



Application of Big Five Model of Personality for Employee Presenteeism in the Workplace

Debayan Nandi

Assistant Professor, Dept of MBA, Siliguri Institute of Technology

Nandita Nandi

Headmistress, Techno India Group Public School, Siliguri Campus

ABSTRACT

Employee presenteeism refers being present in the work with physical illness. This study scrutinizes the extent to which magnitudes of the Big Five model of personality (which is also termed as 5-factor model of personality) are related to employee presenteeism in the workplace. This article also focuses on the development of interest in presenteeism among the employees. Managerial and professional correlates of attending work during ill health were assessed, as are health correlates of consequential yield loss in the tea gardens of West Bengal. Data were collected from a sample of 250 tea garden workers across Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur districts of West Bengal. Results suggest that among big five factors only extraversion and conscientiousness envisage employee presenteeism, but not all.

KEYWORDS : Employee Presenteeism, Big Five model of personality.

Introduction

A recent trend in organizational research is dispositional explanations for the attitudes individuals display at work and their subsequent effects on employee behavior. There is only limited research on the dispositional basis of absenteeism and on the relationship between personality and the construct of absence proneness. On the basis of past research, the role of personality in explaining absence is equivocal at best, particularly in the case of inferring personality effects that are based on past absence. Absenteeism, generally defined as not showing up for scheduled work, has a long research history, due in part to its perennial cost to organizations and its status as an indicator of work adjustment. Whereas, employee presenteeism refers being present in the work with physical illness. However, it is only recently that presenteeism has become a subject of interest. Although some definitional confusion will be addressed in what follows, the most recent scholarly conception of presenteeism involves showing up for work when one is ill. In this article, we aimed at identifying the development of interest in presenteeism and review its several conceptualizations. The challenges involved in measuring presenteeism and related productivity loss are considered, and organizational, occupational, and medical correlates are reviewed. Finally, a research agenda for studying presenteeism is presented. A prominent subtext is that scholars in organizational behavior, human resources, organizational psychology, and health psychology have important theoretical and methodological skills that should be brought to bear in studying presenteeism. Presenteeism is the opposite of absenteeism simply denoting the antonym of absence on the other hand it equals excellent attendance too even if the employee is not medically fit. Interest in presenteeism stems from two main but somewhat geographically distinct sources: (1) UK and European scholars in management (e.g., Simpson, 1998; Worrall, Cooper, & Campbell, 2000) and epidemiology or occupational health (e.g., Virtanen, Kivimäki, Elovainio, Vahtera, & Ferrie, 2003) who are concerned that job insecurity stemming from downsizing and restructuring forces exaggerated levels of attendance that result in stress and illness and (2) mainly (although not exclusively) in recent years, however, the increasing cost of health care, combined with the provision by employers of employee health plans, has led to a third criterion of interest, economic impact. Accordingly, employee health costs to an employer include the direct cost of any health plan, costs due to employee absenteeism, and costs due to reduced productivity among presentees not working at full capacity (Collins et al., 2005).

Within the last decade, however, consensus has emerged that a five-factor model of personality, often termed the Big Five, can be used to describe the most salient aspects of personality.

According to Goldberg (1990) the factors that comprise the Big Five are

- (i) Neuroticism
- (ii) Extraversion
- (iii) Openness to Experience
- (iv) Agreeableness and

- (v) Conscientiousness.

These five factors have been recovered from all personality measures in widespread use, and the five-factor model accounts for the shared variance in the trait adjectives of many languages (e.g., Digman & Shmelyov, 1996). Evidence also indicates that these Big Five traits are genetically transmissible (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Although the five-factor model has had increasing acceptance among personality psychologists, its application to industrial-organizational psychology is incipient. One of the areas in which the five-factor model has not been adequately investigated is employee withdrawal. Thus, the purpose of our field study was to examine the relationship between personality and absenteeism. Specifically, we examined the degree to which three dimensions from the five-factor model of personality (Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness) were related to employee absence. Knowingly we did not hypothesize associations of Openness and Agreeableness to employee presenteeism as there was very feeble theoretical or empirical basis for such linkages. In addition to the personality traits, we have explored whether preceding absence or absence history would intervene the connection between the personality variables and subsequent presence. Hypotheses are grouped by each of the traits. For each hypothesized relationship, we begin by recounting the nature of the attribute and its conceptual relationship to presenteeism.

Neuroticism (Hypothesis 1: Neuroticism will be negatively related to employee presenteeism): generally neuroticism refers to a lack of positive psychological correction and poignant constancy. Persons scoring high on measures of neuroticism are frequently characterized as apprehensive, nervous or depressed for job related issues. It seems likely that such tendencies may make employees who are high on neuroticism more likely to engage in withdrawal behaviors, such as failing to come to work on a frequent basis. There is some disagreement among personality researchers as to the proper placement of impulsivity within the five-factor model. On the other hand, using a different measure of personality, these same authors found that impulsivity loaded equally on Extraversion and Conscientiousness factors (loadings of .43 and -.43, respectively). A full investigation as to the appropriate location of impulsivity within the five-factor framework is beyond the scope of this article. Beyond impulsivity, a few researchers have attempted to relate neuroticism to absence behaviors. Cooper and Payne (1966) found positive correlations (Kendall's TS = .19 and .16, respectively) between neuroticism and two measures of absence (frequency and total days absent) among a sample of 113 female tobacco packers. Sinha (1963) identified a strong, positive correlation ($r = .39$) between manifest anxiety and absence behavior in a sample of industrial workers in India.

