Unveiling the Power Play: How Newcomers' Traits Shape Political Acumen Within Organizations

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Political knowledge describes "an individual's understanding of specific influential others' relationships, demands, resources, and preferences" (Granger et al., 2020), is an often-overlooked dimension of learning how to fit into a new organization (Chao et al., 1994; Taormina, 1994). Moreover, newcomer research has been conducted independently of individual newcomer personality differences. To extend previous research, the present research examines newcomers' Big Five personality traits and political knowledge as an immediate outcome of the process of newcomer adjustment. A 3-wave longitudinal study of 439 newcomers in 7 organizations examined Big Five personality traits as antecedents of political knowledge of the organization. The results suggested that among the Big Five traits, openness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness were positively related to apolitical knowledge of the organization. Overall, the results suggested that the Big Five are one of the key determinants of organizational political knowledge.

Keywords: political knowledge, organizational politics, personality traits

INTRODUCTION

Adjustment outcomes are distinguished based on existing theory and research into proximal and distal categories where the proximal might also be called indicators (Saks &Ashforth, 1997a). Separating proximal and distal outcomes is an important way to improve our understanding of adjustment. Research has neglected outcomes directly relevant to adjustment theory (Bauer et al., 1998; Fisher, 1986; Saks &Ashforth, 1997). Researchers lament the frequent use of broad work attitudes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction as newcomers' adjustment outcomes. Newcomers are primarily interested in resolving questions of how to act and how well they match the new environment. The current research focused on a more direct outcome, i.e., "proximal" to the adjustment process. Chao et al. (1994) considered politics a proximal outcome of socialization since it was argued that politics could be further used to examine other distal outcomes. For example, well-socialized individuals in an organization's politics may be more promotable (distal outcome) than those not socialized in politics.

On the other hand, few recent studies have examined the role of personality traits as related to expatriate adjustment (Huang et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006). These studies have often been adjuncts to larger and more complex adjustment models in the international domain. Therefore, the overall legacy of research on the effect of newcomers' personality traits in their adjustment to a new organization and, more specifically, political knowledge of the organization is unclear. Another potential reason is the lack of consensus regarding which personality traits to measure. The current study seeks to explore the specific role that personality traits might play, and this work will be grounded in contemporary personality theory, especially

work connected to the so-called Big Five personality traits (Digman,1990; • Barrick and Mount, 1.995). For instance, Teagarden and Gordon (1995) found that open-mindedness was related to expatriate adjustment, while de Vries and Mead (1991) suggested that the personality trait of curiosity was a factor in the level of adjustment. However, both traits may belong to the Big Five framework's 'Openness to experience' construct (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Therefore, it is argued that moving beyond isolated personality traits and considering the broad factor structure of personality traits is a more appropriate method for examining the effect of personality traits on the adjustment of newcomers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Knowledge of the Organization as an Adjustment Outcome

Unlike roles, which describe well-defined and structural components of the workplace, organizational politics are the informal power relationships between individuals and departments (Drory & Romm, 1990; Kacmar &Baron, 1999). With a greater understanding of the organization and ongoing observation of new members, the implicit structure of decision is gradually unfolded. Making newcomers pass through a series of inclusion boundaries through radical moves (Schein, 1978). Schein further notes that many newcomers he interviewed reported surprise at the extent to which political forces shape resource allocation and reward decisions in organizations. Thus, learning about politics may be an important component of adjusting to the world of work. Political knowledge was considered in some newcomer adjustment research as an organizational outcome domain, for example, learning about the organization's source of power (Fisher, 1986), Sensemaking regarding organizational norms, practices, and procedures (Reichers, 1987), informal network of power (Chao et al., 1994)

Personality Traits as Antecedents of Political Knowledge

The five-factor taxonomy is among the newest models developed for the description of personality, and this model shows promise to be among the most practical and applicable models available in the field of personality psychology (Digman, 1990). One of the apparent strengths of the Big Five taxonomy is that it can capture, at a broad level of abstraction, the commonalities among most of the existing systems of personality traits, thus providing an integrative descriptive model for research (John &Srivastava, 1999). Definitions of these five traits are as follows: extroversion is the degree to which a person is talkative, friendly, and enjoys social gatherings. Agreeableness is the tendency of a person to be interpersonally generous and cooperative. Conscientiousness is the degree to which a person is strong-willed, determined, and attentive. Neuroticism is associated with negative emotional stability, showing nervousness, moodiness, and a temperamental nature. Openness to experience is the extent to which a person is aesthetically sensitive, aware of inner feelings, and has an active imagination (Goldberg, 1993).

