Select on Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability

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Behavior in organizations is a function of an individual’s ability, his/her motivation, and the constraints inherent in the situation. This chapter focuses on the prediction of workplace behaviors that are influenced by an individual’s motivation, particularly as measured by the personality dimensions of conscientiousness and emotional stability. The previous chapter clearly showed that general intelligence predicts job performance. However, many important workplace behaviors are a function of the individual’s motivation or willingness to perform them and, consequently, are not predicted well by general intelligence. When asked what employee skills managers consider important for workplace success, they ordinarily list the following attributes as critical for success at work:

* Be free from substance abuse
* Demonstrate honesty and integrity
* Pay attention to the person speaking
* Follow directions given verbally
* Show respect for others
* Show pride
* Be punctual in attendance

The behaviors listed above (and others not listed) are influenced largely by an individual’s motivation. Therefore, in order to identify individuals who are likely to exhibit such behaviors, it is necessary to assess relevant personality characteristics rather than general mental ability. The universal principle that we advocate in this chapter is that organizations should routinely select on the personality dimensions of conscientiousness and emotional stability. A sub-principle of the chapter is that organizations should also select on other personality dimensions, but such practices should be dictated by the specific requirements of the job or the particular criterion.

Personality can be defined as an individual’s relatively stable and enduring pattern of thoughts,
feelings and actions. Although more than 15,000 trait terms in the English language can be used to describe personality, most researchers agree that the structure of personality consists of five broad dimensions, often called the Big Five or the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality: conscientiousness (i.e., dependable, industrious, efficient and achievement-oriented), emotional stability (i.e., calm, steady, self-confident, and secure), extraversion (i.e., gregarious, sociable, ambitious, and active), agreeableness (i.e., courteous, helpful, trusting, cooperative, and considerate), and openness to experience (i.e., cultured, intellectual, imaginative, and analytical).

Validity of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability

Other things being equal, individuals high on conscientiousness perform better on the job. This principle is very broad and, like intelligence, it applies to all job types at all job levels. Conscientious individuals are achievement oriented, hard-working, dependable, persistent, responsible, organized, careful, and reliable. Such traits are fundamentally related to motivation at work. They lead to increased effort, they direct effort toward specific goals, and they help sustain effort over time.

Similarly, individuals high on emotional stability perform better on the job. This principle is also quite broad, although the research evidence to date is not as strong as for conscientiousness. Viewed from the negative pole, neurotic individuals are nervous, high-strung, stress prone, moody, lack self-esteem and are insecure. Such traits tend to inhibit positive motivational tendencies at work. That is, individuals who spend time worrying about their performance, doubt their abilities, require assurance from others, are depressed, and are stress prone are unable to develop adequate coping strategies and cannot focus attention on the tasks at hand. In short, traits associated with the low end of emotional stability (neuroticism) lead to poor performance.

These general principles are derived from the results of several meta-analytic studies that have examined the relationship between personality traits and job performance (e.g. Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 1999; Hough, 1992; Hurtz & Donovan, 1998; Salgado, 1997, 1998). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that conscientiousness, and to a lesser extent, emotional stability, are valid predictors of job performance in a wide variety of jobs. For example, Barrick et al., (1999) reviewed eight meta-analyses conducted since 1990 and reported that construct valid measures of conscientiousness and emotional stability predicted overall job performance with an average true score validity of .24 and .15, respectively. This evidence demonstrates that selecting on conscientiousness and emotional stability will increase overall job performance, just like selecting on intelligence will. Furthermore, because conscientiousness and emotional stability have very small (or zero) correlations with intelligence and with each other, each adds unique information to the prediction of job performance. Thus, deciding to hire applicants with higher intelligence, conscientiousness, and emotional stability in combination, will result in an increase in the number of employees who perform assigned job tasks effectively.

Aside from the findings that conscientiousness and emotional stability predict overall work performance, which is an important criterion for all organizations, there are other reasons to select employees on these two broad personality traits. Conscientiousness and emotional stability predict outcomes that are not typically included in an overall job performance criterion. These include regularly coming to work on time, staying with the organization rather than leaving, contributing more positive “citizenship” behaviors, including helping others when needed, training or mentoring newcomers, minimizing or solving conflicts within the work group, and maintaining personal discipline by avoiding negative behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse, rules infractions, and other counterproductive behaviors. All of these are critical to organizational success, yet are not necessarily assessed through an overall performance criterion. Further, none of these important work outcomes are predicted well by general intelligence.

