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The Role of Personality and General Mental Ability in Predicting Performance for New and Experienced Employees

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The Role of Personality and General Mental Ability in Predicting Performance for New and Experienced Employees

Abstract

[Excerpt] Recently, the lead author took his family to a small, family-oriented water park in upstate New York. During the visit, a boy about 15 years old cut his foot while exiting one of the more popular attractions. His injury was fairly severe and required medical attention. The park staff responded promptly and professionally. First aid was rendered, and the injured guest and his family appeared to be quite satisfied with the care they were given. After the injured guest and his family had left, several employees stayed at the scene and cleaned up the area where the incident took place. As the employees were cleaning the area, they were approached by several park guests who asked what had happened. The employees continued to perform their cleaning duties but took the time to answer the questions that were asked. Their responses were accurate, reassuring, and seemed to satisfy everyone's curiosity. As we left the park, we found the general manager, who was thanking all of the departing guests for coming to the park. We complimented him on his staff and their management of the situation. We explained that his employees appeared to have a firm grasp on the technical skills necessary to perform one of the primary functions of their jobs—adhering to safety and sanitation standards—as well as the ability to manage sensitive interactions with guests. The general manager thanked us, and then, without prompting, told us that he looks for employees who can "do the basics first and then keep a smile on their face when things go wrong."

Keywords

hospitality management, hospitality industry, human resource management, employee performance

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The Role of Personality and General Mental Ability in Predicting Performance for New and Experienced Employees

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Lian Shao, and Michael J. Tews

Recently, the lead author took his family to a small, family-oriented water park in upstate New York. During the visit, a boy about 15 years old cut his foot while exiting one of the more popular attractions. His injury was fairly severe and required medical attention. The park staff responded promptly and professionally. First aid was rendered, and the injured guest and his family appeared to be quite satisfied with the care they were given. After the injured guest and his family had left, several employees stayed at the scene and cleaned up the area where the incident took place. As the employees were cleaning the area, they were approached by several park guests who asked what had happened. The employees continued to perform their cleaning duties but took the time to answer the questions that were asked. Their responses were accurate, reassuring, and seemed to satisfy everyone's curiosity. As we left the park, we found the general manager, who was thanking all of the departing guests for coming to the park. We complimented him on his staff and their management of the situation. We explained that his employees appeared to have a firm grasp on the technical skills necessary to perform one of the primary functions of their jobs— adhering to safety and sanitation standards—as well as the ability to manage sensitive interactions with guests. The general manager thanked us, and then, without prompting, told us that he looks for employees who can "do the basics first and then keep a smile on their face when things go wrong."

This example highlights the importance of both ability and personality for achieving quality job performance in the service industry. It can be argued that the most effective employees are those who can learn quickly and execute their responsibilities effectively, while also exercising good judgment when working with others to make decisions and solve problems. The park staff performed both the technical and interpersonal components of their jobs well. Thus, it appears that the park management gave careful consideration and substantial weight to both general mental ability (GMA) and personality when making selection decisions.

"Hire for attitude, train for skill" is a common mantra of many hospitality managers. The general assumption is that the abilities required to perform the technical responsibilities for most jobs are trainable, but attitudinal, dispositional, and related factors necessary for successful performance are not. However, GMA has repeatedly been shown to be a significant predictor of job performance. Furthermore, although it is a commonly held belief that attitudes predict performance better than cognitive ability research has repeatedly shown that GMA is one of the best predictors of job performance available to companies (Rynes, Brown, & Colbert, 2002).¹ As such, GMA should have considerable weight when making selection decisions. Correspondingly, the more appropriate mantra should be "hire for attitude *and* skill."

Many hospitality firms have recognized the need to maintain high standards and utilize a variety of standardized skill and attitudinal assessments in their hiring procedures (e.g., Hillstone Restaurant Group, Loews Hotels, and Wynn Resorts, among others). Unfortunately, the realities of recruiting individuals into entry-level service jobs make it very difficult to maintain selective hiring standards. Given the difficulties in attracting and hiring quality employees, it is tempting to relax selection criteria in order to fill open positions. Many managers have lamented this difficulty, perhaps not wholly in jest exclaiming that "if a job candidate has a pulse, they're hired!" Obviously, following this approach can have dire consequences and will ultimately undermine efforts to maintain operational quality and efficiency. Thus, every effort must be taken to utilize rigorous procedures that can clearly differentiate those who will be successful (i.e., those with the requisite abilities and attitudes) from those who will not.

