Does Personality Matter to Performance?

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Personality concerns who we are, what we do, and why we do what we do. Given its relevance to performance, personality has been widely used as a selection tool among practitioners. According to the 2011 poll from the Society for Human Resource Management, at least about 20% of the US firms use a personality test in their hiring or promotion process. As such, it is not surprising that personality has been extensively studied as one of the important trait-based predictors of employee performance among researchers. However, about a decade ago, a group of current and former major journal editors in OB/HR (Morgeson et al., 2007) (re)started questioning the validity (the correlation of personality with employee performance) and utility (strategic and financial values) of personality and seriously argued that “self-report personality tests should probably not be used for personnel selection” (p. 720). This was very sensational to both practitioners and researchers, and some researchers strongly reacted to this criticism by pointing out existing counter-evidence and tried to defend their position. However, this criticism in fact helped me (who had no stakes in this debate) to (re)think of some of the basic assumptions of applied personality research in terms of all parts of the personality-performance equation (e.g., measurement of the predictor and criterion measures, linearity, level of analysis, etc.). In this talk, I will introduce you to my major research program (with select research articles and work in progress I have conducted) along this line and make a compelling case that personality matters to performance more than we previously thought.