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# *In Practice*

## Dealing with Dysfunction: Negotiating with Difficult Individuals

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*Recent research suggests that many times one or both parties in an interaction will struggle with irrationality or dysfunction. Understanding the types of dysfunctional personalities that negotiators might encounter, and how to deal with them, becomes an important measure of preparation for any professional negotiator. For this reason, this article reviews how better to identify, understand, and negotiate with counterparts who exhibit challenging, difficult, and dysfunctional behaviors.*

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## Introduction

Workplace negotiations often present daunting challenges. The negotiation process can test relationships and place reputations at risk. Moreover, in some situations, the difficulty and stress involved in routine negotiations become magnified. Approximately ten percent of working adults have personality styles or behavioral tendencies that can make interactions with them especially challenging. Identifying, understanding, and dealing with personality dysfunction in the negotiation process is therefore a critically important skill (Kessler et al. 2005; Eddy 2018). Today's negotiators need to be able to recognize and interact with people who have difficult and dysfunctional personality traits.

Unfortunately, many of those on the receiving end of such interactions are often left confused, frustrated, exhausted, and unsure of how best to handle these seriously challenging situations (Spain, Harms, and LeBreton 2014). Furthermore, since the most dysfunctional individuals do not always interact in clearly identifiable antisocial ways, it is important for negotiators to be able to distinguish between what is difficult and functional and what is difficult and dysfunctional (Markon, Krueger, and Watson 2005).

## The Call

Negotiation scholars and practitioners often work from the assumption that the counterpart in a negotiation will behave in a functional manner. However, empirical research suggests that at some point negotiators will likely be required to negotiate with someone who is dysfunctional or difficult in a particular way (Adler, Rosen, and Silverstein 1998; Eddy 2018). The first purpose of this article is therefore to help negotiators recognize and identify some of the most difficult personality styles they are likely to encounter in organizations today. The second purpose is to provide some suggestions for effective negotiation when specific forms of personality pathology are present.

In so doing, the authors hope to provide guidance to the many executives, managers, attorneys, and students who have sought our advice when negotiating with counterparts who display especially difficult personality tendencies. This article provides an initial, interdisciplinary negotiation primer in response to these inquiries. Our primary focus is on negotiation—not mediation, arbitration, or other conflict management strategies in which a third party, who is not directly involved in the dispute, is called in to help.<sup>1</sup>

In any negotiation, professional negotiators should seek to understand both the nature of the conflict to be managed and the personality characteristics of the other party before selecting a negotiation style and problem-solving strategy (Donohue 1981; Elfenbein 2015; Ingerson, DeTienne, and Liljenquist 2015). However, when interacting with

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difficult individuals, if negotiators are not careful they may find themselves falling victim to the dysfunctional behavioral traps laid down by the other party, thereby inadvertently reinforcing the problematic behavior (Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, and Smith 2002; Fisher 2012).

Fortunately, the scientific literature in mental health and clinical psychology offers well-refined diagnostic tools and potential solutions for confronting and coping with the behaviors of those around us (e.g., Widiger 2012; APA 2013; Hooley et al. 2017). Additionally, business research offers advice to managers and employees on how to work with difficult or irrational individuals and suggests that certain actions can mitigate the associated negative behaviors (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic 2016; Boddy 2017; Hickerson 2017; Webster and Smith 2019). We draw upon these diverse and overlapping literatures to show how difficult personality styles and challenging interpersonal behaviors can be managed to reduce the likelihood of extreme reactions counterproductive to an optimal negotiation process.

## **Dysfunctional Personality Styles**

Difficult individuals abound in the workplace. They tend to create a confusing environment for others who do not understand how best to interact with them (Hall and Benning 2006; Leahy 2011). Interpersonal problems range in dysfunctionality from odd idiosyncratic tendencies to full-blown personality disorders. Although it can be difficult and frustrating to interact with people along this continuum of dysfunction, it is important to always keep in mind that respect is paramount. Valuing others is critical to successful interactions no matter who the other person happens to be.

A number of especially dysfunctional personality styles can create pitfalls in any type of negotiation. The authors limit the scope of this article to the most challenging of these personality styles—those involving traits of narcissism, antisocial tendencies, Machiavellianism, borderline personality disorder, and passive-aggressive behavior. It is not our goal to provide a diagnostic primer or encourage those without clinical qualifications to attempt to diagnose others. Rather, our goal is to increase awareness of the most challenging personality styles that may be encountered in negotiations and provide information about how to deal with these in functional ways during the negotiation process to bring about fair and optimal outcomes for both parties.

