Connections between personality traits and work experiences

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Abstract: The present study examined the factors that are related to burnout at the workplace. Previous studies researching the emergence of burnout mostly focused on external factors at the level of the nature of work, the workplace and institutions. Very few of them paid attention to the aspects of the individual in the sense of the individual’s personality traits and subjective feelings of satisfaction with work and with life. This is why this study researched the relationship between the burnout phenomenon, work satisfaction, personality traits and quality of life. To analyse personality traits, the emotions profile index (EPI) was used, which is based on Plutchik and Kellerman’s theory of emotion. Results of the study contribute to the understanding of the role of personality in the context of work.

Keywords: personality traits; burnout; quality of life; work satisfaction; employee’s position; emotions profile index; EPI; evolutionary psychology; human resource management.

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1 Introduction

Various factors determine the success of organisations and the individuals who are a part of them. This success is becoming a goal that is increasingly difficult to achieve, owing to globalisation and increasingly higher demands for competitiveness of the market.
Many changes on the level of organisational and environmental aspects contribute to a better adjustment to the global business environment. However, there is a smaller emphasis on the characteristics of individuals and their ability to adapt to ever-emerging challenges. A greater ability of the personality to adapt to the challenges of the global business environment, and greater care for the psychological well-being of employees, can be beneficial for the success of individuals and organisations in a world of increasing demands of globalisation. This is true for different sectors of the economy, same for production and services. It is therefore important to study the role of personality traits in relation to leadership, work efficiency and psychological and physical well-being at work. When exploring the links between psychological constructs, psychologists throughout the past 30 years most widely relied upon the five-factor personality model (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism). Hence the most commonly used tools are BFQ and NEO PI-R (e.g., Judge et al., 2002). Few studies that employed a different personality model were found. The present research therefore tested a personality model which is based on the evolutionary theory of emotions. BFQ and NEO-PI are based on a lexicographic and factorial-analytical approach. They observe the extent to which personality traits are represented in language, but do not explain why these traits can be described with more or less expressions. The personality structure derived from BFQ or NEO-PI is based on characteristics of verbal expressions and on defining sub-categories of these expressions. Emotions profile index (EPI), on the other hand, tries to explain personality traits from an evolutionary point of view: basic emotions are evolutionary products, related to basic adaptation mechanisms, and to some extent they are present at all evolutionary stages.

Evolutionary psychology is a new, recent science and not yet recognised in studies of organisational processes and other phenomena. In the future, more research in business from an evolutionary perspective is expected. From this point of view, the present article is quite innovative.

This empirical study investigated distinctions between the personality profiles of leaders and workers, based on the evolutionary theory of emotions, and the relationship between individual personality dimensions, viewed from an evolutionary perspective, and measures of burnout, work satisfaction and quality of life.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Personality: emotions profile index

The basis for the research was the theory of emotions by Plutchik and Kellerman. The authors of the theory implemented the evolutionary view of emotions to develop the theory of personality and devised the EPI questionnaire (Boben, 2006). The EPI questionnaire has proved a useful and reliable instrument in more than 20 years of practice in business (it is very useful for determination of psychological profiles employed at different positions). At the same time, the use of the EPI questionnaire is an innovative approach in the field of research in business.

The distinctiveness of Plutchik’s theory of emotions is that it explains the development of personality traits, based on the prototypical patterns of behaviour that come from the adaptive functions of primary emotions necessary for the existence of the organism (Boben, 2006). For example, the adaptive function of fear is (self-) protection
of an organism from danger (with the act of retreat, flight). People who often exhibit such behaviour have a highly expressed trait of self-protection. Similarly defined are the eight personality dimensions: reproduction, incorporation, orientation, protection, deprivation, rejection, exploration and destruction. Reproduction is conveyed with the ability of building up and maintaining relationships, therefore people with this trait highly expressed like to keep company, are pleasant, warm, friendly and outgoing. Incorporation is shown by acceptance of others and trust. People with a more characterised incorporation are trustful, obedient, may be naïve and easily allow themselves be led by other people. Orientation demonstrates the speed of response to environmental stimuli. Typical for people with a high score in this personality dimension are quick responding, deciding, working without particular consideration, and enjoyment of dynamic change. Protection points towards people who are observant, careful, and like to be well-informed. People with high deprivation are sad, distressed, unsatisfied, have feelings of emptiness, and are often pessimistic. Oppositional people are stubborn, stand by their principles, do not accept the opinion of the majority, are critical and may reject others. Exploration is seen as good organisation, structuralism, orderliness, self-control and precision. For people with high destruction, it is representative that they have a lot of energy for work and strong willpower; determinedly stand for themselves and their goals, which is why they easily appear merciless, harsh and confrontational in relationships (Boben, 2006; Lamovec, 1991).

