The Contributions of Personality to Organizational Behavior and Psychology: Findings, Criticisms, and Future Research Directions

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Abstract

Skepticism regarding the importance of personality traits as predictors of organizational behavior criteria has given way to an appreciation of the broad array of work outcomes predicted by personality. This article considers the effects of the five-factor model ('Big Five') personality traits on the following work outcomes: (1) job performance; (2) work motivation; (3) job attitudes; (4) leadership; (5) power, politics, and influence; (6) stress, adaptability, and coping; (7) team effectiveness; (8) counterproductive/deviant workplace behaviors; (9) workplace accidents; and (10) conflict and negotiation. Two contemporary criticisms of personality research in organizational behavior – that the validities are small and that faking undermines the usefulness of personality inventories in employment contexts – are then evaluated. Finally, a brief agenda for future research is provided which highlights needed areas of advancement.

Over the past 20 years, there is perhaps no area of psychology that has more deeply and broadly influenced organizational behavior – defined as the field of inquiry concerned with attitudes, decision-making, interpersonal processes, and individual and group behavior in work settings – than personality psychology. Personality traits and other individual differences, of course, have a long history in organizational behavior. However, prior to 20 years ago, the inclusion of personality traits in organizational research was sufficiently scattershot that little cumulative knowledge was generated. In 1989, an influential article deemed personality effects in organizational behavior to be more illusory than real, concluding that 'dispositions are likely to have only limited effects on attitudes and behavior inside organizations' (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989, p. 396).

For a time, this and other cautionary notes were influential. But like a war in which losses in one battle are washed away by gains on other fronts, such

criticisms quickly became overwhelmed by evidence. Three pieces of evidence were especially influential. First, the growth of meta-analysis allowed for cumulation of results across studies. This development was particularly important in the area of personality, given the myriad traits that had been considered over decades of scientific research. Second, and related, the widespread acceptance of the five-factor model (or the 'Big Five') of personality (McCrae & Costa, 2003) provided a framework to organize the diverse set of traits. Indeed, as we will note, while the gains from the five-factor model have been considerable, its acceptance in organizational behavior is so widespread that it threatens to 'white out' other potentially relevant traits. Third, there was an accumulating body of evidence in personality psychology that supported the enduring nature of personality traits (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005), their genetic origins (Johnson, McGue, & Krueger, 2005), and their neuropsychological basis (Pickering & Gray, 1999).

From the vantage point of today, that personality has shown itself relevant to individual attitudes and behavior as well as team and organizational functioning seems an incontrovertible statement. Barrick and Mount (2005, p. 361) flatly state: 'Personality traits do matter at work', and indeed, the data appear to support their conclusion (Hogan, 2004). Though, as we will note, the acceptance of personality traits as important predictors of employment outcomes is far from universal, there is scarcely an area of organizational behavior that has not been affected by personality research, sometimes profoundly so.

In this article, we briefly review the work criteria for which personality variables have demonstrated important effects. We first review the evidence regarding personality effects on 10 core organizational behavior criteria (job performance, work motivation, job attitudes, leadership, power and politics, stress and coping, team effectiveness, counterproductive/deviant workplace behaviors, accidents, and conflict and negotiation). Table 1 provides a summary of effect sizes for those criteria for which meta-analytic estimates are available.

After reviewing what is known about the relationship of personality to these 10 criteria, we then review two common criticisms of personality research in organizational behavior: validities are meager and scores on personality inventories are rendered useless by faking. We conclude with a brief agenda for future research.

Evidence of the Relationship between Personality Traits and Organizational Behavior

Job performance

Perhaps the most intensive application of personality research in organizational settings, and arguably the most controversial, has been in relation to job performance. One reason for this interest – and controversy – concerns the

Table 1 Available meta-analytic correlations between Big Five personality traits and criteria

