

# The Big Five Model in the Workplace: The Transition From Job Satisfaction to Job Engagement

Elena Pardali, Michael Galanakis  
The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece

Personality in modern organizations plays a significant role in determining behavior, attitudes, and performance. How can empirical models like Big Five Theory be put into practice in the recruitment and selection process? Would it be useful to apply in the workplace? What creates a positive motivating experience at work? How do the personality traits affect the productivity as well as the results in an organization? The above questions are answered in this presented systematic review and different researches and studies are applied in order to provide a holistic spectrum. Nowadays there is a transition from job satisfaction to job engagement pinpointing the importance of the meaning and purpose for organizations with good compensation and benefits. Is working for something that delivers value and has an impact correlated with certain personality traits that are presented in the Big Five Theory Model?

*Keywords:* Big Five Personality Theory, personality, job satisfaction, job performance, job engagement, work attitudes

## Introduction: The Big Five Theory Model

Personality can be referring to behavioral and cognitive patterns that show stability across different situations over time (Yahaza et al., 2011). According to the American Psychological Association, the study of personality focuses on understanding individual differences as well as how the various parts of a person constitute what is considered as whole. Through empirical studies it is demonstrated that personality traits can play a defining role and influence someone's behavior in the workplace (Kozako, Safin, & Rahim, 2013). The Big Five Theory is a comprehensive and empirical model, where personality traits are organized into broad groups, having the potential to predict attitudes and workplace behaviors like employee performance and engagement (Baldoni, 2013). According to Goldberg, who developed the theory and provided a reliable tool in order to measure personality, the five global dimensions of individual differences are: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness (Ackerman, 2017).

Modern organizations, to achieve their goals around boosting productivity and turning the employee experience to human experience, make use of personality tests like the Big Five Model that can benefit recruiters in the hiring and selection collecting the results in order to understand better employee's potential, strengths, and noticeable areas of improvement (Asmus, Florian, Schaninger, & Sikka, 2021).

---

Elena Pardali, Organizational Psychologist, Master's Program in Organizational Psychology, The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece.

Michael Galanakis, Ph.D., Post Doc, Organizational Psychologist, Psychology Professor, Deree, The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece.

Hence, understanding the personality is a priority in the organizational agenda of a company's strategy and job satisfaction as well as job engagement is strictly connected to this.

### **Applying Big Five Theory in the Workplace**

During the previous years, recruiters used to assume that intelligence tests and academic qualifications were defining factors in the recruitment and selection process of new employees. Nowadays, modern organizations tend to use the Big Five Model as a theoretical framework to investigate connections between personality traits and the workplace (Barza & Galanakis, 2022).

In recent years, personality plays an important role in hiring and retaining talent in the company, and how someone performs daily can indicate the underlying traits that make us who we are.

These personality traits are: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness (Ackerman, 2017) and are relevant to organizations because research has shown they have the potential to predict workplace behaviors and attitudes, such as performance and engagement.

Particularly, openness to experience with high levels is a valuable trait for employees since it shows an open-minded person with a growth mindset, sharing creative ideas and opinions who are intellectually curious and can be authentic leaders. Conscientiousness is also a strong indicator of efficiency, organization, reliability, and high levels of responsibility. Moreover, it is a personality trait that is defined in terms of leadership positions and pursuit of goals with determination and forethought. In addition to that, employees with high levels of conscientiousness show great behavioral citizenship and organizational commitment. A person who scores high in this, is someone who works hard and perseveres to finish the job without unresolved tasks (Power & Pluess, 2015).

Continuing with extraversion, is an indicating factor of an employee who is sociable, outgoing, talkative, and friendly. Extraversion in the workplace can be considered as ice breakers and team spirits who are keen on social interactions.

In addition to that, agreeableness is a factor which shows the orientation and interaction with others. Scoring high in agreeableness shows tolerance, contribution, and adaption to the rest of the team (Neal, Yeo, Koy, & Xiao, 2018).

Last but not least, neuroticism is a major personality trait which is associated with negative emotions, thoughts, and cognitions. It is strictly connected with self-esteem and people with high levels of neuroticism are anxious, depressed, and lack positivity.

