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Understanding the Personality of a Coworker

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Abstract

The concept of personal intelligence (PI) refers to an individual's capacity to accurately reason about personality and personality-related information in themselves and others (Mayer, 2008). Understanding personal intelligence has various practical applications, including the workplace, where it has been shown that individuals with higher PI exhibit lower levels of counterproductive work behavior and perceive their work environments as more supportive (Mayer et al., 2018). In a recent study by Peters and colleagues (2021), participants were asked to describe their interactions with difficult coworkers, and their sophistication in the narratives was evaluated by judges. The study found that there was a positive correlation between sophistication and personal intelligence ($r = .43$, $p < .001$) (Munro, 2022), suggesting that personal intelligence is detectable in employees. Munro's findings were consistent with Peters et al. (2021), further supporting the notion that personal intelligence is discernible in employees and linked to the construct of personal intelligence. The present study broadens the scope of Munro's sample, augmenting it with an expanded cohort, and introduces refined analyses of the dataset.

KEYWORDS: PERSONAL INTELLIGENCE, WORKPLACE, SOPHISTICATION.

Introduction

Personality, a complex and multifaceted system that encompasses various aspects of an individual's psychological life (Mayer, 2005), has garnered significant attention in research. It is defined as a psychological process emerging from the interplay of motives, feelings, and thoughts, often characterized by specific traits that capture an individual's behavioral tendencies, such as energy level or apathy. Assessing these personality traits and dimensions requires a diverse range of measures and tests.

Within organizational contexts, counterproductive work behavior (CWB) poses a prevalent and pressing concern (Spector et al., 2006). CWB refers to deliberate actions carried out by employees with the intention to harm either their colleagues or the organization. This detrimental behavior takes a toll on workplace dynamics, leading to reduced productivity, increased job dissatisfaction, and elevated employee turnover rates.

Among the various factors contributing to CWB, personal intelligence (PI) remains an intriguing but underexplored construct. PI encompasses individuals' ability to understand themselves and others, effectively manage their emotions and behaviors, and cultivate positive interpersonal relationships. While prior research has linked PI to improved job satisfaction, performance, and leadership effectiveness, the association between PI and CWB remains relatively unexplored. Thus, the present research paper aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the relationship between PI and CWB in the workplace. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive approach incorporating a range of assessments and evaluations will be employed to explore personality traits, dimensions, and reasoning about coworkers among a group of student employees.

Assessment of Personality Measures for Investigating Personal Intelligence and Counterproductive Work Behavior

Personal Intelligence

Personal intelligence refers to the ability to reason accurately about oneself and others in relation to their personalities and relevant information (Mayer, 2008). This mental capacity involves problem-solving in four domains, which include recognizing personally relevant information through introspection and observations, forming accurate models of personality, using this information to guide decision-making, and creating positive outcomes through goal systematization, planning, and life stories. These areas of problem-solving are interconnected and form a continuous cycle of learning, understanding, and personal development. To objectively measure personal intelligence, Mayer and colleagues (2012) developed the Test of Personal Intelligence (TOPI), which utilizes multiple-choice questions with answers based on established findings from personality research. Each question on the TOPI has four options with one correct answer, allowing for the assessment of an individual's ability in this area. Existing literature suggests that personal intelligence varies across individuals, with some having low levels while others have high levels (Mayer, 2008). Moreover, research has found that personal intelligence, as evaluated by the TOPI, is linked to practical outcomes such as counterproductive work behavior, as demonstrated in a study by Mayer et al. (2018).

Personal Intelligence in the Workplace

The workplace is a domain where personal intelligence research can be highly beneficial. A form of conduct that occurs in workplaces is referred to as counterproductive work behavior, which is purposeful behavior aimed at causing harm to an organization and its members (Spector

et al., 2006). Researchers analyze counterproductive work behavior through subscales such as sabotage, theft, withdrawal, production deviance, and abuse, and some studies suggest that these behaviors may arise from motives such as injustice and aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1997; Munro, 2022). In general, personality traits or responses to work stressors and injustice can lead to counterproductive behaviors, which are frequently associated with anger (Spector et al., 2006).

