scores together with other psychopathology-related measures, scale variables used in interpreting the tests, cognitive measures, and additional personality characteristics. Because these assessments are administered before substantial labor-market experience, the key trait measure predates the career outcomes studied here. Psychopathic deviance is standardized within birth-year cohort.

The administrative data follow individuals over time and contain information on earnings, employment, unemployment, education, occupations, employers, workplaces, and managerial status. Employer and establishment identifiers make it possible to construct coworker networks and to observe whether workers remain at the same workplace from one year to the next. The resulting data therefore permit analysis of both the focal individual's long-run career and outcomes among workers who subsequently share a workplace with that individual.

The main personality-based sample consists of men because of the institutional setting in which

the military tests were administered. This is an important limitation for external validity across sex. At the same time, the data provide unusually broad population-based coverage of personality measured before labor-market entry and linked to long-run administrative outcomes.

3 Methods

3.1 Career outcomes

The analysis of individual career outcomes is descriptive. We estimate flexible relationships of the form

$$Y_i = \alpha + f(PD_i) + X_i'\gamma + \lambda_c + \varepsilon_i, \tag{1}$$

where Y_i denotes outcomes such as managerial attainment or high earnings, PD_i is standardized psychopathic deviance, X_i contains other military-test measures and family-background characteristics, and λ_c denotes birth-cohort fixed effects. Because the empirical relationship is not well summarized by a single linear coefficient, the analysis emphasizes flexible functional forms and graphical evidence.

Specifications are shown first with birth-cohort controls and then with additional controls for the military-test measures and family background. These comparisons are not interpreted as causal effects of personality. Their purpose is to document how the observed relationship changes when correlated cognitive, personality, psychopathology-related, and family-background characteristics are taken into account.

3.2 Coworker turnover

To study whether focal individuals are systematically associated with turnover among the people around them, we construct a person-specific coworker-turnover component from the worker-year panel. We estimate

$$Turnover_{it} = \alpha_i + \psi_{j(i,t)} + \tau_t + u_{it}, \tag{2}$$

where $Turnover_{it}$ is the probability that a coworker of focal individual i in year t is no longer employed at the same workplace in the following year, α_i is an individual fixed effect, $\psi_{j(i,t)}$ is a workplace fixed effect, and τ_t is a year fixed effect. The estimated $\widehat{\alpha}_i$ is then merged with the person-level personality data.

This approach removes persistent differences across workplaces and common year shocks when constructing the person-specific turnover component. The subsequent relationship between this component and psychopathic deviance nevertheless remains descriptive: workers and managers are not randomly assigned to workplaces, and persistent unobserved individual characteristics may remain correlated with the personality measure.

4 Implementation during the funded period

The most data-intensive part of the project was completed during the funded period. The personality measures were linked to long-run labor-market histories, managerial outcomes were constructed, employer and establishment identifiers were used to build coworker networks, and the baseline analyses of managerial attainment and high earnings were completed. In addition,

an annual coworker-turnover measure and person-specific turnover components were constructed and linked to the personality data.

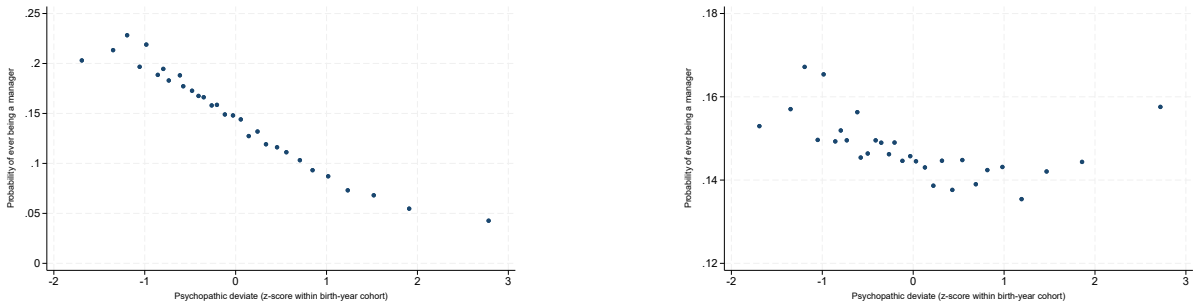
The project therefore moved from data construction to substantive empirical analysis during the grant period. The results reported below are the main findings available at the end of this phase. The managerial-transition design intended to identify causal coworker effects is described briefly in Section 8; it is not presented here as a completed result.

5 Results

5.1 Psychopathic deviance and managerial attainment

The raw data do not support the idea that higher psychopathic deviance generally facilitates entry into leadership. Men who have worked as managers by age 40 have, on average, lower psychopathic-deviance scores than men who have not. In specifications that control only for birth cohort, the probability of ever working as a manager by age 40 declines markedly as psychopathic deviance increases.

