



The Big 5 Personality Traits and Willingness to Justify Unethical Behavior—A Cross-National Examination

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the relationships between three of the Big 5 personality traits (conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness) and willingness to justify unethical behavior. We also consider the moderating relationship of four of the GLOBE cultural dimensions (institutional collectivism, humane orientation, performance orientation, and assertiveness) on the above relationship. We tested our propositions on a sample of 38,655 individuals from 23 different countries obtained from the latest data available from the World Values Survey Group's survey (WVS 2014). We found that conscientiousness and agreeableness were both negatively associated with willingness to justify unethical behavior. We also conducted Hierarchical Linear Modeling and found significant interaction effects of selected GLOBE cultural dimensions (humane orientation, assertiveness, institutional collectivism, and performance orientation) on the relationships between personality traits and willingness to justify unethical behavior. We provide managerial implications of our findings, as well as suggestions for future research.

Keywords Personality traits · Unethical behavior justification · GLOBE study dimensions · National culture · World Values Survey

Introduction

Personality research has become a prolific and abundant source of knowledge about human attitudes and behaviors, and workplace outcomes (Gebauer et al. 2014; Khalis and Mikami 2018; Kluemper et al. 2015; Seigfried-Spellar and Lankford 2018; Woo et al. 2016). It has been utilized as a theoretical lens by researchers in a variety of disciplines, including psychology (e.g., Barrick and Mount 1991; Hanania 2017; Hurtz and Donovan 2000; Judge et al. 2002; Mathieu 2013), business administration (e.g., Beus et al. 2015; Dalal et al. 2015; Kalshoven et al. 2011; Organ 1994; Parks-Leduc et al. 2015; Raja et al. 2004), education (e.g., Busato et al. 1998; Komarraju et al. 2009). Other disciplines

such as criminology (e.g., Agnew et al. 2002; Miller and Lynam 2001), anthropology (e.g., Gurven et al. 2013) and even medicine (e.g., Abram and DeYoung 2017; Cunningham-Williams et al. 2005; Denollet et al. 1996) have also considered personality variables.

In particular, the Big Five personality framework (Azucar et al. 2018; Costa and McCrae 1992; Goldberg 1990; John and Srivastava 1999; Soto and John 2009) has emerged as one of the most widely accepted frameworks for measuring personality, especially in organizational contexts (Kluemper et al. 2015; Hurtz and Donovan 2000). Personality has been linked with a variety of workplace outcomes such as job satisfaction (Judge et al. 2000, 2001, 2002, 2017; Mathieu 2013), commitment (Erdheim et al. 2006), organizational citizenship behaviors (Chiaburu et al. 2011; Shaffer et al. 2015), and job performance (Barrick and Mount 1991, 1993; Hu and Judge 2017; Hurtz and Donovan 2000; Shaffer and Postlethwaite 2012).

While personality's effects on ethical outcomes have been explored by previous research, it appears that most of that research has looked specifically at instances of academic dishonesty such as cheating on exams and homework, and plagiarism (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Stone et al. 2010).

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Some other studies have looked at the influence of personality on counterproductive and deviant behaviors (Clarke and Robertson 2005; Egan and Taylor 2010; Henle 2005; Mount et al. 2006; Ones et al. 2003; Salgado 2002) and found that some of the Big Five personality traits do predict counterproductive behaviors. Additionally, there has been theoretical work linking personality and other personal characteristics to ethical outcomes such as virtue (Moberg 1999) or empirical examinations with ethical ideology (McFerran et al. 2010). However, despite the important contributions that such research has generated, there remain significant gaps that form the basis of our study.

First, while there has been some empirical examination of the link between personality and ethical outcomes, much of this research has been on convenient samples within single countries. To date, none have examined the relationship between personality and justification of ethically suspect behaviors as we consider in this study. While some ethical outcomes tend to elicit socially acceptable responses, prior research have shown that justification of ethically suspect behaviors as surveyed by the World Values Survey to be an important measure of ethics (Chen et al. 2016; Cullen et al. 2004). We therefore make a significant contribution to the literature examining the link between personality and ethics.

Second, given the importance of ethics cross-culturally, it is also important to examine the relationship in a wider variety of societies. We therefore test our hypotheses on a cross-cultural sample from a large number of countries. Our primary aim for this study is to hypothesize and examine the relationship between relevant Big Five personality traits and individuals' deliberative ethical reasoning (similar to Cullen et al. 2004 here we use willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors as a measure of that belief.). By doing so, we examine whether these individual-level relationships hold irrespective of culture. Furthermore, given the acceptance of the measure cross-culturally, our approach is therefore very appropriate.

Third, we also aim to contribute to understanding of the impact of national culture on the above relationships. Scarcely any, if at all, studies exist that have looked at the role of culture in explaining the relationship of personality on ethical attitudes using large cross-national samples. Most of the current cross-national research appears to focus on variables such as national culture (e.g., Husted et al. 1996; Tsui et al. 2007) and social institutions (e.g., Hofstede 2001; Schooler 1996). Some work has been conducted cross-nationally with personality, but that work has focused on issues such as satisfaction (Haar et al. 2014; Magee et al. 2013) and subjective wellbeing (Cheng et al. 2014; Fonseca-Pedrero et al. 2017). As such, another critical aim of this study is to examine how cross-national cultural differences moderate the relationship between personality and ethics. Our study answers a call for more investigation into

systematic and cross-national research (e.g., Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault 2017). Specifically, the contextual approach suggests that national culture creates an environment that either enhances or inhibits specific relationships between personality and ethics. We investigate these relationships and aim to bring more clarity into the nuances of these relationships.

Given the above gaps, we test our hypotheses on managerial data from 38,655 individuals from 23 countries. We begin by developing a theoretical rationale as to how the Big Five personality traits relate to managerial ethical reasoning. We follow that with a rationale as to how the culture dimensions moderate the relationship between personality and ethical reasoning. We then present the results of our hypotheses testing and conclude by discussing the implications of our findings.

The Five Factor Model of Personality and Ethical Reasoning

The Big Five model includes five distinct factors, labeled as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience. Over the past few decades, this model has established itself as a dominant model of personality (Barrick and Mount 1991; Digman 1990; Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Mount and Barrick 1995). One of the reasons for this dominance is that these Big Five factors have been consistently discovered using a variety of research methods, and the five factor model itself has been recognized as being genetically based, and stable generalizable (Costa and McCrae 1988; Digman and Shmelyov 1996; Kalshoven et al. 2011). Most importantly for this study, the five personality model has been shown to be cross-culturally generalizable (Moberg 1999) and has been validated in societies such as Japan (Isaka 1990), Israel (Birenbaum and Montag 1986), Germany (Angleitner et al. 1990) among many others. We therefore believe it is appropriate to consider these factors cross-culturally.

As mentioned earlier, the Big Five factors of personality have been associated with several ethical outcome variables, including ethical leadership, academic dishonesty, and counterproductive deviance (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Kalshoven et al. 2011; Salgado 2002). Surprisingly, there are few studies empirically examining personality and ethical outcomes. Therefore, it seems logical to infer that these personality variables should be associated with ethical reasoning as well.

Although there are five personality variables, extant research suggests only three are most relevant for ethics. Specifically, McFerran et al. (2010) argue that conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience are considered higher-order moral personality. In other words,

these three personality variables are much more relevant to ethical outcomes. Additionally, the other dimensions of neuroticism and extraversion have shown very weak empirical relationships with ethical outcomes (Colquitt et al. 2006). Therefore, consistent with extant research practices of only considering theoretically relevant variables (Kostova 1997), we examined only these three personality variables.

Below, we therefore discuss these three personality factors and build arguments to link these variables with justification of unethical behavior. The latter is accepted as a measure of ethical outcome (Cullen et al. 2004) as it asks respondents to indicate the degree to which they justify ethically suspect behaviors such as cheating on taxes etc. This measure is also cross-culturally generalizable and has been used in prior research (Cullen et al. 2004).

