

Article

Personality, Generalized Self-efficacy & Team Performance: A Study of Rural Development Teams

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The study focused on the relationship between the big five factors of personality (Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience) and generalized perceived self-efficacy with team performance among professionals of non-profit rural development organizations. The results suggest that Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are positively related with team performance and Neuroticism was negatively related with it. Generalized perceived self-efficacy and openness to experience are not related with team performance. Regression analysis results show that the big five factors of personality along with generalized perceived self-efficacy explained 31% of variance in team performance. However, only Extra-version, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness had significant unique contribution to the variance in performance.

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Introduction

Teams in organizations are specialized forms of work-groups which are characterized by strong interdependence, autonomy, and shared responsibilities (Guzzo & Dickson 1996). Work teams are being increasingly used in a diverse range of organizations with positive results (Emery & Barker 2007, Neuman & Wright 1999). Researchers have identified cognitive, motivational, and behavioural processes and emergent states that are essential to the effective performance of teams (Kozlowski & Ilgen 2006). Personalities of team members have been found to have considerable influence on group processes (Barrick et. al. 1998, Frederick et. al. 2005, Suzanne 2007). Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be robust predictors of learning in training and performance in a wide range of situations (Gist 1987, Stajkovic & Luthans 1998). Team member self-efficacy affects decision making in teams (Jeffery et. al 2003), group cohesion (Pillai & Willaims 2004), and outcome expectancy (Stone & Bailey 2007).

Teamwork is necessary for most development programs as it needs multiple skills to manage any development project ranging from healthcare, education or income generation projects.

However, most research on teams focus on industrial and commercial organizations in the developed nations. Following liberalization of the Indian economy, working in teams has become an imperative (Tata & Prasad 2004). It has been argued that to survive in the competitive environment, among other changes, Indians should develop a team based work culture as it is an essential ingredient for higher levels of performance and innovation in organizations (Joshi 2001). Creating high-performing self-managed teams have been identified as a major behavioural training need to fulfil the requirements of Indian organizations in the next fifteen years (Sanghi 2003). However, Gupta (2002) has observed that due to ethnic plurality, importance of hierarchy, perceived in-group and out-group differences, Indians will resist working in teams. Poor teamwork has been identified as a major issue among the staff members in primary healthcare centres in South India (Nichter 2002). Teamwork is necessary for most development programs as it needs multiple skills to manage any development project ranging from healthcare, education or income generation projects. However, the all encompassing heterogeneity (Gupta 2002) and cultural factors (Kumar 2004) has been argued

as a major threat to the self-managed work teams in Indian organizations.

In a significant study of Indian managers Pearson and Chatterjee (2001) found that within a brief period, following the liberalization of Indian economy, managers in India have adopted values of teamwork and other necessary qualities needed to remain competitive in an open market; while subjugating societal qualities reinforced over hundreds of years. Similarly, studies in automobile sector have pointed out that, because of the desire to become world class manufacturers following deregulation in the early 90s, some Indian automobile manufacturers have transformed themselves into world-class organizations by creating a culture of teamwork (Dangayach & Deshmukh 2001, Som 2006). In a case study of a government organization, it was found that excellent self-managed teams were created due to the role played by an extra-ordinary leader (Dwivedi 2006). Effective teamwork in an Indian manufacturing organization had significant impact in reducing wastage (Anand 1993). However, there are only few studies which have focused on teamwork in Indian organizations and all of them were on commercial organizations.

In a developing country like India a large number of not-for-profit organizations are engaged in rural development projects for the amelioration of poverty and these organizations are largely funded on project basis by donor organizations (Mishra et. al. 2005).

