



# The multiple face(t)s of state conscientiousness: Predicting task performance and organizational citizenship behavior<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that conscientiousness facets incrementally predict performance above and beyond trait conscientiousness. In the present paper we investigate whether this finding also holds at the daily level. We conducted a ten-day experience sampling study assessing state conscientiousness in the morning and task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in the afternoon. Using multilevel bi-factor modeling we show that general state conscientiousness positively predicts both task performance and OCB. Moreover, self-discipline and deliberation showed incremental predictive validity above and beyond overall state conscientiousness in the prediction of daily task performance, whereas none of the state conscientiousness facets uniquely predicted daily OCB levels.

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## 1. Introduction

Studies on the personality-performance relationship have consistently found that conscientiousness is among the best personality predictors of performance (Biderman, Nguyen, & Sebre, 2008; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; LaHuis, Martin, & Avis, 2005; Witt & Ferris, 2003). At the same time, however, there is widespread agreement that the predictive validity of trait conscientiousness—and that of the Big Five traits in general—is rather limited. For example, a meta-analysis of Judge, Klinger, Simon, and Yang (2008) revealed that about 8% of the variance in employee job performance is explained by between-person differences in conscientiousness. To address this issue, several researchers examined moderators of the conscientiousness-performance relationship (e.g. Meyer, Dalal, & Bonaccio, 2009), while others have tested whether the more narrow conscientiousness facets (i.e., the lower-order dimensions underlying trait conscientiousness) offer additional predictive validity on top of general trait conscientiousness (Hogan & Holland, 2003; Tett, Steele, & Beauregard, 2003).

Apart from the quest to maximize the predictive validity of personality, looking at the predictive role of facets is also interesting from a theoretical point of view. The reason is that, although broad

factors tend to robustly relate to outcome variables, they typically obscure the predictive power of the underlying facets, thereby limiting a more sophisticated understanding of the role of personality in applied settings (McAbee, Oswald, & Connelly, 2014). For example, although it makes sense for an organization to look for highly conscientious candidates, one might in fact search for someone high on achievement striving and low on conformity when recruiting for a start-up company, while someone low on achievement striving and high on conformity might be sought after when hiring for the function of security monitor (Oswald & Hough, 2011). Such important nuances get lost when neglecting the facets as they are then mixed up in the general conscientiousness construct. Because of this reason, research involving facets has the potential to provide “a more substantive understanding of the relationships between personality and criterion variables of importance to organizations” (Oswald & Hough, 2011, p. 157) and therefore such studies hold the promise of facets as components of improved theory, model building, and validity.

In a recent study on the unique predictive validity of conscientiousness facets for academic performance outcomes, McAbee et al. (2014) found that several of the conscientiousness facets predicted academic performance outcomes above and beyond general trait conscientiousness. In the present study we address a similar question, but in a work context. In particular, we study whether conscientiousness facets predict work performance above and beyond general conscientiousness. However, unlike McAbee et al. (2014), we do not focus on between-person differences, but on within-person, daily effects of conscientiousness on performance. This

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focus on the daily effects is important for at least two reasons. First, it is increasingly recognized that personality is a process that is embedded in day-to-day behavior (Brown & Moskowitz, 1998). The implication of this embeddedness is that, while traits might be useful when the focus is on global functioning of the individual across time (i.e., describing how people are), they are less useful when it comes to providing pictures of day-to-day behavior expression. Because such day-to-day variation in the expression of behavior is a central feature of personality (Brown & Moskowitz, 1998; Mischel & Shoda, 1995), there is a need for research that studies what people actually do in their day-to-day lives (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015). Second, if our study can show that the relationship between conscientiousness and performance is not limited to a co-occurrence of differences between individuals, but really characterizes psychological functioning, it incorporates the conscientiousness-performance relationship in the realm of basic processes of psychological functioning (Fleeson, Malanos, & Achille, 2002). In other words, it would show that it is really the act of being conscientious that is central to the conscientiousness-performance relationship.

In the remainder of this introduction we first give a short overview on the conscientiousness-performance relationship and discuss the importance of studying conscientiousness facets in addition to general conscientiousness. Next, we shift attention from the trait to the day-to-day level, and finally we discuss how daily conscientiousness (and its facets) is expected to relate to daily work performance.

