



Grit in the workplace: Hype or ripe?



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ABSTRACT

One of the recent developments in personality psychology is the emergence of a new construct, Grit. Its emergence led to a proliferation of studies advancing Grit as a significant predictor of various positive outcomes. So far, little attention has been paid to testing its relevance for various work-related outcomes. The present paper unraveled Grit's validity in predicting a series of work-relevant outcomes, namely, organizational citizenship behavior, in-role performance, counter-productive work behaviors and job satisfaction over the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality. These constructs were assessed on a sample including 170 working adults. Grit had limited predictive validity over the FFM dimensions in predicting the focal outcomes. Consequently, its relevance in the workplace should be treated with caution. More research should be conducted before using Grit as a basis for personnel selection or for interventions focusing on various aspects of performance or job satisfaction.

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1. Personality in selection settings

Over the past decades, much ink has been spilled on describing the importance and role of personality dimensions in the workplace. Our understanding in this domain shifted radically from considering that personality is of little importance in the workplace (Guion & Gottier, 1965) to asserting its centrality to organizational behavior (Judge, Klinger, Simon, & Yang, 2008).

Building on the emergence of unifying personality frameworks, such as the Five-Factor Model (FFM) researchers began conducting meta-analytical reviews that led to a wider understanding of personality's contribution to the workplace. Extant research has shown that personality traits consistently predict job performance across all types of jobs and across a wide range of job complexities (e.g. Schmidt, Shaffer, & Oh, 2008). From the entire range of non-cognitive predictors of job performance, personality traits have one of the highest validities over cognitive variables (e.g. Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Measuring personality dimensions not only increases the predictive validity, but it also reduces the adverse impact against protected groups (e.g. Hough, Oswald, & Ployhart, 2001). To date, criticism surrounding the role and importance of personality dimensions in the workplace has been dispelled, an overwhelming amount of evidence indicating the utility and validity of personality dimensions in work-relevant outcomes (e.g. Sackett & Lievens, 2008).

One ubiquitous concern hovering the study of personality in the workplace is its relatively low validity in predicting various work-

relevant outcomes (e.g. Woods, Lievens, DeFruyt, & Wille, 2013). This issue has received considerable critical attention and remains one of the unresolved challenges in personnel psychology (e.g. Morgeson et al., 2007; Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007). Even when potential curvilinear relationships between personality dimensions and job relevant outcomes are considered, the validity of these dimensions is still low, especially compared to that of cognitive predictors (Le, Oh, Robbins, Ilieș, Holland, & Westrick, 2011). Researchers have tackled this issue by devising various designs aimed at uncovering the hidden parts of the intricate personality-performance relationship. Some of these approaches were: longitudinal analyses of the personality-job performance relationship (e.g. Minbashian, Earl, & Bright, 2013), matching personality predictors with job performance criteria (e.g. Hogan & Holland, 2003a, 2003b) estimating the validity of narrow dimensions stemming from the five-factor model (e.g. Judge, Rodell, Klinger, Simon, & Crawford, 2013) or exploring dimensions lying beyond the five-factor dimensions (e.g. Lee, Ashton, & De Vries, 2005). Drawing upon the latter approach, the current investigation determines the incremental validity of a novel personality construct, Grit, in predicting work-relevant outcomes over the FFM personality dimensions.

1.1. The nature of grit

One non-cognitive construct that received widespread attention over the past decade, being touted as one of the most important predictors of academic performance and other key outcomes, is Grit. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) describe Grit as a higher-order personality dimension, defined as “perseverance and passion for long term goals” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). Grit has two

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lower-order facets: “perseverance of effort” and “consistency of interests”. This hierarchical structure has been retrieved via confirmatory factorial analyses and, consequently, it became a current practice to regard Grit as being unidimensional in nature (e.g. [Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2016](#)).

One issue eliciting vivid Grit-related debates has to do with its alleged insufficient differentiation from Conscientiousness. Empirical investigations have reported “phenotypic correlations of approximately 0.70” with the broad five-factor personality dimension ([Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale, & Plomin, 2016](#), p. 2). Therefore, any attempt to illustrate Grit’s relevance for various outcomes needs to illustrate its validity over and beyond Conscientiousness.

Irrespective of Grit’s relationship with Conscientiousness (equal-level or lower-order trait) if this trait is to be considered as a relevant and useful individual difference, it should explain a unique proportion of variance in desirable work outcomes. Its correlation with Conscientiousness for instance does not preclude Grit’s relevance for work-relevant outcomes beyond the broad FFM dimensions. Recent meta-analytical reviews shed light into the fidelity-bandwidth dilemma ([Cronbach & Gleser, 1965](#)), illustrating that lower-order traits from various FFM dimensions have higher validities in predicting job performance ([Judge et al., 2013](#)).

