

## Does personality predict job performance?

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### Introduction

Discussions that concern [personality as a valid predictor of job performance](#) have started gathering momentum ever since Barrick and Mount (1991) conducted a substantial meta-analysis on the same topic. To date, the major objective in most research studies has been to interrogate the potential relationship between the famous Five-Factor Model (FFM) and overall job performance. The findings of meta-analytic research showed that there was an upward surge in the validity estimates of personality traits which resulted in the growth in the utilization of personality in employment selection (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006; Scroggins, Thomas & Morris, 2008). It is the unanimous agreement among Human Resources Management scientists and practitioners that the [Five-Factor Model](#) is a useful tool in predicting employee performance across a range of jobs and settings. The five factors are emotional stability, [extraversion](#), openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Research suggests that personality traits as predictor variables can be generalized across all occupations and work tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1991). It is the burden of this paper to critically examine the FFM and its association with job performance.

Related: [The personality traits that drive job performance](#)

### Definitions of Personality

An individual's personality can be explained in terms of a set of traits possessed by that particular individual that determines the person's *behaviour, attitude, motivation and cognition* in particular circumstances.

[Personality](#) refers to the set of invisible characteristics and practices that lie behind a relatively stable pattern of behaviour in response to ideas, objects, or people in the environment (Daft, 2011).

Ewin (2003) noted that the most suitable approach to defining personality is through investigating characteristics and qualities within an individual. He argued for a definition that is inclusive of everything about the person, e.g. mental, emotional, social and physical aspects.

According to McCrae & Costa (1990), personality can be defined as a ‘dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviours in various situations.

Hogan, Hogan and Roberts (1996) define personality measurement as "any procedure that systematically assigns numbers to the characteristic features of a person's interpersonal style according to some explicit rules."

Personality is defined as the dynamic organisation within the individual psychological and physical systems which influences characteristics, behaviour and thoughts (Maddi & Costa, 2009).

According to Schultz and Schultz (2005), personality may be defined as “unique, relatively enduring internal and external aspects of a person’s character that influence behaviour in different situations.

According to Ivancevich & Matteson (2002), personality is defined as reasonably stable feelings and behaviours of individuals resultant from different genetic and environmental influencers and factors.

The research done by Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki and Cortina (2006), has confirmed that [personality traits](#) are capable of predicting behavioural outcomes at work and the results can be replicated in different cultural contexts... This indicates that the findings are universal and that it is possible to generalize the results of such studies across cultures. The succeeding sections will define the personality dimensions included in the FFM as well as the cover ground on what past research specifically has found on each of them.

According to the [Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology](#), 13% of US employers utilize personality assessments; 10,000 employees, 2,500 colleges, and 200 federal agencies use the well-known [Myers-Briggs test](#). Companies that use these types of assessments include McKinsey & Company, the CIA, the Department of State, and [89 of the Fortune 100](#) companies. The personality assessment industry is thriving – Myers-Briggs generates [\\$20 million per year](#) in revenue; other companies that specialize in this area include Criteria, Wonderlic, and Humanmetrics.

According to the [Myers-Briggs Foundation](#), personality assessment helps people better understand and appreciate their strengths. This can improve their performance and professional development at work. It can also help people appreciate and understand others. It can be used to understand and strengthen many [areas of your life](#): relationships, career, education, spirituality, workplace, and counselling.

## Conscientiousness

[Conscientiousness](#) refers to individuals who exhibit traits of self-control using being capable of planning, organizing, working strategically towards goals, and carrying out tasks (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Barrick & Mount, 1998). Conscientiousness is also a trait that is associated with diligence, self-discipline, punctuality, and general competence (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003). The trait characterizes an achievement-oriented person. On the negative side, high Conscientiousness may lead to annoying fastidiousness, compulsive neatness or workaholic behaviour. Low scorers may not necessarily lack moral principles, but they are less thorough in applying them. The six sub-dimensions included in this broad dimension of personality refer to Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement-striving, Self-discipline, and Deliberation (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

By synthesise large amounts of data from studies conducted from 1952 to 1988, Mount and Barrick (1991), in their large-scale meta-analysis, investigated the relationship between the Five-Factor Model and job performance across five occupational groups (i.e., professionals, police, managers, sales, and skilled/semiskilled). Conscientiousness has correlated positively ( $r = .22$ ) with all five occupational groups, concerning successful job performance.