The main personalities that are examined in this article are commonly grouped together because of their similarity across characteristics, such as manipulation, self-absorption, exploitative tendencies, and a general lack of empathy (Bursten 1972). However, each personality style possesses differences that make them uniquely challenging in negotiation. Additionally, more than one variant of a personality functioning may exist. This article defines each personality style and offers insights for negotiating with those who are characterized by them.

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Furthermore, we limit the generalizability of our conclusions to negotiations that are ongoing, rather than one-off or temporally limited interactions. Ideally, professionals with enough time and the right tools would be able to identify the problematic personality tendencies, and in some cases, disorders, of those around them. However, a true clinical diagnosis can be made only by appropriately trained professionals, and generally only after a number of formal interactions with an individual. Therefore, we warn against making any perfunctory diagnoses of a coworker or negotiating counterpart; those who do so run the risk of arriving at an incorrect conclusion (Hickerson 2017).

Our goal is to provide an overview of the latest tools to help others make more astute observations than would otherwise be possible without clear criteria. Ultimately, we hope that by becoming more aware of specific propensities of those who have difficult personalities, negotiators can work toward better negotiation outcomes and improved relational outcomes with those individuals. In the following sections we explore personality styles characterized by traits of narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, Machiavellianism, borderline personality disorder, and passive-aggressive behavior. After each description we offer suggestions for negotiating with those who have such tendencies.

## Narcissism

Narcissistic personality disorder, as classified by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), is characterized by “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts” (APA 2013: 669). Campbell et al. (2011) explain that narcissism is best understood from three vantage points: the self, interpersonal relationships, and self-regulatory strategies. A narcissistic *self* is characterized by “positivity, specialness and uniqueness, vanity, a sense of entitlement, and a desire for power and esteem” (Campbell et al. 2011: 269).

In interpersonal relationships, individuals with narcissistic traits tend to have low levels of empathy, reduced capacity for emotional intimacy, and numerous shallow relationships that “range from exciting and engaging to manipulative and exploitative” (Campbell et al. 2011: 269). In order to maintain their inflated self-views, they employ various self-regulatory strategies, with the goal of receiving attention and admiration from others. This desire manifests itself through excessive bragging and even stealing credit from others. When such individuals succeed across these three components, they report high self-esteem and positive life satisfaction (Sedikides et al. 2004). When unsuccessful,

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they can be aggressive, anxious, and depressed (Miller, Campbell, and Piconis 2007).

The negative characteristics associated with narcissism may cause one to wonder why narcissistic individuals are so often found in senior level management positions. However, it is important to note that these individuals often have desirable traits, such as charm, leadership, assertiveness, and impression management skills (Jonason, Slomski, and Partyka 2012). High levels of self-confidence and grandiosity may also factor into a narcissistic individual's ability to climb the corporate ladder (Tracy et al. 2009). Many notable CEOs fit the narcissistic profile, among them former chairman and CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch (Gladwell 2002). Welch has been praised for his passion, vision, and innovation but condemned for his lack of empathy (Welch 2001). Other commonly cited examples of people with traits of narcissism include Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and Walt Disney (Thurm and Woo 2011; Chamorro-Premuzic 2016).

Another potential reason for narcissistic individuals' uncanny ability to climb the corporate ladder may lie in the fact that narcissistic personality disorder is often more difficult to identify than other personality disorders. A study done by Wright and Furnham (2015) determined that people who have subclinical narcissism are difficult to detect. Two hundred participants were asked to read five vignettes of people with different disorders (one with depression, one with schizophrenia, and three with narcissism). The participants were then asked, "What if anything would you say is (the character's) main problem?" Out of the participants, 89% correctly identified the depression vignette and 48% correctly identified the schizophrenia vignette. Notably, however, only 17%, 10%, and 6% of participants correctly identified narcissism in the three narcissism vignettes. Therefore, we encourage negotiators to pay attention to specific traits and behaviors discussed here and elsewhere to identify counterparts with narcissistic tendencies.

Although making a clinical diagnosis of narcissism requires specific assessment and training, some behavioral features are most readily observable. The most obvious behavioral indicators of narcissism are bragging (Carlson 2013) and taking undue credit for achievements (Morf, Horvath, and Torchetti 2011) whether real or fictitious. Whereas a decreased capacity for empathy might be a characteristic that is more difficult to spot, a marked lack of humility is an apparent and reliable preliminary identifier for narcissism. As discussed previously, a negotiator needs time to observe these behaviors; the behaviors are unlikely to be readily apparent in a transactional, one-time negotiation. In the absence of a known pattern we caution against making a premature

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conclusion since it could lead to choosing the wrong strategy for the negotiation.

