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PERSONALITY TRAITS AND PERFECTIONISM AS PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES

ABSTRACT: The aim of the research was to determine whether personality traits and perfectionism are significant in predicting the attitude towards organisational change. The research sample consisted of 336 employees with a mean age 35.29 (SD = 11.44). The instruments used were The Big Five Plus Two Personality Inventory (BF + 2), the Attitudes Towards Organisational Change Scale (OC) and the Burns Perfectionism Scale. Regression analysis results indicate that high scores on extraversion, openness, and positive valence correlate with initiating change among employees. High scores on neuroticism and positive valence, and low scores on extraversion and openness predict a negative attitude towards organisational changes. High scores on extraversion and openness correlate with employee flexibility. High scores on perfectionism predict both change initiation and employee flexibility.

KEY WORDS: personality traits, attitude towards organisational change, perfectionism.

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1. Introduction

In the business world of today, organisations face various changes happening every day both at the global and local level. One of the main goals of every organisation is to be successful and productive, and organisational change is instrumental in achieving that goal. An essential prerequisite for employees in organisations to recognize and respond to change in a timely manner is to have a positive attitude towards change and to perceive it as necessary and desirable. According to Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen (1986), coping with organisational change is defined as an individual's cognitive and behavioural effort to manage the internal and external demands of the exchange between people and environment, which at times may exceed human capacities. Every change can disrupt the already learned and established way of functioning and threatens one of the basic human needs – the need for security. According to Suvajdžić and Vujić (2015), the primary cause of resistance to change is loss of control, because employees believe that control over their life situations has been taken away by the external imposition of change. This insight creates further opportunities to explore and apply the results of psychological research in the field of organisational change.

2. Personality Traits

Personality traits as behavioural descriptors are highly instrumental for describing the individual behavioural characteristics. In line with the lexical approach to the study of personality structure, three psycholexical studies were carried out in Serbia: Smederevac, 2000; Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović, 2010; DeRaad, Smederevac, Čolović & Mitrović, 2017, quoted in Smederevac & Mitrović, 2018. The outcome of these studies was the construction of The Big Five Plus Two Personality Model (Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović, 2010). The Big Five Plus Two Personality Model consists of seven basic dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, Aggressiveness, Positive Valence, and Negative Valence. According to Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović (2010), neuroticism refers to an individual's tendency to experience negative emotions, such as sadness, worry, fear or anxiety.

The differences on this dimension can range from excessive emotional reactivity to marked non-reactivity, i.e., exhibiting impassiveness and stability in stressful situations. Extraversion is described as the degree of emotional reactivity to the environment. The differences range from high reactivity typical for introverts to low reactivity typical for extraverts. Conscientiousness can be described as an attitude towards obligations, willpower, perseverance, and self-discipline. The differences on this dimension can range from excessive activity and commitment to obligations, typical for workaholics, to marked inactivity, typical for inert, passive people. Aggressiveness describes individual differences in the frequency, intensity, and control of aggressive impulses, intensity and manifestation of aggressive reactions, and provocative factors. Openness to experience involves the pursuit of progress and improvement, intellectual curiosity, a wide range of interests, and openness to change. Positive valence, as a dimension of self-evaluation, refers to high self-confidence and willingness to openly express an opinion about self-worth. The differences on this dimension can range from a distinct self-experience of superiority, egocentricity, and narcissism to a lack of self-esteem, condescension, and self-deprecation. Negative valence refers to the perception of oneself as a bad person and a tendency to manipulation.

3. Attitude Towards Organisational Change

Organisational change has been examined in different contexts. Huse & Cummings (1985) discuss organisational change focusing on the organisation undergoing change, while Armenakis, Harris, & Mosholder (1993) discuss readiness for change focusing on the individual, i.e., their attitudes and intentions, as well as the necessity and extent of change, and organisational capacities to implement change.

When introducing changes, every organisation encounters three types of employees: those who are flexible, easily adaptable, and quickly accepting of the changes, those initially resist, due to a lack of self-confidence and doubts about their knowledge and experience, and those who find it difficult to adapt to changes and exhibit considerable resistance to organisational change (Tenjović, 2015). Huczynski & Buchanan (2004)