Moreover, Mount and Barrick (1998), re-established their conclusions from 1991 by stating: “individuals who are dependable, persistent, goal-directed, and organized tend to be higher performers on virtually any job; viewed negatively, those who are careless, irresponsible, low achievement striving, and impulsive tend to be lower performers on virtually any job.

As a reinforcement of Barrick and Mount’s (1991), a strand of research subsequent research findings support the notion that expresses that Conscientiousness is the personality dimension that correlates the strongest, out of all personality dimensions, with overall job performance, across occupations (Barrick et al., 2001; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Mount & Barrick, 1995; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996; Salgado, 1997;

Vinchur et al., 1998).

According to Schmidt and Ryan (1993), conscientiousness is related to job performance and practitioners will seek this personality trait during hiring due to its linkage to job performance. Also, Hurtz and Donovan (2000), found that of the five factors, conscientiousness was the best predictor of job performance. However, there was little relationship between the other Big Five traits and overall job performance.

Related: [What does conscientiousness mean?](#)

## Extroversion

According to Costa & McCrae (1992), extroversion refers to the quantity and intensity of energy directed outwards into the social world. This dimension of personality also refers to the quantity and intensity of preferred interpersonal interactions, activity level, need for stimulation, and capacity for joy. Individuals who score high on extroversion tend to be sociable, active, talkative, person-oriented, optimistic, fun, loving, and affectionate. Individuals who are low in extroversion tend to show traits of shyness; hence they tend to prefer spending time on their own rather than being drawn to an eventful scene with large groups of people. The six sub-dimensions included in this broad dimension of personality refer to Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement seeking, and Positive emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

In tandem with the above, research reveals that extroverted individuals are likely to excel in occupations that require individuals to socialize and be highly interactive with other individuals (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The same researchers concluded that extroversion predicts not only overall job performance but specifically sales performance as well. In evidence, researchers have reported that individuals with high levels of extroversion tend to perform well at supervisory-, police-, and sales-related positions (Salgado, 1997). It should be noted, that Barrick et al. (2001), found no significant relationship between extroversion and overall job performance, however they extended Salgado's findings by reporting that extroversion predicts managerial performance ( $r=.21$ ) as well as teamwork.

Moreso, Vinchur et al. (1998) conducted a meta-analysis where findings indicated that extroversion is a solid predictor of supervisory ratings of sales performance and objective data (sales volume) of sales performance. In light of this information, reoccurring findings in the past have shown that extroversion

has a positive relationship with job performance.

However, past research findings, all in all, hint at the possibility that extroversion is an important personality trait to consider only for some specific occupations (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997). Based on what has been identified in the literature, it is nonetheless reasonable to believe that extroverted sales workers, rather than [introverted](#) ones, are likely to perform better in sales-related positions, particularly as such work frequently requires one to be highly sociable with customers.

As noted by (Colquitt & Le-Pine, 2009), extroverted leaders tend to be more successful because they are more likely to be talkative, and sociable and develop a higher number of relationships (Colquitt & Le-Pine, 2009). The extroverted leader is also excellent in [communication skills](#) and effectively communicates with the employee. Besides, with the extroverted leader, the job performance of the employees is enhanced when they are motivated by status striving, as an indicator of job satisfaction (Barrick, Stewart & Piotrowski, 2002).

Related: [Jobs for Introverts: What You Need to Know](#)

## Neuroticism

Costa & McCrae (1992), noted that [neuroticism](#), as opposed to [Emotional stability](#), refers to individuals who tend to be shy, angry, insecure, depressed, vulnerable and anxious. In contrast, emotionally stable individuals tend to be secure and calm, and therefore more likely to control their impulses and cope with stress. The six sub-dimensions of Neuroticism include Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-consciousness, Impulsiveness, and Vulnerability (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

It can lead to a decrease in the employees' [job performance at the workplace](#) (Barrick, & Mount, 1991). Neurotic leader probably does not have positive attitudes towards work and may lack confidence and optimism, which result in less ambition and less focus on career goals. Therefore, a negative relationship likely exists between neuroticism and goal direction that may give an impact followers' job performance (Malouff et al., 1990).

