Chapter 13
The Development of the Occupational Work Ethic for K–20 Education

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ABSTRACT

The question of what affective skills are needed for the job or occupation are continually raised by K-20 educators, but little research has focused on a quantitative measure of this seemingly nebulous competency. This chapter focuses specifically on these competencies and how they relate to occupations and more importantly the genesis of these measures. This is a literature- and research-based rendition of the work ethic as it pertains to a person's occupation and his or her own perception of work ethic. This information can be used for curriculum development, management, team building, or cooperative analysis of the workforce. The factor analysis performed for this study reveals four factors: actively caring, work resilience, organizational commitment, and work resistance.

INTRODUCTION

The K-20 educator is continually faced with the problem of teaching skills, knowledge and attitudes. Most contemporary research and literature focuses on the teaching of skills and knowledge and ignores the last. However, parents of students as well as employers and personnel directors from industry remind educators that it is the attitudes of the employees that will make or break their future (Hill, 1996; Petty, 2010).

The skills and knowledge of the world of work are important for teachers who develop relevant curriculum. However, without clear patterns of affective worker characteristics teachers cannot be sure that the affective domain is being effectively taught by current material.

Upon his first investigation of the work ethic, utilizing the term affective work competencies Petty (1979, 1981) revealed that "the Protestant work ethic", as delineated by Max Weber (1991) dominated the literature. On closer examination, it was difficult to reconcile this terminology in educational or practical terms. Other researchers struggled with the same discord between a practical explanation and a theoretical basis for work ethic (Cherrington, 1980; Maccoby & Terzi, 1981; Miller & Coady, 1984; 1989).

Petty and Hill (2007) in their paper to the ACTE proposed that over the last ten years aspects of

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work ethic have changed significantly from year to year with a low point immediately following the 9/11 disaster of the World Trade Center. The only plausible reason for this change in this sample of 76,000 subjects responding to an Internet survey was from overall shifts in society's mores.

Petty's original intention for the OWEI was to share a tool with interested and legitimate researchers who wish to study this important topic. He set out to design a simple, quantifiable measure of a complex subject (Petty, 1993a). To date, each new study has confirmed Petty's belief that the OWEI is a reliable and valid measure of the important construct of positive intrinsic attributes of work (Petty & Hill, 2007; Petty, 2009; Petty, 2010).

BACKGROUND

The work ethic is a complex amalgam of worker attitudes, habits, and values (Petty, 2010). For educators and teachers to assume that their personal work ethic or their knowledge of the work ethic is satisfactory for teaching, is a misrepresentation of the competencies that make up this concept. Some studies have shown that oftentimes practitioners have significantly different work attitudes than do teachers of a particular subject (Petty & Campbell, 1988). Educators must better understand components of the affective domain (work ethic) if they are to effectively teach technical subjects.

This chapter is a report of the processes and procedures involving the investigation of different occupations to provide an analysis for K-20 teachers with information from the affective domain. In some cases, attempts and strategies to teach the work ethic are reported. The final report from this study will be an analysis of the structural factors of the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory.

Over the past 50 years, more than 25 different concepts or measures of worker commitment or work ethic has been developed by researchers (Dawson, 1999). Petty and Brewer (2005; 2008) reported on the international perspective of the work ethic that employers should reflect on the global forces affecting workers. Other studies reveal that it is not enough for business leaders and workforce educators to focus only on job skills but rather methods to improve a young worker's work ethic (Petty, 1995a; 1995b; 1995c).

The Development of the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory was part of a research project conducted by Dr. Gregory C. Petty at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville to investigate work ethics of gainfully employed workers. Items for the instrument were selected from a list extracted from a review of literature regarding work attitudes, work values, and work habits. This procedure for instrument development was similar to that conducted by Petty and Kazanas at the University of Missouri (Petty, et al., 1981) to develop the Affective Work Competencies Inventory.

Instrument Development

Psychometric items to measure work ethic were identified from an extensive review of sociological, psychological, and human resource development literature regarding work attitudes, work values, and work habits (Petty, 1995c; Petty, 2010). The OWEI consists of fifty descriptors of the work ethic. Brauchle and Azam (2004) concluded that the OWEI "…factors are replicable in different populations and that evidence exists for construct validity of this instrument." It was also their opinion that "…others can use these factors with confidence and without fear of population bias in their research (Brauchle & Azam, 2004, p. 128)." Factorial validity was established for this study utilizing an exploratory factor analytic procedure to identify explanatory concepts. Hill and Petty (1995) reported this validity procedure in their study of 1,151 workers from a variety of occupational areas. Factor analysis is a technique for achieving parsimony by identifying the smallest number of descriptive terms to explain the maximum amount of common variance in a correlation matrix.

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