



Hardiness as a moderator variable between the Big-Five Model and work effort



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to analyse hardiness as a moderator variable among personality traits, assessed using the Big-Five or Five Factor Model (FFM) and responses in work effort of workers confronted with stress. Using a multi-occupational sample of 403 subjects, statistically significant correlations between the factors of the FFM and work effort were found, as well as between hardiness and effort, as predicted by the theoretical model. Finally, empirical evidence indicates that hardiness performs a moderating role between the factors of FFM and effort displayed, in the sense that hardiness (understood as a quantitative variable) affects the intensity of the relationship between the structure of personality (predictor variable) and work effort (criterion variable), that is, even taking into account that personality structure affects work effort, people who score high in hardiness will show more effort.

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1. Introduction

The main objective of the present study is to analyse the relationship between personality traits, assessed using the Big Five or Five Factor Model (FFM), and responses in work effort when confronted with stress, as well as the moderating effect of hardiness.

In the study of the relationships between personality traits and responses to stress, some researchers have included specific constructs, such as Type A (Friedman, 1991), hostility (Suls & Wan, 1993), or optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992). However, a wider perspective in the study of personality is offered by the Big Five Model (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2006; Penley & Tomaka, 2002).

This introduction is organised as follows. Firstly, the three main variables considered are outlined: hardiness, personality traits assessed through the FFM, and work effort. Then, a theoretical proposal on the relationships between these variables is presented, and finally, several specific hypotheses to test in an empirical study are formulated.

1.1. Hardiness

One important personality variable studied in relation to stress is hardiness or hardy personality (Delajaih, Gaillard, & van Dam, 2010; Moreno-Jiménez, Garrosa, Corso, Boada, & Rodríguez-Carvajal, 2012). The concept of hardiness was introduced by Kobasa (1979), who perceived it as a construct of three components: control, commitment, and challenge.

Hardiness is an attribute of certain people that allows them to respond effectively to stress demands, to perform better (Bartone, Eid, Johnsen, Laberg, & Snook, 2009), and to stay healthier (Soderstrom, Dolbier, Leifeman, & Steinhardt, 2000). Kobasa identified the possible moderating role of hardiness between stressful situations and healthy responses to stress. Therefore, a moderating effect of hardiness between personality traits and work effort, as a means of challenging stress demands in the workplace is expected.

Currently, hardiness continues to arouse great interest among researchers, extending their interest to a type of variable which itself may be moderated by other variables (Delajaih et al., 2010).

Other studies have demonstrated the influence of hardiness on the degree of burnout experienced by nurses when attempting to reduce their susceptibility to it (Garrosa, Moreno-Jiménez, Liang, & González, 2008). Definitively, the concept of hardiness is becoming one of the most important factors for protecting physical and psychological health when faced with adverse situations, becoming one of the fundamental ingredients of personal wellbeing.

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1.2. The Big Five Model or Five Factor Model

The Big Five Model was primarily consolidated using contributions from Costa and McCrae's Five Factor Model (FFM), (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1987), focussing on the following traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. This model could be considered as an example of a nomothetic approach to the study of personality as it refers to the dimensions in which individuals differ (Winter, 1996), in contrast to the idiographic approach to the organisation and structure of personality in which individual idiosyncrasies are taken into account (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2006).

It must be noted that, in our study, the instrument used to assess the big five considers emotional stability instead of neuroticism. Therefore, although in the theoretical review we consider neuroticism, in Sections 3 and 4 we use the concept of emotional stability, at the opposite pole.

Recent studies have dealt with the relationship between the dimensions of the FFM and specific aspects of the response to stress, coping strategies, and the evaluation of stressful situations (Penley & Tomaka, 2002). The FFM predicts a differential use of coping strategies in response to stress. For example, neuroticism predicts strategies such as avoidance or hostile reactions (Watson & Hubbard, 1996), while conscientiousness is more closely related to strategies focussing on the problem, such as planning (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996). Other studies have focussed on the combined role of various traits, for example high levels of extraversion and conscientiousness predict coping strategies which focus more on the problem than other combinations (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2006).

