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Personality traits and career satisfaction of human resource professionals

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Occupational choice frameworks suggest that personality factors influence person-job fit. This paper focuses on personality factors and career satisfactions of human resources (HR) managers. 'Big Five' and narrow personality traits as well as managerial style variables were drawn from an archive of 1846 HR managers and 1375 non-managers. Results indicated that HR managers differed from 51,297 individuals in other occupations and from non-managerial HR specialists on many of the study variables, most of which were also related to career satisfaction. Implications for differentiation selection and development of HR managers were discussed.

Keywords: career satisfaction; personality traits; Holland's vocational theory

Optimization of person-job fit has been an overarching theme of selection frameworks (e.g. Schneider 1987) and vocational-choice models (e.g. Holland 1976). By following selection and placement strategies that optimize person-job fit, an organization can populate its workforce with motivated and committed employees. Selection and vocational-choice frameworks are also based on this underlying principle. Both types of frameworks assume that individuals will respond more favourably to jobs that are congruent with their personalities. All that is really different between selection and vocational-choice frameworks is the scope of the concept 'job'. When selection frameworks refer to the fit between an individual and a job, they are usually targeting a single, near-term position. In contrast, when vocational-choice models refer to the concept of 'a job', they may actually mean the collection of jobs that comprise an individual's entire career.

'Fit' (or 'congruence') is a cornerstone principle of vocational-choice frameworks. Holland (1996) argued that vocational satisfaction, stability and achievement depend on the congruence between one's personality and the environment in which one works. Fit or congruence may be realized when the behavioural expectations of a work role synchronize with the behavioural inclinations of a particular personality type. If, for example, an extroverted individual finds outlets for his/her expressive nature in the customer contact aspects of sales work, 'congruence', as defined by Holland, has been achieved.

Traditionally, vocational-choice models have employed self-reports of personal interests as markers of occupational preference (Ackerman and Heggestad 1997). However, organizational scholars have become increasingly inclined to view occupational interests as components of personality (e.g. Barrick, Mount, and Gupta 2003; De Fruyt and

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Mervielde 1999). Empirical findings have been fuelling a rapprochement between the personality literature and the occupational-interest literature. Several studies have shown that occupational interests (e.g. Holland 1976) significantly overlap personality dimensions (Barrick, Mount, and Gupta 2003; De Fruyt and Mervielde 1999). More recently, researchers have been combining broad-spectrum personality measures (e.g. 'Big Five' personality dimensions) with narrow spectrum personality measures (e.g. optimism) to assess fit (e.g. Logue, Lounsbury, and Leong 2007). A general consensus in research on personality has emerged that all normal personality traits can be parsimoniously described by five broad traits, termed the 'Big Five' model of personality (agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional resilience, extraversion and openness), which has been found to generalize across a wide range of social-cultural settings (e.g. McCrae and Allik 2002) and validated against many different criteria, including job performance (Salgado 1997), job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, and Mount 2002), career success (Judge et al. 1999), life satisfaction (DeNeve and Cooper 1998) and academic performance (Lounsbury, Sundstrom, et al. 2003). However, a number of researchers have shown that more narrow personality traits add incremental validity for a wide range of criteria above and beyond the 'Big Five' traits (e.g. Paunonen and Ashton 2001; Schneider, Hough, and Dunnette 1996).

The current study utilized personality measures as a means of investigating the person-job fit of a specific occupational group – human resource (HR) managers. This is an important group to study because HR managers are often responsible for overseeing the general well-being and satisfaction of the workforce, but, ironically, factors contributing to their own job adaptation and morale have received scant attention. As noted by Sadler-Smith, Bagder, and Leat (2000), studies of morale and satisfaction have rarely singled out HR managers as a focal population.

Career satisfaction

The literature on job satisfaction is voluminous (e.g. Brief 1998; Locke 1976; Smith, Kendall, and Hulin 1969), but our emphasis here is on a less-studied, but related, construct – career satisfaction. Job satisfaction provides a measure of job-specific affect, whereas career satisfaction represents an individual's feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an entire career. Our usage of the term 'career' follows Hall (1976, 4), viewing a career as the entirety of 'work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life.'

There are a number of good reasons for studying career satisfaction. First, career satisfaction is an important variable in its own right. It summarizes feelings about a lifetime of work – approximately 100,000 hours of toil for the typical American worker (Career Strategists 2004).