### ***Narcissism and Negotiations***

Manfred Kets de Vries advised that the first rule when dealing with a narcissistic individual is to “avoid anything that might upset their delicate sense of self” (Kets de Vries 2014: 104). In order to engage in successful negotiations with someone with clear narcissistic tendencies, two aspects of narcissism should be considered: transference and competitiveness. As regards transference, people with narcissistic traits are prone to pleasing authority figures and seeking out the company of high-status individuals (Horton and Sedikides 2009). Thus, negotiators may be able to establish a more advantageous working relationship if they are able to present themselves as high-status individuals. With respect to competitiveness, successful negotiators can use a narcissistic individual’s ambitions to motivate him or her toward a desired goal. The negotiator should establish a goal that is challenging enough to fuel this competitiveness. For example, a negotiator might offer: “If we can ship the pallet to you on Monday, I can give you the lowest price of any of our buyers.”

Other research suggests that developing trust is a key factor in influencing negotiation with narcissistic individuals (Kong 2015) and that building trust can be a low-cost tool in conducting both business matters and negotiations (Currall and Judge 1995; Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone 1998). Unfortunately for the negotiator, individuals with narcissistic tendencies usually do not trust those with whom they are negotiating (Kong 2015). However, the level of mistrust is influenced by the individual’s perception of the negotiator’s *competence* and *benevolence* (Kong 2015). The greater the negotiator’s competence and benevolence—as perceived by the individual with narcissism—the more likely it is that the individual will trust the negotiator. Therefore, negotiators should seek to establish their professional competence early on in the negotiation process and should exhibit a genuine feeling of concern for the counterparty’s welfare. Such concern could be communicated through general inquiries about the counterparty’s health, family, or business aspirations and goals. But more importantly, knowledge of the counterparty’s business objectives provides the negotiator with the opportunity to frame proposals as beneficial to the counterparty’s goals. For example, a negotiator might offer, “Let me see what I can do for you.” Together, these tactics combine to promote a relationship of trust between the negotiator and a person with narcissistic tendencies.

Narcissism is one of three characteristics in what is called the “dark triad” (Jonason and Webster 2010; Jones and Paulhus 2010). The dark

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triad comprises three traits that are sometimes seen together in the same individual: narcissism, psychopathy/antisocial personality disorder, and Machiavellianism (Vize et al. 2018). These traits often result in socially aversive behaviors and are often predictive of negative workplace outcomes (Webster and Smith 2019). The next two sections will examine antisocial personality disorder and Machiavellianism.

## **Antisocial Personality Disorder**

Words such as sociopath and psychopath typically bring to mind images of famous serial killers. However, although criminality is common, only a minority of all individuals who are diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) exhibit such truly heinous behaviors. Moreover, many individuals with antisocial personality disorder find ways to function as good citizens. Indeed, they are often found in the business arena where they can make for extremely potent and cunning negotiators (Pooh and Slade 2007). The DSM-5 (APA 2013) offers several diagnostic criteria for identifying an individual with ASPD, the most prevalent distinguishing characteristic being a blatant disregard for and violation of others' rights, which is manifested in one or more of the following ways (APA 2013):

1. Failure to obey laws and norms (for example, engaging in behavior that would warrant criminal arrest)
2. Lying, deception, and/or manipulation (for profit or self-amusement)
3. Impulsive behavior
4. Irritability and aggression (for example, frequently assaulting or fighting with others)
5. Blatant disregard for safety (of self and others)
6. Pattern of irresponsibility
7. Lack of remorse for actions

Although ASPD, sociopathy, and psychopathy are often used interchangeably, there are important differences. The diagnostic criteria for ASPD were intended to capture the constructs of psychopathy and sociopathy (Hare, Neuman, and Widiger 2012). However, in an effort to increase diagnostic reliability, heavy reliance was placed on behavior, as opposed to features such as glib charm or lack of empathy that could require more inference on the part of the assessor. As a result, the DSM criteria for ASPD have more of an explicit behavioral focus and often include criminal behavior (Edens et al. 2006; Howard et al. 2008). Psychopathy is a narrower construct and is much more focused on personality structure. Criminality is not an essential component. Although not formally listed in the DSM, psychopathy remains a major focus of

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interest for researchers; it generally refers to individuals who exhibit extreme forms of deviance (for example, remorseless killers). The term sociopathy is closely related conceptually, but is now generally used to describe the condition of someone who is less dangerous, such as a “con-artist” or a “scammer.” In all cases, however, antisocial or socially disruptive behavior is a fundamental feature. Johnson (2019) notes that sociopathy occurs in about 4% of the general population. Dinwiddie notes that the prevalence of ASPD is about three times greater than that of psychopathy, “with psychopathy being nested within the larger group and distinguished by greater severity and pervasiveness of antisocial behaviors” (Dinwiddie 2015: 174).