Research on some personality variables has shown that they might influence newcomers' socialization. Self-efficacy is positively associated with adjustment (Bauer & Green, 1994; Morrison &Brantner, 1992; Jones, 1986; Saks, 1995), as is the similar concept of behavioral self-management (Saks &Ashforth, 1996). In the international domain, applying personality tests to predict adjustment and performance is considered useful (e.g., Caligiuri, 1996; Deller, 1997; Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). Based on the Big Five model, the proposed relationships and hypotheses were developed as follows:

Openness to Experience

Fowler, Baker, and Dawes (2008) found that 60% of the variation in overall political participation could be attributed to genetic factors. Scholars studying the effect of personality on political participation and attitudes have argued that since personality traits are formed before political behaviors and are known to be heritable (Bouchard & McGue, 2003), they most likely represent an intermediate link in the causal chain (Mondak et al., 2010). Mondak et al. (2010) found a significant relationship between the Big Five personality traits, openness to experience, and several acts of political knowledge gaining and participation, including attending public meetings and working for a party or candidate. Mondak et al. (2010) found that political knowledge and efficacy mediated 40% of the relationship between openness to experience and

political participation. Vecchione and Caprara (2009) also showed that openness to experience was significantly predicted overall. Political knowledge and participation. Those highly open are more curious and likely to express interest in learning more about political issues than those who prefer to • avoid unfamiliar or new experiences. We expected that people high on openness would be attracted to the informal network of power within the organization and thus would be more interested in and informed about organizational political matters than people low on openness. Based on this, the following hypothesis was offered:

Hypothesis 1: *Openness to experience will be positively related to newcomer political knowledge*

Neuroticism

Studies of affective intelligence show a relationship between political anxiety and the desire to learn more about the political issue (MacKuen et al., 2001). This suggests that those who are more neurotic may be more likely to seek out information to ease their feelings of anxiety. People's willingness to extend rights to disliked groups depends on personality. Marcus et al. (1995) find personality- differences in tolerance, where greater neuroticism and extroversion limit tolerance and greater openness promotes it. Neuroticism is the personality trait most closely connected to emotionality, representing emotional stability. Those high in neuroticism can be characterized as moody, anxious, self-conscious, or insecure, while those low in neuroticism are described as unemotional - relaxed, calm, and secure. We expect that those who tend to be neurotic will be more sensitive to political threats and more likely to report emotional responses, particularly the negative emotions of aversion and anxiety, thus seeking more knowledge to reduce their anxiety.

Hypothesis 2: *Neuroticism to experience will be positively related to newcomer political knowledge*

Extraversion

Bakers (2005) also found personality differences in political power engagement, particularly empathy, extraversion, and conscientiousness. These accounts suggest important individual differences in reactivity to political signals. Marcus et al. (1995) find personality-based differences in tolerance, where greater extroversion limits tolerance. Extroversion predicts a stronger desire to learn more about political issues (Marcus et al., 1995). Extroverts are outgoing and optimistic, more likely to be emotionally expressive and interested in political participation than rese Ned, introverted individuals. We expect extroverts to be more likely to consider new information and desire greater personal political knowledge engagement.

Hypothesis 3: *Newcomer political knowledge will be positively related to extraversion.*

Conscientiousness

Individuals high on conscientiousness were more involved in knowledge-acquisition activities than those low (Gupta, 2008). Hochwarter et al. (2000) found that perceptions of Organizational politics moderated the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance, signifying that moderating relationships may exist. Other recent research found that significant correlations between conscientiousness and knowledge sharing existed within teams of an engineering company (Matzler et al., 2007). Whether this relation is valid and generalizable to the political knowledge of organizations as an adjustment indicator remains a valid question. At the same time, comprehensive theory linking personality traits to political behavior is being actively developed (Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Mondak et al., 2010). Scholars in political science have consistently argued that traits related to personal control and a willingness to engage in social interaction are likely to influence political participation (Carmines 1980; Carlson & Hyde, 1980; Guyton, 1988; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Cohen et al., 2001; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Blais & Labbe-St-Vincent, 2010; Gerber et al. 2008; Gerber et al., 2009; Mondak et al., 2010; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). Competence theory postulates that personal control promotes political participation (Carmines, 1980). Recent work has also demonstrated an empirical link between self-efficacy, a trait strongly related to

personal control (Judge et al., 2002), and political participation. Individuals with high personal control will be motivated to become involved in the political process because their actions will be rewarded with a desired outcome. Because conscientiousness is associated with adherence to social norms, we reasoned that this trait would be associated with greater levels of informal network of power and interpersonal relationships, i.e., organizational political knowledge.