For most jobs, a wide range of skills and attitudes are important for effective performance. However, individual characteristics, such as GMA and personality traits, have been shown to be effective predictors of individual job performance across a wide range of positions and work settings. Specifically, GMA, which involves the ability to learn and to process information, can dictate how quickly one can acquire the knowledge and skills required to perform the technical requirements of a position; personality traits affect job performance primarily through a person's motivation to perform. As individual ability and motivation are two critical determinants of performance, it is imperative to take concerted efforts to select candidates with both characteristics in order to make a successful hiring decision.

¹ The Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network, O*NET (www.onetcenter.org), shows that even the most basic, entry-level positions require some degree of knowledge, skill, and ability to perform the essential tasks, duties, and responsibilities.

Of course, while accounting for GMA and personality traits is important when making selection decisions, there are broader concerns. Job performance is dynamic and changes over time. For example, while some people can hit the ground running when they assume a new job, generally it takes time to gain a complete understanding of and demonstrate proficiency in one's tasks, duties, and responsibilities. Thus, in the early stages of an employee's job tenure, performance tends to be less than optimal. As individuals gain more knowledge and experience, they become comfortable with their role requirements, and their performance generally improves. As such, the relevance of job-related skills and attitudes, such as GMA and personality traits, may vary as a function of one's tenure on the job. Specifically, we contend that GMA may be more relevant and thus a better predictor of performance during the early stages of employment, whereas personality traits may be more relevant during later stages of employment. If evidence can be shown that these two individual characteristics have differential importance based on job tenure, then priorities can be established so that training and related development efforts are aligned with the differential needs of employees at different stages of their employment. In addition, such differences can be instrumental in helping managers understand the performance requirements of individuals at different stages in their professional development and thus, be able to direct their coaching and mentoring efforts more effectively.

Of course, all else equal, one would prefer to hire the candidate who scores high on GMA and has the right personality for the job. Unfortunately, all else is rarely equal. Therefore, the purpose of our research effort here is to examine the relative importance of GMA and personality traits for job performance among new and experienced line-level employees. We will examine these relationships in two ways. First, we will explore the GMA and personality-performance relationships *across* employment stages (i.e., newcomers versus experienced employees). An implicit assumption in much of the selection research is that the strength of the predictor-criterion relationship will remain constant over the course of the employment relationship; however, as previously noted, this may not necessarily be the case. Several studies have shown that predictor-criterion validities change over time (Fleishman, 1972; Hulin, Henry, & Noon, 1990). Unfortunately, there have been a few efforts to account for the role of time in the prediction of job performance, and the nature of how validity coefficients change over time is still not well understood (Sturman, 2007). Thus, additional research on the stability of validity coefficients appears warranted. We will also examine the GMA and personality-performance relationships *within* employment stages. Research has repeatedly shown that across a wide variety of jobs, GMA is a better

predictor of job performance than personality traits (see Behling, 1998; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).² However, the relative superiority of GMA over personality traits may not necessarily hold when examining the validities of these predictors at different stages of employment (Hulin et al., 1990).

We will begin by discussing the previous research on the predictive validity of GMA and personality traits, with particular emphasis on the role of these two individual characteristics for new versus experienced employees in entry-level jobs (i.e., high consistency, low complexity positions). We will then present the results from our study that compares the impact of these two characteristics for new and experienced employees. And finally, we will offer some insights regarding the use of GMA and personality measures for making selection decisions and managing employee performance.

Previous Research

A number of studies have shown that GMA is an excellent predictor of employee job performance across a wide variety of settings and occupational groups. Previous research has shown that GMA can account for up to one third of the variance in performance ratings for complex, managerial jobs and up to 16% of the variance in performance for less complex, semiskilled positions (see Hunter, 1986; Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Ree & Earles, 1992; Schmitt, Gooding, Noe, & Kirsch, 1984). These results have led some to argue that GMA should be used as the primary basis on which to make selection decisions.

There is also evidence, however, that the relationship between GMA and performance deteriorates over time (Keil & Cortina, 2001). This finding makes intuitive sense. When individuals are new to their jobs, their "attentional resources" are focused on learning the fundamental task requirements and gaining information required to perform their basic job duties—functionality of the property management or point of sale system, safety and sanitation procedures, menu specifications, property layout, and so forth. As new employees gain a more comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities, job-specific development needs are reduced. As such, they depend less on GMA to perform their jobs and instead rely upon individual characteristics, such as their personality, to execute their job requirements. This is not to say that GMA becomes irrelevant; it's just that other factors may have more relevance for job performance as time unfolds and individuals gain proficiency.