Second, career satisfaction is a better fit with the objectives of the current study. By the time an individual achieves the typical level of seniority of an HR manager position, he/she will have usually served in HR-specialist roles (e.g. compensation specialist, training specialist) for a substantial period of apprenticeship. It is reasonable to contend, therefore, that individuals rising to the level of HR manager will probably have committed to HR as a career.

Third, recent literature lays the conceptual groundwork for a value-adding career satisfaction construct. Judge et al. (1999, 622) partitioned career success into extrinsic and intrinsic components. Intrinsic success was conceptualized as 'an individual's subjective reactions to his or her own career.' Judge et al.'s notion of intrinsic career success aligns closely with the current study's concept of career satisfaction.

Fourth and lastly, researchers have begun to investigate the roots of career satisfaction. For example, career satisfaction has been found to be a product of a variety of job-experience factors including salary progression (Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer 1999), mentoring (Allen et al. 2004), hours worked (Wallace 2001) and satisfaction with the opportunity to achieve career goals (Reitman and Schneer 2003).

There has also been interest in the relationship of personality factors to career satisfaction. Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge (2001) found that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion were correlated positively with career satisfaction in a sample of US executives. They also discovered that extraversion was correlated significantly with the career satisfactions of European executives. In contrast, they found that neuroticism was correlated negatively with career satisfaction in both of their executive samples.

Consonant with Boudreau et al.'s findings, Seibert and Kramer (2001) reported that extraversion was related positively to career satisfaction in a sample of 496 workers. Additionally, they found that neuroticism again emerged as a negative correlate of career satisfaction.

Lounsbury, Loveland, et al. (2003) discovered that 13 different personality traits were correlated significantly with career satisfaction in their sample of 5932 individuals undergoing career transitions. They determined that a core set of three traits – emotional resilience, optimism and work drive – accounted for most of the explainable variance in their measure of career satisfaction.

The current study

Although a direct test of person-job fit for HR managers was not feasible in the context of the current study, a partial test was undertaken by examining personality traits differentiating HR managers from other occupations and seeing which of these traits were related to career satisfaction. We start with a basic assumption derived from Holland's (1976, 1996) vocational theory and Schneider's Attraction–Selection–Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith 1995): Individuals gravitate toward, are satisfied with, and remain in occupations where there is a good fit between their personality and the work environment. There are two logical corollaries of Holland's fit model that have been generally verified by subsequent research and are germane to the present study: (1) there are differences in mean scores on personality characteristics associated with occupations that help determine fit; and (2) higher scores on these personality characteristics are related to higher levels of satisfaction. Thus, under the Holland model, scientists tend to have higher mean scores on the investigative vocational interest scale and higher investigative scores are associated with greater job satisfaction of scientists (Holland 1976, 1996). While attempts to map personality traits onto occupations for purposes of determining fit are in the early stages (see, for example, occupational profiles for the 16 PF (Cattell, Eber, and Tatsuoka 1970) and general work styles (O*NET 2008), there is not at present an empirically validated personality trait profile for human resource managers against which fit could be assessed. Based on the above assumptions, such personality traits for HR managers should at a minimum display two qualities: they will differentiate HRMs from other occupations and they will be related to career satisfaction for HRMs.

Accordingly, and because our dataset included personality information on over 50,000 individuals in many different occupations, we first addressed this research question: 'RQ1: on which personality traits and managerial style variables do HR managers differ from other occupations?' The personality traits assessed for this were the 'Big Five' traits, chosen because of their prominence as definers of normal personality and previously

established relationships with career satisfaction (Lounsbury, Gibson, et al. 2003), as well as seven narrow personality traits found to be related to career satisfaction for occupations in general – optimism, assertiveness, visionary style, work drive, image management, intrinsic motivation and customer service orientation.

Continuing with the second assumption derived from Holland's vocational theory, we also examined the following research question: 'RQ2: Which personality traits and managerial style variables are related to career satisfaction for HR managers?' From the perspective of the Holland model, we wanted to see which traits both differentiated HR managers from other occupations and which were also related positively to career satisfaction. Such traits could potentially be used for a variety of applications, including career planning, coaching, pre-employment selection, promotional testing, succession planning, and leadership training and development for individuals considering an HR manager career or currently employed in an HR manager capacity.