It is well known that turnover is a major cost to employers. A major goal of many employers is to hire employees who not only perform well but also stay on the job for a long period of time, particularly in tight labor markets. Conscientiousness and emotional stability have been found to consistently (negatively) predict an individual’s propensity to withdraw from the job. Barrick and Mount (1996) showed that voluntary turnover was predicted by both personality traits, with true score correlations across two firms ranging from -.21 to -.26. Similarly, DeMatteo, White, Teplitzky, and Sachs (1992) found emotional stability was the best predictor, and conscientiousness was the second best predictor of turnover in the military. Selecting on
conscientiousness and emotional stability will reduce workforce instability such as excessive turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness.

Another important reason to select on conscientiousness and emotional stability is that they are centrally related to the constructs of integrity and customer service, both of which are strongly related to successful job performance. Considering integrity first, employers are very interested in eliminating counterproductive or antisocial behavior at work, including belligerence with customers or fellow co-workers, “badmouthing” the organization, sabotage of equipment or products, theft of goods or money, and excessive alcohol or drug abuse. Research demonstrates integrity tests are valid predictors of these behaviors (Ones, Viswesvaran & Schmidt, 1993), and also predict supervisory ratings of performance ($\rho = .46$). In addition, Ones (1993) identified more than 100 studies reporting correlations between integrity tests and temperament measures. She found that integrity tests were related primarily to conscientiousness and emotional stability (along with agreeableness).

Turning to the customer service construct, Frei and McDaniel (1998) reported a mean validity of customer service measures for predicting supervisory ratings of performance of .50. Customer service measures were strongly related to conscientiousness and emotional stability (again, along with agreeableness). Ones and Viswesvaran (1996) found that emotional stability emerged as the strongest personality based predictor of customer service orientation followed by conscientiousness. Thus, a major component of what is measured by integrity tests and customer service tests is conscientiousness and emotional stability.

Selecting on conscientiousness and emotional stability is also important from the viewpoint of conforming to existing laws and legal precedents. A key question is whether a predictor unintentionally discriminates by screening out a disproportionate number of minorities and women. To the extent this happens, the predictor has adverse impact, which may result in legal action. Research consistently demonstrates a large mean difference of approximately one standard deviation between African Americans and Whites on intelligence. In contrast, there are relatively small sub-group differences on conscientiousness and emotional stability. For example, in a meta-analysis reported by Hough (1995), differences between African American and Hispanic subgroups versus White subgroups were very small (d ranges from -.06 to .04; N up to 142,000). Similar non-significant differences have also been found for gender. In a meta-analysis by Feingold (1994), only small gender differences were found on measures of conscientiousness and emotional stability (d = -.10 and -.14, respectively, where women scored slightly higher; with N larger than 60,000). Thus, from a legal perspective, selecting on conscientiousness and emotional stability (and other personality dimensions) is advantageous because it does not appear to result in adverse impact which could lead to litigation.

In summary, employees selected using conscientiousness and emotional stability are not only better overall performers, but also actively look for more responsibility and challenges, are more service oriented, and exhibit greater integrity and fewer irresponsible behaviors. In addition, deciding whom to hire using conscientiousness and emotional stability is not likely to result in legal challenges.

**Relationship of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability to Work-Related Attitudes**

Another reason to select on conscientiousness and emotional stability is that they are related to work-related attitudes, which in turn, have been shown to affect performance. For example, conscientiousness and emotional stability are positively related to job satisfaction. Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999) found that conscientiousness and emotional stability assessed at an early age (12-14) were strong predictors of overall job satisfaction in late adulthood ($r = .40$ and .34, respectively), even after controlling for clinicians ratings of extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness. In turn, job satisfaction has been shown to be positively related to performance.

Conscientiousness and emotional stability are also among the strongest personality based predictors of life satisfaction (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). It has been argued that conscientiousness plays a major role in both job and life satisfaction because conscientious behavior is instrumental in attaining outcomes such as career success that achievement-oriented people value (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Schmutte and Ryff (1997) concluded that those high in conscientiousness are more satisfied because they achieve a heightened sense of control and competence through their diligent and responsible behavior. Thus conscientiousness is
instrumental in attaining desired outcomes and fostering control, which leads to greater satisfaction.