Hypothesis 4: *Newcomer political knowledge will be positively related to conscientiousness.*

Agreeableness

Mondak and Halperin (2008) found some evidence that individuals with high agreeableness report being less attentive to politics (p.10). Gerber et al., (2009) hypothesized that the conflictual nature of politics may be off-putting to individuals high on agreeableness. While three of the four Agreeableness coefficients were negative, none were statistically significant, and all were fairly small. Based on these researches, no specific hypotheses were given to examine the relationship between agreeableness and political knowledge as an adjustment outcome.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Given the competing problems of internal and external validity problems, a strong sampling strategy is to study newcomers entering a limited number of organizations in a somewhat constrained set of jobs so that the organization and occupation can be held statistically constant while maintaining heterogeneity. Ideally, there will be variability in these newcomers' experience levels. More importantly, all newcomers will be newly hired to avoid the sample selection problem. The initial pool of participants consists of 439 exempt employees recently hired by seven organizations distributed across Bahrain. The primary operational activities of these organizations include manufacturing, airline, health care, military, telecommunication, banking and consulting, and education. The seven organizations are considered the leaders in their fields in Bahrain. Most of their workforce are Bahraini nationals, ranging from 100% Bahraini in the military organization and the lowest to 74% Bahraini in the manufacturing organization. The organization sizes are as follows: • manufacturing (3000), airline (5000), healthcare (250), military (4000), telecommunication (1500), banking and consulting (761), and education (1080). The data were collected longitudinally, with new surveys distributed every three months (see next section: Timing). The organizations provided initial lists of respondents interested in participating in the study. The respondents were assured that their responses were confidential to reduce concerns about social desirability due to the sensitive questions regarding work attitudes and behaviors (Tourangeau et al., 2000).

At Time 1, I received 272 usable completed surveys for a response rate of 62%. At Time 2, the total number of usable surveys completed was 180. This represents an overall response rate of 41%. The overall retention rate is consistent with other longitudinal socialization studies (Bauer & Green, 1998).

Timing

The review of survey timing issues suggested that there is currently little guidance for research. The selection of appropriate spacing between data collection procedures is not well established, and research needs to be conducted to determine definitively when adjustment can be considered to stabilize. Noting these limitations, four- or six- months intervals are commonly used, and some research does suggest that these intervals are at least close enough together to capture meaningful changes (Bauer & Green, 1998). The present study collected data across multiple time waves for two primary reasons: first, this procedure allows for the measurements of antecedents of adjustment in a manner commensurate with the proposed time structure; second, the separation of each stage of the structural model over time helps to minimize concerns about common method bias in prediction. All the parameters involved predictors that· were measured at a separate time from outcomes. First-round data were collected within a month of the respondents' hire date. In this first round, questions related to occupation, demographics, and personality

traits were asked. In the second round, at Time 2, six months after Time 1, adjustment outcomes, including organizational political knowledge, were measured during this phase.

Measures

The scales were obtained from published sources to ensure comparability with previous research, reflecting the difficulties in measuring newcomer adjustment constructs.

Control Variables

Because differences in structure might be correlated with perceptions of organizational socialization efforts, fixed effect dummy codes were used as a control for the organization and occupation. It was necessary to control for additional variables that could cause spurious correlations among the variables in the model (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) as follows: 1. Ethnicity: dichotomized as 1=local, 2=expatriate. This was used to control potential differences in the availability of social information for individuals who are members of minority groups. 2. Gender: Gender was included because it has been linked to work adjustment, career preferences and patterns, and socialization experiences (Banks et al., 1992; Kaldenberg et al., 1995). 3. Work experience: Events in the socialization process may be interpreted through the lens of past experiences (Adkins, 1995; Louis, 1980). Therefore, it is important to control for past work experience, and thus past socialization experiences, when studying socialization.4. Tenure: as a check on the accuracy of the timing of surveys and to control for differences in timing that might be due to either (a) incorrectly reported or changed starting dates (i.e., from the T1 survey) or (b) mailing or other problems in contacting the respondents, the respondents were asked to report their start date and the date they completed the T2 survey. This information computed the total number of days since starting the job. Tenure has been used as a control variable in prior socialization research (e.g., Bauer and Green, 1998). 5. Education: The number of years of education and professional experience held by newcomers was held constant to distinguish between socialization in the organization and socialization in the world of work. Education was reported in categories ranging from 1=school to 5=graduate degree.

