

Final Report for the EAPP Expert Meeting on “Integrating Personality Structure and Personality Processes”

July 26-29, the EAPP expert meeting “Integrating personality structure and processes” took place in Annweiler am Trifels, Germany. Twenty-two researchers (experts and their co-authors) from six countries (Australia, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, UK, USA) took part.

Basic information

Organizers

- (1) Anna Baumert, Assistant Professor, University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany
- (2) Marco Perugini, Professor, University of Milano Bicocca, Italy
- (3) Manfred Schmitt, Professor, University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany

Date

July 26 (arrival and welcome dinner) to July 29 (departure after lunch) 2015

Venue

Kurhaus Trifels, Kurhausstraße 25, 76855 Annweiler am Trifels, Germany

<http://www.kurhaus-trifels.de>

Background

Repeatedly, researchers (including ourselves) have contested a divide in theories and research programs in personality and individual differences.

Roughly, on type of theories and research programs is concerned with the discovery to the structure of personality traits and states, typical examples being the Five Factor Model, HEXACO, or universal two factors of person perception (Fiske et al.). Factor-analytical models of personality identify several broad traits that serve to describe the entire range of individual differences in behavior in a very parsimonious way. The most important limitation of structural approaches is their descriptive nature.

A second type of personality theory and research investigates processes / dynamics and claims to overcome the descriptive limits of personality trait models. Rather than merely describing inter-individual differences in behavioral dispositions, theoretical models of self-regulation try to understand intra-individual links between goal setting, information processing, and decision-making. Dynamic personality models often include motivational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements. They assume causal links among these elements. Some models link the elements in a non-recursive fashion (unidirectional effects), others in a recursive fashion (feedback-loops), and still others as networks.

Importantly, most personality theories and research programs do not combine both approaches but rather study personality structure and personality dynamics separately.

A third area of research looks at development of personality traits across the life span. Within developmental research, a similar divide between process-oriented and structure-focused investigations can be found. Some research programs focus on the description of the stability and the changes of personality structures, whereas others (4) are more interested in understanding the factors and processes that drive intra-individual changes in state and trait levels. Again, attempts of integrating both types of research into a developmental personality model are the exception rather than the rule.

The main goal of the expert meeting was to scrutinize approaches to integrate knowledge and theory on personality structure, processes, and development. By bringing together scientists with a process-oriented approach to personality structure and development, we aimed at compiling the existing knowledge on how personality traits translate into behavior, how personality structure emerges, and how development of personality can be explained. Difficulties, differences and commonalities in approaches to answer these integrative questions could be identified.

The key questions

In preparation of the meeting, the following key questions were sent to all experts. Experts were instructed to reflect on these questions while preparing their presentations and to decide whether they provided specific answers to any of these questions. Further, the key questions served to focus the general discussions during the meeting.

1) Mechanisms of behavior: How can behavior in specific situations be explained?

Traits are descriptive terms summing coherent and relatively stable patterns of behavior. As such, they can serve to predict behavior in concrete situations. Yet, in order to gain explanatory value, they need to be combined with theories on psychological processes.

What processes are relevant to explain how trait-patterns of behavior come about? How can they be tested empirically? To what degree and how are these processes dependent on situational cues?

2) Mechanisms of structure: How can the occurrence of consistent and stable behavioral patterns be explained?

Factor-analytical models of personality identify several broad traits that serve to describe the entire range of individual differences in behavior in a very parsimonious way. Alternative models do exist, yet there is convergence regarding several of the broad factors.

What psychological processes, and what situational constraints explain the occurrence of these broad dimensions of human variability in behavioral patterns? How can these assumptions be tested empirically?

3) Mechanisms of change and development: How can changes in relatively consistent and stable patterns of behavior be explained?

Personality research has provided evidence for changeability of traits. Short-term situational changes as well as long-term developmental trends have been revealed. In order to explain how changes are triggered and perpetuated, assumptions on psychological processes are necessary and need to be tested.

What processes are relevant to explain (more or less enduring) changes to individual (or mean-level) patterns of behavior? What situational cues trigger or moderate these processes? How can these assumptions be tested empirically?

Participants (see Page 3)

The program (see also Page 4)

An initial welcoming session on Sunday evening served to lay out the program and the key questions for the general discussions (see below). The program was structured in five chunks with two or three presentations by experts each. Each presentation lasted 30 minutes and was followed by 15 minutes of questions and discussion. After a set of two or three presentations, a 60 minute slot served for a general discussion that was focused on the key questions provided by the organizers. The program was wrapped up on Wednesday by a concluding discussion.

This structure was very helpful and effective in focusing the general discussion on the main issues of the expert meeting and identifying the contribution of each presentation, consensus and also dissense regarding potential answers to the key questions.