Hypotheses

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is the tendency for individuals to be organized, goal-directed, and followers of norms and rules (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Roberts et al. 2009). This particular trait consists mainly of two facets, namely, dependability and achievement (Kalshoven et al. 2011). The dependability facet has to do with conscientious individuals being thorough, diligent, responsible, and organized whereas the achievement facet has to do with individuals working hard and meeting expectations and requirements (Digman 1990; Kalshoven et al. 2011; McCrae and Costa 1987; Mount and Barrick 1995).

We argue that there is a negative relationship between conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. Our hypothesis is based on several studies that have shown that more conscientious individuals are more likely to relate positively to ethical outcomes. A study by Moon (2001) found that conscientious individuals do the right thing not only for themselves, but also for others. Similarly, Witt et al. (2002) have found that conscientious individuals prefer and take personal responsibility. Conscientiousness has also been linked with honesty and pro-social behaviors (Lodi-Smith and Roberts 2007; McFerran et al. 2010; Roberts and Hogan 2001). A recent study by Babalola et al. (2017) found that conscientiousness was related to moral reflexivity which was then associated with perceptions of ethical leadership. Another study by Stewart (1996) found that conscientious individuals were more likely to be concerned with achievement than by economic gain. Roberts and Hogan (2001) have also found that people with high conscientiousness were less likely to engage in dishonest activities. Similarly, Mercado et al. (2018) found that conscientiousness was negatively associated with Counterproductive

Work Behaviors. Finally, a meta-analysis by Nei et al. (2018) found that conscientiousness was positively associated with leader integrity and accountability.

These findings, when coupled with other evidence that conscientious individuals tend to cheat less (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015), procrastinate less (Steel 2007), and are less likely to engage in workplace deviance (Salgado 2002), suggests that conscientious managers will be less likely to justify unethically suspect behaviors. Additionally, because conscientious individuals are also more likely to adhere to standards of conduct (Khan et al. 2016), we also expect them to be less likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors as such behaviors often violate appropriate norms. Furthermore, as noted by Bratton and Strittmatter (2013), conscientious as such, has been related to many ethical outcomes, none have examined how conscientiousness relates to justification of ethically suspect behaviors in a cross-national sample. We therefore hypothesize.

Hypothesis 1 Conscientiousness will be negatively associated with willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors.

Agreeableness

According to extant research, agreeable individuals tend to be kind, gentle, trusting, honest, and altruistic (Goldberg 1990; Kalshoven et al. 2011; McCrae and Costa 1987). In its essence, it is the trait that is concerned with how individuals approach interpersonal relationships, and agreeable individuals tend to be likeable, trusting, and concerned with others' welfare (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015). Agreeable individuals also tend to avoid and elicit less conflict from others (Graziano and Tobin 2009; Graziano et al. 1996).

We argue that there is a negative relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. Agreeableness is typically associated with straightforwardness (McCrae and Costa 1987; Kalshoven et al. 2011), which implies that agreeable individuals tend to be honest, sincere, and truthful in their dealings with other individuals. Additionally, McAdams (2009) found that agreeable individuals tend to be loyal, and unwilling to justify harming a colleague. Furthermore, those who have high agreeableness tend to a more acute sense of justice and fairness (Matsuba and Walker 2004). DeShong and her colleagues (2017) too recently found that agreeableness was negatively associated with interpersonal and organizational counterproductive work behaviors.

Based on the above findings, we suggest that since agreeable individuals are not only warm and friendly (Kalshoven et al. 2011) but they are also fair and just, they will be less likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors. Additionally, because such individuals will avoid harming others (Khan et al. 2016), they will be less likely to justify ethically

suspect behaviors that may hurt some people. Furthermore, the desire to protect others and the preference for fairness and justice also suggests that such individuals are less likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors. The above therefore leads us to propose:

Hypothesis 2 Agreeableness will be negatively associated with willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors.

Openness to Experience

Openness to experience is concerned with individuals actively seeking out experiences that may be novel or even completely new experiences (Aluja et al. 2003; Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; McCrae and Costa 1987). Individuals who are high on this trait also tend to enjoy the process of exploring and discovering new ideas and methods. Studies have found that openness to experience was positively associated with sensation seeking and negatively associated with conforming to the values of others (Aluja et al. 2003; Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Parks-Leduc et al. 2015). McAdams (2009) characterizes individuals who are high on openness to experience as having greater levels of moral reasoning. But overall, the research based on openness to experience yields mixed results when it comes to academic dishonesty. Some studies have found negative associations between this trait and dishonesty (Aslam and Nazir 2011; Nguyen and Biderman 2013) whereas some other studies have found positive associations between this trait and dishonesty (Gallagher 2010; Williams et al. 2010). In terms of deviance, while Salgado (2002) has found that openness is positively associated with deviant workplace behavior, Miller and Lynam (2001) have found a negative relationship between openness and antisocial behavior. A recent study by Moisuc et al. (2018) found that openness to experience was positively associated with social control; however, the researchers claimed that the association was probably a Type 1 error, and a spurious correlation.

Despite this somewhat equivocal evidence, we propose here that openness to experience will be positively associated with willingness to justify ethically suspect behavior. Our contention in that regard is that ethically suspect behavior is behavior that is likely to violate conformity values and is also likely to yield sensory experiences. For instance, a recent study by Lu et al. (2017) found that individuals that had experienced foreign experiences tended to engage in more immoral behavior. This is a function of their increased moral flexibility. Therefore, one can conjecture that it is quite likely that individuals who are high on openness to new experience may also have increased levels of moral flexibility. This in turn will lead them to be more accepting of unethical behavior. This leads us to suggest that individuals who are high on openness to experiences will be likely

to justify ethically suspect behaviors, because the sensation seeking facet of openness to experience will be satisfied by such behaviors. Additionally, justification of ethically suspect behaviors inevitably involves acceptance of behaviors counter to social norms, an aspect that those open to experience prefer. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3 Openness to experience will be positively associated with willingness to justify ethically suspect behaviors.

National Culture as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Personality and Ethical Reasoning

While we argue that individual-level personality variables are related to justification of unethically suspect behaviors, we believe that national culture variables act as important country-level moderators of such behaviors. As such, culture is the “learned behavioral standards, socially transmitted through personal values, norms, activities, attitudes, cognitive processes” (Allred and Swan 2004, p. 82). It is in this sense a system of collectively held values (Hofstede 2001) or the “software of the mind.” At a societal level, national cultures are important because the collectively held values inherent in national cultures are central to culture’s influence on behavior by providing the stimuli that focus conscious or unconscious attention on expected patterns of behaviors.

National cultures act as important moderators of the individual-level relationships because they create a contextual environment that either enhances or mitigates the relationships discussed earlier. The contextual environment perspective basically assumes that national level factors have important influences on the environment that societal members operate in (Kelley and De Graaf 1997). Specifically, national cultures place boundary conditions within which individuals’ behaviors and attitudes are constrained. We argue that the national culture environment will provide for an environment whereby the personality variables effects on justification of unethically suspect behaviors will be influenced.

Although extant research suggests that there are various national culture frameworks (Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2002; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998) and numerous cultural dimensions, we focused on the perspective of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (House and Javidan 2004). The GLOBE study is a long-term, multi-phase study which involved scholars from across the world and provides a very comprehensive model. It also covers a lot of countries in its model ($n = 62$).

We chose the GLOBE model for several reasons. First, while the Hofstede’s cultural framework (Hofstede 2001) is

still very relevant and has received tremendous support in the literature (Kirkman et al. 2006), the GLOBE scheme has been seen as an update on cultural dimensions. We therefore consider a more contemporary approach while still acknowledging Hofstede's work. Second, and most importantly, we wanted to be able to maximize the number of countries we could use through consideration of availability of cultural dimension scores. More countries were available for the GLOBE cultural dimensions for our sample.

Although the GLOBE model (House and Javidan 2004) includes nine dimensions, here, we consider only four dimensions as moderators of the relationship between ethically suspect behaviors and the personality variables. Specifically, we only consider humane orientation, performance orientation, assertiveness, and institutional collectivism for a few reasons.