	Big Five Trait									
	Conscientiousness		Agreeableness		Neuroticism		Openness		Extraversion	
Criterion	ρ	SDρ	ρ	SDρ	ρ	SDρ	ρ	SDρ	ρ	SDρ
Job satisfaction*	0.26	(0.22)	0.17	(0.16)	−0.29	(0.16)	0.02	(0.21)	0.25	(0.15)
Job performance†	0.28	(0.16)	0.13	(0.15)	−0.16	(0.10)	0.08	(0.10)	0.07	(0.14)
Leadership‡	0.28	(0.17)	0.08	(0.17)	−0.24	(0.18)	0.24	(0.11)	0.31	(0.17)
Workplace deviance§	−0.35	(−)	−0.44	(−)	0.26	(−)	−0.08	(−)	−0.03	(−)
Workplace accidents¶	−0.31	(0.29)	−0.44	(0.05)	0.30	(0.22)	0.50	(0.63)	0.02	(0.33)
Motivation (goal-setting)**	0.28	(0.07)	−0.29	(0.21)	−0.29	(0.06)	0.18	(0.00)	0.15	(0.00)
Motivation (expectancy)**	0.23	(0.09)	0.13	(0.00)	−0.29	(0.17)	−0.08	(0.00)	0.10	(0.00)
Motivation (self-efficacy)**	0.22	(0.15)	0.11	(0.17)	−0.35	(0.18)	0.20	(0.04)	0.33	(0.16)
Team effectiveness††	0.11	(0.11)	0.12	(0.13)	−0.04	(0.04)	0.05	(0.13)	0.09	(0.04)

Notes. Correlations are based on the most recently published meta-analysis for the corresponding criterion. Dashes indicate unreported information. ρ = estimated true score correlations; SD$_\rho$ = standard deviation of true score correlations. *Reported in Judge, Heller, and Mount (2002). †Reported in Salgado (2003). ‡Reported in Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002). §Reported in Berry, Ones, and Sackett (2007). ¶Reported in Clarke and Robertson (2008). **Reported in Judge and Ilies (2002). ††Reported in Bell (2007).

role of personality testing in hiring decisions (Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007). The relationship of personality traits to job performance has generated hundreds of articles and over three dozen separate meta-analyses since Barrick and Mount's (1991) influential investigation. In terms of the Big Five, Barrick, Mount, and Judge (2001) pooled validity estimates from 15 prior meta-analyses and determined that one trait, conscientiousness, significantly predicts job performance across different performance criteria and organizational settings. Emotional stability (often labeled by its opposite pole, neuroticism) also predicts overall job performance, albeit generally more weakly than conscientiousness, and generalizes across different occupations. The final three Big Five traits (extraversion, agreeableness, and openness), though not predictive of all job performance criteria in all occupational settings, do demonstrate significant validity coefficients in certain conditions. For instance, both extraversion and agreeableness predict teamwork performance (where interpersonal relationships are important) and openness, which entails intellectual curiosity, predicts training performance.

Aside from the Big Five, another broad personality trait has been shown to predict job performance. Core self-evaluations (CSE; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) is a higher-order factor representing the fundamental evaluations people make about themselves. CSE is conceptualized as a broad, latent trait indicated by at least four specific traits (self-esteem, locus of control, emotional stability, and generalized self-efficacy), though a direct measure of CSE has been developed (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). Judge et al. (Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge et al., 2003) found evidence that the higher order core self-evaluations trait is comparable in predictive validity to conscientiousness and captures incremental variance in job performance over and above the Big Five.

Work motivation

Though different areas of psychology define and treat the concept of motivation in vastly different ways (Miner, 2006), for our purposes, we define work motivation as the direction (choice), intensity (effort), and duration (persistence) of work behavior (Locke & Latham, 2004). Before the advent of the five-factor model, a plethora of traits had been related to work motivation with relatively disappointing results. Locke, Shaw, Saari, and Latham (1981) noted that 'the only consistent thing about studies of individual differences in goal setting is their inconsistency' (p. 142). However, when Judge and Ilies (2002) organized the personality–work motivation research using the five-factor model, and meta-analyzed the relationship between the Big Five traits and various measures of motivation (i.e., goal-setting motivation, self-efficacy, expectancy motivation), they found that neuroticism and conscientiousness, respectively, displayed strong negative and positive correlations with work motivation across the three aforementioned measures.

Job attitudes

Perhaps the two most commonly studied job attitudes are job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In a meta-analytic review, Judge, Heller, and Mount (2002) found that extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Another meta-analysis linked both positive and negative trait affect to job satisfaction (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). A final meta-analysis (Judge & Bono, 2001) suggested that traits indicating core self-evaluations were significantly related to job satisfaction. A comparative test of these three frameworks suggested that core self-evaluations may be most important to job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Klinger, 2008).

