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# Personality and achievement motivation: Relationship among Big Five domain and facet scales, achievement goals, and intelligence

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## Abstract

In the present study we examined the nomological network of achievement motivation and personality by inspecting the relationships between four goal orientations (learning, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, work avoidance), the Big Five personality traits, and intelligence. Within a sample of university students ( $N = 160$ ), relations were examined on the facet level of the Big Five. Inspection of associations between personality facets and goal orientations provided a clearer picture about why goals and personality traits are related and some of the previous inconsistent results could be explained by opposing associations at this level of analysis. Intelligence and goal orientations shared no common variance. Findings are discussed with reference to a hypothesized approach and avoidance temperament and the nomological network integrating personality, motivation, and ability dimensions.

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*Keywords:* Goal orientations; Personality; Intelligence; Achievement motivation; Nomological network; Big Five

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## 1. Introduction

Within the last two decades, the construct of goal orientation has become one of the most frequently studied in the field of motivation. Based on the extensive research on achievement motivation in educational psychology (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996), the construct has spread out successfully into various applied settings. Goal orientation is thought to be involved in self-regulatory processes and, thus, constitutes an important social-cognitive component of behavior and personality. To understand the interplay of personality and goal orientation, it is important to investigate how goal orientations are linked to traits on various levels of abstraction.

### 1.1. Goal orientations

Different researchers have found it useful to distinguish between two goal orientations when describing reasons why people engage in achievement tasks and learning (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). People with a high learning goal orientation (LG) primarily want to gain knowledge and skills and thus increase their competence. People with a high performance goal orientation (PG) want to demonstrate high abilities or want to avoid demonstrating a lack of competence to others. Further research has led to the partitioning of PG into approach and avoidance factors (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996): While performance-approach goals (P-ApG) focus the individual on demonstrating high competence, performance-avoidance goals (P-AvG) entail strategies that prevent the individual from showing a lack of competence. Although there have been suggestions to distinguish even more goal orientations (see Smith, Duda, Allen, & Hall, 2002), the so-called trichotomous goal framework is currently the most widely used in achievement motivation research. Furthermore, some researchers have included one component in their considerations that taps the opposite of high achievement motivation, namely work avoidance (W-AvG) (e.g., Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, & Elliot, 1997). People high in W-AvG are interested neither in competence enhancement nor in demonstrating high or low ability: They simply want to invest as little work as possible in a task. Although the term W-AvG suggests a predominant active avoidance behavior, individuals high in W-AvG act very passively and are not driven by worry or fear.

### 1.2. Relationship between goal orientations and personality

With regard to trait-oriented personality theories, especially the Five Factor Model (see Digman, 1990) has inspired much research over the past decades. According to this model, five largely independent personality dimensions – neuroticism (*N*), extraversion (*E*), openness to experience (*O*), agreeableness (*A*), and conscientiousness (*C*) – constitute the basic structure of personality.

Some previous studies have already investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and goal orientations. Due to different theoretical and measurement models, studies are difficult to compare and lead to inconsistent results (e.g., Day, Radosevich, & Chasteen, 2003). A recent meta-analysis examining the nomological net of goal orientations (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007) noticed that very few studies had used three-dimensional measures of goal orientation when investigating the relationship to personality. Most studies only distinguished LG and

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