The pattern changes substantially when the broader set of military-test and family-background characteristics is taken into account. As Figure 1 shows, the pronounced negative gradient becomes much flatter and distinctly non-linear, with an upturn at the upper end of the psychopathic-deviance distribution. The finding is descriptive, but it is important substantively: the relationship between psychopathic deviance and leadership selection depends strongly on the other characteristics with which the trait is correlated.



(a) Birth-cohort controls only

(b) Additional test and family-background controls

Figure 1: **Psychopathic deviance and becoming a manager by age 40.** Person-level binscatters. Panel (a) controls for birth cohort only. Panel (b) additionally conditions on the principal components for the test-scale component, other psychopathology scores, personality tests and cognitive skills, and on family background. The vertical scales differ. The comparison is descriptive and is not given a causal interpretation.

One interpretation consistent with these patterns is selection and complementarity: high psychopathic deviance is disadvantageous on average, but some individuals with relatively high scores may still reach leadership when the trait is combined with other advantageous characteristics or with labor-market environments in which its disadvantages are attenuated. The present analysis establishes the empirical pattern but does not yet identify the exact combinations or mechanisms responsible for it.

5.2 Psychopathic deviance and high earnings

The non-linearity is not confined to formal managerial status. Using the same broad control structure, the probability of being in the top 10% of the within-birth-cohort earnings distribution at age 40 declines over most of the psychopathic-deviance distribution but turns upward at high scores (Figure 2).

This result reinforces the conclusion that the labor-market consequences of psychopathic deviance cannot be summarized by a simple monotonic relationship. It also suggests that the mechanisms behind the leadership result are likely to concern career advancement more broadly rather than managerial status alone.

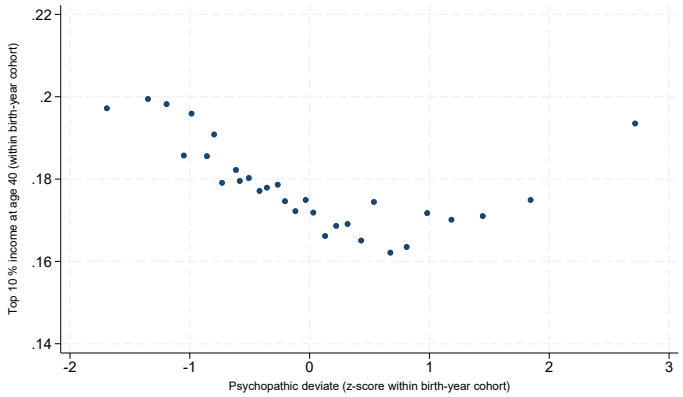


Figure 2: **Psychopathic deviance and high earnings.** Person-level binscatter for the probability of being in the top 10% of the within-birth-cohort earnings distribution at age 40, using the adjusted control set.

5.3 Psychopathic deviance and coworker turnover

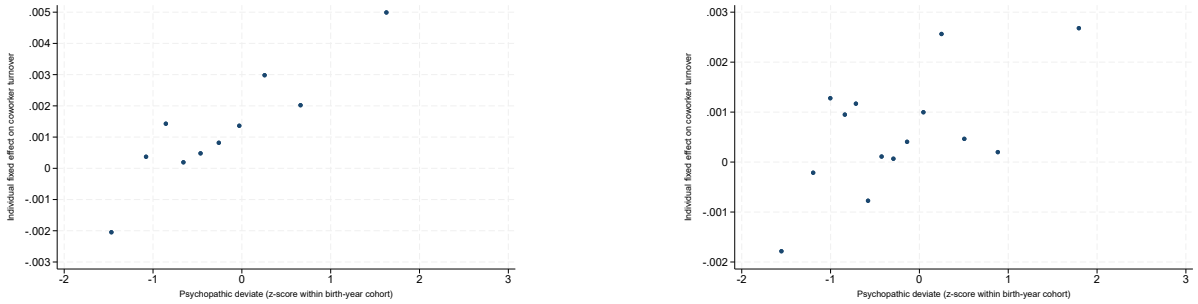
The most consequential finding for working-life outcomes concerns turnover among other workers in the same establishment. Figure 3 relates psychopathic deviance to the person-specific component of coworker turnover constructed from Equation 2.

With birth-cohort controls only, there is a pronounced positive relationship between psychopathic deviance and the person-specific coworker-turnover component. Conditioning on the broader set of individual characteristics attenuates the relationship and makes it less visually precise, but it does not eliminate the positive pattern. Individuals with higher psychopathic-deviance scores therefore tend to be associated with greater turnover among coworkers around them even after accounting for a broad set of correlated observed characteristics.