argue that resistance to change is seen as the inability or unwillingness to discuss or to accept changes that are considered harmful or threatening to the individual. The reasons that lead to resistance to change are numerous and complex. According to Stolnik (2016), organisational change is largely determined by its nature and mode of implementation. Stolnik further stresses the importance of different contextual factors in each organisation, which influence the process of implementing organisational change. More precisely, the resistance of individual members of the organisation to a specific change will depend on how acceptable and desirable the employees find its essence and mode of implementation. Ljubičić (2018) believes that people's natural reaction is to feel resistance to change, especially when they feel that change threatens them in any way. Oreg (2003) observed that there were six sources of resistance that appeared to derive from an individual's personality: cognitive rigidity, lack of psychological resilience, intolerance to the adjustment period involved in change, preference for a low level of stimulation, and reluctance to give up old habits. According to Simonović & Damnjanović (2011), most people are afraid of change, because every change brings uncertainty and risk. Therefore, employees will inevitably oppose any attempt to introduce changes, whether related to work process, hierarchy, economic status, or the necessity to master new knowledge and skills. This reaction is expected, because any novelty or change is perceived as uncertainty (Janićijević, 2006).

4. Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a tendency to achieve highly demanding goals. Perfectionism is considered desirable or acceptable when an individual is content to pursue perfection but is aware of their own abilities. When an individual has unrealistically high expectations and is often dissatisfied with what they achieved, perfectionism becomes a problem (Hill, Crull, & Trullington, 1997, according to Hamacheh, 1978). Shafran, Cooper & Fairburn (2002) offered a new definition of unidimensional perfectionism. They argued that perfectionist tendencies appear in individuals who evaluate their personal worth depending on success in a particular activity. Striving to preserve their self-esteem and sense of personal

worth, these individuals rigidly persist in their efforts to achieve their goals, regardless of consequences. If they fail, perfectionists are prone to extreme self-criticism and self-deprecation. If they succeed, they re-evaluate their standards and consider the set goals insufficiently demanding (Shafran et al., 2002). In previous research, perfectionism has been correlated to both personal and social dysfunctions, such as low self-confidence, low achievement, low life satisfaction, marital and family problems, pessimism, anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicidal ideation. Flett & Hewitt (2002) believe that perfectionism develops under the influence of external factors and individual personality traits. Current life circumstances that further encourage the development of perfectionism must be considered as well. Originally, perfectionism was viewed as a one-dimensional construct.

Authors such as Hamachek (1978) and Roedell (1984) believed that perfectionism can provide the driving force for great achievements and brilliant creations. On the other hand, later research (Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1999) has demonstrated the correlation between perfectionism and negative outcomes, which can limit and prevent achievement. Perfectionism in that case ceases to be a healthy aspiration and becomes a neurotic tendency. Hayward & Arthur (1998) claim that neurotic perfectionists tend to focus on and obsess over their shortcomings and past failures, equating their personal value with successful accomplishments. Đurišić-Bojanović & Savković (2010) observed that readiness for change among employees is significantly positively correlated to acceptance of plurality of ideas and ego strength, and negatively correlated to dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity. Vakola (2013) found that there is a positive correlation between extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness with affirmative attitudes toward organisational change, while neuroticism is negatively correlated with affirmative attitudes toward organisational change. Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015) studied attitudes towards organisational change in Serbia. They found that the most significant predictors of a positive attitude towards organisational change are high scores on openness and positive valence and low scores on extraversion.

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Research Topic

In the present research we examine the relationship between individual dispositional traits and perfectionism, on the one hand, and resistance to organisational change, on the other. The relationship will be examined in the context of socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education, employment in the private or state sector, and length of service).

5.2. Variables and Measures

The basic personality dimensions were defined in accordance with the Big Five Plus Two seven-factor personality model (Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović, 2010), which encompasses seven basic dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Aggressiveness, Positive Valence, and Negative Valence. The Big Five Plus Two (BF + 2) inventory was used to tap the basic personality dimensions (Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović, 2010). It consists of 70 items equally distributed in seven broad personality dimensions (each dimension consisting of 10 items). Many empirical studies have shown that the scale reliability is high, ranging from 0.81 to 0.92 (Smederevac, Mitrović & Čolović, 2010). Cronbach's alpha ranges from .70 to .84 in our sample.

Attitudes Towards Organisational Change Scale (OC; Suvajdžić & Vujić, 2015). To examine the attitude towards organisational changes, we used the Attitudes Towards Organisational Change, an improved and modified version of the 2013 scale (Suvajdžić & Vujić, 2015). The scale consists of 15 items equally distributed in three dimensions: Initiating change, Negative attitude towards organisational change and Employee flexibility, with answers formatted as a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the subscales ranges from .63 to .78, and in our sample from .69 to .77 Cronbach's alpha.

