Beyond the Big Five: Investigating the Five-Factor Theory Description of the Personality System

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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The University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee approved the conduct of this research:

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Abstract

The Five Factor Theory (FFT; R.R. McCrae & P.T. Costa, 2008) identifies the major components of personality as Basic Tendencies (stable dispositions), Characteristic Adaptations (contextual dynamics) and the Self-Concept. The overall purpose of this thesis was to test the structural properties of the FFT as a personality system. The introductory chapter reviewed the historical context of the FFT and compared the theory to contemporary alternatives.

The first study reported in Chapter Two operationalised the FFT to test the structural links between the components. Participants were 322 undergraduate psychology students who completed the web survey measures selected to represent each component of the theory. Consistent with predictions, Characteristic Adaptations added incremental validity to the prediction of Time Management Behaviour and Work Engagement achieved by Basic Tendencies. Some support was also found indicating that Characteristic Adaptations fully mediated the relationship between Basic Tendencies and Characteristic Adaptations.

The second study reported in Chapter Three aimed to verify the structure of the FFT using the refined questionnaire. Three hundred and fifty-two undergraduate students from several degree programs participated in a web survey measuring the FFT, preference for organisational climates, and Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranks (ATAR). Results suggested partial mediation between Basic Tendencies and Characteristic Adaptations by Self-Concept. Furthermore, Self-Concept and Characteristic Adaptations appeared to mediate the relationship between Basic Tendencies, Time Management and Organisational Culture Preferences.

The third and final study of this thesis investigated the predictive validity of the FFT in the extrinsic career success of a working population. Two hundred and nineteen
members of a regional Australian workforce completed the FFT questionnaire online, as well as questions about their career. Examination of structural equation models indicated full mediation of Age and Gender’s prediction of Annual Salary by Self-Concept and Characteristic Adaptations.

Overall it was concluded that preliminary support for the structure of the FFT had been found. Despite some theoretical and methodological limitations, the FFT is a valuable contribution to the personality literature that with further consideration might provide a more integrated system view of personality.