

# Occupational Differences in Healthcare: A Categorization in Terms of Personality Dispositions

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## Abstract

This personality study on organizational psychology examines different attitudes demonstrated by different occupational work groups towards situational characteristics and namely those within the context of Performance Management (PM), a management tool charting agreed objectives in a work plan, monitoring progress of, and providing feedback to each individual employee in the achievement of these objectives, which may be linked to a reward. Contrary to the traditional school which advocates that situational characteristics cause predictable behaviour across individuals, the main focus is therefore the dispositional approach, although this perspective does not negate situational effects.

The attitudes towards the eventual roll out of a Performance Management Plan (PMP) in St. Luke's Hospital are investigated. The organization under investigation was seen to provide suitable ground for conducting the study because of the heterogeneity of work groups involving professional and other ancillary workers. The categorization of attitudes employed a number of personality disposition indices, including Locus of control (LOC), Goal orientation (GO) and Self efficacy (SE). The bipolar nature of these constructs enabled most of the answers to the items used in the questionnaire to be coded along a scale.

Quantitatively, the occupation variable emerged as one of the most important variable out of all the biographical variables under study, when correlated with the personality variables. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate a qualified clustering of the professions in terms of personality traits, compared with the ancillary group. The LOC variable emerged as the most consistent of all the constructs under study both cross-sectionally amongst the various occupations under study and also vertically within the same occupation. This paper argues that this personality variable may relate to previous literature exploring the strategies and struggles over boundaries between a profession and other groups where power is contested.

## Keywords

Goal orientation, locus of control, performance management plan, professions.

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## Introduction

The different attitudes and perceptions demonstrated by different occupational work-groups towards a given particular subject are often striking. This does not tally with what traditional organizational psychology advocates. The major theories in this respect advocate that the same basic processes account for behaviour across all individuals and that situational characteristics cause predictable behaviour across people.<sup>1</sup> As a result, little attention has been given to individual personality in research on job motivation and satisfaction. However, if dispositional factors do have an influence, a major lever for change is being missed. Thus a key theme running in this piece of work is the role of dispositional factors in determining behaviour. The dispositional factors selected have already been elicited in the literature as effecting attitudes towards PM.<sup>2</sup>

The organization under study was found to be particularly adept to lend itself to this kind of study. In this environment, the front line units have typically quite complex structures, with most of them being multidisciplinary, involving doctors, nurses, professions allied to medicine and ancillary workers.

LOC is a personality attribute reflecting the degree to which one generally perceives events to be under his/her control (internal locus) or under the control of powerful others (external locus). This then could have a direct link with occupational choice at the beginning of a career. An attrition of internals may therefore be observed for occupations which provide more discretion and autonomy, such as professional jobs and highly technical or skilled jobs whilst those with an external locus may gravitate towards jobs which offer less in terms of independent life chances such as unskilled labour jobs, clerical jobs and jobs of a routine nature.<sup>3</sup> This effect may be expected to operate not only cross-sectionally between different occupations, but also vertically within the same occupation. For instance, internals would tend to be found in supervisory jobs.

The basic distinguishing feature i.e. belief in personal control should have direct implications on the organizational context. However, this seems to be very much conditioned by the expectancy that performance will lead to the desired outcomes. In fact, most of the job motivation studies involving locus of control have been attempts to validate the expectancy theory hypothesis. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory<sup>4</sup>, proposes two types of expectancies, namely that effort will lead to good job performance and that good performance will lead to valued rewards. The first is actually the belief in personal effectiveness; that is, the individual can perform well if he or she makes the

effort. The second is the belief that good performance will be rewarded. This has led to tailoring of most pay incentive schemes for internals.

Internals would also be expected to exert more effort than externals, as their generalized expectancies of environmental control are higher. Thus internals may be expected to display greater job motivation and involvement than externals. Traditional motivational techniques involving goal setting, reinforcement etc. may therefore be more useful for internals than externals.