Perfectionism is a tendency to achieve or aspire to very high standards. The Burns Perfectionism Scale (Burns, 1980, according to Cal-

houn & Accocela, 1990) was used to measure perfectionism. The scale contains 10 items and measures self-directed perfectionism. The author of the scale reports a reliability of .78 Cronbach's alpha, while in our sample the reliability is .75 Cronbach's alpha.

Sociodemographic variables include data on respondents' gender and age (continuous variable), level of education (categorical variable with five categories), employment (categorical variable with two categories - state or private sector), length of service (continuous variable).

5.3. Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the literature review and in relation to the research aim, we proposed several hypotheses:

- Personality traits can be used to predict the attitude towards organisational change. This hypothesis is based on the personality model that explains the processes and mechanisms underlying personality and based on the results of research conducted by the researchers in Serbia (Suvajdžić & Vujić, 2015) and abroad (Rogers, Miller & Judge; 1999; Vakola, 2013).
- Perfectionism can be used to predict Initiating change, Negative attitude towards organisational change, and Employee flexibility as an attitude towards organisational change. This hypothesis is based on the results of research conducted by Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015).

5.4. Sample and Data Processing

The research was anonymous and was conducted on a purposive sample of 336 employees in Serbian state- and private-owned organisations from May to December 2019. Out of the total number of respondents, 189 were male and 147 were female. The average age of the respondents was 35.29 (SD = 11.44). The largest percentage of respondents had upper secondary education (47.5%), then bachelor's or

equivalent level (39.9%). There were significantly fewer respondents with primary education, master's or equivalent level, specialisation, and doctor or equivalent level. 54.8% of respondents are employed in the private sector, and 45.2% in the public sector. The highest percentage of respondents (43.4%) has up to five years of work experience, then 25.5% of respondents have five to ten years of work experience, while the number of respondents with more than ten years of experience is considerably lower. The data were processed in SPSS 17, using the correlation and multiple regression analysis tools.

6. Results

A multiple regression model was used to assess the predictive power of personality traits and perfectionism in predicting attitudes towards organisational changes. Personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Aggressiveness, Openness to Experience, Positive Valence, and Negative Valence) and Perfectionism were included in the regression analysis model as predictors, and the scores on the measured dimensions of attitude towards organisational change were treated as criterion variables.

6.1. Personality Traits as Predictors of Attitude Towards Organisational Change

Initiating change. Table 1 shows the results of the regression analysis for which the criterion variable is Initiating change as a dimension of the attitude towards organisational change, and the predictor variables are personality traits. Personality traits explain 33.1% of the variance in Initiating change. Extraversion ($\beta = .279$, $p < 0.05$), Openness ($\beta = .289$, $p < 0.05$) and Positive valence ($\beta = .193$, $p < 0.05$) were revealed as significant predictors.

Table 1

Linear Regression Analysis – Personality Traits as Predictors of Initiating Change

	R	R ²	F	B	Sig
Personality Traits	.331	.316	22.192		
Neuroticism				.007	.903
Extraversion				.279	.000
Openness				.289	.000
Aggressiveness				-.013	.835
Conscientiousness				-.072	.208
Positive Valence				.193	.002
Negative Valence				-.022	.713

p < 0,05 *p* < 0,01 *p* < 0,001

Negative attitude towards organisational change. Personality traits account for 23.7% of the variance of the negative attitude towards change, and the following stand out as significant predictors: Neuroticism ($\beta = .240$, $p < 0.01$), Extraversion with a negative β coefficient ($\beta = -.223$, $p < 0.01$), Openness with a negative β coefficient ($\beta = -.258$, $p < 0.01$) and Positive Valence ($\beta = .145$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 2

Linear Regression Analysis – Personality Traits as Predictors of Negative Attitude Towards Organisational Change

	R	R ²	F	B	Sig
Personality Traits	.237	.220	13.923		
Neuroticism				.240	.000
Extraversion				-.223	.000
Openness				-.258	.000
Aggressiveness				.087	.199
Conscientiousness				.113	.065
Positive Valence				.145	.026
Negative Valence				.026	.682

p < 0,05 *p* < 0,01 *p* < 0,001

Employee flexibility. Personality traits account for 26% of the flexibility variance, and Extraversion ($\beta = .157$, $p < 0.05$) and Openness ($\beta = .379$, $p < 0.01$) stood out as significant predictors.

