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Personality Predictors of the Tripartite Model of Work Orientation in a Diverse Population

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between personality characteristics and Tripartite Model of Work Orientation (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997) in a diverse population. Participants read three vignettes describing individuals with different orientations to work. After self-reporting which of the three workers with they most strongly identify, participants completed multiple personality measures. Results from statistical analyses demonstrated significant relationships between vary personality dimensions and different work orientations. One hundred and twenty four students enrolled in Psychology courses in culturally diverse New York City College participated in the study.

Keywords: Personality dimensions, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, Diverse population, Work Orientation, Meaning of Work, Positive Psychology

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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between personality characteristics and Tripartite Model of Work Orientation (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997) in a diverse population. Participants read three vignettes describing individuals with different orientations to work. After self-reporting which of the three workers with they most strongly identify, participants completed multiple personality measures. Results from statistical analyses demonstrated significant relationships between vary personality dimensions and different work orientations. One hundred and twenty four students enrolled in Psychology courses in culturally diverse New York City College participated in the study.

According to the Tripartite Model of Work Orientation, people differ in three ways in their orientation to their work regardless of the rank or prestige of their job. Some individuals perceive work as a “Job” that provides the financial income to welcome their time away from work to non-work interests. Others see work as a “Career” providing opportunities for promotion, advancement, pay increases, prestige and recognition. The final group think profoundly of work as a “Calling”, where personal satisfaction and fulfillment come from contributing to making the world a better place (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997).

The majority of research on “Calling” has been conducted with individuals that are predominantly white. The lack of diversity in research populations make it impossible to generalize to racial and ethnic minority groups (Duffy and Dik, 2013). Broadening the population sampled in “Meaning of Work” research is important step to achieving that goal. Past research results suggests that the way people view work may be a function of personality traits and not just objective characteristics of the work (e.g., Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). For these reasons it is important to understand how individuals differ in personality and their subjective orientation to work.

Different orientations to work have implications for both the good of the individual and the work organization. A large body of evidence has demonstrated job satisfaction as a powerful predictor of longevity. For example, a meta-analysis of 485 studies resulted in a strong overall correlation for job satisfaction and across all positive health measures. Job satisfaction was most strongly related to lower levels of burnout, depression and anxiety (Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005).

The “Calling” employee is the most advantageous from the organization’s standpoint. Research findings suggest this orientation is related to increased identification, commitment, and increased communications with their team. Also the “Calling” employee is less likely to have conflict with others at work as well as increased positive regard for management. In contrast, those individuals with the “Job” or “Career” orientation relate in the opposite direction for those dimensions (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzeniewski, 2010).

Based on published empirical research, the following hypotheses:

➤H1: Participants who strongly identify with the Calling Orientation will positively correlate to scores on Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and negatively correlate to scores on Neuroticism.

➤H2: Participants who strongly identify with either the Job or Career Orientation will negatively correlate to scores on Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and positively correlate to Neuroticism scores.

In addition, evidence exists for the fundamental role of positive affect in the experience of meaning (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006), however the meaning of work researchers have ignored affective processes in favor of cognitive processes (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzeniewski, 2010).

Based on the above research, the following hypothesis:

➤H3: Participants who strongly identify with the Calling Orientation will positively correlate to scores on Positive Affectivity and will negatively correlate to scores on Negative Affectivity whereas participants who strongly identify with either the Job or Career Orientation will positively correlate to scores on Negative Affectivity and will negatively correlate to scores on Positive Affectivity.

Study Design

Participants were handed an envelope that contains the following questionnaires: Demographic information sheet, Work–Life Questionnaire, NEO-FFI and PANAS. In small groups, participants were administered all questionnaires in the same time period. Administration of all measures were counterbalanced to help control for carryover effects. Participants were given 45 minutes to assess and complete the information required from the documents. The instructions for completing all questionnaires stressed the importance of responding candidly and honestly for research purposes.

Participants

One hundred and twenty four students taking classes in psychology were randomly selected from a culturally diverse New York City college subject pool. The participants received a small gift card for participation. The average age of the subjects was 22 years old. The reported ethnic background of the subjects was: Hispanic 28%, African 25%, West Indian 16%, Asian 13%, Euro 8%, Arab 2%, and Haitian 2%, (the remaining percentage fit some other category or failed to report heritage). Females comprised 46% of the participants. Also, 62% of the participants reported English as their first language, and 76% report English as their best language. In addition, 59% reported that English is not the only language spoken at home. Further, 63% are the first in their family to attend college. Finally, 49% of the participants report being born in the USA.

Measures

Demographic information sheet

Demographic information requested included the respondent’s name, age, ethnic background and religion.

