

PSIWORLD 2012

Autonomy variation in teachers

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Abstract

The autonomy concept was not analyzed too often in the educational environment and especially in teachers. Yet we consider it as a major personality trait which could contribute substantially to an efficient teaching, being associated more with intrinsic motivation and greater interest for the activities. Within the study a sample of Romanian teachers (N=70) were investigated to determine the variation of their autonomy and the relation between autonomy and gender.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of PSIWORLD 2012

Keywords: autonomy; behavior; teacher

1. Introduction

Studies in the last decades indicate that there is an increased interest in the validity of personality factors measures as predictors of job performance. The Big Five factors personality model was often used for analyzing different aspects of the individuals' interaction with the environment, or, in other words, the personality dynamics within the environment.

The Big Five factors, from the "classical" view are:

- Extraversion (positive characteristics: sociable and assertive).
- Agreeableness (positive characteristics: good-natured, cooperative, and trusting).
- Conscientiousness (positive characteristics: responsible, persistent, and achievement oriented).
- Emotional Stability (positive characteristics: relaxed, secured and calm).
- Openness to Experience (positive characteristics: imaginative, artistically sensitive and intellectual) (Barrick & Mount, 1993).

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Different views on the classic model resulted in slightly modified models of the Big Five theory, in terms of the five factors. This way, different instruments were designed, trying to measure the “classic” five personality factors, or proposing new or modified personality factors. One instrument (applied in the present study) is CP5F – Five Personality Factors Questionnaire, measuring Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Autonomy.

Discussions on autonomy are often built on two distinct sides: the first one refers to the degree of distancing of self from others (the “interpersonal distance” direction), underlying self-other relation and extending from separateness to relatedness poles. It reflects the degree of connection with others. The second side refers to the degree of autonomous functioning (called “agency”). It extends from autonomy to heteronomy (Kagitcibasi, 2005).

Autonomy support has generally been associated with more intrinsic motivation, greater interest, less pressure and tension, more creativity, more cognitive flexibility, better conceptual learning, a more positive emotional tone, higher self-esteem, more trust, greater persistence of behavior change, and better physical and psychological health than has control. (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Some studies discuss about power as related to control and, by extension, we can analyze the autonomy through this view also (Albu, 2012).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the research

Within this study a sample of Romanian teachers (N=70) were investigated in order to determine the values of their autonomy and the relation between autonomy and gender. The correlation with age was also observed.

2.2. Instruments

The Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire (Chestionarul de Personalitate cu Cinci Factori) – CP5F was used together with basic info questionnaire referring to subjects’ personal details: age, gender, study level. The variation of autonomy for the studied sample is represented and discussed.

The CP5F is a questionnaire evaluating the five superfactors of the Big Five model. It includes 130 items, grouped in six scales. The Autonomy scale consists form 22 items. According to the obtained scores, different characteristics are shown:

High score: The participant acts differently than the others. He/she is creative and does not like to be lead. He/she is a leader.

Low score: The participant does not have his/her own opinions. He/she accepts anything that he/she is being told. He/she can be easily manipulated. (Albu, 2009; Albu & Porumb, 2009).

2.3. Participants

The CP5F has been applied on 70 participants, 18 men and 52 women, aged between 21 and 57 years old (M = 40.15; SD = 9.66).

2.4. Procedure

The instrument was administered by instructed operators, to groups of subjects, according to instructions. The subjects were told about the purpose of the research, and that the information they will provide will be secured and they are free to participate into the research.

3. Results

Statistical analysis has been conducted in Excel and SPSS. The paper presents only partial results (for the Autonomy factor only, taking into account that the CP5F measure all the five factors).

3.1. Findings

An interesting similarity was found between the two genders. Using Excel worksheet, the analysis was conducted by statistical functions and graphs. Two different variables were used, one at a time. The subjects obtained scores between 61 and 102 (males: 63 – 97; females 61 - 102) – Fig. 1 and 2. The medium score by sample was 78.98 (78.78 in women and 79.55 in men).

Out of 52 women, 30 obtained scores which reflects a low autonomy, while out of 18 men, 7 obtained scores reflecting a low autonomy. In other words, 57.69% women-teachers have a low autonomy, comparing to 38.88% of men-teachers which have low autonomy.

