APPLIED PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY: THEORY, EVIDENCE, AND CONTEMPORARY DOMAINS

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ABSTRACT:

Personality psychology offers a comprehensive framework for understanding stable individual differences that shape cognition, emotion, and behavior across essential domains of functioning. This paper provides an integrative review of the applied relevance of personality in education, health, sport, organizational settings, and antisocial behavior. In the educational context, personality traits interact with motivation, self-regulation, and classroom environments to influence engagement, persistence, and achievement among students. Research on mental and physical health shows that neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion systematically predict well-being, psychopathology, health behaviors, and longevity. In sport psychology, traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, perfectionism, and affective states play a central role in athletic performance, coping strategies, and resilience. The paper also reviews findings linking low agreeableness, low conscientiousness, and high psychopathy to aggression and delinquency, as demonstrated across models including the Big Five, Eysenck's PEN, and the dark triad. Within organizational contexts, conscientiousness and emotional stability emerge as robust predictors of job performance, leadership effectiveness, teamwork, and reduced counterproductive behaviors, while dark triad traits show stronger associations with manipulation and workplace deviance. Overall, the evidence underscores the pervasive influence of personality traits across applied psychological domains and highlights the value of integrating personality assessment into evidence-based practice aimed at fostering well-being, performance, and adaptive development across the lifespan.

Keywords: *personality traits, applied psychology, academic achievement, mental and physical health, antisocial behavior, organizational behavior*

Introduction

Personality psychology is a discipline that examines stable individual differences in how people think, feel, and behave. Although the primary aim of the field has traditionally involved describing and explaining the structure and dynamics of personality, contemporary research increasingly emphasizes its applied significance. This shift reflects a growing interest not only in the theoretical understanding of personality but also in how personality characteristics manifest across various domains of everyday functioning.Applied personality psychology investigates the role of personality traits across various contexts, including education, organizational systems,

health practices, clinical and counseling psychology, sport psychology, and interpersonal relationships. As Corr and Matthews emphasize, "one of the strongest arguments for the importance of personality traits is their ability to predict outcomes with long-term implications, such as academic achievement, physical and mental health, life satisfaction, and job performance" (Corr & Matthews, 2020, p. 7). This suggests that personality is not an abstract psychological construct but a central determinant of human functioning. The applied perspective does not diminish the scientific rigor of the discipline; rather, it builds upon theoretical models and raises questions such as: In what ways can personality be measured validly? How can its role in adaptation and well-being be conceptualized? How can insights about personality be used to enhance individual and collective functioning?

There is extensive empirical evidence that certain personality dimensions - particularly conscientiousness and emotional stability - serve as significant predictors of both psychological and physical well-being (Strickhouser, Zell, & Krizan, 2017; Friedman & Kern, 2014). Moreover, personality models are widely applied in personnel selection and development, clinical diagnosis, and research on social behavior and political orientations (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1997). In this regard, increasing attention is being directed toward transdisciplinary approaches that incorporate personality as a factor within broader social and systemic processes. In today's context, where individual and collective challenges are becoming increasingly complex, applied personality psychology assumes particular relevance. Personality research is increasingly integrated into interdisciplinary practices related to mental health, education, leadership, public policy, and digital behavior. As Roberts and colleagues (2007) emphasize, personality traits have long-term predictive value across three fundamental life domains - love, work, and health - which makes them essential to a wide range of applied settings. For example, personality traits are considered in the design of educational programs grounded in individualized learning, in interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving, and in the development of programs that foster organizational resilience and psychological well-being (John & De Fruyt, 2015). Through such practices, applied personality psychology not only bridges the gap between theory and practice but also contributes to the creation of inclusive and adaptive systems - educational, organizational, and societal - that recognize the importance of individual differences and personal potential.

Personality in education

Education is one of the fundamental social processes through which individuals develop their intellectual, emotional, and social capacities. Through learning, interactions with teachers and peers, participation in school activities, and engagement in assessment practices, students' develop not only knowledge and skills but also the attitudes, values, and beliefs that constitute the structure of their personality. However, this influence is not unidirectional: while education contributes to the formation of personality, personality also significantly shapes the ways in which students' learn, become motivated, and behave within the school context.

Personality traits are reflected in the ways students' set goals, maintain self-confidence, regulate their emotions, and interpret their own successes and failures. They shape the teacher–student relationship, the social climate of the classroom, cooperation among peers, and the degree of prosocial behavior. Because personality dimensions are associated with the experience of positive and negative emotions, their influence extends across the emotional and motivational processes involved in learning (Matthews et al., 2006). Thus, education cannot be understood solely as a cognitive process but as an experience grounded in emotional and social contexts.