Work–Life Questionnaire

The questionnaire assesses where individuals identify themselves within Tripartite Model of Work Orientation of the Job–Career–Calling distinctions (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin& Schwartz, 1997). There are three different descriptions of people and what their work means to them. The instructions are first to read all three paragraphs and then to indicate how much you are similar to each type of person on a scale ranging from “very much, ” “somewhat, ” “a little, ” or “not at all like me”. On the second page of the questionnaire appears items asking about specific aspects of relations to work that are relevant to the Job, Career, and Calling distinction.

NEO-FFI - An Inventory Measure of the Five Factor Model

The NEO-FFI consists of 60 items that have a five-point Likert scale response option: strongly agree to strongly disagree. Total scores for Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness are derived from 12 items each.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is a self-report questionnaire that assesses individual differences in experiencing positive and negative moods. The test comprises 20 terms, with ten focusing on a positive emotion and the other ten focusing on a negative emotion. Each term is rated on a scale of 1 to 5 to indicate the extent to which the respondent agrees that term applies to them (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988).

Results

Results indicated support for Hypothesis 1: Participants who strongly identified with the Calling Orientation positively correlated to scores on Extraversion $r=.24^{**}$, Openness $r=.30^{**}$, Agreeableness $r=.13$, and Conscientiousness $r=.21^*$ and negatively correlated to scores on Neuroticism $r=-.06$.

Results indicated partial support for Hypothesis 2: Results supported the prediction for the Job group. Participants who strongly identified with the Job Orientation negatively correlated to scores on Extraversion $r=-.13$, Openness $r=-.12$, Agreeableness $r=-.24^{**}$ and Conscientiousness $r=-.09$ and positively correlated to Neuroticism $r=.28^{**}$.

Results only partially supported the prediction for the Career group. Participants who strongly identified with the Career Orientation negatively correlated to scores on Extraversion $r=-.10$, Openness $r=-.06$, Agreeableness $r=-.01$ but not Conscientiousness $r=.15$ and positively correlated to Neuroticism $r=.19^*$.

Table 1. Correlations for Five Factor Personality Variables and Tripartite Model of Work Orientations.

	Calling	Job	Career
NEO-FFI			
1. Extroversion	.24**	-.13	.10
2. Openness	.30**	-.12	.06
3. Agreeableness	.13	-.24**	.01
4. Conscientiousness	.21*	-.09	.15
5. Neuroticism	-.06	.28**	.19*

Note: (N = 92 - 108). Significant correlations are bold faced.

Table 2. Correlations for Positive and Negative Affectivity Scores and Tripartite Model of Work Orientations.

	Calling	Job	Career
PANAS			
Positive Affectivity	.21*	-.16	.20*
Negative Affectivity	-.08	.16*	-.11

Note: (N = 92 - 115). Significant correlations are bold faced.

➤ Results indicate support for Hypothesis 3: Participants who strongly identified with the Calling Orientation positively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity $r=.21^*$ and negatively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity $r=-.08$.

Results also supported the predictions for the Job group. Participants who strongly identified with the Job Orientation negatively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity $r = -.16$ and positively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity $r = .16^*$. Finally, results only partially supported the prediction for the Career group. Participants who strongly identified with the Career Orientation positively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity $r = .20^*$ and negatively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity $r = -.11$.

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between personality characteristics and Tripartite Model of Work Orientation in a diverse population. According to the model people differ in three ways as to how to approach their work. Some people see it as a job that must be endured in order to pay bills to enable them to enjoy the world outside of work. The second group see work as a career as an opportunity to gain status, respect and recognition in the world through promotions and hard work. The third orientation sees work as a calling that gives personal satisfaction. The majority of the research that has been done in the area of calling orientation has been conducted with a white participant population. The lack of diversity in participant samples makes it impossible to make generalizations to the population as a whole.

It was predicted that certain personality variables would vary in individuals' subjective orientations towards work. These personality variables included the five factor model and positive and negative affectivity.

Specifically, it was predicted that individuals that identify with a calling orientation would positively relate to extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness scores and negatively relate to neuroticism scores. This hypothesis was supported with statistical significance being found in all of those predictions except for agreeableness and neuroticism.

The second hypothesis predicted that those individuals who strongly identified with career or job orientation would negatively relate to extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness scores and positively relate to the neuroticism scores. Results indicated that this was true for both groups except for the career group regarding conscientiousness. The career group positively correlated with conscientiousness scores.

Results supported the third hypothesis that predicted the Calling Orientation positively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity and negatively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity. Results also supported the prediction for the Job group. Participants who strongly identified with the Job Orientation negatively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity and positively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity. Finally, results partially supported the prediction for the Career group. Participants who strongly identified with the Career Orientation positively correlated to scores on Positive Affectivity and negatively correlated to scores on Negative Affectivity. These results suggest that the way people view work may be a function of personality traits, not just characteristics of the work itself.

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