Personality Traits

The 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI) was developed to represent the prototype definitions developed through expert ratings and subsequent factor analytic verification in observer personality ratings. The goal was to create a brief inventory that would allow efficient and flexible assessment of the five dimensions when there is no need for more differentiated measurements of individual facets. There is much to be said in favor of brevity; as Burisch (1984) observed, 'Short scales not only save testing time but also avoid subject boredom and fatigue ... there are subjects ... from whom you won't get any response if the test looks too long' (p. 219). The BFI uses short phrases based on the trait adjectives known to be prototypical markers of the Big Five (John, 1989, 1990). One or two prototypical trait adjectives served as the item core, to which elaborative, clarifying, or contextual information was added. For example, the openness adjective original became the BFI item 'Is original, comes up with new ideas,' and the conscientiousness adjective persevering served as the basis for the item 'Perseveres until the task is finished.' Thus, the BFI items retain the advantages of adjectival items (brevity and simplicity) while avoiding some of their pitfalls (ambiguous or multiple meanings and salient desirability). The reliability for this scale was a=0.89.

Political Knowledge

Organizational political knowledge was assessed using five items from Chao et al. (1994). The items include, 'I do not have a good understanding of the politics in my organization' and 'I know who the most influential people are in my organization'. The responses were on a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The reliability of the score is a =0.82 for politics.

ANALYSIS

To test the proposed direct effect of the traits on the political knowledge of the organization (Hypothesis 1:4), hierarchical regression analysis (HLM)was performed. This method is called incremental variance partitioning (Pedhazur, 1982). The hierarchical regression has several definite advantages over stepwise regression; for example, this approach allows us to focus on the variables forming the hypotheses and simultaneously sieve out the influence of the control variables that might have a moderating effect on adjustment. Also, this method allows the researcher to control the order of the variables entered into the regression model, allowing us to assess the incremental predictive ability of any variable of interest (McQuarrie, 1998).

Non-normal distributions are another problem for statistical conclusion validity. Such violations of normality attenuate relationships, invalidate traditional hypothesis tests and create serious problems for structural equation model estimation. Several solutions to this problem exist as well. The first is using methods that explicitly incorporate distributions, such as logistic regression, count data models, or event-history models (Greene, 2000). An alternative solution is to use transformed or standardized variables. Transformations also help remove the problem of disproportionate comparisons between variables with differing levels of non-normality. Given the above-mentioned, HLM with transformed variables is the preferred analytical method.

FINDINGS

The researcher controlled for gender, ethnicity, organization size, last job starting date, professional experience, highest educational qualification achieved, and salary range per month as predictors of the effect of traits on political knowledge to ensure that possible differences in those variables are not confounded with possible relations as per the theoretical model.

In hypotheses 1,2,3,4, it was postulated that a newcomer who scored high in the four given traits would have a better political knowledge of the organization as an adjustment outcome than a newcomer who scored low in those traits. As shown in Table 1, hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 were supported, as conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism positively predicted the intercept of task performance (=.32, .34, - .22 respectively, p<.01), meaning that newcomers who have more openness, neuroticism, or conscientiousness -biased personalities had more egalitarian political knowledge of his/her new organization. Hypothesis 3 suggests that newcomers' political knowledge is positively related to extraversion. The empirical testing (table 1) does not support this hypothesis (=.04, p=ns). In other words, high extrovert newcomers do not display more political knowledge than low extrovert newcomers.