People with high neuroticism are vulnerable to situations that demand high social skills (Ackerman, 2017). Emotional stability is called the opposite of neuroticism which indicates resilience in the workplace (Power & Pluess, 2015).

The Big Five Model provides an accurate measurement of individual differences, since choosing less than five dimensions makes the assessment process of personality traits more laborious while choosing more than five factors lowers parsimony since the more dimensions are being measured then the traits are intercorrelated and provide more information than needed.

Therefore, the Big Five Theory can be a useful tool in terms of precision and parsimony (Schimmack, Oishi, Furr, & Funder, 2012).

### **Methodology**

In order to accomplish the systematic literature review in terms of the recent contributions of the Big Five

traits at work, an extensive analysis of many scientific publications was conducted. The current study is based on, using secondary research findings regarding the relationship between the Big Five Theory personality traits with employee performance and job satisfaction.

## **Major Findings**

### **Big Five Theory and Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction reflects values and attitudes; hence it is related to personality traits and organizational commitment (Cheung, Graham, & Schiavon, 2022). According to different researches job satisfaction can be considered as a global feeling that someone has for the job and it is stated as an individual's perception and evaluation of a job, influenced by factors that people think that are important to them such as circumstances, values, expectations, and including needs (Yahaza et al., 2011).

Additional researches indicate a complex correlation between negative and positive dispositions as far as the components of job satisfaction. On a broader level, job satisfaction can be considered as an emotional response to a job situation, which means that it cannot be seen but it can be deduced (Nadinloyi et al., 2013). Satisfied employees are people who work for an organization and exceed or meet their expectations. Researches show that job satisfaction relates to someone's evaluations and perceptions of a job and this perception can be explained as being willing and prepared to stay in the industrial profession regardless of the discomfort that may occur since the individual perceives it as a challenge (Yahaza et al., 2011). In addition to that if employees feel they work harder than others in the same department and at the same time receive fewer rewards then they will probably have a negative attitude or a lower motivation toward the coworkers, the upper-management, and work in general. From the opposing side, if employees feel appreciated and they are treated well it is more likely to have positive attitude towards their jobs (Nadinloyi et al., 2013).

Similarly, other researches state that the levels of participation in decision making, ownership, and autonomy are factors of utmost importance in terms of job satisfaction while others posit the view that industrial culture which gives emphasis to recognition, accomplishment, and affiliation is contributing to components of employee's job satisfaction (Yahaza et al., 2013).

Moreover, nowadays employees take claim a job that consists of skill variety. Skill variety means a job that an employee can benefit from using different skills and abilities in his/her everyday work life of prioritizing the agenda of his/her duties. Skill variety is signified up to the extent where there are challenges, interests, and abilities that someone has in the job as well as lack of ambiguity in terms of gray zones as far as how they efficiently and clearly understands the responsibilities of the job (Yahaza et al., 2012).

Additionally, rewards and benefits such as pay, fair promotion policies, and professional development opportunities can play an important role in job satisfaction. The leadership style, and a cooperative and supportive group of coworkers determine high levels of job satisfaction (Nadinloyi et al., 2013). Moreover, according to different empirical data, satisfaction with colleagues and supervisors results in higher productivity and is strictly connected with strong organizational commitment to lowering the turnover, increasing willingness to assist, and building on team management (Nadinloyi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, according to the surveys conducted by Cheung et al. (2022), work environment has positive correlation with job satisfaction.

The Big Five Model has a correlation with all levels of job satisfaction that experience the employees. In addition to that, employees who are satisfied are more likely to stay and flourish in an organization and are

committed to it. Particularly neuroticism or emotional instability is negatively correlated with job satisfaction while conscientiousness agreeableness and extraversion are factors that show a positive correlation between job satisfaction (Yahaza et al., 2011).

According to subjective wellbeing researchers, extraversion and neuroticism are the strongest and most prominent predictors of life satisfaction (Schimmack et al., 2012).