In a preliminary study investigating workplace behavior, Mayer and colleagues (2018) made an intriguing discovery: employees who scored higher on a personal intelligence test not only reported receiving more social support but also demonstrated a lower tendency for engaging in counterproductive work behaviors, including theft and incivility. This finding highlights the importance of understanding the reasoning processes of workers, as it allows us to delve into the factors influencing their engagement in such behaviors. Moreover, it sheds light on the potential role of personal intelligence in mitigating these undesirable actions.

Sophistication

Building on the significance of comprehending workers' reasoning processes and the factors influencing their engagement in counterproductive behaviors, Allen (2017) conducted a study that introduced a novel measure of sophistication. In this study, participants were asked to recall a time they learned about someone's personality and to provide a narrative about their experience. Allen then developed a system for rating sophistication by having independent judges evaluate differences in the type of learning described by the participants. Higher ratings of sophistication reflected the participant's ability to adjust their perception of others and their behavior based on their evaluations. The results showed that the independently judged raters were able to detect differences in sophistication, which was found to be significantly related to ability-based personal intelligence.

Current Study

The disruption of the workplace by issues like counterproductive work behavior and poor coworker relations is a well-known problem (Spector et al., 2006). To investigate the potential psychological factors associated with such issues, this study focuses on personal intelligence, counterproductive work behavior, and reasoning about coworkers among a group of student employees. This study serves as a follow-up to prior research that analyzed narratives about participants' experiences with challenging coworkers (Peters et al., 2021). The results of Peters' (2021) study showed that judges could identify differences in employees' sophistication levels when understanding personalities, and that personal intelligence was significantly related to sophistication levels ($r = .43$, $p < .001$).

The first part of this follow-up, 2nd study, was initiated by Munro (2022) who replicated and expanded upon the work of Peters et al. (2021) by examining the complex interplay between sophistication ratings of narratives about challenging coworkers, personal intelligence, and counterproductive work behavior. The results of Munro's study showed a significant positive correlation between sophistication and personal intelligence ($r = .27$), as well as a significant negative correlation between sophistication and counterproductive work behavior ($r = -.20$). These findings provide further evidence that employees' perceptions and reactions to difficult coworkers may be influenced by their personal intelligence and propensity for counterproductive work behavior. The present study more than doubles the size of Munro's (2022) initial sample and provides a reanalysis of the data, enhancing the credibility of the relationship between personal intelligence and workplace behavior.

Hypotheses

In this study, we aimed to investigate the following hypotheses:

1. A factor model will capture judges' ability to detect sophistication within ratings

2. The previous correlation of r = .46, as discovered in Mayer, Panter, and Caruso's (2012) study, between the Test of Personal Intelligence (TOPI) and verbal intelligence will be reproduced in this study.

3. Balanced Perspective factor of sophistication ratings will negatively correlate with counterproductive work behavior.

4. PI will positively correlate with sophistication ratings & negatively correlate with counterproductive work behavior

Methods

Participants

A total of 249 participants were solicited through their SONA accounts to take the Qualtrics survey. Following the screening process, a total of 130 participants were excluded from the study due to unsatisfactory responses. These responses exhibited various issues, such as inadequate answer rates, long string responses, failure to pass attention checks, and excessively quick completion times. Notably, a total of 116 participants did not meet the criteria of the attention checks and were consequently excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, the study excluded an additional 14 participants from analysis due to the reasons discussed earlier. To augment the dataset, 87 participants from Munro's cohort were integrated into the sample, resulting in a final count of 253 student employees, of whom 78% were female, 88% were Caucasian, and 88% reported annual earnings below $15,000.