People in these organizations work as members of rural development project teams (Duraisingam & Dollard 2005). Interventions in the areas of livelihood, watershed development, health and sanitation, education, and other income generation projects in rural areas have largely been carried out by not-for-profit organizations with or without direct support of other government agencies. Each project based on focus and geographical spread is handled by a team of NGO professionals who bring in their technical and managerial skills to facilitate project implementation and eventually to empower the local community who would ultimately takeover the project from the concerned not-for-profit organization (Bouma et. al. 2007). Despite their overwhelming presence and impact there is a paucity of empirical research on the impact of personal factors on team performance in the not-for-profit sector in India. A search of electronic databases like EBSCO, JSTOR, ABI-INFO and print journals on management and psychology published from India did not yield a single empirical research paper published on the topic.

Self-efficacy & Team Performance

Social cognitive theory posits, among other things, that self-efficacy plays a critical role in the relationship between ability and performance (Bandura 1997). The individual's self-referent thought is a better predictor of performance and it is the critical factor that distinguishes between high and low performers than just the ability to

perform. Three decades of research on self-efficacy beliefs have confirmed that the factors that affect self-efficacy; such as past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological state of arousal, affective arousal, etc. have a direct impact on performance (Stone & Bailey 2007). When work teams are composed of members with high self-efficacy perceptions the team is likely to demonstrate greater level of persistence in the face of obstacles. Self-efficacy behaviours have been found to be a robust predictor of learning in training and performance in a wide range of situations (Gist et. al. 1989, Stajkovic & Luthans 1998). Team member self-efficacy affects decision making in teams (Jeffery et. al. 2003), group cohesion (Pillai & Williams 2004), and outcome expectancy (Stone & Bailey 2007).

Personality Dimensions & Team Performance

The Big five-factor model (Goldberg 1992) has provided a consistent structure for understanding how personality relates to different kinds of behaviour and is used as a framework for research related to team performance (Thoms et. al. 1996). The five factors namely; extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience have been found to be good predictors of important life outcomes (John & Srivastava 1999). Recent developments in the study of group composition effects indicate that personalities of team members have a substantial influence on group processes (Morgeson et.al. 2005). McClure and

Successful teams were characterized by higher levels of general cognitive ability, higher extroversion, higher agreeableness, and lower neuroticism than their unsuccessful counterparts.

Werther (1993) have pointed out that personality of team members is the primary contextual variable which needs to be addressed to create a greater sense of teamwork. Personality dimensions such as conscientiousness and extraversion predicted performance (McClure & Werther 1993). In a multilevel analysis, both at group and individual level Neuman and Wright (1999) found that measures of personality predicted peer ratings of team member performance beyond the measures of job-specific skills and general cognitive ability. Similarly, at the group level of analysis, both agreeableness and conscientiousness predicted supervisor ratings of work team performance (Neuman & Wright 1999). The Big Five-factor has also been investigated in terms of the personality composition of teams. Neuman et. al. (1999) investigated the relationship between work-team personality composition and the job performance of teams. They focused on two distinct aspects of the personality composition of teams - the average level of a given trait within a team, which they referred to as team personality elevation (TPE), and the personality diversity found within a team (TPD). Participants in the study were assessed on a broad range of traits organized around the framework of the Big Five personality

factors. Both TPE and TDP predicted unique variance in ratings of team job performance. TPE of the traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience was positively related with team performance and TPD of extroversion and emotional stability was positively related with team performance

In a study of 45 work teams' relationship between personality traits and team-level outcomes were analyzed. At the individual level, peer ratings of task role behaviour related positively with conscientiousness and negatively with neuroticism and extraversion. Peer ratings of social role behaviour related positively with agreeableness and negatively with openness to experience (Stewart et. al 2005). Personality factors such as extroversion, openness to experience and cognitive ability were predictive of emergent leadership behaviours (Kickul & Neuman 2000). Successful teams were characterized by higher levels of general cognitive ability, higher extroversion, higher agreeableness, and lower neuroticism than their unsuccessful counterparts (Kichuk & Wiesner 1997). Thus, there is growing evidence that the big five personality factors are related to team performance. Both the diversity of team personality composition and the average composition on each dimension have shown significant relationship with performance. However, for the purpose of effective selection of team members it is important that the researchers focus on the dimensions of personality which better predicts team performance. In a

meta-analytic study to estimate the relationships between specified deep-level team composition variables (i.e., personality factors, values, abilities) and team performance; agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, collectivism, and preference for teamwork emerged as strong predictors of team performance in field studies (Suzanne 2007).

