

CONSTRUCTING THE TEAM: A PERSONALITY-BASED PERSPECTIVE TO TEAM ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY

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Recent research has shown that personality traits can impact a team member's contribution to the team, which can in turn affect the team's absorptive capacity and performance. This paper provides theoretical foundations for the formulation of a model to explore how individual personality traits interact with relational learning activities to improve team absorptive capacity and performance based on the Myer's Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality framework. It is argued that potential absorptive capacity which constitutes acquisition and assimilation capacities is influenced by the extroversion-introversion (E-I) and sensing-intuition (S-N) personality traits taxonomies of individual team members. Similarly, the individual thinking-feeling (T-F) and judging-perception (J-P) personality traits taxonomies were argued to influence realized absorptive capacity of the project team which constitutes transformation and exploitation capacities. The proposed interactions presented in this paper are based on a literature review, therefore empirical investigations are needed to validate the proposed arguments and relationships. Nonetheless, this paper can serve as a starting point for future academic efforts.

Keywords: Absorptive capacity; MBTI; personality traits; project; team performance

INTRODUCTION

Studies such as Vecchio *et al.*, (2016) in organizational behaviour have highlighted the significant effect of individual characteristics and perceptions towards team building and performance. Evidently, there has been an array of constructs in the modern management literature that have been argued to mediate the effect such characteristics and perceptions on team performance (Bjorvatn and Wald, 2018; Um and Kim, 2018; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2019). One of these constructs is absorptive capacity, which reflects a set of dynamic organizational routines and processes by which organizations acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit work related knowledge. Such knowledge has significant bearing on the built environment as this is mostly delivered using project teams of diverse compositions. Previous studies such as Zailani *et al.* (2021) have explored the effect of project team absorptive capacity on improving the overall project team performance and project management

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success. Bjorvatn and Wald (2018) established a positive effect of absorptive capacity on mitigating project constraints and improving performance. Leal-rodríguez *et al.*, (2014) in a study to model the distinct dimensions of absorptive capacity and effect on project team performance argued that the construct is characterised by two main components. The potential absorptive capacity, which include the ability to acquire and assimilate new information or knowledge, and realized absorptive capacity, which include the ability to transform and exploit new information or knowledge. The study indicated that potential absorptive capacity has an important influence on realized absorptive capacity, positively moderated by relational learning activities such as sharing work experiences, and peer training amongst others that ultimately affect performance.

Although there is no contention that studying personality traits in relation to team performance is not a novel academic venture, the Big-Five framework of personality has been excessively used to assess the relationship between personality and team performance (Nowak 2018; Soomro *et al.*, 2016; Mammadov, 2022). However, noting the limitations of the Big Five personality studies, Carl Jung's theory of personality types (Jung, 1923) which serves as the foundation for the Myer's Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality framework presents a differing approach to assessing team member's personality with regards to relational learning. The cognitive style MBTI psychological framework defines an individual's personality trait based on four psychological functioning typologies: sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling extraversion vs. introversion, judging vs. Perceiving. While personality traits such as extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience have been argued to remain constant, and have a direct relationship with overall team performance (Roberts and Woodman, 2017), it is argued in this paper that the distinction of the Jung's theory (1923) makes the MBTI framework most suitable to study dynamic relational learning interactions between team members, with a view to assessing the individual cognitive characteristics of the team members and how it affects the team performance through mediating factors (Roberts and Woodman, 2017).

It is argued that relational learning activities that builds on team level absorptive capacity mediate the relationship between dynamic personality traits and team performance. Although Studies on absorptive capacity have been largely concerned with the construct as an aggregated, organizational or team level phenomenon, recent studies have called for the adoption of a micro-foundations approach by uncovering the actions and agency of individuals in absorptive capacity studies (Scuotto *et al.*, 2022; Knudsen *et al.*, 2022). This paper focuses on this perspective to build up its arguments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality Traits and Performance

The nexus between personality traits and performance has been widely studied in the past, with many studies positing the influence of personality traits on the thoughts and decision-making processes of an individual, thereby dictating their behaviour and performance (Nowak, 2018; Judge and Zapata 2015). Nonetheless, (He *et al.*, 2019) noted that the construct of team or individual performance is broad and multidimensional, just as the indicators of personality traits are also multifaceted. Therefore, assessing the interaction between personality traits and performance may involve a certain level of variability, as certain dimensions of a specific personality

trait could have more influence to specific performance metrics than others. For instance, dimensions of personality traits that promote dutifulness and self-discipline have been found to have stronger associations with the performance dimension that facilitates interpersonal relations and task dedication (Dundley *et al.*, 2016).

