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## Using Personality to Identify High Technology Career Preference in Military Recruits

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# Using Personality to Identify High Technology Career Preference in Military Recruits

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David E. Fleming, Eastern Illinois University

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*Given increasing budget constraints, it is vital that employers get the most bang for their buck in recruiting efforts and that they result in hiring employees that possess the necessary skills. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States military which faces cutbacks while still needing to recruit soldiers who possess the skills needed to operate the modern military. This paper develops a set of propositions aimed at guiding empirical research into how military recruiters can use currently administered personality tests to ensure that they are enlisting the recruits needed to perform high technology occupations now needed.*

## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Military has long been held as an innovative marketer in terms of recruitment strategy. Presently, the Military has taken to using familiar entertainment (i.e video games) to attract today's recruits. On any given day, youths in the United States spend an average of 73 minutes playing video games, and with 97% of teenagers playing videogames, the U.S. Military saw an apparent opportunity to recruit the next generation of soldiers (Media Literacy, 2010).

Previous research has examined military recruiting from a variety of different angles. Studies have explored recruitment designed to reach women (e.g. Brown, 2012) and recruitment efforts targeted at specific individuals of a certain socio-economic status (e.g. Elder, et al., 2010). Other studies have examined the ethics of military recruitment (e.g. Hagopian & Barker, 2011). However little exploration has been done, looking at the one round-the-clock recruitment tool the military heavily relies on, the Internet. This study will address this gap and provide guidance for how to maximize the usefulness of this recruitment tool.

Given the recent and upcoming budget cuts to the military (Alexander, 2012), it is vital that the armed forces get the biggest return it can for its investment in recruits. Because military jobs are becoming more technical and complex according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook), it is also important that the military select those recruits that are best able to perform the necessary tasks. To accomplish both of these ends, this paper attempts to create links between currently administered personality inventories, the affinity for technology recruits have and the desire for high technology military careers. The goal is to allow recruiters to evaluate the potential fit of recruits and select those that best fit the needs of the new, high tech military without incurring significant cost increases arising from the administration of additional tests.

## MODEL DEVELOPMENT

### Linking Personality to Affinity for Technology

Understanding relationships between personality and affinity for technology will enable organizations to both select individuals for work assignments best suited to the applicant's personality and to design jobs that capitalize on an individual's capabilities. Amongst the existing personality frameworks, the "Big Five" personality factors model (i.e. conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience) has emerged as the most agreed upon framework in the literature (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992a, 1992b; Goldberg, 1993; Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004;

Zweig & Webster, 2004). The five factors theoretically capture the essence of one's personality (Digman, 1990) and play a powerful role in explaining a multitude of individual attitudes and behaviors.

The concept of Affinity for Technology was introduced by Edison and Geissler (2003) as a way to assess individual's positive feelings toward technology as a general concept. This is different from other technology measures which tend to concentrate on adoption potential (e.g., Parasuraman 2000, Davis 1989) or on computers as technology (i.e., Heinssen, Glass, & Knight, 1987). This concept directly influences outcomes such as marketing mavenism (Geissler & Edison 2005) and employee self-directed learning project use (Fleming, Artis & Hawes, forthcoming) based on empirical studies. This it is a reasonable starting point in the investigation of the link between technology perceptions and career choice

Openness to Experience - Openness to experience describes the breadth, depth, originality and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life (John & Srivastava, 1999). Those individuals high in openness are curious, willing to explore new ideas, and seek out opportunities to learn new things. Given these traits, we hypothesize:

*P1a. Openness to experience is positively related to AFT.*

Conscientiousness - Conscientiousness, as a personality trait, describes an individual's socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task and goal oriented behavior, such as organizing, and planning (John & Srivastava, 1999). High conscientious individuals are serious, persistent, disciplined and methodical (Gellatly, 1996). In view of these collective research findings, those high in conscientiousness are more likely to deliberately seek outcomes consistent with these desires. Therefore, the following is proposed:

*P1b. Conscientiousness is positively related to AFT.*

Agreeableness - The personality trait of agreeableness contrasts a prosocial and communal orientation toward others with relationships of a more antagonistic nature (John & Srivastava, 1999). Individuals who are high in agreeableness are characterized as courteous, generous, warm, trusting, good-natured and flexible (Colbert, et al., 2004; Goldberg, 1990). In the context of AFT, these tendencies should lead agreeable employees to be willingly to do what is expected of them and to seek to engage in activities that are accepted and desired by others. Thus, agreeable individuals should be more likely than disagreeable individuals to exhibit AFT.