In addition to one's stage of employment, the nature of one's tasks, duties, and responsibilities may dictate the extent to which GMA influences performance. Specifically, the degree to which the

² A large-scale meta-analysis comparing 19 different selection methods reported a predictive validity of .51 for GMA, compared to an average validity of .31 for conscientiousness.

tasks, duties, and responsibilities are consistent over time may influence the degree to which task performance becomes automatic and may influence the extent to which GMA and related abilities are more or less predictive of performance (Ackerman 1986, 1987, 1988). Consistent tasks are those that can become automatic, fast, and effortless and where highly accurate performance is possible. In contrast, inconsistent tasks are those where little or no automatic processing development can occur and where successful performance will place continuous "attentional demands" on job incumbents. Thus, if the nature of one's job requires ongoing learning efforts, then GMA may be a constant predictor of performance (due to the continuous demands on one's attentional resources). On the other hand, if a job involves relatively consistent tasks, then GMA will likely be more relevant at the earlier stages of employment but decrease in importance as individuals acquire the knowledge and skills required to perform the job duties. As such, the predictive validity of GMA will decline for jobs with consistent performance requirements, and other abilities or characteristics may become better predictors of performance.

The five-factor model (FFM) of personality defines five basic dimensions of the normal personality. It is by far the most frequently used taxonomy in the studies on personality trait-performance relationship across jobs. The five personality traits include conscientiousness, emotional stability (or neuroticism), extroversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness. In general, personality traits affect job performance through motivation. Research suggests that the validity of personality traits in predicting job performance increases with time because once employees master the needed skills to perform the job tasks the success of more experienced employees is largely determined by their willingness to consistently repeat well-learned behaviors. In the following sections, we will discuss how each Big Five dimension might affect job performance over time.

Conscientiousness is defined as an achievement-striving disposition characterized by a strong sense of purpose and high aspiration levels (McCrae & Costa, 1999). It is not surprising that those who are more achievement-oriented, hardworking, and dependable are likely to be more effective employees. Interestingly, and perhaps contrary to popular belief, conscientiousness has been shown to explain less variance in performance than GMA—about 7% across a wide range of positions (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). One of the reasons for this finding is that conscientiousness may be more relevant at later stages of employment. Indeed, in contrast to GMA, there is some evidence that conscientiousness becomes more predictive of performance at later stages of an employee's tenure (Helmreich, Sawin, & Carsrud, 1986).

Emotional stability is associated with the tendency to be confident, secure, and steady. It is one personality trait that is positively correlated with performance in virtually all jobs. Emotional stability has been linked to job performance through job satisfaction, such that individuals who score high on emotional stability are predisposed to experience positive affects, which, in turn, are contributive to job satisfaction. As employees will always be required to cope with uncertainties to some aspects of the job during their tenure, those with a high level of emotional stability will be less likely to be anxious and depressed, characteristics that usually hinder job performance, and, at the same time, are more likely to interpret uncertainties in a positive way and to handle the changes confidently.

While conscientiousness and emotional stability are correlated with job performance across jobs, extroversion has been shown to be an effective predictor of job performance in occupations where interactions with others are a major job component. Extroverts tend to be sociable, gregarious, assertive, and energetic. They are therefore more likely to get along well with others and seek out relationships and interpersonal interactions. Research suggests that extroverts are better at socializing or initiating contacts with others (e.g., customers, coworkers, and supervisors). As a result, individuals with a higher level of extroversion enjoy interacting with the customer and are more likely to accumulate organizational knowledge and social capital—all of which is valuable to their job performance. The desire to excel relative to others and to strive for achievement, other characteristics linked to extroversion, also explain why extroverts exhibit higher performance levels at later stages of employment when job-related tasks have become fairly routinized; employees lower on extroversion tend to become complacent and stop exerting further efforts to improve their performance by then.