## Openness to Experience

Openness to Experience refers to individuals who tend to be creative, imaginative, and curious to experience new things amongst other things (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Also, individuals scoring high on this trait are likely to have positive attitudes towards their ideas and experiences in life. In contrast, individuals who score low tend not to prefer fixed routines. More specifically, the dimension relates to an individual's emotional processes. Those who score high may experience deeper emotional states meaning they might experience emotions of both happiness and unhappiness to a larger extent compared to low scorers. The six sub-dimensions of Openness to Experience include Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas, and Values (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Previous research regarding this dimension is not in agreement to what extent it predicts job performance. Barrick et al. (2001), found no significant relationship between Openness and overall job performance. However, findings indicated that Openness predicted success in specific occupations and specific work tasks. As indicated by Barrick and Mount (1991) Openness was found to be a valid predictor of training proficiency. For overall job performance the correlation coefficient was rather weak ( $r=.11$ ). In perspective, Salgado (1997) reported that Openness was significantly related to "police and skilled labour performance". As sales on the phone may be characterized by monotone work processes and fixed routines. It is reasonable to believe that sales workers who score high on Openness will perform better, compared to sales workers who score low on Openness.

According to McCrae and Costa, (1997) openness to experience is quite ambiguous and debatable, and further research is required on this particular dimension compared to the other Big Five personality traits. Salgado et al. (2003), found in their study that openness to experience is not an appropriate trait of personality for employee performance.

In a study done by Mark & John (2000) that analyzed the relationship between openness to experience and job performance, it has been found that the openness to experience trait predicted unique variance in job performance for employees beyond both cognitive aptitudes. Apart from that, leaders that are more open to experience, can handle and solve the conflict positively so that it can reduce the effect on job performance.

Related: [Openness to Experience: The Trait That Matters in Innovation](#)

## Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to individuals who tend to be trusting, helpful towards others, forgiving, soft-hearted, and compassionate (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Quite the contrary, individuals who are low in Agreeableness tend to be egocentric, pessimistic, suspicious, and distrustful, and they also lack the desire to cooperate with others. The six sub-dimensions included in this broad dimension of personality refer to Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, and Tender Mindedness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Past research has found no correlation between Agreeableness and overall job performance (Barrick and Mount (1991).

However, Barrick et al. (2001) found that the dimension predicts teamwork ( $r=.34$ ) and that the dimension respectively can predict success in specific occupations. This indicates that, depending on the type of occupation, Agreeableness may still be conceptualized as a contributing factor to job performance.

Employees scoring high in agreeableness are kind, positive and gentle to other employees and very much interested to cooperate and coordinate them in the area where people need them (Costa and McCrae, 2006). This trait is desirable in the case for account managers to maintain healthy relationships with employees and customers. People with higher agreeableness support others, take a genuine interest in others and rely easily on others. Such people are very kind, gentle, forgiving and flexible in their opinion.

However, it must be noted that High agreeableness is not always useful and advisable. People with low scorer agreeableness believe that some degree of manipulation is necessary for life. These people are perceived as arrogant because they are rigid in their opinion. Organ and Lingl (1995), said that employees with higher agreeableness are satisfied in the context of their work relationship.

Responses to personality assessments help classify and differentiate individuals, providing a basis for understanding prior actions and predicting future behaviour. In summary, different jobs require different types of behaviours for successful performance. Personality, in part, determines who has a natural inclination for certain jobs and certain work environments. People's differing personality characteristics help determine whether they will be a good fit for a certain position. The goal of personality assessment in personnel selection is to identify which individuals, in general, will be successful performers and remain on the job.

According to Hogan & Shelton (1998), the validity of personality assessment instruments in the employment context is two-fold; they investigate human nature to explain the features which characterise human performance, and they explain individual differences and identify the critical dimensions of human performance (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). Hogan (2005), noted a resurgence of personality studies in industrial psychology in the 1990s, with research results demonstrating the usefulness of well-constructed personality measures in predicting work performance.

In a meta-analysis of the relationship between personality and work performance, Barrick and Mount (2005), concluded that both common sense and empirical evidence supported the view that personality traits matter in the workplace. They did however acknowledge that the relationships were complex with both mediating and moderating variables at play.

Related: [Agreeableness Personality: Everything you need to know](#)

## Conclusion

Against this background, it is difficult if not impossible to escape the conclusion that consciousness is the most valid and strongest predictor of on the job performance among the other traits of personality. Therefore this paper calls upon employers to use personality assessment not only in recruitment and selection but also other organisational interventions like competency profiling and personal development.

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