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Linking the Big Five personality constructs to organizational commitment

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Abstract

This study explored the linkages between the five-factor model of personality and Meyer and Allen's (1991) model of organizational commitment using a field sample. Results indicated that Extraversion was significantly related to affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience were all significantly related to continuance commitment. Lastly, Agreeableness was significantly related to normative commitment. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, organizational commitment has become a highly researched job attitude. Indeed, commitment has been the subject of several meta-analyses (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), theoretical reviews (Lawler, 1992; Reichers, 1985), and one overview book (Meyer & Allen,

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1997), largely because employees with low levels of commitment are more likely to leave their organizations (Meyer et al., 2002). Although the antecedents of commitment have received increased attention, environmental rather than dispositional sources are typically considered, despite a surge in research looking at the dispositional sources of other job attitudes, such as job satisfaction (e.g., Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002).

The logic underlying the individual difference approach to understanding job attitudes is twofold: theoretically, an attitude has been defined as a psychological tendency that is expressed by an evaluation (favorable or unfavorable) of a particular entity (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993), which maps onto the prevailing conceptualization of job satisfaction; empirically, research has provided evidence that some individuals may be dispositionally predisposed to experience heightened or diminished levels of job satisfaction (e.g., Staw & Ross, 1985). In the past 15 years, as studies have continued to explore this question, evidence has continued to mount supporting this trend, lending credence to the argument that job satisfaction is, at least partially, dispositionally based (House, Shane, & Herold, 1996). Interestingly, so far only minimal attention has been directed toward understanding the dispositional basis of organizational commitment.

Although research has investigated relationships between an isolated facet of personality and organizational commitment (e.g., Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003), all of these studies have employed the positive affectivity (PA)–negative affectivity (NA) taxonomy of affective temperament (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), despite meta-analysis demonstrating that Conscientiousness is related to job satisfaction, and unlike Extraversion and Neuroticism, is a Big Five personality trait not subsumed under the PA–NA typology (Judge et al., 2002). Because organizational commitment, like job satisfaction, is a job attitude, the five-factor model of personality may include traits not covered by the PA–NA typology that provide a more in-depth understanding of commitment development.

As such, the application of the Big Five model may provide much needed integration in this literature. However, to date, we are not aware of any studies that have investigated the relationship between the Big Five and organizational commitment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the relationship between these constructs to better understand the dispositional basis of organizational commitment.

1.1. The five-factor model of personality

The Big Five model implies that personality consists of five relatively independent dimensions that altogether provide a meaningful taxonomy for the study of individual differences. Our interpretation of the Big Five directly corresponds to our measurement of the five-factor model of personality. The first factor we measured was Extraversion. The behavioral tendencies used to measure this factor include being sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The second factor that we explored was Neuroticism. It represents individual differences in the tendency to experience distress (McCrae & John, 1992). Typical behaviors associated with this factor include being anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, emotional, worried, and insecure (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Agreeableness was the third factor we examined. It describes the humane aspects of people—characteristics such as altruism, nurturance, caring, and emotional support at one end of the dimension, and hostility, indifference to others, self-centeredness, spitefulness, and jealousy at

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