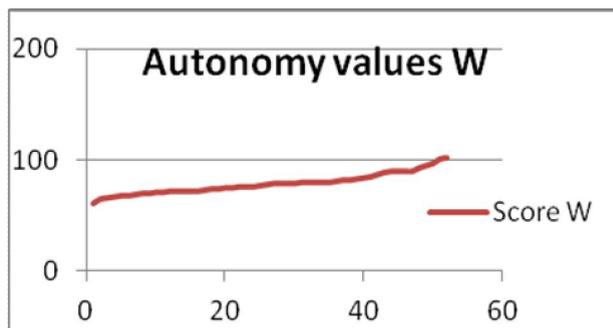


Fig. 1. Autonomy variation in women

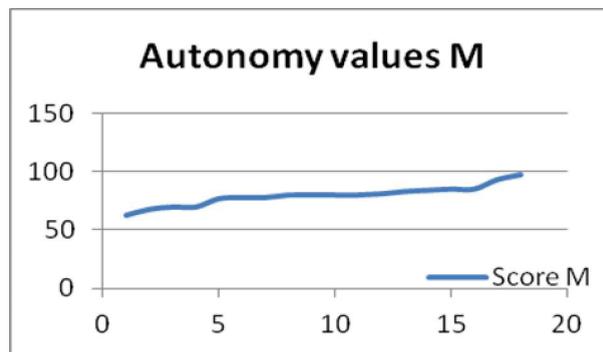


Fig. 2. Autonomy variation in men

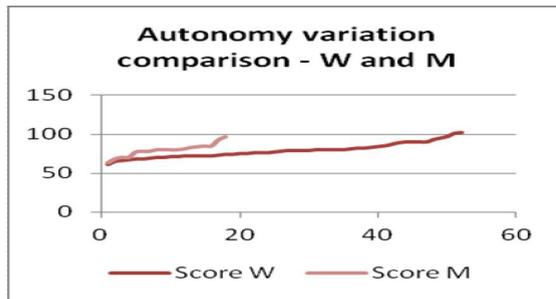


Fig. 3. Autonomy variation comparison by gender

The autonomy comparison by gender indicates that, for the studied sample, women-teachers are more inclined to wait for indications from leaders (principals, Ministry of Education etc.) and not to act as leaders.

The autonomy was also analyzed in terms of age, but due to the limited space, we will only present two graphs reflecting the most different values for men and women for the 36-45 y.o. interval (Fig. 4 and 5).

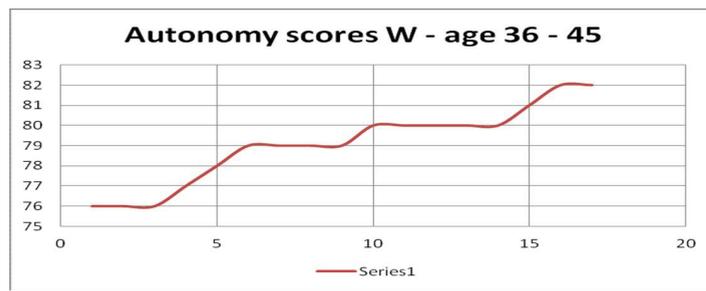


Fig. 4. Autonomy variation with age (36-45) in women

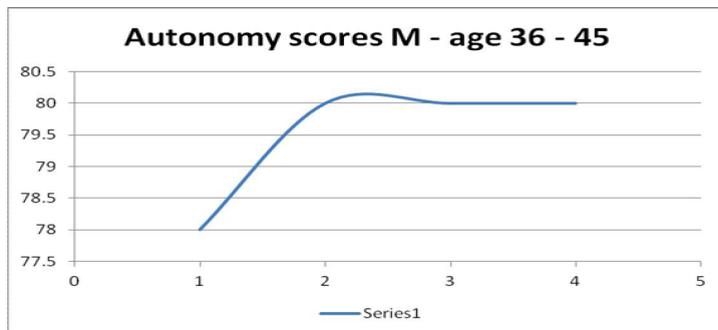


Fig. 5. Autonomy variation with age (36-45) in men

4. Conclusions

The Autonomy factor influences the teachers' activities in different ways, depending both by the positive or negative pole and by the type of autonomy analyzed. Within this factor we can analyze four dimensions of Autonomy: cognitive autonomy, behavioral autonomy, emotional autonomy and moral/value autonomy.

Discussing the general superfactor we can comment the scores variation in teachers starting from the meaning of the low and high scores: those who obtained low scores have some characteristics such as: they don't have their own opinions, they accept any order and they are easy to manipulate. On the contrary, those with high scores are creative persons and they are leaders. Yet, within the educational environment, we have to take into consideration other factors in the students' performance: school context and student background characteristics influence both student investments in out-of-school activities as well as student investments in school-related activities (Anitei & Chraif, 2011).

The low scores for more than 50% of women-teachers (almost 60%) could reflect, for the studied sample, a low creativity and a medium to high obedience. For the men sample, we found almost 40% teachers having small to medium values for the autonomy, which indicates (for the studied sample) that 60% of the sample act differently than the others. Most probably they are creative and they could be leaders. In this context we could discuss also about a leadership attitude (Lupu, 2011).

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