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Process Models of Personality and Work Behavior

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When it comes to predicting behavior at work, Hough and Oswald (2008) made it clear that measures of personality have complex patterns of validity results. As opposed to the highly generalizable validities of cognitive ability tests, validities of personality measures tend to be situationally specific and are influenced by a number of factors. To account for a substantial proportion of the variance in the criterion space, we need theories and models that reflect the complexity of how personality influences the determinants of job performance. Hough and Oswald briefly touched on some mediated models involving personality, but this topic deserves more attention because of the potential for better understanding how personality influences performance. A number of process models of how personality influences performance have been proposed in recent years, both for individual job performance and for counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The purpose of this commentary is to expand on Hough and Oswald's article by providing a brief review of recent models of how personality influences behavior at work.

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Individual Job Performance Models

Campbell (1990) presented a performance prediction model proposing that performance is determined directly by a combination of knowledge, skill, and motivation. These direct determinants are distinguished from indirect performance determinants, which can only influence performance via the direct determinants. Personality is an indirect determinant, along with variables such as abilities, education, experience, training, and management practices. Motowidlo, Borman, and Schmit (1997) proposed a similar model that distinguished between task performance and citizenship performance.

Johnson (2003) built on and expanded these performance prediction models, adding work habits as a fourth determinant that was distinct from motivation. He also expanded the conceptualization of motivation by incorporating Mitchell and Daniels' (2003) distinction between proactive cognitive processes (e.g., expectancies, self-efficacy, goal setting) and online cognitive processes (e.g., self-regulation). Johnson added psychological motives (e.g., values, interests, preferences, attitudes) as a third component of motivation that may mediate the relationship between personality and proactive cognitive processes. Johnson, Duehr, Hezlett, Muros, and Ferstl (2008) found partial support for this model for five different performance dimensions. As Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985) suggested, personality variables had differential relationships

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with different components of motivation. This finding, along with direct paths to performance from each motivation component, supports the need for splitting motivation into its components in order to truly understand how personality influences performance.

Barrick, Mitchell, and Stewart's (2003) model is consistent with Johnson's (2003) model but focuses exclusively on the influence of motivation. In their model, three types of motivation (accomplishment striving, status striving, and communion striving) mediate the relationship between personality and performance. This model also recognizes the importance of situational demands on the way personality is expressed. The relationship between a given personality trait and behavior is stronger when the situation is relevant to the trait's expression and allows enough autonomy that individual behavior varies. Barrick et al. focused on cooperative and competitive social demands as situational aspects that influence trait expression. The relationship between accomplishment striving and performance is mediated by communion striving in situations in which cooperative demands operate and by status striving in situations in which competitive demands operate. Barrick, Stewart, and Piotrowski (2002) found partial support for this model, showing that status striving mediated the relationship between accomplishment striving and performance in a sample of sales representatives who worked in a competitive sales setting.

Tett and Burnett (2003) described the influence of the situation on trait expression in more detail with their trait activation theory. This theory asserts that traits are activated by situations that provide trait expression opportunities or "cues." Behavior that is consistent with the trait is considered job performance when the organization values that behavior. The intrinsic satisfaction associated with expressing your traits and the extrinsic satisfaction from being rewarded for good performance reinforces the behavior. Trait activation theory predicts that personality–performance relationships are stronger to the extent that the situation provides cues for trait expression that are valued by those who evaluate performance. Positive correlations are expected when trait expression is considered to meet work demands, and negative correlations are expected when trait expression is considered to interfere with meeting work demands.

CWB Models

Cullen and Sackett (2003) proposed a model in which personality traits can influence CWB through their impact on (a) perceptual variables such as job satisfaction, mood, stress, and workplace injustice and (b) attitudes toward CWB. This model incorporates Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, in which intentions to perform a behavior are a function of an individual's attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms about what relevant others think about the behavior. Personality traits can influence each of the components of attitudes and subjective norms.