Openness to experience has the highest correlation with the measures of cognitive ability out of the five personality dimensions, as individuals with high openness to experience personality usually display intellectual curiosity, creativity, and flexible thinking, which facilitate learning. Consistently, research shows that openness to experience is positively associated with performance when there is a high demand on job knowledge processing and acquisition. Openness to experience tends to become unrelated to performance when employees have familiarized themselves with job-specific demands. Moreover, openness to experience is associated with such characteristics as adaptability and flexibility, which helps explain why employees with a higher level of openness will perform better when they need to adapt to change under certain job circumstances, such as the transitional employment periods.

Agreeableness is associated with traits such as being kind, altruistic, sympathetic, and eager to help others. Apparently, agreeableness should perform as a valid predictor of job performance when the job involves interpersonal interactions or "getting along" being a critical component for performance.

However, agreeableness turned out to have a weak relationship with job performance. One explanation is that, although agreeableness is basically a socially based personality dimension, as is extroversion, the traits associated with agreeableness, such as being courteous and softhearted, have a smaller impact on job performance than being talkative, active, and assertive—the traits associated with extroversion.

As we are interested in exploring the personality-performance relationship across employment stages (i.e., newcomers versus experienced employees) as well as within employment stages, we need to discuss the role of personality in entry-level jobs (i.e., high consistency and low complexity positions). In general, the degree to which the tasks, duties, and responsibilities are consistent over time may be one of the chief reasons for why personality is a stronger predictor of performance for experienced employees than for newcomers. As previously noted, given the novelty and demands of a new position, individuals tend to focus on learning the technical aspects of their jobs first. In addition, individuals in the early stages of employment may engage in more self-monitoring as they attempt to make sense of their new environment and adjust to their work demands. Accordingly, newcomers may adhere more closely to organizational rules—both formal (e.g., policies and procedures) and informal (e.g., culture)—and thus, conform to more narrowly defined patterns of behavior. As such, they may be somewhat reticent to display their personalities until they become better adjusted and gain a more comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities. That is, learning the key tasks, duties, and responsibilities may dominate one's attentional resources, and thus, restrains new employees from utilizing their personality to any great extent. However, after employees have become socialized and have a clearer understanding of the positional and organizational demands, they may "come out of their shells" and be more likely to use their personality as they perform their job duties. Therefore, personality traits may be more strongly related to performance for experienced employees than for new employees.

Summary

We contend that an individual's stage of employment will have a pronounced influence on the GMA and personality-performance relationships for task-consistent jobs. Specifically, we expect that GMA will be a stronger predictor of performance for newcomers than for experienced workers; whereas personality will be a stronger predictor of performance for experienced employees than for newcomers. Moreover, we expect that personality will function as a stronger predictor of job performance than will GMA over time for entry-level jobs, which involve relatively consistent tasks, duties, and responsibilities and consequently require less information processing. Evidence in support of these propositions will

shed needed light on the role of these individual characteristics for predicting employee performance, as well as establishing priorities for training, development, and managing staff performance.

The Current Study

As part of a research project on selection instrument validation, data for the current study were collected from frontline service employees from 19 units of a company that owns and operates approximately 120 midscale restaurants throughout the United States. The target employees within these restaurants held positions as servers, hosts, and bartenders. These jobs tend to be quite standardized and scripted to ensure service and product consistency, a particularly important concern for multiunit, chain-affiliated restaurant companies.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network, O*NET, the jobs we examined require no previous work-related experience and may involve anywhere from a few days to a few months of training (see Peterson et al., 1999). Moreover, the O*NET specific vocational preparation (SVP) value, defined as the amount of lapsed time required by a typical worker to learn the techniques, acquire information, and develop facilities required for average performance, is over 3 months and up to and including 6 months for these positions—a value that is on the lower end of the SVP scale. Finally, the O*NET summary report makes no mention of changes with regard to task requirements over time. As such, the task requirements for these jobs appear highly consistent.

The GMA and personality data were gathered by a field human resources manager (FHRM) who visited each of the restaurants for 1 or 2 days and administered surveys to the employees who were working during this time. Employee confidentiality was guaranteed both verbally and in writing. Employee performance data were also gathered by the FHRM during the site visits. Performance ratings were obtained from two managers for each employee and then matched with the GMA and personality data. It should be noted that these performance ratings were used for research purposes only and not as a basis for making employment/human resources (HR) decisions (e.g., compensation).

Complete data were obtained from 241 employees (about one third of the total staff in the focal positions in the targeted units). Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were female, 85% were Caucasian, and all were employed part-time. The average age was 25 years, and the average tenure was about 2 years.

