

Do personality traits matter in executives' misconduct?: A systematic literature

Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the personality traits contributing to irresponsible management within companies, with a specific focus on those of key decision-makers such as CEOs and other top management team members. To do so, this study is grounded on two established theoretical frameworks: the Upper Echelon Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Additionally, this research adopts a rigorous approach to systematically gather, assess, and analyze existing knowledge with the dual aim of establishing a comprehensive research agenda. As a result, upon completion, this research will have significant implications for academics, professionals, investors, policymakers, and stakeholders alike.

Keywords: *irresponsible management, corporate misconduct, apical decision makers, systematic literature review, research agenda*

1. Introduction

In a context of increasing emphasis on firms' commitment to a positive and sustainable impact on society, incidents of irresponsible management – defined as “activities and actions that organizational members engage in to deceive or swindle investors or other key stakeholders, including acts that violate laws or regulations or that are legal but considered morally wrong,

such as earnings management, financial statement or other accounting fraud, regulatory violations, actions that result in class action lawsuits, and anti-competitive actions, potentially harming firm stakeholders, eliciting negative reactions from those stakeholders, and being perceived as reasonably avoidable” (Neville *et al.*, 2019; p. 2541) – generate always great perplexity. In the last decades, notable examples include Enron, Volkswagen, Boeing, Theranos, Wells Fargo, Lehman Brothers, WorldCom, France Telecom, Tyco International, Wirecard, Parmalat, FTX, Goldman Sachs and many others.

Comprehending why firms act irresponsibly poses a significant challenge. However, by examining the behavior of *apical decision-makers* (i.e., top managers, executives, and entrepreneurs), it is possible to gain valuable insights, as they hold the ultimate authority in resource allocation, shaping organizational culture, managing stakeholder relationships, setting strategic visions, handling risks, and addressing legal and ethical concerns. To do so, this article is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which posits that individuals’ intention to pursue a specific action is influenced by their behavioral, normative, and control beliefs, moderated by skills and environmental constraints. Thus, grounding in TPB is helpful to engage in a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions influencing apical decision-makers misconduct (i.e., psychological, behavioral, and socio-demographic factors), while also accounting for contextual elements such as culture, incentives, regulations, competition, board structure, and the role of other stakeholders.

Among the various dimensions under consideration, the psychological one presents the most challenging issues given its nature. Notably, within this complex realm, the enduring nature of personality traits makes them pivotal when dealing with the inclination towards misconduct. This holds because personality traits are “relatively stable, consistent, and enduring internal characteristics inferred from patterns of behaviors, attitudes, feelings, and habits in individuals [they prove] useful in summarizing, predicting, and explaining an

individual's conduct" (American Psychological Association, 2023a). However, understanding and evaluating the role of personality traits face substantial theoretical and practical constraints. For instance, scholars encounter difficulties in directly assessing the personality traits of top decision-makers (Van Scotter, 2020), leading them to overemphasize easily accessible traits such as narcissism (Borgholthaus *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, the lack of a clinical psychology background among these scholars (Van Scotter and Roglio, 2020) has resulted in the analysis of specific traits separately rather than as part of a complex biopsychosocial system (Garcia, 2020).

Despite these challenges, recent advancements in unobtrusive assessment techniques, such as videometric, paralinguistic, and text analyses (Petrenko *et al.*, 2016; Harrison *et al.*, 2019, Marrero *et al.*, 2022), offer promising solutions for scholars to address and overcome these limitations, thus reinvigorating this field of research. Yet, these research avenues are not exempted from challenges and critical flaws, consequently, this paper aims to address the following research questions paving the way for future scholars: *What is the role of personality traits as catalyst for apical decision-makers' irresponsible management?* and *What is the current state of knowledge in this field of research?*

To tackle these questions, this study is based upon a systematic literature review (SLR) of 36 articles published between 2002 and 2023 providing a fine-grained assessment of the current knowledge on this field of research. Furthermore, to enhance the quality of the search process, supplementary steps were taken. These involved forming a group of experts to refine the research design, employing a Delphi survey to validate the selected keywords and criteria for article inclusion, and incorporating a bibliometric approach to offer further insights that support the analysis.

Within the following sections, this study meticulously examines the theoretical underpinnings, elucidates the methodological approach, engages in a comprehensive discussion of the state-of-the-art literature, and formulates a research agenda.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior

Grounded in the realm of social psychology, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) – refined by Ajzen in 1991 as an extension of Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) –, postulates that individuals’ intention to perform a specific behavior can be traced back to three determinants: *i*) attitude, which refer to “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question”, *ii*) subjective norm, which pertains “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior”, and *iii*) perceived behavioral control, which reflects “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles” (p. 188).

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that various background factors (see Figure 1) play a crucial role in shaping intentions and behaviors by indirectly affecting people’s determinants of intention (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005; Ajzen, 2011). Thus, “with the aid of the TPB it becomes possible to examine why a given background factor influences, or fails to influence, behavior by tracing its effects via the more proximal antecedents of the behavior” (Ajzen, 2020; p. 318).

Please insert Figure 1 about here

Given its comprehensiveness and versatility, TPB has been applied to disentangle a wide range of topics also in management literature, including unethical or illegal decisions. For

instance, Carpenter and Reimers (2005) used it to examine the effects of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control on managers' decisions to violate accounting legal standards. Kulik *et al.* (2008) adopted this theory to disentangle the structural factors that influence individuals' ethical behavior. Cohen *et al.* (2010) also applied it, revealing the link between the psychological aspects of individual managers and the existence of opportunities to engage in fraud, both playing an important role in explaining fraud. More recently, Egor *et al.* (2022) used TPB to illustrate the relationship between CEOs, crony directors, and the backscratching unethical practice.