Table 3

Linear Regression Analysis – Personality Traits as Predictors of Employee Flexibility

	R	R ²	F	B	Sig
Personality Traits	.260	.244	15.796		
Neuroticism				.038	.538
Extraversion				.157	.009
Openness				.379	.000
Aggressiveness				-.068	.307
Conscientiousness				-.091	.130
Positive Valence				.099	.121
Negative Valence				-.076	.220

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$ *** $p < 0,001$

6.2. Perfectionism as a Predictor of Attitude Towards Organisational Change

Initiating change. Perfectionism accounts for the 2.5% variance of Initiating change as a dimension of attitude towards organisational change.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis – Perfectionism as a Predictor of Initiating Change

	R	R ²	F	B	Sig
Perfectionism	.025	.022	8.138	.157	.005

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$ *** $p < 0,001$

Negative attitude towards organisational change. Perfectionism is not a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward organisational change.

Employee flexibility. Perfectionism accounts for 2.1% variance of flexibility at work, as a dimension of attitude towards organisational change.

Table 5

Linear Regression Analysis – Perfectionism as a Predictor of Flexibility

	R	R ²	F	B	Sig
Perfectionism	.021	.018	7.111	.145	.008

* $p < 0,05$ ** $p < 0,01$ *** $p < 0,001$

7. Discussion

The factors that influence the success or failure to implement organisational change can come from different areas of business. Besides economic power, natural resources, and technological development, it is the employees, i.e., their qualities, competences, experience, motivation, etc., that remain the crucial factor in implementing change. The employees can thus facilitate or impede organisational change and progress. The results of the present research indicate the correlation between personality traits and organisational change. The initial hypothesis of this research was that personality traits and perfectionism are significant predictors of attitude towards organisational change. The results showed that the best predictors of initiating change, as dimensions of attitude towards organisational change, are High Extraversion, Openness and Positive Valence. Optimistic, self-confident, and active people eager to grow and improve will be more inclined to initiate and implement organisational change. People who are less optimistic, less confident, and passive will try to preserve the existing situation in organisations. While being cautious when comparing our results with the results of Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015), primarily due to the difference in

the measures used to tap attitudes towards organisational changes, we note that the present research did not indicate that Conscientiousness was a significant predictor of initiating change, unlike the results obtained by Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015). The results of the regression analysis also showed that high scores on Neuroticism and Positive Valence, and low scores on Extraversion and Openness indicate a negative attitude towards organisational change. Conservative people, who tend to experience negative emotions, are withdrawn and rigid, and prone to fixed patterns of behaviour, are not likely to be initiators of change in their work settings. The importance of these traits as predictors has been confirmed by previous empirical research. Rogers, Miller & Judge (1999) demonstrated that locus of control, self-efficacy, positive affectivity, and openness to experience highly correlate with self-assessment of coping with organisational change. Vakola's study (2013) showed a significant correlation between openness to experience and positive attitudes towards change. Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015) also identified four personality dimensions as significant predictors. However, their study identified Conscientiousness as a significant predictor, while in the present research it is Neuroticism. The people who score highly on Extraversion and Openness are likely to demonstrate Employee flexibility, while high Perfectionism scores correlate with Initiating change and Employee flexibility. These people are intellectually curious, ready to learn and improve, and acquire new knowledge and skills that will facilitate their adaptation to new workplace requirements. In contrast to the results of Suvajdžić & Vujić (2015), the present research stresses the importance of both Extraversion and Perfectionism. This research demonstrated that Perfectionism is a significant predictor of Initiating change and Employee flexibility. Personality traits and Perfectionism are very important for understanding the attitude towards organisational change. This research can be useful in the employee selection for manager and change agent roles, which involve initiating and managing change, and other professional roles which depend on innovation and change.

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OSOBINE LIČNOSTI I PERFEKCIONIZAM KAO PREDIKTORI STAVA PREMA ORGANIZACIONIM PROMENAMA

APSTRAKT: Cilj istraživanja je bio utvrditi da li su osobine ličnosti i perfekcionizam značajni u predviđanju stava prema organizacionim promenama. U istraživanju je učestvovalo 336 zaposlenih osoba prosečne starosti $AS = 35,29$; $SD = 11,44$. Primenjeni instrumenti su: Inventar ličnosti Velikih pet plus dva – VP + 2, Skala stavova prema organizacionim promenama – OP i Burnsova skala perfekcionizma. Rezultati regresione analize pokazuju da visoka ekstraverzija, otvorenost i pozitivna valenca dovode do iniciranja promena kod zaposlenih. Visok neuroticizam i pozitivna valenca, a niska ekstraverzija i otvorenost dovode do negativnog odnosa prema organizacionim promenama. Visoka ekstraverzija i otvorenost dovode do fleksibilnosti zaposlenih. Visok perfekcionizam dovodi do iniciranja promena i fleksibilnosti zaposlenih.

KLJUČNE REČI: osobine ličnosti, stav prema organizacionim promenama, perfekcionizam.