Newcomers were operationalized as those employed with the company fewer than 6 months, and experienced employees were operationalized as those employed 6 months or more. Six months was selected as the newcomer ceiling based on the O*NET SVP value previously indicated and interviews

with corporate HR staff who indicated that frontline staff should be fully competent at performing their core job responsibilities by 6 months. Based on organizational records, an employee's stage of employment was identified as either a newcomer (coded 0; $N = 64$) or an experienced employee (coded 1; $N = 177$).

GMA was assessed using the Wonderlic Personnel Test, Form A (Wonderlic, Inc., 2001). The Wonderlic consists of 50 items that ask respondents to make word and numerical comparisons, analyze geometric figures, and solve problems that require mathematic or logic solutions, among others. The test was administered under the standard 12-minute, timed protocol. The five personality traits (i.e., conscientiousness, emotional stability, extroversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness) were assessed by the NEO Five-Factor Personality Inventory, Form S (Costa & McCrae, 1991). The employees rated the extent to which they felt the items generally described themselves. Response choices ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

For measuring job performance, we utilized an 18-item scale developed from analyzing the sponsoring organization's job descriptions, training manuals, and performance appraisals. The items reflect a broad range of technical and interpersonal performance dimensions, including product knowledge, guest relations, and sales expertise, as well as helping others and adhering to health and safety standards. Response choices ranged from (5) excellent to (1) poor. We also controlled for age and gender in our analyses to remove any effects that might be associated with these characteristics.

To analyze the data, we first computed simple correlations to examine the overall GMA and personality-performance relationships. Exhibit 28.1 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables that were examined. For the total sample, the correlation between GMA and performance was .23 ($p < .05$). For the personality traits, conscientiousness and extroversion both predicted performance (r 's of .28 and .22) respectively (both at $p < .05$).

When we compare employees based on their level of on-the-job experience, we can clearly see the role that time plays when determining predictors of performance. Exhibit 28.2a and Exhibit 28.2b list the correlations among the focal variables for the new employee and experienced employee groups, respectively. From these analyses, we see that the correlation between GMA and performance for newcomers was .39 ($p < .01$) but only .14 ($p < .05$) for experienced employees. The correlation between conscientiousness and performance was -.04 (ns) for newcomers, but .34 ($p < .01$) for experienced employees. We also observed a correlation of .24 ($p < .05$) between openness to experience and job performance among new employees yet .00 (ns) among experienced employees. In addition, extroversion was correlated with job performance for both new hires and veteran employees (r 's of .14

and .18, respectively) (both at $p < .05$). The correlation between agreeableness and job performance seemed interesting: a nonsignificant correlation emerged among the group of new employees ($r = -.13$, ns) whereas a significant correlation was shown in the experienced employee group ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). Lastly, the personality trait of neuroticism did not show a significant correlation with job performance, either in the new employee group or in the experienced employee group.

Next, we completed a series of regression analyses to further examine the role of GMA and personality traits in predicting job performance for the total sample (Exhibit 28.3) and for the new employee and experienced employee group separately (Exhibit 28.4).

For the total sample (i.e., including both the new employees and the experienced employees), after controlling for the effects from age and gender, the results (in Step 4) showed that GMA ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) and personality traits, such as conscientiousness ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$), emotional stability ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), and extroversion ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), were significant predictors of job performance when GMA and the five personality traits were considered simultaneously.³

A similar set of regression analyses were completed to examine the proposition that GMA would be a stronger predictor of performance than personality traits for newcomers and conversely, that personality traits would be a stronger predictor of performance than GMA for experienced employees.⁴ Consistent with the correlation results, the regression analyses supported our propositions. For newcomers, GMA was a significant predictor of performance but not personality traits.⁵ The opposite was true for experienced employees.⁶ Therefore, these results demonstrate that GMA and personality traits had different levels of relevance in predicting performance for employees at different stages of employment.

³ For the regression analyses using the total sample (see Exhibit 28.3), control variables (i.e., gender and age) were examined in Step 1. In Step 2, GMA was added in addition to the control variables, and significant effect was found for GMA ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) in predicting job performance. In Step 3, GMA was excluded, and five personality traits were simultaneously included in addition to the control variables, and significant effects were found for conscientiousness ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$), emotional stability ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), extroversion ($p = .15$, $p < .05$), and openness to experience ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$). In Step 4, performance was simultaneously regressed on the control variables, GMA, and five personality traits. The model including only personality traits had a higher R-square (.16) than that with only GMA (.13), and the overall model had the highest R-square (.21).

