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Jennifer N. Perkins

King's University College, jenniferperkins597@gmail.com

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Targeting Extraversion and Introversion in the Workplace

Jennifer N. Perkins*

The purpose of this research was to explore the effect that the environment, specifically workplace culture, can have on the expression of the personality trait of extraversion. Participants were employees at a major Canadian department store which has a workplace culture directed toward active engagement with customers and which appears to reward outgoing behaviours in staff. Participants completed the extraversion section of the Big Five Factor Markers Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1990) in both the workplace environment as well as in their own home. In addition, participants were asked to respond to several open-ended questions regarding their perceived behaviour. It was hypothesized that participants would report a more extraverted personality while at work due to the reinforcers in the workplace culture. Though the data was in the direction of the hypothesis, there was no significant effect to report. Interestingly, participants did not feel represented within the over-arching workplace culture and identified participating in smaller subcultures within the workplace. This lack of identification may explain patterns observed in the quantitative data. This study suggests a need for future research on the interaction between the person, situation, and environment.

There is a lack of literature of long-term and applied studies of personality, especially within an organizational context. This gap in the literature raises questions about the external validity of current personality theories. Walter Mischel's theory of personality changed the focus of personality research from the role of the person to a more comprehensive view of the person and the situation (Mischel, 1968). As personality researchers regularly failed to find significant results when searching for consistencies in human personality, especially in short-term observations, Mischel provided a more inclusive theory of personality that facilitated an understanding of the situational nature of traits (Mischel, 2004). Walter Mischel, along with researcher Yuichi Shoda, proposed that situational demands influence which neural networks are more available and easier to access, which would, in turn, influence behavioural responses. However, Mischel did not deny that there were behavioural consistencies within an individual; he believed that each individual neural network was unique and was regularly altered through experience,

feelings, and thoughts. Mischel proposed that consistencies in an individual's personality would be more accurately identified over a long period of time, by averaging common behavioural responses (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Although Mischel's theory provides a logical explanation of personality and its relationship with neural networks and situational demands, there are few recent studies in this area. This could be due to the cost and time involved in conducting long-term and cross-contextual studies.

The state of current personality research needs to evolve in order to evaluate a broader range of proposed influences on personality. Forty years ago, Mischel suggested that personality researchers were so focused on internal forces that they were not considering external influences. This would explain why many studies could not find significant results pertaining to personality as a consistent entity. One such study that Mischel notes as an example of failure to find direct consistencies between short-term behaviour and personality

*Initially submitted for Psychology 4891E at the University of Western Ontario. For inquiries regarding the article, please email the author at jenniferperkins597@gmail.com.

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traits is Theodore Newcomb's 1929 study at a boys' summer camp. Newcomb observed 51 boys in 21 different situations, recorded their behaviour and indicated if he thought it was exemplary of either introversion or extraversion. After averaging these behaviours over time, he found that the correlation between the observed behaviours and measured personality traits was only 0.14, showing, contrary to the original hypothesis, that personality is generally inconsistent. It is likely that this correlation was low because the observation took place in a single context and was limited to a time period of only two days. Though this is only one example of research, that took place over 80 years ago, more longitudinal and cross-contextual studies are still needed (Mischel, 2004). Older studies, such as Newcomb's, helped researchers to identify a need for redirecting the focus from the individual person to a more comprehensive approach, which included context and consistencies over a long period of time. The nonsignificant findings of older studies were certainly not failures, as they helped to guide future theory development. The availability of new, more innovative ideas and theories creates a need to test their validity.

Consideration of a trait's endurance over time is important when testing these new foundational ideas, and longitudinal studies can reveal trends that occur in an individual's personality over a period of time. These trends can show both consistencies and inconsistencies, which can sometimes be linked to life events. These types of studies help to establish which personality constructs can be enduring and which may decline or increase with age. Longitudinal research has been done examining the stability of personality constructs, such as a study conducted by Soldz and Valliant (1999) which looked at the stability of 25 personality traits over a period of 45 years. Interestingly, the researchers found that only three of the 25 personality traits were consistent: extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness (Soldz & Valliant, 1999) which, notably, are three of the Big Five Personality Traits (Goldberg, 1990). Personality traits were only

measured once at the participants' age of 22 or 23 and again at the age of 67 or 68. Due to the limited number of measurements across participants' lifetime, there is no information about the trends that may have occurred between time one and time two measurements. As a result, there are limitations in identifying trends in personality, demonstrating again the need for further research.

