

CONNECTING PERSONALITY TRAITS WITH DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Deviant workplace behaviour presents an important research question in today's organizations as it can cause harmful effects on both the individual and organizational level. Besides affecting individual work outcomes, it can also have different social and psychological effects on them and consequently on the overall organization. As of this, it is important to recognize possible determinants of workplace deviance. Personality traits present an important element in defining individual behaviour and intentions. As such, they can be considered as a strong predictor of various forms of deviant workplace behaviour. To test the proposed connection, an empirical research was done on a sample of 189 individuals. The work is based on the big five personality model, as a popular method of assessing personality traits, and deviant workplace behaviour is analysed from individual and organizational point of view. In general, results show higher level of organizational than individual deviant behaviour, but also their mutual dependence. Regarding personality traits, results indicate that the personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness are statistically significantly negatively connected with both forms of undesirable behaviour. Other traits including extraversion, emotional stability and openness are not statistically significantly connected with either individual or organizational workplace behaviour. Results are controlled for difference regarding age and gender. Research implications are provided.

Keywords: Personality, Personality traits, Deviant workplace behaviour, Croatia.

INTRODUCTION

The reason why people behave in a certain matter can partly be attributed to their personality traits, as they can be understood as the forces that affect how people think, feel and behave (Norem, 2012). Personality is something that each individual carry within himself over time, from one situation to the other. The definition of personality

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emphasizes that personality sources are within individuals and that personality is therefore stable over time and to some extent consistent in different situations (Larsen & Buss, 2008). As such, personality traits are useful because they help predict future. In other words, personality is useful for describing, explaining and predicting differences among individuals (Hoyle, 2010). In this case, differences regarding deviant workplace behaviour.

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship among the personality traits measured by the big five factor model (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness) with different forms of deviant workplace behaviour. It is widely recognized that any form of inadequate treatment of employees at the workplace can cause adverse effects on the health and safety of employees. Moreover, research has shown that deviant behaviour in the workplace does not only result in poor health and safety of individuals but leads to high costs for organizations.

Understanding different types of personality and characteristic way of different types' approach to distinct forms of deviant behaviour can greatly help prevent distortion of balance in interpersonal relations. This paper examines the relationship between deviant workplace behaviour at interpersonal and organizational level, and big five personality traits. Strong connection among personality traits and deviance has been recognized. However, results regarding influence of different personality traits on deviant behaviour are still inconsistent. Therefore, by this study we seek to provide additional insight into these relationships. As O'Connor et al. (2017, p. 20) emphasize, this research is necessary as we still have not "identified specific risk factors for sub-groups of individuals".

DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR

Workplace deviance or deviant work place behaviour presents a "voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization, and its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556). It is recognized as intentional behaviour of certain members of organizations that are opposed to legitimate organizational interests and goals (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). They include behaviours such as physical and verbal violence and aggression, theft, abusive supervision, incivility, withholding effort or information (Jensen & Patel, 2011). Yildiz and Alpkan (2015) stress these behaviours are not mentioned in the formal job definitions; they rise above existing role expectations and break organizational norms.

Past research indicates enormous economic and social costs connected with deviance at work (Nurul et al., 2015) harming not just employees and organizations but also customers (Raman et al., 2016). Almost all deviant workplace behaviours reduce productivity and efficiency of employees. This primarily refers to people who are victims of such behaviours. Negative effects of deviance on an individual level include: psychological and other health problems, anxiety, lack of motivation for work, job dissatisfaction and absenteeism, poorer quality of private life, increased consumption of opiates such as alcohol or other narcotics due to disrupted interpersonal relationships at work, and ultimately the possibility of suicide (Applebaum et al., 2007). Moreover, the negative indirect effects of these behaviours may also affect individuals who are not participants in such behaviours (nor are victims, nor actors). This is through a disturbed working atmosphere and conditions and fear spreading climate. All this ultimately negatively affects organizations through various aspects: financial, production, reputation, competition aspect or aspects of employee turnover (Brkic & Aleksic, 2016).