Within the study of individual differences, a traditional distinction is made between personality traits (relatively stable dispositions) and abilities (differences in mental or physical efficiency) (Schneider & Newman, 2015). Although research has primarily focused on the role of cognitive abilities in academic achievement, contemporary perspectives increasingly emphasize that a comprehensive understanding of school performance must also consider non-intellectual factors such as personality, motivation, and self-regulation, as well as broader social and economic conditions (Ben-Eliyahu & Bernacki, 2015).

This is further supported by the meta-analysis conducted by Mammadov (2021), which included 228 studies with a total sample of N = 413,074 students'. The combined contribution of cognitive abilities and personality dimensions explained 27.8% of the variance in academic performance. Although cognitive abilities were the strongest individual predictor, conscientiousness emerged as the personality dimension with the most consistent and stable association with academic outcomes (28%), even after controlling for intellectual abilities. This finding indicates that academic success depends not only on what students' know but also on how they organize, plan, and persist in completing tasks.

Motivation further connects personality to learning outcomes. According to achievement goal theory (Pintrich, 2000), three primary orientations are distinguished: mastery orientation, performance orientation, and performance-avoidance orientation. Students' with a mastery orientation focus on learning, personal growth, and improvement; they exhibit higher academic achievement, engagement, and persistence, along with lower levels of stress. In contrast, a performance-avoidance orientation is associated with anxiety, task avoidance, and a reduced willingness to seek support.

Self-regulation represents another key mechanism that helps explain why some students' are more successful than others. It involves setting goals, monitoring one's progress, selecting appropriate strategies, and engaging in self-evaluation (Zimmerman et al., 2015). Students' who develop self-regulatory skills tend to be more resilient in the face of obstacles and frustration and exhibit greater autonomy in their learning.

Another important – yet often overlooked – aspect is the way personality traits shape responses to failure. Students' high in emotional stability cope more effectively with disappointment, low grades, or criticism, whereas those high in neuroticism are more likely to perceive such situations as threatening or distressing. Research indicates that neuroticism is negatively related to academic

persistence and to emotional regulation under stress (Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009). These differences are particularly salient during transitional periods, such as the shift from primary to secondary education or during times of heightened academic pressure.

Beyond individual differences, increasing attention is being directed toward the interaction between personality and the educational environment. For instance, the same personality characteristics may lead to different outcomes depending on the teacher's instructional style, peer support, or assessment practices. Contemporary research indicates that contextual factors can moderate the influence of personality traits on students'' academic outcomes and well-being (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). This highlights the need for a sensitive, individualized approach to instruction—one that acknowledges the importance of personality in students'' overall educational development.

According to expectancy–value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), students' invest effort and persist when they believe they can be successful (expectancy) and when they perceive an activity as important, interesting, or useful (value). This theory provides a framework for understanding students'' choices, persistence, and intensity of engagement across different academic tasks. The value students' attribute to an activity is shaped by several components: perceived importance (the activity's relevance to their goals), interest (intrinsic enjoyment), utility (its contribution to future goals), and cost (perceived drawbacks such as stress or time investment).

Research indicates that students' with higher expectations for success and stronger value appraisals of academic tasks are more likely to invest effort, persist, and achieve higher outcomes (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Consequently, educational environments that cultivate a sense of competence, intrinsic motivation, and psychological safety not only facilitate academic achievement but also promote positive personality development. Creating such environments requires encouraging student autonomy, recognizing and valuing individual interests, and minimizing excessive performance pressure.

Personality, mental, and physical health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals can effectively cope with everyday stressors, realize their potential, learn and work productively, and contribute to society. Mental health is not limited to the absence of mental disorders; rather, it represents a complex continuum that varies in intensity, psychological distress, and potential social and clinical implications (World Health Organization, 2022).

Personality is closely associated with health and overall quality of life. Its contribution is substantial for understanding a wide range of medical conditions. Research examining the relationship between personality and mental health commonly relies on the Five-Factor Model of personality (Goldberg, 1992), which shapes both psychological well-being and the likelihood of developing certain mental disorders.

Busseri and Erb (2023) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis examining the associations between the five personality dimensions and positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction—three core components of subjective well-being. The analysis included 35 samples with a total of 22,135 participants across 14 countries. The findings indicate that the personality dimensions collectively explain a substantial proportion of the variance in subjective well-being and its three components. In addition, each of the five personality dimensions makes a significant individual contribution to subjective well-being.

