



RESEARCH NOTE

Fitting the person to the organisation: examining the personality-job performance relationship from a new perspective

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Abstract *The current study represents an attempt to explore personality dispositions and personality process in a P-O fit context. A total of 227 employees completed self-report measures of personality and job satisfaction and their supervisors assessed their citizenship behaviours, generic work competencies and overall job performance. The theoretical approach of the cognitive-affective personality system was adopted in exploring the research questions and discussing the findings, which reinforced the significance of a confirmatory, theory-based approach in personality testing. The results supported the existence of relationships between personality and job satisfaction but not between personality and the performance-related variables, although agreeableness and openness to experience were related to performance for occupations involving interpersonal interaction.*

Edwards (1991), in an overview of the person-job fit literature and research, suggested that the person and the job operate as joint determinants of individual and organisational outcomes. Kristof (1996) addressed this issue saying that it concerns the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between people and the organisation in which they are employed. According to those two reviews, two issues in P-O fit are important. These are the supplementary vs complementary fit, and the needs-supplies, demands-abilities distinctions. Supplementary fit occurs when the person possesses similar characteristics to other individuals in the work environment, whereas complementary fit exists when the person brings into the organisation abilities and characteristics which act incrementally to the existing organisational attributes (Kristof, 1996). The second perspective of needs-supplies and abilities-demands has attracted more attention, because of its application to congruence theories and vocational psychology. From a



needs-supplies standpoint, P-O fit takes place when the organisation fulfils employee's needs, whereas from all abilities-demands perspective, there is congruence between person and organisation, when the employee possesses and demonstrates the abilities to meet organisational demands (Kristof, 1996). Edwards (1991) has brought together these two perspectives suggesting that needs and abilities compose the "person" angle, and supplies and demands the "job" angle of the P-O fit research. He described needs in terms of employees' desires, goals, values, interests and preferences, and abilities in terms of aptitudes, experience and education. Surprisingly, employees' personality dispositions are not included in this domain and it was this lack which initiated the current study. As far as the "job" domain is concerned, Edwards (1991) described supplies in terms of occupational characteristics and attributes, and demands in terms of workload, performance requirements and instrumental activities. As most P-O fit studies have stressed the dynamic interaction of individual and situational variables for explaining work outcomes, the present study attempts to examine the role of person (personality traits, individual generic work competencies and employees' attitudes – e.g. satisfaction and citizenship behaviour) and situation (type of occupation) on employees' performance, using Edwards' model of person-job fit (see Edwards, 1991, figure 1, p. 285).

Personality dispositions and personality processes

The five-factor model (FFM) has recently dominated the field of personality providing a significant degree of convergence in the trait-factor analytic psychology (Robertson and Callinan, 1998). Although it is impossible to determine work behaviour from the effect of personality alone, because of the importance of situational variables such as colleagues, supervision, job environments, reward structure etc., personality variables can be significant predictors of work performance, when they are carefully matched with appropriate occupations and organisations (Robertson and Callinan, 1998). Nevertheless, the encouraging results regarding the criterion-related validity of the FFM do not provide an adequate theoretical explanation of how these relationships actually work in everyday work settings, and why they explain some of the variance in job performance. Further, the question of how specific personality dimensions interact with work-related variables such as job satisfaction and generic work competencies, in predicting job performance still remains unresolved. Thus, in order to investigate the effect of specific work-related variables on the validity of the FFM, the adoption of an appropriate theoretical framework was essential. The focus of attention was shifted to social-cognitive theory and more specifically Mischel and Shoda's (1995, 1998; Shoda and Mischel, 1996) refined theory called the cognitive affective personality system (CAPS). The most important contribution of this theory is the identification of five cognitive-affective units as psychological

mediating processes underlying individual differences. These personal variables were the individuals' encodings, expectancies, values, self-regulatory systems and competencies, which are not seen as isolated, static components, but rather as mental events which become activated within an individual in relation to certain figures of the situation or of the self (Mischel and Shoda, 1998). A significant asset of this theory is the reconceptualisation of an individual's personality not as a simple aggregation of particular units, but rather turning the focus of attention to the organisation that underlies these units, into a network of interrelations that operate as a whole. This sentence describes the central idea behind the present attempt to use the CAPS model in explaining relationships between personality and job performance via, and/or with other work-related variables, Under a P-O fit perspective. These work-related variables are namely job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour and generic work competencies.

