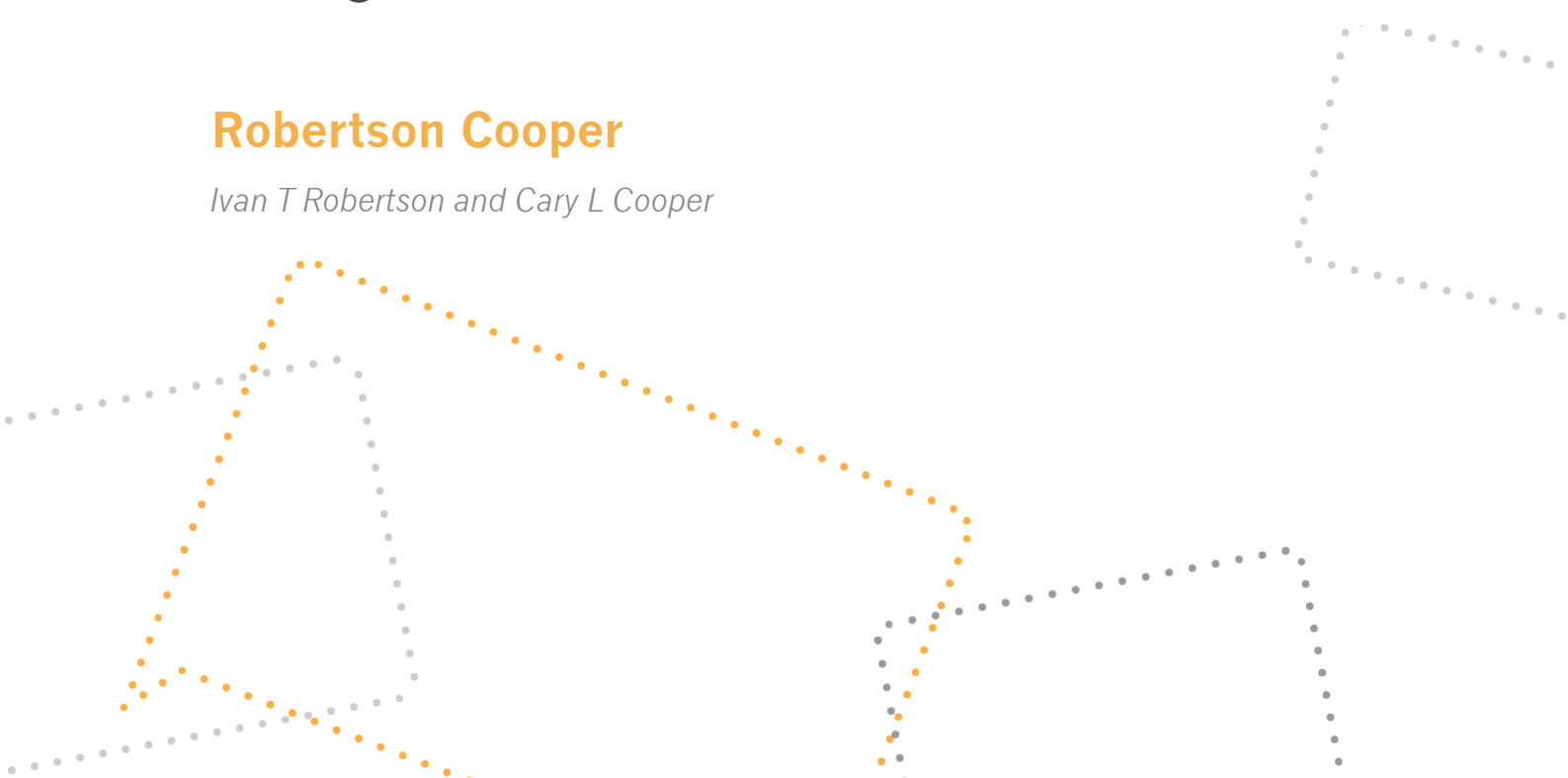




Personality and the Experience of Good Days at Work

Robertson Cooper

Ivan T Robertson and Cary L Cooper



Contents

Summary & discussion	2
Situational factors	4
Personality and the experience of work.....	6
Hypothesis.....	7
Method.....	8
Results.....	9
References.....	12