Based on the review presented above, the following relationships were hypothesized:

H1: The five broad dimensions of personality (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience) and Self-efficacy will be positively related with performance and Neuroticism will be negatively related with it among the rural development workers in India.

H2: The combined personality dimensions and self-efficacy will significantly affect performance and they will also uniquely contribute positively to performance except Neuroticism which will have a significant negative unique contribution.

Management simulation games provide an opportunity to researchers to test some of the fundamental concepts in the area of group dynamics and team building. However, most such studies focus on MBA students who are yet to experience the world of work and have little or no experience in working in live projects. When experienced

managers or workers participate in such simulated team games/projects they also bring in their experiences of teamwork from the real world of work. This research examines the impact of self-efficacy and the big five dimensions of personality on team performance in short lived self-managed teams.

Participants

The source of data for this study were 28 different team building workshops conducted for the project team members of not-for-profit rural development organizations and a large government rural development project. All the participants had experience of working in teams in different poverty alleviation projects in India. The participants had similar experience in rural development projects. Their major work was organizing village communities in the form of small self-help groups around some income generating, or development activities like health and sanitation, water sharing, etc., through participative planning exercise. All team building workshops were of three-day duration; the participants were undergoing the training to develop skill to work as members of self-managed work teams. In total, 492 rural development professionals in 110 teams participated in the study of which 58 had 4 members each and 52 had 5 members each. About 79% of the participants in the study were males and 21% were females. The age of the participants ranged from 24 years to 51 years ($M = 37.11$ yrs.; $SD = 8.12$ yrs.). Work experience of the part-

icipants ranged from 5 years to 30 years ($M = 10.97$ yrs.; $SD = 5.99$ yrs.). Majority of participants (91%) were college graduates and rest were high school graduates (9%).

Procedure

During the team building workshops the participants were sensitized to team processes and as an experiential exercise they participated in a team task – “house building game”; a simulation exercise developed by the author, which among other things, helps to sensitize the participants to the concept of interdependence, group cohesion, result orientation, importance of planning, etc. The simulation exercise was conducted in the post-lunch session of the second day of the team building workshops. Prior to the conduct of the ‘house building’ exercise the participants underwent sessions on ice-breaking and an introductory lecture on team-building. On the first day of each three-day programme the training groups were divided into groups of either 4 or 5 member teams depending on the total number of participants in each training group they participated on few team-based exercises which included a team-based problem solving exercise, a team-based creativity exercise, and an exercise on creating team mission. These exercises were aimed at building rapport and understanding between team members. By the time they involved themselves in the ‘house building’ exercise they had close interaction with each other for over 8 hours.

House Building Exercise

During the exercise, participating teams planned and executed a simulated house building project; under limited resource conditions. Teams were given detailed information on the task and each team member was given a handout with instructions about planning and execution of the project (Appendix 1). Participants were required to work as a team and construct a model of a house with limited raw materials - a pair of scissors, a self-adhesive tape, two drawing-sheets, and coloured pens. The objective was to construct a model which was both attractive and functional. In all training workshops the ‘house building’ exercise was conducted without a leader and was designed to simulate an intact work team where the members were in a condition of high interdependence, and were required to work as a self-managed team (no formal leader was identified for any group). Each team was allocated about 15-20 minutes to plan for building the house and another 45-60 minutes to execute the plan.