Results from another meta-analysis show that neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness are the three personality dimensions that most strongly predict subjective well-being (Anglim et al., 2020). Neuroticism is negatively associated with subjective well-being, whereas extraversion and conscientiousness show positive associations. These personality dimensions influence how individuals experience emotions, regulate their behavior, and cope with everyday stressors, making them highly relevant to mental health and psychological well-being.

In research examining the relationship between personality and physical health, neuroticism and conscientiousness consistently emerge as the strongest predictors. Conscientiousness is associated with a substantially reduced likelihood of developing a wide range of physical illnesses in adulthood, whereas neuroticism is linked to higher rates of such conditions and generally poorer health (Murray & Booth, 2005).

Conscientiousness, as one of the dimensions of the Five-Factor Model, shows a significant positive association with health and longevity among both men and women when combined with an internal locus of control (Rozhkova, 2024). This association is only partially mediated by the extent to which individuals take care of their health and engage in behaviors aimed at maintaining it. Researchers have also identified sex-based differences in the relationship between personality dimensions and health outcomes: higher levels of neuroticism are associated with an increased risk of mortality among men, whereas higher levels of openness to experience are linked to a reduced risk of mortality among women.

The traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, as well as an internal locus of control, show statistically significant associations with self-reported health. These findings are crucial for developing interventions aimed at fostering positive noncognitive skills in the early stages of a child's socialization, as such skills may serve as effective tools for improving individual health outcomes. A growing body of research underscores the importance of personality traits in the design of public health programs, prevention efforts, and psychological resilience-building initiatives. Conscientiousness, as a predictor of self-regulation and healthy habits, plays a central role in interventions targeting behavior change (e.g., nutrition, physical activity, and risk avoidance). At the same time, traits such as emotional stability and openness to experience are associated with a greater likelihood of seeking psychological support and engaging in active coping strategies (Hampson, 2012).

By integrating personality profiles, health professionals and clinical psychologists can more effectively tailor interventions to individual needs, resulting in more sustainable improvements in mental well-being. This approach is particularly important in early developmental stages, where personality traits may serve as indicators of both risk and protective potential for mental health.

Personality also has a substantial influence on other life outcomes, including self-esteem, identity, interpersonal relationships, romantic relationships, values, attitudes, and related domains.

A primary focus of clinical psychology is the prevention and treatment of psychological disorders. Psychopathology has been consistently found to be strongly associated with the personality factor neuroticism. Individuals high in neuroticism exhibit more intense reactions to stressful situations, are more likely to perceive others' behaviors as threatening, and tend to interpret even low-intensity negative events as frightening or overwhelming.

There is strong evidence for the association between neuroticism and affective disorders (Barlow et al., 2024), as well as for its link with anxiety disorders, somatoform disorders, schizophrenia, and eating disorders. Neuroticism has also been associated with drug use and substance abuse (Dash et al., 2023).

According to some perspectives, personality disorders can be understood as extreme, maladaptive manifestations of the five basic personality dimensions. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5, 2013), incorporates a dimensional model of personality. This model includes five broad dimensions that correspond to the personality dimensions of the Five-Factor Model but focus on the extreme ends of the continuum. These dimensions are: Negative Affect (high neuroticism), Detachment (low extraversion), Antagonism (low agreeableness), Disinhibition (low conscientiousness), and Psychoticism (an extreme and maladaptive form of openness to experience).

Personality in the organizational context

Within organizational psychology, personality is regarded as one of the central factors for understanding individual differences in work styles, professional engagement, and the ways in which employees interact with their work environment. The workplace is not merely a collection of tasks but a dynamic social context in which relationships are formed, decisions are made, and diverse priorities and pressures are navigated. The manner in which an individual interprets this environment, organizes personal goals, responds to failure and stress, and communicates with colleagues is shaped to a large extent by their personality characteristics. Consequently, personality is not viewed as an abstract or general disposition but as a concrete and active factor that shapes professional behavior, motivation, and job performance.

Research on personality within organizational contexts has historically been driven by the aim of predicting key outcomes such as effectiveness, productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention. Before examining these specific influences, it is necessary to introduce the psychological

models and assessment instruments most commonly used to evaluate personality in organizational settings.

