A person–centric investigation of personality types, job performance, and attrition

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1. Introduction

Several theoretical conceptualizations of personality have been proposed, with the most widely studied and agreed upon taxonomy being the Five Factor Model (McCrae & Costa, 2008). The Five Factor Model (FFM) includes the following personality dimensions: Conscientiousness (e.g., achievement-oriented), Agreeableness (e.g., cooperative), Emotional Stability (e.g., even–tempered), Extraversion (attention–seeking), and Openness (e.g., tolerant). This model is the result of 1) a careful conceptual analysis of what most personality tests are trying to assess and 2) statistical analyses of personality test information gathered over many decades. There is now broad consensus among industrial and organizational (I–O) psychologists that personality dimensions included in the FFM predict a wide range of work-related behavior including job performance, training performance, and turnover (Barrick & Mount, 2005). More specifically, research indicates that a) personality differences play an important role in work behavior independent of the role played by cognitive ability; b) personality is more closely related to motivational aspects of work (e.g., effort expenditure) than to technical aspects of work (e.g., knowledge components); and c) personality is more likely to predict what a person will do, and ability measures are more likely to predict what a person can do. This study incorporates personality dimensions from FFM and the person–centered approach to help with understanding relationships among personality constructs, cognitive ability, and work outcomes such as attrition and job performance.

1.1. Person–centered approach

In contrast to the prevailing paradigm in I–O psychology that focuses on variables and relationships among variables, person–centered psychology focuses on the person and takes a holistic and dynamic view of people (Foti, Thompson, & Allgood, 2011; Weiss & Rupp, 2011). Although variable–centered approaches focus on meaningful personality characteristics, these dimensions are typically treated as separate and isolated. In contrast, the person–centered approach considers personality as a whole, integrated system (Merz & Roesch, 2011). Using a person–centered approach, several attempts have been made to organize groups of respondents based on personality traits into types or profiles. Three personality types (Resilients, Overcontrolled, and Undercontrolled) have been consistently identified in the research literature (e.g., Denissen, Asendorpf, & van Aken, 2008; Specht, Luhmann, & Geiser, 2014). Resilients have been characterized by below average Neuroticism, above average Conscientiousness, moderate Extraversion, and moderate Agreeableness. Resilients are often called well–adjusted because they tend to be adaptable, flexible, resourceful, and interpersonal. Successful. They tend to control their emotions and impulses appropriately, and they seem to handle adversity well. Those labeled as Overcontrolled tend to have above average Neuroticism, but below average Extraversion. They are often described as being uptight, difficult to deal with, self–conscious, and uncomfortable around strangers; in sum,
they control their emotions too much. Those labeled as Undercontrolled tend to have above average Neuroticism, lower than average Conscientiousness, and above average Extraversion. They are often described as being impulsive and prone toward unsafe activities; in sum, they often have difficulty controlling their emotions and impulses.

Several studies have used a person-centered approach with the FFM to validate the three personality types (e.g., Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorf, & Van Aken, 2001; Poncheri & Ward, 2008). In addition, numerous studies indicate that these personality types are associated with a wide variety of negative outcomes (Donnellan & Robins, 2010). In addition, Ostendorf, & Van Aken, 2001; Poncheri & Ward, 2008). In addition, numerous studies indicate that these personality types are associated with a wide variety of negative outcomes (Donnellan & Robins, 2010). In addition, Chapman and Goldberg (2011) that found that personality types showed associations with multiple health outcomes that were measured 40 years later. These investigations suggest that examining personality using a person-centered approach can help to enhance understanding of relationships among personality and work outcomes.

The present study used latent profile analysis (LPA), which identifies homogeneous groups based on a number of observed variables, such as the FFM personality dimensions. In particular, LPA (described further below) can be used to determine whether personality dimensions can help to organize respondents into groups with similar trait profiles. The identification of profile groups using LPA can reveal new multivariate relationships among observed variables that can contribute to greater understanding of the relationships among FFM personality dimensions and work outcomes. The present study extends previous work by using a person-centered approach to investigate relationships among personality dimensions using LPA in a large Army sample. This investigation will examine if the LPA provides evidence of multiple classes based on the personality data. In addition, this study will examine whether there are significant differences on performance and attrition among the personality classes.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and measures

The sample for this study was obtained as part of the data collected from the Army Class Longitudinal project at the Army Research Institute (Knapp & Heffner, 2010). Predictor data were obtained in 2007 and early 2008 from 4763 Soldiers who entered reception battalions. Predictor measures included the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT, a general cognitive ability measure) and the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System (TAPAS, a Big Five measure). In terms of the gender breakdown, 3902 (81.9%) were male, 825 (17.3%) were female, and 36 (0.7%) did not indicate their gender. The mean age of the sample was 27.91 (s.d. = 4.27).

The AFQT is a composite based on four subtests (Arithmetic Reasoning, Mathematics Knowledge, Word Knowledge, and Paragraph Comprehension) of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Applicants must meet a minimum score on the AFQT to enter the Army (Knapp, Heffner, & Owens, 2010). Scores on the AFQT range from 0 to 99. Previous research has indicated that AFQT scores correlate highly with other standardized aptitude tests (e.g., Orme, Brehm, & Ree, 2001). The AFQT’s reliability from the current sample was not available, but previous large-scale studies indicate that the reliability is 0.90 or higher (Bock & Moore, 1986; Van Iddekinge, Ferris, & Heffner, 2009). The AFQT was used as a control variable to examine the influence of the personality types above the contribution of cognitive ability. For example, logistic regression analyses were conducted on the attrition outcomes while controlling for cognitive ability.

The TAPAS is a personality measure that was designed to promote resistance to faking (Stark, Chernyshenko, Dragswog, & White, 2012). The items were created by pairing statements that are similar on social desirability. The present study utilized 11 TAPAS dimensions that included 10 dimensions that can be aligned with Five Factor Model personality dimensions and a Physical Conditioning dimension that has been deemed important to assess in the military (Table 1). The TAPAS utilizes a multidimensional pairwise preference (MDPP) format, item response theory (IRT), and multidimensional Bayes model estimation (Stark, Chernyshenko, & Dragswog, 2010). The TAPAS dimensions are scored so that they range from −3 to +3. In developing the TAPAS, Stark et al. (2010) noted that individual scale reliabilities are not traditionally used for IRT-scored measures. Nevertheless, marginal reliability, which is the IRT analog of traditional reliability measures, ranged from 0.66 to 0.75 in a subset of the TAPAS scales (Dragswog et al., 2012).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAPAS facets, descriptions, and corresponding Big 5 personality factors.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facet name</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dominance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Attention</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Order</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Non-delinquent</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Even tempered</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Well-being/Optimistic</strong></td>
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Adapted from Table 3.1 of Stark et al. (2010).
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