During the exercise, for each group a process observer was appointed. The process observers were to report back to the whole group about the processes that emerged during the execution of the task. The process observers were also required to observe whether the teams followed the instructions or not. Once the house building was completed the process observers were requested to evaluate the houses of all the groups except for which they were observers. They were requested to evaluate the

house on aesthetics and on functionality. Each parameter was rated on a ten point scale ranging from '1' very low to '10' very high. Each team received the average of scores provided by the observers as performance score and thus the teams received a score ranging from 2 to 20 on the house building exercise. The best performing team were congratulated and then observations on processes that took place were made.

Measures

In this study, the Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John and Srivastava (1999) was used. BFI had 44 items which measured five dimensions; such as, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. The scale as a whole and each of the sub-scales have been found to be reliable and it has also been validated against existing larger scales measuring Big Five factors. All items in the BFI scale have short phrases based on the trait adjectives. For example, all items have common stem such as, "I see myself as someone who..." The respondents are requested to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. The scale ranged from '1' strongly disagree to '5' strongly agree. The scale has a very high reliability with a mean alpha of 0.85 (John & Srivastava 1999). In the following a brief description of each dimension is presented.

Extraversion implies an energetic approach toward the social and material world.

Extraversion implies an energetic approach toward the social and material world. People high on this trait often exhibit behaviour full of energy, engaged in physical and mental activities, generate lot of enthusiasm, are assertive (and not aggressive), and display positive emotionality as opposed to negative emotionality of anger and hatred. This dimension was measured with eight items. Few of the items of the measure were, 'I see myself as someone who is talkative', 'I see myself as someone who is full of energy' (Cronbach alpha = 0.75).

Agreeableness includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty.

Agreeableness includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty. People high on agreeableness would exhibit pro-social behaviour, like helping others, and are accommodating in nature. They, at times, go out of their way to help fellow team members and are generally forgiving towards the faults of team members. Few items of the measure were, 'I see myself as someone who is helpful and unselfish with others', 'I see myself as someone who has a forgiving nature', 'I see myself as someone who is considerate and kind to everyone'. There were nine items in this dimension (Cronbach alpha = 0.66).

Conscientiousness refers to socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task and goal-directed behaviour.

Conscientious people, in general, think before acting, they are against immediate gratification of need. They follow norms and rules and often engage in planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks. Conscientious people also display strong self-control and work diligently to attain stated goals. Few of the items were, 'I see myself as someone who does a thorough job', and 'I see myself as someone who is a reliable worker'. This measure consisted of nine items (Cronbach alpha = 0.74).

Neuroticism relates to negative emotionality, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense. People who are high on neuroticism are often depressed and tensed. They also worry a lot. Few of the items were, 'I see myself as someone who worries a lot', 'I see myself as someone who can be tense', 'I see myself as someone who can be moody'. There were eight items in this measure (Cronbach alpha = 0.78).

Openness to Experience relates to originality, curiosity, and aesthetics. People high on openness are deep thinkers and analytical, they are innovative like to toy with varied ideas. Few of the items were; 'I see myself as someone who is inventive', 'I see myself as someone who values artistic, aesthetic experiences', etc. The measure had eight items (Cronbach alpha = 0.73).

General Perceived Self-efficacy Scale was created by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) to assess a general

sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing various kinds of stressful life events. The scale has been used across different countries and has been found to be reliable across cultures. It has a reliability ranging from 0.73 to 0.94 (Schwarzer et. al. 1997, Schwarzer & Jerusalem 1995), such items include: "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough" and "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goal". The participants were requested to indicate the extent to which they agree with statement ranging from strongly disagree '1' to strongly agree '4'. The scale had 10 items (Cronbach alpha = 0.77).