Goldberg's (1992) Five-Factor Model organizes individual differences into five broad dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These dimensions offer a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies of individuals. Extraversion is associated with the need for social stimulation and assertiveness, whereas lower levels reflect introversion and a preference for solitary work. Neuroticism captures emotional sensitivity and susceptibility to stress, while emotional stability reflects psychological resilience. Openness to experience encompasses intellectual curiosity and creativity; agreeableness refers to cooperation, trustworthiness, and empathy; and conscientiousness involves self-discipline, organization, and goal-directed behavior.

Beyond the Five-Factor Model, the HEXACO framework (Ashton & Lee, 2007) is also widely applied in organizational contexts, introducing a sixth dimension: Honesty–Humility. High levels of this trait are associated with fairness, adherence to ethical standards, and the absence of manipulative tendencies, whereas low levels indicate a propensity toward selfishness, exploitation of others, and a strong orientation toward status and personal gain. This dimension is particularly relevant in organizational environments where trust, transparency, and integrity are essential for maintaining stable professional relationships.

To assess emotional aspects of organizational functioning, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1998) is frequently employed. This instrument provides insight into whether an employee predominantly experiences positive states such as enthusiasm and inspiration, or negative states such as frustration and anxiety—experiences that have direct implications for workplace climate and interpersonal interactions.

Additionally, the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & Briggs, 1962), which is based on Jung's theoretical framework, is often used to identify work styles and communication preferences. Although widely applied in practice - particularly in team development and training - its psychometric validity remains a subject of professional debate. Consequently, its use is generally recommended for descriptive purposes rather than for formal prediction of job performance.

Research conducted during the second half of the 20th century frequently pointed to the limited ability of personality questionnaires to predict workplace behavior (Anderson, 2005). However, the accumulation of evidence through meta-analytic studies in recent decades has led to a substantial revision of these views. Contemporary findings confirm that the Five-Factor Model is associated with a range of occupational outcomes, with conscientiousness and neuroticism emerging as the most consistent predictors of job performance (Salgado et al., 2020).

The meta-analysis conducted by Zell and Lesick (2022) indicates that all five dimensions demonstrate statistically significant associations with job performance, with conscientiousness showing the strongest correlation with outcomes in tasks requiring organization, persistence, and responsibility. These findings are further supported by the work of Barrick and Mount (1991),

which demonstrates that conscientiousness is a stable predictor across diverse professions, whereas extraversion and openness to experience are more relevant in roles that demand interaction, adaptability, and learning.

In addition to "positive" personality models, considerable attention has been directed toward negative tendencies commonly referred to as the "Dark Triad": narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Research shows that these traits exhibit weaker predictive effects on performance but stronger associations with counterproductive work behaviors, particularly among individuals high in Machiavellianism and narcissism (Grijalva & Newman, 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2012). Counterproductive behavior may include theft, misuse of resources, aggression, or disruption of workplace dynamics (Schmitt & Kim, 2007; Sackett & DeVore, 2001).

Personality in sport

One of the central aims of contemporary personality psychology is to examine how thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and environmental factors influence athletes and their success in sport. Researchers seek to describe, explain, predict, and modify these psychological processes in order to enhance athletic performance and support athletes' well-being. Historically, the primary focus of sport psychology was the achievement of high performance, often at the expense of mental health. However, athletes encounter similar psychological challenges as the general population and may even face heightened risks to their psychological stability. As a result, recent years have seen growing attention to athletes' mental health and overall well-being.

One of the theories that seeks to explain behavior in sport is Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Bandura highlights the social environment as a significant factor in shaping athletes' behavior. According to this theory, athletes learn which behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable through the process of modeling - observing and imitating others. Thus, young athletes, by observing the behavior of others, learn whether certain forms of aggressive behavior are considered acceptable within the context of a specific sport. Models in this process may include coaches, peers, professional athletes, or other relevant figures, and learning is based not only on observation but also on the consequences the model receives for a given behavior (e.g., praise, punishment, or reward). In this way, behavioral patterns are formed that align with the social and ethical norms of the sport.However, an increasing number of researchers argue that personality plays a significant role in shaping sport-related behavior and performance (Tod, 2022). Among athletes, there are notable differences related to culture, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation, as well as in their personality characteristics. Elite athletes often exhibit certain similarities in the personality traits they possess.

A study conducted by Piepiora (2021) examined personality dimensions among 600 athletes aged 20 to 29 years, representing twenty different sport disciplines. Within this sample, 59 participants were classified as "elite" athletes (i.e., individuals who had earned national or international distinctions). The results showed that athletes in the elite group exhibited lower

levels of neuroticism and higher levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness compared to the remaining athletes. Thus, levels of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness may contribute to determining competitive success.