The first general discussion slot served to discuss some of the key terms of the meeting, namely description, explanation, process, and mechanism. The second general discussion focused on whether psychological mechanisms are specific for answering one of the key discussion questions or whether there are more general mechanisms. The third general discussion addressed the second key question of how to explain covariation of behaviors, thoughts and feelings more directly. The fourth general discussion concerned some specifications of the trait term and addressed the third question regarding explanation of development more directly. The fifth general discussion served to pin point down rather general mechanisms that might serve to answer all key questions in one vein. Finally, the concluding discussion was concerned with the time schedule and the plans regarding the writing of a target article for the European Journal of Personality.

The program also contained as cultural program the walk to and guided tour at the castle Trifels.

Further aims

The organizers are currently working on a concept for a target article to be submitted to the European Journal of Personality.

EAPP Expert meeting “Integrating Personality Structure and Processes” – List of participants

Expert	Coauthor	Affiliation
Baumert, Anna	Maltese, Simona	University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany
Borkenau, Peter	Kurzius, Elena	Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany
Denissen, Jaap	(Chung, Joanne)	Tilburg University, Netherlands
Fleeson, William	Jayawickreme, Eranda	Wake Forest University, USA
Johnson, Wendy	Ritchie, Stuart	University of Edinburgh, Great Britain
MacLeod, Colin	Grafton, Ben	University of Western Australia, Australia
Perugini, Marco	Costantini, Giulio	University of Milano Bicocca, Italy
Read, Stephen	Miller, Lynn	University of Southern California, USA
Roberts, Brent	(Damian, Rodica)	University of Illinois, USA
Robinson, Michael	Persich, Michelle	North Dakota State University, USA
Schmitt, Manfred	Blum, Gabriela	University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany
Wrzus, Cornelia		University of Mainz, Germany
Wood, Dustin		Wake Forest University, USA

Unfortunately, Damian and Chung were not able to attend the meeting.

Expert Meeting Program

Integrating Personality Structure and Personality Processes

Sunday 26.07.2015

Monday 27.07.2015

Tuesday 28.07.2015

Wednesday 29.07.2015

08:30 – 09:15

Whole Trait Theory as a model of traits that explicitly links process and structure

Fleeson & Jayawickreme (Chair: Brent Roberts)

09:25 – 10:10

A functional formative framework for understanding trait covariation

Dustin Wood (Chair: Cornelia Wrzus)

10:20 – 11:05

A process model of nonlinear person x situation - interactions

Schmitt & Blum (Chair: Jaap Denissen)

11:15 – 12:15

General Discussion (Chair: Baumert & Perugini)

12:30

Lunch

13:30 – 14:15

A Neural Network Model of the Structure and Dynamics of Personality: Personality as a Structured Motivational System

Read & Miller (Chair: Wendy Johnson)

14:25 – 15:10

Agreeableness: An integration of trait, social, cognitive, and motivational perspectives

Robinson & Persich (Chair: Simona Maltese)

15:20- 16:20

General Discussion (Chair: Perugini & Schmitt)

16:30

Cultural Program & Barbecue

Arrival

18:30 – 19:30

Welcoming & Introduction to the program

Baumert, Perugini, Schmitt

19:30

Dinner

08:30 – 09:15

The interpersonal circumplex as a framework for studying interpersonal processes

Borkenau & Kurzius (Chair: Gabriela Blum)

09:25 – 10:10

Cognitive basis of positive and negative affectivity: The role of attention bias

MacLeod & Grafton (Chair: Dustin Wood)

10:20 – 11:05

Personality as parameters of the cognitive-affective system: Information processing mediating situation specific behavior and personality change

Baumert & Maltese (Chair: William Fleeson)

11:15 – 12:15

General Discussion (Chair: Schmitt & Baumert)

12:30

Lunch

13:30 – 14:15

The sociogenomic perspective on personality traits

Roberts & Damian (Chair: Peter Borkenau)

14:25 – 15:10

Understanding short-term processes to understand personality development across the lifespan

Cornelia Wrzus (Chair: Colin MacLeod)

15:20- 16:05

A functionalist framework to link personality dynamics and structure

Denissen & Chung (Chair: Lynn Miller)

16:15 – 17:15

General Discussion (Chair: Perugini & Baumert)

08:30 – 09:15

What happens to personality when we learn temperamentally demanding skills? Does it actually change?

Johnson & Ritchie (Chair: Stephen Read)

09:25 – 10:10

The rocky road from traits to mechanisms (and vice versa)

Perugini & Constantini (Chair: Michael D. Robinson)

10:20 – 11:20

General Discussion (Chair: Schmitt & Perugini)

11:20 – 12:20

Concluding Discussion

12:30

Lunch