

Using narrow personality traits to identify top talents within a group of successful managers

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Abstract

Personality tests are considered useful in predicting job performance. However, there has been a debate as to whether job performance is best predicted from narrow or broad personality traits. The findings from this study clearly support the view that narrow personality traits add value to prediction of job performance.

Introduction

Over recent decades, we have become increasingly aware of the importance of leadership for organisational success (Hogan and Kaizer, 2005). Accordingly, many researchers have looked into the individual characteristics of successful managers. However, there has been a debate as to whether job performance is best predicted from narrow or broad personality traits. Some researchers argue for instance, that the Broad Big Five factors are suitable for predicting overall job performance, whereas other argue that the Big Five factors are too broad (i.e. Paunonen et al, 2003). Judge et al (2013) sums up this debate in a recent meta-analysis and concludes that narrow traits add to the prediction of job performance. Iversen (2014) conducted a study to see whether the broad five factors (measured by NEO FFI) could be used to identify top performers in a group of successful managers. Performance data was collected from three sources (self-report, superior and subordinates). No significant correlations were found between the five broad factors and the merged performance data, concluding that the NEO FFI not is suitable for identifying top talents in a group of successful managers. This study investigates whether the use of narrow personality traits will add value in predicting job performance in a group of successful managers.

Methodology

The sample consisted of 229 managers (66% male, 34% female) all below 40 years old who were identified by their manager as superior performers. The average age was 35.3 years. All managers have been in their position for more than 12 months, and were responsible for at least five employees. Most of the managers were from the private sector. The personality inventory OPQ 32 r was used to measure narrow personality traits. The OPQ comprises 32 relatively narrow personality traits. The 60 item NEO FFI (Martinsen et al., 2005) was used to measure broad personality traits. Data about job performance was collected by a ten items questionnaire (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2009) distinguishing between effort and quality, and was collected from three sources (self-report, superior and subordinates).

Results and Analysis

A correlation analysis between the narrower OPQ traits and job performance is presented in Table 1. Interestingly, none of the traits correlate for both performance dimensions.

Table 1.
OPQ correlations with job performance

OPQ dimensions	Effort	Quality
Controlling	,152*	
Caring		,154*
Data Rational		,135*
Evaluative		,157*
Detail Conscious		,252**
Conscientious		,273**
Relaxed	-,150*	
Tough Minded	-,147*	
Vigorous	,150*	
Achieving	,132*	
Decisive	,183**	

Only significant correlations included

*= significant at .05 level, **=significant at 0.01 level

Highest correlations are found between conscientiousness, detail conscious and the quality dimensions of job performance. Together with achieving, these narrow traits fall into the

broader FFM-factor conscientiousness. Furthermore, controlling, vigorous and decisive fall within the broader FFM-factor extraversion. Relaxed and tough minded fall within the broader FF-factor neuroticism. Caring is clearly linked to agreeableness.

In order to see how much of the variance that can be explained by the narrow personality traits a stepwise linear regression analysis were conducted, as can be seen in Table 2.

11,3 % of the variance in job performance can be explained by five of the narrow personality traits. Conscientiousness alone can explain 7,5 % of the variance.

Table 2.
Regression analysis – model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,273 ^a	,075	,071	,29627
2	,292 ^b	,085	,077	,29524
3	,315 ^c	,099	,087	,29359
4	,326 ^d	,106	,090	,29314
5	,336 ^e	,113	,093	,29263

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness Detail Conscious
- c. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness Detail Conscious
- d. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Detail Conscious, Caring, Evaluative
- e. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness Detail Conscious, Caring, Evaluative, Data Rational

Discussion and Conclusion

The broad factors in the FFM measured by the 60 item NEO FFI seem to be too wide and multifaceted to be able to identify top talents within a group of successful managers. Using a personality framework with narrower personality traits (OPQ 32r) seems to be able to aid identification. These findings are consistent with Judge et al.'s (2013) conclusion. When considering the relatively weak correlations it has to be remembered that the sample consists of successful managers. Most other research in the field is based on a more diverse group of managers. The fact that narrower personality traits adds value in a group like this emphasizes the importance of using narrow personality traits in predicting job performance. These findings are important as many companies use personality testing in the latter phase

of the selection process where the variation in the group of candidates is limited. If only three to four candidates are tested during the second or third interview, instruments measuring narrow traits seems to be most useful.

Key References

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