Given the considerable diversity of sports, it is assumed that different personality traits may facilitate success across various sport disciplines. A meta-analysis including 155 independent studies investigated extraversion among athletes (Allen et al., 2021). The findings indicate that athletes demonstrate higher levels of extraversion than the general population, athletes in team sports show higher extraversion than those competing in individual sports, and female athletes score higher on extraversion than male athletes. Additionally, research shows that athletes with higher levels of extraversion tend to use more adaptive coping strategies, form higher-quality relationships with coaches, and display greater motivation to achieve high levels of sport performance.

Other research has focused on examining personality states and their association with sport performance. In a study by Beedie and colleagues, the relationships between various mood states - anger, depressed mood, confusion, fatigue, tension, and vigor - and sport success were investigated (Beedie et al., 2000). The findings indicated that mood was not significantly related to athletes' ability level; athletes of different ability levels reported similar moods over a given period. However, mood emerged as an important factor when assessed immediately before competition. Vigor was associated with greater sport success, whereas confusion, fatigue, and depressed mood were linked to poorer performance. Anger and tension were associated with either higher or lower success depending on the situational context.

Two parallel studies examined the association between perfectionism - measured through perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns - and sport performance in a 10-kilometer run and a half marathon (Walerianczyk & Stolarski, 2021). In both studies, perfectionistic concerns emerged as a significant predictor of running performance, explaining 7% and 13% of the variance, respectively. Furthermore, perfectionistic strivings moderated the relationship between expected and actual performance, with this association being substantially stronger among individuals exhibiting higher levels of perfectionistic strivings. The second study demonstrated that these effects remained statistically significant even after controlling for the five personality factors, indicating that they cannot be attributed solely to higher levels of conscientiousness among perfectionists.

Personality and criminal behavior

One of the outcomes associated with personality is criminal behavior. The relative stability of personality helps explain the continuity of antisocial behavior across different situations and over extended periods of time (Loeber, 1982). Research examining the relationship between personality traits and antisocial behavior indicates that individuals with high levels of negative emotionality and low levels of constraint are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Agnew et al., 1992).

Several meta-analyses have examined the relationship between personality traits and antisocial behavior. In the meta-analysis conducted by Miller and Lynam (2001), which included

51 studies, four different personality models were incorporated: Eysenck's P–E–N model, the Five-Factor Model, Tellegen's three-factor model, and Cloninger's seven-factor temperament and character model. The aim of the meta-analysis was to determine which personality traits, across these theoretical frameworks, most strongly predict antisocial behavior. The researchers identified the following traits as key predictors: novelty seeking, psychoticism, constraint, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness.

Jones and colleagues (2011) expanded on the earlier meta-analysis by examining the associations between the dimensions of the Five-Factor Model and both general antisocial behavior and aggressive behavior. Their meta-analysis, which included 29 studies on general antisocial behavior and 35 studies on aggressive behavior, yielded consistent results. Agreeableness emerged as the strongest - though negative - predictor of aggressive behavior. In addition, conscientiousness and neuroticism showed significant associations with both forms of behavior, whereas extraversion and openness to experience were not significantly related to either outcome.

Comparable findings were obtained in a more recent study by Donald and colleagues (2022), which represents a methodologically expanded version of the previous meta-analysis. The only notable deviations were the weak but statistically significant association between openness to experience and aggression, and the weak yet significant associations of both openness and extraversion with nonaggressive antisocial behavior.Despite the relative stability of personality across time and contexts, certain traits show systematic developmental shifts. With increasing age, individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness and lower levels of neuroticism. These developmental changes in personality correspond with the well-documented decline in antisocial behavior across the lifespan (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008).

In the meta-analysis conducted by Moreira and colleagues (2024), the relationship between the Dark Triad personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and antisocial behavior was examined. The analysis encompassed 367 studies published between 2010 and 2023. The results indicate a significant association between Dark Triad traits and delinquent behavior among adolescents, with conduct disorder showing positive links to psychopathy and Machiavellianism. A significant relationship was also found between Dark Triad traits and various forms of antisocial behavior in adults, including bullying, aggression, violence, and cyberbullying. Psychopathy emerged as the trait most strongly correlated with antisocial behavior. Although narcissism showed weaker overall associations, it was linked to reactive aggression and ego-threat responses. The findings underscore the central role of psychopathy in predicting antisocial behavior and highlight its capacity to reduce the relative influence of Machiavellianism and narcissism on such behaviors.

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