2.2 The role of personality considering the Theory of Planned Behavior

Among the background factors shaping individuals' determinants of intention there is also personality (Ajzen, 2011), which refers to the interconnected behavioral, cognitive, and emotional traits that form people's distinct adaptation to life (American Psychological Association, 2023b). This unique makeup is further elucidated by personality traits (i.e., the building blocks of personality) that are enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors shaping how people perceive and respond to various situations (American Psychological Association, 2023a).

Psychologists have developed a multitude of diverse methods to articulate and structure the spectrum of individuals' personality traits. These traits are often organized based on broad personality factors such as the Big Five or Dark Triad taxonomy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that people do not inherently possess or lack these traits; rather, they can exhibit high, low, or moderate levels of each trait when compared to others (e.g., the dark cube; Garcia, 2020). Consequently, various configurations of personality trait levels result in distinct cognitive, emotional, and social responses to stimuli.

In this sense, TPB may serve as a valuable framework for disentangling the relationship between personality traits and individuals' behavioral outcomes. For example, in an organizational setting, apical decision-makers high in conscientiousness may have a positive attitude toward following rules and regulations, influencing their intention to comply with them. Others high in extraversion may be more susceptible to normative influence, and their intentions and behavior may be more affected by the opinions and approval of others. While decision-makers high in neuroticism may have lower perceived control over their emotions, potentially affecting their ability to regulate their behavior in stressful situations. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the extant literature investigating the role of personality traits associated with unethical and irresponsible management by apical decision-makers may shed light on the dark side of top management behaviors and their impacts on corporate misconduct.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

In line with Tranfield *et al.*'s (2003), we employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to rigorously investigate existing knowledge. Furthermore, to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings, we implemented additional measures for both data collection and analysis. Specifically we: *i*) validated the research design through a panel of 13 experts, *ii*) conducted a Delphi survey involving 52 scholars to ensure the appropriateness of selected keywords for retrieving relevant articles, *iii*) meticulously screened articles, and *iv*) strictly adhered to the PRISMA 2020 Expanded Checklist (Page *et al.*, 2021) to guarantee transparency in reporting our systematic review process.

3.2 Panel of experts

To address the research questions effectively, we engaged an interdisciplinary panel of experts to refine and validate the research design, minimizing the risk of overlooking critical aspects. A systematic keyword search in Google Scholar identified leading scholars in corporate governance, business ethics, and personality traits. The list was further refined using citation counts from the Scopus database. Thirty scholars from each category were invited for an online interview on the research design. Interviews were conducted individually to ensure experts were fully briefed, had time for reflection, and allowed for the correct integration of suggested adjustments. Due to data saturation, we concluded the interviews after the eleventh expert.

3.3 Delphi study

To establish and validate a set of keywords for article collection and to define the inclusion criteria, we conducted a Delphi survey (Hasson *et al.*, 2000; Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004) involving 52 scholars who have published articles on corporate governance, business ethics, and personality traits in journals ranked either 4* or 4, as per the 2021 Academic Journal Guide by CABS. Participants assessed three distinct sets of keywords using a 5-item Likert-type scale, open-ended questions were included for additional suggestions. We received 48 responses, with 95% of experts rating the goodness of keywords with a score of 3 or higher. Then, upon reviewing the comments, we successfully generated a consolidated string of keywords (see Table 1) and inclusion criteria. Given the near-unanimous agreement, further Delphi rounds were deemed unnecessary.

Please insert Table 1 about here

3.4 Article collection

We searched for articles across various databases (i.e., Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, and APA) to minimize the chances of missing any potential contribution. The focus was narrowed

to articles published in English within the fields of “business”, “management”, and “accounting”. Subsequently, after merging the results and eliminating duplicates, a total of 4,495 original articles were retrieved as of January 1st, 2024.

Through a screening process, we excluded articles with titles and abstracts that did not align with the study’s objectives or those with inaccessible abstracts. This process resulted in 937 articles (21%). Upon an in-depth and meticulous review of the full text, only 31 articles (3%) met the predefined inclusion criteria. In this regard, it is worth noting that this rate of exclusion is mostly due to the following causes: *i*) articles that have not approached the three topics simultaneously (i.e., corporate governance, business ethics, and personality traits), *ii*) articles have not used apical decision makers as their population (i.e. most of the studies have either used MBA students, managers without disclosing their role within the organization, or employees), and *iii*) they were not peer-reviewed articles.

Furthermore, the references used in these 31 articles have been scrutinized by reviewing their titles to check for potential missing contributions, during this process 4 new articles were discovered, and an additional reference check done on these last articles has revealed an additional contribution fitting the inclusion criterion of this review. As a result, the final sample size amounted to 36 articles (see Figure 2).

Please insert Figure 2 about here

4. Results

4.1 Bibliometric and descriptive analyses

We followed the method by Caputo and Kargina (2022) to extract and merge the data regarding the 36 (34 articles and 2 reviews) contributions, enabling then an in-depth analysis using the Bibliometrix R package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). Specifically, several maps have been generated, revealing trends and key information about this stream of research.

For example, Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of articles in the dataset. Notably, the number of published works fluctuated between 2002 and 2016. However, since 2017, there has been a consistent upward trend, possibly due to the adoption of unobtrusive assessment techniques such as videometric analysis (Petrenko *et al.*, 2016). Figure 4 presents the dataset's historiographical analysis (Garfield, 2004), demonstrating how papers are interconnected chronologically, enabling the tracing of the field's origins. Similarly, Table 2 displays the ten most influential papers within the dataset in terms of citations received.

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Moreover, scholars' interests can be categorized into three clusters: those who focused on narcissism ($n = 22$; $\% = 61$), psychopathy ($n = 6$; $\% = 17$), and Machiavellianism ($n = 3$; $\% = 8$). It is noteworthy, however, that only the remaining five articles ($\% = 14$) addressed two or more personality traits simultaneously. This is significant, considering psychological literature emphasizes that individual behavior is not solely defined by a single personality trait but rather by a combination of various traits. This discrepancy highlights a crucial flaw in the management literature that needs to be addressed. Consequently, the rest of the article is structured as follows: first, we delve into each of the three clusters independently, and later, in the discussion section, we aim to fill this gap by presenting a more integrated and holistic examination of the literature.

