Looking for Performance in Personality Inventories
The Primacy of Agentic and Communal Information over the Big-Five Descriptive Traits

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Introduction

Everyday judgments: Two evaluative information sources

- Agency: Self-promotion, affiliation
- Communal: Other-orientation

Agency and communal are inferred from behavior and communicated by adjectives. They indicate the value of people in interpersonal situations (communal) and interdependence relations (agency).


Personality assessment: A different tradition

- Five major dimensions: Emotional stability, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness

These “Big-Five” are non-evaluative (i.e. descriptive) individual differences. They are measured with personality inventories (i.e., behavioural tendencies ratings). They predict the same kind of outcomes than social value.

As far as evaluative information is distributed across personality inventories (Backstrom et al., 2009), we designed this experimental research to show that agentic information can explain a part of the link between personality descriptions and job success.

Procedure and materials

- Participants put themselves in the place of a recruiter and read through a fictitious applicant’s responses to a personality inventory varying on social value (Exp. 1 & 2) and personality (Exp. 2).
- J upward grades for agency-oriented profiles compared with communion-oriented or neutral profiles.

Results

- At equal scores on the five factors, higher performance ratings for agency-oriented profiles compared with communion-oriented or neutral profiles.

References

- Abele, A. E., & Brack, S. (2013). Performance for other person’s traits is dependent on the kind of social relationship. Social Psychology, 44(6), 9-44.
- Backstrom, A., McDonald, F. C., & Lanser, M. E. (2005). Five-factor theories have a major impact on personality research, but diversity which can be reduced by training items neutral. Journal of Research in Personality, 39, 409-424.

Highlights

- Evaluative information is sufficient to make predictions about job success or performance from personality items (same results with an organizational citizenship measure).
- In performance contexts, it’s more important to be agentic than conscientious: Evaluative information conveyed by personality items is perceived before descriptive information.
- Real life replication with real performance measure would be interesting in order to show that: Each big five could potentially predict performance provided it is measured with agency.
- Agency and communion should account for incremental variance in performance prediction.