A second aspect of the current study involved comparative analysis of HR managers to non-managerial HR specialists. Literature on the roles of HR professionals draws distinctions between HR managers and other HR professionals who work in non-managerial capacities (e.g. Mathis and Jackson 2002; Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux 2004). Because our dataset included personality data on HR managers and other kinds of non-managerial HR specialists (e.g. training, compensation specialists), we were able to compare groups of individuals who had chosen either a managerial or non-managerial HR career path. If personality differences characterize these two groups, then personality factors may explain why HR managers have chosen managerial careers instead of opting for other types of HR roles. Thus, our third research question was: 'RQ3: Are there differences between HR managers and non-managers on the personality traits and managerial style variables examined in the first research question?' We examined whether there were differences in mean scores on personality traits between these two groups. There already is some evidence of differences between HR managers and HR non-managers. Hoque and Noon (2001) found that HR specialists, most of whom were managers, were more involved in strategic planning than personnel specialists, the majority of whom were non-managers. Therefore, we predicted that HR managers and non-managers would differ significantly on measures of managerial style involving strategic responsibilities. Accordingly, we tested the following hypothesis:

> H1: HR managers would have higher visionary scores than non-managers.

Since Cattell et al. (1970) reported generally higher assertiveness for managers than non-managers, we also hypothesized that:

> H2: HR managers would have higher assertiveness scores than non-managers.

A third aspect of the current study focused on potential differences between US and UK human resource managers. Standard HR textbooks increasingly emphasize the global nature of contemporary business practice and the internationalization of the HR profession (e.g. Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux 2004). The current study's dataset included domestic and international HR-manager groups. We were able to compare personality-career satisfaction relationships for HR managers in the US to HR managers from the UK. Whether the groups from the two countries are similar or dissimilar can inform the ongoing general debate over adoption by HR researchers of a more universalistic outlook for the profession. A universalistic outlook emphasizes similarity between nations in HR practices, whereas a more-traditional contextualist outlook would emphasize 'diversity across nations' (Pot and Paawe 2004, 155).

Although research on this topic is limited, some differences may exist. Strauss (2001, 874) views HR management in the US as being generally different from HR management in the UK, with the former emphasizing more traditional personnel functions, and the latter placing relatively more emphasis on 'all the organization's people-oriented policies and practices'. Strauss contends that HR managers in the UK. stress people-oriented programs, like employee involvement initiatives, more than their stateside counterparts.

Such observations led to our fourth research question: 'RQ4: Are there differences between US and the UK HR managers on the personality traits and managerial style variables?'

Method

Overview

Data for this study were extracted from an archival database provided by eCareerfit.com, a company that offers online, personality-based career assessments to companies for employee career development, succession planning, leadership development, mentoring, coaching, workforce planning and outplacement/transition services. We acknowledge some advantages and disadvantages of using archival data sources for research (see, for example, Hoyle, Harris, and Judd 2001 and Jex and Britt 2008), but the former are considered by many to outweigh the latter as secondary analyses are becoming more frequently used as large-scale archival data sources continue to be made available to researchers (Shultz, Hoffman, and Reiter-Palmon 2008). We chose to use an archival data source for the following reasons: The responses represented data from reliable and previously validated (Lounsbury, Loveland, et al. 2003; Lounsbury and Gibson 2008) scales that were readily available from the Internet and, were collected via a non-reactive form of measurement in that respondents were not participating in a research study. Because participants were providing responses to questions so that they could receive information about their personality and personal style for purposes of self-awareness and career planning, the threat of positive response bias, which typically characterizes personality assessment (cf. Pervin and John 1997), was minimized. The database contained information on individuals from a wide range of occupations and industries, including data on HR professionals from the US and UK. All data was collected originally on the Internet as part of a career planning service offered by an international strategic human resources company. Data was collected over the period March of 2003 to January of 2008.

Participants

The database we used comprised a total of 1846 HR managers, 1375 HR non-managers and 51,297 individuals employed in a wide range of jobs from many different companies in the United States and the United Kingdom. Of the 3221 HR managers and non-managers, 35% were male, 65% were female; 93% were from the US and 7% from the UK. Participation rates by age group were as follows: 21% were under 30; 23% were 30–39; 33% were 40–49; and 23% were 50 and over. Race/ethnic data were not available. For both US and UK managers, the most common job title listed was HR manager. For the US non-managers, the most common job titles were HR assistant and HR specialist. Respondents came from many different industries including banking and financial services (10%), information technology (5%), communications (4%), retail (4%), health care (2%), science and technology (2%), entertainment (2%) and automotive (1%).

