Can personality predict job performance?

Personality at Work · https://psyasia.com/kb/can-personality-predict-job-performance/

Personality and job performance

Job performance concerns the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required to enable an individual to perform the activities listed in the job description as per the competency profile that a human resource or similar professional may have developed through job analysis. Performance appraisal is used in organisations worldwide as a means to ensure the (at least) adequate performance of employees. It is linked to the entire human resource cycle in that it informs the training and development agenda, is a factor in the remuneration calculation and is inextricably coupled with and derived from job analysis, which itself feeds into the recruitment and selection process. Ultimately, assuming both reliability and validity of performance appraisal systems (some have postulated that appraisal is inherently flawed: Derven, 1990; others have described it as a crucial aspect of organisational life: Lawrie, 1990), organisations require solid evidence that candidates for job vacancies will score highly on appraisal dimensions once incumbent in the job. That is, the incumbent will consistently demonstrate competent and high levels of performance as defined by the organisation within the appraisal system.

On the basis of a review of articles appearing in the Journal of Applied Psychology and in Personnel Psychology between 1952 and 1963, Guion and Gottier (1965) concluded that personality questionnaires were not useful in the prediction of job performance and that they should not be used in selection decisions unless their validity has been specifically and competently determined for the specific situation (p.160). The authors did note that too few studies were available in the literature to allow for a thorough review of the criterion-related validity of personality assessments. More recently, with the development of meta-analytical techniques and the “general, if not quite universal” (McCrae, 2004, p.4) acceptance of the FFM, research in the West has, in the main, given support to the limited utility of personality assessment, alongside other reliable and valid forms of assessment, as an aid to the selection and development of employees (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001; Tett, Steele, & Beauregard, 2003; Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004; Waldman, Atwater & Davidson,

2004). The majority of researchers tend to report correlations and predictions based upon the FFM labels. Despite some criticisms of the FFM (e.g., Block, 1995a) this does provide a unifying ground in which theorists and practitioners may study, communicate and utilise personality as a tool in the workplace.

Van den Berg and Feij (2003) used Structural Equation Modelling to reveal links between personality as measured by four Dutch questionnaires assessing Neuroticism, Extraversion, Achievement Motivation and Experience Seeking and outcome measures such as satisfaction, intention to quit and job performance. In their discussion they interpreted their findings within the Big-Five taxonomy. Among a number of important findings, they discovered that Extraversion predicted work self-efficacy and job satisfaction whilst work stress mediated the relationship between Neuroticism and job satisfaction. They also found that feedback mediated the relationship between achievement motivation and job performance but there were no direct links between the personality scales and job performance. Potentially, had the researchers used a combination of the Big-5 factors they may have observed higher validities. It is also possible that, had the researchers used narrow-band (personality trait) predictors, more significant findings between personality and job performance may have emerged.

Personality has been found to account for unique variance in performance, after partialling out the effects of cognitive ability. McHenry, Hough, Toquam, Hansom, and Ashworth (1990) found that the competencies of personal discipline and physical fitness were better predicted by personality and temperament than by ability. In a study of 284 New Zealand police force recruits, Black (2000) discovered that the NEO-PI-R's Conscientiousness factor added predictive ability above and beyond cognitive testing. Conscientiousness within the NEO-PI-R was also implicated in Blickle's (1996) study of 231 university students with this factor being associated with "learning discipline".

Barrick, Mount and Judge (2001) discuss various 'phases' in research assessing the predictive validity of personality instruments in performance. Their paper provides a strong argument for the lack of significant findings in this domain up to the mid-1980s and implicitly cautions researchers not to simply enter all independent variables into an analysis in an attempt to find correlations. They note that, in recent times, the findings have been more positive and that researchers appear to be heeding another of Barrick, Mount and Judge's assertions - to use different levels of personality measurement (see Section 2.8.4). For example, Timmerman (2004) found significant correlations between NEO-PI-R Conscientiousness (r=.16), Agreeableness (r=.16) and supervisor's performance ratings in call-centre

staff in the USA. He then went on to examine correlations at the facet level and found that a number of Conscientiousness facets, but only one Agreeableness facet, were significantly correlated with performance. Salgado (1997) reported meta-analytic findings from 36 studies carried out in the European community. Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability were valid predictors across occupational groups, whereas Openness and Agreeableness were more likely to show as valid predictors of training success. This finding was confirmed by Barrick, Mount and Judge (2001). Barrick, Mount & Judge (2001) also noted that Extroversion was related to success in specific jobs such as sales or management, but was less related to performance for skilled workers. From the accumulation of the evidence, it does appear that Conscientiousness is the most consistent predictor of performance. This assertion has been supported by Matthews and Deary (1998) in their assessment of Barrick and Mount's (1991) data (Van den Berg & Feij, 2003).

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Newsflash:
Here's the abstract and reference from a study that linked the Big-5 to job performance in Thailand:

Personality Traits and Job Success: An investigation in a Thai sample

The purpose of this study was to examine the predictive power of each facet of the five-factor model of personality on job success in a Thai sample. The sample consisted of 2518 persons from seven occupations. The research found that for all occupational groups neuroticism was significantly negatively correlated with job success, while extroversion and conscientiousness were significantly positively correlated with job success. Moreover, conscientiousness was the only personality trait that consistently predicted job success of persons across occupations.

Chuchai Smithikrai (2007)
Personality Traits and Job Success: An investigation in a Thai sample
International Journal of Selection and Assessment 15 (1), 134–138.