Job satisfaction is, to an extent, an affective, cognitive or attitudinal response to work with significant organisational outcomes (Spector, 1997). With respect to the CAPS model, four of the five cognitive-affective units may help to explain the personality-satisfaction relationship. First, as far as encodings are concerned, an event which occurs at work, or the interaction with another employee or supervisor at work may not have the same effect on levels of job satisfaction for everybody within the organisation. As regards effect, a particular task may be favourable for someone but not for somebody else, influencing their satisfaction levels. As far as expectancies-beliefs are concerned, an employee may feel satisfied because expectations are fulfilled within the work organisation, or because efforts are acknowledged, or even because of increased levels of self-efficacy. Finally, goals and values are also related to job satisfaction. As was the case for expectancies, if employees' personal values are congruent with those of the organisation or if they believe that at the current positions they can satisfy the goals they have set for themselves, then it would not be surprising to find increased levels of job satisfaction.

As far as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), which is usually defined as a set of individual behaviours that are not formally or explicitly recognised as part of a job description, but in the aggregate promote the functioning of the organisation (Organ, 1988), it is suggested that employees engage in extra-role activities because they have positive feelings about their colleagues or supervisor or their work overall (affective unit), or because they expect that the appreciation of these actions by their supervisors or colleagues will result in secondary benefits (e.g. chance for promotion or rewards) capturing the expectancy-beliefs and goals-values cognitive units. The relationship of OCB with fairness and social exchange has also been discussed (Organ, 1988). Thus, an employee who feels satisfied at work will be more keen to participate in extra-role activities, or if she/he is treated fairly

she/he will also be more keen to engage in contextual performance. The same outcome will occur if they believe that by engaging in these actions, they also increase the possibility of personal gains (e.g. promotion or pay raise).

According to the CAPS, competencies and self-regulatory plans refer to people's ability to perform potential behaviours, plans and strategies, which lead to desirable outcomes (Mischel and Shoda, 1998). In work settings, competencies refer to employees' skills, which are necessary to successfully perform everyday tasks. Thus, an employee who is aware, for example, of his or her ability to communicate or interact well with other people may use these skills in order to increase performance, or may decide not to use them, If (in combination with the expectancies-beliefs cognitive-affective unit) he or she believes that it is not worth utilising them at work.

Competencies may also be subject to the influence of the cognitive-affective units. Thus, an employee may possess a particular set of work competencies (e.g. leadership, or communication skills) but may hesitate in using them at work, either because of a belief that they cannot help in the successful completion of tasks (encodings), or because they are not valued by his or her supervisor (values), thus not resulting in superior performance (expectancies) or because he or she does not know how to make appropriate use of them (self-regulatory plans, competencies).

Research questions

Adopting the CAPS people are not "hostages" of their traits, but active personalities, that certainly have stable, dispositional personality characteristics as expressed by the FFM, but also have the ability either consciously or unconsciously to change their behaviour, simply because they want to, like to, or have to. Especially, in contemporary competitive work settings, employees quite often have to change their attitudes and their personal approach at work in order to adapt to the changing circumstances of today's work environment. The present study examines the relationship between personal variables, such as personality dispositions, competencies and preferences-values (OCB) and work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, work performance and tenure. The moderating effect of job type in the relationship between specific personality dimensions and job performance is also explored. Following the principles of P-O fit, it is expected that employees with specific personality dimensions, such as agreeableness and extroversion, will demonstrate increased performance at work in occupations involving interpersonal interaction, as opposed to employees with similar personality characteristics employed in occupations involving less interpersonal interaction. Further, the effect of extroversion and agreeableness on job performance, for this type of occupation, is expected to be mediated by job satisfaction, OCB and generic work competencies, since employees will "activate", according to the CAPS model (Mischel and Shoda, 1998), the five

cognitive-affective units in order to influence the levels of their work performance.

Method

Procedure

The research design adopted in the present study was that of a concurrent criterion-related validity. The employees completed two measures; a personality inventory and a job satisfaction measure and their supervisors rated their performance on three independent measures, one questionnaire assessing organizational citizenship behavior, a short job performance measure and a questionnaire measuring generic work competencies.

The selection of the organizations participating in the study was random based on selection from Greek and European business guides. The distribution and collection of the material was arranged centrally through the HR department following a structured, confidential procedure. The employees received an envelope explaining the purpose of the study and the two questionnaires (personality-job satisfaction). As soon as they returned their completed questionnaires, their immediate supervisors were identified and they were handed out an envelope containing a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the names of the subordinates they had to rate and the three performance questionnaires.