The affects of emotional stability on satisfaction are complex and are best viewed from the negative pole (i.e., neuroticism). People who suffer from low emotional stability experience greater distress and reduced job and life satisfaction because they experience more adverse events, and react negatively and more strongly when such problems occur. Higher levels of emotional stability result in greater satisfaction because stable people have more confidence to approach stressful work, have a more positive view of themselves, others, and the world around them, and do not let negative emotions and dysfunctional thought processes distract them from the task at hand. Overall, these results show that conscientiousness and emotional stability are fundamentally important to success at work, but are also important to satisfaction at work as well as one’s overall satisfaction in life. It is not an exaggeration to say that conscientiousness and emotional stability are fundamentally important to overall life success.

How do conscientiousness and emotional stability affect job performance?

The literature accumulated to date convincingly demonstrates that there are numerous advantages to organizations when applicants are selected on conscientiousness. But how does conscientiousness affect performance? As discussed below it affects job performance both directly and indirectly. It has a direct effect on performance because all other things equal, conscientious individuals are more reliable and dependable, are more careful and thorough, and are highly achievement-oriented. All of these traits lead directly to success at work.

Conscientiousness has an indirect effect on task performance through its effects on self-regulatory processes. These self-regulatory processes work primarily through motivational or “will-do” performance factors. An especially important mechanism by which conscientiousness affects performance indirectly is through the amount of effort exerted. Mount and Barrick (1995) found that conscientiousness correlates highly with amount of effort exerted ($\rho = .51$). This strong relationship indicates that conscientiousness affects task performance through increased time on task, which in turn affects performance through its effect on other mediating variables. For example, increased time on task leads to greater quantity of output, all other things equal. It also provides more opportunities to practice and provides more exposure to a wider variety of problems. Both of these increase job knowledge, which in turn increases task performance. (As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a strong correlation between job knowledge and job performance).

Conscientiousness also affects performance indirectly through its effect on quality. Mount and Barrick (1995) found that conscientiousness is strongly correlated with quality ($\rho = .44$). This makes sense because conscientious people plan and organize their work, and are careful, thorough and detail oriented. Such individuals are more likely to spot problems and errors in processes and output. This leads to better quality work, which, in turn leads to higher performance. These traits are also likely to lead to fewer accidents and safety violations.

Similarly, conscientious people are dependable, reliable and abide by rules. They are less likely to engage in counterproductive behaviors such as theft, rules infractions, violence on the job, sabotage and so forth. In turn, each of these counterproductive behaviors are associated with job performance (negatively). In a related, but positive vein these same traits lead to positive citizenship behaviors. Such behaviors include willingness to help in emergency or overload situations, taking on tasks no one else is willing to do, and going beyond prescribed role requirements to get the job done. Conscientiousness has been shown to be a valid predictor of these behaviors, which in turn, have been shown to be related to positive supervisory ratings.

Conscientiousness also affects performance through its effect on positive self-efficacy. That is, because conscientious people develop greater job knowledge and produce more and better quality output, they develop more positive beliefs about their capabilities to accomplish particular tasks. Chen, Casper, and Cortina (1999) have shown that conscientiousness predicts self-efficacy and, in turn, self-efficacy is related to task performance.

Another way conscientiousness indirectly effects job performance is through goal setting processes. Conscientious people are more likely to set goals which, in turn leads to higher performance. (See Latham’s Chapter for a detailed discussion of the positive effects of goal setting.) A study by Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993) showed that
highly conscientious sales representatives are more likely to set goals autonomously and to be more committed to their goal, which, in turn, led to higher performance. Barrick et al. (1993) found that about half of the total effect of conscientiousness on performance was indirect.

In summary, conscientiousness has both direct and indirect effects on performance, largely through its effects on “will-do” performance factors. Conscientious people exert more effort, which in turn, leads to greater job knowledge and greater work output. Conscientiousness leads to better planned and organized work and work that is done more carefully with more attention to detail, which leads to better quality and fewer accidents and safety violations. Increased job knowledge and greater quality work lead to greater confidence that the individual can accomplish a specific task, which in turn, leads to higher job performance. In addition conscientious individuals set goals and are more committed to them which, in turn leads to better performance.