Results

Research on teams will have to essentially focus on teams as units of analysis though the data is generated at the level of individuals. The aggregation was done using mean aggregate function of SPSS. Performance score on house building for each team was added to the data file. To understand the impact of team personality dimensions and team level self-efficacy beliefs on performance, with the team personality dimension scores were used as predictors and performance scores as dependent variable. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the team mean scores of five factors of personality, self-efficacy, and performance were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations, Means, & Standard Deviations of Personality, Self-efficacy, & Performance Scores (N= 110)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Performance							
2. Extraversion	0.26**						
3. Agreeableness	0.41**	0.26**					
4. Conscientiousness	0.38**	-0.09	0.28**				
5. Neuroticism	-0.22**	0.13	0.02	-0.40			
6. Openness	-0.05	0.15	-0.16*	-0.37**	-0.1		
7. Self-Efficacy	0.04	0.10	-0.13	0.10	-0.02	0.42**	
Mean	12.1	22.53	25.2	23.31	24.29	34.78	31.95
Std. Deviation	2.67	2.78	4.23	4.53	4.11	6.34	5.65

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

A perusal of the inter-variable correlations reveal that Extraversion ($r = 0.26$; $p < 0.003$), Agreeableness ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$), and Conscientiousness ($r = 0.38$; $p < 0.001$) were positively related with the performance score and Neuroticism was negatively related with it. Both Openness to Experience and Self-efficacy were not related with the performance score. Extraversion was positively related with Agreeableness ($r = 0.26$; $p < 0.003$). Agreeableness ($r = 0.28$; $p < 0.001$) was positively related with Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was negatively related with Neuroticism ($r = -0.40$; $p < 0.001$) and Openness to Experience ($r = -0.37$; $p < 0.001$). Openness to Experience was positively related with Self-efficacy ($r = 0.42$; $p < 0.001$).

Extraversion and Conscientiousness were positively related with the performance score and Neuroticism was negatively related with it. Both Openness to Experience and Self-efficacy were not related with the performance score.

In the multiple regression analyses the mean scores of all five personality dimensions and Self-efficacy beliefs as predictors of performance scores were used. Results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. The combined mean scores on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Self-efficacy significantly explained 31% of variance on performance scores $F(6,103) = 7.14$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = 0.31$. However, Extraversion ($\beta = 0.22$), Agreeableness ($\beta = 0.29$), and Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.28$) had unique contribution whereas Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, and Self-efficacy did not have any unique contribution (Table 2).

Discussion

The present study tested the impact of personality attributes (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience) and generalized Self-efficacy beliefs on performance of teams. The study reveals that personality dimen-

Table 2: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for Personality & Self-efficacy on Performance Scores

	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Extraversion	0.221	2.505	0.014	0.864	1.157
Agreeableness	0.290	3.146	0.002	0.787	1.271
Conscientiousness	0.276	2.418	0.017	0.515	1.941
Neuroticism	-0.136	-1.400	0.165	0.705	1.418
Openness	0.048	0.437	0.663	0.560	1.784
Self-Efficacy	0.008	0.081	0.935	0.691	1.447

F (6, 103) = 7.714**
R² = 0.31

sions play a significant role in performance even for short-lived self-managed work teams.

The study shows that Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness positively affect performance and Neuroticism which is the opposite of emotional stability negatively affects performance.

The first hypothesis was partially supported by the data. The study shows that Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness positively affect performance and Neuroticism which is the opposite of emotional stability negatively affects performance. These findings are supported by the earlier ones which suggested that successful teams were characterized by higher Extroversion, higher Agreeableness, and lower Neuroticism (Barrick et.al. 1998, Kichuk & Wiesner 1997). A low level of Neuroticism is characterized by relaxed and friendly environment within the work teams. This is a very important aspect in regulating the team dynamics

particularly in short-lived teams which has to deliver results within a stipulated time frame.