This can be attributed to the social nature of the workplace, which means that a social workplace will be a better match for extraverted employees where there is appropriate stimulus while introverts on the other hand are not that satisfied.

### **Big Five Theory as Indicator of Job Performance: The Shift From Job Satisfaction to Job Engagement**

Contrary to the past, when personality tests had low validity, nowadays personality models like the Big Five Theory are being used in the selection and recruitment process as indicators for predicting job performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

After analysis of the factors that influence a number of crucial work outcomes during the hiring process, such as job-seeking habits, responsiveness to job postings, applicant responses to selection procedures, newcomer adjustment, training results, collaboration, task, and context performance not only at individual but also in a team level, Big Five Model has been a great tool in showing the importance of personality in predicting important work and life outcomes (Hough, Oswald, & Ock, 2015).

In many reviews that are being demonstrated by the researchers, it is indicated that personality is useful in job performance with the most profound dimension being conscientiousness (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014). Through many metanalytic works, it is conclude that this personality dimension plays a significant role in job performance and selection process since the personality of individuals who are characterized as careful, hard workers, and disciplined has been shown to relate much with work performance (Neal et al., 2011).

Their focus and determination often make them ideal employees and good leaders especially in fields of work where there is a great deal of routine. They are also loyal employees and more likely to stay with the business for a long term. In addition, they are ideal for remote work, functionally, independently, and efficiently. Those who score higher in this trait are likely to have higher levels of job-related knowledge as those who are highly conscientious learn more. They're likely to have the aspects of a strong leader. However, they are also more likely to put work first over anything else and are not as likely to adapt to changing situations. They may face issues over learning a complex skill early on because they tend to focus on their performance instead of the learning process, and they are generally not as creative (Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2006).

The other traits have been shown to predict more specific aspects of job performance. For instance, agreeableness and neuroticism predict better performance in jobs where teamwork is involved. However, agreeableness is negatively related to individual proactivity. Openness to experience is positively related to individual proactivity but negatively related to team efficiency (Neal et al., 2011).

The Big Five personality traits were found to be moderators of the association between negative feedback and employee job performance. When extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness grew, the severity of the negative link between negative feedback and work performance decreased (Guo et al., 2017).

The notion of job satisfaction, a relatively passive sensation of low to moderate engagement, has typically received the most emphasis in studies of workers' well-being. The more energizing form of well-being known as

job engagement has just been added to this sort of wellbeing. Positive feelings about their situation are experienced by engaged workers, but their motivation to put effort on a task goes beyond simple satisfaction (Inceoglu & Warr, 2012).

Leiter and Bakker (2010) defined job engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being” (p. 1-9), and the review by Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011) identified a “growing consensus that engagement can be defined in terms of high levels of energy and high levels of involvement in work” (p. 74-88).

Given that job engagement is characterized as being very active and energizing, it can be assumed that personality traits that are furthermore active and energizing will be manifested in engagement.

Therefore, stronger links between job engagement are predicted for the more energized components of extraversion and conscientiousness, namely social potency and achievement orientation.

Additionally, job engagement is associated with three personality factors of the empirical model of the Big Five which are emotional stability from one side and neuroticism from the other, extraversion and conscientiousness.

Findings from researches show that in terms of disposition, employees who are involved in their work tend to be emotionally stable, socially active, and goal-oriented (Inceoglu & Warr, 2012).

Different researches show that standard involvement levels can be raised through people selection processes that concentrate on the detection of emotional stability and activated types of extraversion and conscientiousness, in addition to potential improvements in engagement from enhanced job design.

Additionally, valuable information about those traits can be beneficial to the creation of person-centered task assignments and the establishing of goals that capitalize on each person’s unique talents and abilities in recruitment and selection process.

### **Critical Review: Limitations**

We should always take into consideration that behavior is an interaction between a person’s underlying personality traits and situational variables. The situation plays a major role in how the person reacts and therefore environmental working conditions are indicating factors of job satisfaction.

Personality has complexity and there is a wide spectrum of displayed behaviors across several dimensions. For example, people who are sociable tend to be talkative, but this is not the case for everyone who is characterized as sociable.