First, we base our choice on theoretical consideration. While it is likely that all nine dimensions can have some contextual influence on the relationship between personality and ethics; institutional collectivism, humane orientation, performance orientation, and assertiveness, are the ones that are most likely to affect the environment relevant to the relationship. For instance, individualism and collectivism are values that affect and influence an individual's likelihood to be opportunistic (Chen et al. 2015; Doney et al. 1998). More specifically, institutional collectivism (Gelfand et al. 2004) is concerned with group loyalty and collective interests. It therefore is a cultural variable that is relevant because it will have an impact on individuals' self-interested behaviors.

Humane orientation is a cultural variable that is associated with how much a society values and encourages individuals to behave altruistically and generally behave kindly and generously with others (House and Javidan 2004; Schlösser et al. 2013). It too is a variable that is relevant because it will have an impact on individuals' self-interested behaviors, and therefore, their ethical or unethical behavior.

Similarly, performance orientation reflects the extent to which societies encourage and reward individuals' innovation and performance improvement (House and Javidan 2004; Parboteeah et al. 2012). That too will have an impact on individuals' ethical attitudes and behaviors. Finally, assertiveness reflects the level to which societies encourage individuals to be assertive, aggressive, and tough, or non-assertive, non-aggressive and tender in social relationships (House and Javidan 2004; Parboteeah et al. 2012). Assertive individuals tend to express their intentions in clear and unambiguous terms (Booraem and Flowers 1978; Parboteeah et al. 2012). It too will affect individuals' ethical reasoning as applied to self-serving behaviors.

Secondly, we follow Kostova's (1997) advice of only using the dimensions that are relevant to our study. Additionally, including all nine cultural dimensions would end up overwhelming our cross-level model (Nam et al. 2014;

Parboteeah et al. 2008). Therefore, in the interest of parsimony and theoretical relevance, we only consider the four cultural dimensions that we mention earlier (i.e., institutional collectivism, humane orientation, performance orientation, and assertiveness). Out of the remaining five dimensions, only power distance was theoretically relevant for our model. However, we deliberately excluded power distance because prior research has found high correlations between power distance and the collectivism construct (Parboteeah and Cullen 2003). Additionally, while both power distance and collectivism have been related to ethical outcomes, the latter remains one of the most studied components of culture (Kirkman et al. 2006) and there seems to be stronger theoretical rationale for the inclusion of that dimension. Also, as noted by Sims (2009, p. 41), collectivism is a "primary reason for national differences in ethical practices." Inclusion of power distance in the model would produce inaccurate estimates, and so we intentionally excluded power distance from our model.

Below we discuss the four cultural dimensions and their roles in moderating the relationship between personality and ethics.

Institutional Collectivism

The collectivism cultural dimension is one of the most prolific and important dimensions that have been employed to differentiate between cultures (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Lewellyn and Bao 2017; Parboteeah et al. 2012; Søndergaard 1994; Triandis 1989). The GLOBE study named the collectivism end of the individualism-collectivism continuum as institutional collectivism. In contrast to individualistic societies, individuals in collectivistic societies rely on social membership to gain status and identity (Hofstede 2001; Lewellyn and Bao 2017; Parboteeah et al. 2012). People's actions tend to be concerned with what is best for the groups' goals, and cooperation and harmony tend to be emphasized. This is in direct opposition to individuals operating in individualistic societies (Gelfand et al. 2004; Sims 2009), because individualistic societies tend to emphasize self-interest whereby individual interests are seen as being more important than groups' interests. Therefore, decision-making in collectivistic societies tends to take societal or group concerns into consideration. Collectivist societies tend to place value on the group's interests and societal members are expected to live in harmony and be loyal to one's group (such as immediate family, friends etc.).

We argue that in general, institutional collectivism will strengthen the negative relationships between agreeableness and conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors and weaken the positive relationships between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behavior. The prime rationale behind these

two arguments is the interdependence condition in collectivistic cultures, wherein individuals are more likely to consider the needs of their group members as opposed to their own self-interest needs (Chen et al. 2015; Javidan and House 2001; Waldman et al. 2006). Additionally, this engagement with the collective will also end up strengthening the bonds of social control (Cullen et al. 2004). Considering this focus on the wellbeing of the collective group, it is likely that conscientious individuals will be more likely to be concerned with honesty and pro-social behaviors. Similarly, we expect that such focus on the collective wellbeing of the group will make it more likely that those agreeable members of collectivistic societies tend to be concerned about other's welfare and therefore less likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors. We therefore believe that collectivism will moderate the relationship between agreeableness and conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is stronger in societies with high collectivism.

We also hypothesize that collectivism will weaken the positive relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors. With its focus on the collective good, collectivism is likely to dampen individuals' propensity to try new things and be less concerned about consequences of such actions. It is therefore likely that individuals with high levels of openness to experience are less likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors in more collectivistic societies. Perhaps, the emphasis on the wellbeing of others will cause individuals with high levels of openness to new experiences to be more concerned about the unintended consequences of their actions on other folks. Lewellyn and Bao (2017) argued that individualistic societies would have individuals who would have lower ethical standards. They reasoned that collectivistic societies with their focus on the wellbeing of the collective whole would have individuals with higher ethical standards. Given all of the above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4a Collectivism will moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is stronger in more collectivistic societies relative to less collectivistic societies.

Hypothesis 4b Collectivism will moderate the relationship between agreeableness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is stronger in more collectivistic societies relative to less collectivistic societies.

Hypothesis 4c Collectivism will moderate the relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the positive relationship is weaker in more collectivistic societies relative to less collectivistic societies.

Humane Orientation

Humane orientation captures the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others (House and Javidan 2004; Mansur et al. 2017; Parboteeah et al. 2012). Essentially, this cultural dimension originates from Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) concept of human nature. In societies with higher levels of humane orientation, individuals tend to consider others important and people in those societies focus on supporting each other (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004; Mansur et al. 2017; Parboteeah et al. 2012; Schlösser et al. 2013). Societies high on humane orientation also tend to place more importance on others, and prioritize benevolence, love, and generosity towards each other (Mansur et al. 2017). Conversely, in societies with lower levels of humane orientation, individuals are more likely to be materialistic and inclined to be self-interested even at the expense of others' needs (Parboteeah et al. 2012).

Consistent with our arguments for collectivism, we buttress that humane orientation will strengthen the negative relationships between conscientiousness and agreeableness, and justification of ethically suspect behaviors, and weaken the positive relationships between openness to new experience and justification of ethically suspect behavior. The focus on others' needs and their wellbeing in high humane orientation societies will possibly cause conscientious individuals to be even more unlikely to justify unethical behavior. The presence of high humane orientation will accentuate the negative relationship between conscientiousness and justification of unethical behavior.

We expect humane orientation to accentuate the negative relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. Given the focus of agreeable individuals to avoid conflict and general unwillingness to harm others (McAdams 2009), we expect that the contextual environment characterizing high humane orientation with its preference for concern for others to interact to create an even stronger environment whereby ethically suspect behaviors are discouraged. The general focus on being generous and meeting others' needs likely strengthen the negative effects of agreeable individuals for ethically suspect behaviors.

With regards to openness to new experience, we expect humane orientation to inhibit the relationship with ethically suspect behaviors. While an individual with high openness to experience is generally willing to break the rules and justify ethically suspect behaviors, we expect the high humane orientation environment to curb such tendencies as high humane orientation implies preference for behavior that is ethical and focused on the wellbeing of others. To be accepted by one's peers and be a good societal citizen, even those individuals with high openness to experience are likely to temper such tendencies. We therefore expect high humane

orientation to see a weaker positive relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors. Collectively, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5a Humane Orientation will moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors such that the negative relationship is stronger in higher humane orientation societies relative to societies with lower humane orientation.

Hypothesis 5b Humane Orientation will moderate the relationship between agreeableness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is stronger in higher humane orientation societies relative to societies with lower humane orientation.