Compared with job satisfaction, there is a paucity of research investigating the link between personality and organizational commitment. Erdheim, Wang, and Zickar (2006) found that extraversion was significantly related to various aspects of commitment including affective commitment (one's emotional attachment to the organization), continuance commitment (perceived costs and benefits of remaining an employee of the organization), and normative commitment (one's felt obligation to remain with the organization). Neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness were related to continuance commitment, while agreeableness was related to normative commitment. Considering the strong correlations between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, there is reason to believe that the relationships between personality and organizational commitment may be comparable to those found for job satisfaction (see Table 1).

Leadership

The Victorian era historian Thomas Carlyle commented 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men' (Carlyle, 1907, p. 18). This 'great man' hypothesis – that history is shaped by the forces of extraordinary leadership – gave rise to the trait theory of leadership. Like the great man theory, trait theory assumed that leadership depended on the personal qualities of the leader. However, it did not necessarily assume that leadership resided solely within the grasp of a few heroic men. Cowley (1931) summarized the view of trait theorists in commenting that 'the approach to the study of leadership has usually been and perhaps must always be through the study of traits' (p. 144).

Despite this venerable tradition, several qualitative reviews of the leadership literature concluded that the trait approach had fallen out of favor. For instance, Zaccaro, Foti, and Kenny (1991) noted, 'trait explanations of leader emergence are generally regarded with little esteem by leadership theorists' (p. 308). As in other areas, the application of meta-analysis coupled with the organization of traits into the five-factor model lead to considerably more optimism. Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002) found that four of

the Big Five traits, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability had non-zero correlations with the leadership criteria (leader emergence and leader effectiveness). In addition, when individuals' perceptions of leader emergence and effectiveness were combined to create an overall 'leadership' factor, the Big Five framework, as a set, explained a considerable amount of variance in leadership (multiple $R = 0.48$), indicating strong support for the leader trait perspective.

Power, politics, and influence

Relative to other organizational criteria, there is considerably less research exploring the relationships between personality (particularly traits embodying the five-factor model) and power, politics, and influence in organizations. Although the empirical landscape for these domains remains somewhat barren, research is turning desolate tract into fertile ground.

   First, researchers have examined factors contributing to how often and how flexibly individuals use influence tactics. For instance, need for power is positively related to how often one employs influence tactics (Mowday, 1978), whereas Machiavellianism is positively linked to the flexible use of influence tactics (Grams & Rogers, 1990). In addition, extraversion, desire for control, and self-monitoring (Caldwell & Burger, 1997; Snyder, 1974) are positively related to both of these criteria. Second, scholars have examined dispositional correlates of political skill. Findings point to conscientiousness (Ferris et al., 2005), proactive personality (Liu et al., 2007), and extraversion (Liu et al., 2007) as significant predictors. Third, researchers have examined how different personality traits correspond to the use of specific influence tactics. For instance, Cable and Judge (2003) found that extraverted individuals were more likely to use inspirational appeal and ingratiation tactics whereas conscientious individuals were more likely to rely on rational appeals to influence their supervisors. Finally, of interest is who becomes powerful. Within social groups, evidence suggests that extraverts enjoy higher social status, whereas neurotic individuals are typically afforded positions of lower status (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001).

Stress, coping, and adaptability

As noted by Lee-Baggley, Preece, and DeLongis (2005), personality influences every component of the stress and coping process, from stress proneness and cognitive appraisal of stressors to coping and health. Findings suggest that neurotic individuals perceive greater amounts of stress regardless of actual workload (Conard & Matthews, 2008), feel more threatened by stressful events (Gallagher, 1990), and use maladaptive coping strategies in stressful situations (David & Suls, 1999), while extraverts tend to exhibit opposite patterns (Conard & Matthews, 2008; David & Suls, 1999; Gallagher, 1990). Additionally, some evidence suggests that dispositional factors moderate the

relationships between appraisals of stressors and the coping strategies one employs (David & Suls, 1999).

Currently, researchers have begun to focus on understanding how Big Five personality traits interact with one another to influence stress, coping, and adaptability (e.g., Grant & Langan-Fox, 2006). Recent research endeavors also explore how more broad personality traits, such as core self-evaluations, impact stress, and coping (Kammeyer-Mueller, Scott, & Judge, 2008).