The premise of the Big-Five framework is that factors that include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience are poised to remain stable and consistent over time, which collectively predisposes an individual to behave in a certain way in all situations (Roberts and Woodman, 2017). Although (Furnham, 1996) highlighted the overlapping similarities between the Big-Five and the MBTI frameworks, Celli and Lepri (2018) found that the MBTI framework having 4 binary classes and 16 possible personality type combinations (Figure 1) is best suited for modelling performance dynamics that involves complex deep learning processes. According to McCrae and Costa (1989), the MBTI is distinct from other personality assessment frameworks, because of it being formulated from a classical theory, and it set out to measure personality type combinations, rather than continuous personality trait variables.

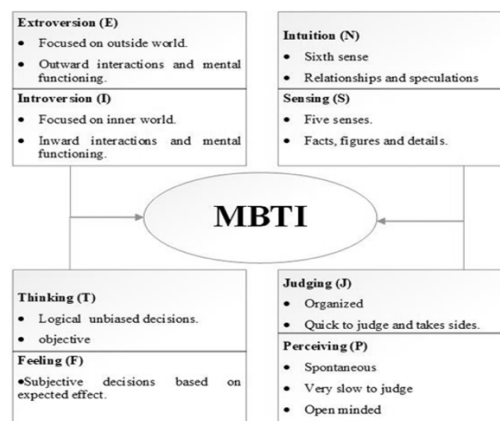


Figure 1: The MBTI Taxonomy

Relatedly, recent advances in technology, has prompted the adoption of machine learning approaches to modelling team dynamics such as personality traits towards optimizing performance (Ahmad and Saddique, 2017). Celli and Lepri (2018) argued that the MBTI framework performs better with the machine learning algorithms, yielding positive outcomes, and enabling data-driven performance optimizations. Similarly, Ahmad and Siddique (2017) studied the performance of gradient boosting algorithm trained with Kaggle MBTI dataset, reporting significant performance improvement.

Absorptive Capacity and Performance

Zahra and George (2002) conceptualized the construct of absorptive capacity as a set of dynamic organizational routines and processes by which organizations acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit knowledge. Absorptive capacities are path-dependent and develop cumulatively, facilitated by communication between individuals and subunits (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Killen *et al.*, (2012) noted a sparing application of the absorptive capacity construct in the project management literature as opposed to organization-focused business literature. However, an established stream of literature views projects as temporary organizations (Burke and Morley, 2016). Also, Hobday *et al.*, (2000) opined that most or all business activities of an organization are undertaken in the form of projects. Thus, it is argued that the

development of absorptive capacity in teams presupposes smooth knowledge exchange between individuals or project team members.

Table 1 depicts the four dimensions of absorptive capacity as conceptualized by Zahra and George (2002), which according to Sun and Anderson (2008) is a multi-level learning process directly related to the individual or organisation. In recent literature, these dimensions have been grossly classified into Potential Absorptive capacity and Realised absorptive capacity by Leal-rodríguez *et al.*, (2014). Potential absorptive capacity enables the organizations or project team to be receptive to both internal and external innovative knowledge. That is, to acquire, analyse, interpret, and understand this new knowledge. It involves the dimensions of knowledge acquisition and assimilation. Whereas, realized absorptive capacity reflects the organization's ability to transform and exploit the new knowledge, incorporating it, with existing knowledge, into its operations. This capacity is thus determined by the dimensions of knowledge transformation and exploitation.