Personality factors

The personality instrument used in the current study was the 'Personal Style Inventory' (PSI), a work-based personality measure. The PSI has been used in a variety of settings internationally, mainly for career development and pre-employment screening purposes, for which there is extensive evidence of criterion-related and construct validity (Lounsbury, Gibson, and Hamrick 2004; Lounsbury, Gibson, et al. 2003; Lounsbury, Loveland, et al. 2003; Lounsbury et al. 2004; Williamson, Pemberton, and Lounsbury 2005). All of the PSI items had five-point response scales with bipolar verbal anchors. Below is a sample item from the Optimism scale.

When the future is uncertain, I tend to anticipate positive outcomes.	__ __ __ __ __ 1 2 3 4 5	When the future is uncertain, I tend to anticipate problems.

A brief description of each of the personality and managerial style measures used in the present study is presented below along with the number of items in each scale and the coefficient alpha for the total sample.

'Big Five' personality traits

- *Agreeableness/teamwork*: propensity for working as part of a team and functioning cooperatively on work group efforts (six items; coefficient alpha = .83).
- *Conscientiousness*: dependability, reliability, trustworthiness and inclination to adhere to company norms, rules and values (eight items; coefficient alpha = .74).
- *Emotional resilience*: overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience in the face of job stress and pressure (six items; coefficient alpha = .81).
- *Extraversion*: tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, expressive, warmhearted and talkative (seven items; coefficient alpha = .83).
- *Openness*: receptivity/openness to change, innovation, novel experience and new learning (nine items; coefficient alpha = .78).

Narrow personality traits

- *Assertiveness*: a person's disposition to speak up on matters of importance, expressing ideas and opinions confidently, defending personal beliefs, seizing the initiative, and exerting influence in a forthright but not aggressive manner (eight items; coefficient alpha = .83).
- *Customer service orientation:* striving to provide highly responsive, personalized, quality service to (internal and external) customers; putting the customer first and trying to make the customer satisfied, even if it means going above and beyond the normal job description or policy (seven items; coefficient alpha = .69).
- *Intrinsic motivation:* a disposition to be motivated by intrinsic work factors, such as challenge, meaning, autonomy, variety and significance (six items; coefficient alpha = .82).
- *Image management:* reflects a person's disposition to monitor, observe, regulate and control the self-presentation and image s/he projects during interactions with other people (six items; coefficient alpha = .82)

- *Optimism:* having an upbeat, hopeful outlook concerning situations, people, prospects and the future, even in the face of difficulty and adversity; a tendency to minimize problems and persist in the face of setbacks (eight items; coefficient alpha = .85).
- *Work drive:* disposition to work for long hours (including overtime) and an irregular schedule; investing high levels of time and energy into job and career, and being motivated to extend oneself, if necessary, to finish projects, meet deadlines, be productive and achieve job success (eight items; coefficient alpha = .81).
- *Visionary style:* focusing on long-term planning, strategy, and envisioning future possibilities and contingencies (eight items; coefficient alpha = .88).

Managerial constructs

Based directly on the two main managerial factors found in the Ohio State Leadership studies (Bass 1990) – initiating structure and consideration – two managerial constructs of the PSI were used in the present study: *task structuring* – referring to a manager's disposition toward planning, scheduling, monitoring and organizing the work of subordinates (eight items; coefficient alpha = .87) – and *managerial human relations* – referring to a manager's responsiveness to the concerns of his/her subordinates, being empathetic, and showing consideration for their needs and feelings (nine items; coefficient alpha = .78). These two scales have been validated in previous studies on career satisfaction (e.g. Lounsbury, Loveland, et al. 2003b).

Career satisfaction

A five-item scale was used to measure career satisfaction (Lounsbury et al. 2007), with items assessing satisfaction with career progress and trajectory, career advancement, future career prospects and career as a whole. Each career satisfaction item was placed on a five-point response scale with verbally opposing anchors at each end (e.g. 'I am very satisfied with the way my career has progressed so far' vs. 'I am very dissatisfied with the way my career has progressed so far'). Coefficient alpha for the career satisfaction scale = .81. This career satisfaction measure was introduced into the dataset in 2006, so there is a smaller sample size for it ($n = 310$).