Team effectiveness

Aside from predicting individual-level job performance, personality traits have also contributed to the prediction of team-level criteria. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of the personality-team effectiveness literature, Bell (2007) found each of the Big Five traits to significantly predict team effectiveness. However, several important factors have been shown to moderate these relationships.

First, what is the best way to operationalize personality at the team level? In terms of conscientiousness, Bell (2007) found that the strongest effects occurred when traits were operationalized as the mean of team members' scores. Agreeableness, on the other hand, was most strongly related to team performance when operationalized as the lowest score of any team member, suggesting that even one disagreeable member can disadvantage the team. Furthermore, in terms of openness, homogenous groups, whether high or low in openness, tended to outperform heterogeneous groups. Second, what is the best technique for measuring team-level personality? While the most common approach has been to aggregate individual-level responses to individual-level personality scales, researchers have shown that allowing teams to work together to reach consensus on their personality ratings (Kirkman, Tesluk, & Rosen, 2001) and shifting the personality referent from the individual – to the team-level (Hofmann & Jones, 2005) may increase personality-team effectiveness relationships. Finally, situational factors such as task interdependence and reward interdependence have been shown to moderate these relationships (Bell, 2007; Wageman, 1995).

Deviance and counterproductive behavior

Counterproductive work behaviors are defined as discretionary behaviors that violate organizational norms and threaten the well-being of an organization, its members, or both (CWB; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Some researchers have examined personality in relation to discrete CWBs (e.g., absence, theft); others have collapsed more discrete behaviors into broader categories (e.g., deviance); and still others have measured CWB as a unidimensional construct. At the broadest level, findings suggest that conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability are each negatively related to CWB (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007; Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006). When the target of the CWB is accounted for, agreeableness more strongly relates to interpersonal

deviance, whereas conscientiousness more strongly relates to deviance directed toward the organization (Berry et al., 2007). In considering traits in addition to the Big Five, Roberts, Harms, Caspi, and Moffitt (2007) found that whereas constraint negatively predicted CWBs even when the personality traits were assessed prior to the participants entering the workforce and the CWBs were assessed 8 years later.

Workplace accidents

Accidents are an important criterion in organizational behavior, given their deleterious effects on individuals' health and safety, and on organizational health care and workers' compensation claim costs. Accident-proneness – assuming that there are individual differences in the propensity to experience accidents – has long been a feature of the occupational health literature (see McKenna, 1983). Lardent (1991), for example, found that fighter pilots had or had not experienced a crash could be correctly classified in 70% of the cases based on their scores on Cattell's 16 PF. Only recently, however, has the link between personality and accidents taken shape. Clarke and Robertson (2008) performed a meta-analysis of the relationship between the Big Five traits and workplace accidents. They found that, except for openness, the Big Five traits were strongly associated with accidents, in particular those with high levels of openness and neuroticism, and those with low levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness. They also found, however, that with the exception of agreeableness, the variability in the correlations was quite high.

Conflict and negotiation

Are certain people dispositionally better than others at getting what they want? Historically, most negotiation research suggested that the answer to this question was clearly 'No' (Rubin & Brown, 1975; Wall & Blum, 1991). However, as has been the case in many other criteria domains, recent findings have begun to challenge this assertion.

Because negotiation and conflict are social interactions, the two most socially oriented Big Five traits – extraversion and agreeableness – are often hypothesized to be related to conflict and negotiation processes. Findings tend to support this supposition. For example, extraversion and agreeableness are liabilities in distributive bargaining, due to the tendency of extraverted and agreeable individuals to be disadvantageously forthcoming with information (Barry & Friedman, 1998; Liu, Friedman, & Chi, 2005). Agreeable individuals are also likely to be more distressed by interpersonal conflict, but are less likely to engage in conflict in the first place (Suls, Martin, & David, 1998). When conflict does occur, agreeable individuals, along with extraverts, are more likely to employ an integrative, or problem-solving, strategy (Nauta & Sanders, 2000).