Summary & discussion

A sample of 3262 people completed a Five Factor Model (FFM, Costa & McCrae, 1992) Personality Questionnaire. They also reported on the number of good days at work that they felt they experienced in a typical working week. The results show that the proportion of good days that people report is predicted by specific personality facets from the Five Factor Model. In particular, three facets explain nearly 15% of the variance in reported good days at work (Multiple R=0.38). This finding indicates that people's feelings about the good days they have experienced will depend, to some extent, on their underlying disposition, regardless of their own expectations of work, or their experience of work. The results of this study show that personality predicts people's experience of work. Although personality factors explain 15% of the variance in the proportion of good days at work that people feel they experience, it is important to note that this still leaves 85% of the variance that is not due to personality. How people are treated at work, and how they interact, are also important, but, as these results show, so is underlying personality.

The results of this research have implications for HR leaders and operational managers in organisational settings. Most importantly, organisations should bear in mind that the behaviour of their managers will elicit a range of reactions and that some employees with a certain personality may find it more difficult to see the positive side. Some employees, regardless of how they have been managed, will be more inclined to feel that their day at work has not been particularly good. This has implications on how managers deal with people on a daily basis, and in particular, on how they introduce change and new initiatives. The results also suggest that it may be helpful for managers to manage their own expectations about how positively some people will feel about their work.

There is strong evidence to suggest that people who are happier at work are more productive, relate better to colleagues, and are less likely to leave (see for example Robertson Cooper's *What is a Good Day At Work?* Report, produced in partnership with Bank Workers Charity, 2017). Some employees will have a more positive reaction to their work, and others will react more negatively. As noted above it is important for leaders and managers to understand how members of their workforce are feeling about their work. These results indicate that there is also a case for supporting employees to help them build skills to manage their own emotions more effectively, especially those more inclined to feel that they have a high percentage of bad days at work.

A further obvious implication is that, if all other things are equal, it would make sense to recruit people who score relatively high on E6 (positive emotions) and C5 (self-discipline), and relatively low on N3 (sensitivity to distress). But in practice all

other things will rarely be equal. Whilst being aware of how candidates score on the three key facets of personality (E6, N3 and C5) will be useful information when making selection decisions, candidates' competencies and experience may often be overwhelmingly important. Some employees with very strong skill sets may find it more difficult to feel that their days at work are good ones (if they are low scorers on E6 and C5 and high scorers on N3). Nevertheless, because they have strong skill sets, these employees may be very important to the organisation and it will be important to retain them. Getting the best out of these employees and ensuring that they feel positive about their working days will be more challenging, for both the employees themselves and their managers. Active development and support whilst taking into account scores on the key personality factors could be useful in helping to retain key employees and useful in tailoring management actions.

Introduction

There is a significant amount of previous research that has explored the factors associated with people's experience of work. People's reaction to work has typically been assessed by measuring aspects of psychological health (including work-related stress), job satisfaction and employee engagement. All these factors are important and presumably each of them helps to determine whether people feel that they have experienced a good day at work. It is interesting however that there is no published research that looks specifically at the extent to which people report good days at work and the factors that influence this.

In broad terms the key determinants that have an impact on how people feel about their work may be divided into two main clusters. First, there are situational influences, such as their expectations of the work itself, the work-home interface, and relationships at work, especially leadership, management and supervision. All of these factors are extrinsic to the individual and, at least in principle, can be changed in order to improve people's overall experience of work. The primary intrinsic factors that may affect how people feel about their work are their attitudes, values, and underlying disposition (personality). The research reported here focuses on exploring the role that intrinsic factors, particularly facets of personality, play in influencing people's overall perception of the proportion of good days at work that they feel they experience.

Situational factors

As far as work itself is concerned, research has identified and crystallised the key aspects of jobs that are linked to the psychological wellbeing and satisfaction of job holders. Early theories such as the Job Demand-Control model (Karasek, 1979) and the Effort-Reward Imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) have been incorporated into the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). During the past decade, the JDR model has given rise to a vast literature on how various job aspects might relate to individual and organisational outcomes, but the core ideas have remained, and there is a consensus that the demands of work and the resources available to the worker jointly influence people's reactions to their work and their psychological wellbeing. There is also evidence that the level of control that people have over how they carry out their work (e.g. Griffin et al., 2007) and the extent to which they feel that their work has purpose and meaning (e.g. Allan et al., 2018) are also important.