Hypothesis 5c Humane Orientation will moderate the relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the positive relationship is weaker in higher humane orientation societies relative to societies with lower humane orientation.

Performance Orientation

Performance orientation refers to the extent to which individuals in a community encourage and reward innovation, high standards, and performance improvement (House and Javidan 2004). This cultural dimension builds on both Weber's Protestant work ethic as well as McClelland's need for achievement (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), and a direct result of this focus on excellence and achievement is that results are valued more than are people (Parboteeah et al. 2012). Societies high in performance orientation will value results, assertiveness, competition and materialism (House and Javidan 2004), which suggests the potential for a prevailing cultural sentiment that the ends justify the means, because the end results are what are valued. As Parboteeah et al. (2012) assert, individuals operating in high performance orientation societies tend to believe that they can dominate and control the outside world. That suggests that individuals in high performance orientation societies will find it acceptable to justify unethical behavior as long as doing so helps them produce the results they strive to achieve.

We argue that in general, performance orientation will weaken the negative relationships between conscientiousness and agreeableness, and justification of ethically suspect behaviors, and strengthen the positive relationships between openness to new experiences and justification of ethically suspect behavior. The focus and importance accorded to results in high performance orientation societies will possibly cause conscientious individuals to be a bit more likely to justify unethical behavior (as long as doing so produces the

desired results.) The presence of high performance orientation will weaken the negative relationship between conscientiousness and justification of unethical behavior.

We also expect performance orientation to weaken the negative relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. Since agreeable individuals typically avoid conflict and express a general unwillingness to harm others (McAdams 2009), we expect that the contextual environment characterizing high performance orientation with its preference for results over concern for others, to interact to create a weaker environment, whereby ethically suspect behaviors are more likely to be justified. Performance orientation societies tend to place emphasis on performance and visible results as an outcome of competition (Gelbrich et al. 2016). We therefore believe that such preferences will likely weaken any desire to avoid conflict or to protect others. The overarching preference is for competition at the expense of cooperation and the general focus on results over meeting others' needs will likely weaken the negative effects of agreeable individuals for ethically suspect behaviors.

With regards to openness to new experiences, we expect performance orientation to fortify the positive relationship with ethically suspect behaviors. Since an individual with high openness to experience is generally willing to break the rules and justify ethically suspect behaviors, we expect the high performance orientation environment to increase such tendencies as high performance orientation implies preference for behavior that is focused entirely on producing desired results by any possible means. Therefore, individuals with high openness to experience are likely to increase their tendencies to justify ethically suspect behavior. We therefore expect high performance orientation to see a stronger positive relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors. Collectively, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6a Performance Orientation will moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors such that the negative relationship is weaker in higher Performance orientation societies relative to societies with weaker performance orientation.

Hypothesis 6b Performance Orientation will moderate the relationship between agreeableness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is weaker in higher Performance orientation societies relative to societies with weaker performance orientation.

Hypothesis 6c Performance Orientation will moderate the relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the positive relationship is stronger in higher Performance orientation societies relative to societies with weaker performance orientation.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a cultural dimension that reflects beliefs as to whether or not people should be encouraged to be assertive, aggressive, and tough (or alternatively, non-assertive, non-aggressive and tender) in social relationships (House and Javidan 2004). Cultural assertiveness differs from performance orientation in that cultural assertiveness focuses primarily on how people relate to each other, whereas performance orientation focuses on results and achievements of individuals within societies. Assertive individuals are clear about what they want, what they don't want, and can clearly articulate their intentions (Booraem and Flowers 1978; Peretz et al. 2018). In assertive societies, people tend to be competitive, value success, and think of others as opportunistic. Essentially, the emphasis is on competition, and assertive societies encourage individuals to be ambitious, competitive, self-interested, and to assume that other individuals are also equally opportunistic. It therefore stands to reason that in assertive societies, individuals will be more likely to justify unethical behavior because they will believe that other individuals are also likely to justify unethical behavior. Peretz et al. (2018) found that assertiveness was positively associated with the tendency to seek out flexible work arrangements. This suggests that individuals operating in assertive societies tend to seek out arrangements for their own convenience, and therefore may be willing to justify certain unethical behaviors.

We therefore argue that in general, assertiveness will weaken the negative relationships between conscientiousness and agreeableness, and justification of ethically suspect behaviors, and strengthen the positive relationships between openness to new experiences and justification of ethically suspect behavior. The emphasis on opportunistic self-interested behavior in assertive societies will possibly cause conscientious individuals to be a bit more likely to justify unethical behavior. The presence of assertiveness will likely weaken the negative relationship between conscientiousness and justification of unethical behavior.

We also expect assertiveness to weaken the negative relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. The prevalence of assertiveness in society may complicate how agreeable individuals act and respond. It is likely that the interaction between agreeableness and assertiveness will create a weaker environment, wherein ethically suspect behavior is more likely to be justified. This would create a similarly attenuating effect on the overall negative relationship. Assertiveness will most likely weaken the negative effects of agreeable individuals for ethically suspect behaviors.

With regards to openness to new experiences, we expect assertiveness to strengthen the positive relationship with ethically suspect behaviors. Since an individual with high

openness to experience is generally willing to break the rules and justify ethically suspect behaviors, we expect an assertive environment to increase such tendencies as assertiveness increases opportunistic self-interested behavior. Therefore, individuals with high openness to experience are likely to increase their tendencies to justify ethically suspect behavior. We therefore expect assertiveness to see a stronger positive relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors. Collectively, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 7a Assertiveness will moderate the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors such that the negative relationship is weaker in higher assertiveness societies relative to societies with lower assertiveness.

Hypothesis 7b Assertiveness will moderate the relationship between agreeableness and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the negative relationship is weaker in higher assertiveness societies relative to societies with lower assertiveness.

Hypothesis 7c Assertiveness will moderate the relationship between openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors such as that the positive relationship is stronger in higher assertiveness societies relative to societies with lower assertiveness.

Methods

Sample

Our data come from the national probability samples collected every 5 years by the World Values Study (WVS) Group, which is a global network of social scientists and is headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. The data for our paper were obtained from the 6th wave of the WVS survey, which was collected between 2010 and 2014. The main purpose of these surveys is to observe the changes in values and beliefs in people around the globe. The WVS data consist of nationally representative surveys which were conducted in about 100 countries which in turn represent about 90% of the world's adult population. The WVS group provides more details about their data-gathering procedures on their homepage. The data from the survey are available to researchers by the WVS on their homepage here <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

The sample included in this paper is individual-level data from 38,655 respondents from 23 countries. The nations in the sample cover a wide variety of societies with different national cultures and include Algeria, Brazil, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Georgia, Hong Kong, India, Iraq,

Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Netherlands, Pakistan, Palestine, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia and Yemen. Such a diverse sample allows us to provide for a robust test of our hypotheses.

Nations

While the World Values Survey researchers collected data for 60 countries for its sixth wave, our study was limited to only 23 countries. Unfortunately, personality variables were not collected for 35 of the World Values Survey countries. Consequently, we could only select 25 out of the entire WVS list of nations. However, after we reviewed the 25 countries, we found that two of these countries (Bahrain and Germany) did not have data for our dependent variable (i.e., willingness to justify ethically suspect behavior). As a result, we were only able to use data for 23 countries. We then examined reliability for these 23 countries and found that it ranged from 0.60 for Colombia to 0.95 for Rwanda. While reliability values of 0.7 and above are considered acceptable, we note that reliability of 0.6 is acceptable in the context of cross-cultural studies (Fu and Yukl 2000; Ralston et al. 2014). We therefore conducted our analyses on these 23 countries.