Individuals may show consistency across time, but consistency across situations may be a different matter. The reason many researchers were not finding significant results before the 1960s was because characteristic personality measures were under-developed and under-validated participants' responses were not the same in each context. Situational demands alter how we shape our responses; therefore, further research with attention to the characteristics of the situation is needed. Researchers have examined various domains of personality, including workplace demands. A study conducted by Beaty, Cleveland, and Murphy (2009) focused on the role of expectations in the workplace and corresponding work ethic attitudes. Participants were given articles which described scenarios with either a weak or strong cooperation focus, or a task completion focus, and asked what kind of work ethic they would demonstrate in that specific work environment. Cooperation focus entailed a value of teamwork and helping behaviours involved in the process of work tasks while the task completion focus valued the end results rather than the means of work tasks. The articles either implied or explicitly encouraged each of these focuses, which the researchers described as weak and strong conditions. The findings suggested that when the work ethic was strongly identified in the article, participants would act in accordance with the described work orientation of either cooperation focus or task completion focus. However, when the article weakly described the appropriate work ethic to adopt, individual personality traits became the factor most influential in work ethic orientation. This study demonstrates that when situational demands are obvious, participants are more likely to act in

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accordance with these demands, even if these demands put the participant outside of their usual pattern of behaviour; however, when behaviour demands are more ambiguous, individual personality traits are more of a factor. This study is important because it demonstrates the power of the situation in altering behaviour, although it lacks external validity. Participants merely responded with what they thought they might do in each work environment, but were not asked to enact it within the described environment. Participants could have been responding with answers that they felt were desirable or were most obviously correct. Regardless of these limitations, other studies seem to imply that results found in Beaty et al.'s (2009) study is consistent with reality. For example, Kausel and Slaughter (2011) found that publicizing a need for extraverted employees was an ineffective hiring strategy. Kausel and Slaughter suggested that creating a workplace environment which expressed value in extraverted behaviours may serve in maintaining the occurrence of such behaviours. These two studies suggest that personality is not cross-contextually consistent. However, it can also be argued that these studies lack generalizability, as they are not conducted in a real workplace environment and, therefore, that different results may have been found in an actual workplace. Studies that focus on cross-contextual personality consistency or inconsistency in real life settings are needed to further clarify this ambiguity.

Applications of personality research are broad, but increasingly useful. There are numerous examples of personality research applications in healthcare, specifically mental health, as well as organizational social structures and even career performance. One example of its applications in organizational psychology involves personality trait-targeted recruitment procedures. Some organizations have made the decision to seek out applicants based on their personality types. This proactive tactic of attracting a certain personality type proved more effective than simply selecting the most extraverted applicants. It may seem logical that

an individual who displayed extraverted behaviours in an interview procedure would also display these behaviours in the workplace; however, Kausel and Slaughter (2011) found this to be an incorrect assumption as interviewees tend to act as they believe necessary to get the desired position and return to their usual selves once in the workplace. This type of finding draws attention to the need for a study which questions why this type of recruitment is ineffective and what is necessary to increase desirable personality characteristics in employees. Furthermore, certain employee personality traits have been shown to predict workplace success (e.g. Yao, Chen, & Miao, 2013); personality measures can also predict the success of self-employed small business owners: Owens, Jeral, Kirwan, Lounsbury, Levy, and Gibson (2013) found that sociability, goal setting, and emotional resilience were most predictive of entrepreneurs' success in their businesses. Recruitment procedures and success prediction are only a few examples of the broad range of applications of personality studies. The fact that such studies have proven to be so useful suggests that they should be valued in many fields—that they are instead widely under-utilised, under-valued, and under-reported is troubling.

The application of Mischel and Shoda's (1995) interactionist theory of personality can be particularly useful in the field of organizational psychology. Organizational structures, particularly those focused on customer service, depend on extraverted employees who provide exceptional guest service to buyers. Mischel and Shoda (1995), elaborating on Mischel's earlier work (1968), proposed a cognitive-affective processing model of personality which explains the need to consistently foster a work environment which motivates the desired personality trait. This model suggests the person's situational attributes have an influence on what types of mental representations in the brain are activated. Mischel and Shoda (1995) called these representations cognitive affective units. They include representations of the self, people and

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situations, enduring goals, expectation-beliefs, feeling states, as well as memories of people and past events. The activation of these cognitive affective units results in behavioural tendencies, which are then perceived as individual characteristics. These cognitive affective units are connected to each other, making the path of activation difficult to follow. Mischel and Shoda (1995) noted that it is important to consider the availability of each cognitive affective unit, as well as the accessibility. According to this theory, a workplace which regularly recognizes and rewards extraverted behaviours increases the availability and accessibility of extraverted-themed cognitive affective units in individuals and should therefore cause an increase in extraverted behaviours in their workplace.