⁴ To test these propositions, performance was first regressed on the controls, ability, and conscientiousness for each subsample (i.e., new versus experienced employees) to obtain standardized estimates.

⁵ For newcomers, the standardized estimates for GMA was .43 ($p < .01$) and none of the five personality traits was significant (R-squared = .26).

⁶ For experienced employees, the standardized estimate for GMA was 0.17 ($p < .05$), .29 ($p < .01$) for conscientiousness, .15 ($p < .05$) for emotional stability, and .20 ($p < .05$) for extroversion (R-squared = .24).

Exhibit 28.1 Correlations and Summary Statistics

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Gender | 0.32 | 0.47 | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 24.8 | 6.64 | .06 | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Tenure | 2.07 | 2.90 | -.01 | .55 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Job Stage | 0.73 | 0.44 | -.21 | .10 | .37 | — | | | | | | | |
| 5. GMA | 23.24 | 6.40 | .08 | -.01 | -.03 | -.06 | — | | | | | | |
| 6. Conscientiousness | 3.87 | 0.50 | -.02 | .22 | .09 | .04 | .01 | (.82) | | | | | |
| 7. Emotional stability | 2.51 | 0.59 | -.11 | -.17 | -.10 | -.04 | -.08 | -.49 | (.82) | | | | |
| 8. Extroversion | 3.73 | 0.50 | -.10 | .03 | -.02 | .06 | .02 | .39 | -.45 | (.81) | | | |
| 9. Openness to experience | 3.45 | 0.49 | .02 | -.05 | -.09 | .01 | .32 | -.08 | -.16 | .21 | (.72) | | |
| 10. Agreeableness | 3.74 | 0.50 | -.16 | .14 | .03 | -.07 | .08 | .31 | -.38 | .34 | .17 | (.78) | |
| 11. Job task performance | 3.70 | 0.50 | -.07 | .25 | .29 | .14 | .23 | .28 | -.09 | .22 | .07 | .10 | (.95) |

Note: $N = 241$. Correlations greater than .13 (in bold) are significant ($p < .05$). Coefficient alphas are shown along the main diagonal in parentheses () when available. For Gender, Female = 0; Male = 1.

Exhibit 28.2a Correlation Statistics for New Employees

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|----|
| 1. Gender | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | .01 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Tenure | .21 | -.14 | — | | | | | | | |
| 4. GMA | .11 | -.30 | -.05 | — | | | | | | |
| 5. Conscientiousness | -.02 | .36 | -.26 | -.11 | — | | | | | |
| 6. Emotional stability | -.12 | -.27 | .20 | -.21 | -.37 | — | | | | |
| 7. Extroversion | -.10 | .04 | -.22 | .24 | .44 | -.43 | — | | | |
| 8. Openness to experience | .08 | -.23 | .27 | .40 | -.17 | -.11 | .22 | — | | |
| 9. Agreeableness | -.29 | .08 | -.04 | -.02 | .20 | -.24 | .02 | .13 | — | |
| 10. Job task performance | -.03 | -.10 | .11 | .39 | -.04 | .11 | .14 | .24 | -.13 | — |

Note: $N = 64$. Correlations in bold are significant ($p < .05$). For Gender, Female = 0; Male = 1.

Exhibit 28.2b Correlation Statistics for Experienced Employees

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---------------------------|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|----|
| 1. Gender | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | .10 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Tenure | .08 | .60 | — | | | | | | | |
| 4. GMA | .05 | .08 | .00 | — | | | | | | |
| 5. Conscientiousness | .00 | .18 | .09 | .07 | — | | | | | |
| 6. Emotional stability | -.12 | -.15 | -.11 | -.05 | -.52 | — | | | | |
| 7. Extroversion | -.08 | .01 | -.05 | -.06 | .37 | -.46 | — | | | |
| 8. Openness to experience | -.01 | -.01 | -.12 | .27 | -.06 | -.18 | .21 | — | | |
| 9. Agreeableness | -.13 | .17 | .07 | .13 | .35 | -.43 | .48 | .18 | — | |
| 10. Job task performance | -.09 | .32 | .31 | .14 | .34 | -.09 | .18 | .00 | .15 | — |

Note: $N = 177$. Correlations in bold are significant ($p < .05$). For Gender, Female = 0; Male = 1.

