

Reflective Essay for Tenure Application

RESEARCH

My research is motivated by an underlying curiosity about individuals' adaptation in the workplace, specifically how individual differences drive perceptions and behaviors at work, and how work experiences bring about stable changes in individuals. I strive to produce high-impact research that on the one hand enriches theoretical understanding about individuals at work while on the other hand offering practical insights for organizations and employees to better manage the working experience.

Over the past decade, my research has resulted in 40 peer-reviewed journal articles and seven book chapters. Seventeen of the articles are in the top-tier journal list in the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations. The academic impact of my work is reflected in quantitative metrics such as more than 1,750 citations and an h-index of 14, as well as recognitions such as the William A. Owens Scholarly Achievement Award and the GLOBE Robert J. House Highly Commended Paper.

My substantive research focuses on two primary themes: (a) ***personality and adaptability at work*** – how stable traits and dynamic processes enable individuals to adapt to various work situations; (b) ***training and transfer*** – what factors facilitate individuals' skill acquisition and subsequent applications. I have also developed a stream of methodological research on ***insufficient effort responding*** – how assessing and deterring careless responding to surveys and tests can provide more precise understanding of psychological phenomena.

Personality and Adaptability at Work

Personality, broadly defined, captures people's typical behavioral tendencies across a wide range of situations. Personality variables have long been used in the management and applied psychology literature to understand and predict employee behavior. I have **adopted this traditional view of personality to examine the mechanisms through which personality affects experiences at work**. In *Personality and Adaptive Performance at Work: A Meta-Analytic Investigation* (Journal of Applied Psychology, 2014), I was interested in whether personality factors could predict how well individuals adapt to changes in the workplace. Drawing from evolutionary research that suggests personality traits underlie human's adaptation to the environment, I tested the idea that emotional stability enables employees to stay calm and unperturbed in the face of unexpected changes at work whereas ambition drives the desire and pursuit of changes in the workplace as a means to achieve status and power. These findings not only help resolve some of the inconsistencies in the literature, but also offer organizations critical input for selecting employees who can readily adapt to changing work environments.

In *Employee Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Supervisor Justice Rule Compliance: A Three-Study Investigation* (Journal of Applied Psychology, 2017), I focused on how employee personality traits can evoke reactions from their supervisors: through a cognitive pathway where supervisors recognize conscientious employees' effort, and through an affective pathway where supervisors perceive interpersonal liking toward agreeable employees. These pathways helped explain why supervisors may act more or less fairly to different employees. With this focus on personality as stable individual difference, the manuscript under revision for Personnel

Psychology entitled *General Mental Ability, Conscientiousness, and the Work-Family Interface: A Test of Mediating Pathways* is an attempt to illuminate the unintended work-family consequences of intelligence and conscientiousness. Specifically, intelligent and conscientious individuals may self-select and be selected into occupations with high prestige. Prestigious jobs may create psychological demands that lead to work-family conflict but also offer resources that facilitate enrichment between work and family life.

Although personality may be a useful tool to predict and understand behaviors at work, the main effect of the person is often bounded by contextual and situational features. I have **followed this interactional perspective to examine how contexts moderate the downstream effects of personality and behaviors**. In *Rethinking the Association between Extraversion and Job Satisfaction: The Role of Interpersonal Job Context* (Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 2016), I challenged the conventional view that extraverted workers are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and proposed interpersonal job context as a moderating variable. Across two archival datasets, extraverts were no more satisfied than introverts if their jobs entailed limited interpersonal contact. Thus, considering the fit between the person and the job provides a richer understanding of the person. *Rising to the Challenge: Deep Acting Is More Beneficial When Tasks Are Appraised as Challenging* (Journal of Applied Psychology, 2015) is another attempt to understand how the employee adapts to the ebbs and flows of his/her work environment. Specifically, I examined customer service representatives' need to manage their emotions in service delivery in conjunction with how challenging they viewed the service interactions. The findings suggest that seeing tasks as challenging enabled service agents to benefit more from an adaptive emotion management strategy.

I have viewed culture as a backdrop in which personality variables exert influence on various behaviors. Due to the difficulty in collecting cross-cultural data, I have worked with several collaborators to acquire large scale archival datasets. In *Culture and Vocational Interests: The Moderating Role of Collectivism and Gender Egalitarianism* (Journal of Counseling Psychology, 2013), we challenged the assumption that the influence of personality on vocational interests would be universal and instead proposed that collectivistic cultures would restrict the personality-interest relationship because familial and societal expectations can limit people's pursuit of their career paths. In *The Effects of Culture and Gender on Perceived Self-Other Similarity in Personality* (Journal of Research in Personality, 2014), we investigated how culture may shape individuals' perceptions of their similarity to others. In cultures high in collectivism and low in assertiveness, individuals tended to see more personality similarity between themselves and others. Besides contributing to personality research, these findings are personally relevant because as someone from a collectivistic culture, I have always been skeptical about attributing behaviors to the person's personality without appreciating the potential influence of the person's environment.