Measures

The present investigation utilized various instruments to assess personal intelligence and workplace behavior and attitudes. Specifically, student employees were requested to complete a comprehensive questionnaire, which included a detailed informed consent form, demographic inquiries, the Interaction with Difficult or Challenging Employees Survey, the Test of Personal Intelligence Brief-20, the Wordsumplus-14 examination, the Self-Estimated Personal Intelligence Scale, the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist, the HEXACO–60, and an open-ended comments section.

The Interaction with Difficult or Challenging Employees Survey (Peters et al., 2021; see Appendix A). The survey administered in this study required participants to provide details about a challenging interaction with a coworker. This measurement instrument comprised six multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions.

The Test of Personal Intelligence Brief-20 (TOPI-BRIEF-20, Mayer et al. 2019). The abbreviated version of this assessment comprises 20 items, offering a rapid measure of personal intelligence based on abilities. An example item from this test is as follows:

> A person is witty, comical, and amusing. Most likely, he also could be described as:
>   a. Hilarious
>   b. Neurotic
>   c. Intelligent
>   d. Handsome

The Wordsumplus-14 test (Cor et al., 2012). The test utilized in this study consists of a 14-item assessment of verbal intelligence. An example item from this test is as follows:

> ANIMOSITY:
>   a. Hatred
>   b. Animation
>   c. Disobedience
>   d. Diversity
>   e. Friendship.

The Self-Estimated Personal Intelligence Scale (SEPI-16, Mayer et al., 2017). The

scale employed in this study encompasses a self-judgment measure comprising 16 items

designed to assess personal intelligence. An example item from this scale is as follows:

> I read people's intentions well:
>   a. Strongly disagree
>   b. Disagree a little
>   c. Neither agree nor disagree
>   d. Agree a little
>   e. Strongly agree.

The Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C, Spector et al., 2006). This

measure investigates the frequency at which respondents engage in a specific counterproductive

work behavior in their current job. An example item from this measure is as follows:

> Purposely did your work incorrectly:
>   a. Never
>   b. Once or twice
>   c. Once or twice per month
>   d. Once or twice per week
>   e. Every day.

The HEXACO–60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009). The brief personality inventory utilized in this

study evaluates the six dimensions of the HEXACO model of personality structure. Of relevance

to the current study are the subscales of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to

Experience. An example item representing the type of question included in this inventory is as

follows:

> I rarely express my opinions in group meetings:
>   a. Strongly disagree
>   b. Disagree
>   c. Neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
>   d. Agree
>   e. Strongly agree.

Coworker Narrative Coding Sheet (Allen, 2017; see Appendix B). The current study

employed an adapted version of the Sophistication Coding Sheet that had been previously

utilized in related research. This sheet served as a valuable tool for raters to identify variations in the perceived level of sophistication employed by employees when describing their difficult or challenging coworker. Essentially, the raters utilized this sheet to rigorously evaluate and analyze the narrative descriptions provided by participants in response to the Interaction with Difficult or Challenging Employees Survey.

Procedure

The present study employed SONA, an online recruitment tool for participants. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to be at least 18 years of age and currently employed for a minimum of five hours per week. Participants who fully completed the Qualtrics survey were awarded one SONA credit. In addition, participants were given the option to provide comments on the survey as an alternative, non-research activity. However, no participants elected to pursue this alternative option in lieu of earning SONA credit.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

The following results are preliminary and will benefit from further data checking ana analyses. That said, the results here appear to be approximately correct.

Preliminary Analyses

After obtaining the participant responses, it was crucial to assess the inter-rater reliability of the judges' evaluations. This measure evaluates the level of agreement among the judges, indicating the consistency and trustworthiness of the results. The two-way random, average measures intraclass correlation coefficient was deemed appropriate for this analysis. The calculated inter-rater reliability coefficient was .71, which indicates the judges' considerable agreement, indicating that the ratings were reliable and consistent.