Exhibit 28.3 Predicting Employee Performance Ratings

| Variable | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 | Step 4 |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Gender | -0.09 | -0.11 | -0.06 | -0.07 |
| Age | 0.26** | 0.26** | 0.23** | 0.24** |
| GMA | | 0.24** | | 0.24** |
| Conscientiousness | | | 0.26** | 0.24** |
| Emotional stability | | | 0.12* | 0.14* |
| Extroversion | | | 0.15* | 0.17* |
| Openness to experience | | | 0.11* | 0.03 |
| Agreeableness | | | -0.04 | -0.06 |
| R-squared | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.16 | 0.21 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Analyses were based on 231 employees. Analyses above represent standardized regression coefficients.

Implications

This study demonstrates that both GMA and personality traits are important for entry-level jobs in the hospitality industry. The results also show that the degree to which each of these factors may influence performance depends on how long one has been on the job. GMA appears to be the best predictor of job performance among new hires. However, for experienced employees, GMA has less

relevance (especially for the jobs with a high level of consistency and low level of complexity) compared to personality. Thus, it appears that the relative importance of ability (i.e., GMA) and motivation (i.e., personality traits) for predicting job performance will change as employees progress through different job stages.

While it would be nice to be able to select new employees who have high levels of GMA and personality traits, such as conscientiousness, emotional stability, and extroversion, hiring managers may not be afforded this luxury. So if a trade-off is necessary, what should the decision maker do? Not surprisingly, the answer depends on one's specific organizational circumstances. Because of the changing relationships of GMA and personality with job performance, the relative importance of the various predictors depends in part on employee turnover. If, for example, hiring in a seasonal business where turnover is 100% within 6 months, these results suggest that GMA be emphasized in the hiring process. However, as employees exhibit higher tenure, the potential benefits of personality traits increase. In our sample, where tenure averages 2 years, the data suggest that GMA and certain personality traits should be weighted nearly equally in a hiring decision.⁷ In similar jobs but where tenure is expected to exceed 2 years, we would recommend that personality traits be given the greater emphasis.

⁷ The regression coefficients for GMA and conscientiousness are not statistically significantly different from each other.

Exhibit 28.4**Regression Predicting Employee Performance Ratings for Each Subgroup**

| Variable | Newcomers β | Experienced Employees β |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gender | -0.06 | -0.07 |
| Age | -0.08 | 0.27** |
| GMA | 0.43** | 0.17* |
| Conscientiousness | 0.12 | 0.29** |
| Emotional stability | 0.24 | 0.15* |
| Extroversion | 0.11 | 0.20* |
| Openness to experience | 0.14 | -0.02 |
| Agreeableness | -0.15 | -0.02 |
| R-squared | 0.26 | 0.24 |
| Number of employees in group | 62 | 176 |

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Analyses above represent standardized regression coefficients.

Another key implication of the current results is the on-boarding process for new employees. Given the learning demands that are faced by new employees, we recommend that orientation and training programs begin by emphasizing the technical requirements of the job. As the previous example suggests, focusing on "the basics"—such as safety and sanitation procedures—may be a critical first step in developing and realizing successful performance. As individuals learn and become proficient in the technical aspects of their jobs (assuming that employees remain with the firm long enough), developmental attention can then be placed on mastering those aspects of the job that involve the dispositional and attitudinal requirements of work, such as engaging with team members to make decisions, solving guests' problems, and performing related activities. The shift in developmental focus also has implications for coaching and performance management. Managers should be careful not to overwhelm new employees with the aspects of work in which one's personality and attitude may play a crucial role in effective performance. Instead, encouragement and feedback provided at the early employment stage should focus on how well new employees are performing their technical responsibilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if GMA and personality indices are used for making selection, placement, and related HR decisions, it is critical to understand how these variables predict job performance, particularly when time and task requirements are considered. The results from the current study demonstrate that stage of employment has a significant impact on GMA and personality- performance relationships for jobs that involve primarily consistent tasks. GMA is more important when an employee is new to a job and when there is a high cognitive demand on processing new information and learning critical job tasks. Moreover, due to the "honeymoon effect," which exists during employees' first few months on the job, employees are usually highly motivated and tend to exert high levels of effort. As a job is well learned and can be performed with minimal mental effort, the honeymoon effect usually disappears by then, GMA becomes less important, and motivation (i.e., personality traits) will be a better predictor of job performance.

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