

# Impact of the Conscientiousness as Personality Trait on both Job and Organizational Performance

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## Abstract

*Present paper examined the effect of Conscientiousness Trait on Job Performance as sufficient evidence from literature proved that out of Big Five Personality Traits; Conscientiousness is a valid predictor of Job Performance across occupations and cultures. Therefore, present paper aimed to investigate relationship between Conscientiousness trait and Job Performance in Pakistani context. In the study, questionnaires were administered on 612 microfinance staff from various parts of Pakistan. The original version of International Personality Item Pool inventory was modified and used to measure the Conscientiousness trait and for Job Performance measurement; researchers developed the instrument. The hypotheses were tested & checked by regression analysis. The study results endorsed that Conscientiousness has strong association with and also a valid predictor of employee Job Performance. The study findings also recognized that there is stronger link between Conscientiousness and Contextual Performance with then with Conscientiousness to Task Performance. Overall Job Performance was strongly linked to Conscientiousness.*

**Keywords:** Big Five Personality, Business Management, Conscientiousness, Job Performance, Microfinance, Personality Traits.

## Introduction

Researchers studied and concluded that employee performance, like all aspects of human behavior, is a function of both personal attributes of the actor and the situation in which he or she exist (Robertson et al., 1999). Additionally people and their performances are keys to an organization's effectiveness. Understanding employee's behavior is critical, as it helps to comprehend and predicts job performance with features that cannot necessarily be related to the individual's skills, abilities, and knowledge; rather it predicts what an employee will do. This resulted in undeniable

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link of personality to individual's performance at work (Harris & Lee, 2004).

Barrick & Mount (1991) meta-analytic review found and concluded the relationship between Personality and Job Performance. Although, a meta-analytic review generates a relatively small relation ( $r = 0.24$ ) between personality and job performance yet the authors concluded, "Overall results firmly supports the use of personality scales in personnel selection" (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, Tett et al., (1991) has identified a broader spectrum of association between Personality and Job Performance unlike previous results, which identified relationship mainly with Conscientiousness and Extraversion.

With respected to Conscientiousness Trait, almost a decade after meta-analysis by Tell et al., (1991); Barrick et al. (2001) has conducted another meta-analysis of personality and job performance and reaffirmed that Conscientiousness Trait is a valid predictor of Job Performance in all occupations.

The employee's personality and performance relationship is not explored to its full potential in Pakistani work environment. Very little empirical evidence on personality and performance relationship is found. This knowledge deficiency critically impeded organizations to hire a right person and subsequently for addressing trainings needs of employees. In the context of Pakistan, review of literature revealed that studies primarily focused on single construct i.e. personality or job performance or its relationship to other constructs such as Marital Adjustment, Organizational Role Stress, Organizational Commitment, or Job Analysis (Ansari, 2003; Khurshid, 2008; Rehman, 2009). Therefore, present paper aimed to measure the personality trait i.e. Conscientiousness relationship to employee's performance in work environment in Pakistan.

### Literature Review

Chamorro-Premuzic (2007) traced that 'personality' origin from Greek work 'persona'. He suggested that 'personality' which makes the person different or similar to others. While, Gleitman (1992) narrated that personality pattern attributes to characters, which were assumed consistent from time to time and from situation to situation. For Banyard & Hayes (1994) personality is "a distinctive and relatively stable pattern of behavior, thoughts, motives, and emotions that characterize an individual." Since, individual personality is stable over time, hence can be used to measure individual performance. (Matthews et al., 2003)

Barrick & Mount (2005) describe that personality matters because it predicts and explains behavior at work. The recurrence of growing interest in personality and job performance relationship are credits mainly due to emergence of "Big Five" taxonomy (Jayan, 2006 and

Detrick & Chibnall, 2006). This view is endorsed by Paunonen (2003), who added that researcher's confidence has increased on Big Five factors to predict variation in behavior at work. Gerrig & Zimbardo (2005) mentioned that as name suggests "Big Five" represent five broad dimensions and each category of big five brings many traits that have common idea but distinctive connotations. Goldberg (1992, p. 26) has also mentioned that Tupes and Christal (1961) originally discovered the Big-Five Factor as a result of re-analyse of bipolar constructs as proposed by Cattell (1957). Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr. (2003) mentioned that Big-Five framework is a "hierarchical model of personality traits." The model presents the personality at the "broadest level of abstraction."