Motivation also appears to be the primary mechanism through which emotional stability affects job performance. A recent meta-analysis (Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990) reported a correlation of .16 (\( \rho = .25^{1} \)) between emotional stability (Hough et al. use the term adjustment) and effort. Furthermore, the ABLE military study reported a correlation of .17 (\( \rho = .27^{1} \)) between emotional stability (also labeled adjustment) and effort and leadership (Hough et al., 1990). This makes sense as those prone to greater anxiety and insecurity (low on emotional stability) tend to be fearful of novel situations, be more concerned about failure, and are more susceptible to feelings of dependence and helplessness (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Those who experience greater and more frequent negative emotions may choose to withhold effort rather than risk the potential affective consequences of failure. Researchers label this phenomenon the “self-handicapping” paradox (Rhodewalt, 1994). In addition, the tendency of people to behave in this way, particularly within the context of achievement (i.e., job) settings, is fundamental to the learned helplessness theory of depression (Seligman, 1978). Taken together, these findings suggest that the inability of neurotics to cope with fear of failure substantively impacts job performance through their effects on motivational level.

Research also suggests emotional stability affects the employee’s ability and willingness to get along with other employees. Mount, Barrick, and Stewart (1998) demonstrate that emotional stability is correlated with performance in jobs that involve considerable interpersonal interaction, particularly when the interaction involves helping, cooperating with and nurturing others (\( \rho = .18 \)). These effects were found to be even stronger in work teams (\( \rho = .27 \)). It is logical that employees low on emotional stability are likely to be more anxious, moody, and to express more negative affectivity, which could suppress or even inhibit cooperation. Reduced cooperation and teamwork, in turn, lead to less success at work.

Emotional stability also effects motivation at work through its moderately strong affect (\( \rho = .33 \)) on self-efficacy (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). In essence, people who do not see themselves as worthy and able are less confident, and interpret their environment through a negative lens. Thus, they are more likely to view themselves as victims, rate themselves and peers less favorably, and tend to be more dissatisfied with themselves, their jobs, and lives in general (Judge et al., 1997; Hogan & Briggs, 1984; Watson & Clark, 1984). These perceptions are likely to influence one’s estimate of one’s fundamental capabilities to cope with work’s exigencies. Taken together, people who are emotionally stable are more motivated because they feel greater confidence and control at work, are more willing to engage in novel situations, and view life more positively.

Emotional stability is also (negatively) related to counterproductive behavior, which in turn affects job performance. Hough et al. (1990) found a very large correlation of -.43 (\( \rho = -.68^{1} \)) between emotional stability and delinquency. In an extension of that meta-analysis, Hough (1992) reported a correlation of .41 (\( \rho = .64^{1} \)) between emotional stability (labeled adjustment) and law-abiding behavior. In essence, emotionally unstable employees commit more theft, more delinquent or even criminal offenses, and have greater incidences of absenteeism, tardiness, disciplinary actions, and fail to follow the rules. Further support for the importance of emotional stability can be found by examining meta-analytic evidence (Hough et al., 1990; Hough, 1992) about its relationship to commendable behavior (\( \rho = .24^{1} \)) and personal discipline (\( \rho = .19^{1} \)). Employees scoring high on emotional stability are likely to be steady, calm, and predictable, which helps them...
obtain more commendations and recognition at work. In turn, commendations along with fewer disciplinary actions and reprimands have been linked to higher performance ratings (Borman, White, Pulakos, & Oppler, 1991).

In sum, people who are more confident, secure, and unflappable are more motivated at work, which in turn increases performance. They are also more cooperative and more actively participate in teamwork, which leads to higher job performance. Furthermore, emotionally stable people are more committed to work and can more effectively cope with short- and long-term changes at work, which enhances success. Poor “copers” continually find themselves in situations they appraise as exceeding their cognitive resources and level of motivation, while effective “copers” may seek out situations that they find challenging or providing opportunities for personal growth. They are also more likely to abide by the organizations rules and policies, and will exhibit more commendable behaviors, which in turn, leads to higher performance. In essence, stable employees are predisposed to view events, themselves, and others in a positive light, can cope better, are more confident, motivated and committed to work, are willing to help others, and adhere to organizational rules and policies, which enables the employee to be more successful at work.