As a result, organizations where deviance has been extensively present and encouraged are described as toxic ones (Cheang & Appelbaum, 2015).

Many researchers provide classification of these behaviours (e.g. Hollinger & Clark 1982; Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Spector et al., 2006; Bowling & Gruys, 2010). However, one of the most widely used classification measures is the one by Robinson and Bennett (1995). By using multidimensional scaling techniques, they developed a typology of deviant behaviour that includes two dimensions: (1) minor versus serious, referring to the severity of the behaviour; and (2) interpersonal versus organizational, depending if the behaviour is targeting organization or individuals.

Accordingly, deviant behaviours can be classified into four categories: (1) production deviance (minor/organizational) - includes behaviours such as leaving early, intentionally working slowly; (2) property deviance (serious, organizational) - includes sabotage, stealing, taking bribes; (3) political deviance (minor/interpersonal) - includes showing favouritism, gossiping, blaming co-workers; (4) personal aggression (serious/interpersonal) - includes sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stealing from co-workers, and endangering co-workers (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 565).

When it comes to sources of deviance some researchers stress the importance of individual attitudes and perceptions (e.g. Bennett & Robbins, 2000), others stress more the importance of context and situation (e.g. Applebaum et al., 2007). But, acknowledging the findings from the field it is possible to conclude that deviance is "the result of a complex interaction between the person and the environment in which the individual's reasoning about the environment and expected outcomes drive the individual's behaviour" (Martinko et al., 2002, p. 41). In the context of organization, beside employee attitudes and personality, environmental factors include situational factors, such as perception of justice, and organizational factors, such as organizational structure or climate (Marasi et al., 2018).

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR

The term or concept of personality refers to the traits or features of an individual's behaviour (action, motivation, response, beliefs, etc.). It refers to "stylistic consistencies in social behaviour which are a reflection of an inner structure and process" (Furnham, 1992, p. 15).

The five-factor or big five personality model is a taxonomy of personality traits that has had the greatest support of researchers for the last couple of decades. An impressive number of researches confirm that the five basic dimensions make up the foundation of all others and include the most important variations in the personality of people. The five-factor model includes traits of extraversion referring to one's comfort in relationship, agreeableness concerning individual inclination to defer to others, conscientiousness as a measure of reliability, neuroticism or emotional stability referring to way individuals copes with emotions and stress and openness to experience describing one's range of interests and attraction to new things (Robbins & Judge, 2009). Key characteristics of five personality traits are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Key adjectives for markers of the five personality traits

Personality traits	Characteristics
Extraversion	The degree to which a person is sociable, assertive, active, ambitious; includes characteristics as: energetic, enthusiastic, outgoing, talkative
Agreeableness	The degree to which a person is good-natured, cooperative, and trusting; includes characteristics as: appreciative, forgiving, generous, kind, trusting
Conscientiousness	The degree to which a person is responsible, dependable, persistent, and organized; includes characteristics as efficient, reliable, thorough
Emotional stability/Neuroticism	The degree to which a person is calm, self-confident, secure under stress (positive); includes characteristics as relaxed, stable, self-confident
Openness	The degree to which a person is curious, imaginative, artistic, and sensitive; includes characteristics as artistic, imaginative, insightful, original, wide interests

Source: McCrae & John (1992), Robbins & Judge (2009)

Personality can affect individual deviant workplace behaviour through the process of individual perception and attribution. More precisely personality can affect the way people perceive stimuli from their environment, interpret them and make attributions to them, their emotional and behavioural responses to them as well as their ability to inhibit aggressive and deviant impulses (Nurul et al., 2013, citing Spector 2010).