Variables and Data Sources

Dependent Variable: Willingness to Justify Ethically Suspect Behaviors

Similar to Parboteeah et al. (2004), our dependent variable is a measure that captures the extent to which individuals would justify behaviors which would be deemed ethically suspect. These behaviors include behaviors such as “cheating on taxes if you have the chance”, “accepting bribes in the course of your duty”, and “stealing property”. Five items were pertinent to managers and organizations, and we created a combined measure that averaged responses to these items. The responses to these items were made on a 1–10 scale. Factor analysis revealed a single-factor solution for all nations separately as well as for the combined data. As mentioned above, while the overall reliability by country varied, the overall Cronbach’s alpha value for this dependent variable is 0.87.

Independent Variable: Big Five Personality Variables

There are many versions of the Big Five personality test—the one that the WVS questionnaire utilized in its survey was the 10-item short-form version developed by Rammstedt and John (2007), called the BFI-10. Each Big Five personality dimension is measured with two questions. This version of the Big Five scale is one that is suitable for face-to-face

interviewing, the means by which the WVS researchers collected the data. Additionally, the short-form of the BFI has been very popular and has been used in a plethora of studies—for instance, it has been cited in over 1635 studies since it was first developed. This particular scale is popular because it can help in assessing personality in about a minute or so. However, this scale has frequently yielded poor reliability metrics. Most scholars report bivariate correlations for the various Big 5 dimensions, as opposed to providing Cronbach alphas coefficient values.

We first used six questions from this measure to create measures for conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Similar to other studies using the Rammstedt and John shortened scales (e.g., Steffens et al. 2015), we too found that the bivariate correlations (*r*s) for these scales ranged from 0.03 to 0.48. This approach is used when it comes to reporting reliability figures for two item scales (Credé et al. 2012; Steffens et al. 2015).

However, a study by Ludeke and Larsen (2017) suggests that using the personality assessment data through the World Values Survey is problematic. Another article by Chapman and Elliot (2017) also cautions that the shortened version of the BFI sometimes gives unexpected results—they attribute this to the reverse coded items on the shortened version of the BFI-10. To ensure that our findings were not adversely influenced by potential reverse-coding artifactual effects, we used a single-item scale by only using the positively worded items for conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Although this approach did not let us calculate reliability metrics, there is past precedence in successfully using single-item scales for various constructs such as satisfaction, self-esteem, and even personality (e.g., Abdel-Khalek 2006; Denissen et al. 2008; Gosling et al. 2003; Wanous and Reichers 1997). We believe that with this single-item approach, we have addressed the potential issues with the BFI-10 reverse coded items, as alluded by Chapman and Elliot (2017) and Ludeke and Larsen (2017). Additionally, we believe that the insights brought by this personality indicator across 23 nations far outweigh challenges in use of 1 item measures given the difficulty of data collection across nations.

Moderating Variables: National Culture Variables

We used four national cultural dimensions from the GLOBE study, namely *collectivism*, *humane orientation*, *performance orientation*, and *assertiveness*. These cultural dimensions are prominently used in most research focusing on national culture (e.g., Chen et al. 2015; Fell et al. 2016; Nam et al. 2014; Parboteeah et al. 2012). These cultural dimension measures were obtained from House et al.’s 2004 work. We also note that the GLOBE researchers collected “as is” scores (the way things are) and “should be” scores

(the way things should be). Consistent with prior research (Parboteeah et al. 2004), we used the “as is” scores as we are interested in how the perceived culture moderates the various relationships. These scores were applied to all the individuals within a country. Furthermore, we also acknowledge that the scores were not available for all the countries mentioned earlier. In some cases, we had to substitute with scores of countries that are both geographically and culturally closely related. For example, we replaced the score for Algeria with those for Morocco. This approach is defensible in that Hofstede (2001) also offered average scores for regions that are used by researchers thereby confirming the assumption that countries that are geographically closer often tends to have similar cultural make-ups.

As detailed in House and Javidan (2004), *institutional collectivism* was assessed using four questions that emphasized the society’s encouragement and reward of collective action. As an example, one of the questions was “in this society, leaders encourage group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.” In contrast, five questions were used for the *humane orientation* cultural dimension. These questions tapped into the society’s preference for friendliness, general caring and generosity. For instance, one of these five questions asked respondents to respond to in this society, people are generally: “very concerned about others” to “not at all concerned about others.” For the *performance orientation* dimension, the GLOBE researchers used three questions that reflected the society’s propensity to support and reward improvements in performance. One of these questions asked respondents to respond to “in this organization, employees are encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance.” Finally, the GLOBE researchers used two questions to measure *assertiveness* (House and Javidan 2004), the degree to which a society encourages its members to be aggressive and assertive in relationships. Similar to all of the other cultural dimensions, respondents were presented with a 7-point Likert scale and asked to respond to the following statement: In this society, people are generally expected to be assertive to non-assertive.

Control Variables

We used several individual-level variables that are typically associated with ethical issues. We used gender, age and education. All these variables have normally been used as control variables by past researchers (e.g., Chen 2014; Cullen et al. 2004; Fleischman and Valentine 2003; Parboteeah et al. 2005; Serwinek 1992).

Because our data were measured at two different levels (individuals and country), we provide two tables for the descriptive statistics and correlations of our variable. Table 1 shows the statistics for our lower level data (individuals). Table 2 shows the descriptives and correlations for our higher level (country).

Common-Method Bias

Because both independent and dependent variables originate from the same source of data (WVS Survey 2014), common-method bias could be as an issue (Podsakoff et al. 2003). We addressed common-method bias by using the Harman Single factor test to demonstrate that common-method bias problematic with our data. Factor analysis confirmed that when we forced all our variables into a one-factor solution, it did not explain more than 50% of the variance, explaining only 30.7% of the variance. While, Harman’s single factor test is not the ideal means to demonstrate no common-method bias (e.g., Chang et al. 2010), considering the secondary nature

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations—level 1 data

Level 1 variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	40.28	15.3						
2. Gender	0.49	0.53	-0.004					
3. Education	5.20	2.57	-0.29***	0.08***				
4. Justification of unethical behavior	2.44	1.85	-0.09***	0.01^	0.02***			
5. Agreeableness	3.27	0.91	0.09***	-0.03***	-0.02^	-0.09***		
6. Conscientiousness	3.60	1.02	0.08***	-0.003	-0.02**	-0.16***	-0.24***	
7. Openness to experience	3.13	0.81	-0.004	0.008	0.004	-0.03***	0.03***	0.25***

N=38,655

^p < .1; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations—level 2 data

Level 2 variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Institutional collectivism	4.28	0.31			
2. Humane orientation	4.32	0.41	0.18		
3. Performance orientation	4.19	0.33	0.25	-0.28	
4. Assertiveness	4.07	0.28	-0.29	-0.52^	0.27

N=8

^p < .1; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

of our data source, it is the best possible way of determining whether common-method bias exists or not (e.g., Conway and Lance 2010).

Analysis Techniques: Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM)

Since our dependent variable, independent variable, and control variables were measured at the individual level (level 1), whereas our moderating variable (national culture dimensions) was measured at the national level (level 2), we chose hierarchical linear modeling as the appropriate technique to analyze our cross-level model (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). This approach is necessary as traditional regression techniques tend to produce biased standard errors when using data at different levels. Use of traditional regression methods ignores the critical assumption of independence of observations as people within the same country tend to respond similarly.

Although moderation tests in traditional regression analysis involve the use of product terms, testing interactions in HLM requires a different approach. Specifically, HLM

requires testing level 1 models (individual-level relationships) and level 2 models (country-level relationships). As such, to test our interaction hypotheses, we used the slopes-as-outcome (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). Specifically, an interaction exists if the slopes of the relationship between our personality variables and justification of ethically suspect behaviors vary across countries. The slopes explaining each of the level 1 relationships thus become the dependent variables for the level 2 tests.