Penley and Tomaka (2002) highlight that neuroticism is associated with the perception of a lesser ability to cope and greater levels of negative emotions, such as anxiety or fear; extraversion is positively linked to happiness and personal satisfaction, and negatively with stress; agreeableness is associated with happiness and coping strategies centred on emotion; and conscientiousness is associated with the perception of capability to cope with situational demands.

Therefore, the FFM is widely used although it is not exempt from criticism. For example, a prominent critic is Cervone (2004), who highlights that the model does not specify the dynamic processes implicated in personality structures.

1.3. Work effort

Work effort is an important aspect in the lives of human beings, affecting as much quality of life as work performance. The concept of effort has been linked to various theories of motivation but has not been studied as an independent concept in its own right (De Cooman, De Gieter, Pepermans, Jegers, & Van Acker, 2009). Therefore, there is a lack of information in psychological research into this concept.

A lack of work effort can be related to poorer performance in the workplace and greater levels of fatigue; this has been defined as a generalised feeling of tiredness or lack of energy which is not exclusively linked to excessive effort (Brown & Schutte, 2006). In the study of fatigue, the importance as much of physical factors as psychosocial factors has been proven (Brown & Schutte, 2006). Despite the recognised significance of fatigue on human wellbeing, there is a little research which has explored this construct within psychological literature (Arpin-Cribbie & Cribbie, 2007).

1.4. Theoretical proposal

This study is based on the hypothesis that the components of hardiness (challenge, control, and commitment) can perform a moderating role between stable personality traits and responses in work effort when confronted with stress in the workplace.

This hypothesis is based on the theoretical focus of the hierarchical organisation of personality. Little (2006) claims that the first level (Tier I) includes traits such as those included in the FFM, and a second level (Tier II) corresponding to personal projects, life tasks, and personal effort. In this sense, the elements of hardiness (challenge, commitment, and control) convey a greater level of precision in the hierarchical structure of personality and a greater capacity to manage these kinds of variables by the subject, leaving a margin for intervention programmes in various fields of applied psychology. Therefore, hardiness could perform a moderating role between more stable personality traits and work effort in response to stress.

This position is linked to the controversy in the study of personality between structures and processes. Socio-cognitive theories, in contrast to traditional theories, do not explicitly distinguish between procedural and structural variables. "Individual constructs may refer as much to dynamic processes as to stable structures" (Cervone, 2004, p. 185). The KAPA (Knowledge-Appraisal Personality Architecture) model fits within this theory, which also addresses the duality between processes and structure (Cervone, 2004), and the Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) by Mischel and Shoda (1995), which considers personality as a complex organisation of dynamic cognitive and affective elements. The evaluation of personality leads to the construction of types based on differential dynamic processes which are, in essence, linked to the specific situations in which they are expressed (Mischel, 2004). According to this argument, the dimensions of hardiness could be considered as much as processes as structure. Meanwhile, other authors (Tomaka, Blascovich, Kibler, & Ernst, 1997) have identified two types of evaluation linked to stress: evaluations of threat and evaluations of challenge, clearly placing the dimensions of hardiness at the process level, meaning it could, therefore, perform a moderating role.

Finally, we would like to point out that this study does not attempt to definitively place the dimensions of hardiness or establish the bases of a theoretical foundation in which the traits of the FFM are considered as structure (knowledge) and hardiness is more closely linked to processes (appraisal). We wish to highlight that previous studies have attempted to discover how high level variables can perform a moderating role (understood as a moderator of consistency) against other variables also considered to be high level (Hofstee & De Raad, 1992).

1.5. Objective and hypothesis

The objective of this study is to investigate the moderating role of hardiness among the stable personality traits and responses in effort when faced with stress in the workplace. It aims to determine whether hardiness, either globally or in certain of its dimensions, affects the intensity of the relationship between personality structure (predictor variable) and work effort (criterion variable). A void in this line of investigation was noted in the literature review carried out.

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. People with a high level of extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness employ a greater level of work effort in response to stressful situations than those with a low level of the same traits.

Hypothesis 2. Hardiness (overall, commitment, challenge and control) will perform a moderating role among the personality traits of the FFM (extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness) and responses in work effort, in that the relationship between the FFM and effort will become less intense if the level of hardiness is greater and vice versa.

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