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**REINFORCEMENT SENSITIVITY THEORY, PERSONALITY,
AND SENIOR EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Management, The University of Auckland, 2010.

Abstract

This thesis explores the extent to which Jeffrey Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory of personality can predict and explain the job performance of top-level executive leaders. In this study, 189 senior executives underwent a battery of psychometric, biographical and performance measures. The dimensions of approach and avoidance motivation were measured using Carver and White's (1994) 'BIS/BAS Scales', and the predictive power of these dimensions was compared to R. Hogan and Hogan's (1997) ambition and adjustment traits. Overall, a model of senior executive performance prediction was tested using structural equation modelling. The results showed that the 'BIS/BAS Scales' did not predict the selected aspects of executive performance. However, the Hogan ambition and adjustment traits did, but only when certain facets of these traits were used. Most notably, the executives' levels of experience and perceived reward at work were stronger predictors of performance than personality was. The results suggest that reinforcement sensitivity theory does not provide a particularly promising explanation for senior executive job performance, with the chosen measures, but that selected Hogan measures do. However, executive performance prediction is very much a nuanced phenomenon, and these nuances only emerge when the performance and predictor domains are measured and analysed at a facet level.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this thesis would not have been possible without the individual executives who gave of their time and themselves to participate in this project, and their numerous colleagues who completed performance surveys. I thank each of these people for their generosity of spirit.

I am equally grateful to the numerous chief executives, consultants, human resource directors, friends, and University of Auckland colleagues who opened doors for me so that I could reach my data collection target. In particular, I thank Mattie Wall, Brad Jackson, Marie Wilson, Barry Spicer, Kevin McCaffrey, Galia Barhava-Monteith, Owen and Rebecca Swinson, and Jean Avery for putting me in touch with their executive contacts.

Grateful thanks go to Arran Caza, who shared his wealth of knowledge in structural equation modelling and provided comments on chapter 8, Philip Corr, for his helpful feedback on chapter 3, and David Scott, who kindly gave of his time and statistical expertise.

Robert Hogan and his team at Hogan Assessments Systems were extremely generous in allowing me to use their commercial tools for this research, and in particular I acknowledge Matt Lemming for his continuous assistance. Korn/Ferry International also kindly allowed me to use their Lominger tools. Finally, I acknowledge the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand, and the University of Auckland itself, for providing me with financial support.

Most importantly, the people in my everyday life provided me with so much support that to say ‘thank you’ seems trite, but I’ll try. First of all, I thank my friend Vanessa Frost for all her practical help. I thank my parents and Grandad for the various steps they each took to get me to this point and for their moral support of this project over the last four years.

I express deep gratitude to Giles Burch and Peter Boxall, my supervisors, who put in huge amounts of interest, insight, and energy, mentored me, and gave me constant friendship throughout the journey. Finally, I thank my family for their love and support: Bryce, for graciously taking on this project, sharing the experience with me, and providing every kind of support I needed to finish it; and Travis and Miles, who gave me reason to do this in the first place.

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