GO can be defined as an orientation towards developing or demonstrating one's ability.<sup>5</sup> It therefore draws clear parallels with the concept of PM where there are also two main perspectives, the developmental and judgmental aspects.

Originating in the educational literature, GO is a construct which suggests that individuals hold either a learning or performance orientation towards tasks.<sup>6</sup> The model advanced suggests that individuals have either of two different implicit theories of self-attributes and namely, an entity theory or an incremental theory. Specifically, conceiving of one's intelligence as a fixed entity is associated with adopting the performance goal of documenting that entity, whereas conceiving of intelligence as a malleable quality is associated with a learning goal of developing that quality.

GO influences the individual's views of effort expenditure. This once again is intrinsically related to the view of ability; with a learning goal orientation (LGO), effort is perceived as a means for developing ability for future task mastery. However, a performance goal orientation (PGO) individual views ability as a fixed attribute and thus expending effort is seen to be futile.

Another pattern concerns the response to task difficulty or task failure. Individuals with a high LGO would attempt to adapt to the problem by solution-oriented self-instruction persist and even escalate effort when viewing a challenge because they perceive that they can solve the problem and that this would lead to their self development. With a PGO however, individuals pursue a maladaptive response pattern in that they exhibit task withdrawal and make negative ability attributions. Continued effort would go against their impression management strategies and this is particularly enhanced by their perception of task mastery which is low.

The difference in GO has also been found to influence feedback seeking behaviour.<sup>5</sup> The conclusions from this study demonstrate a positive relationship between a LGO and feedback-seeking and a negative relationship between a PGO and feedback seeking with the perceived cost and perceived value of feedback-seeking mediating these relationships.

SE, which may be considered as a super ordinate judgment induced by the assimilation of the previous two personality dispositions, has already been posited in the literature as a shaper of career trajectories<sup>7</sup> and as highly influential in occupational development and pursuits.<sup>8</sup>

A review of the literature dealing with the concept of what is meant by a profession shows that the concept of power

struggle over contested terrains, professional dominance and autonomy are common buzz words. Given that this piece of research examines professions as one of the occupational categories and locus of control (which bears notions of quest for power to no small measure), and given the findings of this study, it is not surprising that this subject finds mention.

## Methodology

**Participants** The participants in this study were 100 employees from different health occupations. The sample consisted of a Medical and Dental (M +D) sub-group (16 males, 9 females), a Nursing and Midwifery (N + M) sub-group (8 males, 17 females), a Professions Allied to Medicine (PAM) sub-group (6 males, 19 females) and a Clerical and Manual (C + M) sub-group (7 males, 18 females). The participants were drawn at random from the personnel list of St. Luke's Hospital, the main general-care, public hospital, around which hospital services are centred in Malta. The response rate was 97% with one employee from the PAM sub-group and two from the C + M sub-group refusing to participate. Another three respondents from the same sub-groups were then selected instead. The structured interviews were conducted in the period October 2002 to January 2003. Each interview lasted on average forty minutes.

**Procedure** The technique selected was stratified random sampling with disproportionate sampling fractions for each health ministration stratum. The main reason for this was the heterogeneity of the sizes of these sub-groups, which would have made it difficult to represent in the sample. Therefore, a large sampling fraction was taken in order to provide for special sub-groups of the population.

The selected individuals were first contacted by telephone. The subjects were assured that their identity was not to be revealed and that the scope of the research was purely academic. It was also made clear that the research had been endorsed by the hospital administration.

**Layout and measures** The bipolar nature of the personality constructs has already been referred to earlier on. This structure was made use of in the tool which was employed in this study and namely a questionnaire where most questions were coded along a scale with one end corresponding to one extreme of the construct and the other end corresponding to the other. This then did not only allow one to explore the relationship between personality and occupational activity but also to explore the direction of this association.

The first few lines of the questionnaire included the title of the study and a brief introduction. A textbook definition of PM was given and this was further explained to the respondents. This was deemed necessary because many of the employees have not as yet experienced the PM process as at the present point in time it is only being implemented for clerical workers.