According to Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist<sup>2</sup> (Hare 1999, 2003; Olver 2013), psychopathic individuals possess specific traits in each of four dimensions: interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial. When it comes to interpersonal factors, individuals with high levels of psychopathy tend to be superficially charming. They like to brag, have high self-esteem, are pathological liars, and are cunning and manipulative (Hare 2003). Affectively, they tend to display a lack of remorse and guilt, fail to accept responsibility, show a lack of empathy, and are emotionally shallow and callous (Hare 2003). In the lifestyle dimension, individuals with psychopathy are likely to feel bored, need stimulation, live a parasitic lifestyle, lack long-term goals, and be impulsive and irresponsible (Hare 2003). People who score high on the lifestyle dimension of psychopathy may be comfortable living off or otherwise exploiting other people. Finally, the antisocial dimension of psychopathy features poor behavioral controls, early behavioral problems including juvenile delinquency, and a criminal history (Hare 1999). As Clive Boddy (2006) notes, psychopathic individuals often have a streak of cruelty to them, viewing people as pawns to be played with and not as human beings.

In negotiations, as well as in other aspects of their lives, psychopathic individuals are ruthless and extremely competitive. Adults with high levels of psychopathy tend to like money, power, fame, and sex. However, in organizational life, this list grows to include access to information, communication, influence, and authority (Babiak and Hare 2006). Such people see emotion as a weakness and are unable to grasp its importance to others (Patrick, Cuthbert, and Lang 1994). Making matters more difficult for the negotiator, psychopathic individuals may not display antisocial behaviors or deviance, but the “social” behaviors they display may be a ruse to accomplish a more sinister end goal (Fagan and Lira 1980; Babiak 2007). Unfortunately for those who interact with such individuals, “having a psychopath in your life can be an emotionally draining, psychologically debilitating, and sometimes physically harmful experience” (Babiak and Hare 2006: 269).



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### ***Antisocial Personality Disorder and Negotiations***

Optimal negotiation outcomes are achieved when both parties value their relationship and cooperate to find the solution that is most satisfactory to both of them (Weingart, Bennett, and Brett 1993). Obtaining optimal negotiation outcomes is made more difficult when antisocial individuals are involved, as they hinder success by embracing the selfish manipulation of others, callousness, competitiveness, and impulsive behavior (Brinke et al. 2015). They are not likely to listen to what the negotiator is saying and they may try to force their opinions onto the negotiator. Many antisocial individuals would rather walk away from a mutually beneficial deal than lose face and agree to another's offer.

Moreover, people with antisocial personalities fear teams and unity. Team cohesion and agreement cause such individuals anxiety as they usually seek to isolate their prey (Babiak and O'Toole 2012). When one's negotiation counterpart is an antisocial individual, the negotiator may find greater success by negotiating with others in a team, rather than individually. At the very least this approach may mitigate the emotional burden and stress of dealing with an individual with antisocial traits. It may also provide corroboration of what was said during the negotiation, which may be helpful if the antisocial individual lies about the content of the negotiation and its outcome.

Another specific recommendation is to learn all you can about yourself (Baker 2004). Whether this is through personality assessments or consulting with your peers, self-knowledge provides an advantage. The more you know about your personality and behavior the more you can avoid having your strengths and weaknesses manipulated or exploited by people with ASPD. For instance, individuals scoring high on psychopathic traits are especially skilled at judging vulnerability in potential victims. One horrifying example is Ted Bundy who allegedly stated that "he could tell a victim by the way she walked down the street, the tilt of her head, the manner in which she carried herself..." (Holmes and Holmes 2009: 221). Subsequent studies have confirmed that psychopathic individuals are significantly better than the general population at judging victim vulnerability by the way someone walks (Wheeler, Book, and Costello 2009). Thus, awareness of one's body language and gait is important to avoid sending nonverbal cues indicating a negotiator's vulnerability (Book, Costello, and Camilleri 2013). Other traits that are exploitable by a person with ASPD include a high level of empathy, a lack of assertiveness, low life satisfaction, submissiveness, poor self-confidence, and a history of victimization. When negotiators know and address their own weaknesses, the antisocial individual loses a potential advantage (Brown 1990).