However, hypothesized positive relationship between Openness to Experience and Self-efficacy was not supported. This may be because generalized Self-efficacy as a construct is more akin to a trait (Schwarzer et.al. 1997) than the domain specific nature of Self-efficacy beliefs as suggested by Bandura (1996). Furthermore, the type of task may moderate the relationship between performance and Self-efficacy beliefs. In the present research the task was presented in a simulated environment and required relatively simple cognitive and motor skills, which may not have strong relationship with generalized Self-efficacy beliefs. Lack of relationship between Openness to Experience and performance may also be influenced by the task type. It seems that Openness to Experience is more in the realm of innovation and breaking new grounds as opposed to closed mindedness, whereas Conscientiousness is more related to maintaining rules and norms.

The second hypothesis was also supported by the data. However, support for the second part of hypothesis which stated that all personality dimensions and generalized perceived Self-efficacy will make unique contribution was not supported. The present study shows that Agreeableness which essentially refers to the helping, optimistic and sympathetic feelings for others has the greatest contribution to performance. When most team members are high on the trait of Agreeableness perhaps it gives rise to greater degree of amicability among the team members. Conscientiousness which refers to the qualities of self-control, planning and goal setting, and preference for order is an essential attribute in a result oriented situation had the second highest unique contribution. Conscientious people are not only hardworking but also reliable and persevering. Most teams are formed with a view to achieve certain results. When most team members are high on Conscientiousness it is likely that the team would be able to achieve desired goals better than when the team members are low on Conscientiousness. This study supports the existing research on personality performance relationship in team based organizations (e.g. Kickul & Neuman 2000).

For rural development occupation apart from Conscientiousness, both Agreeableness and Extraversion are important.

Deniz et. al. (2007) have observed that apart from Conscientiousness

which has been found to be a powerful predictor of performance, for different occupational groups different sets of personality variables have been found to be useful in predicting job performance. The present study suggests that for rural development occupation apart from Conscientiousness, both Agreeableness and Extraversion are important. This has strong implications for selection of people for teamwork in rural development organizations in India which are largely project based and depend on teamwork. The study throws light on a neglected aspect of selection decision in formation of teams. The study suggests that other things being constant, team members should be high on Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness. At present very few organizations in the rural development sector use personality tests for selection.

One of the major limitations of the study was that performance of teams was measured on a simulated exercise and not actual working conditions. Therefore, the extent to which the findings could be generalized will be restricted. However, the study has empirically demonstrated the importance of personality factors in teamwork in Indian rural development organizations a hitherto neglected area of research in the country. Future studies should focus on actual performance of rural development teams and a multi-method approach should be followed. And instead of just focusing on a single indicator of performance,

multi-dimensional construct of team effectiveness should be used.

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Appendix 1: Instructions for Participants

The Task

You are required to work as a team and construct a three-dimensional model of a house (the ones you see in an architect's office) and not a drawing of a house on a two-dimensional plane. Each group will be provided with a pair of scissors, a self-adhesive tape, two drawing-sheets, and coloured pens to construct the house. You may plan first for the house. For planning, each team may spend about 15-20 minutes and another 45-60 minutes will be given to execute the task. The total time allocated to each group will not exceed 90 minutes.

The Process

Each group will be assigned an observer who does not belong to the group and is an outsider. S/he will not offer any advice or participate in the group process. S/he will observe the group process and report the processes that occurred within the group at the end of the exercise. The group members may well ignore the presence of the external observer.

Evaluation

The house will be evaluated on the basis of functionality and aesthetics.

Functionality means how comfortable you would feel living in the house if it were constructed in real life. Aesthetics means the extent to which the house is appealing to the viewer. Each parameter will be evaluated on a 10 point scale ranging from Very Low '1' to Very High '10' on the parameter. At the end of the exercise, the observers will change role and act as a peer evaluators. The peer evaluators will evaluate all the houses constructed except for the group for which s/he played the role of the observer. The average of the rating given by the peer evaluators will be the team's score.

Instruction Points

- * All team members will have to participate in planning, designing and execution.
- * The team has to arrive at a consensus on decision-making.
- * During the idea generation stage no one will criticize.
- * Team members will have to decide who will do what.
- * Team members shall be accountable to each other.