The questionnaire included open questions, closed questions and fixed questions with pre-coded response choices and batteries of scales. The battery of questions as a series of

single items, each relating to a given variable of interest is essential. Single item questions have been shown to be imperfect indices of attitudes and behaviour, as responses to one question can only be partially reflective of the area of interest.<sup>9</sup>

For instance, the Internality-Externality differences within the LOC construct are rehearsed in 13 questions (8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17k, 17l, 17m, 17n, 17o, 17p and 17q), the GO construct is rehearsed in 12 questions (4, 10, 17a, 17b, 17c, 17d, 17e, 17f, 17g, 17h, 17i and 17j) whilst the SE construct is rehearsed in 2 questions (7 and 17p).

In the penultimate question (17), the Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used as the scaling method to measure attitudes. A number of items (17a, 17b and 17c) in the GO construct were adopted from tested instruments.<sup>10</sup> The LOC construct was partly adopted from a tested <sup>11</sup> Internal-External scale and partly created. The advantage of such tests is that they are claimed to be 'objective' in several senses. On the other hand, these personality tests would not have complemented the PM thread.

Despite the fact that the interview was essentially a structured one, it also incorporated elements, which buttressed against it being dismissed completely from a qualitative standpoint. It included an appreciable number of open questions.

## Analysis

**Qualitative analysis** Analysis of the data resulting from this method of inquiry is generally accomplished by drawing up the questions on a specially prepared analysis sheet. All the specific questions are drawn up along the page, and the respondents are identified down one margin. Each questionnaire was then worked through in turn, accompanied by cataloguing the various responses made to the main theme for which information was sought. The visual themes which emerged from such analysis are described in the results section.

**Quantitative analysis** The coded results were entered into a tabular spreadsheet. The respondents were sequenced in different categories according to the four occupational sub-groups under study. A SPSS was used to test the data.

1. Pearson's chi square test was used to test the significance of the association between occupation and personality.
2. Factor analysis was used to test the solidity of the three personality constructs themselves. It was also used to assess the reliability of the group of question items relating to each of the personality constructs used in the questionnaire.

## Results and findings

**Findings** The findings section, which basically reflects the qualitative aspect of this study, included material such as quotations from the interviews. This was very helpful at times to explain otherwise contradictory assertions taken at face value from quantitative analysis alone.

One theme which emerged consistently on both analyses was the difference in GO, particularly between the professional workers on one side and the clerical staff on the other. This was

elicited in numerous questions. These included recounting of distinct experiences which made the subject either particularly pleased or annoyed, development of competence, suggestions as to how the work situation could be improved and feedback provision. In all these questions the difference in GO between professional workers on one side and the clerical staff on the other was consistent.

The other personality variable was LOC. Some of the main issues discussed here were hierarchical perceptions and the conduction of the PMP exercise and namely objective-setting, performance appraisal and rewards. Again, the running thread was the difference between the professions and other workers with the former being more internally oriented.

## Quantitative analysis

From the results of the Pearson chi square test it appears that GO and LOC are two important constructs to consider in the link between occupational choice and the personality disposition (Table 1).

The level of significance was taken to be at the 0.05 level which is commonly interpreted as a justification for rejecting the null hypotheses which posits that no relationship exists. The software package yields a chi-square value and in order for the relationship to be significant, it was essential that the chi-square value be smaller than 0.05.

The results provide modest support for the association between occupation and personality. Almost half of the items (five out of twelve) testing the GO variable were found to confirm a significant relationship with the occupation type. Some qualifications need to be made about the LOC variable. Although

**Table 1:** Relationship examining the effect of occupation difference on personality variable – Pearson chi square values (question number is shown in brackets).