Exceptions to this Universal Principle

The general principle in this chapter is that individuals should be selected on their level of conscientiousness and emotional stability. However, this does not mean that these are the only valid personality dimensions that predict performance. A sub-principle of this chapter is that individuals should be selected on other personality dimensions according to the specific requirements of the job and/or the nature of the criterion. Research has shown that the other three personality dimensions in the FFM model (agreeableness, extraversion and openness to experience) are relevant in some jobs or for some specific types of criteria. To clearly identify when these relationships are likely to be non-zero, practitioners need to focus more on job requirements, demands, or what now are labeled competencies. This does not imply an extensive, time consuming, content-specific job analysis. Rather, it suggests the relevance of these personality traits depends on the requirements and competencies generally demanded by the job to achieve successful job performance. For example, if the job requires extensive interpersonal interaction of a cooperative nature, agreeableness would be expected to be an important predictor. In fact, recent research demonstrates that agreeableness is the single best predictor of teamwork and is also related to service orientation (Mount et al., 1998). In contrast, if the nature of the interpersonal interaction is competitive or requires persuasion or negotiating, then one would expect extraversion to be a relevant predictor. Thus, extraversion has been found to be a valid predictor of success in sales and management jobs (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Finally, it would be expected that companies who are seeking employees who are flexible and highly adaptive to the rapid changes frequently encountered at work would select on openness to experience. To date, however, there is very little evidence to support this hypothesis. This is somewhat surprising, particularly when one recognizes that college students tend to be almost a full standard deviation higher on this attribute than non-college students are. However, as one would expect, employees higher on openness to experience tend to have higher training performance than those low in openness (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Thus, to date, the only criterion openness to experience appears relevant for is training success. It should also be noted that trainees scoring higher on extraversion have been found to be more successful during training. This has been attributed to extraverts’ increased and more active participation during training.

Implementing these Principles

The general principle that we have discussed is that employers should select applicants who are hardworking, dependable, achievement striving (i.e., conscientious) as well as not temperamental, not stress prone, not anxious, and not worrisome (i.e., emotionally stable). This is not a particularly surprising statement; however, a necessary first step before a principle can be implemented is that it must be well understood. In this vein, much progress has been made in the past decade in understanding how conscientiousness and emotional stability relate to job performance. Equally important to the implementation of these principles has been the contribution of industrial-organizational psychologists to the development of reliable and valid measures of these constructs.

The use of personality assessment to select applicants requires collecting “personal” data. To make sure that accurate data are collected in a fair manner, attention must be given to the relevance of
various personality traits, privacy and confidentiality of the information, and some consideration of the “demands” of the applicant setting. Implementation requires that the organization accurately identifies and measures applicant qualifications relative to job requirements. Thus, before assessing personality traits, a job analysis should be conducted to identify critical competencies and job requirements. By understanding the critical requirements of the job, one will recognize which personality traits are relevant predictors, in addition to conscientiousness and emotional stability. Nevertheless, some consideration must be given to the “job” itself. Today organizations are moving away from the use of narrow, well-defined jobs and towards broader, less well-defined, more amorphous jobs, with constantly changing content. The changing structure of jobs implies there will be greater emphasis on those traits and qualities that are valid for all jobs (intelligence, conscientiousness, and emotional stability). Nevertheless, it will be desirable to select on the other three personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience) when those traits are valid predictors of requirements for jobs likely to be encountered by the people being hired.

Once it is known which specific traits will be assessed, consideration must also be given to the best means for assessing personality. Research illustrates that co-workers, customers and supervisors at work can rate a person’s personality, and those assessments have been found to predict job performance better than self-reports of personality. For example, Mount, Barrick, and Strauss (1994) found that the validity of co-worker and customer ratings of conscientiousness was .37 and .42, respectively, in predicting supervisor ratings of performance. The magnitude of these relationships approaches that of general intelligence. The drawback of using observer ratings, however, is that they cannot be used for external hiring.

The most common means of assessing personality is through self-report personality tests. There are several construct valid measures of the Big Five traits. For example, the Personal Characteristics Inventory (PCI by Mount, Barrick, Laffitte, & Callans, 1999) is a self-report measure of the Big Five that asks applicants to report their agreement or disagreement with 150 sentences. The measure takes about 30 minutes to complete and has a 5th- to 6th-grade reading level. Another commonly used measure of the Big Five is the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI by Hogan & Hogan, 1995). Responses to the HPI can be scored to yield measures of occupational success as well as employee reliability and service orientation. A third alternative is the NEO Personality Inventory, which is also based on the Big Five typology (Costa & McCray, 1992). There are several versions of the NEO and it has been translated into several languages.