Five-factor personality traits are recognized as powerful predictors of workplace deviance (e.g. Salgado, 2002; Berry et al., 2007, Bolton et al., 2010; Jensen & Patel, 2011; Raman et al., 2016.) A meta-analysis by Berry et al. (2007) showed personality traits to have the potential to influence an individual to engage in deviance at work. In their meta study, agreeableness and conscientiousness were the strongest predictors of workplace deviance score in general, with agreeableness relating more strongly to interpersonal deviance and conscientiousness to organizational deviance. Bolton et al. (2010) found similar results for agreeableness and conscientiousness, but also for extraversion and openness to experience as predictors of certain forms of workplace deviance. Still, results are not consistent and some research shows contradictory results. For instance, conscientiousness has been found to have no relationship with both forms of deviant behaviour (e.g. Nurul et al., 2016, Lim et al., 2016), as well as agreeableness, and openness to experience (Lim et al., 2016). Also, extraversion and neuroticism were found to be valid predictors of interpersonal deviant behaviour (Abdullah & Marican, 2016; Lim et al., 2016). In addition, extraversion showed no relationship with organizational deviant behaviour (Nurul et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

For the purpose of this study, an empirical survey was designed together with an online research instrument. Research was conducted on a convenient sample of students

of different departments of the University of Zagreb. Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique via personal and professional contacts of the researchers. In total, 189 responses were received. The sample was gender biased, as 76,2 % respondents were female, with average age of 23.1 (SD=2,61), and 43.3% of students had a job at the time the research was conducted.

Using students as a sample of research has been present in the literature, as number of researchers analysing deviant workplace behaviour has used students as a sample (e.g. Samnani et al., 2014).

Data collected were analysed using statistical software package SPSS 18.0.

MEASURES

Personality was measured using a 50-item scale developed by Goldberg (1992). The statements used measured five main personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness. Respondents were asked to read the statements and by using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly) to mark the level of agreement with the statement.

Deviant work place behaviour was measured with the 18-item scale developed specifically for the student population by Tomsic et al., (2014). This measure is based on well-established scale and classification developed by Robinson and Bennett (1995), but adjusted for student population. The scale is consisted of two subscales, with one measuring interpersonal behaviour (statement sample: "have you ever verbally abused your student college?") and other measuring organizational deviance (statement sample: "Have you ever missed classes for no justified reason?"). Respondents were asked to indicate how often they have behaved in a way described by the statement using the scale from 1 to 5 where 1 = never, 2= once or twice in life, 3= once or twice a year, 4= once or twice a month, 5= weekly.

Based on these two subscales it was possible to compute a general score of deviant workplace behaviour.

The reliability coefficient for all variables is higher than 0.7 indicating internal consistency of the scale's items.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means and standard deviations for the personality variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The Big five personality traits

Personality traits	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Extraversion	3.22	0.78	189
Agreeableness	3.9	0.65	189
Conscientiousness	3.57	0.69	189
Emotional stability/Neuroticism	3.09	0.86	189
Openness	3.78	0.58	189
OD	1,67	0.24	189
ID	1,11	0.10	189
DWB	1,39	0.20	189

Throughout this study, the correlation between the big five personality traits and organizational and interpersonal deviant behaviour is observed.

Statistically significant correlations have been found between the tested variables with the Pearson correlation being used to quantify the strength and direction of the statistical links. The results of the aforementioned correlation analysing which personality traits are more prone to organizational, interpersonal and overall deviant behaviour are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlation coefficients

Variable	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Consc.	Emotion. Stability	Openness	OD	ID
Extraversion							
Agreeableness	,232**						
Consc.	,118	,278**					
Emotion. stability	,224**	,019	,268**				
Openness	,312**	,086	,267**	,052			
OD	,109	-,218**	-,382**	-,095	,089		
ID	,076	-,395**	-,254**	-,119	,050	,599**	
DWB	,104	-,339**	-,359**	-,119	,078	,903**	,884**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); OD - Organizational deviance, ID - Interpersonal deviance, DWB - Deviant workplace behaviour (composite measure)

The results of correlation analysis indicate that agreeableness has a significant negative correlation with interpersonal deviance ($r = -395, p < 0.01$), organizational deviance ($r = -218, p < 0.01$) and overall deviant workplace behaviour ($r = -339, p < 0.01$). Similar to results of previous studies (e.g. Bolton et al., 2010, Nurul et al., 2013, Lim et al., 2016) these results indicate individuals with high agreeableness are more likely to demonstrate lower interpersonal and organizational deviant behaviour. These figures are not surprising given that an individual scoring high on the personality trait of agreeableness is likely to withdraw from social conflicts and try to avoid situations that they do not find harmonious. On the other side, individuals scoring low on this dimension are more aggressive and more eager to enter a conflict, thus engaging more into deviant behaviour.