2.2 Employment position and personality

The study focused on how the personality profiles of leaders deviate from those of other employees in the light of evolutionary explanation of emotions. Judge et al. (2002) found that extraversion, openness and conscientiousness are predominant predictions of leadership. While neuroticism has a negative connotation to leadership, it does not have an important predictive value. The weakest role appears to be that of agreeableness, which shows no association with leadership. Personality traits significantly influence the deduction of work efficiency and accomplishments (Hogan and Judge, 2012). Out of the major ones, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness predict achievements only within specific work fields. Important in regards to the performance in the field of leading are extraversion (mostly because of its dominant and assertive components), emotional stability and conscientiousness (Barrick and Mount, 2005). Conscientiousness and extraversion have also been found as important predictors of different leadership styles within a Norwegian study (Kormør and Nordvik, 2004). Hogan and Judge (2012) added their findings that for good management, features such as integrity, being decisive, competent and visionary are also important.

2.3 Burnout

Burnout is a psychological syndrome which is expressed as emotional exhaustion, negative attitude towards work and people at the workplace (depersonalisation, cynicism) and inefficiency. A common cause of burnout is a recurring imbalance between high work demands and limited resources for meeting said demands (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). Burnout is the result of long-lasting threats (e.g., high work demands) to an individual’s energy resources and an actual loss of them after longer, powerful work investment without the corresponding benefits (Shirom et al., 2005). The loss is related to
physical, emotional and cognitive energy resources, which is manifested as exceptional physical fatigue, emotional and cognitive exhaustion. Situational as well as personal factors contribute to the experience of burnout. Research in this area is mostly focused on studying situational factors, such as features of work, job posts and organisation. They are less frequently oriented towards studying personality elements and views on work (e.g., Swider and Zimmerman, 2010).

2.4 Personality and burnout

Studies confirm that the Big Five personality traits are linked to experiencing burnout (e.g., Armon et al., 2012). Neuroticism or emotional instability is positively correlated with burnout (e.g., Swider and Zimmerman, 2010). Alarcon et al. (2009) found a strong correlation between emotional instability and predominantly two components of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation). Extraversion and conscientiousness, on the other hand, are negatively correlated to burnout (Swider and Zimmerman, 2010). Yet some studies contradict this statement, as their results show a positive correlation between conscientiousness and burnout (e.g., Armon et al., 2012), especially with the efficiency component, and a negative correlation with depersonalisation (Kokkinos, 2007). Alarcon et al. (2009) found that together with the Big Five personality traits, there are others importantly related to burnout, specifically self-confidence, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, positive emotionality, negative emotionality, optimism and proactive personality. Frequent experiences of burnout are also connected to high productive orientation, work eagerness, performance and responsibility at work (Pšeničny, 2006).

2.5 Work satisfaction, demographic variables and burnout

Researchers do not always agree on connections between demographic variables (age, gender, work status, period of employment) and work outcomes. Davis (2004) states that these variables do not influence work satisfaction. However, there are others who claim that only one of the variables has an important influence (e.g., Sarker et al., 2003). Furnham et al. (2009) discovered that personality traits and demographic variables can account for 11–12% of variance regarding work satisfaction.

The present study also focused on the link between work satisfaction and burnout. Both concepts are multidimensional and represent affective responses to work; in the first case these are positive, and in the latter negative. Tsigilis et al. (2004) used librarians to show that even though these two concepts are strongly negatively correlated, they do not serve as two extremes of the same dimension.

2.6 Quality of life, personality and work satisfaction

WHO (1997) defines quality of life as an individual’s perception of their life position, together with their goals, expectations and standards. It includes physical health, mental state, interpersonal relationships and the attitude towards important situations.

