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# The Role of Personality Traits on Goal Commitment: A Moderation Analysis

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THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ON GOAL COMMITMENT: A  
MODERATION ANALYSIS

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
in  
Psychology:  
Industrial/Organizational

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by  
Matthew Hendrick Mellegers

March 2018

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## ABSTRACT

Managers and researchers alike have long yearned for a solution to garner peak performance from employees. With the use Locke and Latham's goal setting theory as a motivational foundational principle, goal commitment was predicted from four primary personality traits commonly found in scientific literature: general self-efficacy, conscientiousness, honesty/humility, and learning goal orientation. The possible moderation effect of goal difficulty on these relationships was also explored. 248 undergraduate students at California State University, San Bernardino were presented personality inventories, followed by an anagram word task, and were assigned to either an easy or hard goal condition. Goal commitment was measured at two phases during the assigned task. The results revealed that only self-efficacy and honesty/humility were significantly positively correlated with goal commitment; however, none of the relationships were moderated by goal difficulty. The results highlight the notion that goal-setting theory is more intricate and dynamic than previously assumed. Additionally, the results of the present study provide insight into the malleable nature of motivation, as well as the highlighting specific traits that may be beneficial in the selection for difficult occupations.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Role of Motivation

Managerial success is often tied to the success of their subordinates' ability to achieve an organizational goal (e. g., number of sales, amount of product manufactured). It becomes clear then, that managers have a desire for their employees to perform as well as possible. Early research on performance presented the notion that it is a function of ability and performance; if either component is lacking, then performance will decrease. Thus, the model that has been classically accepted is:  $\text{performance} = \text{motivation} * \text{ability}$  (Vroom, 1964). As research in this area progressed, a more contemporary model of performance emerged to include a third variable of opportunity (O). Thus, this had led to the development of AMO theory, which states that performance is contingent upon three factors --- ability, motivation, and opportunity;  $\text{performance} = \text{motivation} * \text{ability} * \text{opportunity}$  (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). The O in this model illuminates the notion that there are situational factors that contribute to an individual's performance beyond their individual levels of motivation and ability. From this model, business leaders have focused more on the motivation aspect as it is perceived as the malleable construct; shaping employee motivation has the potential to augment performance. As such, one of the age-old questions of

managers is how to effectively garner motivation in employees to foster their peak performance.

What methods can be implemented to effectively motivate employees to achieve organizational goals? This is a question that has fascinated both researchers and managers alike for years. In response to this inquiry, several theories of motivation have emerged over the years. The premise of these theories has manifested themselves to be quite diverse, covering a variety of underlying motivational constructs. To demonstrate this point, consider a couple of different theories of motivation. One of the premier theories of workplace motivation is expectancy theory. This theory asserts that individuals act in a way which is consistent with the outcome that they expect to receive (Vroom, 1964). The underlying construct that this theory is addressing in the decision process that people undergo when selecting an action to take – in other words, the implicit motivation (combined with outside factors) drives us to make certain decisions. This is one example of the many facets within the concept of motivation that has been studied. We will now turn to our theory of interest, *goal setting theory*.

### Emergence of Goal-Setting Theory

The concept of working toward a desired outcome is nothing new; in fact, the philosophy of working toward and achieving goals goes back to Aristotle's time. One of his most famous assertions is that having a purpose (or goal) is paramount to acting. Aristotle coined this term *final causality*, which asserts that

action is caused by purpose (Locke, 1996). This is the premise that goal-setting theory fundamentally lies upon. The idea of goal-setting was rarely studied until Edwin Locke began his fascination with assessing how conscious motives influence our behaviors at work (Locke, 1996). With the framework of Aristotle in mind, Locke began to study the tasks that individuals were striving to perform to assess the question at hand. Over the next 30 years, Locke, and later with the help of Gary Latham's field studies, formed what is known today as *Goal Setting Theory*. The premise to this theory is that setting goals leads to subsequent improved work performance. Specifically, the theory asserts that goals which are challenging and specific yield optimal performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). While setting specific and challenging goals has proven to be a valid form of employee motivation and enhancing performance, there does not appear to be a linear relationship between goal-setting and performance, in that there are outside influences which have been shown to have a mediating or moderating effect on the goal-setting and performance relationship (Latham, Ganegoda, & Locke, 2011). Among the most prominent of these influences are personality characteristics; so now we will turn our attention there.

### Individual Differences: Do they Matter?

One of the first attempts at developing a taxonomy for personality traits was by William McDougall in 1932; he wrote a piece distinguishing, what he saw as five prominent personality subgroups (Digman, 1990). Although his structure

is quite different from our modern-day taxonomies, it gave life to the idea of classifying broad personality traits as over-arching themes for the smaller, more nuanced traits. The *Big-Five Model* was eventually formed by Goldberg in the 1980s. Goldberg's model is characterized by the following traits: openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1984). Since the inception of this model, psychologists have expanded the dimensions to include a sixth trait, humility/honesty – this is known today as the HEXACO inventory (Ashton & Lee, 2005). Like the original five traits, studies have repeatedly demonstrated the validity and reliability of the humility trait across different cultural contexts (Aston & Lee, 2005). Each trait manifests in a distinct behavior and have been verifiably observed for decades, demonstrating their reliability. In fact, the stability in personality trait constructs has even led industrial psychologists to be able to make predictions about who will emerge as a leader or determine what kind of leader they will become.