Tupes and Christal built on Allport and Odbert's work and established five factors known today. Their work was not recognized as it was published in Air Force publication (Howard & Howard, 2004). Warren Norman, in the late 1950's, reproduced the Tupes and Christal study and confirmed the five-factor structure for trait taxonomy. Norman named these factors Surgency, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Culture. From 1980's to till date, Five-Factor Model is established as the basic paradigm for personality research (Howard & Howard, 2004). Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski (2002) wrote that five-factor model (FFM) is now realized as an accepted framework of personality. Judge & Ilies (2002) mentioned that "if a consensual structure of traits is ever to emerge, the five factor model is probably it" (p.798). In the past, personality and job performance relationship largely done due to the fact that it has practical objective in relation to exploring the traits related to job performance (Tett & Burnett, 2003).

Barrick and Mount (1991) identified the dimensions of Conscientiousness as 'careful, thorough, responsible, organized, hardworking, achievement-oriented, and persevering'. According to Goldberg (1990) as mentioned by Larsen & Buss (2002, p.288), key adjectives that describe conscientiousness are: organized, neat, orderly, practical, prompt, and meticulous versus disorganized, disorderly, careless, sloppy, and impractical. For Zhao & Seibert (2006) "individual degree of organization, persistence, hard work, and motivation in the pursuit of goal accomplishment" are some of the trademark of Conscientiousness. Ansari (2003) added that "individual's degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior" are few conscientiousness dimensions. An individual with high on conscientiousness marked as determinant, purposeful with having strong will. A high conscientiousness individual would have greater achievement in academic and professional life than individual low on conscientiousness. An individual low at Conscientiousness is characterized as careless, sloppy, and inconsistent in his/her approach.

Job performance which is prime variable under current study is role prescribed behavior contribute to the goals of the organization and it is combination of knowledge, motivation, skills and ability (Zyphur et al., 2008). Waldman & Spangler (1989) described job performance as the single most pervasive variable in micro-organizational behavior research. Viswesvaran & Ones (2000) view Job performance as a central construct in individual /organizational psychology and defines job performance as “scalable actions, behavior, and outcomes that contribute to organizational goals”. He further suggested that Job Performance is multidimensional in nature and the behavior make up the performance are scalable in terms of level of performance. Rehman (2009) identified that Job Performance is complex in nature, yet it is pragmatic and measureable when it is accomplished.

Earlier, only Task Performance was considered as a sole construct of Job Performance. Witt et al. (2002) identified essential assignments and tasks as are dimensions of task performance. These outcomes distinguish one job from other job or one profession from other profession. Similarly Whiting et al. (2008) and Hackett (2002) called task performance as in-role behavior and delineate into duties and tasks that contribute to organizational technical core.

Borman and Motowidlo, 1993 as cited in Motowidlo & Van Scotter (1994) defines task performance as “the proficiency with which incumbents perform activities that are formally recognized as part of their jobs; activities that contribute to the organization’s technical core either directly by implementing a part of its technological process or indirectly by providing it with needed materials or services.” The task performance can be classified into two broad categories of behavior i.e. activities which transforms raw materials into the goods or services and second covers the activities that maintain the technical core by supporting its first activities (Johnson, 2001; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994).

However, Job Performance entails more than just Task Performance (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). It includes Contextual Performance as well. Organ, 1988 views Organizational Citizenship Behavior as Contextual Performance and describes it as “individual behavior that is discretionary/extra-role, not directly explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization.” Borman and Motowidlo (1993) have identified three dimensions of contextual performance: interpersonal support (helping, supporting, motivating others); organizational support (defending and promoting the organization); and conscientious initiative (persistence of individual effort in completing tasks and in self-development) (cited by Hackett, 2002).

