

Review of the book *From Fear to Flow: Personality and information interaction*, by Jannica Heinström.

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From Fear to Flow: Personality and Information Interaction. Jannica Heinström. Oxford: Chandos Publishing. 2010. 225 pp. \$95 (ISBN: 978–1–84334–513–8).

Through the theoretical lens of Costa and McCrae's 5-factor model of personality, Heinström provides an exploration of the research on the influence of personality on information seeking and use. She successfully brings together research from a variety of domains with an emphasis on psychology and social psychology. The book places equal emphasis on describing personality traits and, as it does, the information behaviors relevant to each trait. The works cited from information behavior research are not treated comprehensively, but rather selectively to illustrate the influence of particular personality trait associated with specific information behaviors.

Information behavior researchers might consider *From Fear to Flow* a companion or complementary work to Case's (2007) *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior*. Nahl and Bilal's (2007), *Information and Emotion: The Emergent Affective Paradigm in Information Behavior Research and Theory*, which specifically examines emotions and information, should also be considered. The former title offers a comprehensive view of information behavior research and the latter focuses specifically on emotions and information behavior. Both of these works provide a variety of potential theoretical frameworks from which to explore information behaviors relevant to personality and emotions. Heinström's work is wholly supported by one perspective, Costa and McCrae's 5-factor model of personality. Some readers might desire for a greater connection to and integration of information behavior theory.

Heinström describes personality as a unique pattern of feelings, thoughts, and behavior consistent over time and context. Trait theory, consistency, and genetic base are briefly explored as a means of explaining personality. However, as previously mentioned, Heinström's analysis of the research on personality relies on Costa and McCrae's (2008) dispositional perspective. The first part of the book describes and provides support for each of the five factors. In increasing order of influence on personality, the factors are *negative affectivity*, *extroversion*, *openness to experience*, *agreeableness*, and *conscientiousness*. The second part of the book explores themes relevant to personality and information interactions, which are related to, but not specifically addressed by, the 5-factor model.

Openness to experience is described in terms of an exploration and joy of discovery dimension with “open searchers” at one end and “conservative searchers” at the other. Curiosity, risk taking, innovation, creativity, and tolerance of ambiguity are all aspects associated with open

searchers. Open searchers also tend to exhibit critical thinking skills that lead to alternative solutions and to questioning authority. Further, they experience joy and excitement when learning from and finding new information. They are likely to use their imaginations in decision making. Searchers open to new experiences are more inclined to explore information incidentally encountered. Conversely, individuals inclined to cautious or conservative information searching are likely to avoid information seeking and when forced to do so will seek only a few resources as ambiguous search results can cause them stress. They are less likely to make independent decisions based on their own interpretations of new information, but rather prefer to believe established common understandings of phenomena.

Conscientiousness is discussed in terms of a persistence dimension: with searchers ranging from conscientious to laid-back. The ritualistic or highly conscientious information searcher is strategic, focused, and thorough during information interactions. Interestingly, the highly conscientious searcher lacks confidence in his or her abilities and seeks information beyond what is necessary to increase confidence. Conscientious searchers are goal focused and need to feel successful in their search endeavors. Laid-back searchers are described as easily distracted, careless, hasty, or impulsive. Their attitude is casual and immediate gratification is desired. They want to finish search-related tasks as quickly as possible often with information that is readily available. This is an example of where Heinström could have made connections to information behavior research. In her discussion of laid-back searchers, she does not refer to the research related to Zipf's Principle of Least Effort or the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm.

Extroversion is the personality factor most related to interpersonal information seeking and is described in terms of a social dimension. Extroverts tend to engage in interpersonal information interaction and find people as information sources a natural fit to their personalities. They are considered to be less systematic in their search approaches and prefer active, spontaneous, and practical approaches to information gathering. Introverts tend to reflect on and analyze information critically and independently. Introverts are considered natural searchers as they tend to be intellectual, creative, and thoughtful.

Agreeableness is described in terms of a trust dimension. Information searchers with a high degree of agreeableness are more trusting of others and information, whereas those with a low degree of agreeableness are more competitive and more critical in evaluating information. Agreeable information seekers are cooperative and accepting of encountered information; competitive information seekers search alone, are impatient in information acquisition, and can critically and accurately evaluate information readily without running the risk of using misinformation. Agreeable information seekers abide by rules and social norms; whereas competitive information seekers are less concerned by them and more likely to commit misuses of information such as plagiarism.

Negative affectivity is explored in terms of the emotional dimension, from anxiety to depression. Negative affectivity is the emotion most strongly associated with information seeking and use. Anxiety in information seeking is frantic and worried, whereas depression in information seeking results in indifference and the avoidance of information. Negative affect, anxiety in particular, has received overwhelming attention from researchers while less attention has been paid to positive affect, which tends to facilitate rather than disrupt information seeking. In the second

part of the book, Heinström includes a companion chapter on positive emotionality, which provides a helpful framework for studying positive affectivity. The discussion includes the positive influences of mood and motivation on information seeking and the positive statuses of enjoyment of uncertainty and flow.

Themes discussed in the second part of the book include the individual need for cognition, positive emotionality, self-efficacy and self-confidence, locus of control, monitoring and blunting, uncertainty orientation, broad scanning, fast surfing, and deep diving. Many of the chapters examine a type of information behavior or context and apply one or more of the five factors in the analysis of that behavior. In this way, Heinström provides examples of how these factors can be applied and understood in relationship to one another. For example, in her discussion of broad scanning, fast surfing, and deep diving, the individual who engages in broad scanning is open, curious, experiences joy and discovery; the fast surfer is laid-back, indifferent, and usually required to seek information; and the individual who engages in deep diving is conscientious and driven by problem solving.

The final chapter of the book provides a holistic view of the 5-factor model and its relationship to information seeking and use. Several useful tables illustrate the relationship between varying degrees of each personality dimension to the expectant information behaviors. Reading the final chapter first would give the reader an overview and guide to the preceding chapters, which would prove helpful to unifying the focus of the book.

From Fear to Flow is most remarkable for its contextualization of the influence of personality on information behaviors and for its bibliography on the research relevant to personality and information seeking and use. Its main weakness is that the book reads more like a thoughtfully annotated bibliography than as a literature review with an overarching or unifying theme. At times, this can make the reading somewhat tedious. There is no narrative to pull the reader along. Therefore, the book is best viewed as a resource for those doing research related to personality and information. The integration of research on personality and information with the 5-factor model is so seamlessly done that one might overlook the magnitude of Heinström's effort and lose sight of how valuable this perspective is to studying personality and information. This book is a valuable resource to anyone researching information behavior and for any library with an information science collection.

References

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