Imai and Nakachi (2001) found that emotionally unstable and introverted males have a unhealthier lifestyle and are more susceptible to mental stress than emotionally stable
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and extraverted males. Studies also researched the D personality type (tendency towards negative emotions, e.g., concernment, irritability, weariness, social inhibition) and lifestyle. They found that the D personality type is predominant in males with a sedentary lifestyle (as opposed to males who partake in regular recreation; Borkoles et al., 2009) and in students who spend less time outside (compared to students who have a healthier lifestyle; Williams et al., 2008). Authors of older studies (e.g., Clark and Watson, 1991) suggest that negative emotions and neuroticism act as glasses through which the individual interprets his surroundings. People with predominantly negative emotions are thus supposedly more unsatisfied with themselves, their work and their life in general. Other researchers dispute this, suggesting that personality factors play no role at all (e.g., Vidal et al., 2008).

Quality of life is also connected to work satisfaction (e.g., Adams et al., 1996 cited in Hart, 1999) – work satisfaction may influence life satisfaction and vice versa. Hart (1999) showed that satisfaction with free time, personality factors (neuroticism and extraversion), work satisfaction, and ups and downs within and outside of work, importantly influence the extent to which people are satisfied with their lives. Cimete et al. (2003) found a positive correlation between work satisfaction and quality of life. They also discovered that the expression of these constructs changes with age, economy status, work-life length and position at work.

Burnout negatively correlates to quality of life (Takai et al., 2009). Higher levels of burnout may decrease the degree of perceived quality of life (Suñer-Soler et al., 2013). On the other hand, commitment to work has a positive effect on contentment with life (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012). Events at work are important for an individual’s satisfaction with life, thus burnout means a lower satisfaction with life, while well-being at work leads to feeling good in general.

2.7 Problem and hypotheses

The present research focused on studying personality factors using the EPI questionnaire, which has proved itself a useful instrument for personality profiling of individuals at different employment positions. The study tested the differences in personality traits between leaders and employees, and the relationship between different personality characteristics and the experience of burnout, work satisfaction and quality of life. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. connections between burnout and certain EPI dimensions are expected
2. connections between work satisfaction and certain EPI dimensions are expected
3. connections between general quality of life and certain EPI dimensions are expected
4. a positive correlation between work satisfaction and quality of life and a negative correlation of these two concepts and burnout are expected
5. differences between the group of leaders and group of employees in certain EPI dimensions are expected.

The study also tested whether there are differences between employees and leaders in regard to the extent of burnout, quality of life and work satisfaction.
3 Method

3.1 Data and sample

This study was conducted in Slovenia, a member state of the EU. 362 individuals were included, employed in different companies in the Obala-Kras region. 159 (44%) of the participants were male and 203 (56%) were female. The majority of participants were between the ages of 31 and 36 (83 people, 23%), 76 people (21%) were between the ages of 37 and 42 and 73 people (20%) between the ages of 43 and 48. The fewest participants were less than 25 years old or more than 60 years old (15 people in total, 4%). Most of them completed high school or vocational school (134 people, 37%) and college or higher education (106 people, 29%). 73 people (18%) had a university degree, 26 people (7%) had a Master’s or a PhD, and 23 people (6%) had primary education. Almost a half of the participating individuals (173 people) were employed in the same organisation for over ten years. Two thirds of the participants (237 people) were workers, a quarter (89 people) performed the function of an operations manager and a tenth (36 people) that of a middle manager. Regarding the field of employment, 30% (109 people) of the participants were in the area of production and services, 32% (115 people) from the area of back offices, finances, legal and general affairs, and 38% (138 people) from other areas of employment.

3.2 Measuring instruments

The EPI questionnaire was used in the study, as well as a questionnaire with rankings of burnout, quality of life and work satisfaction. It also included questions about demographic variables.

3.2.1 Burnout

The burnout dimension consists of 13 items. The design of the items was based on Maslach’s theory of burnout, which predicts three components of burnout (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). Therefore items related to exhaustion (e.g., in the morning I wake up tired), negative attitude towards work (e.g., I only go to work because of the pay check) and the sense of inefficiency (e.g., I feel less able and less efficient than I could be) are included in the questionnaire. Participants answered on a five-rating scale (1 – never; 5 – always). The purpose of the questionnaire was to get a rough overview of how the participants experience burnout. The designed questionnaire of burnout is highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.874$).