In 2001, Barrick, Mount & Judge carried out another study, which summarized the results of 15 preceding meta-analytic research. The study results reconfirmed the findings of previous researches that ‘Conscientiousness’ is a valid predictor of performance in all professions (Barrick et al., 2001). Rothmann & Coetzer (2003) based on their research; concluded that that four personality dimensions i.e. Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness were related to Task Performance. Berg & Feij (2003) reported from various researchers that Conscientiousness, is related to performance criteria and findings are consistent across different occupational groups. Berg & Feij’s (2003) work also concluded that Conscientiousness is related to job performance across various occupational groups.

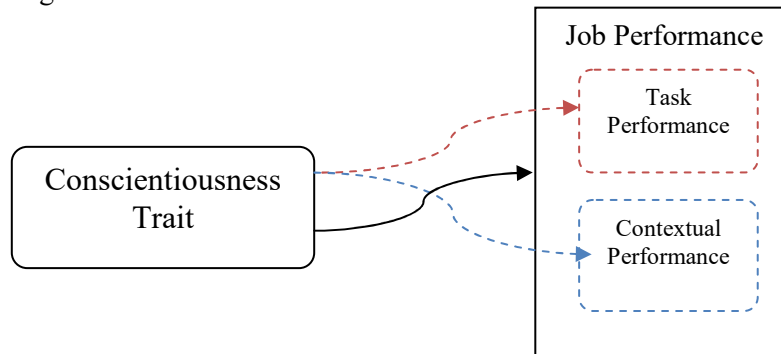
Another important reason recognized by Barrick & Mount (2005) on the basis of seven research steams that personality measurement yield better results in terms of diverse workforce since findings identified no or very small differences in the mean values between various ethnic and racial groups. Therefore, use of personality measurement enhanced social justice at the time of selection. Jiang et al. (2009) found that Conscientiousness was both related to Task and Contextual Performance.

Based on literature documentation, below hypotheses were developed to investigate:

- There is direct relationship between Conscioustiouness Trait and Employee Task Performance.
- There is postive association between employee with Conscioustiouness Trait and Contextual Performance.
- Employee with Conscioustiousness Trait perform better on overall Job Performance.

The theoretical model (Figure1) depicted the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Figure 1: Theoretical Model



## Method

The current study focused on descriptive, hypotheses testing and one-industry research design (Akhtar N., 2010 and Khan, 2009). The study setting is non-contrived and is cross sectional (Sekaran, 2003). Researcher conducted preliminary data collection through interviews with microfinance practitioners and industry expert to better understand the nature of the problem, knowledge of work environment prior to establishment of job performance instrument. These interviews also helped in finalizing the determinants of Job Performance. The study is based on quantitative research approach as suggested by Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festing (2005).

### *Sample*

The study is based on 612 samples (field staff of microfinance organizations). Out of 612 participants, 335 (54.7%) were male and 227 were female (45.3%). 50.3% of participants belonged to 20 to 25 years of age group, followed by 35% of participants to 26 to 30 years of age bracket. On the whole 85.3% of participants were equal or below 30 years of age.

### *Instrument and Instrument' Scale*

The Conscientiousness Trait was sub-categorized into five dimensions. These sub-dimensions were self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement-striving and self-discipline and these were measured by nine elements. For Task Performance, three dimensions were identified to measure staff' technical core behaviors and it was measured by using eight items. These include disbursement, recovery and reporting. In the study; Contextual Performance, dimension of Job Performance is measured through five dimensions i.e. initiative, organizational care, work motivation, teamwork and lead from front.

The data gathered through questionnaires which were courier to Microfinance Institutions' Field Offices and Field In-charge were briefed through mail and telephonic contact about the purpose of the study and guidelines for filling the questionnaires. Additionally, written instruction was also available with questionnaires.

