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THE NATURE OF THE CORPORATION > The Complete Diagnosis

We can go through the characteristics that define this particular disorder one by one and see how they might apply to corporations.

For example the first one would be from the screening version, the short version of the PCLR, psychopathy checklist, would be superficial relations. The psychopath's relations with others are superficial, surface, very, very little depth, mostly style over substance. And the idea is to impress other individuals to somehow put them in a position where you can manipulate them and so forth.

And a corporation I would imagine would be not unlike that in many respects. They would have public relations firms. They would be spending half their time and a lot of their budget in trying to present a particular image to other people. And this image is a very superficial, you never really get to know the real corporation. You're going to see what they want you to see.

A psychopath is also a grandiose individual, has a very powerful sense of self, believes that he or she is the centre of the universe, better, smarter than everybody else. Corporations I suppose almost by their very nature would have to adopt this particular attitude. If they took the stance that they were in fact inferior to every other company they'd probably not going to get very far. So I imagine that they would spend an awful lot of time explaining to others and to themselves that we're number one, we're the best.

The psychopath is also very manipulative. Tends to manipulate, con and deceive other people, to try and mold them into something that they can use. Remember the psychopath is really a predator and as a predator you're trying to groom and put your prey in the right position for where you can make some use of the, of this particular object is the way they would see them.

Would a corporation be the same? To a very large extent I would imagine so because what you're trying to do is manipulate everything including public opinion, for one thing. And imagine in a sales meeting where you're trying to get everybody pumped up, you've got to have to, you know rah, rah. You've got to manipulate and get them into a position where they actually believe in something that they may not have believed in before.

A psychopath lacks empathy. And this simply means that it's very difficult or impossible for a psychopath to put himself inside the emotional skin of somebody else. They may understand at some sort of superficial level that this person is going through what could be construed as an emotion by other people but I don't understand what it is. This is a psychopath's position.

Would a company, or a corporation actually lack empathy? Well maybe by definition they would have to. If you're concerned about the fate of your competitors and also the general public you may not have profits that are so respectable. So I suppose a corporation could lack empathy in the sense that the psychopath does.

Lacks remorse is another characteristic that defines psychopathy. That is, having done something you don't feel badly about it. A corporation I would imagine would be much the same. Unless one is caught, now a psychopath who is caught for committing a crime the first thing he'll say is yeah I'm really sorry, I did it. I feel remorse. But only when caught and I imagine at most corporations it would be much the same. If some sort of regulatory body finds out what you're doing and if it's considered to be illegal, I would imagine that they would say well yes I am, we're really sorry. But otherwise you're not likely to do that.

Psychopath doesn't accept responsibility for his or her own behaviour. Usually diffusion of responsibility is the name of the game for the psychopath. Somebody else made me do it, it wasn't my fault, it was fate. And I'm not really responsible.

Corporations would do this almost routinely I would imagine. In fact, they would have public relations personnel whose only job is to make sure that this, this image is portrayed to the general public. As yes somebody else, it was fate, it was a political decision, or it wasn't our, the market suddenly crashed, and there was a war in some other place and this accounted for everything.

Psychopaths tend to be impulsive but in a fairly controlled sense. That is most psychopaths are not going to do things if there's an external control present. Psychopaths stand on the street corner is not going to commit a crime with the policeman standing right next to him. On the other hand if the policeman is not there, if the external control is not there, then it's possible that he or she will do whatever he feels like doing if he has a chance of getting away with it.

Are corporations impulsive? It's difficult to actually evaluate this but I would imagine so in some cases, particularly if the corporation is not well structured. If the rules and the, of behaviour and the hierarchal structure is not firmly in place then it would very possible for a corporation to be, to act impulsively. Of course if you do this then, then you run the risk of actually experiencing fairly serious losses.

Psychopaths don't have long term goals most of their, the things that they're striving for are short term. You could refer to it as a short term form of hedonism. And corporations I imagine are much the same way. In fact, one could argue that sacrificing short term profits for the long term potential of making profits would not be in the company's best interest. So almost by their very nature they would have to lack long term goals.

Now some corporations of course would have a long term strategy. But at the same time it would have the short term goals that are firmly in place. They've got to go to the next stockholders' meeting for example and show that there's a profit.

Poor behavioural controls, is another characteristic that defines a psychopath. These are individuals who are likely to lose their temper very easily, to strike out and do things that are fairly irrational in the short term. But they do it in a very controlled manner. They know what they're doing. It could be a reaction to frustration and so forth.

Corporations, this is very difficult for me to evaluate this, to translate it directly in to corporate field. I suppose it could be possible but I'd have to think about that for some, you know for another four or five years I think.

Psychopaths tend to be irresponsible. And that means that their behaviour doesn't take into account what's likely to happen to somebody else. They will put others at risk, their own behaviour puts other people at risk all the time. This could be in driving, it could be in their personal relations, or anything they do in their general life.

And corporations I imagine could be irresponsible in exactly the same way. That is in an attempt to satisfy the corporate goal, everybody else is put at risk. This could be other companies. As a matter of fact, I suppose one could argue that this is good in the business sense. I mean if your competitors fall by the wayside because you are acting irresponsibly with respect to them, that's good as long as you get some sort of goal out of that, some sort of benefit.

Psychopaths also tend to engage in behaviour that is anti-social, or at least asocial from a very early age, and this continues on throughout most of the lifespan. And by this I mean their behaviour is not necessarily criminal in the strict sense of the term. But in fact it's harmful to other people, other individuals. It may not take into account the fact that your behaviour is going to have negative consequences for somebody else.

Corporations could be much the same. And this ties in with irresponsibility to a certain extent. What they're doing with respect to the general public and to other companies would clearly be looked at, viewed as, or construed as asocial, or anti-social. We just don't really care.

... There are some corporations that clearly are operating at a level that are disastrous for the general public. Some of them for example would be the tobacco industry or some industries where the disposal of nuclear waste is unregulated. Or puts everybody's lives at risk. Now it would be pretty hard for us not to look at the corporate structure itself as not being psychopathic. They would have all the characteristics. And in fact I suppose one could argue that in many respects a corporation of that sort is of the prototypical psychopath, at the corporate level instead of the individual level.