

Study finds agreeableness a helpful trait for general success in life

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Following a major study of the effects of personality on job performance, researchers zoomed in on one personality trait—agreeableness—and found that it has a desirable effect on

hundreds of physical, psychological and occupational metrics that impact not only job performance but general life success.

Michael Wilmot, assistant professor of management at the University of Arkansas, and Deniz Ones, professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota, examined a wide range of variables, from psychological and [physical health](#) to interpersonal relationships, and from leadership effectiveness to performance in academic and organizational settings.

To better understand the impact of [agreeableness](#), the researchers summarized results from 142 [meta-analyses](#) reporting effects for 275 variables. In all, the results comprised more than 1.9 million participants from roughly 3,900 studies. Meta-analysis is a process used to systematically merge multiple independent findings using statistical methods to calculate an overall effect.

Wilmot and Ones found that agreeableness had a desirable effect on 93% of variables and outcomes.

"We wanted to do a quantitative summary and synthesis of what we have learned about relations between agreeableness, one of the so-called Big 5 [personality traits](#), and its consequences," Wilmot said. "We know this is important—perhaps now more than ever—because agreeableness is the [personality](#) trait primarily concerned with helping people and building positive relationships, which is not lost on organizational leaders."

In their previous study, Wilmot and Ones combined multiple meta-analyses of the five big personality traits—conscientiousness, extraversion, openness and neuroticism, in addition to agreeableness—and examined their effect on job performance. They found that relationships between personality traits and performance varied greatly across nine major occupational groups.

To clarify and emphasize the importance of agreeableness, the researchers organized the 275 variables into broader conceptual categories. These included physical and psychological health, performance, motivation and success.

Wilmot and Ones also synthesized eight themes that captured the characteristic functioning of agreeableness across all variables and categories. The themes illustrated the essence of how agreeableness is helpful to both individuals and organizations. The themes were:

- Self-transcendence—Having aspirations for self-directed growth and motivation to show care and concern for others
- Contentment—Accepting life as it is, and an ability to successfully adjust to new contexts and institutions
- Relational investment—Motivation to cultivate and maintain positive relationships with others
- Teamworking—Empathetic capacity to coordinate goals with others and ability to cooperate effectively, regardless of role, to accomplish collective objectives
- Work investment—Willingness to expend effort on tasks, do quality work and show a responsiveness to the work environment
- Lower results emphasis—A generally lower emphasis on setting goals and producing individual results and a tendency to rate others' performance with greater leniency
- Social norm orientation—Greater sensitivity to and respect for behavioral compliance with [social norms](#) and rules and avoidance of rule-breaking and wrongdoing
- Social integration—Capacity for [successful integration](#) into social roles and institutions and a reduced likelihood of delinquency, antisocial behavior and turnover

"Taken altogether, the interaction among the themes became clear," Wilmot said. "Agreeableness was marked by work investment, but this

energy was best directed at helping or cooperating with others. In other words, teamwork."

More information: Michael P. Wilmot et al, Agreeableness and Its Consequences: A Quantitative Review of Meta-Analytic Findings, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/10888683211073007](https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683211073007)

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