Results

To test our hypotheses relating the individual-level variables (level 1), we ran an individual-level model using traditional regression. Model 1 in Table 3 shows the results of this test. Hypothesis 1 proposed that conscientiousness is negatively related to justification of ethically suspect behaviors. Results from Model 1 provide support for Hypothesis 1 as there is a negative and significant coefficient explaining the relationship between

Table 3 Hierarchical linear model test

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Level 1						
Age	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***
Gender	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Education	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**
Income	0.06^	0.06^	0.06^	0.06^	0.06^	0.06^
Conscientiousness	-0.13***	-0.13***	-0.13***	-0.13***	-0.13***	-0.13***
Agreeableness	-0.04^	-0.04^	-0.04^	-0.04^	-0.04^	-0.04^
Openness to experience	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03
Level 2						
Collectivism		0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
Human orientation		0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Performance orientation		0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77
Assertiveness		0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
Interactions						
Collectivism*conscientiousness			-0.28***			
Collectivism*agreeableness			0.09^			
Collectivism*openness to experience			-0.21***			
Humane orientation*conscientiousness				-0.04		
Humane orientation*agreeableness				-0.03		
Humane orientation*openness to experience				0.17***		
Performance orientation*conscientiousness					0.18***	
Performance orientation*agreeableness					-0.14***	
Performance orientation*openness to experience					0.27***	
Assertiveness*conscientiousness						-0.29***
Assertiveness*agreeableness						-0.01
Assertiveness*openness to experience						0.04

^p < .1; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors after controlling for age, education and gender. In Hypothesis 2, we argued for a negative relationship between agreeableness and our dependent variable. Results from Model 1 provide support for this hypothesis 2 as there is a negative and significant coefficient explaining the relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors after controlling for age, education and gender. Finally, Hypothesis 3 was not supported as results did not show a positive relationship between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behaviors.

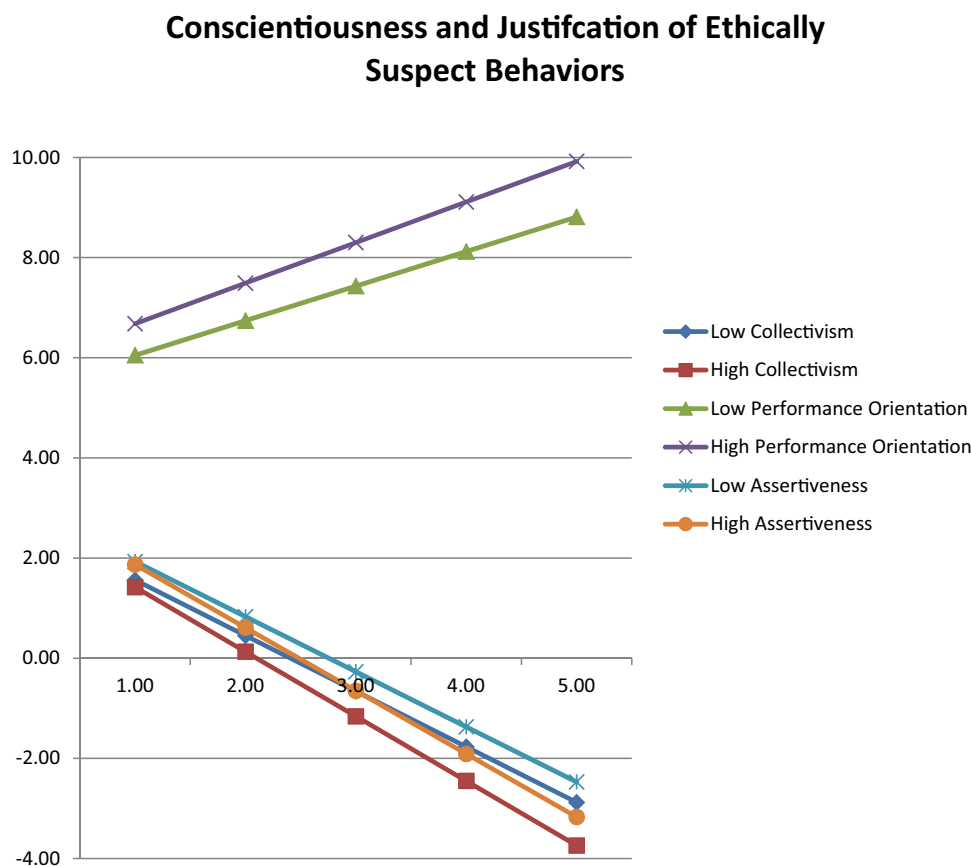
To consider the effects of moderating variables, researchers routinely rely on spotlight analysis where the effects of one variable is illustrated at different levels of the moderating variable, usually at plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean. However, recent research suggests that this approach may not always work well because such values of the moderating variable may be meaningless. Spiller et al. (2013) thus propose the use of floodlight analysis where the plot considers ranges of the moderating variables “where the simple effect of a second variable is significant and where it is not” (Spiller et al. 2013, p. 286). As such, floodlight analysis shows the range of data rather than focusing on the mean of the moderating variable.

To consider whether floodlight or spotlight analysis would be most appropriate for the present paper, we used the decision tree as discussed in Spiller et al. (2013). Because our moderators are measured on a meaningful scale (7-point Likert scale measuring agreement with characteristics of a society) and there are focal values (the means of these cultural dimensions and plus and minus one standard deviation shows the effects of these moderating variables), we decided to use the more traditional spotlight analysis.

Model 3 in Table 3 shows the results for testing Hypotheses 4a through 4c. As Model 3 in Table 3 shows, the interaction coefficient for the moderating effect of collectivism on the relationship between all three personality types and justification of ethically suspect behaviors are significant. To interpret these coefficients, it is necessary to examine these relationships at different levels of collectivism. Consistent with the spotlight approach, to interpret whether these coefficients support our hypotheses, we plot the interactions using the typical one standard deviation above and below the mean for collectivism. Furthermore, we plot the interaction graphs for each personality type on one Figure.

Figure 1 shows the interaction plot for the relationship between conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. As Fig. 1 shows, the relationship between conscientiousness and justification of ethically

Fig. 1 Moderating effects of culture on the relationship between conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors



suspect behaviors is indeed stronger in more collectivistic societies. This lends support to Hypothesis 4a as the negative relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors is stronger in more collectivistic societies. Results from Fig. 2, however, reject Hypothesis 4b, as agreeableness had a stronger and positive relationship with justification of ethically suspect behaviors in more collectivistic societies. This is counter to our expectation that the relationship would be strong and negative. Finally, results from Fig. 3 also reject Hypothesis 4c as openness to experience had a stronger but negative relationship with justification of ethically suspect behaviors in more collectivistic societies. While we hypothesized that collectivism would make the positive relationship stronger, we found a stronger negative relationship.

Model 4 shows the results for the tests of Hypotheses 5a through 5c examining the moderating influence of humane orientation. The interaction coefficients for the moderating influence of humane orientation were significant only for the openness to experience personality type. Hypotheses 5a and 5b are therefore rejected. We again plot interaction of humane orientation to determine support for Hypotheses 5c. Figure 3 rejects Hypothesis 5c as the relationship between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behaviors is actually stronger and positive in higher humane orientation societies. We expected the relationship to be weaker in higher humane orientation societies.

Model 5 shows the moderating effects of performance orientation for testing Hypotheses 6a through 6c. As Model 4 in Table 3 shows, coefficients for the interaction terms representing Hypotheses 6a (conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors), 6b (agreeableness and ethically suspect behaviors) and 6c (openness to experience and ethically suspect behaviors) are significant. Given these significant coefficients, we again plot interaction plots of performance orientation to determine support for Hypotheses 6a, 6b, and 6c. Figures 1, 2 and 3, illustrate these relationships. Figure 1 rejects Hypothesis 6a as the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors was positive and stronger in higher performance orientation. Figure 2 also rejects Hypothesis 6b as the relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors was actually stronger and negative in higher performance orientation societies (see Fig. 2). Hypothesis 6c is supported though as the relationship between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behaviors is stronger and positive in higher performance orientation societies (see Fig. 3).