Sample and measures

A total of 227 employees participated in the study. They were drawn from 22 small and medium firms in Athens, Greece. The majority of the participants were females ($n = 130$, 57.3 per cent of the sample) between 20 and 30 years of age ($n = 107$, 48.4 per cent of the sample), working in various occupations, such as teachers, managers, accountants, in sales/insurance, etc. with a mean tenure of 4.3 years.

Employees' personality characteristics were assessed using a Greek measure of the FFM (Tsaousis, 1999). Competencies were assessed using a new instrument (Nikolaou, in press) assessing three types of generic work competencies; action-leadership competencies, people orientation competencies, and communication skills. Organizational citizenship behaviours were assessed using Smith *et al.*'s (1983) measure assessing altruism and generalised compliance or conscientiousness. Job satisfaction levels were assessed using Warr's job satisfaction scale (Warr *et al.*, 1979), which was used as an overall measure of job satisfaction. Finally, job performance was measured using a short measure which was successfully used in a number of studies (e.g. Robertson *et al.*, 1999, 2000) as an overall job performance score.

Results

Table I presents the descriptive statistics, reliability estimates and the intercorrelation matrix of the measures used in the study. None of the big-five dimensions is related to overall job performance for the total sample. Along with the lines of the P-O fit literature, tenure was a valid predictor of overall job performance, as were employees' OCBs and work competencies, which correlated significantly with in-role performance. Further, job satisfaction was related to most personality dimensions in line with earlier findings by Tokar and Subich (1997).

As far as the personality-job performance relationship is concerned, our suggestion was that the pattern of relationships with job performance for agreeableness and extroversion would not be the same across all occupations. In order to examine that, employees' job titles were divided into two broad categories with respect to the centrality of their interpersonal interaction. Employees working in managerial, teaching, sales, and human resources and training positions which involve increased interaction with other people, were assigned in one category, as opposed to administrative, accountancy and scientific positions. Table II shows the intercorrelation matrix of the measures for occupations involving interpersonal interactions.

Table II shows that agreeableness, but not extroversion, is positively related to overall job performance. A comparison was carried out using the Fisher z transformation (Rosenthal and Rubin, 1982), in order to examine if the effect sizes between the two sub-samples are statistically significant. The examination of the differences, following the Fisher z transformation, showed that the existence of interpersonal interaction moderates the validity of personality traits. This is especially the case for agreeableness and openness[1].

Hierarchical regression analyses were carried out (see Table III) in order to examine the hypothesis that the effect of agreeableness on job performance, for occupations involving interpersonal interaction, would be mediated by OCB-altruism, job satisfaction and work competencies (people-orientation competencies). Generally, the effect of agreeableness remains statistically significant and is only mediated, marginally though, by OCB-altruism, since the significance of agreeableness drops to non-significant levels when OCB-altruism is entered earlier in the equation.

Discussion

The advocates of the CAPS model Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda claim that the big-five approach represents a taxonomy that provides consensus and durability in the field of personality psychology (Mischel and Shoda, 1998). The present study incorporated the five cognitive-affective units in the big-five approach of personality in order to explain work behaviour, under a P-O fit perspective, exploring the interaction of employees' personal characteristics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Mean	SD	Alpha
1. Tenure	1.000												4.3	5.13	
2. Extroversion	-0.123	1.000											128.10	16.12	0.83
3. Neuroticism	0.088	-0.329**	1.000										100.42	19.54	0.85
4. Openness	-0.248**	0.249**	-0.003	1.000									125.19	14.91	0.70
5. Agreeableness	0.242**	-0.002	0.056	0.119	1.000								122.05	11.91	0.67
6. Conscientiousness	0.148*	0.210**	-0.526**	-0.205**	-0.003	1.000							129.76	16.83	0.85
7. Job satisfaction	-0.032	0.145*	-0.242**	-0.156*	-0.048	0.182**	1.000						4.97	0.95	0.90
8. OCB-altruism	0.161*	-0.011	0.028	0.066	0.025	0.086	0.133	1.000					3.59	0.96	0.90
9. OCB-conscientiousness	-0.128	-0.094	0.110	0.099	-0.036	0.088	-0.014	0.217**	1.000				3.94	0.68	0.71
10. Communication skills	0.034	-0.075	0.013	0.164*	0.036	-0.051	-0.049	0.280**	0.163*	1.000			5.13	1.62	0.95
11. People orientation	0.059	-0.031	0.068	0.124	0.069	-0.075	-0.002	0.406**	0.145*	0.682**	1.000		5.33	1.72	0.97
12. Action-leadership	0.126	0.055	-0.013	0.087	-0.029	0.024	0.060	0.595**	0.193**	0.667**	0.761**	1.000	4.74	1.58	0.93
13. Job performance	0.194**	-0.122	0.077	0.038	0.101	0.057	0.050	0.750**	0.441**	0.392**	0.390**	0.571**	4.00	0.77	0.93

