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When is it better to not be more conscientious? When you are not conscientious to begin with

Jennifer Pickett, Jonas Debusscher & Joeri Hofmans

INTRODUCTION

The overall assumption in I/O literature when it comes to conscientiousness (C) is that more is better. Conscientious individuals are organized, goal-orientated and experience higher well-being. Therefore, C is typically conceptualized as a positive personality trait. In the present study, we challenge this assumption. Building upon the Behavioral Concordance Model (Moskowitz & Côté, 1995) which states that trait-concordant behavior leads to pleasant affect, whereas trait-discordant behavior leads to unpleasant affect, we hypothesized that high momentary levels of C relate to high PA and low NA, but only for people high on trait C.

METHODS

Data (N=82) • Belgian professionals • Male 39 (48%) • 27 year old (SD = 7.61) • 17.2% in education • 3.98 years tenure (SD = 6.27)

Data (N=734) • Conscientiousness and affect were measured for 10 consecutive work days

Data Analysis • Multilevel polynomial regression (conducted with the lme4 package in R)

Scale | Items | Items | α
--- | --- | --- | ---
Mini-Markers | organized, efficient, systematic, practical, disorganized, sloppy, inefficient, careless | 8 | .80
(Saucier, 1994)

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) | attentive, interested, alert, excited, enthusiastic, inspired, proud, determined, strong, active | 10 | .85
(1 very slightly or not at all – 5 extremely)
(Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) | distressed, upset, guilty, scared, hostile, irritable, ashamed, nervous, jittery, afraid | 10 | .83
(1 very slightly or not at all – 5 extremely)
(Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

RESULTS

For people high on trait C, within-person fluctuations in C were positively related to PA and negatively to NA. For people low in trait C, however, within-person fluctuations in C related in a positive way to both PA and NA.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results challenge the idea that more conscientiousness is always better. Rather, they suggest that engaging in behaviors that are not congruent with one’s personality preferences brings about more NA, even if those behaviors are considered to be “good”, such as behaving more conscientious. From a practical point of view, our results suggest that by fostering trait congruence in the workplace employee well-being is also cultivated.