To establish scales based on the ratings, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted in R using a maximum likelihood factor method and Oblimin rotation, with up to a five-factor solution tested. The three-factor solution was ultimately selected for our analysis. The factors are attentiveness to traits, balanced perspective, and personality sophistication. All items that were greater than +/-.30 were loaded onto the factor.

It is worth noting that an issue of a Heywood case emerged in factor 3 when incorporating the data from a rater into the analysis. This anomaly persisted across various iterations, including 2, 3, and 4 factor solutions, and was not resolved by altering the rotation or extraction methods. While this issue does not fundamentally affect the dataset, it remains unresolved at present.

Table 1
Three Factor Exploratory Factor Analysis with a ML Extraction and Oblimin Rotation of the Coworker Narrative Coding Sheet

		Three-Factor Solution		
Rating	**Description of Ratings**	**I**	**II**	**III**
1	Made a connection between personality traits and behaviors		.74	
2	Mention personality traits?		.66	
3	Understood their coworker's goal/traits/motives could conflict with one another	.60		
4	Mention what their goals and/or motives may have been in their interaction	.58		
5	Provide a description of a person's positive traits(s) or attribute(s)			1.01
6	Provide a description of a person's negative traits(s) or attribute(s)		.68	
7	Provide a description of a person's negative and positive trait(s) or attribute(s)			.83
8	Chose a constructive coping response; likely to improve the situation			
9	Chose a poor coping response; likely to worsen the situation			
10	Attributes the interaction to something about their coworker		.74	
11	Attributes the interaction to something about the situation	.79		
12	Provides a sophisticated balance between the person and the situation	.74		
13	Express empathy; "feels" for the person and/or the person's situation	.51		.35
14	Demonstrate good understanding of their coworker	.49	.33	
15	Demonstrate a lack of understanding with their coworker			

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables of interest, including means, standard deviations, and reliabilities. The majority of the values fell within the anticipated range

across all scales, with the exception of the TOPI-BRIEF-20 and Wordsumplus-14 reliabilities.

Specifically, the reliability of the TOPI-BRIEF-20 was slightly lower than what had been previously reported, although it remained satisfactory for the purposes of this study (Mayer et al., 2017; Munro, 2022). Similarly, the reliability of the Wordsumplus-14 was somewhat below the typical reported levels but still deemed adequate for the current investigation (Cor et al., 2012; Munro, 2022). Conversely, the reliabilities of the SEPI, Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist, and HEXACO Scales all fell within the expected range.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Measure	n	M	SD	α
TOPI-BRIEF-20	253	.78	.13	.69
SEPI-16	253	2.86	.60	.81
Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist	253	1.20	.21	.85
Wordsumplus-14	253	.62	.16	.59
Coworker Narrative Coding Sheet				
Attentive to Traits	253	37.77	9.70	.75
Balanced Perspective	253	65.76	18.65	.84
Personality Sophistication	253	74.84	16.65	.81
HEXACO-60 Scales				
Agreeableness	253	2.97	.56	.65
Conscientiousness	253	3.16	.49	.70
Openness to Experience	253	2.68	.55	.522

Test of Hypotheses

      Did a factor model capture judges' ability to detect sophistication within ratings?

(**Hypothesis 1**) Table 1 provides compelling evidence that the judges demonstrated an adeptness in identifying nuanced differences not only in participants' levels of sophistication but also in their ability to present a well-rounded perspective of the situation, as well as their attentiveness to personality traits.

Were previous correlational relationships between Test of Personal Intelligence (TOPI) and verbal intelligence replicated? (Hypothesis 2) Table 3 reveals a significant positive correlation between the Test of Personal Intelligence and the Wordsumplus, a measure of verbal intelligence.

Did a Balanced Perspective factor of sophistication ratings negatively correlate with counterproductive work behavior? (Hypothesis 3)

Among the sophistication ratings, Attentiveness to Traits correlated significantly with CWB in the expected direction, but not Balanced Perspective or Personality Sophistication.