An implementation concern in the use of personality inventories is that testing may be seen as an invasion of privacy and confidentiality. Personality testing is a means to learn about applicants’ traditional ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, and critics contend such probing is a violation of privacy rights. Although a general right to privacy is not explicitly stated in the U.S. constitution, some states, such as California, do incorporate such a right in their state constitutions. However, employers who assess only job-relevant personality traits should be able to prevail in these states. Courts generally seem inclined to accept an argument that the information obtained bears a relationship to some legitimate employer goal, such as higher job performance. Nevertheless, a practitioner should examine the items of the personality test to determine whether there are invasive or offensive test items. To evaluate items, the practitioner must consider the need to balance the employer’s right to know versus the employee’s right to privacy.

Finally, some consideration of the demands of the applicant setting must be taken. There is some concern that applicants may distort their responses to personality tests. This concern becomes apparent when one considers the nature of some personality items. For example, few applicants would agree with the statement that “others would describe me as lazy or irresponsible at work,” if they desperately wanted the job. Given the near impossibility of verifying responses to some of these questions, the possibility that impression management influences responses is quite real. In fact, research suggests applicants do manage impressions, as scores are higher by one-half standard deviation between applicants versus non-applicant settings. Given that a job is on the line when applicants complete a personality test, the tendency to enhance their impression is undeniable. Nevertheless, research clearly shows (Barrick & Mount, 1996) that impression management does not significantly detract from the predictive validity of the tests. Thus, it has yet to be shown that faking undermines the predictive validity of personality tests in selection. However, an important implication from these findings is that practitioners should not rely on norms based on incumbent responses, as they will
tend to be one-half standard deviation lower than norms derived from incumbent samples.

In sum, significant progress has been made in understanding the magnitude of the relationship between conscientiousness and emotional stability to job performance and the processes by which these constructs affect performance. Successful implementation of the principles we advocate requires reliable and valid measures of both conscientiousness and emotional stability. Over the past decade several construct valid measures of the five factor taxonomy of personality have been developed. Nonetheless, additional research is needed to further develop and refine these measures to overcome potential problems associated with impression management and socially desirable responding.

Real World Examples

I. Relationship of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability to Career Success

A recent study (Judge et. al., 1999) investigated the relationship between traits from the Big Five model of personality to success in careers spanning over 50 years. The ability to predict success 50 years after assessing personality provides a rigorous test of the utility of selecting applicants using conscientiousness and emotional stability. The data for this study were obtained from the Intergenerational Studies, administered by the institute of Human Development, University of California at Berkeley. The sample (average N = 194) was derived from children born in Berkeley, California in 1928 and 1929. Many measurements were collected from participants over the 60-year course of the study. For example, there were two studies during later childhood (11-13 and again 16-18), as well as three major follow-up studies conducted when participants were in early adulthood (30-38), middle age (41-50) and in late adulthood (53-62). In addition to collecting personality and intelligence test data, the subject’s job satisfaction, income, and occupational status were collected during each of these studies. Thus, the records were rich with personality and career data, and comparisons were made across data collected at five different points in time (ranging from childhood to late adulthood).

Both childhood and early adulthood assessments of personality revealed enduring relationships between personality traits and later career success. For example, childhood assessments of conscientiousness and emotional stability predicted job satisfaction (r = .40 and .22, respectively), income (.16 and .26, respectively), and occupational status (r = .49 and .26, respectively), even in late adulthood. These results show that knowledge about one’s conscientiousness and emotional stability early in life proved to be an effective predictor of satisfaction and success in one’s later career, even over a 50 year time span. Results also demonstrated that these two personality traits explained significant incremental variance in these measures of career success, even after controlling for the influence of intelligence. Taken together, these results show that highly conscientious and emotionally stable children earned higher salaries, were more satisfied with their work, and attained higher positions in the social hierarchy later in life. Obviously, organizations will be better off selecting individuals who are conscientious and emotionally adjusted, as they will be rewarded by those decisions with higher performance and more committed employees for years to come.

