REINFORCEMENT SENSITIVITY THEORY, PERSONALITY, AND SENIOR EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE

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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.

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Table of Contents

Tables and Figures