Results

Our first research question focused on personality factor differences between HR managers and individuals in other occupations, for which we used an independent sample t-test to compare the mean scores of HR managers against the mean scores of individuals from other occupations on a variety of personality measures. Results of this analysis are summarized in Table 1. Compared to the other occupations, the HR managers had significantly higher mean scores on all of the personality and managerial style variables except conscientiousness and task structuring in which cases the means for HR managers (3.26 and 2.40, respectively) were significantly lower than the corresponding means for other occupations (3.40 and 2.60, respectively) as indicated by the t tests $t(53,121) = -4.34$ and -12.65, respectively).

The second research question (RQ2) focused on potential linkages between career satisfaction and the personality traits of HR managers. To evaluate RQ2, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to reflect the relationships between career

Table 1. Mean scores on personality traits for HR managers vs. all other occupations.

Variable	Group	Mean	Std deviation	t test
Openness	HR managers	4.02	.60	13.63**
	All other occupations	3.81	.67	
Conscientiousness	HR managers	3.26	.69	−4.34**
	All other occupations	3.34	.71	
Emotional resilience	HR managers	3.58	.67	7.62**
	All other occupations	3.46	.71	
Agreeableness/teamwork	HR managers	3.78	.71	12.87**
	All other occupations	3.54	.77	
Extraversion	HR managers	4.11	.67	16.86**
	All other occupations	3.79	.77	
Assertiveness	HR managers	3.97	.64	19.51**
	All other occupations	3.58	.82	
Image management	HR managers	2.74	.77	6.01**
	All other occupations	2.60	.81	
Intrinsic motivation	HR managers	3.59	.77	5.74**
	All other occupations	3.48	.81	
Optimism	HR managers	4.03	.67	11.02**
	All other occupations	3.83	.77	
Work drive	HR managers	3.64	.73	15.50**
	All other occupations	3.35	.79	
Customer service	HR managers	4.48	.40	8.14**
	All other occupations	4.34	.45	
Visionary style	HR managers	3.18	.80	12.61**
	All other occupations	2.94	.77	
Managerial human relations	HR managers	4.14	.52	15.30**
	All other occupations	3.93	.55	
Managerial task structuring	HR managers	2.40	.63	−12.65**
	All other occupations	2.60	.68	

Note: For HR managers $n = 1846$; for all other occupations $n = 51,297$.
**$p < .01$.

satisfaction and the other study variables, with results displayed in Table 2. Career satisfaction was positively and significantly related to two of the 'Big Five' traits – openness ($r = .17, p < 01$) and emotional resilience ($r = .46, p < 01$) – as well as three of the narrow personality traits – optimism ($r = .49, p < 01$), work drive ($r = .13, p < 05$) and customer service ($r = .18, p < 01$) – and with managerial human relations ($r = .16, p < 01$).

The third research (RQ3) focused on potential personality differences between HR managers and HR non-managers; RQ4 dealt with potential personality differences between US and UK HR managers. To assess RQ3 and RQ4 simultaneously, we compared four groups – US HR managers, US HR non-managers, UK HR managers and UK HR non-managers – using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each personality variable and a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to assess net differences among the four groups.

Using Wilk's criterion, a significant multivariate F was obtained, $F (12, 739) = 1.18$, $p < .01$. The results of the univariate one-way ANOVA's revealed significant differences between the groups for all variables except conscientiousness and customer service. Post hoc tests were conducted for each significant univariate F using Tukey b comparisons. The results of these post hoc tests are summarized in Table 3, with common superscripts indicating no significant difference between means and different superscripts indicating significant differences between means. The most common pattern was for the means of HR

Table 2. Intercorrelations of study variables.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
(1) Openness	–	–.10**	.26**	.30**	.37**	.47**	.09**	.01*	.35**	.35**	.31**	.42**	.22**	–.13**	.17**
(2) Conscientiousness		–	.22**	.02*	.06*	.00	–.22**	.02*	.13**	.15**	.14**	–.36**	.10**	.36**	.04
(3) Emotional resilience			–	.20**	.34**	.35**	–.15**	.06**	.68**	.17**	.30**	.08**	.17**	–.01*	.46**
(4) Agreeableness/ teamwork				–	.41**	.29**	.04*	.10**	.26**	.14**	.26**	.15**	.31**	–.06*	.11
(5) Extraversion					–	.54**	.09**	–.04**	.46**	.24**	.39**	.23**	.44**	.01	.25**
(6) Assertiveness						–	.15**	–.12**	.41**	.43**	.35**	.38**	.31**	–.05**	.24**
(7) Image management							–	–.30**	–.08**	.09**	–.04**	.17**	–.03**	–.03**	–.06
(8) Intrinsic motivation								–	.09**	–.13**	.08**	–.09**	.13**	–.09**	.11
(9) Optimism									–	.23**	.39**	.19**	.30**	–.04**	.49**
(10) Work drive										–	.29**	.18**	.16**	.10**	.13*
(11) Customer service											–	.08**	.36**	–.03**	.18**
(12) Visionary style												–	.06**	–.26**	.07
(13) Human relations													–	.01	.16**
(14) Task structuring														–	–.01
(15) Career satisfaction															–