Mount, Ilies, and Johnson (2006) found some support for a model in which job satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between personality and CWB. In this study, job satisfaction was related to both interpersonal and organizational CWB. Agreeableness had a direct influence on interpersonal CWB as well as an indirect influence on both types of CWB through job satisfaction. Conscientiousness had a direct path to organizational CWB, but the mediating effect through job satisfaction was weaker. These results are consistent with what Johnson et al. (2008) found for the performance dimensions of maintaining good working relationships and organizational commitment, which should be highly negatively correlated with interpersonal CWB and organizational CWB, respectively.

An Integrated Personality–Performance Process Model

Examination of these recent individual job performance and CWB process models reveals that they are generally consistent

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with each other, with each model emphasizing different aspects of the personality-performance process. Johnson and Hezlett (in press) integrated these models into a single high-level model in which all variables are expressed as broad construct domains and all the major potential influences of personality on performance are incorporated. The purpose of the general model is to provide a guide for constructing separate models for specific performance components. Because this is a general model of potential influences on performance, the model for any specific performance dimension would not necessarily include each potential path. Research is necessary on specific performance dimensions to determine what elements of the general model operate for different types of performance. What follows is an abbreviated description of the components of this model.

The Johnson and Hezlett (in press) model is presented in Figure 1. As before, knowledge, skill, motivation, and work habits are direct determinants of performance. The indirect performance determinants are broad predictor domains, which are represented throughout the model by the initials P (Personality), O (Organizational context), E (Experience), and A (Ability). Personality traits are expected to directly influence each aspect of the model, as well as moderating some relationships. Organizational context includes a wide variety of variables. Tett and Burnett's (2003) task, social, and organizational cues (demands, distracters, constraints, and releasers) are part of the organizational context. The job itself is an important part of the organizational context that influences the relationship between personality and performance (Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007). Other aspects of the organizational context are supervision, procedural fairness, training, reward systems, and stressors.

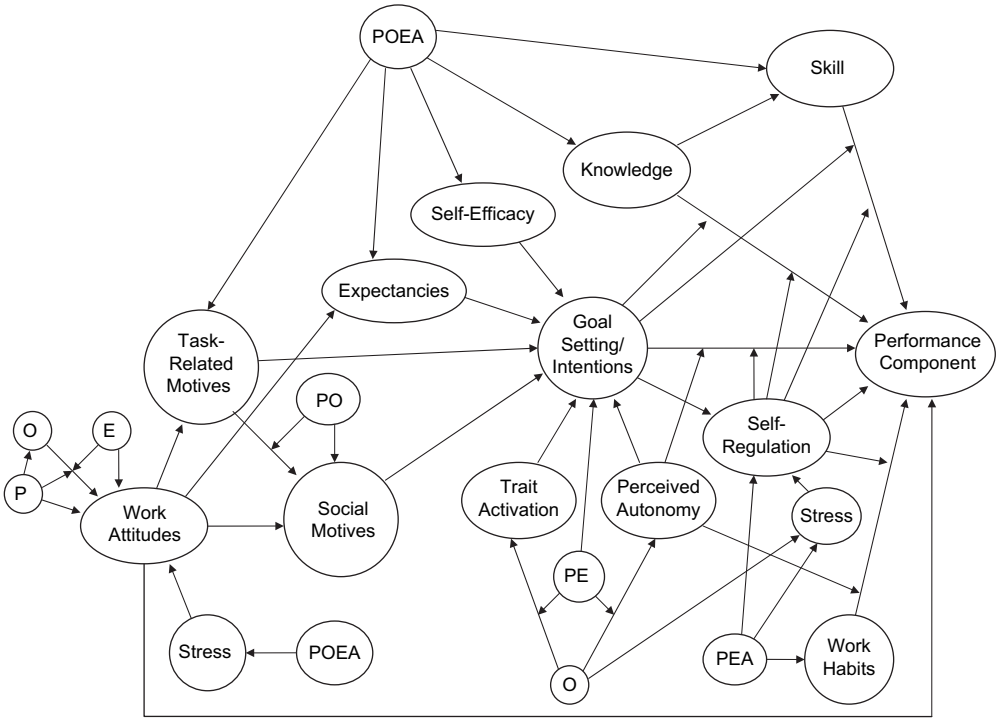


Figure 1. General model of the potential influence of personality traits and other variables on determinants of performance.
Note. P = personality. O = organizational context. E = experience. A = ability. Reproduced from J. W. Johnson, and S. A. Hezlett, 2008. Copyright 2008 by Oxford University Press.