One important thing to remember is that personality is an indicator of performance but only up to a level which means that personality models which can be used as tests can play a significant role in the selection and recruitment process but also should be used as supplements to other selection tools like structured interviews or reference checks.

Even though conscientiousness is the predominant Big Five trait across all job types and job levels, most of the jobs nowadays have unique demands and different combinations of personality traits are needed. Moreover, although the Big Five traits are remarkably universal, it is extremely difficult to generalize the findings internationally since personalities differ based on culture, climate, region, religion, and the developmental levels of society and its institutions (Bui, 2017). This is an important factor in order to consider the international differences that appear across different cultures.

Considering the cross-language researches that have been demonstrated, the translation provided in different countries and among different cultures is a great challenge since when translating ideas from their native tongue to English communication gaps may appear which though can have a significant meaning in the interpretation of these results in a hiring or selecting process (John & Srivastava, 1999). Moreover, the Big Five traits are frequently criticized for each trait being overly broad.

The Big Five traits are helpful in terms of giving a broad overview of personality, but additional features are needed to be effective for making predictions. Psychologists may also contend that more than five qualities are necessary to fully describe personality.

Kibeom Lee and Michael Ashton created the HEXACO model (2012), which is built on the Big Five Model. The Big Five Model's basic attributes are still there in HEXACO, but they also include an extra trait called Honesty-Humility, which they define as the degree to which one puts the interests of others before their own (John & Srivastava, 1999).

The HEXACO model covers personality traits that are not adequately represented in the Big Five model, such as social awareness, self-awareness, Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, altruism, humility, fairness, and greed avoidance, even if they are not stated aspects of the model (Hough et al., 2015). Moreover, according to Hough et al. (2015), the Big Five Theory Model is method-bound (e.g., results typically rely on factor analysis models without much consideration of person-centered approaches). Also, this model still lacks individual differences that are considered by many theorists and practitioners to be personality traits and do not accurately reflect relationships between factors (e.g., many facets load on multiple factors) as well as do not reflect or inspire enough creativity.

Additionally, in terms of job satisfaction, there are different dispositional studies that show different and ambiguous results of which traits can best predict job satisfaction.

### **Future Research**

Future researches can help solve these inconsistencies between the empirical model of Big Five personality traits and job satisfaction across different studies.

A proposal for future researchers could be to focus on creating personality traits scales that businesses can use as a screening tool for prospective employees like IQ and EQ testing in order to enhance recruitment process and measure job performance effectively.

Moreover, in order to create more accurate models of the factors that influence behavior, performance, and outcomes in organizational settings, specific personality traits (facets) can be used. Technology plays a significant role in the organizations nowadays and artificial intelligence can be helpful in order to set an algorithm so as to create priori-designed prediction equations that are specific to a given job or set of occupations.

In addition to that, person-centered analyses can have a great impact and be used as a supplement to empirical models like the Big Five personality traits, so as to analyze and comprehend the characteristics of compound personality traits, which are combinations of more specialized personality traits or aspects (Hough et al., 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Universally, people have recognized the significant role of personality in the workplace. Different researches indicate that there are some personality traits that stay stable over time and across situations. In modern days, in

the field of organizational science, empirical models like the Big Five personality model, are defining factors in many workplaces in selection and recruitment process and are being used as a valuable tool that measures job performance, behavior, job engagement, and satisfaction at the team and individual level.

Specific personality traits like conscientiousness and emotional stability are important in terms of job performance but we should take into consideration the individual differences since two people are not the same and everyone has different personality traits. Contextual job performance and tailor-made approaches may be more time-consuming but provide more representative results. While there are many things that can be done to enhance work-life balance, research indicates that the most crucial element of all is the work itself which means giving individuals a sense of belonging, trust, and relationship through their work.

For all employees across the company, firms should shift their attention away from considering the workplace experience in terms of benefits, rewards, or support and instead place an emphasis on job fit, job design, and purpose.