### 1.1. The conscientiousness-performance relationship

Several meta-analyses have shown that, among the Big Five personality dimensions, conscientiousness is the best personality predictor of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Salgado, 1997). The reason is that people high in conscientiousness are typically organized, exacting, disciplined, diligent, dependable, methodical, and purposeful (Witt, Burke, Barrick, & Mount, 2002), all of which are believed to promote job performance.

General job performance, in turn, pertains to the degree to which an individual performs well in her/his job, but it can also be split into several sub-dimensions. In the present study we will make a broad distinction between in-role task performance and extra-role organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Task performance is defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) as activities that are formally recognized as being part of the job and that contribute to the technical core of the organization. In contrast, OCB is defined as behavior that contributes to the goals of the organization by contributing to the organization's social and psychological environment (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). In previous meta-analyses the correlations of trait conscientiousness with task performance generally range between 0.20 and 0.31 (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Salgado, 1997), while LePine, Erez, and Johnson (2002) report a correlation of 0.19 between conscientiousness and OCB.

### 1.2. Conscientiousness: from the broad trait to narrow facets

Whereas broad personality traits are useful when the goal is to obtain a rapid and general snapshot of someone's personality, facets (i.e., the lower-order dimensions underlying the broad trait) are typically favored when a more detailed assessment of personality is required (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Moreover, because the facets contain information that is not necessarily reflected in the broad trait, facets might also enhance the predictive validity of personality (Tett et al., 2003). Finally, facets allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the role of personality in applied

settings because they reveal which ingredients of the broad trait are relevant for the outcomes at hand (McAbee et al., 2014). Given the potential benefits of the use of facet scores, it is not surprising that different facet scales have been developed over the course of several years. However, the number and content of these facets has been the target of numerous debates. For example, DeYoung, Quilty, and Peterson (2007) developed two facet scales for each Big Five personality dimension. In turn, Roberts, Bogg, Walton, Chernyshenko, and Stark (2004)—using a lexical approach—represented the lower-order structure of conscientiousness using eight sub-components, while Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, and Goldberg (2005)—based on a factor analysis of seven conscientiousness scales—found a hierarchical structure with six sub-components. Finally, also Costa and McCrae (1992) proposed a six-facet structure for each Big Five trait, although this six-facet structure differed from the one of Roberts et al. (2005).

In the present study we draw on the six-facet structure of Costa and McCrae (1992). According to this conceptualization, a first conscientiousness facet is *competence*, which encompasses the sense that one is capable, sensible, and accomplished. *Order* refers to the tendency to keep one's environment tidy and well-organized. *Dutifulness* in turn reflects a strict adherence to standards of conduct, whereas *achievement striving* involves a striving for excellence. Persistence or the ability to continue with a task despite boredom or other distractions is captured by the facet *self-discipline*. Finally, *deliberation* is best described by caution, planning, and thoughtfulness or put differently, the degree to which people think before they act.

### 1.3. From trait to state conscientiousness

Traditionally, it is assumed that people are relatively stable in their cognitions, affects and behaviors across time and situations (Goldberg, 1990). These stable personality dimensions have been conceptualized using different taxonomies, of which the Big Five taxonomy is the most well-known and widespread. Recently, however, within-person variability in these cognitions, affects, and behaviors started to receive more attention (Fleeson, 2001).

These two streams are better known as the structural or trait approach and the process or social-cognitive approach to personality (Fleeson, 2001). The structural approach emphasizes broad behavioral tendencies, which in the literature are often referred to as personality traits. The process approach pertains to intra-individual variability within these broad tendencies. These deviations from the average level are referred to as personality states or momentary enactments that have “the same affective, behavioral, and cognitive content as their corresponding traits” (Fleeson, 2012, p. 52). Although the structural and process approaches focus on different aspects of personality, they are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, both approaches are needed to obtain a good understanding of personality.

An integration of both approaches is exactly what ‘Whole Trait Theory’ (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015) pursues by building on the strengths of both the trait and social-cognitive approach. According to this integrative theory of personality, traits consist of an explanatory and a descriptive part. The explanatory part pertains to social-cognitive mechanisms such as goals, encodings, self-regulatory plans, and expectancies, which are all believed to differ within individuals and therefore determine how traits operate, come about, and how they can account for intra-individual differences in behavior. The descriptive side of traits can be conceptualized as density distributions of states. People think, behave, and feel differently in different situations and these differential patterns of behavior, affect, and cognition can be summarized as a distribution of states. These distributions thus capture individual differences in the momentary enactment of a trait and therefore

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