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The motivation component of the model is further expanded from what was introduced in Johnson (2003). We separated task-related motives from social motives. Task-related motives are similar to Barrick et al.'s (2003) accomplishment striving, and social motives include communion striving and status striving. Consistent with Barrick et al.'s model, social motives mediate the relationship between task-related motives and intentions, but we also allow for a direct path from task-related motives to intentions. We also separate work attitudes from other motives. Although an attitude can be a motive for performing a behavior, it can also have a direct effect on both task-related and social motives. Based on the results of Johnson et al. (2008), work attitudes are potentially directly related to both expectancies and performance (specifically for citizenship performance).

Just as Cullen and Sackett (2003) incorporated Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action into their model of CWB determinants, we incorporate Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behavior, which adds perceived behavioral control to attitudes and subjective norms as the determinants of intention formation. The central portion of Figure 1 represents an integration of the theory of planned behavior with concepts in motivation and personality theories, which overlap considerably. For example, goal-setting theory is based on the idea that most behaviors are the result of one's consciously chosen goals and intentions (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003). Setting a goal and being committed to that goal is by definition forming an intention to engage in behavior aimed at goal attainment. Thus, our model combines goal setting and intentions.

An attitude toward a behavior is a function of the individual's beliefs about the consequences of performing the behavior and the desirability of those consequences. These components of an attitude are similar to the components of expectancy theories of motivation (expectancy, instrumentality, and valence; Mitchell & Daniels, 2003). Thus, in our model, expectancies influence goal setting/intentions in the same way that attitudes influence intentions in the theory of planned behavior.

Subjective norms are a combination of a normative belief about whether others think the individual should perform the behavior and the individual's motivation to comply with what others think. Tett and Burnett's (2003) trait activation theory states that task, social, and organizational cues indicate what kind of behavior is valued positively and negatively in an organization. As the individual continues to experience trait-relevant cues and the value placed on certain behavior is communicated, normative beliefs about what others in the organization think the individual should do are formed. Motivation to comply with what others think depends on the intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction gained by engaging in certain behaviors. Individuals gain extrinsic satisfaction when rewarded for good performance, and they gain intrinsic satisfaction by expressing their traits in an environment that values such trait expression. Therefore, the subjective norms component is represented by trait activation, which includes perceptions of trait-relevant cues and motivation to perform behaviors that are valued by others.

Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's perception of the relative difficulty and volitional control associated with performing a behavior. Perceived behavioral control is represented by self-efficacy and autonomy in our model. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own capabilities to successfully accomplish a task. High self-efficacy should lead to a stronger perception that a behavior is under one's control. Autonomy is the extent to which the situation allows a person freedom to behave in an idiosyncratic manner and is an important part of Barrick et al.'s (2003) model and trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Personality is more highly related to performance when people are free to perform their jobs in idiosyncratic ways. The amount of perceived autonomy in a situation will contribute to the amount of perceived behavioral control, so there is a direct path from autonomy to goal setting/intentions.

The final component of motivation included in this model is self-regulation. Self-regulation partially mediates the

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relationship between goal commitment/intentions and performance because those who are more committed to a goal are likely to work harder at maintaining goal-directed action. Self-regulation also moderates the relationship between other direct determinants and performance. If two people have similar knowledge, skill, habits, and desire to perform but different levels of performance, this could be explained by differing levels of ability to self-regulate. Self-regulation moderates the relationship between intentions and performance because this relationship is stronger the greater one's ability to protect the intention from competing action tendencies (Kuhl, 1985).

The extent to which this model accurately represents the influence of personality and other individual differences on performance will be determined by future research. Nevertheless, this model highlights the many potential routes through which personality may influence individual job performance and CWB. Personality is included as a determinant of every direct determinant of performance, as well as other indirect determinants such as motivational variables and attitudes. In addition, personality is a potential moderator of many of the relationships specified in this model. The influence of personality on job performance and CWB is indeed very complex, and understanding this complexity is an important route toward improving our ability to predict these important constructs with measures of personality.

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