This association is not yet evidence that psychopathic deviance causally increases coworker turnover. Persistent unobserved characteristics may be correlated with psychopathic deviance, and individuals are not randomly assigned to managerial positions or workplaces. The result should therefore be interpreted as evidence of a robust descriptive relationship and as motivation for a more demanding causal design.

6 Conclusions and relevance for working life

The project has produced three main conclusions. First, higher psychopathic deviance is associated with weaker career advancement on average rather than with a generally higher probability of reaching leadership. Second, the relationship changes markedly once other characteristics are



(a) Birth-cohort controls only

(b) Additional test and family-background controls

Figure 3: **Psychopathic deviance and the individual fixed effect for coworker turnover.** The dependent variable is the individual fixed effect estimated beforehand in a worker-year regression with individual, workplace, and year fixed effects. Panel (a) controls for birth cohort only. Panel (b) additionally conditions on the principal components for the test-scale component, other psychopathology scores, personality tests and cognitive skills, and on family background.

taken into account and becomes non-linear, both for managerial attainment and high earnings. Third, higher psychopathic deviance is associated with greater turnover among coworkers in the same workplace.

Together, these findings reveal a potentially important distinction between private career outcomes and workplace externalities. A characteristic that is disadvantageous on average may nevertheless be compatible with substantial career advancement for a subset of individuals, while the presence of individuals with higher scores may be associated with adverse outcomes among coworkers. The results therefore caution against evaluating leadership potential or leadership quality using a single trait or an individual's own career success alone.

For Finnish working life, the main practical implication is that organizations should pay attention to outcomes experienced by the surrounding work community when evaluating leadership and personnel practices. Persistent coworker turnover may contain information about leadership-related workplace costs that is not captured by the focal individual's performance or career progression. The results also motivate attention to organizational structures that can buffer harmful interpersonal or managerial effects, such as clear accountability, functioning feedback channels, and systematic monitoring of personnel outcomes.

The findings do *not* provide a basis for screening or diagnosing employees on the basis of a single personality measure. The psychopathic-deviance score used here is a continuous historical test measure, the core associations reported in this final report are descriptive, and the main personality-based sample consists of men. These limitations are important when considering direct organizational applications.

7 Limitations

The current results have three main limitations. First, the analyses of leadership selection and high earnings are descriptive and do not identify a causal effect of personality on career outcomes. Second, the coworker-turnover relationship may reflect sorting or unobserved characteristics rather than a direct effect of the focal individual. Third, common-workplace links do not necessarily identify direct reporting relationships, and personality scores are not observed for every potential manager.

These limitations do not undermine the descriptive findings, but they define the appropriate scope of interpretation. The current evidence establishes systematic relationships that can be

studied further with designs that exploit changes in managerial exposure within workplaces.

8 Further work

The analyses described in this section are a continuation of the research program rather than completed results of the funding period reported here.

The first priority is to deepen the analysis of selection into positions of authority. We will examine the pathways through which individuals with relatively high psychopathic-deviance scores nevertheless reach managerial and other high-status positions. These intermediate outcomes will include educational choices, field of study, industry entry, firm size, and occupation choice. We will also examine interactions with cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics. These intermediate outcomes will help identify the selection mechanisms and complementarities that shape who ultimately reaches positions of authority.

The project will then extend the analysis of coworker outcomes from the descriptive relationships documented in this report to a more focused causal design. We will exploit managerial transitions that change incumbent workers' exposure to managers with different psychopathic-deviance scores and compare these transitions with manager changes involving little change in the relevant personality measure. Difference-in-differences and event-study methods will be used to distinguish the effect associated with managerial psychopathic deviance from both general manager-turnover effects and the effects of particular workplaces.

Finally, further work will examine the organizational conditions under which these effects are amplified or mitigated. We will study heterogeneity across industries, firm and workplace size, public and private employment, and other organizational characteristics that can be measured credibly in the administrative data. The aim is to identify the environments in which managers with higher psychopathic-deviance scores are most likely to generate adverse consequences for coworkers, as well as the institutional and organizational settings that may protect workers from such effects.

9 Publications and dissemination

The principal scientific output will be a journal article integrating the leadership-selection results, the analysis of high earnings, and the coworker-outcome analysis. At the time of this final report, the manuscript is in preparation with the working title

- *Antisocial Personality, Leadership Selection, and Coworker Outcomes*

The results of the research will be disseminated also through presentations at academic conferences and as a working paper before final publication.

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