Extraversion is one of the Big Five Personality Traits described by McCrae and Costa (1987) and can be defined as a tendency toward assertiveness, sociability, and leadership qualities. Extraversion is directly opposite to introversion, which is a tendency to prefer individual activities and a reserved nature. The two extremes form a continuum, such that an individual may be both extraverted and introverted—varying degrees of each or a balance of the two. A work culture that has adopted extraversion as its main behavioural cue may help to maintain its own culture and increase positive buyer experiences, making this personality theory relevant to organizational social structures. Extraversion, as opposed to introversion, holds value for many businesses. Extraversion has been linked to increased rates of employee well-being (Malkoç, 2011) and increased profitability for businesses that have more extraverted employees (Matzler, Faullant, Renzl, & Leiter, 2005). The outward focus that extraverted persons have may serve well in companies with a customer service imperative.

The main research question this study investigated is whether or not the culture of a workplace can exert a measurable effect on personality in comparison to a baseline measure. Specifically, this study examined the extent to which a workplace that emphasizes and rewards

extraverted behaviours can increase self-reports of extraversion at the workplace in comparison to a measure of personality completed at home. The study detailed here involved measuring personality traits at a place of employment that rewards and expects employee extraversion. These scores of extraversion were then compared to the same participant's personality measures in an at-home environment, which was removed from this work culture. The independent variable was the environment in which participants are completing their personality assessment—whether it was in the workplace or at-home environment. The dependent variable was the scores of extraversion in each environment, measured using the 20 extraversion-focused questions of the Big Five Factor Model, created by Lewis Goldberg (1990). It was hypothesized that scores of extraversion would be significantly higher when measured in the extraverted workplace environment compared to the at-home environment, as extravert-related cognitive affective units would be more accessible and available to participants at work.

Method

Participants

Research participants were employees at a major Canadian department store, each working as store team members, brand team members, guest service attendants, team leads or executive team leads. Participants represented groups of employees who were considered to hold authority and those who were not considered to have authority over other staff members. There were 13 participants in this study, nine of whom identified as female and four of whom identified as male. Participants were all over 18 years of age. Participants were recruited using a voluntary convenience sample. Employees who indicated an interest in participating were randomly assigned to complete the questionnaire at home first or at work first.

Materials

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After completing the consent form, all participants were asked to complete the Demographic Questionnaire, which was used to collect information such as age, gender and level of authority in the workplace (Appendix B).

Following the completion of the Demographic Questionnaire, participants were asked to complete the Big Five Factor Markers (BFFM) (Appendix C). The BFFM (Goldberg, 1990) is a measure of the commonly used Big Five Personality Traits (Goldberg, 1981; McCrae & Costa, 1987). The BFFM is a 100-item scale focusing on the Big Five Personality Traits, but for the purpose of this study, only the Extraversion/Introversion-focused questions were used. The BFFM has an Alpha of .91, indicating a high internal consistency reliability. On the scale, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed to each statement using a seven-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*). Responses were then averaged across subscale questions after adjusting for reverse scored items.

At the end of both BFFM tests, participants were asked to respond to three open-ended questions for the purpose of exploring possible explanations for results found. The full list of open-ended questions can be found in Appendix D. A sample question from this form is: "*Do you think that you are more outgoing at work or at home? Explain.*" Once the participant had completed both of their questionnaires, the Demographic Questionnaire and Open-Ended Questions, they were provided with the debriefing form which provided useful resources for further information on this study and other related research as well as contact information.

A random number generator was used to create the form in the Appendix A, which aided in assigning participants to each category of either home questionnaire first or workplace questionnaire first. It was also used to collect

email addresses and applied a number to each email to keep track of who had completed both of their designated questionnaires.

Procedure

As part of regular work at this organization, employees engage in a group gathering during their shift at work, called a huddle. During these group huddles, employees were provided with information about the study and asked if they would like to participate. As part of the information provided during this meeting and through the informed consent process, employees were assured that this study was a separate entity from their workplace responsibilities and was completely voluntary. Employees interested in participating were asked to read and sign the consent form. All participants were then assigned to either the Work/Home condition or the Home/Work condition through the use of the randomized spreadsheet found in Appendix A. The order in which participants complete the questionnaires was randomly assigned to prevent order effects. All participants first completed the Demographic Questionnaire, regardless of condition (see Appendix B).

Participants assigned to the Work/Home condition filled out the questionnaire right away, omitting any questions they did not feel comfortable answering with the freedom to stop their participation at any time. After they completed the questionnaire, they were given an internet link to the second questionnaire. They were advised to complete the questionnaire after they had returned home and relaxed into their home life. After the completion of the online questionnaire, they were provided with the debriefing form, were advised to approach the researcher if they had any questions or concerns and were then thanked for their participation.