4.2 Cluster analysis

4.2.1 Narcissism and corporate misconduct

The American Psychological Association Dictionary (2023c) defines narcissism as “excessive self-love or egocentrism”. Within academic discourse, various perspectives on narcissism exist. Despite the American Psychiatric Association’s (2013) classification of narcissism as a personality disorder, this article adopts the perspective put forth by Raskin and Hall (1979) and by Emmons (1987), treating it as a normal personality trait.

Among the scholarly articles that have dealt with narcissistic apical decision-makers, it is noteworthy to mention the contribution of Lubit (2002). He was among the first in management and business sciences to emphasize the need for identifying and addressing the potentially destructive effects of narcissistic behavior within the organizational hierarchy. Specifically, Lubit (2002) highlighted the importance for organizations to examine their cultural setting to prevent and discourage the presence of people with such characteristics.

A few years later, Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007) empirically demonstrated that narcissistic CEOs are naturally more inclined to make attention-grabbing decisions that may lead to either significant successes or tremendous failures. Specifically, CEOs’ egocentrism represents a double-edged sword. For instance, narcissism can prompt apical decision-makers to invest in innovation, but it can also lead them to prioritize their interests over stakeholders’ interests, compromising ethical and safety standards (Petrenko *et al.*, 2016; Kashmiri *et al.*, 2017).

In this vein, O’Reilly *et al.* (2018) unveiled the tendency of narcissistic CEOs to discount expert advice, making them more prone to risk-taking and intuitive decisions. This finding aligns with Li *et al.* (2022), who highlighted the correlation between prestigious awards and the propensity for financial misconduct among CEOs, indicating how their grandiose sense of superiority increases the likelihood of unethical or illegal behaviors. However, this latter conclusion is contradicted by Kalbuana *et al.* (2023) who identified a positive correlation between high CEO narcissism and a decrease in corporate tax avoidance.

Overall, the 22 articles that have primarily concentrated on narcissism emphasized the strong relationship between narcissism and organizational behavior. They also underlined the critical need for robust governance structures, effective leadership training, and a conscientious organizational culture to mitigate the potential risks associated with narcissistic apical decision-makers. Concerning the link between narcissism and the intention to misconduct, by adopting TPB lenses, it can be concluded that the grandiose self-perception of narcissistic individuals can reshape subjective norms, fostering a belief that their actions are justifiable or even commendable in the pursuit of personal success or recognition, as indicated by Li *et al.* (2022). This skewed subjective norm reinforces their belief in the legitimacy of their potentially unethical or illegal conduct. Additionally, narcissistic individuals exhibit an inflated sense of their abilities and power, leading them to perceive fewer obstacles or constraints in engaging in unethical or illegal behaviors.

4.2.3 Psychopathy and corporate misconduct

According to the 2023 edition of the American Psychological Association Dictionary, the term “psychopathy” is synonymous with *antisocial personality disorder*. It is defined as “a chronic and pervasive disposition to disregard and violate the rights of others. Manifestations include repeated violations of the law, exploitation of others, deceitfulness, impulsivity, aggressiveness, reckless disregard for the safety of self and others, and irresponsibility, accompanied by lack of guilt, remorse, and empathy”. Despite the current identification by the American Psychological Association (2023d), the business and management literature predominantly refer to this phenomenon as “psychopathy” – consequently, to maintain consistency, this study will adopt the same terminology.

According to the information retrieved from the dataset, Clive R. Boddy is credited as the first to conceptualize the notion of “corporate psychopaths” in 2006. He underscored the necessity of investigating the influence of such individuals – who represent 1% of the world

population – on organizational misconduct, business sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. Adding to this discourse, Babiak *et al.* (2010) shed light on the capacity of psychopaths to manipulate others through their communication skills and charisma. These scholars specifically suggested that corporate psychopaths manage to progress in their careers despite exhibiting poor performance in the workplace.

This assertion was corroborated by Boddy *et al.* (2010), who highlighted that corporate psychopaths are more prevalent in senior positions within organizations. This suggests that individuals without conscience may be in control of significant corporate resources and may prioritize their self-interest over the organization and its stakeholders' interests. Boddy (2011) further posited that corporate psychopaths played a significant role in precipitating the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, which originated with a subprime mortgage lending crisis in 2007 and evolved into a global banking emergency when Lehman Brothers crashed into bankruptcy (Kenton, 2023).

This claim is also supported by Boddy *et al.* (2015), who empirically demonstrated that despite their short-term successes, corporate psychopaths' conduct is detrimental to the long-term prosperity of the organizations they oversee because they often engage in fraudulent activities as well as displaying bullying, fear-mongering, and manipulative behaviors – ultimately jeopardizing organizational outcomes. For instance, Boddy (2023) found that, due to their profound disregard for corporate social responsibility and their willingness to falsify environmental impact reports, corporate psychopaths are likely to engage in deceptive practices (e.g., unlawful disposal of toxic waste materials).

In conclusion, all the articles in this cluster have highlighted how corporate psychopaths represent a substantial threat not only to organizations themselves but also to society at large. Consequently, these authors call for more robust governance mechanisms that, by prioritizing transparency, ethical leadership, and accountability, can stem the detrimental decisions made

by psychopath apical decision-makers. Also in this case TPB proves useful. It is possible to infer that psychopathy alters the attitudes of top managers, leading them to adopt a callous and exploitative stance, it shapes their subjective norms by normalizing deceit and manipulation within the organizational context as well as influences their perceived behavioral control by enabling them to extremely exercise their power – ultimately fostering an environment where unethical and illegal behaviors are favored.

4.2.3 Machiavellianism and corporate misconduct

The American Psychological Association Dictionary (2023e) defines Machiavellianism as “a personality trait marked by a calculating attitude toward human relationships and a belief that ends justify means, however ruthless. A Machiavellian is one who views other people more or less as objects to be manipulated in pursuit of his or her goals, if necessary through deliberate deception”.