The work-home interface is important in many ways and clearly may affect how people feel about their work, even though some of the important determinants are not directly related to work itself. Work provides people with structure, goals, opportunities to achieve something, contact with other people and a range of other psychologically important benefits. Research has confirmed the positive benefits of working – see Waddell and Burton (2006). Being out of work can include a range of negative consequences for both physical and psychological health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Despite this positive side to work, the challenges of integrating life outside work and the demands of employment may create problems for people's overall levels of satisfaction and wellbeing.

Most of the literature and guidance that is focused on psychological wellbeing at work places a great deal of emphasis on the role of managers. For example, the primary approach of the British Health and Safety Executive for tackling work-related stress focuses on a set of “management standards” (Health and Safety Executive, 2007).

Other important reports dealing with psychological wellbeing at work, such as the UK government's Foresight report on Mental Capital (2008) also emphasise the role that line managers play in determining psychological wellbeing at work. The quality of exchanges between employees and their boss has been shown to be an important predictor of whether people stay in an organisation or leave (Griffith et al., 2000). But the relationship between an employee and their manager is not only linked to employee turnover, it is also linked closely to the psychological wellbeing of employees. In some respects, it is quite easy to see how the manager might have

a major impact on the psychological wellbeing of employees. The manager is (or should be) closely involved in the setting of goals for an employee. The manager can also exert a significant impact on the kind of factors identified by HSE and others as important determinants of psychological wellbeing at work. For example, the level of control that an employee experiences could be seriously limited by a manager who tries to micro-manage their employees' tasks. The demands placed on people and the resources and support available together with work-life integration issues can all be influenced by the manager. See Gilbreath (2004) for further information on research studies looking at the impact of managers on critical factors that determine psychological wellbeing, such as role ambiguity or conflict, task autonomy, or the balance between job demands and control. There is also a substantial amount of research showing how supervisory or leadership style links to perceived stress, strain, and burnout in subordinates (e.g. Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Poor quality exchanges between the manager and his or her direct reports have been linked to higher perceived stress (Nelson, Basu, & Purdie, 1998). There has also been research linking supervisor and leadership approaches with employee health complaints (Landeweerd and Boumans, 1994) and with burnout (Martin and Schinke, 1998). It also seems that the behaviour of managers can have an influence on how well people deal with some of the types of "hindrance" pressures such as lack of resources and day-to-day hassles (Snelgrove and Phil, 2001).

Managers and leaders do not only influence employee psychological wellbeing in a negative way. Good quality leadership and management can have a very positive impact on psychological wellbeing. Gilbreath and Benson (2004) looked at the impact of managers' behaviour on psychological wellbeing. What they found was that supervisor behaviour contributed to the prediction of psychiatric disturbance over and above the impact of other factors including age, health practices, support from other people at work, support from home, stressful life events, and stressful work events. As they noted, "...this provides additional evidence that supervisor behaviour can affect employee wellbeing and suggests that those seeking to create healthier workplaces should not neglect supervision." (Gilbreath and Benson, 2004, p 255). Managers who develop high quality work practices within their workgroups can have a positive impact on wellbeing. Interestingly, the wellbeing of a workgroup also has a reciprocal effect on the wellbeing of the leader (Van Dierendonck et al., 2004), so those who nurture the wellbeing of their workgroups through high quality leadership practices also get a beneficial impact, in the longer term, on their own wellbeing.

In practice, the experience that people have of work is filtered through their own perceptions. Two people working in the same environment may see it completely differently because of other influences such as: their view of what to expect from work; the role that work plays in their overall life; their skills and abilities; and their capacity to cope with pressures. These factors provide a bridge between the actual

situations that people work in (colleagues, managers, workplace pressures, etc.) and their own interpretation of the situation. Probably the most important influence on how people perceive their environment is their underlying personality. For example, it has been established that personality shows important links with people's experience of positive emotions, their tendency to experience positive emotions, and their resilience (see Robertson, Leach and Dawson, In press).