Recently, investigators have examined the relationship between Grit and academic success and performance, while controlling for the five broad personality dimensions. For example, Grit proved to significantly predict important life outcomes, explaining a unique, although minor variance in academic success or job retention (e.g. [Duckworth, 2013](#); [Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013](#); [Duckworth et al., 2007](#); [Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014](#); [Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014a, 2014b](#)). This dimension has been negatively related with the number of career changes, suggesting its potential relevance in predicting career stability ([Duckworth & Quinn, 2009](#)). Furthermore, Grit displayed incremental validity over the five factor dimensions in predicting educational attainment (e.g. [Duckworth & Quinn, 2009](#)). Grit scores were predictive of associated college and graduate school grade point averages (e.g. [Duckworth & Quinn, 2009](#)). Grit was not only related to students’ performance, but also to teacher effectiveness (e.g. [Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009](#)). Also, Grit predicted better summer training completion than Conscientiousness ([Duckworth et al., 2007](#)) and Whole Candidate Score ([Duckworth et al., 2007](#)). An investigation based on a military sample revealed that Grit outperformed self-control in predicting the completion of the training program ([Duckworth et al., 2007](#)). In the same investigation Grit was reported as the single predictor displaying a non-trivial relationship with the focal outcome. Another recent empirical investigation revealed that Grit was positively related to persistence in task, especially when participants were on losing streak (e.g. [Lucas, Gratch, Cheng, & Marsella, 2015](#)). However, Grit has not always been found as a significant predictor of academic outcomes. For instance, Grit was not a predictor of student academic achievement and course success in a sample of first-year Canadian college students (e.g. [Bazelais, Lemay, & Doleck, 2016](#)). Similar results were found in an American study where Grit had no predictive validity in relation to school success beyond Conscientiousness (e.g. [Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014](#)).

Most of the validity studies conducted to date are focused on educational related outcomes and results are still inconclusive. In so far, research provided only circumstantial evidence regarding Grit’s relevance for various occupational outcomes. Searching the title words “Job Performance” and “Grit” on PsycInfo did not return any matching results. Despite this paucity of research and the inconclusive evidence relating Grit to occupational outcomes, proponents of this dimension argued that dedication to achieve long term goals and objectives explains how people having only moderate standings on “traditional” predictors, attain proficiency in various lines of study or work. Such

extraordinary claims need to be backed up by evidence and it is therefore crucial to establish whether Grit can be considered a valid predictor of occupational outcomes.

The current investigation explores Grit’s validity in predicting various work-relevant outcomes (job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, counter-productive work behaviors) and one of the most researched job attitudes (job satisfaction).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

2.1.1. Power estimation

The optimal sample size necessary for detecting small effect sizes (0.10 or larger), with a power of 0.80, was established via power analysis conducted with G-Power. The sample size necessary for detecting such effects, for a model including one criterion and eight predictors, was 159 participants. We targeted 200 participants. After eliminating all the cases that had missing entries, a total sample of 170 participants remained.

2.1.2. Participants

Participants were 170 Romanian working adults with 78 males (45%) and 92 females. The age range was 22 to 60 years ($M = 35.82$, $SD = 7.13$). Most of the participants had graduate (96 participants) or post-graduate (69 participants) studies, with only 5 (2.9%) of the total sample having graduated only secondary education programs.

2.2. Measures

All the measures were translated into Romanian closely following the guidelines for test translation recommended by [Hambleton \(2005\)](#).

2.2.1. Personality

We used the Romanian version of the 60-item NEO-FFI ([Costa & McCrae, 1992](#)) for measuring the Big Five personality factors. The NEO-FFI follows a 12 item per domain structure. Each item was rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

2.2.2. Grit

Grit was measured with the unidimensional inventory proposed by [Duckworth et al. \(2007\)](#). This measure has demonstrated very good psychometric characteristics: internal consistency, test-retest stability and predictive validity ([Duckworth & Quinn, 2009](#)). The 12-item Grit measure was translated into several languages (e.g. German or French). The psychometric characteristics of this measure are outlined in the paper published by [Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama, and Kwok \(2012\)](#). The English version was translated into Romanian and then back-translated into English to ensure semantic equivalence. The Grit Scale includes 12 items (sample items: “Setbacks don’t discourage me” or “I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one”) measured via a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 - Not like me at all to 5 - Very much like me ([Duckworth et al., 2007](#)).

2.2.3. Job performance

We measured three classes of performance-related behaviors: organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), counter-productive work behaviors (CWB) and in-role behaviors (IRB). OCB was assessed via the questionnaire designed by [Williams and Anderson \(1991\)](#), including a total of 13 items, measuring both interpersonal and organizational OCB. “I give notice in advance when I am unable to come to work” is a sample item tapping into organizational OCB. The English versions were translated into Romanian and then back-translated into English to ensure semantic equivalence. An item designed to measure interpersonal OCB is “I help others who have heavy work-loads.” ([Williams &](#)

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