Note: Sample size for intercorrelations of personality traits = 3221; sample size for correlations between personality traits and managerial variables = 1846; sample size for correlations of personality and managerial variables with career satisfaction = 310.
*p < .05; **p < .01.

Table 3.   Mean scores for personality traits for US and UK HR managers and specialists.

Variable	US HR specialists	US HR managers	UK HR specialists	UK HR managers
Openness	3.74[b]	4.02[c]	3.52[a]	3.99[c]
Conscientiousness	3.31	3.26	3.42	3.26
Emotional resilience	3.38[a]	3.58[b]	3.40[a]	3.61[b]
Agreeableness/teamwork	3.41[a]	3.78[b]	3.37[a]	3.74[b]
Extraversion	3.76[a]	4.11[b]	3.63[a]	4.03[b]
Assertiveness	3.36[b]	3.97[c]	3.16[a]	3.91[c]
Image management	2.64[b]	2.74[b]	2.41[a]	2.69[b]
Intrinsic motivation	3.69[a,b]	3.59[a]	3.83[b]	3.63[a]
Optimism	3.81[a]	4.03[b]	3.84[a]	4.00[b]
Work drive	3.16[a]	3.64[b]	3.09[a]	3.64[b]
Customer service	4.35	4.44	4.41	4.41
Visionary style	2.88[a]	3.18[b]	2.74[a]	3.12[b]
Managerial human relations	–	4.14[a]	–	4.11[a]
Managerial task structuring	–	2.40[a]	–	2.32[a]
Sample size	1280	1712	95	134

Note: Groups with a common superscript do not differ from each other at a $p < .05$ level as indicated by a Tukey *b* test (Guilford and Fruchter 1979).

managers in both the US and UK to be significantly higher than the means for HR non-managers in both the US and the UK, including openness, emotional resilience, agreeableness/teamwork, extraversion, assertiveness, image management, optimism, work drive and visionary style. There were generally no significant differences between the US and UK groups, with the exception of openness, assertiveness and image management, where the US non-managerial HR group had higher means than the UK non-managerial group.

As displayed in Table 3, Hypothesis 1 – concerning higher visionary scores for HR managers than non-managers – was confirmed in both the US and UK samples with the finding that the mean visionary scores for the US HR managers is 3.18 and non-managers is 2.88, while the mean visionary scores for the UK HR managers is 3.12 and non-managers is 2.72.

Also as can be seen in Table 3, Hypothesis 2 – concerning higher assertiveness scores for HR managers than non-managers – was confirmed in both the US and UK samples by the finding that the mean assertiveness scores for the US HR managers is 3.97 and non-managers is 3.36, while the mean assertiveness scores for the UK HR managers is 3.91 and non-managers is 3.16.

Discussion

Management researchers have become increasingly aware of the importance of personality in shaping orientations toward work and career (McCrae and Costa 1997). Personality has long been viewed as an important determinant of career choice (e.g. Holland 1976), though increasingly researchers are recognizing that personality also affects work-role functioning. As a case in point, personality traits have been found to have functional value for individuals in solving problems. As Buss (1996, 192) noted, personality traits 'represent individual differences in the qualities or resources individuals can draw upon to solve adaptive problems.' Buss suggests that an emotionally stable 'person may rely on

steadiness of nerves, inner resilience, and the capacity to rally from setback' (1996, 192–3), which allows the person to focus on work demands without performance being impaired by anxiety, worrying, loss of energy, etc. Similar examples can be formulated to show how different personality traits are involved in successful job performance and such outcomes as job satisfaction and career success (see, for example, Lounsbury 2006). To the extent that personality traits facilitate successful job performance and positive career outcomes, we would expect them to be related to career satisfaction.