3.2.2 Work satisfaction

The scale consisted of 5 headings regarding the experience of work (pleasantness of work) and the working environment (working hours and feedback). The design of the headings was derived from the findings of Mihalič (2008) and Fakin and Smrke (2004), who suggest that work satisfaction reflects experience, such as the ability to deliver proposals, praise for a job well done and the familiarity with work tasks. Participants answered on a five-rating scale (1 – never; 5 – always). The reliability of this scale is satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.75$).
3.2.3 General quality of life

The scale consisted of 5 headings regarding the subjective experience of satisfaction (pleasure in work, contentment with life) as well as objective indicators (frequency of social interactions and recreation). The design of the headings was based on the definition of Costanza et al. (2007), which is that quality of life brings together both aspects: subjective well-being and objective indicators. Participants answered with a five-rating scale (1 – never; 5 – always). The reliability of this scale is satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.72$).

3.2.4 EPI (emotions profile index)

The questionnaire is based on Plutchik and Kellerman’s theory of emotions and is an efficient psychodiagnostic tool (Boben, 2006). The Slovenian version of the questionnaire, developed in 1983, was used (Boben, 2006). The questionnaire measures eight personality dimensions: reproduction, incorporation, orientation, protection, deprivation, rejection, exploration and destruction. Furthermore, it also measures the level of bias of responses. It consists of 62 pairs of words, which represent personality characteristics. Completing the questionnaire requires of the participant to select a word in each pair that they feel better describes them. The reliability coefficients of dimensions lie between 0.60 and 0.80.

3.3 Procedure

The research was conducted in the electronic format. Participants received the questionnaire via e-mail. The data was processed using the SPSS statistics program. Disproportion in the size of samples appeared in the categories of workers, operations managers and middle managers (the majority of the participants were in the worker position), which is why both types of managers were joined into one category (leaders). The reliability of the devised scales, the degrees of relatedness between the variables and the importance of differences between the studied groups were calculated.

4 Results and interpretation

In Table 1, it can be seen that there appear to be relatively strong correlations (Pearson coefficients) between the perceived quality of life, work satisfaction and burnout. However, the correlations are lower between these concepts and EPI dimensions. Only two out of eight EPI dimensions do not relate to quality of life (protection and exploration), and the highest correlation is with reproduction and incorporation. Work satisfaction connects to three EPI dimensions (orientation, protection and exploration). Intensities of correlations of other dimensions are similar to each other. Protection and exploration are the only two EPI dimensions not linked with burnout; however its correlation with other dimensions is weak.
Table 1  Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients of measured constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Quality life</th>
<th>Work satisfaction</th>
<th>Burnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality life</td>
<td>20.09</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.433**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-469**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work satisfaction</td>
<td>16.87</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.433**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-561**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>31.61</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>-469**</td>
<td>-561**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction</td>
<td>15.27</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.305**</td>
<td>.190**</td>
<td>-263**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>20.53</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>.337**</td>
<td>.220**</td>
<td>-287**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.121*</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-143**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>-236**</td>
<td>-157**</td>
<td>.298**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>-236**</td>
<td>-197**</td>
<td>.205**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>16.15</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>10.33</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>-.240**</td>
<td>-.206**</td>
<td>.274**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: **p < 0.01 (two-way); *p < 0.05 (two-way); N = 362.

4.1  Links between perceived quality of life, work satisfaction and burnout

Perceived quality of life and work satisfaction are moderately positively correlated, while burnout correlates moderately negative to both concepts (Table 1). Therefore, the employees who are more satisfied with their work rate their quality of life higher than those who are not. Those who experience burnout at work are less content not only with their job but also with their life. These findings are in agreement with previous studies, which show that there is a mutual influence of work satisfaction and quality of life, and a negative influence of burnout on both concepts (e.g., Suñer-Soler et al., 2013). Experiencing work is not completely separated from experiencing quality of life; rather these two areas influence each other. Work represents an important part of a person’s life, but on the other hand it is often affected by unpleasantness in personal life. Burnout is expressed as exhaustion, cynicism and the feeling of inefficiency, which is not limited to work, but may also be generalised to all areas of a person’s functioning. Research confirms this with the finding that burnout predicts a lower satisfaction with life, as well as symptoms of depression (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2012).

4.2 Link between burnout and EPI dimensions

Connections between burnout and different personality dimensions are confirmed, which is consistent with the findings of the previous meta-analyses that discovered a significant relationship between personality and experiencing burnout at work (e.g., Alarcon et al., 2009). Personality therefore is an important factor in understanding the reasons for a more frequent experience of burnout at work regardless of objective working conditions.