*P1c. Agreeableness is positively related to AFT.*

Extraversion - The personality trait of extraversion conveys an energetic approach to the social and material world, including such traits as sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm (John & Srivastava, 1999). An extravert conveys an energetic approach to the social world, which is often accessed via the Internet. Also, extraverts are goal-oriented and draw on resource power to attain those goals. Therefore, we postulate:

*P1d. Extraversion is positively related to AFT.*

Neuroticism - Also known by its positive pole of emotional stability, neuroticism embodies feelings such as sadness, anxiousness, insecurity, anger and nervousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999) and those high in neuroticism are found to be indecisive, impulsive, and often engage in avoidance strategies to cope (Antonioni, 1998). It is reasoned that, relative to emotionally stable individuals, neurotics would be less likely to have high levels affinity for technology.

*P1e. Neuroticism is negatively related to AFT.*

## Linking Affinity for Technology to Career Selection

Career Choice - Congruity theory is used to link the recruit's affinity for technology to his/her preference of high or low technology careers in the military. The notion of self-congruity was introduced to the marketing literature by Sirgy (1980, 1981, 1982a, 1982b) and is based on the psychological view that people possess multiple self-concepts. The key self-concepts he focuses on are the ideal self, the actual self and the social self. In his work (Sirgy, 1982c) the ideal self is defined as how an individual would like to see himself or herself. The actual self is defined as how an individual views himself or herself. The social self is defined as how an individual would like to be seen by others. Sirgy's work revealed that consumers were more likely to select products that possessed traits which were consistent with positive aspects their self-image. An example of the extension of the self-congruity research is the work of Lau and Phau (2007), which examined the importance of brand personality for symbolic brands versus functional brands, and found that brand personality congruity is an important influence on consumer choice in both cases. Studies by Harris and Fleming (2005) and Ekinici and Riley (2003) have found that that personality congruency is important in service settings. The Ekinici and Riley (2003) study found that personality congruence is correlated with service outcomes like customer satisfaction.