Personality and the experience of work

Researchers' views of the key factors involved in describing human personality reached agreement about 20 years ago, and nearly all psychologists recognise the so-called Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality. These five factors are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Five Factor Model of Personality



Each person's standing on these factors becomes fairly clear by about 20 years of age and although there are some changes in later life, each person's position on each factor remains fairly stable throughout life. The personality factors are continuous – so everyone lies somewhere between two extremes. For example, on Neuroticism, everyone is somewhere between very emotionally stable and laid back versus highly neurotic, tense and anxious.

The impact of personality on how people feel stretches a long way (e.g. Weiss, Bates & Luciano, 2008) and even extends to links between national personality and levels of psychological wellbeing. For example, Steel and Ones (2002) found that personality predicted national levels of psychological wellbeing, even when gross national product was taken into account. There is also evidence linking personality with people's overall levels of psychological wellbeing (e.g. DeNeve & Cooper, 1998).

Personality and good days at work

Situational and dispositional factors exert an influence on how people feel when they are at work. As noted above, there is extensive research on the role of situational factors, but there is an absence of work looking at the role that personality plays in determining how people feel about their work. Personality is unlikely to *fully* determine how people feel about their work. Situational factors, such as the work itself and the quality of management will also be important but given the relationship between personality and overall psychological wellbeing, it seems likely that personality will play a role in people's experience of work. Understanding the role of personality in determining people's feelings about their work is important, as it represents a possibly influential factor that is not controlled directly by extrinsic factors such as management behaviour or work design.

Research looking at people's reactions to their work has focused on various outcomes, including reported levels of stress or wellbeing and levels of satisfaction. If people report having had a good day at work this could reasonably be taken as an indication that the various aspects of work have combined to make them feel positive about that particular day and can provide a simple overall indicator of their aggregated feelings about their work. In the published literature to date there is no available research focused on the extent to which people report having good days at work.

Hypothesis

The research reported here set out to explore the relationship between personality and the proportion of good days at work that people experience. The hypothesis investigated is that, *"specific facets of personality from the Five Factor Model will show statistically significant relationships with the proportion of good days at work that people report"*.

Method

The sample comprised 3262 cases. Participants completed online questionnaires that were hosted on a website specifically designed to provide open access to the questionnaires. Invitations to visit the website were (1) presented on an existing website that provides information and resources relating to wellbeing at work and (2) issued by a variety of electronic mail-shots, word of mouth, conference presentations etc. The invitations offered participants a free personal resilience report, providing an assessment of the implications of their personality results in relation to their personal resilience. To obtain informed consent, participants were invited to opt in to participate in a research study and to allow their results to be included in the research.

Measures

Respondents completed the Robertson Cooper FFM Personality Questionnaire (Robertson Cooper Ltd., 2008), measuring Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C), with six facets in each domain (e.g. N1-N6). The questionnaire included a total of 180 items (six items for each facet). Example item: "I often worry about what might happen" (Neuroticism domain). Responses were recorded on a five-point scale from 0 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. The reliability and construct validity for the domain and facet scores compare favourably with existing measures, such as the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Full psychometric information on the personality questionnaire is available from the authors.

Participants also completed a second questionnaire which included two items: (1) "In a typical working week, how many days do you work?" (2) "In a typical working week, how many good days at work do you have?" The ratio of number of good days/number of days worked was computed to provide a measure of the proportion of good days reported.

Results

The first step in the analysis involved multiple regression analysis (MRA) with the six facets in each personality domain as the predictors and the proportion of good days reported as the dependent variable. For each domain, the results of these analyses identified which facets within each domain had unique statistically significant relationships with the proportion of good days. The next step involved taking all the statistically significant facets across all of the five domains and using these to predict the proportion of good days.

Table 1: Key facets associated with the proportion of good days at work

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.305 ^a	.093	.093	25.46265	.093	332.442	1	3249	.000
2	.361 ^b	.130	.130	24.93326	.038	140.431	1	3248	.000
3	.376 ^c	.141	.140	24.78424	.011	40.176	1	3247	.000
4	.383 ^d	.147	.146	24.70417	.006	22.083	1	3246	.000
5	.386 ^e	.149	.148	24.67622	.002	8.358	1	3245	.004
6	.388 ^f	.150	.149	24.65954	.001	5.389	1	3244	.020
7	.390 ^g	.152	.150	24.64362	.001	5.193	1	3243	.023
8	.391 ^h	.153	.151	24.63144	.001	4.210	1	3242	.040
9	.393 ⁱ	.154	.152	24.61351	.001	5.723	1	3241	.017