Did PI positively correlate with sophistication and negatively with counterproductive work behavior? (Hypothesis 4)

Among the sophistication ratings, Attentiveness to Traits correlated significantly with the Test of Personal Intelligence.

Table 3
Correlations for Measures

Measure	Intelligence Measures		Self-Est. PI	CWB	Attentive	Balanced	Sophistication
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TOPI-BRIEF 20	-						
Wordsumplus-14	.384*	-					
SEPI-16	.040	-.057	-				
CWB	-.071	-.008	-.194	-			
Attentive to Traits	.271*	.079	.013	.140*	-		
Balanced Perspective	.049	.163*	-.016	-.026	.101	-	
Personality Sophistication	.070	.153*	-.036	.027	.399*	.886*	-

Discussion

Overall, the purpose of this study was to replicate and strengthen previous findings from Peters et al., (2021) & Munro (2022) where we examine counterproductive work behavior and the roles that it plays in the student workforce.

The results of the analyses suggest that the raters were able to detect variations in the participants' Attentiveness to Traits, Balanced Perspective, and Personality Sophistication when describing their interactions with difficult coworkers, as evidenced by high levels of interclass correlations. Furthermore, some significant relationships were observed among the variables in the dataset, indicating that personal intelligence may have some impact on student workplace behavior. For instance, the Attentiveness to Traits aspect of the sophistication ratings had have a significant positive correlation with the TOPI and a negative correlation with counterproductive work behavior.

Limitations

The present study acknowledges the limitation that the normal demographics observed at the University of New Hampshire may not be generalizable to the overall demographics of the United States. Moreover, during the course of data analysis, several data issues arose, including incongruence amongst analyses and data structure. Future studies could address these issues by employing more rigorous data screening techniques and data organization methods. Additionally, the present study screened participants based on a minimum of 5 hours of work per week, and future studies could investigate whether increasing this threshold to 10-15+ hours per week would yield different results. Lastly, conducting this research in a real workforce setting could provide valuable insights and enhance the external validity of the study's findings.

Conclusions

The implications of the present study extend beyond the academic realm and offer potential benefits for the workplace. By delving into the construct of personal intelligence, human resource professionals can better equip themselves to make informed decisions in personnel selection, resulting in a more refined hiring process. Additionally, the study findings shed light on potential weaknesses in employee perceptions of their colleagues and provide insight for targeted training interventions.

Moreover, this study contributes to the existing literature on personal intelligence by utilizing an adapted sophistication-rating system, which enhances our understanding of this construct in the workplace. The successful replication of previous findings strengthens the case that personal intelligence is a discernible trait in employees and is associated with sophistication. These findings not only advance our theoretical understanding of personal intelligence, but also have practical implications for the workplace, highlighting the importance of fostering personal intelligence among employees to enhance their overall performance and productivity.

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The contents of this section, presented in the following appendices, have been sourced directly from Miah Munro's honors thesis of 2022. It is important to note that Miah Munro is the exclusive author responsible for the creation of this particular section.

Appendix A. Interaction with Difficult or Challenging Employees Survey

ccinst1 INSTRUCTIONS: Please think of someone at work who can be challenging or difficult to work with. We will ask you several questions about them below, referring to the person as the "target person."

cc1 How long have you worked with this target person?
- o   Less than a month (1)
- o   Between a month and 6 months (2)
- o   6 months to a year (3)
- o   1 to 2 years (4)
- o   More than 2 years (5)

cc2 How often do you interact with this person in person? (Please choose the alternative closest to how often you see the person)
- o   Every day (1)
- o   Every few days (e.g., once or twice a week) (2)
- o   Once or twice a month (3)
- o   Less than once a month (4)

cc3 How often do you interact with this person online? (Please choose the alternative closest to how often you see the person)

- o   Every day (1)
- o   Every few days (e.g., once or twice a week) (2)
- o   Once or twice a month (3)
- o   Less than once a month (4)

ccinst2 Now, please think of one recent episode in particular with the target person that was especially challenging or difficult in terms of dealing with the target person, and that you believe turned out reasonably well.

cc4 Please describe the challenging situation was you faced with the target person in a few sentences or so:

_____

cc5 What, specifically, did you find especially challenging or difficult about the person in this situation?