Finally, Model 6 shows the results for the tests of Hypotheses 7a through 7c examining the moderating influence of assertiveness. The interaction coefficients for the moderating influence of humane orientation were significant only for the relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors. This therefore rejects Hypotheses 7b and

Fig. 2 Moderating effects of culture on the relationship between agreeableness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors

Agreeableness and Justification of Ethically Suspect Behaviors

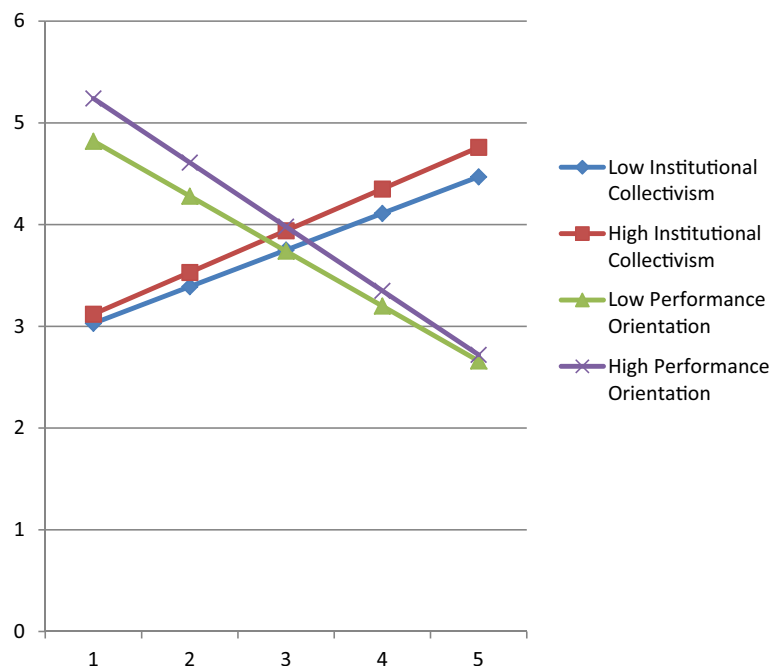
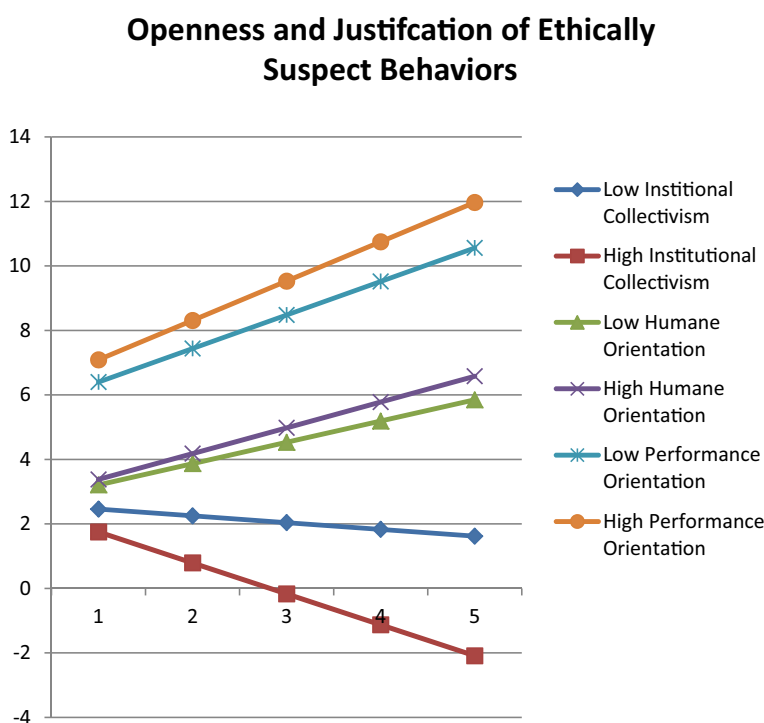


Fig. 3 Moderating effects of culture on the relationship between openness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors



7c. Figure 3 illustrates the relationships for Hypothesis 7a. The interaction graph provides support for Hypothesis 7a as the negative relationship between conscientiousness and ethically suspect behaviors was weaker in more assertive societies.

Discussion

One of the primary objectives of this study was to test the relationships between personality dimensions and managerial ethics, as measured by their willingness to justify ethically suspect behavior. From our individual-level results, we found that two of our three hypotheses were supported. This suggests that perhaps when it comes to ethics, conscientiousness and agreeableness are the more important personality dimensions to consider. We were unable to find significant results for openness to new experiences.

When it comes to conscientiousness and its negative associations with unethical behavior, our findings echo what a plethora of research has found that a high level of conscientiousness is positively associated with rule-following and negatively associated with rule-breaking (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015; Roberts et al. 2009; Salgado 2002). Similar to past research findings, our results suggest that conscientious individuals will be less likely to be willing to justify unethical behavior. This bodes well for organizations that have conscientious managers at the helm of affairs, as such managers will be less likely to engage in rule-breaking

and justify unethical behavior. One explanation for these results can be that conscientious individuals (and managers) tend to keep well-organized and methodical records, which are painstakingly detail-oriented (e.g., Jackson et al. 2010). It is possible that this inclination to keep accurate detailed records precludes any willingness to justify unethical behavior.

When it comes to agreeableness and its negative associations with justification of unethical behavior, one can explain that using the social component inherent to agreeableness. Essentially, since agreeable individuals have a strong desire to maintain positive relationships with others and avoid conflict (e.g., Barrick et al. 2002; Costa and McCrae 1992; Judge and Zapata 2015), the social component entailed in maintaining positive relationships may prevent them from being willing to justify unethical behavior. This is because if an individual engages in justification of unethical behavior, there is a strong possibility of interpersonal conflict. That reduces the likelihood of agreeable individuals considering justifying such behaviors. If some other unethical behaviors (i.e., something that would never involve social interactions) were to be surveyed, then there may be a higher prospect of justification of unethical behavior.

In terms of openness to experience, despite equivocal past research findings, our contention that openness to experience will be positively associated with willingness to justify unethical behavior was not supported. This is a rather surprising result as our contention was that individuals high on openness to experience are more likely to seek out risky

endeavors and moves, some of which may be unethical or ethically ambiguous. One explanation of this finding is that individuals high on openness may be just more likely to be creative and seek out new independent ways of exploration and expression (Judge and Zapata 2015; King et al. 1996; Koestner and Losier 1996). And this independent creativity may be wholly distinct from unethical behavior or unethical activity (e.g., Baucus et al. 2008; Bierly et al. 2009). This distinction between creativity and unethical activity may be why we didn't get support for the hypothesis pertaining to openness to experience.

Our results provide some support for the argument that specific national culture variables have a moderating influence on the relationship between personality variables and justification of ethically suspect behaviors. As expected, we found that collectivism creates environmental conditions whereby the relationship between conscientiousness and justification of ethically suspect behaviors is negative and stronger under high collectivism. Surprisingly, we found that the positive relationship between openness to experience and justification of unethical behavior was stronger under high collectivism. While these findings may be surprising, they can be explained in light of some other study findings. Collectivism necessarily implies a collective effort and the need to imitate others (Li and Parboteeah 2015). This can be seen in collectivistic societies where completely unethical practices such as honor killings are still justified by people, in part due to the collectivistic nature of those societies (Dorjee et al. 2013). Similarly, perhaps those who operate in a high collectivistic society end up imitating other individuals who are open to new experiences and willing to justify unethical behavior. This could possibly be a reason for this particular finding as societal members copy others to fit in.

These results provide great support for the contention that country-level variables can exert a very influential role in shaping relationships between individual-level variables. These findings are also consistent with some studies showing that country-level collectivism is actually negatively related to unethical outcomes at the individual level (Chen et al. 2015; Cullen et al. 2004). But we hope that future research can confirm more similar findings.