Nowak (2017) observed the interactions between the two broad classifications of absorptive capacity, establishing a link between the ability to access and recognize the value of new knowledge or idea, and the ability to leverage on new knowledge or idea towards performance optimization. Volberda *et al.* (2010) argued that realized absorptive capacity enables the individual or team to be more responsive to novel knowledge, thereby further strengthening the dimensions of potential absorptive capacity. While Zahra and George (2002) posited that the creation and exploitation of novel knowledge or idea is the core of absorptive capacity formulation, it is argued that having weak internal mechanism of integration and learning could significantly hinder this process (Volberda *et al.*, 2010), ultimately leading to poor performance. The extent of such hindrance according to Chang and Shih (2019) remains relatively unclear, providing appropriate context to interpreting how the manifestation of novel knowledge is regarded as either an opportunity or a threat.

Nexus Between Personality Traits, Absorptive Capacity and Performance

Despite the popularity of absorptive capacity in the wider organizational management literature, there is an emerging interest among project management and team scholars to apply the construct (Bjorvatn and Wald, 2018). This is noting the similarities perceived between organizational and project team settings, with an established stream of literature perceiving projects as temporary organizations (Sydow, 2017; Burke and Morley, 2016). As noted by Zwikael and Unger-Aviram, (2010), the professional and organizational diversity frequently encountered in construction project teams represents a palette of original and novel perspectives that need to be assessed, assimilated, and applied by the project team collectively. Knippenberg and Schippers, (2007) noted the tendencies of diversity within teams to result in conflict of opinions and interests which diminishes ultimate performance. On the other hand, diversity has been reported to promote relational learning activities as it broadens the scope of knowledge and expertise within the team enabling innovative processes that yield improved outputs (Mitchell *et al.*, 2017).

Nowak (2020) argued that cognitive diversity, constituting the dimensions of personality traits significantly influences the ability of the team to assess, assimilate, transform, and exploit new knowledge towards performance improvement. Acquisition capacity emphasizes not only evaluation of the use of the knowledge, but also its transfer.

Table 1: Dimensions of Absorptive Capacity

	Dimensions	Components	Role/ Importance
Potential Absorptive Capacity	Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior investments • Prior knowledge • Intensity • Speed • Direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of search • Perceptual schema • New connections • Speed of learning • Quality of learning
	Assimilation	Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation • Comprehension • Learning
Realized Absorptive Capacity	Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalization • Conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synergy • Recodification
	Exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use • Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core competencies • Harvesting resources

This entails close personal interaction and mutual trust and respect between team members. However, considering the diversity often experienced in teams, the importance of being able to communicate in the language of others within a team to ensure knowledge assimilation has been highlighted (Pedrosa and Välling, 2013). The extroversion-introversion (E-I) and sensing-intuition (S-N) taxonomies of the Jung (1926) model collectively define individual perceptions and orientation towards generating and processing data. Thus, depending on the inclination of the team member towards extroversion or introversion for instance, the individual’s capacity for perspective taking could serve as a means of overcoming interpretive barriers to successful knowledge integration, caused by the existence of different thought worlds inside the team (Distel, 2019).

Similarly, assimilation capacity is characterized by the team's ability to work together across professional and structural divisions (Zahra and George, 2002). Complementary skill sets and a common professional language aid the team in analysing and interpreting the new knowledge, thus ensuring timely and economical knowledge processing. To assimilate the acquired knowledge and obtain advantages from it, team members must interpret and comprehend the knowledge to finally learn it (Hussain *et al.*, 2022). In this regard, the cognitive characteristics and capabilities of individual team members could play a vital role in determining the collective absorptive capacity of the team (Knudsen *et al.*, 2022). This has a direct link to the team’s ability to acquire new knowledge or ideas, as well as assimilate information which reflects the overall potential absorptive capacity of the team.