Participants assigned to the Home/Work condition provided their email address and were sent a link to the online questionnaire and instructed to complete it once they had relaxed into their home life. Upon completion of the

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questionnaire they were prompted to disclose the next time would be working. On this date, they met with the researcher after a team huddle and completed the questionnaire again. After completion, the researcher provided a copy of the debriefing form, asked if the participant had any questions or concerns and thanked them for their participation. The researcher discarded participant questionnaires not fully completed.

Results

Quantitative Analyses

This study examined the effect that a work culture could have on the personality construct of extraversion in a company's employees. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the workplace extraversion scores, home extraversion scores and ages of participants. Table 2 shows a boxplot of the means and standard deviations for extraversion scores in each environment.

A mixed model ANOVA was conducted on participants' reported extraversion in the home and work conditions and authority level within the company with age and sex as covariate factors. Participants' scores were generally higher in the workplace condition ($M=73.4$, $SD=12.6$) than in the home condition ($M=70.3$, $SD=9.7$); however, the environment in which questionnaires were completed did not produce a significant effect on extraversion scores ($f(1,8) = 0.23$, $p>0.05 = ns$).

Between subject effects revealed no significant effect of age ($f(1,8) = 0.002$, $p>0.05 = ns$), sex ($f(1,8) = 0.27$, $p>0.05 = ns$) or authority level ($f(2,8) = 0.77$, $p>.05 = ns$).

Qualitative Analyses

Participants were asked to answer three open-ended questions. All 13 participants responded to the questions. Open-ended questions focused on personal reflections on the participants' personality across environments, the perceived degree of influence that work

culture has on individual work performance and their perceived inclusion in workplace culture.

Personal reflections on personality fluctuations. Participants were asked to report whether they were more outgoing at home or at work and to explain why they thought that might be. Six participants reported that they thought they were more outgoing at home and likewise, six participants reported that they thought they were more outgoing at work. One participant believed they were equally outgoing in both environments. This even split between the two environments was not a trend found in the quantitative data as, statistically, only one individual in the sample was found to be more outgoing at home.

Perceived influence on job performance. All participants thought that their work culture had a positive influence on job performance in some way. Many commented on the focus of safety and having an open-door policy, which encourages open communication between team members and upper management. They reported that this culture made them feel more comfortable in their workplace. Almost all participants reported guest service to be the biggest focus of the organization and as such, that the work culture helped to accomplish great guest service. Only one person critiqued the work culture by saying: "... *at times it hinders it [job performance]—too many meetings!*" It seemed that for some individuals, the effort that needed to be put into being extraverted and the upkeep of the extraverted work culture could distract from their other tasks.

Perceived workplace culture applications to one's own role. Seven participants reported that they believed there was an expectation to be outgoing in the workplace. This response came mostly from individuals with a higher authority position, showing that the work culture of extraversion is more pervasive in certain job positions. Other positions that reported similar perceived expectations were those that worked directly with customers. Four participants reported that

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they believed their positions in the company did not require an outgoing personality. One such participant noted: "... *I know if I want to move up in the company, I need to be more outgoing.*" This statement exemplifies employees' awareness of the expectation to be extraverted, as well as how they feel a lack of inclusion within the work culture in their current role.

The open-ended questions revealed that over half of participants reported an inaccurate perception that they were more extraverted at home. Inaccuracy in identifying the fluctuations of one's personality can have implications on real-life emotional responses (Spain, Eaton, & Funder, 2000). All participants reported that they thought their workplace culture has a positive impact on their job performance. This response is interesting in combination with the final finding that participants who were not in a position of authority did not feel that their job position was included in the workplace culture. It seems as though the overall workplace culture is beneficial to employees, as reported, but that it is not entirely inclusive of all job positions. Overall, the open-ended questions revealed important information about the way in which the culture affects personality expression in individuals, in varying degrees.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that participants would self-report higher levels of extraversion when in the workplace environment. This hypothesis was not supported by the results of this study, as no effect was found. A possible explanation for this may be the small sample size. As seen in Table 2, it does appear that on average participants reported higher extraversion scores while completing the questionnaire at work, while indicating lower levels of extraversion at home. Though the relationship was not significant, it appears to align with the proposed hypothesis. A larger sample size may yield a different result, as might a higher completion rate of the online component of this study.