Burnout in the present research was negatively correlated to reproduction, incorporation and orientation. On the other hand, deprivation, rejection and destruction correlated to burnout positively (Table 1). Participants who are less skilled in interpersonal relationships, less trusting towards others and are slower to respond to environmental stimuli and information experience higher levels of burnout. Those more
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Researchers (e.g., Langelaan et al., 2006) assume that people who are highly neurotic are more susceptible to burnout (because they are emotionally unstable), experience stress more often and detect more potential threats in the working environment. Even though the EPI questionnaire does not measure neuroticism in itself, deprivation is a personality trait that often carries more frequently expressed negative emotions. Thus people with this particular trait highly expressed are supposedly more inclined to burnout, as they have a tendency to feel sad, unhappy with several aspects of their own life, and often have a negative, even pessimistic perspective of the world. This type of people may develop a negative attitude towards work and co-workers as well as towards personal abilities, which are two important components of experiencing burnout – cynicism (depersonalisation), feelings of ineffectiveness (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). Alarcon et al. (2009) accordingly found that positive and negative emotionality and optimism are importantly related to burnout.

Multiple studies identified negative correlations between burnout, extraversion and agreeableness (e.g., Cano-García et al., 2005). These are the two personality traits that may importantly determine an individual’s cooperativeness and their potential to establish relationships of quality. Accordingly, in the present research, the personality characteristics determining an individual’s potential to build up quality relationships stood out as significantly related to burnout. These are reproduction, rejection and destruction. Individuals with low reproduction and incorporation have fewer social abilities, are less pleasant in relationships, are less interested in establishing them in the first place, are less trusting and do not connect to others easily. Individuals with high rejection and destruction insist on their views that they fiercely defend, do not accept the opinions of others and may be sharp and relentless towards others on the account of persistency at work. Consequently, they find it more difficult to establish relationships of quality at work, which leads to a greater difficulty of gaining the support and help of co-workers when the workload increases. All of these characteristics may encourage emotional exhaustion and a negative attitude towards work and co-workers, and at the same time affect the person’s efficiency at work.

Destruction has another peculiarity, as it is expressed not only as sharpness in interpersonal relationships, but also as persistency in accomplishing difficult tasks, tackling barriers and reaching set goals. People with this trait highly expressed do not give up easily, but may perform the tasks uncompromisingly. This can be burdensome when workload increases further, and from this standpoint this persistency is a greater risk for burnout. Correspondingly, research shows that people, who are very performance-oriented, committed to work and have an image of themselves as highly productive experience burnout more frequently (Pšeničny, 2006, 2008).

Orientation is negatively correlated to burnout. It is typical for people with a low orientation to be slow in responding to environmental stimuli, which means they work slower, think a lot, are more indecisive and may postpone completing the tasks. A frequent cause of burnout is a continuing imbalance between high demands at work and limited resources for completion of these assignments, which is reflected as the loss of energy sources of an individual (e.g., Shirom et al., 2005). This type of imbalance may be the consequence of exceptional working demands and an increased requirement for speed of an individual with low abilities for quick, dynamic and diverse work. This means that
a low orientation represents susceptibility to burnout due to a decreased response of an individual in fast-paced environments, which may lead to greater levels of exhaustion when the individual tries to speed up their working pace. It may also result in a negative attitude towards work and the feeling of inefficiency due to the failure to meet the demands for speed.

4.3 Connecting quality of life and EPI dimensions

The link of contentment with life to reproduction, incorporation, orientation, deprivation, rejection and destruction is low or moderate (Table 1). People who are frequently physically active, socialise with friends, trust in their abilities to cope with stress and are more content with their life have a slightly higher interest in people, more social skills, and are a little more trusting of and lenient towards others. On the other hand, they are somewhat more optimistic and impulsive, and feel a lesser need for success.

Socialness, interest in one’s surroundings, looking for contact with people, establishment of relationships, attachment to others, etc. are characteristics or behaviours that can be defined as a common denominator of reproduction and incorporation on one side and extraversion on the other (both EPI dimensions correlate to extraversion in the EPQ questionnaire (Eysenck et al., 1997) and with social extraversion and affiliation (Boben, 2006). Rejection, originating from the basic emotion of rejection, opposition, also negatively correlates to extraversion (Eysenck et al., 1997). People who are not very oppositional can adapt to others more easily, and their form of communication is more pleasant. A few other researchers showed that more social people rate their life as being of higher quality (e.g., Williams et al., 2008).