Note: * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed, ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed
 $n = 227$

Table I.
Inter-correlation matrix and descriptive statistics of the study's variables

Table II.
Big-five and
performance measures
for occupations
involving interpersonal
interactions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job performance	1.000						
2. Job satisfaction	0.042	1.000					
3. Communication skills	0.521**	-0.151	1.000				
4. People orientation	0.510**	-0.061	0.747**	1.000			
5. Action-leadership	0.681**	0.050	0.696**	0.733**	1.000		
6. OCB-altruism	0.757**	0.167	0.349**	0.502**	0.684**	1.000	
7. OCB-conscientiousness	0.390**	-0.029	0.316**	0.161**	0.233**	0.082	1.000
8. Conscientiousness	0.129	0.262**	-0.097	-0.085	0.002	0.170	0.080
9. Extroversion	-0.064	0.150	-0.217*	-0.080	-0.003	0.089	-0.132
10. Neuroticism	-0.003	-0.230**	0.128	0.102	0.104	-0.045	0.010
11. Openness to experience	0.216*	-0.203**	0.253**	0.312**	0.242**	0.203**	0.115
12. Agreeableness	0.218*	0.118	0.066	0.093	0.058	0.136	-0.133

Notes: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

(i.e. dispositional traits), skills (work competencies) and preferences and values (citizenship behaviours).

The significance of preferences (i.e. participation in citizenship behaviours) and skills (i.e. work competencies) for employees' work performance was initially identified. Citizenship behaviours seemed to have a stronger effect on supervisors' assessment of job performance than work competencies, suggesting that supervisors value employees' participation in extra-role performance. From a P-O fit perspective, employees' preferences and skills, as expressed by OCB and competencies, were shown to be an integral part of their work performance and seem to have a strong impact on supervisory evaluations of in-role performance.

The results regarding the validity of personality confirmed that a confirmatory approach is essential in exploring the relationship between personality and job performance. Agreeableness and openness to experience

Table III.
The mediating effect of
job satisfaction,
OCB-altruism, and
people orientation
competencies on the
agreeableness-job
performance
relationship for
occupations involving
interpersonal interaction

Independent variables	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adj. <i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² change	<i>F</i> change	Sig.
Job satisfaction	0.042	0.002	-0.007	0.002	0.194	0.661
Agreeableness	0.218	0.048	0.030	0.046	5.261	0.024
OCB-altruism	0.757	0.572	0.568	0.572	145.895	0.000
Agreeableness	0.765	0.586	0.578	0.013	3.489	0.065
People orientation competencies	0.510	0.260	0.253	0.260	39.283	0.000
Agreeableness	0.538	0.289	0.276	0.029	4.567	0.035

Note: Dependent variable: overall job performance

showed the most consistent relationships with the performance measures in occupations involving interpersonal interaction. Agreeableness demonstrated a unique, although small, contribution in explaining employees' performance without being mediated by preferences (OCB), competencies or even job satisfaction. As far as openness is concerned, it is maybe the case that it is desirable for people working in positions where interaction with others is central, to demonstrate behaviours such as strong fantasy and creativity, and being open to new experiences, especially in the contemporary work environments, where the only steady characteristic is constant change. Another suggestion for the positive correlations between openness and the performance measures for this type of occupation could be the link usually found between this personality trait and measures of cognitive (Ferguson and Patterson, 1998) or verbal ability (King *et al.*, 1996). This suggestion is further supported by the positive correlations between openness and the three types of competencies. Its positive relationship to OCB-altruism was also surprising, since it has not been established in the past, suggesting that creative and imaginative employees are more willing to participate in extra-role activities captured by the personal dimension of OCB.

The current study, despite limitations in research design which do not allow affirmative conclusions, has attempted to offer an explanation of the use of personality testing. Reconciling personality dispositions with personality processes may offer a new opportunity for research and for better understanding of the role of individual differences in applied settings.

Note

1. Owing to limited space the results of this analysis may be obtained by the author

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