Personality, the Five-Factor Model, and Job Performance

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Abstract

This paper investigates the correlation and validity of the five-factor model with job performance and other job related activities. Motivation, deviation, absences, and job satisfaction are related to the five factors. Conscientiousness and agreeableness appear to be positively correlated with productivity in a team environment among peers and are more likely to aid in being selected for a job. Neuroticism and agreeableness were negatively correlated with leadership capabilities. Individuals who score high on conscientiousness tend to perform well at work; while individuals lacking conscientiousness and having neuroticism tend to perform poorly at work.
This is a review of the relation between the Five-Factor Model of psychological analysis and performance in the workplace. Research in this field has yielded correlations regarding aspects of job performance such as motivation, deviation, job satisfaction, and teamwork, and the five-factor model.

Motivation and the Workplace

Studies performed on sales representatives have defined two aspects of motivation. Status striving and accomplishment striving are these two aspects and they are correlated with extraversion and conscientiousness, respectively. These two subsets of motivation lead to sales performance, although the data implies that status striving is responsible for performance and accomplishment striving leads to performance only indirectly via a relation between accomplishment striving and status striving. (Barrick et. al, 2002)

This study is questionable in that it studied sales representatives who are likely required to be extraverted in order to succeed at their job. To say that extraverted sales representatives perform better is a bit redundant; shy sales people do not go far. Since extraversion is such an integral aspect of being a salesperson, this study does not lend much support for a general model or theory correlating the five-factor model with job performance.

Deviation and the Workplace

Workplace deviance is a situation in which an employee voluntarily pursues a course of action that threatens the well-being of the individual or the organization. Examples of this include stealing, hostile behavior towards coworkers, and withholding
Workplace Five Factors

Effort. Withholding effort and stealing are categorized as Organizational Deviance, while hostile and rude behavior towards coworkers is categorized as Interpersonal Deviance.

Workplace deviance is related to the five-factor model of personality. Interpersonal Deviance is negatively correlated with high levels of agreeableness. Organizational Deviance is correlated negatively with high levels of conscientiousness and low levels of neuroticism. This implies that individuals who are emotionally stable and conscientious are less likely to withhold effort or to steal, while those who are agreeable are less likely to be hostile to their coworkers.

Another entirely different factor to consider is perception of the workplace. Employees who had a positive perception of their workplace were less likely to pursue deviant behavior. Research indicates that personality acts as a moderating factor: workplace deviance was more likely to be endorsed in an individual when both the perception of the workplace was negative and when emotional stability, conscientiousness, or agreeableness was low. (Colbert et al, 2004)

Job Satisfaction and the Five Factor Model

The five-factor model is correlated with the overall level of job satisfaction experienced by employees. In general satisfied employees are more likely to remain in a position and to avoid absences than those that are not satisfied.

Initial research indicated that neuroticism is negatively correlated with job satisfaction while conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness are positively correlated. Openness to experience had a negligible impact on job satisfaction. Additional research, however, has only been able to replicate correlations among the factors of neuroticism and extraversion, with extraversion being positively correlated
workplace five factors

with job satisfaction and neuroticism being negatively correlated. This could be due to the social nature of the workplace. (Judge et. al., 2002)

This is possibly due to the nominal level of arousal for extraverted individuals (Hebb’s theory). If the workplace is a social environment then extraverted employees are more likely to be at their nominal level of arousal while at work, whereas at their home there is a greater chance of few stimuli. Introverts, on the other hand, are more likely at their optimal level of arousal outside of the workplace, and therefore are more likely unsatisfied with the level of stimulation that they experience at their place of employment.