Maintenance of hope for the future and interpreting the circumstances as positive springs out of low deprivation [deprivation correlates to depression (Boben, 2006; Eysenck et al., 1997)]. Thus it is understandable that low deprivation correlates to higher quality of life. As stated by Clark and Watson (1991), individuals with a predominant positive emotionality are more satisfied with their life. Behaviours such as concern, irritability and weariness, as well as the personality characteristic of neuroticism all connect to a less healthy lifestyle or lower quality of life (e.g., Borkoles et al., 2009).

Being more impulsive (high orientation) relates to a higher quality of life. These people like to try out novelties and enjoy them, they are adventurous and curious. They are more open to changes and challenges that are brought about by life, and accept them more easily as well. With such an attitude towards life, it is more likely they will rate it as being of better quality.

People with higher quality of life are less aggressive: they have a lesser need for success and a greater need for affiliation and attachment (rejection and success are positively correlated, while aggression and affiliation are negatively correlated (EPPS questionnaire; Boben, 2006). These people are not as oriented towards production as they are towards investing in interpersonal relationships – it can therefore be concluded (similar to the paragraph above): people who build on connections with others are happier with their lives.
4.4 Connections between work satisfaction and EPI dimensions

Work satisfaction and EPI dimensions have low correlation coefficients: low negative correlations exist between work satisfaction and deprivation, rejection and destruction, and positive on the other hand with reproduction and incorporation (Table 1). Participants who believe that their work tasks are being well presented to them, that their ideas are taken into account, that they are praised for a job well done and who enjoy their work are slightly more skilled in interpersonal relationships and lenient and trusting towards others. They are slightly more optimistic and feel a lesser need for success. Emotions in the background of higher reproduction and incorporation are intensified joy and acceptance. Lower deprivation reflects a weaker sadness, while lower destruction indicates a less intense anger. These characteristics are outwardly manifested as social skills, sociability, flexibility to closely related people, hope and faith in the future, positive interpretation of circumstances, attributing minor importance to achievements at work and a lesser need for success. Said traits or behaviours negatively correlate to depression, social introversion and neuroticism, and positively to extraversion (sociability, interest in people, etc.), emotional stability (calmness, experiencing negative emotions and anxiety rarely) and affiliation (Eysenck et al., 1997; Boben, 2006). Many studies have already showed that a higher satisfaction with work relates to greater emotional stability and extraversion (Judge et al., 2002). Similarly, this is also true for personality traits which are related to these two constructs (Tokar et al., 1998 cited in Judge et al., 2002).

4.5 Differences in personality traits, burnout, work satisfaction and quality of life between workers and leaders

In Table 2, it can be seen that the groups of workers and leaders have fairly similar results in terms of the EPI dimensions. To verify the statistical significance of differences between workers and leaders, a t-test was used where the distribution of dimensions was normal and the Mann-Whitney U test was used for non-normal distributions. The greatest variations appear in two areas, protection and orientation (Table 3), followed by deprivation ($U = 12,755.00; p = 0.029$); these discrepancies are statistically important. Leaders express orientation more than workers, who in turn express protection and deprivation to a greater extent. Operation and middle managers more easily accept novelties and unpredictable situations are more tolerant of changes and face challenges more easily. Workers find it more difficult to adapt to new situations, are more cautious and observant. The combination of orientation and protection also tells us how operational an individual at work is: in this case, the leaders are a bit more operational, meaning that they are more at ease making decisions and completing tasks than workers. Both groups scored in the middle of the scale of deprivation, which suggests a realistic, rational view of the world; they do not succumb to euphoria or weariness. The result of the managers is slightly biased towards the direction of optimism. All of the described differences between managers and workers are minimal.
Table 2  Descriptive statistics for EPI dimensions, according to an employee’s position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPI dimensions</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.65</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.07</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20.52</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20.53</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.84</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deprivation</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>9.02</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.91</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.27</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>6.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: N leaders = 123; N workers = 237.