Links between personality traits and the career satisfactions of HR managers make sense when viewed from the perspective of HR-manager competencies. There has been extensive discussion of the personal qualities of HR professionals that affect successful role performance (e.g. Blancero, Boroski, and Dyer 1996; Ulrich et al. 1995). Much of this literature focuses on 'the types of competencies that HR managers need' (Buckley and Monks 2004, 41), where 'HR competencies' like business knowledge, delivery of HR practices, management of change processes (Ulrich et al. 1995), performance improvement and restructuring (Warner Burke 1997), and so on are ultimately rooted in traditional competency frameworks (i.e. Knowledge–Skill–Ability (KSA) frameworks).

However, it should also be noted that non-KSA competencies focusing on motives, traits, dispositions, attitudes and perceptions are receiving attention in the HR literature (e.g. Antonacopoulou and Fitzgerald 1996; Boyatzis 1982; Buckley and Monks 2004). Unfortunately, there are very few empirical studies on HR manager attributes of this type, and fewer still linking these kinds of factors to satisfaction outcomes.

Many of the personality traits that the present study identified as both differentiating HR managers from other occupations and as being related to career satisfaction are related to core competencies identified in the HR literature. For example, emotional resilience was highly correlated with career satisfaction for HR managers. Blancero et al. (1996) found that personal resilience, a construct similar to the present study's emotional resilience construct, was a key HR competence. Likewise, Buckley and Monks (2004) characterized emotional resilience as a 'meta-quality' of HR roles.

Role demands of HR managers place a premium on emotional resilience. Contemporary HR managers contend with system complexities like globalization, intense competition, labour market deregulation, technological advances, management of intellectual capital, demographic workforce changes (Storey 2000) and the expanding role of HR itself (Ulrich 1997) in ways that their forebears could never have imagined. Emotional resilience has increasingly become an indispensable attribute of an HR manager's make-up.

The current findings also identified assertiveness as an important component of an HR manager's make-up. Assertiveness is a component of two key HR competencies identified by Blancero et al. (1996): leadership and influence. High levels of assertiveness will also be required of HR professionals who manage change processes in organizations (Ulrich et al. 1995), especially if they adopt a change agent role within their own companies (Tichy 1983). Because today's HR managers must exert influence, take the initiative and compete for resources (inter alia), it is difficult to imagine success for an HR manager lacking assertiveness.

HR managers must routinely interact with fellow employees, often in situations where they take the lead in discussions and meetings. Effective HR managers will be asked to create and sustain ongoing relationships with organizational members and with external constituencies. Moreover, it helps if they can do so quickly and in a manner that projects warmth and creates positive emotions. All of these characteristics are fundamental components of extraversion (De Raad 2000). Our finding that extraversion was positively

correlated with HR-manager career satisfaction in the US and UK supports arguments of HR theorists who would classify extraversion-related factors among the core competencies of HR managers. Blancero et al. (1996), for example, included communication and relationship building in their description of 11 core HR competencies. Similarly, Buckley and Monks (2004) listed relationship management and networking as core HR competencies.

The trait which we found to be consistently and most highly related to career satisfaction and which differentiated HR managers from other occupations was optimism. Taxonomies of HR competency do not routinely include optimism *per se*. However, optimism is an ingredient of listed competencies like 'enthusiasm and commitment' (Blancero, Boroski, and Dyer 1996), positive energy for work (Clawson and Newburg 2005). It is interesting to consider that nearly one-fourth of the variance in an HR manager's career satisfaction is accountable by his or her level of optimism. From an organizational standpoint, it may be more important to hire HR managers who are optimistic than to provide them work experiences and development programmes that are designed to increase their career satisfaction.

Analyses of HR competencies have also included teamwork, sometimes explicitly (e.g. Blancero, Boroski, and Dyer 1996), sometimes implicitly (Buckley and Monks 2004). The current study found that agreeableness/teamwork was correlated positively with career satisfaction for HR managers and HR managers had higher scores on agreeableness/teamwork than other occupations.

HR has been viewed historically in organizational theory as a service and support function of organization. We found that customer service was related significantly to career satisfaction and distinguished HR managers from other occupations. Although this dimension does not appear in current lists of core HR competencies, Ulrich (1997) emphasizes that customer responsiveness is one of the key competitive challenges facing HR organizations.