Among the scholarly articles that have studied the link between personality traits and apical decision-makers’ inclination to misconduct, Machiavellianism has received less attention compared with narcissism and psychopathy. However, scholars have produced interesting results. For example, in their exploration of Chinese decision-makers, Al-Khatib *et al.* (2007) revealed a tendency for individuals high in Machiavellianism to resort to deceptive negotiation tactics, such as misrepresentation and false promises. Their inclination toward viewing negotiations as zero-sum games, can erode trust and cooperation, ultimately fracturing long-term relationships between organizations and their stakeholders.

Further shedding light on the link between Machiavellianism and unethical behavior, Kish-Gephart *et al.* (2010) emphasized how Machiavellian decision-makers tend to manipulate interpersonal relationships opportunistically, using deception and exploitation to serve their personal interests. This manipulation can extend to actions such as falsifying financial results,

deceiving shareholders, and engaging in other unethical practices to further personal gains, disregarding ethical standards and potentially causing harm to stakeholders.

Moreover, the study by Shafer and Lucianetti (2018) elucidated how Machiavellian apex decision-makers may exhibit resistance to sustainability and environmental responsibility reports. In fact, these individuals, by prioritizing immediate gains, might view such reports as a hindrance to short-term profits due to their focus on long-term investments. Additionally, these reports demand transparency and accountability, challenging the secretive nature and desire for control of Machiavellians. Changes associated with such initiatives could disrupt the status quo that serves their interests. Finally, implementing these reports would represent an emphasis on communal benefit over personal gain, which does not align with the self-serving nature of Machiavellian decision-makers.

Altogether, these studies paint a comprehensive picture of how Machiavellian traits can significantly shape decision-making and behaviors within corporate environments. From the erosion of trust in negotiations to the manipulation of relationships for personal gain and the resistance to sustainable practices, the influence of Machiavellianism on corporate misconduct is apparent, underscoring the need for vigilance in identifying and addressing such tendencies within organizational decision-making structures. Moreover, thanks to TPB, it is possible to argue that Machiavellian apical decision-makers often adopt a calculating attitude, perceiving human relationships as tools to serve their interests, their subjective norms are shaped by a tendency to manipulate interpersonal relationships opportunistically, resorting to deception and exploitation to achieve their objectives, and their perceived behavioral control is reinforced by a belief in their ability to control outcomes and manipulate situations to their advantage – even if this can result in unethical or illegal behaviors.

5. Discussion and research agenda

This article delves into the complex relationship between personality traits and the inclination of apical decision-makers towards misconduct. Utilizing an SLR with the support of a Delphi survey and bibliometric analyses, we identify narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism as influential factors in fostering such tendencies. Building upon the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) as a conceptual framework, we elucidate how these dark personality traits intricately contribute to decision-makers' likelihood of pursuing unethical or illegal behaviors.

Specifically, according to Ajzen (1991), the first determinant of an intention is the attitude, i.e., “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (p. 188). In the literature review, it is evident that decision-makers characterized by grandiose narcissism tend to prioritize personal recognition at the expense of ethical considerations; this inclination fosters a willingness to engage in misconduct, particularly when there is a perception of potential personal gain or the enhancement of their public image (Li *et al.*, 2022). Apical decision-makers with high psychopathic traits, extremely conscious of their ability to manipulate others and deceptive in their interactions, are confident of their ability in accomplishing their self-interest even if this means leveraging unethical standards (Boddy, 2023). Analogously, those with high Machiavellian tendencies artfully manipulate situations, maintaining an optimistic outlook on the success of their intentions for personal gain, regardless of the potential harm inflicted upon others (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, we anticipate a direct association between decision-makers exhibiting dark triad personality traits and the success of their unethical or illegal behaviors.

The second determinant of TPB is the subjective norm, i.e., “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991; p. 188). In this regard, highly narcissistic decision-makers seek validation, attention, and praise, often resorting to misconduct to surpass others' expectations (Kashmiri *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, top-tier decision-

makers exhibiting psychopathic tendencies, marked by a lack of empathy and adept manipulation skills, adeptly appear socially compliant while advancing personal interests, even at the expense of stakeholders' interests (Boddy, 2023). Likewise, Machiavellian decision-makers strategically exploit relationships, fostering a corporate culture where questionable behaviors are not only tolerated but frequently embraced, especially when they yield personal advantages (Shafer and Lucianetti, 2018). Consequently, we anticipate a positive relationship between apical decision-makers characterized by the dark triad traits and the manipulation of subjective norms to suit their own interests.

The last determinant of individuals' intention is the perceived behavioral control, i.e., "the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles" (Ajzen, 1991; p. 188). In this vein, decision-makers exhibiting high narcissistic tendencies show high perceived behavioral control given their inflated sense of invulnerability and entitlement (Li *et al.*, 2022). Likewise, individuals with psychopathic traits, adept at manipulation, demonstrate to be high in this determinant due to their perception of grandiosity combined with lack of empathy (Boddy, 2011). Similarly, decision-makers with high Machiavellian traits exhibit a strong perceived behavioral control, attributed to their calculated and pragmatic strategic thinking, grounded in manipulative and deceptive tactics (Al-Khatib *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, we unveil a positive relationship between the presence of dark triad personality traits and high perceived behavioral control.

However, while this study represents a pioneering effort to synthesize existing literature and establish a comprehensive understanding of how personality traits influence individuals' predisposition towards misconduct, there remain significant areas of ambiguity. This knowledge gap primarily arises from inherent limitations characterizing distinct personality traits (e.g., the disproportionate attention given to narcissism to the detriment of other, perhaps

even more impactful, personality traits), alongside overarching issues (e.g., the burdensome challenge of collecting primary measures of the personalities of apical decision-makers). Therefore, drawing insights and identifying limitations from the analysis of the 36 articles included in the dataset used for this SLR, Table 3 presents potential avenues for future research.