Criticisms of Personality Assessment in Organizational Settings

The foregoing review shows that much has been learned about the dispositional basis of organizational behavior. Though there is general acceptance that personality predicts most broad organizational attitudes and behaviors, not all scholars are convinced of the usefulness of personality measures in organizational research. Two of the most frequently advanced criticisms are: (a) that the validities are sufficiently weak as to question the usefulness of personality measures in predicting organizational criteria, particularly job performance; and (b) that because items on self-report personality measures are socially desirable (i.e., the 'right' response is transparent), faking undermines the usefulness of personality measures. We evaluate each of these criticisms in turn.

Meager validities

The meta-analytic accumulation of evidence concerning relationships between personality and organizational criteria has led some researchers to assert 'personality plays a meaningful role in nearly all facets of work ...' (Barrick & Mount, 2005, p. 363) and 'the controversy over whether personality tests can be useful for the prediction of employee performance is no longer pertinent' (Kanfer, Ackerman, Murtha, & Goff, 1995, p. 597). However, critics of the literature suggest that many statistically significant relationships are too low to be of much practical significance, especially in the domain of personnel selection (e.g., Morgeson et al., 2007a; Murphy & Dzieweczynski, 2005). For instance, critics are usually quick to point out that the average validity of the Big Five in predicting job performance ($\rho = 0.13$; Barrick et al., 2001) or the validity of the single best predictor, conscientiousness ($\rho = 0.23$; Barrick et al., 2001), is much lower than the validity of the 'gold-standard' individual difference predictor – intelligence or general mental ability ($\rho = 0.51$; Hunter, 1980).

However, to dismiss personality research on such grounds of low validity evidence is specious for several reasons. First, there is no theoretical reason to suggest that all personality traits should predict all performance criteria across all occupations. Thus, merely averaging Big Five validity estimates is a rather mindless enterprise, producing misleading results. A more appropriate means of assessing the validity of personality would be to compute the multiple correlation between the Big Five, as a set, and performance (e.g., Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2005). When this is done, most studies indicate that the multiple correlation between the set of Big Five traits and broad criteria is between $R = 0.40$ and $R = 0.50$ – hardly a trivial result. In addition, when meta-analyses are restricted to include only hypothesized relationships between traits and performance criteria (either based on theoretical grounds or job analyses), personality validities increase

substantially (Hogan & Holland, 2003; Tett, Jackson, Rothstein, & Reddon, 1999).

Personality inventories can be 'faked'

If applicants for jobs in organizations are selected based on their scores on personality tests, there is an incentive for applicants to enhance or 'fake' their scores. Judging from ongoing debates (see Morgeson et al., 2007a,b; Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007; Tett & Christiansen, 2007), answers to four questions are required to evaluate this potential problem: (1) *Can* personality inventories be faked?; (2) *Does* faking occur?; (3) What impact does faking have on validity?; and (4) How can faking be alleviated?

To assess whether personality inventories can be faked, researchers generally ask groups of participants to complete personality inventories under two conditions: to respond 'honestly' and to 'fake-good'. If the observed scores for desirable traits in the 'fake-good' condition are higher than in the 'honesty' condition, then one can conclude that participants have the *ability* to fake on personality tests. A meta-analysis of 51 such studies supports the notion that individuals can, if prompted, distort their 'honest' responses in favorable manners (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). However, showing that individuals *can* fake does not mean that individuals *do* fake in organizational settings. To test the degree of faking in actual selection contexts, researchers generally compare groups of participants with a motivation to fake (e.g., job applicants or candidates for promotion) with participants lacking such motivation (e.g., students or job incumbents). Here, results are less consistent. Several studies report significant changes in the predictive validity of personality tests between job applicants and job incumbents (e.g., Rosse, Stecher, Miller, & Levin, 1998), whereas other studies fail to find such effects (e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 1998). Thus, though it seems clear that faking can occur, whether most applicants do fake and whether faking impacts the validity of personality testing is less clear.

Methods for 'fixing' faking generally fall under two categories – proactive and reactive. Proactive measures involve incorporating procedures designed to decrease respondents' ability or desire to fake. For instance, forced-choice personality inventories instruct respondents to select between multiple options that are equal in terms of social desirability but unequal in terms of predictive validity (e.g., Rust, 1999). Conditional reasoning measures assess respondents' underlying logical processes used to make decisions under the assumption that different logical processes are indicative of different personality traits (James, 1998). Because these measures do not asses personality directly, it is very difficult for respondents to intentionally distort their personality profiles. To decrease respondents' desire to fake, researchers have suggested warning respondents not to fake (Dwight & Donovan, 2003) or requiring respondents to elaborate on their responses (Schmitt & Kunce, 2002).

