Work and Home Personality: differentiation or integration?

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Introduction

People behave differently when fulfilling different roles at work and home [1], with work personality more Conscientious and less Extraverted than various home roles. However, results for other traits have been somewhat inconsistent [2] [3]. This inconsistency is probably due to the methods used in previous research, which are unduly influenced by role stereotypes or social desirability (e.g. [4], [5]). Participants may actively exaggerate or attenuate differences in roles depending on their wish to appear consistent or flexible.

- Can the differences between work and home personalities reported in the literature be replicated using more innovative methodologies?

Consistency between different contextual personalities is associated with higher performance [6], greater satisfaction [7] and better psychological and physical well-being [3]. In addition, an individual’s sense of authenticity within each role is related to both well-being and satisfaction. There is little research, however, on the interaction between authenticity and role personality differentiation. This study explores the idea that authenticity could provide a means for reducing the negative impact of the ‘necessary evil’ of maintaining differing role personalities.

- Are individual differences in differentiation of role personalities related to authenticity?

To what extent is differentiation between role personalities a source of distress and is this affected by feelings of authenticity?

Method

191 full time employees completed an online questionnaire contextualised for either work or home, while in the appropriate work or home, while in the appropriate context for each role. Two weeks later, they completed the same sort of the context. The questionnaire consisted of the following scales:}

- Trait Self and True Self: Cross-Ratings and Observer Ratings of Personality on the Personality 

Differences between work and home personalities

Across the group, only Conscientiousness was higher at work than at home (t = 8.39, p < 0.001).

Individuals however, showed significant differences between their work and home personalities on all five traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Work mean</th>
<th>Home mean</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personality Differentiation and Authenticity

Self-integration (a measure of authenticity across both roles) was mostly unrelated to how similar or different participants’ role personalities were. The feeling of being true to oneself is only minimally related to personality differentiation.

Differentiation, Authenticity and Well-being

Those who felt more authentic in each role had higher well-being scores (less stressed, more satisfied with the role and a higher preference for the role) [Work role correlations: r = .33, .46 and .44 respectively, p < .01]. Home role correlations: r = .73, .64 and .36 respectively, p < .01].

Summary and Implications

Previous research on contextual personalities has relied on methods that could be confounded by social desirability or role stereotypes. Using more robust methods, this study supports the finding that, at a group level, people are more conscientious at work than home. While group differences are minimal, at an individual level, employees adapt their personality significantly to suit their own particular work or home context.

Personality differentiation has previously been associated with lower well-being but this work demonstrates that a key contributing factor is in fact authenticity. Employees who feel they are being authentic, regardless of the extent of their role personality differentiation, are less stressed and more satisfied with their roles. Inauthenticity in role personality has a large negative impact on well-being, yet employees also report a clear differentiation between their work and home personalities. How then can organisations encourage professional behaviour at work while still safeguarding employee well-being?

Further qualitative research is currently underway to explore the impact of inauthenticity on employees’ experience of work in more depth.