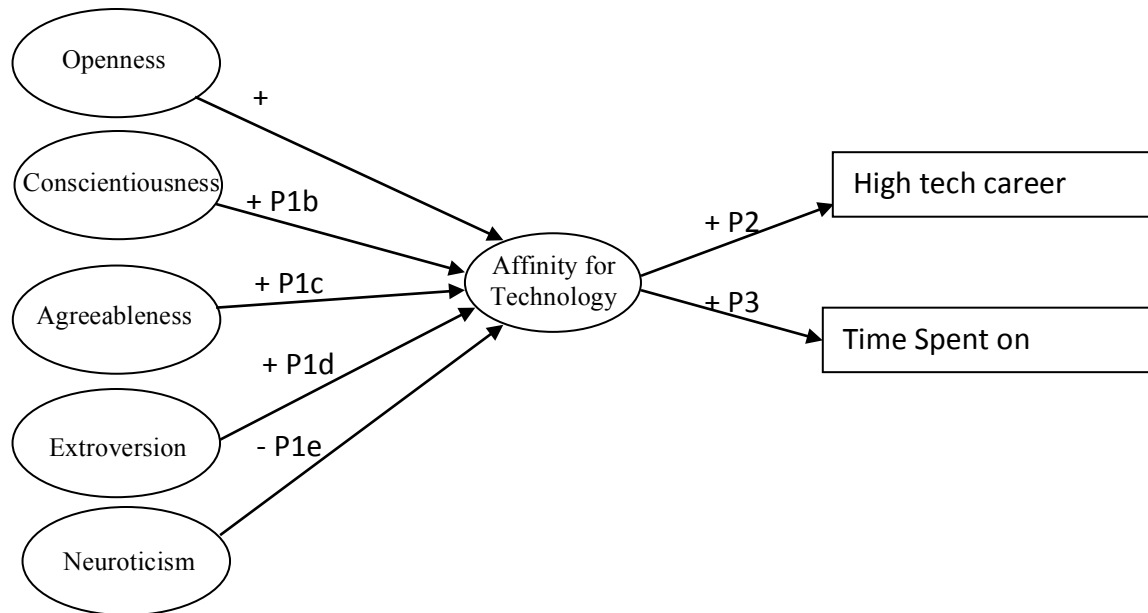
According to the self-congruity literature, consumers are more likely to be loyal to a firm that consumers perceive as having an image (Sirgy & Samli, 1985) consistent their own and are more likely to report a positive service experience if the firm is perceived as having personality traits congruent with their own (Harris & Fleming, 2005). It is also logical to assume that people are likely to select a job which is compatible with their own self-image; in this case allowing the recruit to match personal affinity for technology with the type of career preferred in the military. This is also supported by the research of Donohue (2006) who found that people who had high congruence between personality and work environment were more likely to be persistent in their current career while those with low personality-work environment congruity were more likely to change careers to one with higher levels of congruity. Additionally, the "self-serving bias principle" put forth by Sirgy, Johar, Samli, and Claiborne (1991) states that customer evaluations of products are influenced by the extent to which customers perceive similarities between the attributes possessed by the product and themselves and these similarities influences how incoming information is processed by the customer. Thus, recruits who have a self-concept of a high affinity for technology are more likely to process information on career opportunities that coincide. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

*P2: AFT is positively related to the preference of a high technology military career by the recruit.*

Career Research - Similarly, congruity theory can be used to explain recruit utilization of the website for the branch of the armed forces the recruit is joining. In this case, the recruit who has a higher affinity for technology is likely to spend more time of the branch's website because doing so is congruent with his/her self-concept. In addition, part of this behavior can also be attributed to social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley 1959) which states that all exchange relationships involve a mutual give-and-take between the parties involved. In this case the military provides news, entertainment, and information pertinent to those in the military; and the potential recruit reciprocates by using this information to become a better soldier or determine if this is his/her proper career path. However, this relationship only occurs if internet and website usage is congruent with the recruit's self-concept. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

*P3: AFT is positively related to the amount of time spent on military websites before joining the armed forces.*

These propositions can be seen in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

## IMPLICATIONS

If the preceding propositions are supported, it gives those making recruitment and placement decisions additional metrics to use in identifying those potential soldiers best suited to working in the high technology careers now demanded in the modern military. Additionally, empirical testing of these propositions will show whether the military websites as currently designed and implemented and other modern technology based recruiting tools, such as video games, actually work to recruit those potential soldiers who possess the skill sets desired in the modern military.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual study is designed to serve as the foundation for a stream of future research. The first study should attempt to support or disprove the propositions of this manuscript through an empirical test. That study would provide evidence of whether personality alone has the power to differentiate between candidates who will fit well in high technology positions and if there is a way to look at past behavior to further the precision of the recruitment and selection processes for this type of project. A second study from this stream should examine whether the theoretical framework developed in this manuscript based on the characteristics of military recruitment and careers also apply to more traditional work settings. Finally, another study needs to be undertaken to determine if there is an overarching model that would incorporate the theoretical perspectives in this manuscript in a more cohesive fashion. One such model already in the literature is the 3M model of personality by Mowen (2000) which notes that there are several levels of personality from the elemental traits (e.g., an expanded five-factor model) through surface traits that directly influence behaviors. An investigation of the fit of this or some other integrating model would further help to determine the process through which personality may influence job choice and fit in addition to helping HR professionals to further validate the use of personality as a screening mechanism for recruiting and selecting for technology focused positions. Overall, this manuscript should

serve as a starting point for further investigation of the links between personality, recruitment, job fit and job performance in high tech situations.

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