To me, the most intellectually stimulating aspect of personality and adaptability research has to do with **dynamic personality processes, namely how individuals manifest personality-relevant behaviors differently across situations**. Although personality can capture typical behavioral tendencies across a wide range of situations, people vary in cross-situational consistency of behaviors. Two individuals with the same levels of a trait, such as conscientiousness, can differ in how variable they are across different situations, one may be

quite stable regardless of the situation he/she is in, whereas the other may behave highly conscientiously in one situation and much less so in another situation. Modulating one's manifestation of personality can have direct consequence on being adaptable in different situations. As my first attempt to unpack such individual difference in dynamic response to situational cues, I examined customer service employees' experiences at work in *Beyond Personality Traits: A Study of Personality States and Situational Contingencies in Customer Service Jobs* (Personnel Psychology, 2011). The study demonstrated that personality measured in the traditional approach as one's typical behavioral tendencies provided only coarse prediction of personality-relevant behavior. In contrast, service employees tended to respond to situational cues: They acted in a more conscientious manner when dealing with a higher task demand, and behaved in a more extraverted fashion when dealing with a friendly person. In a subsequent study entitled *Trait, State, and Task-Contingent Conscientiousness: Influence on Learning and Transfer* (Personality and Individual Differences, 2016), I tried to capture the dynamic "if (situation) then (behavior)" contingency on the conscientiousness domain as a stable individual characteristic. The results showed that learners who tend to behave in a more conscientious manner when dealing with a demanding task also tended to perform better in an adaptive task environment after training.

Taking on a dynamic view of personality processes has allowed me to examine how personality changes in response to environmental changes. In *Cross-Cultural Adjustment to the United States: The Role of Extraversion Change* (Frontiers in Psychology, 2015), my former doctoral student and I modeled changes in extraversion in a sample of new international students in the US. As expected, increase in extraversion was associated with better cross-cultural adjustment and lower withdrawal cognition at the end of the semester. In an ongoing project, which is in the data analysis phase, I am pushing this line of research further by exploring personality changes in conjunction with changes in work-family conflict and enrichment over an eight-year span.

Training and Transfer

My interest in training research stems from my work experience as a training practitioner, which opened my eyes to the field of organizational psychology and paved the way to my current academic career. Training induces relatively stable changes in individuals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. While much of the training literature is focused on learning processes and end-of-training outcomes, I am particularly interested in what occurs after training during the transfer of training, which refers to the application and maintenance of newly acquired knowledge and skills outside of the learning context. Training transfer entails performance adaptation: When trainees are no longer in the relatively safe learning environment and instead are expected to perform, their training transfer depends on their ability to anticipate or recognize the need to utilize newly acquired skills.

In one area of training research, I am broadly interested in **identifying the training design features that facilitate subsequent transfer**. My earlier work, such as *Influencing Learning States to Enhance Trainee Motivation and Improve Training Transfer* (Journal of Business and Psychology, 2011) focused on specific mechanisms that trainers and organizations may influence to maximize transfer. Closely connected to my interest in how individuals adapt to changes, these two studies also bridge my broader interests in personality and training. My recent effort in this area has been allocated to transfer in specific training programs, resulting in three systematic

review articles: *Effectiveness of Job Search Interventions: A Meta-Analysis* (Psychological Bulletin, 2014); *Enhancing Adaptive Transfer of Cross-Cultural Training: Lessons Learned from the Broader Training Literature* (Human Resource Management Review, 2017); and *Sexual Harassment Training Effectiveness: An Interdisciplinary Review and Call for Research* (Journal of Organizational Behavior, in press). By identifying how scholars can consider the transfer problem in each of these training programs, I can see the potential for my research to influence both research and practice.

Another area of training that has captured my interest is **the conceptualization of transfer as a process that unfolds over time**. My earlier work, *Transfer of Training: A Meta-Analytic Review* (Journal of Management, 2010), reflects an initial attempt to understand the nature of the transfer construct. A follow-up study, *A Tale of Two Transfers: Disentangling Maximum and Typical Transfer and Their Respective Predictors* (Journal of Business and Psychology, 2015), begins to challenge the notion that transfer is a unidimensional construct and underscores the need to appreciate the transfer measurement context. In *Ignored No More: Within-Person Variability Enables Better Understanding of Training Transfer* (Personnel Psychology, 2017), I modeled transfer as a within-person process that unfolds over time. It is also noteworthy that I connected personality, adaptability, and transfer in this study by capturing the variability in the person to better predict transfer process. For the future, I am particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of understanding transfer of interpersonal skills as an adaptive process over time and have been in contact with leadership training practitioners for potential collaboration.