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It is important to understand your utility to an individual with ASPD. Often as a negotiator you will need to downplay your assets, whether tangible or intangible. By being perceived as less powerful you will be less threatening to an individual with ASPD. This diminished threat perception may encourage the antisocial individual to feel more comfortable and share more information during the negotiation, thereby increasing the likelihood of an optimal outcome. It is vital to be a good performer and let the counterpart see and hear only what you feel is necessary to expose, always maintaining control and keeping negotiations on your terms.

When negotiating with a person with antisocial features, make sure everything is written down, especially agreed-upon terms and conditions. As noted earlier, it can also be valuable to have another person present during the negotiations to verify what was said. Verbal exchanges can be manipulated and mischaracterized but with meticulous documentation, a negotiator can protect oneself against such abuse. Be aware of the possibility that an antisocial person may also record the negotiation without your knowledge or permission.

Avoid cornering an antisocial individual, whether physically, rhetorically, or intellectually, as this may be to your detriment. Again, it is important that the negotiator avoid behavior perceived as threatening by an antisocial individual, because this may encourage the person to resist a mutually beneficial outcome in order to appease his or her exceedingly competitive tendencies.

Keep meetings on your terms where possible. Negotiating with antisocial individuals requires tremendous preparation and caution. Seek first to understand your goal for the negotiation and make sure your objectives are directly addressed during the negotiation. With proper planning, it is possible to walk away from the negotiation with a successful outcome, which should include a binding, mutually beneficial agreement to which all parties are committed. It is also important to preserve a good working relationship with an antisocial individual to reduce the risk that the person will retaliate or renege on the agreement out of spite.

## **Machiavellianism**

Rounding out the dark triad is Machiavellianism. This is best characterized as a manipulative personality epitomized by the belief that the ends justify the means, regardless of human suffering (Paulhus and Williams 2002; Al Aïn et al. 2013). The construct originates from Richard Christie and Florence Geis' (1970) selection of statements from Machiavelli's writings redesigned as a measure of manipulativeness. Respondents who demonstrated agreement with these statements demonstrated greater

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coldness and manipulation in various laboratory and real-world settings (Christie and Geis 2013).

Society views individuals with Machiavellianism as highly distasteful. However, Machiavellian individuals do not view themselves as selfish or entitled and they are excellent at rationalizing their behavior and presenting their best side (Jakobwitz and Egan 2006; Sherry et al. 2006). Although it is not a disorder in any formal clinical sense, the Machiavellian personality is a close analogue to ASPD. However, whereas an antisocial individual may have difficulty in discerning others' emotions, a Machiavellian individual is better at understanding and manipulating the emotions of others (Langdon and Mackenzie 2012). Men tend to have more Machiavellian tendencies than women (Christoffersen and Stamp 1995).

Machiavellianism can be classified into two categories based on the strategies used by the individual Machiavellian. According to Christie's MACH test (Christie and Geis 1970), low Machs are emotionally driven and impulsive, whereas high Machs think strategically, are cold, and lack empathy (Christie and Geis 2013). Much like the antisocial individual, those with a Machiavellian personality see little that is good in the world; they assume that people are purely self-interested. Machiavellianism is also similar to narcissism in that both involve a "propensity for interpersonal manipulation" (McHoskey 1995: 755). A factor analysis revealed four additional characteristics of Machiavellianism: "flattery, rejection of honesty, rejection of the belief that people are moral, and acceptance of the belief that people are vicious and untrustworthy" (Hunter, Gerbing, and Boster 1982: 1293).

Perhaps what Machiavellian individuals are best known for, however, is their use of deception and their ability to blend in with a crowd (Geis and Moon 1981). For example, in a study of subjects who were implicated in a theft and then accused by the victim, high Machs' false denials were less often tagged as lies than low Machs' denials (Geis and Moon 1981).

### ***Machiavellianism and Negotiations***

When negotiating with someone with a Machiavellian personality, it is important to use all of the tactics mentioned previously in our discussion of ASPD. However, it is also essential that one engage in critical thinking. Like masterful chess players, Machiavellian individuals think several steps ahead and evaluate the outcomes of various alternative actions.