TABLE 1
HIERARCHICAL LINEAR MODELING PREDICTING POLITICAL KNOWLEDGEVERSUSPERSONALITY TRAITS

Predictors	R	R^2	β	$R\Delta^2$	ΔF	P
Intercept, BO Ethnicity, Gender, No. of Employees, job starting date, Professional Experience, highest educational qualification, achieved, Salary range per M.	0.22	0.05		0.16	1.12	0.35
B01, Openness	0.45	0.20	0.34**	0.94	18.61	0.00
B01, Neuroticism	0.39	0.15	-0.22**	0.04	7.76	0.00
B01, Extraversion	0.33	0.11	0.04	0.00	0.37	0.5

Standardized hierarchical linear modeling coefficient. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conscientiousness was significantly related to the political knowledge of the organization. This finding extended the generalizability of recent research that found significant correlations between conscientiousness and knowledge sharing within teams of engineering companies (Matzler et al., 2007) and the political knowledge of the organizations. The current research finding that openness is associated with interest in political knowledge of organizations is consistent with recent work that shows openness is positively associated with participation in various political activities to gain political knowledge (Gerber et al., 2010 b; Mondak et al., 2010). Thus, it appears that the Big Five trait of openness is at least part of the reason why some people both (1) express an interest in and follow politics and (2) actively participate in politics in the organization as well as general politics. The findings also suggested that extraversion was unrelated to political knowledge, thus differentiating political power engagement from political knowledge; i.e., extraverted employees are interested in having political power (Bakers, 2005) but not necessarily seeking political knowledge. Finally, matching with previous research, the anxiety component of neuroticism predicts the desire to learn more about political issues (MacKuen et al., 2001), hence political knowledge of the organization.

Those who understand how informal decisions are made may not necessarily have a more positive view of organizational functioning and may not work any harder, but usually senior employees. However, understanding the antecedents of political knowledge is of critical importance as this knowledge is further related to important work-related outcomes. For example, research showed that political knowledge of the organization might be related to other positive outcomes for newcomers after longer periods, in accord with Seibert & Kraemer (2001), who found that political knowledge was positively related to salary progression and career satisfaction. Latent growth models exploring the relationship between political knowledge and salary trajectory over time would be informative. Scholars have noted that individual differences and human capital variables often strongly influence career success (e.g., Ng et al., 2005). In particular, previous researchers have suggested that political knowledge and the social skills related to succeeding in political environments will play a role (Ferris, Davidson, et al., 2005).

Moreover, scholars report that political knowledge influences several outcomes, including the role overload and strain relationship (Perrewe et al., 2005), leader effectiveness (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004), and team performance (Ahearn et al., 2004). Furthermore, Harris et al. (2007) reported that employees with high political knowledge of their organization were seen as better performers when engaging in influence tactics than those with low political knowledge. These findings suggest that impression management tactics alone are insufficient to achieve successful outcomes but must be combined with high political knowledge and skills. Finally, in recent research, political knowledge was related to five career-related outcomes: total compensation, total promotions, perceived career success, life satisfaction, and perceived external mobility (Todd et al., 2009).

The current research findings showed that personality traits are associated with political knowledge. These results are important because they examine antecedents related to individual differences, which was suggested in previous research but not directly examined. It is noted that the current research conception of political knowledge is consistent with the findings reported by Seibert et al. (1999), who demonstrated that a proactive personality is an important antecedent of political knowledge. Some individuals were better at advancing their careers actively by taking the initiative to improve current circumstances. Political knowledge predicted

Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

This study had several methodological advantages over previous studies in organizational adjustment. While other studies have had elements of the research design ·employed here, the combination of a multi-wave, multi-organization design with a sample of heterogeneous newcomers concerning occupation and experience distinguishes this study and previous research. However, several caveats are to interpret these results;

1) the data is self-reported (common method bias concerns); one problem with self-report measures is

that participants may be unable or unwilling to accurately assess the situation, report their attitude and behaviors accurately, and answer thoughtfully and carefully enough to assess fine distinctions among constructs. This was addressed by checking the validity of measures, as noted above. Moreover, the study aimed to reduce this by separating measures by three months over a three-time wave and adding a focus group as a qualitative element. 2) According to Creswell (2002), limitations examine a study's boundaries, reservations, exceptions, and qualifications. While there was occupational diversity in this study, which was done in Bahrain, the findings may not represent what occurs in other industry sectors. As such, this limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should endeavor to compare these results to those of occupational samples from other countries that might have different socialization patterns. 3) The univariate statistics for most measures also show that they are skewed to the left, which restricts the observed range of the scales. While normalizing transformations partially correct this problem, studies utilizing an item response theory approach to develop measures that provide better discrimination between individuals on the proximal socialization outcomes may improve model fit (Zickar, 2002). In short, developing high-quality measures of organizational entry constructs is one of the most direct ways to improve our understanding of the area.

Finally, this study provides evidence that the trait dimensions may be equally important. Future researchers should extend the current results by examining the relations between the political knowledge dimensions and important job outcomes.

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