Teamwork and the Five Factor Model

Often times at the workplace the ability to be a team player is valued and is critical to job performance. Recent research has suggested that conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness are all related to cooperative behavior, but that they are not related to task performance. While this fortifies that case that job performance is related to the five-factor model via increased cooperativeness among coworkers, it lays siege to it by implying that actual job performance (task performance) is related to cognitive ability and not to personality. (LePine et. al., 2001)

Leadership abilities are often essential in the workplace, especially for individuals who aspire to move up into the ranks of management. Studies performed on Asian military units have found that neuroticism is negatively correlated with leadership abilities, but agreeableness is negatively correlated as well (which was not what the researchers hypothesized). Openness to experience was unrelated while extraversion was positively correlated with leadership abilities. (Lim et. al., 2004)
This evidence suggests the long-standing idea that there are leaders and followers in teams. The leaders make decisions and the followers abide by them. While agreeableness was positively correlated with working with a team, it is negatively correlated with being a leader. Those followers who don’t always agree and are willing to voice their own opinions end up moving up the ranks while those who blindly agree are left as followers.

**Job Performance and the Five-Factor Model**

Of the five factors, the single factor of conscientiousness is the most predictive of job performance (it is positively correlated with job performance). (Hurtz et. al., 2000)

**Job Absences**

Job absence is very much a part of job performance: employees are not performing effectively if they do not even come to work. Introverted, conscientious employees are much less likely to be absent from work, as opposed to extraverted employees who are low on conscientiousness. Interestingly enough, neuroticism was not highly correlated with absence (Judge et. al., 1997).

This is an interesting study considering the results of research performed on Job Satisfaction and the five-factor model (Judge et. al., 2002). The results of that research suggested that extroverted individuals were more satisfied at the workplace because it gives them an opportunity to experience an optimal level of arousal, whereas introverted individuals were less satisfied with their workplace experience due to too much stimulation. Combining the results of these two studies would suggest that conscientiousness is the deciding factor regarding job absence.
Perhaps another factor is that although introverts may be less satisfied at the workplace, they go to work anyway. This behavior might implicate a more conscientious individual, or simply that the individual has no compelling reason not to go to work (whereas an extrovert may have friends who urge him or her to skip work and go see a movie). It is also, however, debatable that introverts would be tempted to skip work to avoid the extra stimulation, and perhaps stay home and read a book (a book on psychology, no doubt). Timothy Judge and his colleagues will likely continue their research and perhaps provide answers in the future.

Personnel Selection

Research into the relation between the five factors and personnel hiring provides additional evidence that conscientiousness is the most valid predictor of job performance. (Schmidt et. al., 1993)

Since conscientious individuals have a tendency to perform better as employees, it is easy to believe that employers will seek out that factor or the traits that coincide with it.

Summary

Job performance and personality are related, as are the five factors of the five-factor model are related as well. It would appear as though the relation between job performance and the five factors is more a consequence of the social aspects of the workplace than actual ability.

Research indicates that cognitive ability is more strongly correlated to task performance than any of the five factors. The five factors are strongly correlated with cooperating with others and enjoying the overall workplace experience, which are key in long-term job success. Being absent from work, or working as a team are examples of
parts of personality that directly affect whether you will succeed in the workplace or not, and they are strongly correlated with the big five, and not with cognitive ability.

It is worth noting that the majority of research is performed on observing sales people, or other occupations in which interacting with people is required. Is it possible that these studies are skewed? Perhaps researching individuals in jobs that require very little human interaction (such as authors of fiction, like Steven King) would yield different results.

Conscientiousness and extraversion are the two aspects of the five-factor model that are always correlated with positive job performance, although conscientiousness is more positively correlated (Extraversion is negatively correlated with job performance in that it appears to inspire more absence, but only when combined with low levels of conscientiousness). Agreeableness is negatively correlated with job performance within a leadership role. Openness to experience is, in general, unrelated. Neuroticism is negatively correlated with job performance.

Cognitive ability may be a factor regarding the abilities of an employee to complete a specific task, but the ability to work with others and to stay motivated are due to aspects of personality. The five-factor model is a valid predictor of workplace performance. This research is indispensable for employers who are looking for quality employees.

References