## References

- Ackerman, C. E. (2017). Big five personality traits: The OCEAN model. *Positive Psychology*. Retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com/big-five-personality-theory/>
- American Psychological Association. (2017). Personality. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/personality/>
- Bakker, A. B., Albrecht, S. L., & Leiter, M. P. (2011). Work engagement: Further reflections on the state of play. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 20, 74–88
- Baldoni, J. (2013). Employee engagement does more than boost productivity. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/07/employee-engagement-does-more>
- Barza, A. V., & Galanakis, M. (2022). The big five personality theory and organizational commitment. *Scientific Research*, 13(3), 413-419. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2022.133027>
- Bui, H. (2017). Big five personality traits and job satisfaction: Evidence from a national sample. *Journal of General Management*, 42(3), 21-30. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0306307016687990>
- Cheung, T., Graham, L., & Schiavon, S. (2022). Impacts of life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and the big five personality traits on satisfaction with the indoor environment. *Building and Environment*, 212, 1-25. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2022.108783>
- Guo, Y., Zhang, Y. H., Liao, J. Q., Guo, X. W., Liu, J. T., Xue, X., ... & Zhang, Y. M. (2017). Negative feedback and employee job performance: Moderating role of the big five. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 45(10), 1735-1744. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.6478>
- Hough, L. M., Oswald, F. L., & Ock, J. (2015, April). Beyond the big five: New directions for personality research and practice in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2(1), 183-209. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032414-111441>
- Hurtz, G., & Donovan, J. (2000). Personality and job performance: The big 5 revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, 869-879. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0021-9010.85.6.869>
- Inceoglu, I., & Warr, P. (2012). Personality and job engagement. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 10(4), 177-181. Retrieved from [Warr\\_JPP\\_Personality\\_and\\_Engagement\\_pdf.pdf](#)
- John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999, March 5). The big-five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives. University of California at Berkeley Running Head. Retrieved from <https://pages.uoregon.edu/sanjay/pubs/bigfive.pdf>
- Kibeom Lee & Michael C. Ashton. (2012). The H Factor of Personality. Why Some People are Manipulative, Self-Entitled, Materialistic, and Exploitive—And Why It Matters for Everyone.
- Komm, A., Florian, P., Schaninger, B., & Sikka, S. (2021). The new possible: How HR can help build the organization of the future. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-new-possible-how-hr-can-help-build-the-organization-of-the-future>
- Kozako, N. I. A. M. F., Safin, S. Z., & Rahim, R. A. B. A. (2013). The relationship of big five personality traits on counterproductive work behavior among hotel employees: An explanatory study. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 7, 181-187. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(13\)00233-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(13)00233-5)

- Leiter, M. P., & Bakker, A. B. (2010). Work engagement: An introduction. In A. B. Bakker and M. P. Leiter (Eds.), *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and practice* (pp. 1-9). London and New York: Psychology Press.
- Nadinloyi, K. B., Sadeghi, H., & Hajloo, N. (2013). Relationship between job satisfaction and employees mental health. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84, 293-297. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.554>
- Neal, A., Yeo, G., Koy, A., & Xiao, T. (2011). Predicting the form and direction of work role performance from the big 5 model of personality traits. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(2), 175-192. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.742>
- Power, R. A., & Pluess, M. (2015). Heritability estimates of the big five personality traits based on common genetic variants. *Transl Psychiatry*, 5, e604. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1038/tp.2015.96>
- Sackett, P. R., & Walmsley, P. T. (2014). Which personality attributes are most important in the workplace? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 9(5), 538-551. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1745691614543972>
- Truxillo, D., Bauer, N. T., Campion, M., & Paronto, E. M. (2006). A field study of the role of big five personality in applicant perceptions of selection fairness, self, and the hiring organization. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 14(3), 269-277. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2006.00351.x>
- Ulrich, S., Shigehiro, O., Michael, F. R., & David, F. C. (2004). Personality and life satisfaction: A facet level analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(8), 1062-1075. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0146167204264292>
- Yahaya, A., Yahaya, N., Talib, B. A., Sharifuddin, I., & Norzana, M. N. (2012). The relationship between big five personality with work motivation, competitiveness and job satisfaction. *Elixir International Journal*, 44, 7454-7461.