Extraversion (Hypothesis 2: Extraversion will be negatively related to employee presenteeism): extraversion can hardly be interpreted as friendliness and sociability in any given situation. Extroverts are more talkative, lively, and self-assured than their introverted counterparts. Furthermore, extraversion is typically characterized by gregarious-

ness and excitement- seeking behavior. Extroverts are highly social. They frequently exhibit a great deal of commitment to social groups and activities. Although extroverts may scrutinize the workplace as just another place to socialize, they may also see work in general as an obstacle to spending time with family and friends and to their involvement in other leisure activities. Similarly, extraversion frequently implies the seeking out of exciting new situations and activities. We are responsive of one published study that has directly linked extraversion to absenteeism, reporting a positive relationship between the two constructs (Cooper & Payne, 1966). Even though there are limited empirical data, this evidence and the nature of extraversion caused us to suggest a positive relationship between extraversion and absence behavior.

Conscientiousness (Hypothesis 3: Conscientiousness will be positively related to employee presenteeism): conscientiousness is characterized by personal competence, dutifulness, restraint, and thoughtfulness. Conscientious individuals are often identified as determined, strong willed, self controlled, self sufficient, and steadfast. Furthermore, there is evidence that the conscientiousness characteristic is closely related to accomplishment direction and has been labeled by some researchers as the strength of character to attain the organizational vision. The notion of self-control is regarded as a key component of conscientiousness. Because of their achievement orientation, conscientious persons are motivated to perform on the job. It is likely that frequent absences at work would hinder effective job performance. Some research has focused on the aspects of conscientiousness linked to employee responsibility and integrity in attempting to predict a variety of counterproductive employee behaviors (including absence from work). The achievement-orientation component of conscientiousness has also received some attention in the absence literature. Hogan (1989) found a positive relationship between achievement striving and employee dependability. Thus, no research has directly investigated the relationship between Conscientiousness and absence. However, the nature of the construct, and several suggestive studies, support the expectation of a negative relationship between Conscientiousness and absence.

Findings & Implications

Our findings put forward a numeral implication for research and practice. Results from our study recommend positive association of big five model with employee presenteeism in the organizations. Thus, careful individuals appear less likely to vent their displeasure and annoyance in withdrawal behaviors, perhaps because of their dutifulness and rule oriented nature. Similarly, it was found that extroverts are less concerned about presenteeism as because they are generally less satisfied with the organizational policies, or because their assertive and impulsive nature makes them more likely to act on their frustration. Given the nature of conscientiousness and extraversion, it appears likely that conscientious employees are relatively less likely to withdraw when discontented, while extroverted employees are somewhat more likely to depart in this situation. On the other hand,

given the inadequate acquaintance about the affiliation between these personality traits and job satisfaction, we can only point to these questions as important ones for future research to answer. Conscientiousness is an optimistic forward planner of performance across diverse professions. It emerges the positive traits of conscientiousness widen to attendance as well. Thus, results from this study also are evidence of to the convenience of using measures of conscientiousness in employee selection decisions. However, extraversion, like all traits, has a negative aspect as well. For example, biological research has shown a link between extraversion and aggressive behavior, thus, the positive association between extraversion and absence adds to the understanding of the construct in organizational settings. Clearly, it is beneficial to be extroverted in certain situations, but it also can be a hindrance to organizations if it leads to absence and other counterproductive behaviors. Specifically, it is possible that extroverted individuals are more likely to be absent while performing routine tasks, as in low level clerical jobs, because extroverts may find routine work to be more dull than introverts. Future research of this paper has the scope to investigate the moderating role of job type on the relationship between extraversion and presenteeism. More generally, there is some evidence that personality-job performance relations depend on the type of job. Given that personality also may vary by job type, it would be interesting to determine if the association of extraversion and conscientiousness with job attendance during physically unfit state varies by job type as well.

REFERENCES

- [1] Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The Big Five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 44, 1-26. | [2] Bernardin, H. J. (1977). The relationship of personality variables to organizational withdrawal. *Personnel Psychology*, 30, 17-27. | [3] Block, J. (1995). A contrarian view of the five-factor approach to personality description. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117, 187-215. | [4] Breaugh, J. A. (1981). Predicting absenteeism from prior absenteeism and work attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 66, 555-560. | [5] Fichman, M. (1989). Attendance makes the heart grow fonder: A hazard rate approach to modeling attendance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74, 325-335. | [6] Garrison, K. R., & Muchinsky, P.M. (1977). Evaluating the concept of absence proneness. *Personnel Psychology*, 30, 389-393. | [7] Hogan, J., & Hogan, R. (1989). How to measure employee reliability. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74, 273-279. | [8] Murphy, K. R., & Lee, S. L. (1994). Personality variables related to integrity test scores: The role of conscientiousness. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 9, 413-424. | [9] Sinha, A. K. P. (1963). Manifest anxiety affecting industrial absenteeism. *Psychological Reports*, 13, 258. | [10] Specter, P. E., & Jex, S. M. (1991). Relations of job characteristics from multiple data sources with employee affect, absence, turnover intentions, and health. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76, 46-53. |