As an alternative to preventing faking, several reactive methods exist to identify and rectify problems associated with faking after it has occurred.

For instance, social desirability and lie scales may be included within the personality inventory. Respondents who endorse items on these scales are assumed to be faking on focal personality items, and their scores may either be adjusted or eliminated from the response set. Alternatively, researchers have suggested exploring item response latencies in order to identify fakers under the assumption that the longer it takes to answer an item, the more likely the respondent is answering untruthfully (Holden & Hibbs, 1995). In all, none of the proactive or reactive methods are without limitations and each has had only limited empirical success (Ones et al., 2007). Thus, future research is required to explore conditions in which faking is an issue and, subsequently, techniques for mitigating the issue.

Our focus, thus far, has been on reducing faking of self-reported personality. It must be noted that when possible, researchers may lessen the effects of faking by drawing on alternatives to self-report measures of personality (Connolly, Kavanagh, & Viswesvaran, 2007; Van Iddekinge, Raymark, & Roth, 2005). For instance, observer ratings of personality, either by significant others (Connolly, Kavanagh, & Viswesvaran, 2007), coworkers and supervisors (Small & Diefendorff, 2006), or trained psychologists (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999), have been shown to predict performance over and above self-report measures, especially when assessments are aggregated across multiple observers (Judge et al., 1999). However, an interesting paradox of observer ratings of personality is that although increased familiarity between the focal individual and the observer increases the ability of the observer to accurately rate the focal individual, familiarity also increases the motivation of the observer to provide biased personality estimates (Viswesvaran, Deller, & Ones, 2007).

Future Research

Though laying out a full research agenda is beyond the scope of this review, we highlight four areas involving personality and organizational behavior that we believe are most in need of researchers' further attention.

Broad and narrow traits

We can often be victims of our own success. Organizational behavior researchers' focus on the broad Big Five traits clearly has paid dividends. One wonders, however, whether this focus will reach a dead-end where there is little new to be learned, and, related, whether the extant validities might be augmented by a focus on other traits. For example, narcissism, impulsivity, and trait hostility are specific traits and each has been the subject of hundreds of studies in psychology. However, their study by organizational behavior researchers is virtually non-existent.

One of the problems, unless we regress back to the 'pet' stage of personality psychology (Allport, 1958), is to agree on which specific traits should be

studied. One potentially useful investigation was recently completed by DeYoung, Quilty, and Peterson (2007). These authors undertook a comprehensive analysis to determine whether lower-order traits could be housed within the Big Five framework. In their analysis, extraversion is comprised of enthusiasm and assertiveness; agreeableness, of compassion and politeness; conscientiousness, of industriousness and orderliness; neuroticism, of volatility and withdrawal; and openness to experience, of intellect and openness. Likewise, Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, and Goldberg (2005) identified six subfacets of conscientiousness, and Chernyshenko, Stark, Woo, and Conz (2008) identified six subfacets of openness to experience. It is too early to tell whether these analyses will prove useful to organizational behavior scholars, but we encourage such efforts.

Dark side of functional traits

As would be expected and as predicted by an evolutionary perspective on personality, many traits have broad adaptive properties. If one selected a broad range of work and life outcomes, for example, few people would choose to be less conscientious. However, every one of the Big Five traits appears to have certain maladaptive properties for certain specific criteria. As Nettle (2006) noted, 'Behavioral alternatives can be considered as trade-offs, with a particular trait producing not unalloyed advantage but a mixture of costs and benefits such that the optimal value for fitness may depend on very specific local circumstances' (p. 625). Thus, a more nuanced view of the importance of personality to behavior would recognize that even generally desirable traits likely involve trade-offs associated with particular criteria.

For example, despite its widespread benefits, conscientiousness does have disadvantages (Judge & LePine, 2007). Conscientious individuals may learn less in the early stages of skill acquisition (Martocchio & Judge, 1997) perhaps because they are self-deceptive about their abilities or are overly focused on performing well (vs. learning more). There is also evidence that conscientious individuals are less adaptable (LePine, Colquitt, & Erez, 2000). Extraversion, though having positive relations with many organizational criteria, may be related to increased levels of impulsive or risk-seeking behaviors, resulting in increased accident and absenteeism rates (Judge & LePine, 2007).