a. Predictors: (Constant), E6

b. Predictors: (Constant), E6, N3

c. Predictors: (Constant), E6, N3, C5

i. Predictors: (Constant), E6, N3, C5, N2, C2, O4, N6, A3, C6

Key predictors

E6,- N3, C5

As table 1 shows, in total nine, specific facets of personality play a statistically significant role in predicting the proportion of good days at work that people report. Although nine facets show statistically significant relationships with the proportion of good days reported, three facets (**E6, positive emotions; N3, sensitivity to distress; and C5, self-discipline**) explain most of the variance (multiple R= 0.376). Although they are statistically significant (due to the large sample size) the remaining six facets **N2** (Frustration); **C2** (Orderliness); **O4** (Openness to change); **N6** (Sensitivity to pressure); **A3** (Consideration of others) and **C6** (Deliberation) add relatively little to the prediction of good days at work (multiple R increases to only 0.393).

In more detail, the three specific facets that explain most of the variance in the proportion of good days reported are:

E6 (A positive predictor of good days). This scale assesses the tendency to experience positive emotions such as joy, happiness, love, and excitement. High scorers on the Positive Emotions/Enthusiasm scale laugh easily and often. They are cheerful and optimistic. Low scorers are not necessarily unhappy; they are merely less exuberant and high-spirited.

N3 (A negative predictor of good days). This scale measures normal individual differences in the tendency to experience depressive affect. High scorers are prone to feelings of guilt, sadness, hopelessness, and loneliness. They are easily discouraged and often dejected. Low scorers rarely experience such emotions, but they are not necessarily cheerful and light-hearted, this characteristic is associated instead with Extraversion.

C5 (A positive predictor of good days). This scale indicates an individual's tendency to begin tasks and carry them through to completion despite boredom and other distractions. High scorers have the ability to motivate themselves to get the job done. Low scorers procrastinate in beginning chores and are easily discouraged and eager to quit.

A composite variable (referred to from now on as the good day bias) made up of the three most important personality variables (i.e. E6, N3 (negative) and C5) was constructed. The participants scores on this composite variable was divided into three groups (split at the 33rd and 66th percentiles). High scorers on the *good day bias* report a much higher proportion of good days at work. Participants in the top third of scores report almost 80% of good days at work whereas participants in the bottom third report only 57% (see figure 2 and Table 2).

Figure 2: Good day bias and good days at work

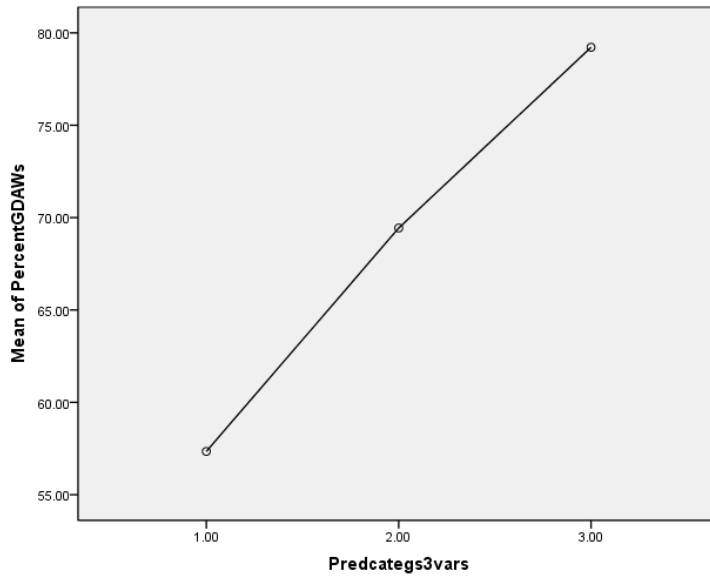


Table 2: Good day at work bias and good days at work

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
					1.00	1148		
2.00	1111	69.4372	23.04636	.69143	68.0806	70.7939	.00	200.00
3.00	992	79.2180	20.13917	.63942	77.9633	80.4728	.00	200.00
Total	3251	68.1508	26.72950	.46879	67.2317	69.0700	.00	400.00

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