Someone who is low on Machiavellian tendencies is likely to interact cooperatively with others (Christie and Geis 2013). Someone who is higher on the Mach scale may be more skilled at lying and persuasion

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and may be less easily persuaded by others. In repeated games (and presumably also in negotiations), high Machs often reciprocate in an effort to manipulate the other side to cooperate. However, in one-shot games, high Machs are more likely to defect (Christie and Geis 2013). Therefore, negotiators should present their side in a manner that appeals to Machiavellian counterparties and assures them that the negotiators are looking out for both parties' best interests. It is also important for negotiators to be well prepared and able to fill any holes in their logic or reasoning, as a Machiavellian individual is likely to discover any inconsistencies and leverage them against the negotiator (Leary, Knight, and Barnes 1986).

Another useful tactic is called sandbagging. "Sandbagging involves displaying oneself as an unworthy foe for the purpose of undermining or sandbagging an opponent's effort or inducing an opponent to let down his or her guard. The goal of the sandbagger is to lull an opponent into a false sense of security that victory is inevitable or complete" (Shepperd and Socherman 1997: 1,448). This tactic is useful when the negotiator wishes to reduce the Machiavellian's performance pressure for an impending task (Gibson and Sachau 2000). For example, a negotiator might sandbag by not calling attention to her negotiation expertise in an effort to discourage competitive behavior in her Machiavellian counterpart.

## **Borderline Personality Disorder**

Borderline personality disorder is characterized by relatively stable impairments in self-image and interpersonal functioning as well as pathological personality traits, including negative affectivity, disinhibition, and antagonism (APA 2013). Clinical signs of borderline personality disorder can include self-injury, difficulty in regulating emotions, impulsive aggression, and suicidal tendencies (Leichsenring et al. 2011). Borderline personality disorder affects about 1–2% of the general population (Lenzenweger et al. 2007).<sup>3</sup>

The DSM-5 (APA 2013) explains impairments in self-functioning in terms of identity and self-direction. For example, someone with borderline personality disorder may have a poorly developed or unstable self-image, which is also often associated with excessive self-criticism. The person may have persistent feelings of emptiness, and even experience dissociative states when under stress. Deficiencies in self-direction, such as unstable values, goals, or career plans, are also characteristic of borderline pathology (APA 2013).

People with borderline personality often have conflicted close relationships that can be both intense and unstable and are characterized by neediness and mistrust. These individuals also tend to switch rapidly

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between idealizing and devaluing other people. An individual with borderline personality may admire someone in the morning only to have contempt for that same person later in the day. Another feature is a profound fear of abandonment. This can be either real or imagined (APA 2013). Angry outbursts and temper tantrums are also common.

Family members of those with borderline personality disorder often talk about “walking on eggshells” in their efforts to avoid triggering an emotional storm (Hooley, Cole, and Gironde 2012: 411). Although such a feeling is highly impressionistic and unreliable as a diagnostic tool, it may provide an informal way of identifying the possible presence of borderline traits. If a person generates this kind of feeling in those with whom they interact, and if other features noted above are also present, negotiators may be wise to consider tailoring their approach in some of the ways described below.

### ***Borderline Personality Disorder and Negotiations***

There is frustratingly little research examining negotiations in the context of borderline personality disorder. An article in the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* examining crisis situations states that negotiating with individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder requires the negotiator to have a clear structure of communication and to keep the individual from feeling overwhelmed or confused (Borum and Strentz 1992). Borum and Strentz (1992) encourage negotiators to break down and explain each phase of the planned interaction, clearly outline consequences, and keep the person and the environment as calm as possible.

Psychologists have identified trust as especially important for establishing a therapeutic alliance with individuals who have borderline personality disorder (Langley and Klopper 2005). If trust seems to be lacking, the individual with features of borderline personality disorder may abruptly discontinue the relationship (Langley and Klopper 2005).<sup>4</sup> Developing trust takes time, and the integrity of the negotiator as well as the negotiation relationship may be tested at varying intervals. This further highlights the generalizability of our proposals, namely that their applicability is primarily geared toward a mature, or ongoing, negotiation relationship rather than a brief one-time interaction.

In nonclinical settings, people with features of borderline personality (but who do not meet full diagnostic criteria for the disorder itself) have been shown to be extremely sensitive to any signs of rejection while at the same time having a high need to belong (Sato, Fonagy, and Luyten 2019). Therefore, when negotiating, care must be taken to reassure individuals with characteristics of borderline personality disorder that they are valued and that relationships with them are important

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and will be preserved. This is not to say that relationship boundaries should not be established in the relationship—such as the frequency of the parties' communications, the responsibilities of each party, and the duration and extent of the negotiated agreement. These matters should be discussed and clear expectations should be set prior to reaching a binding agreement between the parties.