Consciousness also has a significant negative correlation with interpersonal deviance ($r = -254, p < 0.01$), organizational deviance ($r = -382, p < 0.01$) and overall deviant workplace behaviour ($r = -359, p < 0.01$). In other words, these results indicate that individuals that are more conscious are less likely to engage into interpersonal or organizational deviant work behaviour, as several studies also show (e.g. Salgado, 2002, Bolton et al., 2010; Abdullah & Marican, 2016). Conscientiousness is defined by diligence, organization, care and thoroughness, and is almost identical to the dimension of agreeableness in the big five model (Babarovic & Sverko, 2013). Conscious individuals are more organized, thorough, like to follow rules, and thus expected not to go against and brake organizational norms i.e. engage into deviant behaviour.

Personality traits of extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience were not found to be statistically significantly correlated with any dimensions of deviant

workplace behaviour. This is in accordance with several previous studies that found no connection between some form of deviant behaviour and extraversion (e.g. Nurul et al., 2016) emotional stability or openness (e.g. Salgado, 2002).

Additional analysis of data showed no statistically significant difference between man and woman, and across different age groups.

The correlation coefficients between deviant workplace behaviour dimensions were positively statistically significant, ranging from ,599 to ,903 ($p < 0.01$). Organizational and interpersonal deviance are correlated with each other to a high degree which is consistent with general analyses that show different wider or narrower categories of undesirable organizational behaviour are interrelated (e.g. Spector et al., 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Individuals differ among themselves in a multitude of psychological variables: interests, motives, needs, aspirations, perceptions, abilities and personality traits. All these variables affect their social behaviour, as well as work ethic. Personality in its wider sense represents all the psychological traits of an individual. Through the personality range, it is possible to link the reactions and patterns of the behaviour of individuals.

The main purpose of this paper was to analyse and understand the relationship between personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness) and organizational and interpersonal deviant workplace behaviour. Deviant behaviour in the workplace can be described as a deliberate effort to harm an organization or one's co-workers. More precisely, it can be seen as deliberate behaviour to violate institutionalized norms and thus endangers the welfare of the organization.

Besides indicating organizational and interpersonal deviant behaviour to be closely related, our empirical research showed only personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness to be negatively related to both forms of deviant behaviour as well as overall deviant behaviour. Other traits showed no statistical connection.

The research carried out in this paper has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. The limitation of this research is primarily related to the number of respondents. The sample is gender biased and relatively small ($N = 189$). While this number may be suitable for predicting correlations within a student population, it is not possible to generalize the results of the questionnaire to the general public. Also, research questionnaire was quite complex (part on personality traits was a 50-item scale) and is based on self-assessment. Therefore, the question of respondent's subjectivity is present. Especially, as the paper examined deviant forms of behaviours, it is possible respondents were not completely honest in providing their answers or felt pressure to provide socially acceptable, "better", answers.

In our paper we used the big five model of personality, as it is one of the most widely used and accepted models of personality. This model focuses on key personality dimensions whose description, as well as differences are consistent and universally applicable, and the flexibility of its application allows comparisons of research conducted around the world. Still the big five model does not go in depth or explore the individual specific of personality, and as some authors suggest, it is the interaction of traits that increases the prediction over and above a single trait approach (Jensen & Patel, 2011). Moreover, some authors (e.g. O'Neill & Hastings, 2011) suggest research needs to move beyond these five traits, and include alternative personality variables, such as integrity,

risk taking, and seductiveness, that can enhance the prediction of the occurrence of deviant behaviour. So future research should encompass additional individual variables, but also consider analysing interaction among them and different environmental or situational factors.

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