Another possible explanation of this result is the starting point of extraversion in the sample, which may be affected by the recruitment practices of this company. It was previously noted that hiring practices that favour a certain type of person, one who is high in specific personality dimensions, have been found to be ineffective. However, the way in which an occupational position is advertised can make a difference in those who apply (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). The recruitment practices of this company include an honest portrayal of what is needed from its applicants; they seek individuals with outgoing personalities who would enjoy working alongside other teammates with similar attributes. It is this advertisement of their company that may attract more extraverted applicants, which could explain the high self-reported extraversion scores in both the home and workplace settings. Moreover, those responsible for hiring may also explicitly look to recruit, and select, team members who meet what they consider to be the ideal behavioural profile for which the company is looking.

The potential implications of this study are exposed in the open-ended questions, as they revealed a common belief that the work culture demanded an extraverted personality in order to move up in the company. However, many participants reported that their specific and current position did not require an extraverted personality. This could explain the small differences in extraversion scores, as only those motivated to move up in the company would adopt the work culture's standard of extraverted attitudes. Many participants with higher authority levels reported that the work culture of professionalism hindered their ability to be as extraverted as they were at home. Constant store management meetings, which were meant to encourage an outgoing team, tended to get in the way of their duties as an employee. They also reported that extraversion was a requirement of their job position. This could create frustration with the work culture and inadvertently decrease the work culture's effect on extraversion.

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Participants who reported that they believed themselves to be more outgoing at home showed a discrepancy with their extraversion questionnaires. This calls for further research as real-life emotional responses can be predicted by self-reports of extraversion, as found by Spain, Eaton, and Funder (2000) in a study which explored the daily emotional reports of individuals who identified themselves as extraverted and neurotic. It is important to know whether a single general personality question is more accurate at predicting emotional responses than a more detailed personality questionnaire.

This study may also be a reflection of the social tendencies found in this particular occupational setting (Beatty, Cleveland, & Murphy, 2009). When workplace demands are strongly implied, work ethic mimics the demand. It seems that in the current study, the overall workplace culture favours extraversion, although many employees did not feel that extraverted behaviours were necessary in their specific department. This distinguishes a need for a distinction in departmental workplace cultures rather than a reliance on a general, corporation-wide culture.

Workplace culture can have a significant influence on the wellbeing of employees and, therefore, on the productivity of a company (Baptiste, 2008). Workplace well-being can be more effectively achieved through the consideration of the reciprocal relationship between the person, situation and environment. This interaction must be investigated further to maximize its use in the workplace setting. This study emphasizes the need for further research on how the situation influences the demonstration of personality. Future research should focus on the role workplace subcultures have in influencing personality expression, employee awareness of their own personality expression, as well as workplace factors that increase employee well-being.

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Table 1

Means for Home Questionnaire, Work Questionnaire, and Age

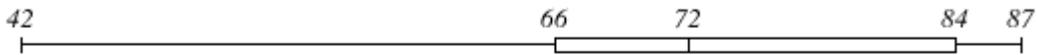
<u>Work Questionnaire</u>	<u>Home Questionnaire</u>	<u>Age</u>
73.4 (12.6)	70.3(9.7)	29.4(10.4)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

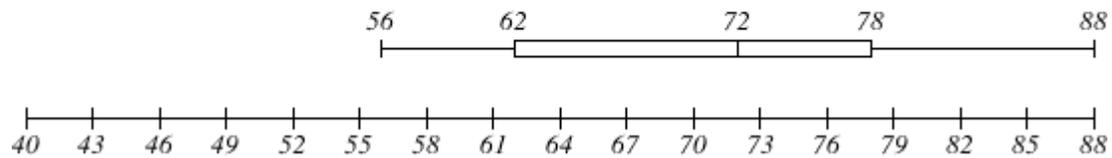
Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Extraversion in the Home and Work Place Settings

Extraversion in the Workplace



Extraversion at Home



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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Gender: _____ Please circle the most accurate description of your
position:

Age: _____

Team member

Team Leader

Executive Team Leader

Other: _____

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Appendix B

Big Five Factor Markers Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which you think the following statements describe you by writing the appropriate number next to each:

1- Strongly agree 2-Agree 3-Neutral 4-Disagree 5-Strongly disagree

I am the life of the party	I am a very private person	I feel comfortable around people	I keep in the background	I know how to captivate people
I find it difficult to approach others	I start conversations	I have little to say	I bottle up my feelings	I don't like to draw attention to myself
I feel at ease with people	I don't talk a lot	I am skilled in handling social situations	I wait for others to lead the way	I take charge
I often feel uncomfortable around people	I make friends easily	I am quiet around strangers	I talk to a lot of different people at parties	I don't mind being the center of attention