## Results

The mean and standard deviation of all four constructs recognized general agreement with regard to the responses. For instance, Conscientiousness (Mean = 4.29, Standard Deviation = 0.567); Task Performance (Mean = 3.88, Standard Deviation = 0.566); Contextual Performance (Mean = 4.42, Standard Deviation = 0.591) and Job Performance (Mean = 4.15, Standard Deviation = 0.483). The mean score and standard deviation indicate respondents' general agreement to

the dimensions of the model. The Cronbach's alpha for individual variables after factor analysis for Conscientiousness (0.826); Task Performance (0.692); Contextual Performance (0.836). It indicated that the measure is compositely reliable and internally consistent as recommended by Akhtar (2010).

The face validity of the instrument was checked by presenting the instrument to four sector experts and 3 academicians who endorsed that the items measured the prescribed concept. Based on their feedbacks and suggestions, instrument contents were improved.

For discriminant validity, pairwise correlations was suggested by many researchers and marked cutoff pairwise correlation value  $< 0.85$  (Harrington, 2009);  $< 0.60$  (Leech et al., 2005); and  $< 0.55$  (Dimosvski, 1994) between constructs or dimensions at 95% level of confidence interval (as cited in Akhtar N., 2010). The pairwise correlation value of all the four constructs are  $< 0.57$  hence, indicating that measure passed the test of discriminated validity and suggested that elements are different from each other.

Before applying regression analysis to the data, regression analysis assumptions of multicollinearity & singularity, linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were checked and found that data met the underlying assumptions. All the three dependent variables "Task Performance, Contextual Performance and Job Performance" were regressed on predicting variable "Conscientiousness". The predicting variable, Conscientiousness significantly envisages Task Performance,  $F(1, 610) = 59.937$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $Beta = 0.299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.089$ . The value of  $R^2$  indicates that model explained 8.9% of variance in Task Performance. For Contextual Performance,  $F(1, 610) = 236.194$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $Beta = 0.528$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.279$  presents that it explains 27.9% of the variance in Contextual Performance. With regard to Job Performance,  $F(1, 610) = 201.995$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $Beta = 0.499$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.249$ , indicates that model explains 24.9% of the variance in job performance.

### Discussion & Conclusion

The foremost objective of study is to explore and examine the relationship between Conscientiousness trait and performance. The study is based on one dependent variable of job performance, sub-categorized into task performance and contextual performance (Motowidlo & Van Scotter 1994; Conway 1999; Waldman & Spangler, 1989) and Conscientiousness trait from Big Five personality traits (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Barrick et al., 2001; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Gosling et al., 2003 and Goldberg et al., 2006). The study findings provide strong empirical evidence that Conscientiousness do relate to performance of employees.

The results indicated that Conscientiousness association with respect to Contextual Performance, Task Performance and Job Performance were similar to findings of previous studies. With reference to task performance, value of  $R$  Square = 0.089, presents that model explains 8.9% of variance by conscientiousness. The  $F$  value (59.937) presented that model has strength to predict Task Performance (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). In contrary to Task Performance, Conscientiousness has stronger prediction of Contextual Performance with  $R$  Square = 0.279 and value of  $F(1, 610) = 236.194$ ,  $p < 0.000$ . The results indicated that 27.9% variance is explained in Contextual Performance by Conscientiousness. Alike this, study findings presented that overall Job Performance has strong and positive relationship with Conscientiousness as values of  $R$  square 0.249 and  $F(1, 610) = 201.995$ ,  $p < 0.000$ . The results of study related to Conscientiousness and Job Performance is consistent with earlier Meta – analytic findings of Barrick & Mount, 2005; Barrick & Mount, 1991 and Tell et al., 2001; Rothamann & Coetzer, 2003, and Tell & Burnett, 2003.

Furthermore, it is found that ‘Conscientiousness’ has strongest relationship with job performance  $R$  Square = 0.249, which is similar to the findings of Barrick et al. (2001) study and many others ( Skyrme et al., 2005; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick et al., 2001; Jiang et al., 2009). Barrick et al. (2001) indicated that ‘Conscientiousness’ is a valid predictor of performance in all professions.