Another trait differentiating HR managers from other occupations and from HR non-managers was visionary style. This is consistent with the numerous calls for the HR profession to become more strategically focused and visionary (e.g. Beatty and Schneier 2005; Ulrich 1997). On the other hand, visionary style was not related significantly to career satisfaction for HR managers, suggesting that it may not be contributing to their career development and fulfilment.

HR managers generally scored significantly higher on most of the personality dimensions than did non-managers. One possible interpretation of this finding is that selection or promotion into the HR managerial jobs is based on attributes measured by these personality traits. These data indicate that HR managers have personality traits that may distinguish them from other rank-and-file HR staff members. Holland's occupational fit framework suggests that such differences may exist and that these differences are a key ingredient of person-job fit in the HR role.

Comparison of the US and UK results bear on the ongoing debate over convergent/universalistic HR approaches versus divergent/contextualist HR approaches (Pot and Paauwe 2004). The present findings are most consistent with the convergence position, given the similarities between sets of UK and US correlations and on all mean scores of personality and managerial measures. Thus, our findings did not generally support Strauss's (2001) position of differences between UK and US HR management; instead, the present findings tend to support more universalist models of HR roles (e.g. Hamlin 2005). The pattern of similarities of mean scores for UK vs. US comparisons is consistent with research in other areas showing no significant differences between the two countries on a

wide range of variables, including cultural variables (Smith, Peterson, and Schwartz 2002), employee work values and attitudes (Ronen and Kraut 2001) and leadership behaviour (Hamlin 2005).

One topic for future research would be to see how personality traits compare to other factors that may be linked to career satisfaction. While studies of HR managers which might answer this question are lacking, research in other occupational areas points toward the importance of a variety of work-related variables, including skills (Eby, Butts, and Lockwood 2003), training and development (Erdogan, Kraimer, and Liden 2004), salary progression (Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer 1999) and mentoring (Murphy and Ensher 2001; Wallace 2001). However, it should be noted that from a developmental perspective, personality precedes these factors. As summarized by Costa and McCrae (1994, 34) in their review of the empirical personality stability literature, 'somewhere between age 21 and 30 personality appears to take its final, fully developed form.' Since personality can directly or indirectly affect all work-related experiences and outcomes – including learning (Ford and Oswald 2003), satisfaction (Judge, Heller, and Mount 2002) and performance (Barrick and Mount 1991; Salgado 1997) – studies of the effects of work-related variables on career satisfaction should consider first controlling for personality traits. Thus, for example, in a study of the effects of a professional development programme on career satisfaction, or in examining the relationship between salary progression and career satisfaction, personality traits could serve as covariate or control variables in the statistical analyses of such relationships. It would be interesting to see if such factors add incremental validity to the prediction of career satisfaction above and beyond that accounted for by personality traits.

Implications of the current findings for professional HR practice are manifold. Measurement of some of the personality traits demonstrating higher levels of correlation with career satisfaction – such as optimism, emotional resilience, assertiveness and extraversion – could be useful adjuncts in screening applicants for managerial HR positions, placement into HR activities from other positions within the company, coaching dissatisfied HR managers and creation of career development programs. In situations where a coach, mentor or counsellor is working with an HR manager, it would be useful to have information on the manager's personality profile. Managers displaying lower levels of optimism, for example, could be coached to develop optimism-enhancing tactics like attributional retraining (Shatte, Gillham, and Reivich 2000) or they could learn to employ defensive pessimism strategies (Norem 2001) in their work activities. Likewise, an HR manager found to be low in emotional resilience could be encouraged to engage in counselling or stress management programs.

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. Although current data were obtained from a large, geographically diverse population, it should be acknowledged that participants self-selected themselves into the sample. It would have been good to have more information about participation rates by demographic attribute. In addition, the field study nature of the data argues strongly against inferences of causality or correlational directionality.

In summary, the results of the present study demonstrate multiple linkages between personality traits and the career satisfaction of HR managers and specialists. In an era of massive technological, economic and social-cultural change (Collin and Young 2000), accompanied by ongoing transformations of the mission of HR and the diverse functions of HR in different organizational contexts (Ulrich 1997), it seems inevitable that the career environments in which HR professionals function will become less stable and more fragmented (cf. 'the death of career', Young and Valach 2000). When this trend is considered in conjunction with research showing the long-term stability of personality

traits for intervals up to 45 (Soldz and Vaillant 1999) and 50 years (Judge et al. 1999), as well as their impact on career success over a 50-year period, it seems likely that personality traits will become more important in future research on factors related to the career satisfaction of HR professionals.

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