We also found that higher levels of humane orientation strengthened a negative relationship with justification of ethically suspect behaviors for both conscientiousness and agreeableness. However, we obtained a counter-intuitive finding wherein the relationship between openness to experience and justification of unethical behavior was stronger in high humane orientation societies. One possible explanation of this counter-intuitive finding is that in high humane orientation societies, the primary focus is on supporting other people. House and Javidan (2004) shows that in high humane oriented societies, others (even strangers) are considered

important. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on kindness, love, generosity and support. A study by Power et al. (2013) found that in general, humane oriented societies tended to find workplace bullying unacceptable. Perhaps, when an individual high on openness to experience justifies his or her unethical behavior, then others in that society feel the necessity to support that individual, regardless of how specious the justification logic is. They may interpret the act of confronting those individuals as being akin to bullying, and will therefore support the individual even if the justification is ethically unmeritorious. This therefore provides a logical explanation for such counter-intuitive findings.

As we had expected, we also found that performance orientation creates environmental conditions whereby the relationship between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behaviors is positive and stronger under high performance orientation societies. On the contrary though, we found that the relationship between agreeableness and willingness to justify unethical behavior was stronger in societies with high performance orientation. One possible way to explain this finding is to consider that possibly in societies with a norm of high performance orientation in place, lack of results may cause interpersonal conflict. In societies like that, even agreeable individuals may be likely to justify unethical behavior, just so they can get the desired performance results, and thereby avoid conflict. A recent example that exemplifies this sort of dynamic can be found in the Volkswagen (VW) Diesel Scandal. The VW CEO Martin Winterkorn was a powerful individual driven by a strong results orientation (Cremer and Bergin 2015). Given that Germany is a society high on performance orientation, one can envision how even agreeable individuals may be likely to justify unethical behavior, because the alternative to that is interpersonal conflict. Given that the focus is on achieving results, this may be so strong to counter agreeable personality types.

Finally, with respect to assertiveness, we found that the relationship between openness to experience and justification of ethically suspect behaviors is positive and stronger in societies with high assertiveness levels. This finding was in line with what we had hypothesized. On the contrary though, we also found that the relationships between conscientiousness, agreeableness and willingness to justify unethical behavior were stronger in societies with high performance orientation. That was contrary to what we had predicted, and it appears that the cultural variable of performance orientation has a great impact on individual's behavior and reasoning. It is likely that cultural values like performance orientation create an environment whereby societal members are more likely to justify ethically suspect behaviors simply because of the overarching focus on results. We hope future research will investigate such counter-intuitive findings in more detail and depth.

Taken together, our study makes some significant contributions to the literature. We contribute to the individual-level research on the link between personality and ethics. Essentially, we find that the Big Five personality dimensions are related to justification of ethically suspect behaviors, regardless of the countries from which individuals hail from. Such findings augment previous research that have considered, for example, only single country data examining personality and ethical behavior of leaders as perceived by subordinates (Kalshoven et al. 2011), conceptual models linking personality to ethics (Hartman 1998) or other studies examining the role of values of undergraduate students with moral reasoning (Lan et al. 2008). This has important ramifications for global management because it supports the view that personality traits are similar across cultures, even though there are cross-cultural variations that may be at play (e.g., Gebauer et al. 2014; Gurven et al. 2013; Schmitt et al. 2008). Such findings also confirm the utility of the personality variables even across a wide sample of individuals located in several countries.

We also make contributions to the burgeoning literature examining the contextual effects of cultural variables. In fact, in their meta-analysis of research using Hofstede's dimensions, Kirkman et al. (2006) noted that the type of moderating analysis we present here seems to be growing in importance. However, their reviews show that no studies have yet been done examining the moderating influence of cultural dimensions on the relationships we examine here. Additionally, we also contribute to the suggestion of examining cultural dimensions beyond individualism (Kirkman et al. 2006).

We found that both collectivism and humane orientation had a generally discouraging effect on justification of ethically suspect behaviors. This in light of the overall findings that collectivists tend to be more cooperative and more concerned about the in-group (Kirkman et al. 2006) suggests that collectivism and humane orientation both have negative effects on justification of ethically suspect behaviors. It appears that concern for others' wellbeing helps prevent an individual from justifying ethically suspect behavior.

Furthermore, we found that performance orientation and assertiveness had a deteriorating effect on the environment influencing ethics, making it more likely for individuals to justify unethical behavior. Here it appears that cultural norms espousing results and dominance as opposed to concern for others make it easier for an individual to justify unethical behavior. In particular, cultural norms emphasizing a focus on results make it likely that individuals will justify unethical behavior. Our findings are interesting and significant because they add more nuanced complexity to our current understanding of how country-level variables affect personality and its outcomes. From prior research (e.g., Schmitt et al. 2008), we know that there are sex differences

in personality that depend on country-level variables such as higher levels of human development (such as life expectancy, economic wealth, access to education). Our study's findings regarding collectivism, humane and performance orientations, and assertiveness add considerable complexity and nuance to this existing literature base on personality and its outcomes. Our findings contribute to the dearth of studies examining the impact of country-level influence on more individual-level relationships.

Managerial Implications

The findings of our study have several implications for managers. Seeing that personality has such an effect on willingness to justify unethical behavior, suggests that managers should be taking personality assessments seriously. Perhaps, more care in assigning and choosing conscientious and agreeable managers should be exercised by organizations. And, while we do not suggest blanket bans on appointing managers who are high on openness to experience, some due diligence is in order there (especially considering how cultural variables affect the relationship of individuals high on openness). More organizational socialization and training of managers high on openness to experience may be advisable. As Beus et al. (2015) point out using personality traits to inform selection and staffing decisions is a judicious step for organizational leaders and decision-makers to take.

Additionally, organizations and leaders aiming to take their firm abroad or in a global trajectory should be aware that global cultural differences exist, and these differences can cause somewhat unexpected results. For instance, a conscientious manager in an assertive country may behave in an entirely unexpected way, and similarly, a manager high on openness, may behave in an unexpected way in a higher humane orientation society. These cultural differences should certainly be examined prior to any decision to set up or outsource operations in a new country. So, essentially organizational decision-makers should consider both personality traits as well as nation level cultural differences when deciding to staff or select personnel in managerial roles. Similarly, managers should possess at least some basic self-awareness of their own personalities as well as the national culture context of the country or region that they're operating in. This becomes particularly important in societies that are assertive and performance oriented. Possessing this self-awareness will hopefully help the individual as well as the organization to flourish and not get entangled in any sort of unethical behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of our study is that we entirely rely on secondary data, which signifies that the data collection

process is out of our control. However, the abundance of research published in premier journals that have utilized the WVS datasets suggests that there is no question about the validity or reliability of the WVS data. Another limitation is that the Big Five personality questionnaire was not administered to all the respondents involved in the study. This reduced our sample size to a sizeable extent, and while we still had respondents from 23 countries in our final analysis, it would have been more complete and comprehensive if we had the opportunity to analyze the entire data set. Similarly, it would help increase the reliability metrics of data procured from the WVS if they were to use a more detailed measure of personality (and other scales), as opposed to the presently used abbreviated BFI-10. Perhaps, future waves of the WVS will do this.

We do have some directions for future studies—one is of course, to increase the size of the sample and replicate our analysis. A related possibility for future research would also to use stronger and more precise measures. Doing so will help establish the validity of our findings, and therefore provide more confidence in managers and leaders that would like to use our findings to make selection and placement decisions. An ideal solution would be for the WVS association to ask the personality questions to every respondent in their next iteration but failing that one can still examine our hypotheses in countries that were not included in our analyses. Another suggestion we have is to include further cultural dimensions, cultural values, and social institutions. Additionally, some longitudinal studies investigating these relationships would help further clarify our overall understanding of these findings. Perhaps, more interesting and counter-intuitive findings will result from doing so, which would add more complexity to the decision-making toolkit of managers and leaders. This would eventually improve our understanding of the factors that affect managerial ethics and business ethics. Additionally, our surprising finding for some personality variables under different contextual conditions deserved further scrutiny. For instance, what are the mechanisms by which agreeableness is positively related to justification of ethically suspect behaviors under high performance orientation? Can national culture variables, as we show here, trump individual-level factors in determining responses to ethical dilemmas? We hope future studies can explore such issues in greater depth.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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