Individuals with borderline personality disorder commonly find it difficult to establish intimate relationships, often due to a general mistrust of others and a deep-rooted fear of abandonment. The problem is exacerbated by the manifestation of others' negative cues (Masland and Hooley 2019). Therefore, the negotiator should seek to avoid negative cues, to develop trust at the beginning of the relationship, and to cultivate deeper trust as the relationship proceeds. G. C. Langley and Hester Klopper (2005) found that for clinicians to facilitate a sense of trust in others, they need to be perceived as available, caring, honest, and accessible. It is also important to keep in mind that people with features of borderline personality disorder are quick to detect anger in facial expressions even when those facial expressions are neutral (Veague and Hooley 2014). In addition, it can be effective to create a safe environment (both physically and emotionally) by maintaining a peaceful negotiation situation, listening carefully, staying calm, and trying to understand what the person with borderline personality disorder is attempting to communicate (Langley and Klopper 2005).

Negotiators need to be prepared for expressions of emotionality by people with borderline personality disorder. These may take the form of angry outbursts (Kellogg and Young 2006) and come as a surprise to an unprepared negotiator. To de-escalate a highly emotional situation, negotiators could express empathy, continue speaking in a normal tone of voice, avoid potentially threatening nonverbal communication (such as an expression of disdain), and use gentle persuasion (Raines and Choi 2016). In our experience, people with borderline personality disorder also respond positively when the negotiator takes responsibility for making a mistake in the communication process or apologizes for making an inadvertently upsetting remark.

Because of their high level of rejection sensitivity, those with borderline personality disorder tend to be very attentive to emotional cues from others (Wagner and Linehan 1999). In one study, women with borderline personality disorder were found to be very quick to accurately detect anger in male (but not female) faces (Veague and Hooley 2014). They were also more inclined than people without borderline personality disorder to see anger in male faces even when the facial expressions they were viewing were completely neutral. When accurate, these "readings" can take the negotiator aback. For example, the person

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with borderline personality disorder might say, “I can tell you are disappointed/angry/etc. with me,” when the negotiator herself is not yet aware of his or her feelings. Regardless of its accuracy, such a comment can derail the interaction in a significant way. If left unchecked, negotiators’ emotions may also exacerbate unwanted behaviors in the other party (Stone, Patton, and Heen 2010). Therefore, it is important that negotiators regulate and be aware of their emotions during the negotiation and take special care to avoid sending negative nonverbal cues (closed body posture, frowning expression, and severe vocal tone) as much as possible.

### **Passive-Aggressiveness**

Passive-aggressive behavior poses a unique challenge for the negotiator. Although removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) as a diagnosable personality disorder in 1994, simply deleting the diagnosis does not lead to the disappearance of its features. Passive-aggressive behavior remains common in business environments (Hughes and Brown 2018; D’Lisa 2019). A commonly accepted definition of passive-aggression would likely resemble behavior that on the surface appears to be innocent but is actually concealed hostility (Wetzler 1993; Wetzler and Morey 1999). In organizations, passive-aggressive behavior tends to be covertly aggressive (rather than overtly aggressive), and ranges from subtle incivility to complete sabotage (D’Lisa 2019). Other identifiers of passive-aggressiveness include procrastination (Milgram, Dangour, and Ravi 1992), deliberately working slowly or doing poor quality work (McIlduff and Coghlan 2000), and resentment upon hearing suggestions for improving productivity.

Unfortunately for the negotiator, passive-aggressive individuals can be difficult to identify as they are often skilled at concealing their true intentions (Fossati et al. 2000; Hopwood et al. 2009). However, the distinguishing mark of truly passive-aggressive individuals is their resistance and unwillingness to fulfill expectations (McIlduff and Coghlan 2000). This is often manifest by obstructionism in which passive-aggressive individuals attempt to frustrate or otherwise hinder progress by taking on more responsibility than they are able to manage successfully. As a result, unfinished business accumulates. Yet when their poor performance is commented upon, they in turn act as though they have been victimized—for example, stating “it’s your fault for piling so much work on me”—and blame others for making unreasonable demands of them (Wetzler and Morey 1999).