Insufficient Effort Responding

My interest in insufficient effort responding started when I wanted to deter careless survey responses to more precisely measure personality. In *Detecting and Deterring Insufficient Effort Responding to Surveys* (Journal of Business and Psychology, 2012), I seemed to have achieved this initial goal. Yet this paper, as well as a follow-up *Detecting Insufficient Effort Responding with an Infrequency Scale: Evaluating Validity and Participant Reactions* (Journal of Business and Psychology, 2015), were very difficult to publish because reviewers tended to be skeptical about “so what”: Removal of a small portion of random noise in psychological measurement did not strike them as important. After several years of experience on this topic, I stumbled upon the rather surprising finding that insufficient effort responding, even at a low rate, can sometimes confound survey results, such that substantive measures will become more strongly correlated. Thus, rather than obscuring significant results (Type II error), insufficient effort responding may make it easier to find significant results (Type I error). In *Insufficient Effort Responding: Examining an Insidious Confound in Survey Data* (Journal of Applied Psychology, 2015), I presented the mechanisms for this confounding effect and raised the awareness of the field. Circling back to my interest in personality, my more recent work *Who Cares and Who Is Careless? Insufficient Effort Responding as a Reflection of Respondent Personality* (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2016) identifies personality characteristics behind insufficient effort responding. In an ongoing manuscript entitled *Distinct Methods, Biased Nonetheless: Insufficient Effort Responding as a Potential Confound in Survey Measures and Objective Tests*, I identify insufficient effort responding as a unique factor that can conflate measures obtained using surveys and objective tests. Until now, researchers have considered data obtained using different methods (surveys vs tests) unlikely to be susceptible to common method bias, but this new study provides sufficient evidence to correct that view.

TEACHING

Teaching is closely tied to my research interest in training transfer. To me, while it is important to maximize the learning outcomes typically assessed at the end of the course, the ultimate goal should be the potential to *transfer* the learned knowledge and skills to other settings, such as to other courses, to work situations, and to daily life. My strategies in teaching are tied to this goal. I have implemented learning principles to enhance learning and retention, such as outlining clear learning objectives, providing ample opportunities for practice, and offering feedback with appropriate frequency and specificity. I also strive to facilitate transfer by making the learning relevant through personal anecdotes, discussing hypothetical scenarios, engaging students to share their experiences, and taking examples from popular media. Furthermore, I emphasize a mastery goal frame in class by encouraging students not to be afraid of making mistake in class discussions and by underscoring the importance of effort and strategy in learning.

I have offered three master's level courses during my appointment at MSU. I considered the unique features of each course to tailor it to maximize transfer. For example, when offering *HRLR 822 Training and Development*, I understood that some of our students could be too focused on learning the "how to" side of issues and neglect their theoretical and empirical basis. The peril of doing so is that best practices evolve over time with new findings, so continued success as training practitioners rely on one's capability to update relevant knowledge from the literature. To prepare for this transfer capability, I implemented a module in HRLR 822 where each student would need to digest a recent research article and summarize relevant best practices. As another example, many students in *HRLR 832 Quantitative Methods for HR Analyses* were not excited to take this required statistical course because they did not see direct relevance to their HR career. In Fall, 2017, I started each lecture with a brief module called "random statistic of the day", where I presented a statistic from the popular press and demonstrated how knowledge from this course would be applicable. Doing so helped elevate students' interest in this course because they now see some practical relevance of the statistical knowledge. Although I have only offered professional master's courses during my appointment at MSU, I have enjoyed teaching both at undergraduate and graduate levels, and I especially loved the intellectual challenge in teaching doctoral seminars. I welcome the opportunity to teach in undergraduate courses and doctoral seminars in the future.

SERVICE

I have been actively involved in service in my unit since the beginning of my appointment. I have been a member of the *Admissions Committee*, evaluating applications our master's program. I am also the co-chair of the *Research and Scholarship Committee*, which revamped our journal list and general procedure for determining journal quality. In the College of Social Science, I recently served on *Thematic Areas Review Committee 1* and evaluated pre-proposals for the Dean's Thematic Area Initiative. I look forward to offering my service at different levels within the university.

I am committed to providing consistent service to my profession. I have been on the editorial boards of *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and *Journal of Business and Psychology* and will join the board of *Journal of Applied Psychology* in January 2018. I have provided ad hoc reviews for two funding agencies (*NSF*, *SHRM*) and a number of key journals in my field. I also guest-edited a special issue on careless responding (in press) at *Applied Psychology: An International Review*.