



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

The effect of Neuroticism in the process of goal pursuit

Tanja Bipp^{a,*}, Uwe Kleinbeck^b^aEindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands^bTechnical University Dortmund, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 January 2011

Received in revised form 6 April 2011

Accepted 18 April 2011

Available online 23 May 2011

Keywords:

Neuroticism
 Motivational process
 Goal pursuit
 Assigned goals
 Facets

ABSTRACT

This study examines the link between Neuroticism and work motivation under work conditions that provide clear behavioral expectations. Within a two-phase correlational laboratory setup, participants ($N = 158$) worked on a simple task with specific, high goals that were linked to monetary rewards. Structural equation modeling analysis largely supported the postulated model. Focusing on antecedents and consequences of goal commitment, we found that Neuroticism was indirectly related to the attainment of assigned goals via motivational variables in the process of goal pursuit. Independent of cognitive ability, positive and negative effects of Neuroticism were evident in the motivational process, which forms an explanation for the close-to-zero relationships to performance outcomes. Two facets (Anxiety, Self-consciousness) seem to offer explanations for the contradicting effects of Neuroticism in the process of goal pursuit.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies and meta-analyses have confirmed the predictive validity of the Big Five personality traits for job performance (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). However, effects have been shown to vary across occupations (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000), and the role of the situation has recently again been taken into account to explain the personality–performance relationship (Kell, Rittmayer, Crook, & Motowidlo, 2010). The strength of the situation has been suggested to play a major role in explaining the link between personality traits and work behavior. In particular restrictions in a situation (e.g., by demands or pressure, therefore characterized as “strong”) are supposed to homogenate behavior and lower the variance in trait-expressive behavior (Tett & Burnett, 2003). On the basis of a motivational process perspective, we argue, however, that personality traits do affect behavior in such situations, but the effect on performance outcomes is lowered (or even eliminated) because of contradicting influences in the process of translating goals into action. In the current study we focused on Neuroticism, as the validity for this trait has been found to vary considerably (Barrick et al., 2001). More specifically, we investigated how Neuroticism influences the motivational process in nonambiguous achievement situations, realized by assigned performance goals in combination with monetary rewards.

1.1. Situational specificity

Tett and Burnett (2003) suggested that a substantial effect of personality traits can only be expected in situations providing appropriate cues for the trait in question. Responsibility, uncertainty, or a stressful work environment are supposed to trigger the effect of emotional stability, and Neuroticism has been shown especially to affect outcomes when performance is evaluated or under pressure (Dobson, 2000). Furthermore, “the greatest variance in trait-expressive behavior may be expected in weak situations where extrinsic rewards are modest or ambiguous” (Tett & Burnett, 2003, p. 502). In contrast, the clarity of strong situations (which provide clear guidelines for behavior, e.g., via external standards and strong reward contingencies) is expected to influence behavior so dominantly that almost no variation is left that can be accounted for by personality traits.

As assigned goals or strong reward contingencies are expected to lower the expression of traits (cf. Klein & Fein, 2005), research has hardly investigated the influence of personality in such situations. Only a few studies have investigated performance effects of personality traits in combination with external standards or rewards (e.g., Kalnbach & Hinsz, 1999), but their results do not form a coherent picture, as the focus was on single narrow traits, or findings were aggregated across conditions. Because strong situations are highly relevant for organizational practice, it becomes necessary to understand how personality traits influence work motivation and behavior under such conditions. We were interested to see how Neuroticism influences the motivational process pursuing assigned performance goals in combination with

* Corresponding author at: TU/e, Faculty Industrial Engineering & Innovation Sciences – HPM Group, P.O. Box 513, 5600 MB Eindhoven, The Netherlands. Tel.: +31 402474407; fax: +31 40 245 1275.

E-mail address: T.Bipp@tue.nl (T. Bipp).

rewards, as such situational features are supposed explicitly to trigger an effect of this trait.

2. Personality and goal pursuit

Because research has shown that state-like motivational constructs can serve as mediators (“motivation hub”, Locke, 2001, p. 13) for the influence of personality on performance, we indirectly linked Neuroticism to goal attainment via motivational variables based on the *goal-setting theory* (Locke & Latham, 1990). Numerous studies have specified by now how personality traits affect goal-setting (e.g., the difficulty of personal goals, Gellatly, 1996), and therefore investigated their influence at the beginning of the action sequence (Gollwitzer, 1990). We took a new approach by examining the influence of Neuroticism on the process of goal pursuit, when a person is actually acting towards goal achievement. To explain the process of putting an assigned goal into action, we focused on *goal commitment* as “one’s attachment to or determination to reach a goal” (Locke & Latham, 1990, p. 125). It refers to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of the process of goal pursuit. People with high goal commitment feel obliged to reach a goal, devote time and effort to reach their goal, resist distractions, and do not give up easily even if faced with obstacles.

