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Does team-level conscientiousness predict team performance? The role of task context and group process

Previous studies linking conscientiousness to job performance have focused primarily on individual performance, neglecting organizations' burgeoning use of teams. While previous literature links high conscientiousness with greater productivity, many group tasks are unstructured and creative in nature. These circumstances may not be optimal for highly conscientious people who excel when given explicit rules, and when performance is closely tied to effort. In this experiment we explore the relationship between team conscientiousness, task context, and task instructions. Questionnaires assessing conscientiousness were distributed to all introductory psychology students. High and low conscientiousness groups were composed of individuals who scored 1 standard deviation or more above or below the mean. The "mundane" word-find task and "creative" marketing task comprised the second independent variable. The order of presentation of these tasks is counterbalanced. The third independent variable is manipulated by giving either linear task instructions (e.g., had to find words or design marketing plans in order, could not go backwards) or flexible instructions (e.g., any order, can go backwards). We have collected data for 58 groups. Group performance for the mundane task will be quantified by the number of words the groups are able to locate; while independent raters will evaluate the marketing task performance. We will use ANOVA to analyze the results. We predict that high conscientiousness groups will outperform low conscientiousness groups on the mundane task, but not the creative task. In addition, we expect that this pattern of results will be moderated by task instructions, such that high conscientiousness groups will do particularly well given linear task instructions, while low conscientiousness groups will do well with flexible instructions. These results would help organizations understand the scope and boundaries of the positive conscientiousness-performance relationship, particularly with regard to the creative and unstructured tasks often assigned to groups in organizational contexts.

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