Relationship between Conscientiousness and Job Performance

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There has been much research conducted examining the relationship between Conscientiousness as defined as one of the dimensions in the "Big Five" Model of personality and job performance. Much of the research has indicated that Conscientiousness is a positive predictor for job performance across a range of job positions. Simply put and what many advocate, is that it appears that people who have been assessed to be higher on Conscientiousness tend to perform better at work. Nevertheless, an article by Tett (1998) highlights some considerations regarding accepting this conclusion and cautions against accepting this at face value.

In this article, a number of examples suggest that Conscientiousness and job performance may not be irrevocably linked as previous research has suggested. It provides two examples of work situations where Conscientiousness may actually hinder the job performance. Firstly, the author highlights situations where being conscientious may result in lower productivity where either tasks require more time to complete or where fewer tasks can be completed. This is illustrated by the example of managers who at times are required to make decisions even when they do not have all the relevant information (Tett, 1998). In such a situation, being high on conscientious may affect the speed at which decisions can be made.

The second example refers to rules and procedures; conscientious individuals tend to adhere to rules and procedures. Tett (1998) highlights that in certain professions, strictly following rules and procedures may affect creativity and innovation. It is proposed that such adherence to rules and procedures can affect productivity as such individuals would be unlikely to develop novel ideas and solutions.

Although Conscientiousness appears to remain as a significant predictor of job performance, it is important to note that there are situations where other factors can play a part.

Reference

Tett, R. P. (1998). Is Conscientiousness ALWAYS positively related to job performance? The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist, 36(1)