### Limitations

Researchers believe that conditions surrounding the individual may affect the level of performance of individual; however most researchers have ignored the moderating effects of variables (Cascio, 1998). Similarly, same limitation persists in the present research, which ignored other variables such as culture, capacity building initiatives, leadership, and environment safety etc., to determine the job performance of microfinance staff. Therefore, present study limits to explore, understand and predict the association between two variables i.e. Conscientiousness and Job Performance.

Secondly, due to the various occupational groups, different job descriptions at different level and grades; to establish a generalized job performance questionnaire is not recommended. Therefore in order to make specific job performance questionnaire, study has only selected the employees of MFIs and NGOs having microfinance as core program as the subjects of the research; hence it is not possible to apply the research findings to other NGOs, government and corporate employees. Moreover, potential limitation of present study is that both dimensions i.e. conscientiousness trait and job performance were obtained from self-responses, hence resulted in common-method bias (Barrick et al., 2002).

### **Recommendations & Implications**

Performance at work is an area of attraction that evolved since the time organizations hired their first employee. The quest for hiring right person for right job leads HR managers and organizations to develop effective selection/hiring tools and techniques that help them in the process and that promise optimal performance as well. The search guided researchers to identify various internal and external factors that significantly contribute to employee Job Performance. Out of these, no other area is investigated to the extent such as personality dimension and finally conclusions were drawn that personality traits are indeed one of the valid predictors of performance at work.

The present research findings substantiated that Microfinance Institutions/NGOs (providing microfinance) should also consider personality dimensions i.e. Conscientiousness for identification of potential applicants at the time of selection/hiring or initiating career development schemes for their existing employees. There is huge potential for them to select appropriate person who is more potentially suitable as his/her personality match with the job requirements. The research finding indicated that together with other selection techniques such as cognitive ability, general aptitude tests, interview etc., organizations should use personality measurement tests to increase the chances of hiring employees that eventually better perform at work. As Black and Mount (2005) rightly expressed that, no manager would like to hire someone with “careless, irresponsible, lazy, impulsive, and low in achievement striving (low in Conscientiousness).” On the other hand, managers and organizations are keen to employ persons with responsible, careful, energetic impulsive etc (high on conscientiousness).

Similar to this, with respect to specific job role, understanding of specific traits would enhance probability of effective job performance. The study of personality dimensions of existing/current employees helps organizations to work to develop trainings modules and seminars that focus on boosting their personal characteristics as managers are always pay great attention to work related behaviors. Importantly, employee performance is not just about performing their technical work behavior but more than that. Recent years also witnessed emergence of contextual performance as one of the important components beside task performance. Managers considered employee contextual performance significantly contributes to overall employee performance ratings. Managers no longer willing to hire persons good in technical core but not supporting their colleague, uncooperative, destroying organizational image, centric focus, and not following organizational policies and procedures.

The present study presented a wide range of scope for future researchers and students because present study is one of the first steps

taken to explore Conscientiousness and Job Performance relationship in Pakistan. Building on present research, researchers could improve the model to other occupations and sectors and eventually analyzed the findings.

Moreover, in the present research, no moderating or intervening variables were included. Therefore, it is worthwhile to introduce other intervening variables especially cultural context that might generate interesting and useful findings. The research instrument developed in English Language. Therefore, there remains a vital and big scope to translate Big-Five personality dimensions into native language so that respondents would relate it more conveniently to their perception about personality.

It is always advisable in measuring behavior variables in research to apply longitudinal studies. Therefore, a potential opportunity lies for longitudinal research design to more in-depth analysis and to test causality.

Hogan, & Roberts (1996) suggested that to increase the expected association between Personality and Job Performance, researchers should categorized jobs by occupational type and in relation to these types use appropriate dimensions of Big-Five together with performance criteria. Since present study is unable to focus this area, therefore, it is recommended to design well-developed and well-structured personality measurement for particular occupational type because it yield consistent and stable results over longer period.

Although the findings of the present research has given strong evidence that well-structured and well developed personality measurement could predict valid performance and therefore it is suggested to use personality measures in selection and decision making, however it is also recommended to always use in combination with other information, about applicant's cognitive ability, technical knowledge, years of experience etc.

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