



The interactive effects of conscientiousness, work effort, and psychological climate on job performance[☆]

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Abstract

Historically, conscientiousness–performance relationships have been modest, suggesting the need to examine theoretically-relevant moderating variables. Based on theory and empirical research suggesting that performance variance is maximally predicted in the presence of person and situation variables, we examined the moderating potential of work effort and psychological climate on the conscientiousness–performance relationship. Data gathered from 139 predominately part-time restaurant employees revealed that conscientiousness predicted performance in the simultaneous presence of high levels of work effort and positive psychological climate. Conversely, conscientiousness had no empirical association with performance

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when coupled with other combinations (e.g., high-negative; low-positive; low-negative) of work effort and psychological climate. Implications for research, strengths, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

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The influence that personality plays in predicting employee behavior has been of interest to organizational psychologists for some time (Johnson, 2003), with particular research emphasis placed on job performance as a criterion variable (Campbell, 1990). The emergence (Costa & McCrae, 1989) and validation (Digman, 1989) of the five-factor model (FFM) of personality consisting of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (also called neuroticism), and openness to experience, has had a significant influence on this stream of research (Judge & Ilies, 2002). Meta-analyses have revealed that specific personality dimensions validly predict job performance in some settings (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). In particular, conscientiousness has demonstrated the most consistent prediction across situations (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993).

However, the correlations between conscientiousness and job performance have been modest by psychometric standards. For example, the overall average corrected validity coefficients in meta-analyses are typically in the .09–.20 range (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett et al., 1991). In addition, individual studies have revealed validity coefficients that range from $-.10$ to $-.30$ (Hogan, Hogan, & Murtha, 1992), roughly zero (Crant, 1995), to the high .20s or low .30s (Barrick & Mount, 1993; Hochwarter, Witt, & Kacmar, 2000). To account for these modest correlations, it has been suggested that researchers examine the influence of moderating variables (Barrick & Mount, 1993). It is apparent that simply examining direct associations between conscientiousness and work contribution, as is the strategy in most meta-analyses, may “have underestimated the potential value of personality in predicting job performance” (Day & Bedeian, 1991, pp. 589–590).

In support of the need to develop a more expansive view of personality–work outcomes linkages, Tett and his colleagues (e.g., Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) developed trait activation theory, which proposes that personality variables may be either dormant or operational depending on cues provided by the environment. In addition, Wright and Mischel (1987) noted that conditional encoding of personality involves the development of contingency relations (*if...then*)

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