Goal orientation	Locus of Control	Self efficacy
<b>0.0008 (4)</b>	<b>0.0000 (8)</b>	0.4308 (7)
0.3621 (10)	0.0542 (11)	0.5116 (17r)
0.4020 (17a)	0.2972 (12)	
0.1449 (17b)	0.2695 (14)	
<b>0.0009 (17c)</b>	0.4597 (15)	
0.0081 (17d)	0.0000 (16)	
0.4280 (17e)	<b>0.0294 (17k)</b>	
0.4688 (17f)	<b>0.0238 (17l)</b>	
0.6654 (17g)	0.1444 (17m)	
0.2404 (17i)	0.1699 (17n)	
<b>0.0000 (17h)</b>	0.7450 (17o)	
0.0051 (17j)	0.5984 (17p)	
0.1887 (17q)		

\* Bold print denotes a significant level at 0.05

here only one-third of the items were found to confirm a relationship between LOC and occupation type, this does not take into account that three items (questions 17o, 17p and 17q) were introduced halfway through the study and this could have affected the final result. Moreover questions 12 and 15 included contaminant factors. Although the result of question 12 is not significant, it is narrowly so. If these factors are taken into consideration, the result becomes five out of seven items, with two of the items being highly significant. On the other hand, no association could be demonstrated between SE and occupation. A possible reason for this could have been the small number of items expounding this personality variable.

An analysis of the frequencies of responses in the cross-tabulations between occupation type and the personality variables, revealed a distinction between three of the occupations and namely established or emerging professions (M + D, N + M, PAM) on one hand and the C + M sub-group on the other. Whilst no distinct patterns could be discerned, an obvious conclusion was that the latter were the least learning goal oriented and the most externally oriented as regards LOC. This test also provides some evidence, although not conclusive, for the direction of the variables i.e. a *LGO* is generally accompanied by internality in LOC and vice-versa.

The association between personality and other biographical variables was also examined using the Pearson chi-square test. Interestingly, the hierarchy position status correlated with the LOC construct on four items and this demonstrates the validity of this construct with respect to the hierarchical positioning of the individual. It also goes to show how LOC operates not only cross-sectionally between the different health ministrations but also vertically in the same health ministrations.

Factor analysis demonstrated that the distinction between the personality variables is not so discreet (i.e. they are correlated). In fact, Cronbach's standardised alpha, computed from the correlation variables (with questions 17o, 17p and 17q dropped since they were introduced halfway through the study) was 0.5898. The original scree plot yielded 10 factors with an eigenvalue of over +1. The eigenvalue demonstrates the variance explained by each factor. The cumulative proportion of variance in data space for the 10 factors was 0.6959. The

**Table 2:** Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC) of each variable with all other variables, and Cronbach's Alpha, with that variable removed.

Question number	SMC	Alpha
4	0.31095	0.5731
7	0.34794	0.5811
8	0.46090	0.5486
10	0.27981	0.5693
11	0.38330	0.5520
12	0.25991	0.6187
14	0.35051	0.5761
15	0.20872	0.6053
16	0.37814	0.5470
17a	0.28722	0.5666
17b	0.11795	0.6055
17c	0.35467	0.5731
17k	0.45263	0.5625
17l	0.27008	0.5706
17d	0.41700	0.5674
17m	0.29122	0.5627
17e	0.43265	0.5509
17f	0.29553	0.6064
17g	0.19056	0.5804
17h	0.39030	0.5697
17I	0.46983	0.6563
17r	0.42163	0.5707
17j	0.33221	0.5697

cumulative proportion of variance in factor space for the first 3 factors was 1.000 (Table 2 and 3).

The items are listed in Table 4, along with the results of a factor analysis of the items (principal component analysis, oblique rotation). The analysis yielded a three-factor solution, accounting for 32% of the variance. The results show that the factors did not load on any one particular personality variable i.e. they are highly correlated.