Another challenge in negotiating with someone who acts in a passive-aggressive manner is that such individuals often deliver mixed messages, communicating in ambiguous ways. This leaves the negotiator

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to wonder whether the passive-aggressive individual actually agreed to the outcome of a negotiation. Sighing and sulking take the place of genuine communication. All of this occurs because the passive-aggressive individual misconstrues relationships with authority figures as endless power struggles. Such power struggles can be real or imagined. However, because the passive-aggressive person lacks the confidence to deal directly with this power asymmetry, resistance is expressed indirectly; endless excuses are provided for a failure to act responsibly (Wetzler and Morey 1999; Wetzler and Jose 2012; Widiger 2012). Furthermore, persons with a passive-aggressive style are often critical or scornful of people in positions of authority and believe that they are doing a much better job than their supervisors think.

### ***Passive-Aggressive Tendencies and Negotiations***

Negotiating with a passive-aggressive individual can be very difficult (Johnson and Klee 2007). One of the best approaches is to address things directly and be clear and frank in your statements. Remain calm and assertive, and when passive-aggressive individuals speak, give them your full, undivided attention. Make them feel important by reducing anxiety and creating a feeling of comfort and safety. This can be achieved by acknowledging the things they are doing well and praising them for their accomplishments.

If they begin to withdraw into passive behaviors, refer to their specific statements to bring them back to the negotiation. This may require the negotiator to carefully document the negotiation. Notwithstanding their outward agreement with the outcome of a negotiation, passive-aggressive individuals may demonstrate passive-aggressive behaviors later on that indicate their true feelings about the agreement (Wetzler and Morey 1999). It is also a good idea to make clear the impact of their decisions on their team, or whomever they are representing.

Communicate with eye contact and open body language. Along with tone of voice, such nonverbal cues are considered “blind spots,” of which the listener has greater awareness than does the speaker (Stone, Patton, and Heen 2010: 254). Watch their body language and be sensitive to withdrawal behaviors such as looking down or poor eye contact. Try to connect their statements to a bigger picture and see if there is a positive direction in which you can take the negotiation. According to Edward McIluff and David Coghlan, the main goal when negotiating with a passive-aggressive individual should be a “genuine attempt to understand and appreciate the perspective of the other while not losing sight of [your] reasons for interacting with this person” (McIluff and Coghlan 2000: 726). Finally, if the passive-aggressive individual views the relationship as merely a power struggle, the negotiation is likely to be unsuccessful. Therefore, it may be in the best interest of the negotiator



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to relinquish some of his or her real or perceived power in order to enable the passive-aggressive individual to feel in control, thus negating the person's often misconstrued view of authority figures. The more the passive-aggressive person can be made to feel like a valued stakeholder in the negotiation, the greater the likelihood of a successful outcome.

## Conclusion

Much of the advice in the negotiation literature is based on the assumption that your counterparts act rationally. However, individuals with personality disorders often act in irrational ways. We encourage negotiators to work to more fully understand both the situation and their counterparts (Morris, Larrick, and Su 1999). In this article we have reviewed the most relevant traits and indicative behaviors for each of five personality types. We have provided suggestions for understanding and choosing effective strategies for negotiating with individuals who see the world in drastically different ways.

## NOTES

1. We follow the common distinction between negotiation and mediation, as outlined in Lewicki, Hiam, and Olander (2010) and Carnevale (1992).

2. A commonly accepted measure of psychopathy is Hare's (2003) 20-item Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R). Items are scored as 0 (*not present*), 1 (*possibly present*), or 2 (*definitely present*). Total scores range from 0 to 40, with a cutoff score of 30 or higher indicating the presence of psychopathy. Items include the following: (1) glibness/superficial charm, (2) grandiose sense of self-worth, (3) conning/manipulative, (4) lack of remorse or guilt, (5) shallow affect, (6) callous/lack of empathy, (7) parasitic lifestyle, (8) poor behavioral controls, (9) promiscuous sexual behavior, (10) early behavior problems, (11) lack of realistic long-term goals, (12) impulsivity, (13) irresponsibility, (14) failure to accept responsibility, (15) many short-term marital relationships, (16) juvenile delinquency, (17) revocation of conditional release, (18) criminal versatility.

3. Early research results suggested that the disorder was much more common in women. However, it is now recognized that this reported gender imbalance is most likely due to the increased tendency of women to seek treatment rather than a genuine difference in prevalence (Rickwood and Braithwaite 1994; Carlton and Deane 2000; Drapalski et al. 2009). Consistent with this, in community samples, the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder is equally prevalent in women and in men (Coid et al. 2009).

4. Most of the research on interacting with individuals with borderline personality disorder is found in the psychology literature rather than the business literature. We expect that the same suggestions for communication will be useful in business and negotiation settings, but caution that little empirical research has been done in this area.

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