Please insert Table 3 about here

Moreover, to advance research on why firms misconduct, there is a critical need to shift focus beyond the CEO and examine the roles of other key figures like other board members and founders. This includes investigating the interplay between executives with “dark” and “light” traits as well as addressing potential biases and heuristics behind the choice of pursuing unethical or illegal behaviors. Leveraging on advanced assessment tools such as videometric and text analyses can provide deeper insights as well as allowing scholars to stop dealing with personality traits separately rather than as part of a complex biopsychosocial system. To facilitate this, fostering collaborations between business scholars and clinical psychology experts is crucial. This interdisciplinary approach can not only lead to more trustworthy and empirically valid results but also to the adoption of more sophisticated measures like the B-Scan 360. Furthermore, scholars should consider diverse factors like experience, socioeconomic backgrounds, industry dynamics variables – possibly simultaneously – when investigating unethical and illegal decisions. In fact, by integrating these perspectives, future studies can offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex drivers behind corporate misconduct, paving the way for effective preventive measures and adaptable legal frameworks within organizations.

6. Conclusion

This article is the first, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to present a holistic SLR to analyse the role of personality traits on apical decision-makers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in the context of irresponsible management. By doing so, we present readers with a three-fold contribution.

First, this article makes a methodological contribution by enhancing traditional SLR best practices with additional measures (e.g., establishing a panel of experts to refine the research design and conducting a Delphi survey to validate both the chosen keywords and the criteria for article inclusion). These supplementary steps are employed to bolster the rigor of the approach employed in collecting, assessing, and analyzing the existing body of knowledge. Second, this article makes a theoretical contribution by adopting a holistic approach to the study of personality traits. It addresses the limitations in current management literature, which, despite the insights from psychology science, persists in treating these traits in isolation rather than as integral components of a complex biopsychosocial system – people's personalities. Third, it advances the theoretical underpinnings of irresponsible management practices by implementing a framework that is not specifically tailored for a precise act of misconduct (e.g., the fraud triangle; Cressey, 1973) rather it provides a more holistic understanding of the underlying catalyst forces.

In this vein, the implications of this research are significant for both scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. By identifying the personality traits linked to irresponsible management, organizations can proactively implement measures to screen potential leaders and develop training programs that foster ethical decision-making. Similarly, policymakers can utilize this research to establish effective preventive measures and adaptable legal frameworks, thereby restricting the freedom for “dark” apical decision-makers to act. Furthermore, this study provides scholars with a comprehensive and timely SLR on the role of personality traits

in corporate misconduct – hence, filling a void in the literature and establishing a solid research agenda to move ahead the knowledge on these evergreen events.

However, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of this article. Although we have conducted a thorough and rigorous approach while reviewing others' contributions, there is a possibility of errors in the author's judgment, such as the inclusion or exclusion of articles from the dataset, or the interpretation of others' findings in the analysis of the findings. In conclusion, this article serves as a first step upon which scholars can continue to advance the understanding of how corporate misconduct is generated; thus, moving forward the ability to contrast such events.