**Table 3:** Cumulative proportion of variance in data space and in factor space.

Factor	Variance explained	Cumulative Proportion of Variance		Carmines Theta
		In Data Space	In Factor Space	
1	3.7832	0.1645	0.5127	0.7691
2	1.9201	0.2480		0.7729
3	1.6755	0.3208		1.000
4	1.4957	0.3858		
5	1.4339	0.4482		
6	1.2941	0.5045		

**Table 4:** Sorted Rotated Factor Loadings (Pattern)

Question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
11	<b>0.648</b>		0.341
8	<b>0.633</b>		
17j	<b>0.614</b>		
17m	<b>0.508</b>		
17i	<b>-0.503</b>	-0.308	
4	<b>0.486</b>		
17c	<b>0.443</b>		-0.269
10	<b>0.407</b>		
7		<b>0.599</b>	
17e		<b>0.579</b>	
17r		<b>0.555</b>	-0.394
17h	0.258	<b>0.479</b>	
16	0.366	<b>0.470</b>	
17l		<b>0.456</b>	0.426
17a		<b>0.406</b>	
15			<b>0.580</b>
17d			<b>-0.563</b>
12			<b>0.486</b>
14		0.334	<b>-0.307</b>
17b			<b>0.299</b>
17k	0.380		
17f		-0.379	
17g		0.270	

(1) The factor loading matrix obtained when all the items in the questionnaire were considered.

(2) Factor rotation was done by the direct quartimin method

(3) Factor loading matrix rearranged so that columns appear in decreasing order of variance as explained by factors. Rows have been rearranged so that for each successive factor, loadings greater than 0.4000 appear first. Loadings less than 0.2500 were replaced by zero and are not shown.

In view of these last results, the aim of the last exercise was to test the internal consistency of each group of questions, which were used to examine the personality variables. For reasons of space, the tables showing the SMC of each variable with all the other variables for that personality construct, and Cronbach's Alpha, with that variable removed are not being published. However, some comments on the findings are in order. Whilst for the LOC, alpha is acceptable, indicating a modest correlation between the items used, alpha and consequently the correlation is lower for the other constructs. The picture which emerges from this is that with the exception of the LOC, the constructs are diffuse, although the items which

were used were not so solid themselves and this could have therefore contributed to the observed pattern.

## Discussion

The original hypothesis of this study was that differences would be found between occupations for the personality constructs under study. However, it did not expect the final results to cluster as they in fact did. In both qualitative and quantitative analyses, a pattern can be distinguished whereby three of the occupations clustered together in contrast to the C + M sub-group. It was noted that all three occupations consist of professions, albeit in different phases of development. Another factor to be considered is that quantitative analysis yielded the LOC construct as the most robust personality variable of all those in the present study. This has direct explanation in terms of the influence of professional autonomy and professional dominance concepts. Qualitative analysis was also helpful to describe certain trends, which in quantitative analysis seem to contradict theory. For instance although PM may present opportunities for internals and should in this respect find their support, it may be viewed by them as an intrusion by management on the clinical autonomy which the professions traditionally enjoyed and thus draw (as in fact it did) some harsh criticism.

This study proposes that the concepts of 'professional dominance' and of 'professional autonomy', which refer to the different aspects of control that the group has in terms of political autonomy, economic autonomy and technical or clinical autonomy, may trace its origins to the higher internality of the professions. This may not only reflect itself in occupational closure and a quest for professional dominance in the relationship with other professions e.g. medicine and nursing but may also be prevalent in the debate between managerialism and professionalism.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to determine whether categorizations in terms of personality dispositions could distinguish between different occupational sub-groups. The PMP was used as the vehicle to elicit the reactions of the respondents and these attitudes were then correlated to the personality dispositions under study.

Two main personality dispositions in this respect were found to be the GO and the LOC constructs. The latter in particular was found to be a robust construct as it constantly emerged as an important construct in both of the tests used in the quantitative analysis. Moreover, its importance was reproduced in qualitative analysis. LOC was shown to operate not only cross-sectionally between the different occupations but also vertically within the same occupation. This latter fact was established when a number of items eliciting the LOC construct managed to score as significant not only in the Pearson chi-square test involving the occupation variable but also the hierarchy variable.