_____

cc6 What did you do in the situation? How did you respond to the target individual, if you did?

_____

cc7 Why do you think the target individual acted in this way?

_____

cc8 More generally, is there anything you could add about the target individual's personality— their behaviors, traits, and characteristics—to further describe them?

_____

ccinst3 Thinking back to the episode you just described:

cc9 How satisfied were you with the outcome?
- o Strongly dissatisfied (1)
- o Mostly dissatisfied (2)
- o Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)
- o Mostly satisfied (4)
- o Strongly satisfied (5)

cc10 How satisfied do you believe the target person was with the outcome?
- o Strongly dissatisfied (1)
- o Mostly dissatisfied (2)
- o Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)
- o Mostly satisfied (4)
- o Strongly satisfied (5)

cc11 How confident are you about the accuracy of your descriptions and evaluation of this person?
- o Not confident at all about my accuracy (1)
- o Slightly confident about my accuracy (2)
- o Somewhat confident about my accuracy (3)
- o Fairly confident about my accuracy (4)
- o Highly confident about my accuracy (5)

Appendix B. Coworker Narrative Coding Sheet
Specifics of Coworkers Personality

1. To what extent did the person make a connection between personality traits and behaviors (e.g., stubbornness influencing decision-making)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Little			Somewhat			Very Much

2. To what extent did the person mention personality traits (e.g., ambition)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Mention			Somewhat			Clear Mention

3. The person expressed understanding of how a person's goals, traits, or motives could differ/conflict with one another (e.g., a coworker who feels pressure to impress their boss leads to them demonstrating rude behavior).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Little			Somewhat			Very Much

4. The person mentioned what their goals and/or motives may have been in their interaction (e.g., hitting the numbers, impressing their boss).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Mention			Somewhat			Clear Mention

Balance of Viewpoint

5. The person provided a description of a person's positive traits(s) or attribute(s) (e.g., optimistic, passionate).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Little			Somewhat			Very Much

6. The person provided a description of a person's negative traits(s) or attribute(s) (e.g., demanding, disorganized).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Little			Somewhat			Very Much

7. The person provided a balanced description of both a person's negative and positive trait(s) or attribute(s) (e.g., passionate, but demanding).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

Effectiveness of Respondent's coping

8. The person chose a constructive coping response; likely to improve the situation (e.g., active listening, effective communication).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Poor			Neither poor			Constructive
Response			nor constructive			Response
			response			

9. The person chose a poor coping response; likely to worsen the situation (e.g., yelling).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Constructive			Neither poor			Poor
Response			nor constructive			Response
			response			

Responsibility

10. To what extent did this person attribute the interaction to something about their coworker (e.g., traits, motives, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

11. To what extent did this person attribute the interaction to something about the situation (e.g., communication, work responsibilities, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

12. To what extent did this person provide a sophisticated balance between the person and the situation (e.g., easy upbringing influencing snide behavior).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

Empathy

13. The person expressed empathy; "feels" for the person and/or the person's situation.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

Overall impression

14. The person demonstrated very good understanding of their coworker; describes highly plausible connections between the person and the situation (e.g., the impulsive behavior the coworker exhibited led to an incomplete assignment).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much

15. The person demonstrates a lack of understanding with their coworker; misses or incorrectly interprets the person and/or the situation (e.g., misunderstood why the coworker was ignoring work procedures).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very			Somewhat			Very
Little						Much