We should not be so enamored with the general desirability of certain traits that we are blinded to the cases in which they are maladaptive. Nor should we ignore the possible benefits of some 'dark side' traits. Moreover, where traits are deemed functional, we should not assume that more is always better. Extremely conscientious individuals, for instance, might not always perform better (LaHuis, Martin, & Avis, 2005) and, in some cases, may perform worse (Cucina & Vasilopoulos, 2005) than moderately conscientious individuals. More research is needed to identify which levels of which traits are functional under what conditions. Tett et al.s' trait activation theory (TAT; Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) and Mischel and Shoda's

cognitive-affective personality system theory (CAPS; Mischel & Shoda, 1995, 1998) are two examples of personality theories that may guide fruitful explorations of this frontier.

Personality change and variability

Personality traits show significant levels of rank–order consistency, even if the interval between the time periods is substantial (Caspi et al., 2005; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). However, evidence also clearly suggests that scores on personality inventories change over time; for example, individuals become more conscientious and less open over time (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Although, thanks to the work of Roberts et al. (e.g., Helson, Roberts, & Agronick, 1995; Roberts, 1997; Roberts & Chapman, 2000; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003), as well as others (e.g., Clausen & Gilens, 1990; Scollon & Diener, 2006), we have learned a great deal about personality change, much remain remains to be known about the role work plays in changes on personality. Is the increase of conscientiousness and decrease of openness over time, for example, a result of a context-free aging process, or might the experience of work play a role in making individuals more conscientious and less open? Similarly, since women's neuroticism scores decline over time, serving to virtually eliminate their heightened neuroticism scores as young women (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), does this narrowing of the 'gender gap' vary by women's labor force experiences (see Roberts, 1997)? Finally, certain organizational cultures may reinforce personalities (Schneider, 1987). We know that individuals, to some degree, chose organizational cultures based on their personality (e.g., open job seekers are more likely to choose to work in organizational cultures they perceive as innovative, agreeable job seekers are less attracted to cultures they see as aggressive or outcome-oriented; Judge & Cable, 1997). Once an individual has joined an organization, do organizations with 'strong cultures' shape employees' personalities? More research is needed to answer these interesting and important questions.

Personality processes

Finally, in organizational behavior, personality research continues to be virtually synonymous with trait research. This stands in stark contrast to personality psychology as a field, where research covers a much more expansive domain, including, for instance, the study of personality processes such as self-determination and self-concordance (Sheldon, 2002), positive psychological states such as gratitude (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004) and forgiveness (Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008), and negative psychological states such as depression (Brinkmann & Gendolla, 2008) and rumination (Ray, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2008). The overwhelming focus on trait psychology to the virtual exclusion of personality processes is unfortunate because

organizations are a dynamic setting in which personality processes (such as power, emotions, intrinsic motivation, and other processes) actively play out. Personality psychology is more than trait psychology, and organizational behavior research can and should do a better job of drawing from, and contributing to, personality processes.

Conclusion

Personality research in organizational behavior is vibrant – diverse, complex, and even controversial. It has proven its centrality to organizational behavior by the range of criteria it has predicted and the oftentimes impressive effect sizes it has shown. Appreciating the gains that have been made, future organizational behavior research would benefit by considering other (lower-order or more finely grained) traits, by focusing on both the bright and the dark sides of traits, and by a greater appreciation of a broad, process-based definition of personality.

Short Biographies

Timothy A. Judge conducts research in the areas of personality, leadership, job attitudes, and moods and emotions. His research has appeared in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, and *Psychological Bulletin*. Tim has been program chair and chair of the scientific affairs committees for Div. 14 of the American Psychological Association (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology). He is a fellow of the Academy of Management, the American Psychological Association, and the American Psychological Society. Tim has held faculty appointments at Cornell University, the University of Iowa, and, presently, the University of Florida. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Ryan L. Klinger's research focuses on personality and personnel selection. His other interests include job attitudes, moods and emotions, and affective forecasting. Ryan Klinger earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Management. Ryan Klinger is currently pursuing his doctorate in Business Administration at the University of Florida.

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