Although the original expectations of this study were that any differences in these dispositions were a matter of degree, which could be graded along a scale, the final results demonstrate a different picture. A cluster comprising three of the four occupations against the fourth sub-group under study could be distinguished. A common feature of the three work-groups was that all of them could be defined as professions, although some, such as the medical professions are well established whilst others such as nursing can be described as emergent professions.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

PM is an umbrella term that includes performance planning, performance review and performance appraisal. It is a form of communication between the manager and the employee of what work is to be accomplished, how it will be accomplished, how work is progressing towards the desired results, and after effort is expended to accomplish the work, whether the performance has achieved the agreed-upon plan.

1a. Occupation	M+D	N+M	PAM	C+M
1b. Gender	Male	Female		
1c. Position	Top Manag.	Middle Manag. (Upper)	Middle Manag. (Lower)	Basic Grade
1d. Job tenure	10 yrs+	5-10 yrs	0-5 yrs	
1e. Education level	Tertiary	Sec +Post-Sec	Secondary	

2. Can I ask you what your job means to you?  
(Look out if there is job satisfaction or not and possible reasons. Explore whether the individual has a mainly instrumental look or otherwise).  
1 = Very satisfied  
2 = Fairly satisfied  
3 = Not satisfied

3. Could you think of an instance where you felt particularly pleased with your work? And one where you felt extremely annoyed?
4. Some people look at their jobs as a learning experience where they learn from their mistakes and feel motivated by the effort required to master a task. Others look at their jobs as an opportunity to excel in an activity, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their competence. To which outlook do you subscribe? Why?  
1 = learning experience  
2 = both  
3 = opportunity to excel
5. If you were asked to forward one suggestion on how to improve the work situation, what would it be?
6. Ask interviewee to state how important s/he feels the following aspects of PM to be:  
Goal-setting  
Feedback provision  
Allocation of rewards  
Identification of development needs  
Opportunity to participate in discussion  
Evaluation of performance
7. Should the objectives set in the PMP be:  
1 = Ambitious and demanding

- 2 = Moderate
- 3 = Easy in terms of challenge

8. Should the objectives in the PMP be set by:  
 1 = The employee alone  
 2 = the employee in conjunction with the supervisor  
 3 = The supervisor alone

9. Why is feedback provision important?

10. What would your reaction to criticism in a Performance review be? Probe if the individual would perceive it as constructive and therefore try to improve on weak areas or whether it would be important to identify the context of one's own actions.

- 1 = Constructive perception of feedback
- 2 = Both
- 3 = Attribution of failure to context

11. Performance review should be carried out by:

- 1 = the appraise himself herself.
- 2 = Both the appraise and the appraiser
- 3 = the appraiser

12. Do you agree with incentives in the PMP?

- 1 = Agree

- 2 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 = Disagree

13. What kind of rewards would you prefer to award good performance?

- Recognition
- Training opportunities
- Career progression
- Monetary rewards

Ask interviewee to explain his/her choice.

14. Do you feel that rewards should be based on:

- 1 = Overall record of accomplishment
- 2 = Status bestowed through seniority or education record.

15. What do you prefer:

- 1 = Pay incentive schemes
- 2 = Uniform rate of pay.

16. Do you believe in:

- 1 = Personal persuasion
- 2 = Both
- 3 = Coercion

18. Are there any other additional comments that you may wish to add?

17. To what extent do you agree with the following?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither disagree nor agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Goal orientation</b> a. I perform work with pleasure because of the effort required b. Making genuine mistakes while performing is not bad c. I perform to show others that I am more competent d. I do not feel put down when criticised e. PA should be carried out on a frequent basis f. I feel comfortable discussing my skill weaknesses with my manager g. Mastery of new skills is a powerful motivator h. One should feel motivated with the difficulty of goals set i. In proving own competence one should feel motivated j. I would perceive criticism in the appraisal interview as threatening					
<b>Locus of control</b> k. Set objectives should be at the discretion of the supervisor l. A job is what you make of it m. Appraisal feedback conditions my performance n. I would not necessarily agree with the supervisor's opinion o. I do not really believe in luck or chance p. Persistence and hard work usually lead to success q. If I do not succeed on a task I tend to give up					
<b>Self-efficacy</b> r. I am capable of meeting the demands of a given situation.					