II. The Generalizability of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability as Predictors

During the 1980’s, the Army conducted the Selection and Classification Project (Project A). Project A was a 7-year effort that was designed to investigate how the contributions of selection could maximize performance within the constraints of one of the largest operational personnel systems in the world. The Army personnel system includes over 276 jobs and hires, almost exclusively, inexperienced and untrained persons to fill them. A major goal of Project A was to develop a battery of predictor measures that would best serve the needs of all the jobs in the entire selection system for entry-level enlisted personnel. Thus, this project examined all of the major domains of individual differences that had potential for generating useful predictor variables. Several versions of the test battery were developed and examined in an iterative sequence, with each round of testing involving thousands of recruits or enlisted personnel. Rather than review the extensive list of predictors examined, interested readers are referred to Peterson, Hough, Dunnette, Rosse, Houston, and Toquam (1990). Suffice it to say that the range of individual differences was extraordinarily comprehensive, ranging from administrative/archival records to training achievement tests.
The study also rigorously modeled job performance to better understand what these individual differences were predicting. Project A examined whether a single model of performance would be stable across the large number of jobs available. Multiple methods were used to generate over 200 performance indicators of a subsample of jobs. An iterative procedure resulted in the identification of five broad performance dimensions that were found in all jobs. Two of these performance measures focus on specific technical competence called core technical proficiency and general soldiering proficiency. While the former dimension appears to be a basic performance component for any job (core task proficiency), the latter dimension would almost surely be specific to the military. The analysis also identified three non-job-specific performance dimensions that are more under motivational control. These are called effort/leadership, maintaining personal discipline, and physical fitness/military bearing. Again, while military bearing is unique to the military, the other two dimensions are quite likely basic performance components of almost any job. Although job performance was found to be multidimensional, an overall decision could scale each performance measure by its relative importance for a particular personnel decision or job.

The findings (McHenry, Hough, Toquam, Hanson, & Ashworth, 1990) from this large-scale project were that intelligence tests provided the best prediction of job-specific and general task proficiency (core technical proficiency and general soldiering proficiency), whereas the personality composites, particularly those traits measuring conscientiousness and emotional stability, were the best predictors of giving extra effort and leadership (multiple R = .33, uncorrected), exhibiting personal discipline (multiple R = .32, uncorrected), and physical fitness and military bearing (multiple R = .37, uncorrected). The study also illustrated the incremental validity contributed by other predictors over intelligence. The greatest amount of incremental validity was generated by the personality measures, especially when predicting effort and leadership ($\Delta R = .11$), personal discipline ($\Delta R = .19$), and physical fitness and military bearing ($\Delta R = .21$). These results show the generalizable value of using conscientiousness and emotional stability for purposes of selection.

Conclusion

The general principle in this chapter is that organizations should select employees based on their conscientiousness and emotional stability. A sub-principle is that organizations should also select on agreeableness, extraversion, or openness to experience when they have been shown to be relevant for specific criteria or requirements of the job. Hiring applicants who are more intelligent (as advocated in the first chapter) will result in employees who are capable of acquiring more work-related facts and principles as well as greater procedural knowledge and skill. This contributes to job success, particularly on the core substantive or technical tasks central to the job. But hiring smart people is not enough. Hiring applicants who are more conscientious and emotionably stable will result in employees who are predisposed to exert greater effort at work, who persist at work for a longer period of time, are able to more effectively cope with stress and are more committed to work. In addition, these employees are likely to be more responsible and helpful to others at work, are more likely to remain on the job, and are less likely to engage in counterproductive behaviors at work. In conclusion, hiring people who work smarter (select on intelligence), and who work harder and cope better (select on conscientiousness and emotional stability), will lead to increased individual productivity which in turn will lead to increased organizational effectiveness.

Footnotes

1 These meta-analytic estimates were not corrected for statistical artifacts in the original article, as most meta-analyses are. Thus, to make these meta-analytic estimates more comparable to other results discussed in this article, they were fully corrected for measurement error in the predictor and criterion, as well as for range restriction (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990). To correct these estimates, the values reported by Barrick et al. (1999) were used: where the average sample weighted predictor reliability value across prior meta-analyses was .78; criterion reliability was .55; and range restriction was .93.
References