Table 3  Results of the t-test for dimensions where important differences between groups were detected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>3.382</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>-2.933</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>-2.516</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accordingly with previous studies (e.g., meta-analysis by Judge et al., 2002), it was discovered that there are a few personality traits that distinguish leaders from other employees. Research suggests that extraversion and openness, together with conscientiousness, importantly predict the efficiency of leadership (Judge et al., 2002). Therefore characteristics such as activeness, sociability, dominance, openness to novelties, adaptation to change, accuracy, forethought, compliance with deadlines, etc. represent a potential for efficient leadership. Despite extraversion, openness and conscientiousness being conceptually different attributes than the studied ones, some relatedness can be found. What differentiates leaders from other is that they make decisions quicker, complete their duties within deadlines, are able to adapt faster to changes and novelties and are more dynamic at work.

The leaders in the present research have a less pessimistic view of the world compared to the workers. They are more content and inclined to see problems as solvable. Emotional stability is one of the traits which predict leadership efficiency (Barrick and Mount, 2005). Despite not having the same meaning as the characteristic of deprivation, these two traits are related in the way they determine a more positive emotionality of an individual, which encourages goal-oriented behaviour. Workers may
have more burnout than leaders because they are more susceptible to developing a negative view of the world due to slightly greater deprivation.

Table 4 Descriptive for quality of life, satisfaction with work, and burnout, according to an employee’s position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20.38</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19.94</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.32</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29.92</td>
<td>8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32.52</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4, it can be seen that the greatest difference between the group of workers and the group of leaders is in the expressed burnout, while both groups rated quality of life and work satisfaction similarly. The t-test highlighted the statistical importance of the difference in expressed burnout (results of the t-test are presented in Table 3). Therefore, workers are more emotionally exhausted, have less psychological and physical energy to continue work, and have a more negative attitude towards work than their leaders (these differences are minor). These results are supported by the findings of Toppinen-Tanner et al. (2002), who suggested that burnout occurs in both leaders and workers in a similar fashion, and is influenced by the characteristics of the working environment such as time pressure, lack of autonomy, uncleranness of roles, conflicts and lack of support. Leaders normally have a higher degree of autonomy when it comes to making decisions, compared to subordinate workers; their work is usually interpreted as more important and highly valued, employees show more respect to them, etc. Perhaps it is these characteristics that act as a protection factor due to which leaders experience less burnout.

5 Limitations and contribution of the present article

It was found that employees who are highly satisfied with their work rate their quality of life higher, and vice versa. In contrast, those who experience burnout at work are less content, not only with their work, but also with their life. It is therefore confirmed that the participants who have lower social skills, are less trusting towards other people and respond to environmental stimuli and information slower, experience higher levels of burnout. Greater burnout is additionally experienced by participants who are more pessimistic, stand firmly by their principles which are in contrast to the standpoints of the majority and are more committed to work and relationships.

Leaders in the present study have a slightly less pessimistic view of the world as opposed to the workers. They may be more satisfied and inclined to see problems as solvable. The greatest difference between the group of workers and the group of leaders is in the way in which they express burnout. Quality of life and work satisfaction were rated similarly. Therefore, it can be concluded that workers are more emotionally exhausted, have less psychological and physical energy to continue work and have a more negative attitude towards work than their leaders.
Usually, such results were attributed to characteristics of work. In the future, stressing the importance of personality traits of workers and leaders may/should become the norm. This study tries, with its structure and methodology, to highlight the importance of personality characteristics of individuals in the development of efficient methods of dealing with challenging business situations. Personal effectiveness at work, experiencing burnout and quality of life relate to personality traits of individuals. The study showed that it is sensible for the scientific community to focus not only on objective circumstances of the workplace as a source of risk factors of burnout, but also on personality traits of employees, as these are the foundation of the behavioural styles with which employees deal with difficult business situations.

On the basis of the present analysis of personal traits, potentials and competences can be discerned (e.g., the combination of the results on the scales of orientation and protection yields operativeness). Starting from these, a plan for courses, training or coaching can be better designed, focusing on regulation of particular emotions and behaviour (for example, for workers in the present study, it would be advised to train a more optimistic view of the world, a sense of self-competence and a sense of control).

The fundamental limitation of this study comes from the choice of instruments. The EPI questionnaire has poorer metric characteristics and therefore it is not often used for research purposes. Since the EPI evaluation method has not been tested many times, comparison to other similar projects is difficult. However, it was chosen for the present study as it is derived from the evolutionary theory of emotions and is often used in Slovenia in the processes of human resources selection and development, as well as in clinical psychology (it is very accurate and informative in the sense of yielding personality traits and competences).

References


Connections between personality traits and work experiences