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Figures and Tables

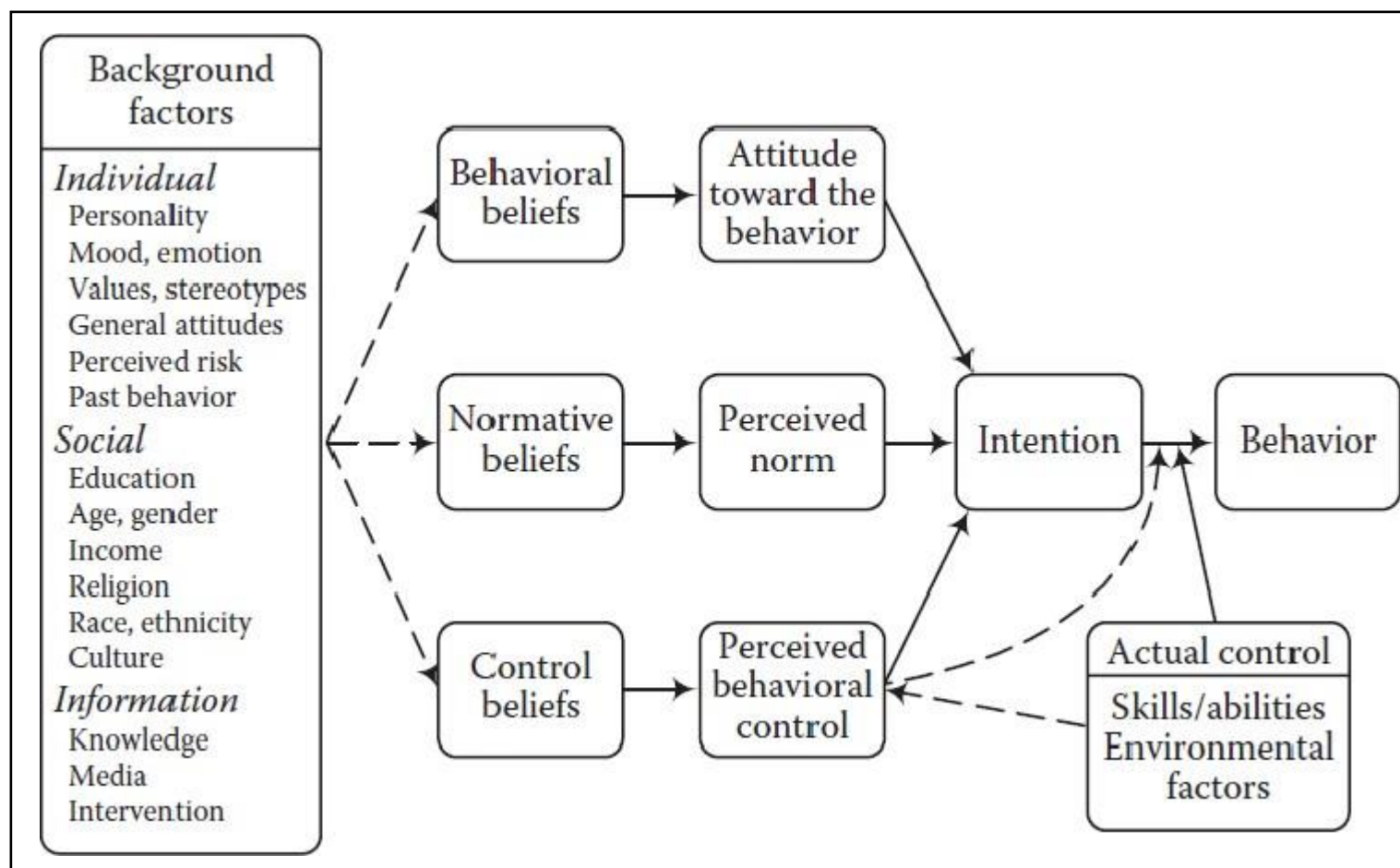


Figure 1 Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005).

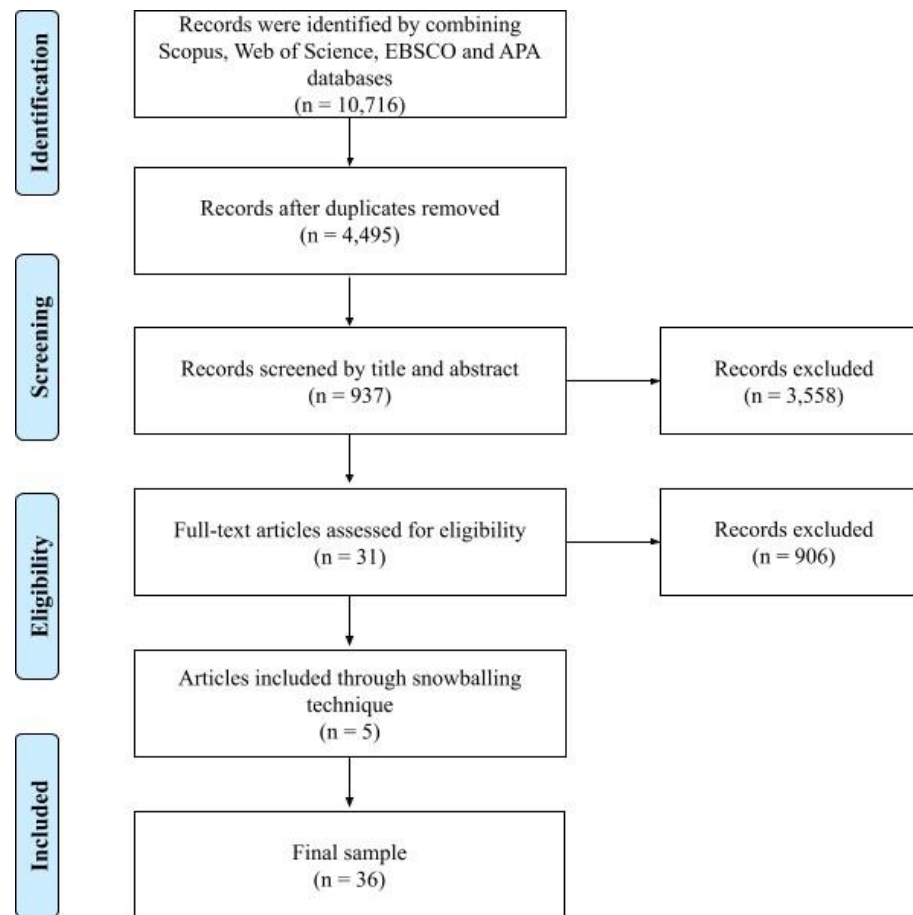


Figure 2 Papers' collection strategy (Author's own elaboration).