2.1. Goal pursuit and task performance

The model we tested based on the goal-setting framework (see Fig. 1) included therefore in the “motivational hub” *goal commitment*. To cover different phases in the motivational process, we focused on a central antecedent (*expectancy*) and a proximal consequence (*motivational strength*) of goal commitment.

Central to definitions of goal commitment is the associated effort or persistence to attain a certain goal (e.g., Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987). While effort relates to the directional mechanism of goals (e.g., directed resources), persistence refers to the extension of effort over time. We treated the two constructs, in line with prior research, as components of one dimension, specifying the amount of “energy-related resources” (Earley, Wojnarowski, & Prest, 1987, p. 107) a person allocates towards task accomplishment (“motivational strength”). On the basis of mechanisms validated in prior research (McCaul, Hinsz, & McCaul, 1987), we expected goal commitment positively to affect motivational strength.

The attractiveness and expectancy of goal attainment form proximal antecedents of goal commitment (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987). We focused on the latter, because Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, and Alge (1999) were able to show the highest overlap with goal commitment for this antecedent in their meta-analysis. Given the finding that people who expect to perform at a higher

performance level are more committed to goals and show prolonged effort or persistence (Wofford, Goodwin, & Premack, 1992), we anticipated similar effects for expectancy.

H1: Motivational strength will be positively related to goal attainment.

H2: Goal commitment will be positively related to motivational strength.

H3: Expectancy will be positively related to (a) goal commitment and (b) motivational strength.

2.2. Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to differences between people in their emotional stability or in how they experience negative feelings. *Anxiety*, *Angry-hostility*, *Depression*, *Self-consciousness*, *Impulsiveness*, and *Vulnerability* are postulated to be the facets of this trait (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Study findings suggest that Neuroticism is negatively related to performance. However, the predictive validity has been found to be weaker and more heterogeneous compared to other traits (Barrick et al., 2001). We expected contradictory effects of Neuroticism in the process of pursuing assigned goals (linked to rewards), which should lower (or even nullify) the overall effect on performance outcomes.

On the one hand, research corroborates that Neuroticism is negatively associated with motivational variables, as expectancy beliefs (Judge & Ilies, 2002) or attentional processes (Wallace & Newman, 1998). People scoring high on Neuroticism are easily distracted by task irrelevant aspects, which imply a negative effect on effort and persistence. On the other hand, they have also been shown to pursue performance-avoidance goals (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), which refers to the desire to avoid showing a lack of competence or receiving unfavorable judgments. In an achievement setting in which individual performance will be evaluated and rewarded, it can therefore be expected that people scoring high on Neuroticism report a higher motivation to pursue or adopt standards that are given to them to validate their competence than emotionally stable people. With regard to goal commitment, this link might be explained by the valence of the goal or the attached consequences. Anxious people, who have a strong tendency to worry, and self-conscious people, who are preoccupied with how others view them, should judge an assigned, difficult performance goal in combination with monetary rewards as highly valuable, despite their lower expectancy to reach it. We expected *Anxiety* and *Self-consciousness* to trigger this effect, as these traits have been shown to be positively related to specific performance aspects (Slaughter & Kausel, 2009).

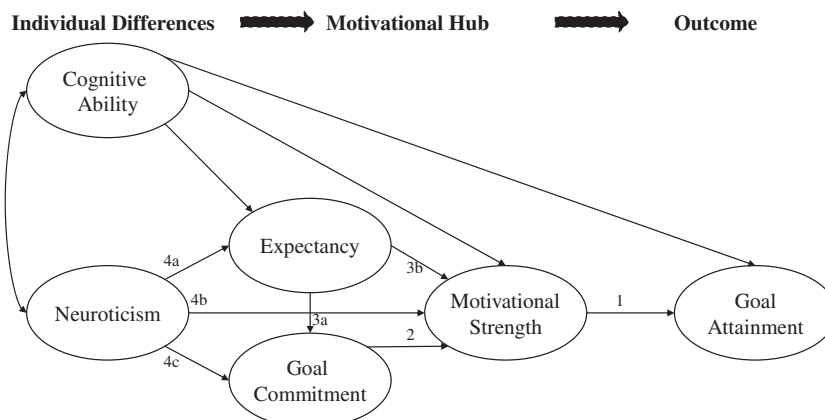


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model of relationships among individual differences, motivational hub variables, and goal attainment.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات