The Impact of Big Five Personality Traits on Psychological Detachment from Work During Off Job Time

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Big Five Personality traits as an important antecedent and predictor of psychological detachment from work during off job time. Specifically, we propose that individuals who are high in extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time whereas individuals high in neuroticism and openness to experience were negatively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Data was collected from 250 employees by administering self-reported questionnaires in various organizations of Pakistan. The findings of the study lend support for all the five hypotheses. In the end, we have discussed the recommendations and practical implications for researchers and managers.

KEYWORDS: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, Psychological detachment from work during off job time.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world of globalization the line between work and non work time have become blurred. The spirit of globalization has challenged the assumption of a traditional working arrangement with the phenomenon of decentralized work sites and telecommuting rising constantly. In the conventional workplace, employees who spend their regular time at the office would easily disengage themselves from their job related tasks when they would reach home. At that time when they physically left their workplace and departed home they would engage themselves by spending time with family and involving themselves in other work related tasks.

Contrary to this situation, today leaving the office physically does not mean that an individual also leaves behind the emotional, traumatic and other work related experiences encountered by the individual during the day at the workplace. In the contemporary work situations an employee has to complete their job related tasks whenever and wherever it is required so. For instance, when individuals return home they are still receiving phone calls from a colleague, analyzing reports, working on job related assignments and preparing for presentations etc. [24].

Moreover, even though sometimes individuals might not be working on achieving work related duties they might persistently thinking about their work, mull over work issues and think about future job prospects. Therefore, when an employee continues to hang about his work mentally and psychologically during non work time, he/she may not fully take advantage of the leisure time that is available to him/her [24].

This above concept referred to as Psychological detachment from work during off job was first introduced by Etzion, Eden, and Lapidot (1998) in the respite literature. It implies that an individual is able to cognitively disassociate oneself from the workplace when he/she reaches home. It refers to a person's capacity to stop thinking about job related problems and constraints and hence mentally disengage from workplace while reaching home [23]. Till date, the causes of psychological detachment from work have not been studied and analyzed thoroughly [23]. Studies that have examined the antecedents of psychological detachment from work during off job time have found work stressors and highly demanding situations to be important causes which make it difficult for employees to detach from work during off-job time [7, 14, 24].

Particularly, previous research on psychological detachment from work has shown that many situational and organizational predictors such as quantative workload, emotional dissonance and low spatial work boundaries are important causes of psychological disengagement from work during off job time and play an important role in affecting one's emotional state [22, 25]. Moreover, individual factors such as job involvement and recovery related self efficacy have been found as potent predictors of both self and family reported measures of psychological detachment from work during off job time [23].

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It has been contended by researchers in the past that psychological detachment from work during off job time is not only dependant on work related factors but individual differences might also help to explain why some individuals are able to mentally detach from their workplace whereas other individuals might face problems disengaging themselves from job during non-work time [24].

However, past research on psychological detachment highlights that individual differences and the role of personality as potential antecedents of psychological detachment from work during off job time have been largely ignored [23].

Even in past studies examining the antecedents to psychological detachment from work during off job time, researchers have controlled for important personality variable like action state orientation [17] since they believe that they play an important role in predicting psychological detachment from work.

It has been asserted by past researchers that dispositional factors may add a significant amount of variance in an individual's capacity to either detach or not disengage mentally from the workplace [24]. Moreover, it is also recommended that future researchers and scholars need to pay attention to individual differences and personality variables in association with psychological detachment from work during off job time as a fruitful avenue for future studies on stress and well-being [23].

The five factor model of personality commonly referred to as the big five model in the past few decades has appeared as a valuable model for understanding and interpreting personality traits. This big five model is the most comprehensive measure of personality which has been tested across studies with highly parsimonious and valid results globally [18].

This model consists of five dimensions such as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness which form the basic facets of personality [6, 11]. These facets have demonstrated convergent and discriminate validity, they have survived to function over the past so many years in adults [19]. Moreover, this model has been used to explain individual differences in behavior [13], and to be at least somewhat replicable in other cultures [9]. Thus, the Big Five model is a useful framework for presenting an extensive view of an individual's personality traits.

Another closely related domain to psychological detachment from work during off job time namely work family conflict also highlights the dire need for future researchers to examine the role of dispositional variables as possible determinants of psychological detachment from work during off job time. Past research in this area of work family conflict have investigated the role of personality variables such as negative affectivity [5], type A [3, 4,5] and big five model of personality [28], as potential causes to work family conflict.

However, there is dearth of research linking personality variables to psychological detachment from work during off job time. Although we do not deny the pertinent role of situational variables in explaining how and why psychological detachment is possible [28], we contend that they are not the only ones explaining variance in psychological detachment and that personality differences are likely to be important factors influencing one's psychological detachment from work during off job time. Till date we have not come across any study which has investigated the impact of individual differences particularly the impact of Big five personality model on psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Therefore, this research paper fills an important gap in the literature on psychological detachment from work during off job time by proposing Big Five model of personality as an important predictor of psychological detachment from work.

Theory and Hypothesis

Etzion et al. (1998) in his pioneer work initiated the concept of state of being away from the workplace. Psychological detachment from work during off job time is defined as an individual's disconnection and disengagement from work duties and responsibilities [12]. It is pertinent that psychological detachment includes not just physically being away from the workplace but also is able to mentally disengage oneself from the workplace. Low psychological detachment would encompass constantly thinking and reflecting upon job related concerns [23]. On the other hand high psychological detachment would imply that an individual has stopped to ponder on work related issues and shifted to other activities such as watching TV, spending time with family and indulging oneself in other leisure activities [24].

Big Five Personality as an antecedent to Psychological detachment from work during off job time

Extraversion personality trait measures an individual's degree of contact and relationship building with others [20]. People who score high on the extraversion trait are characterized by traits such as being friendly, loquaciousness and dominating others [6].

Extraverts are highly enthusiastic as they achieve more goals in a stipulated period of time which generates lower exhaustion and higher positive mood [10]. Moreover, extraverted individuals focus on positive events and

respond more favorably to them and have excessive energy than do introverts which successfully is shifted to other domains such as off job experiences after work. We contend that this abundant positive energy displayed by extraverts helps them to mentally switch off from their job related experiences after returning home creating high levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time.

In addition, highly extraverted individuals are more optimistic which results in interpreting situations as less stressful [28]. Moreover, since extraverts are very friendly and outgoing they have a lot of friends at the workplace and off job time which might appreciate them for their accomplishments and this may help them to mentally disengage from work related thoughts after work time generating high levels of psychological detachment from their work during non work time. Due to their sociable nature they like to interact with friends and colleagues not only at the workplace but after working hours as well which creates a pleasant source for distracting from job related issues and divert their mental energies to relaxing and enjoying their leisure time with family and friends creating high levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion is positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.

It has been interpret the agreeableness personality trait as an individual's ability to defer to others. People who score high on the agreeableness dimension are cooperative, highly considerate, kind and pleasant. On the other hand, people who are low on agreeableness exhibit traits such as self centeredness, aggressiveness, impatient and cynical tendencies towards others [6, 30].

Individuals high in agreeableness possess characteristics of collaboration, benevolence, trusting and compassion [18]. Agreeable employees are more likely get along with others due to their compassion tendencies and gain more affective support from peers, bosses and family members [29]. Such individuals due to their co-operation with others symbolize them as a loveable individual making them experience less negative events at the workplace which may easily help them to disengage themselves from work as soon as they return home from work replenishing their utilized resources easily. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness is positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Individuals high in conscientiousness demonstrate traits of goal achievement, reliability, efficiency, being highly organized, responsible and hard-working [2, 16, 18]. On the other hand, individuals low in conscientiousness are lazy, highly disorganized, irresponsible and undependable when it comes to goal achievement [30].

Past research studying the impact of big five personality traits on individual's job performance clearly depict that highly conscientious individuals are more likely to exhibit higher performance across of broad range of occupations and is the most consistent predictor of job performance [2, 21]. Moreover, highly conscientious individuals also demonstrate high levels of life satisfaction and job satisfaction as well [8].

It is also asserted by past studies that conscientious individuals comprehensively and properly complete their tasks. Constant achievements in their work related tasks are more likely to put them in a positive mood [28] which then ultimately leads one to successfully relax mentally and psychologically from work related worries and problems when returning home from work.

Individuals high in conscientiousness are more successful in effectively utilizing their time, performing duties and more likely to manage work family conflict [30]. Since highly conscientious individuals are highly plannful, determined and organized their ability to accomplish deadlines makes it easy for them to keep themselves mentally relaxed and detached from their workplace during off job time. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: Conscientiousness is positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Openness to experience consists of features such as mental astuteness, originality, inquisitiveness, creativity, and newness [2, 18]. Past research on personality demonstrates that individuals who are high in openness to experience are more likely to initiate and favor change, not influenced by conventions and more likely to come up with unique solutions to problems in times of conflict [28]. Due to their high intellectual abilities they are more likely to ruminate and think on solving work related problems even when they are at home generating low levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time. In addition, since individuals high in openness to experience are more eager to come up with new ways and techniques and use their imagination for innovating different products and services, these individuals might not be able to relax themselves after they return home and constantly ponder over work related discoveries utilizing their resources and creating poor levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Moreover, high openness to experience individuals because of their artistic tendencies are more emotional and are more likely to rely on intuition and affect initiated ideas, these individuals during non working hours might not be able to mentally relax themselves because of their constant mental activation and cognitive engagement on various ideas resulting in lower levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Openness to Experience is negatively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.

The neuroticism personality trait analyzes an employee's emotional adjustment and his/her ability to deal with stressful situations. Individuals who score high on the neuroticism dimension are more likely to be emotionally immature, will display higher levels of anxiety, insecurity, depression, rage and repugnance [2, 6, 16, 18]. In contrast, individuals low in neuroticism will be more emotionally balanced and are more likely to remain calm in tense situations [6].

Such traits might predispose individuals high in neuroticism to experience higher levels of job and family stress both on and off job [26] which in turn causes them to ponder over work related problems experienced during the day making them difficult for them to detach psychologically and distract themselves away from these work hassles.

Past research suggests that high neuroticism is significant negatively linked with life satisfaction [8] and positively related to job stress [15]. Moreover, it has been suggested that highly neurotic individuals are unable to handle demanding work situations and therefore are more likely to encounter work family conflict [30].

We contend that since neurotic individuals utilize a lot of time perturbing and being pessimistic they are less likely to accomplish their prescribed work and role responsibilities making them vulnerable to poor detachment from work when they reach home after work. Thus, their negative thoughts and constant nervousness may activate their cognitive processes creating low levels of psychological detachment from work during off job time. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 5: Neuroticism is negatively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time.
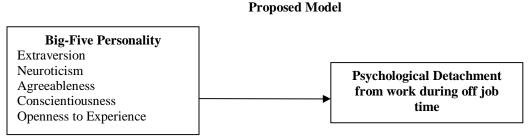
Proposed Model

Fig 1: Research model depicting the impact of Big Five Personality traits on psychological detachment from work during off job time

METHODS

1. Data Sources and Sample

Field data was collected from a sample size of 250 through onsite administration of a survey comprising measures of all the variables in the study. Surveys were distributed to employees working in various public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. The survey was distributed among employees in five different organizations out of which two of the organizations were international commercial banks in Islamabad. One was a leading public sector university in Islamabad. Two of the organizations belonged to the telecommunication sector.

Respondents belonged to all occupational levels ranging from entry level office work to top management. Educational qualification of the respondents ranged from high school (10 years of education) to doctoral degrees. Males constituted 34.3% and females were 65.7% of the total population. The majority of the respondents belonged to the human resource department (28.1%), were on the junior management level (64.0%) and Masters Degree holders (34.8%). Moreover, majority of the respondents had human resource management as their area of specialization (27.5%). The mean age of the respondents was 31.9 ($SD = 8.59$) years with average working experience in the present company of 3.11 ($SD = 2.80$) years and their total working experience was 5.13 ($SD = 4.88$) years.

2. Measures
Big-Five Personality Traits Items

In the 44-item BFI [32], 8 items measure neuroticism (N) and extraversion (E), 9 items each are for conscientiousness (C) and agreeableness (A), and 10 items measure openness to experience (O). All items had anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, and higher mean values reflect higher levels of the corresponding trait. Examples of the statements corresponding to each of the five included, "Has a forgiving nature" and "Is generally trusting" for agreeableness, "Does a thorough job" and "Is a reliable worker" for

consciousness, "Is talkative" and "Is full of energy" for extraversion, "Can be tense" and "Gets nervous easily" for neuroticism, and "Is original, comes up with new ideas" and "Is inventive" for openness to experience.

The internal-consistency reliabilities were ***alpha, α = .86*** for agreeableness, ***alpha, α = .80*** for extraversion, ***alpha, α =.89*** for conscientiousness, ***alpha, α =.88*** for neuroticism, and ***alpha, α =.88*** for openness to experience.

Psychological detachment from work during off job time Items

Psychological detachment from work during off-job time was measured using a self-report by a four item scale [31]. A Sample item is ("During leisure time, I get a break from the demands of work", ***alpha, α =.93***). Respondents reported their answers on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree).

3. Procedures
Sampling
The sampling technique applied to administer the questionnaire was convenient sampling non-probability.

DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS

Data was analyzed using the SPSS software. The Mean of the items were calculated for all the five independent variables i.e. big five personality items and for the dependent variable of psychological detachment from work during off job time items. Descriptive statistics was obtained for sample descriptions. Frequencies with mean, median, mode and standard deviation were run. Histograms and bar charts were displayed for all the items.

The normality of the data was checked using explore in SPSS displaying tests of normality with Q-Q plots. The Value of Kolmogrov-Smirnov test and Shapirao-Wilk tests demonstrate that most of the value of items was significant. Reliability analysis was conducted for each of the items for each factor. All the factors had a Cronbach alpha of 0.5 and above. Bivariate Correlations was conducted to find inter-correlations among study variables. Multiple Linear Regression analysis was used to test the direct effects of the big-five personality types on psychological detachment from work during off job time.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities for the variables in the study.

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Extraversion	3.54	.77	(.80)								
2	Agreeableness	3.31	.75	-.27	(.86)							
3	Conscientiousness	3.62	.87	-.80	.54	(.89)						
4	Neuroticism	2.99	.92	-.34	-.32	.00	(.88)					
5	Openness to Experience	3.45	.83	.10	.77	.44	-.47	(.88)				
6	Psychological detachment from work during off job time	2.56	1.29	.72	-.30	-.68	-.45	-.13	(.93)			
7	Age	31.9	8.59	-.05	-.04	.04	.07	-.02	-.13	-		
8	Gender	1.65	.47	.01	-.01	-.00	.02	-.00	.03	-.36	-	
9	Total Working Experience	3.11	2.80	-.00	-.04	.00	.01	-.01	-.08	.65	-.32	-

Bivariate Correlation
All correlations above .10 were significant at $p < .001$ (2-tailed). The means for extraversion were ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .77$), agreeableness ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .75$), conscientiousness ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .75$), neuroticism ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .92$) and openness to experience ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .83$). The means for turnover intensions ($M = 2.88$, $SD =1.09$) and job stress were ($M = 2.85$, $SD = .68$).

The highest correlations obtained in the current study were between extraversion and conscientiousness ($r = -.80$). Regarding the associations between the big five personality type and psychological detachment from work during off job time, extraversion had significant correlations with psychological detachment from work during off job time ($r = .72$), agreeableness had significant bivariate associations with psychological detachment from work during off job time ($r = -.30$). Conscientiousness correlated significantly with psychological detachment from work during off job time ($r = -.68$), neuroticism had significant correlations with psychological detachment from work during off job time ($r = -.45$).

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analyses was used to test all the five hypotheses concerning the main effects of the five personality types on psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Table 2. Regression analysis for the main effects of the five personality types on psychological detachment from work during off job time

Predictors	Dependant Variable		
	Psychological Detachment from work during off job time		
	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Extraversion	1.36***		
Agreeableness	.439**		
Conscientiousness	.66*		
Neuroticism	-.35***		
Openness to Experience	-1.08***	..84***	.71***

Note: N = 250;
†*p* < .10.
**p* < .05.
***p* < .01.
****p* < .001.

The above table highlights that as predicted extraversion was significantly positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time (β= 1.36, *p* <.001), agreeableness was significantly positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time (β= .439, *p* <.01), conscientiousness was significantly positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time (β= .66, *p* <.05), openness to experience was significantly negatively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time (β= -1.08, *p* <.001) and neuroticism was significantly negatively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time (β= -.35, *p* <.001). The Big Five personality types explained 71% (ΔR^2 = .71, *F* = 69.12, *p* < .001) of the variance in psychological detachment from work during off job time. The above analysis and results reveal that all of the 5 hypothesis were fully supported.

DISCUSSION

In the past decade researchers have become continuously started to pay attention to the concern as to how individuals utilize their off job experiences to recover from stressful work [23]. This recovery is only possible if one is able to psychologically detach oneself during off job time [12, 24]. Psychological detachment from work during off job time a relatively new phenomenon has not been systematically studied and analyzed. Moreover, work related and situational factors have been studied as major antecedents in the past research in this area however, no study has highlighted the pertinent role one's personality can play in affecting an individual's psychological detachment from work during off job time. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper was to address this research gap in the literature on psychological detachment by proposing Big five model of personality as an antecedent to psychological detachment from work during off job time. Our findings suggest that individuals who are high in extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness will be able to easily mentally detach from their workplace when they reach home whereas individuals high in openness to experience and neurotic individuals might find hard to psychologically detach from their workplace during non work time. All the hypothesis were significant and in the direction proposed lending support to all our 5 hypothesis.

The present study was by no means was free from limitations. Firstly, the use of self-report measures and cross-sectional design pose a limitation to the current study. However, the variables used in the present study such as the big five model of personality and psychological detachment from work during off job time etc can be best judged by self-reported designs. In future, it is contended that more longitudinal designs and multi-source data from peers and family/spouse rated measures should be employed in psychological detachment research.

We suggest the following areas for researchers to explore in future studies. Firstly, future researchers could study the big five model of personality in combination with other situational characteristics such as workload to predict psychological detachment from work during off job time. Secondly, future research could explore other important antecedents of psychological detachment from work during off job time such as perceived organizational politics. This type of investigation might explore the question as to whether individual's who develop high perceptions of politics are more or less likely to psychologically detach from work during off job time or not.

Lastly, although past research on psychological detachment from work during off job time have indicated important personal outcomes such as fatigue, sleep complaints, job stress, burnout, positive and negative affect [14, 27,

[22, 24] future researchers need to investigate the impact of psychological detachment from work during off job time on job related outcomes such as job performance, turnover intensions and employee creativity and innovation as well.

The results of the present study offer a number of practical implications for managers and organizations. Firstly, the findings of this study highlight that individual differences play an important role in employee's psychological detachment from work during off job time; therefore managers need to consider employee's personality apart from considering the situational factors as well. Secondly, since our results also reveal that specifically individuals high in openness to experience and neuroticism have low psychological detachment from work during off job time managers need to provide these individuals with recovery related programs such as stress management, counseling and employee assistance programs to help these individuals to help them successfully detach themselves from work during off job time.

Thirdly, our findings also depict that the other three personality types i-e employees who are high in extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness have high psychological detachment from work during off job time they must be given central role when work groups and teams are formed to achieve work related tasks so that these three personality types might be able to guide the highly neurotic and openness to experience types to relax and complete their work related tasks on time making psychological detachment from work during off job time possible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research paper was to study the impact of the Big five model of personality as an important determinant of psychological detachment from work during off job time. We hypothesized that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness would be significant positively related to psychological detachment from work during off job time whereas individuals high in openness to experience and neuroticism would experience low psychological detachment from work during off job time. The findings of the study lend support for all the 5 hypothesis. Our study is the first of its kind that has examined an important unexplored area in the psychological detachment literature by addressing individual differences as important contributors in creating/hampering psychological detachment from work during off job time.

Our study depicts that Big five personality traits alone explain 71% of the variance in psychological detachment from work during off job time highlighting that individual differences play an important role in helping employees to mentally disengage from workplace during non-work time. Such huge amount of variation in psychological detachment from work during off job time because of dispositional factors are in line with the personality school of thought [1] which contends that an individual's emotions, moods and behavior are an outcome of individual differences in personality that are relatively stable over time. Thus, our study adds to the body of knowledge on psychological detachment from work during off job time by corroborating that individual differences explain a significant amount of variance beyond the situational and work related characteristics.

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