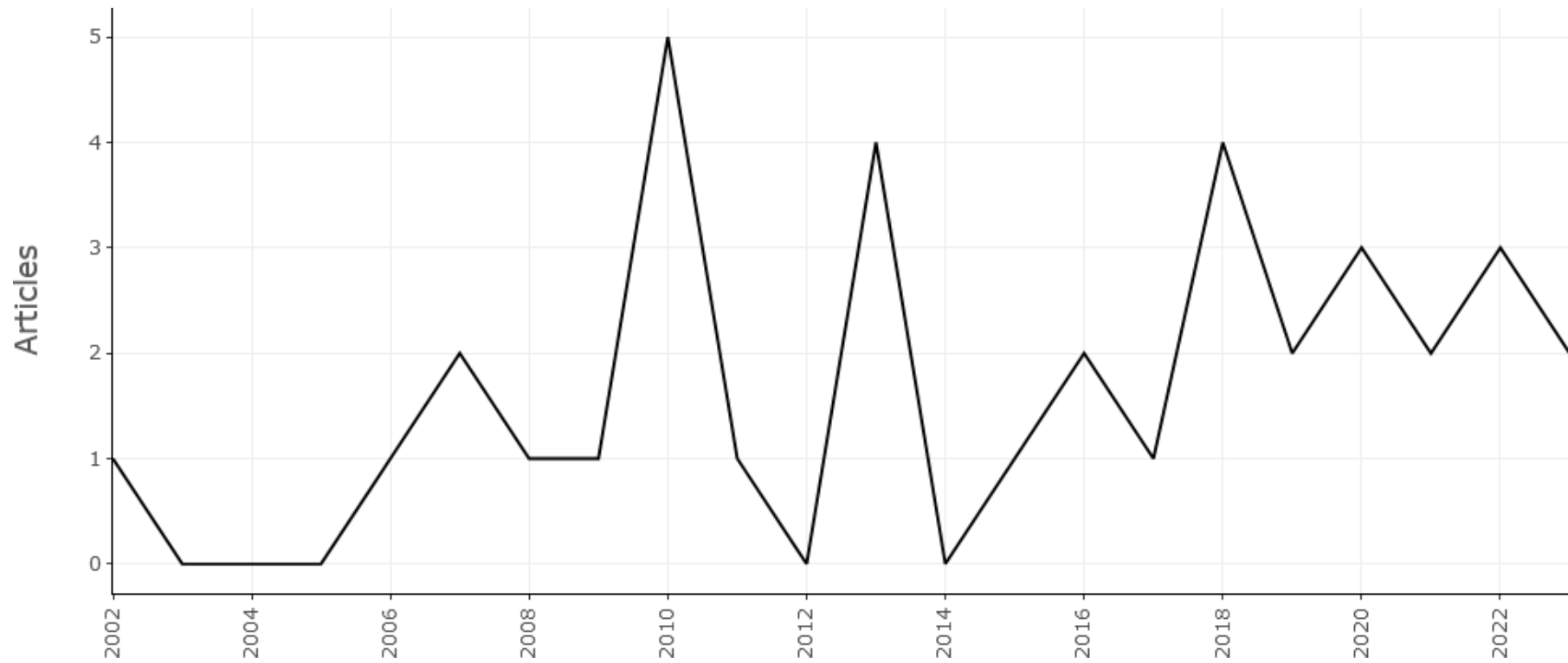


Figure 3 Annual scientific production (Author's own elaboration).

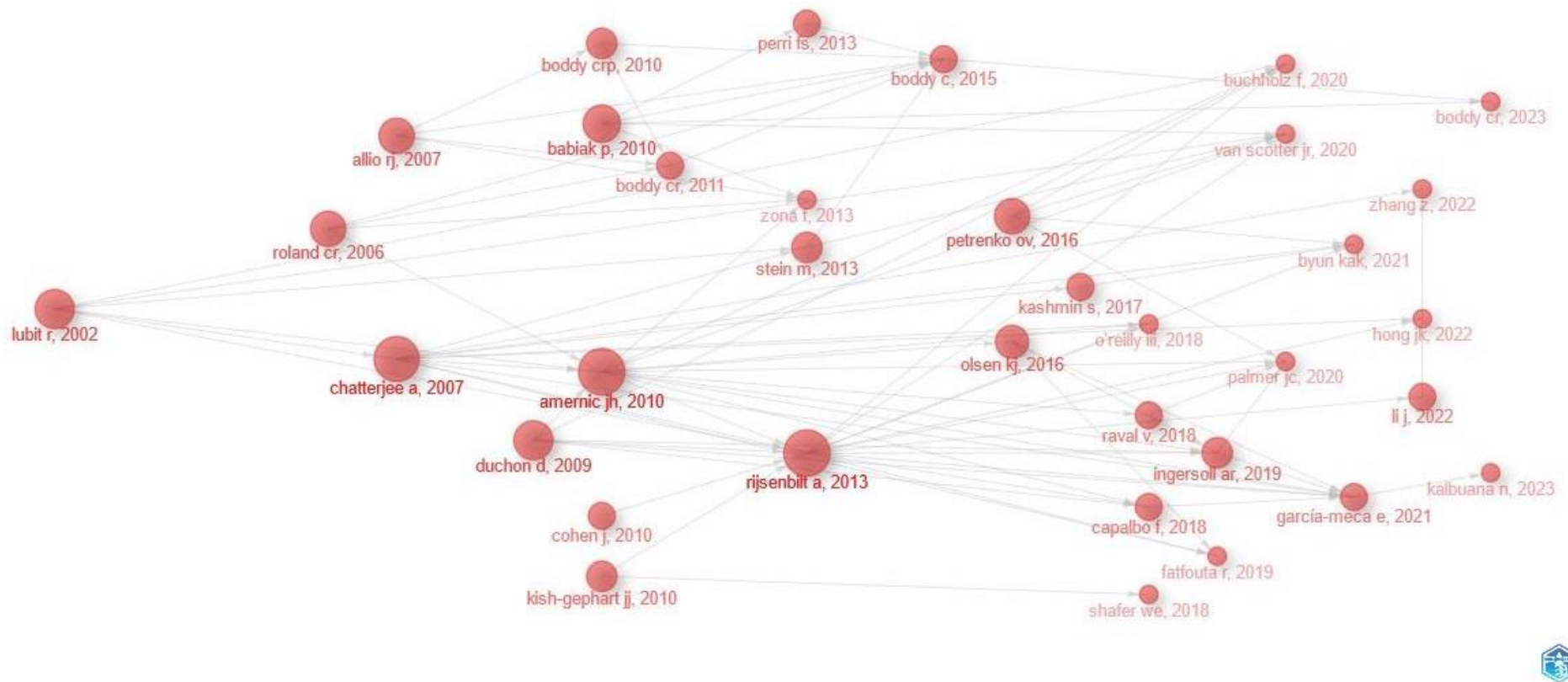


Figure 4 Historiography of articles belonging to the dataset (Author's own elaboration).