Also, potential absorptive capacity which constitutes acquisition and assimilation capacities of team members serves as the catalyst for exchanging and externalizing the tacit knowledge possessed by individual team members in the form of past experiences and lessons learned (Duffield and Whitty, 2016). This knowledge contributes to the project team’s explicit and articulated knowledge and forms the bedrock for a mutual understanding between team members. As Leal-rodríguez *et al.*, (2014) found that potential absorptive capacity complements the formulation of realized absorptive capacity, the thinking-feeling (T-F) and judging-perception (J-P) personality taxonomies of the Jung (1926) model presents the opportunity for transformation and exploitation of new innovative knowledge within project teams (Rezaei-Zadeh *et al.*, 2022). Potential absorptive capacity grants individuals within the team with mutual access to pertinent information from their internal and external knowledge networks (Duffield and Whitty, 2016). This builds the team’s absorptive

capacity by enabling project team members to identify and acquire relevant external information through active networking (Biedenbach and Müller, 2012).

Ultimately, it could be argued that potential absorptive capacity increases the propensity to promote and implement new ideas for both the recipient and the sharer, which therefore enables the team to exploit relevant knowledge and information towards the achievement of team objectives (Yuan *et al.*, 2022). Both subsets of absorptive capacity could be seen to coexist and participate in the improvement of team performance. Teams cannot possibly exploit innovative knowledge without first acquiring it (Nowak, 2021). Also, transforming and exploiting acquired knowledge for performance improvement might be elusive when the team lacks the necessary cognitive traits to do so (Yuan *et al.*, 2022).

Test and Validation

Proposed Testing and Validation of Theorised Interactions

Evidently, there exist a variety of approaches and techniques adopted in literature to test and validate theoretical relationships as presented in this paper (Ye and Liu, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2019). Notably, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) being a multivariate statistical method is often used to test and validate hypothetical relationships between different variables (Kaplan and Depaoli, 2012). It allows the assessment of both direct and indirect paths of influence between different variables, providing a weighted magnitude of the relationships which can provide insights into complex systems of relationships (Hair, *et al.*, 2010). Standardized measurement scales for MBTI personality traits (Myers, 1962), absorptive capacity (Jiménez-Barrionuevo *et al.*, 2011) and team performance (Rezvani *et al.*, 2019) could be used to measure the respective major constructs. Alternatively, abbreviated scales of personality have been used in organisational studies and validated in different empirical settings. As stated by Gosling *et al.*, (2003), short instruments of personality demonstrate respectable psychometric characteristics, suggesting that their use in research is justified. For absorptive capacity, the multi-item proposed by Jansen *et al.*, (2005) designed to capture various system's capabilities embedded in organisational structure, processes, and knowledge sharing routines could be used to accurately measure the construct and provide low explanatory power. Alternative measures for team performance include manager ratings, or peer ratings of team performance could be adopted although Conway (2001) highlighted that different perspectives may reflect somewhat different aspects of the criterion which could affect the reliability of the assessments.

Overall, adopting a SEM approach to testing and validating the hypothesised relationship between personality traits, absorptive capacity and team performance will provide empirical insights into the strength and magnitude of the relationships. Furthermore, deep learning techniques such as association rule mining could be used to uncover meaningful associations and patterns between dynamic personality traits and transient relational learning activities that define team absorptive capacity and performance.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined the distinct taxonomies of the MBTI personality types based on the Jung's theory, and how they relate to the dimensions of absorptive capacity. It is argued that potential absorptive capacity which constitutes acquisition and assimilation capacities is influenced by the extroversion-introversion (E-I) and

sensing-intuition (S-N) personality traits taxonomies of individual team members. Similarly, the individual thinking-feeling (T-F) and judging-perception (J-P) personality traits taxonomies were argued to influence realized absorptive capacity of the project team. The theoretical interactions highlighted in this paper aims to trigger a discourse on the abstract relationship between individual's personality trait, and their ability to contribute to relational learning activities which builds team absorptive capacity and influences team performance. Moderating constructs such as team absorptive capacity, having expansive factors are argued to provide deeper insights into the relationship between personality and team performance. Overall, it is duly acknowledged that the arguments presented in this paper are limited by the theoretical foundations established, and the lack of empirical data to test their validity and reliability. Nonetheless, it is believed that the paper could serve as a foundation for future academic efforts to ascertain the empirical dynamics of the relationships.

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