CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

COMMENTARY

Personality and rater bias: How personality traits influence rater bias and training proficiency

Kassandra Diaz

Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, USA
Email: kdiaz18@ilstu.edu

The focal article by Foster et al. (2024) argued for the importance of understanding what can be attributed to the different sources of variance that affect job performance ratings. Specifically, the authors mentioned that ratee variance is the unbiased component of job performance that we should be trying to predict. Although the ratee variance of performance ratings is important, it is equally as important to investigate the variance of rater performance. The overall variance in job performance ratings is still being impacted by rater main effects, as mentioned in the focal article. One way of helping diminish the variance of rater main effects is to look at the role that personality traits have on potential biases. I argue that personality traits are important factors that must be considered when looking at the variance of rater main effects. The commentary paper will dive into how the rater's personality can help us understand two different aspects.

First, there is an effect of rater personality in understanding rater-related variance in job performance ratings. One way of helping diminish the variance of rater main effects is to look at the role of personality traits. Previous research (e.g., Harari et al., 2015) shows that rater personality traits explain a considerable portion of the variance in job performance ratings. This commentary focuses on explaining how personality traits could be contributing to the variance of rater main effects and how organizations can utilize personality tests to minimize rater bias.

Second, the commentary paper will focus on how rater personality affects rater training proficiency. Previous claims have argued that although rater bias training has good intentions, it can be short lived, and organizations are not aware of the true success after the training has been conducted. I argue that personality traits play an intricate role when assessing the proficiency of rater bias training. In understanding which personality traits are more likely to have higher ratings of training proficiency, we can adapt how rater bias training is presented and delivered to execute high ratings of training success.

Rater personality and performance ratings

The focal article claimed that there is a good amount of variance in job performance ratings that is not explained by the ratee characteristics. I argue that the personality traits of raters can help explain the large portion of variance in job performance. A meta-analysis of rater's Big Five personality traits and job performance ratings by Harari et al. (2015) found that the Big Five personality traits accounted for 6%–22% of the variance in job performance ratings. Cheng et al. (2017) reported that the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were related to leniency bias in performance ratings. They found that individuals who were extroverted and agreeable were more likely to give a generous assessment than those who were not. Komarraju et al. (2011) described how individuals who are high in agreeableness exhibit characteristics such as cooperation and sympathy. This can lead to the potential bias of highly

agreeable raters assimilating with a high-performing individual who exhibits the same qualities. Bernardin et al. (2016) found similar results that indicated raters' levels of agreeableness and mean rating levels were significant in predicting rating accuracy. This personality trait was found to have higher levels of rating inaccuracy. A previous study done by Bernardin et al. (2000) similarly found that rater leniency and rater inaccuracy were highest when the raters rated highly in agreeableness. Knowing the relationship between rater personality and rater biases can help organizations identify the raters who are more likely to provide biased responses. Organizations can utilize these previous findings by implementing a personality test for the employees that will be rating other employees on their respective job performance. When deciding what employees should conduct job performance evaluations, organizations can utilize previous findings on what personality traits are more likely to rate inaccurately. By analyzing the results of the personality test that the employees would undergo, organizations could utilize this information when assessing the best fit for conducting job performance evaluations. The findings could also help alleviate some of the stress that organizations face when attempting to minimize rater bias effects by controlling for personality. These findings do not mean that organizations should not allow highly agreeable individuals to conduct job performance ratings but rather inform and understand the relationship between rater personality and rater bias. Overall, the personality traits of raters can help shed light on what is contributing to the large variance of job performance ratings.

Rater personality and training proficiency

Examining the personality traits of a rater could help organizations understand what employees are more likely to go through rater bias training successfully. Barrick and Mount (1991) found that the personality trait of openness to experience was a valid predictor of the criterion category of training proficiency. Mount and Barrick (1998) reported similar findings that the personality traits of openness to experience and extraversion were valid predictors of training success. These results indicate that employees with high levels of openness to experience or extraversion were more likely to learn in training sessions. Woods et al. (2016) reported that individuals with higher levels of conscientiousness were associated with self-reported learning after taking training and 1 month post training. These results indicate that highly conscientious individuals may feel a greater urge to learn the training material because they embody characteristics such as self-discipline and responsibility. Both studies support the idea that personality relates to training performance. An issue mentioned in the focal article is that although there is good intention in creating training material focused on minimizing the rater main effects, it can be short lived with individuals not processing and applying the material learned. I argue that by understanding what personality traits are associated with high ratings of training success, organizations can better update and deliver training material to employees. Laible et al. (2020) reported that the personality traits of openness to experience and extraversion have a positive relationship with further training participation. Previous literature has found that not only are certain personality traits associated with higher training proficiency but also with the application of the learned material. Organizations must understand the personality traits of potential raters because this can help presenters deliver the training more effectively. If the individual who is delivering the rater bias training does not know who their audience is, it can have an impact on the success of the training.

Conclusion

Overall, there is still a need to explore what other factors could be contributing to the overall rater variance of job performance ratings. The commentary argued for the idea that personality traits contribute to the large portion of rater variance in performance ratings. Additionally, I argued how personality traits can affect rater bias training proficiency. Researchers and organizations

strive to minimize rater bias effects and overall enhance the process of job performance evaluation. Organizations that implement ineffective rater bias training face several consequences. These consequences may include a loss of resources such as revenue and time needed for training purposes. In conclusion, personality traits play an intricate role in understanding the variability in job performance ratings.

Competing interests. None.

References

Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, **44**(1), 1–26.

Bernardin, H. J., Thomason, S., Ronald Buckley, M., & Kane, J. S. (2016). Rater rating-level bias and accuracy in performance appraisals: The impact of rater personality, performance management competence, and rater accountability. *Human Resource Management*, **55**(2), 321–340.

Bernardin, H. J., Villanova, P., & Cook, D. (2000). Conscientiousness and agreeableness as predictors of rating leniency. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **85**(2), 232–236.

Cheng, K. H., Hui, C. H., & Cascio, W. F. (2017). Leniency bias in performance ratings: The big five correlates. *Frontiers in Psychology*, **8**, 521.

Foster, J., Steel, P., Harms, P., O'Neill, T., & Wood, D. (2024). Selection tests work better than we think they do and have for years. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, **17**(3), 269–282.

Harari, M. B., Rudolph, C. W., & Laginess, A. J. (2015). Does rater personality matter? A meta analysis of rater Big Five-performance rating relationships. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, **88**(2), 387–414.

Komarraju, M., Karau, S. J., Schmeck, R. R., & Avdic, A. (2011). The Big Five personality traits, learning styles, and academic achievement. *Personality and individual differences*, **51**(4), 472–477.

Laible, M. C., Anger, S., & Baumann, M. (2020). Personality traits and further training. *Frontiers in Psychology*, **11**, 510537.

Mount, M. K., & Barrick, M. R. (1998). Five reasons why the, big five, article has been frequently cited: The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, **51**(4), 849–857.

Woods, S. A., Patterson, F. C., Koczwara, A., & Sofat, J. A. (2016). The value of being a conscientious learner: Examining the effects of the big five personality traits on self-reported learning from training. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, **28**(7), 424–434.