Area	Keywords	Boolean operator
<i>Corporate governance</i>	“entrepreneur*”, “own*”, “found*”, “president*”, “direct*”, “lead*”, “senior*”, “executive*”, “Chief*”, “C*O”, “CAO*”, “CCO*”, “CDO*”, “CEO*”, “CFO*”, “CIO*”, “CMO*”, “COO*”, “CRO*”, “CSO*”, “CTO*”, “top manage*”, “TMT*”, “board*”, “c suit*”, “c level*”, “upper echelon*”, “chair*”, “white collar*”	OR
		AND
<i>Personality traits</i>	“personality trait*”, “personalit*”, “trait*”, “Machiavelli*”, “psycopath*”, “narcissis*”, “sadis*”, “sociopath*”, “dark personalit*”, “dark triad”, “dark tetrad”, “dark core”, “Mach IV”, “machiavellian personality scale”, “MPS”, “narcissistic personality inventory”, “NPI”, “hare”, “psychopathy checklist”, “PCL”, “self-report psychopathy”, “SRP III”, “conscientious*”, “agreeable*”, “neurotic*”, “extr?version*”, “big five”, “FFM”, “overconfiden*”, “antagonis*”, “antisocial*”, “deceit*”, “dishonest*”, “fraud*”, “assertive*”, “aversive*”, “impulsive*”, “manipulative*”	OR
		AND
<i>Business ethics</i>	“abus*”, “bribery”, “cheat*”, “collusive*”, “corrupt*”, “crim*”, “deceit*”, “dishonest*”, “embezzl*”, “fraud*”, “gambl*”, “harm*”, “illegal*”, “immoral*”, “inside*”, “investigat*”, “irresponsib*”, “launder*”, “lawsuit*”, “manipulat*”, “negligen*”, “penal*”, “sanction*”, “scandal*”, “theft*”, “transgressi*”, “unauthoriz*”, “unethic*”, “violat*”, “wash*”, “whistleblow*”, “wrongdo*”	OR

Table 1 Strings of keywords.

Author(s)	Article	Journal(s)	Year	TC	LC
Chatterjee, A. and Hambrick, D.C.	It's all about me: Narcissistic chief executive officers and their effects on company strategy and performance	Administrative Science Quarterly	2007	1163	10
Kish-Gephart <i>et al.</i>	Bad apples, bad cases, and bad barrels: meta-analytic evidence about sources of unethical decisions at work	Journal of Applied Psychology	2010	1031	2
Petrenko <i>et al.</i>	Corporate social responsibility or CEO narcissism? CSR motivations and organizational performance	Strategic Management Journal	2016	513	4
Babiak <i>et al.</i>	Corporate psychopathy: Talking the walk	Behavioral Sciences & The Law	2010	389	4
Lubit, R.	The long-term organizational impact of destructively narcissistic managers	Academy of Management Perspectives	2002	158	6
Rijsenbilt, A. and Commandeur, H.	Narcissus enters the courtroom: CEO narcissism and fraud	Journal of Business Ethics	2013	156	11
Cohen <i>et al.</i>	Corporate fraud and managers' behavior: Evidence from the Press	Journal of Business Ethics	2010	156	1
Boddy, C.R.	The corporate psychopaths theory of the global financial crisis	Journal of Business Ethics	2011	148	1
Boddy, C.R.	The dark side of management decisions: Organisational psychopaths	Management Decision	2006	135	4
Amernic, J.H. and Craig, R.J.	Accounting as a facilitator of extreme narcissism	Journal of Business Ethics	2010	129	11

Table 2 Most cited articles within the dataset. Total Citations (TC) = Total number of citations received; Local Citations (LC) = Number of citations received from the other papers belonging to the dataset.

Future Research Avenues	
<i>CEOs... and not only</i>	Most of the current research on the tendency of apical decision-makers to engage in misconduct has primarily focused on the CEO as the central unit of investigation. However, it is imperative to broaden this focus to include other components of the board of directors, or alternatively, the founder(s). In fact, it is now rare for organizations, both large and medium-sized, to be led solely by a single figure. By expanding the scope of research, scholars can develop a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of how personality traits influence the propensity for misconduct within firms.
<i>Angels vs Demons</i>	It is not yet fully clear how a “dark” executives are capable of exerting influence on other board members, or conversely, how the presence of “light” executives (i.e., those who have levels of Kantianism, humanism, and faith in humanity as personality) can lower the chances of firms to misconduct. Similarly, exploring whether there is a form of “selection bias” in the turnover process – resulting in the formation of a board consisting mostly of either “angels” or “demons” executives – would be of considerable interest. Alternatively, examining the potential existence of a contagion among executives, where an executive initially displaying a light personality subsequently transforms into a dark one, or vice versa, could provide valuable insights.
<i>V.I.P. (very important personality traits)</i>	For a long time assessing apical decision-makers has represented a nightmare for scholars who had to rely on questionable sources to infer it (e.g., the size of CEO’s picture on the firm reports). The emergence and spread of new unobtrusive assessment techniques, such as videometric, paralinguistic, and text analyses are presenting a turning point for business and management literature. Nevertheless, studies are still mostly focused on analyzing personality traits separately rather than as part of a complex biopsychosocial system.
<i>Even scholars need Heroes</i>	Business and management scholars should start collaborating more often with clinical psychologists and psychiatrists. This will allow not only to produce more robust results but also to implement additional and more sophisticated measures that are still uncommon in the business and management literature (e.g., the B-Scan which may allow to gain more nuanced insights into psychopathic strategies in the corporate world).
<i>See the full landscape</i>	Corporate misconduct is a complex phenomenon that cannot be solely traced back to personality traits. To have a nuanced understanding of why apical decision-makers decide to pursue unethical or even illegal behaviors, scholars necessitate to take into consideration a broad spectrum of factors at individual, group, industry and macro level. For instance, examining the impact of experience may reveal that tenured executives might exhibit overconfidence due to their expertise, potentially leading to hazardous decisions. Similarly, individuals who have experienced poverty might be more inclined to engage in fraudulent activities as a means of financial security. Industry dynamics can lead to the adoption of unethical practices and the exploitation of regulatory loopholes. Incorporating such multifaceted perspectives is crucial for comprehensively grasping the intricate underpinnings of corporate misconduct, thus promoting and efficient and effective implementation of preventive measures.
<i>Scandals echo through time</i>	While modern research methodologies have their own merits, the use of seemingly archaic approaches like historical case studies can offer unique insights. Investigating corporate misconduct through historical case studies yields valuable insights into recurring patterns in decision-making and regulatory flaws. By comparing similar instances over time, scholars can understand how apical decision-makers think, act, and react. The resulting knowledge will be beneficial also for policymakers to refine robust and adaptable legal measures to prevent corporate unethical or illegal behaviors.

Table 3 Research agenda.