For example, research has demonstrated that personality traits (classified using HEXACO model) are correlated with leader emergence – proving evidence of traits being a strong predictor (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Data such as these indicate that personality traits are not only stable in individuals; they can also predict the way we behave in various contexts. In short, personality traits are an important predictor of our behavior at work and how we view the world.

## Purpose of Current Literature Review

Given that personality has been an important predictor of human behavior and emotion (in and out of work), what is personality's relationship to motivation? To examine this relationship, the effects of personality traits on goal-setting will be reviewed. Locke and Latham's theory of goal-setting involved five main premises. (1) Goals must be specific and challenging to foster peak performance; (2) more specific goals have more precise monitoring; (3) the more difficult the goal, the greater the achievement (unless it is beyond an individual's capability); (4) commitment to goals is crucial when they are difficult; (5) commitment is highest when one believes the goal is attainable and important (Locke, 1996). This theory indicates that setting difficult goals and staying committed to those goals are fundamental for success and subsequent high work performance. With these premises in mind, we will review what research has been done on the predictive power that different personality traits have on both goal commitment and self-set goal difficulty. The big-five personality taxonomy and HEXACO models will be included; however, they will not be the focal point as much research between goal setting theory and the big-five/HEXACO taxonomy leaves much to be desired. After we identify these relationships from previous research, we will offer a model that can be utilized to lay the groundwork for the proposed research.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Goal adherence is a vital component of accomplishing any task, particularly when it is challenging in nature. After the conception of goal-setting theory, researchers began to examine how these components (i. e., goal commitment /goal difficulty) were susceptible to outside influences. Nascent research in this area has examined three primary determinants of goal-commitment. *External factors, internal factors, and interactive factors* have been the most closely examined extraneous factors affecting adherence to goal commitment (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). In concordance with the scope of the proposed research, only internal factors will be discussed. Within the domain of internal factors lies the concept of *self-efficacy*; although there has been debate whether self-efficacy is a stable personality trait, for this paper, it will be treated as such. Task-specific self-efficacy is not the focus of concern, but rather *general self-efficacy*, which alludes to an individual's sense of capability that is generalizable to any scenario (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). Additionally, one of the keystones of Latham and Locke's goal setting theory is the notion that goals must be challenging – but obtainable -- to foster peak performance (Latham & Locke, 1990). There is a myriad of factors that play into the level of goal one sets for themselves, but for this paper, the effects of personality attributes will be assessed. There has been a large body of research regarding goal orientation,

for example, meta-analyses have revealed that it is positively related to work performance (Cellar, Stuhlmacher, Young, Fisher, Adair, Haynes, & Riester, 2011). Thus, we will also discuss research that has been done linking each trait to goal difficulty, as it is a fundamental tenant to achieving goals. Thus, the first trait that will be discussed in relation to goal commitment will be general self-efficacy.

### Self-Efficacy

Numerous studies have been successful in highlighting the clear link between self-efficacy and goal commitment. Early research on self-efficacy's relationship with goal commitment revealed that self-efficacy is related to the type of goal one sets for themselves and how committed they are to that endeavor (Locke et al., 1989). Locke and a team of researchers hypothesized that self-efficacy would predict the type of goal one engaged in, as well as the person's inclination to adhere to that specific task; the results were consistent with the hypotheses. The rationale of the study was that the goal type and adherence would effectively act as mediators to organizational performance, which is consistent with the findings of the study (Locke et al., 1989). Locke's piece determined commitment through the work performance; if the results of his study had indicated lower performance, then the authors' hypotheses would not have been supported. The limitation in this line of logic is the assumption that high organizational performance is a direct manifestation of goal commitment;

however, it fails to consider the extraneous factors that can affect the performance outcome criterion of interest – namely performing well can be attributed to other factors (e. g., time of year, ability).

Conversely, it is possible that a low performing-individual is dedicated to their goals, but another factor is inhibiting their performance. To augment the results, these assumptions should be examined – namely, if the measurement criterion of commitment were changed, perhaps a new outcome between these two variables may be identified. For this reason, we should examine this relationship under a different context.

The link between self-efficacy and goal commitment has been examined through different and unique contexts. For instance, entrepreneurial behaviors have been an outcome of interest for self-efficacy researchers. In concordance with Birds' entrepreneurial intention model, self-efficacy leads to positive entrepreneurial intentions, which then lead to actions (Bird, 1988). Because individuals who rate high in self-efficacy are likely to visualize success in their actions, they are more likely to follow through on their goals when in an entrepreneurial context; presumably due to the resilient nature required in entrepreneurship. Goal commitment and goal difficulty levels – by this account – are representative of entrepreneurial intentions. Thus, higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy will lead to a higher commitment to goals; this is consistent with models proposed by social scientists in this arena (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994).

A more in-depth look at the relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and sustained action (including adherence to goals), shows that this relationship is mediated by a passion in the business in which the individual is involved (Cardon & Kirk, 2013). This demonstrates that the link between self-efficacy and goal commitment is present, it is a relationship that is consistent with findings in other studies. Evidence of this nature (demonstrating the link of self-efficacy predicting goal commitment for entrepreneurs) helps to solidify the link between self-efficacy and goal commitment by demonstrating this relationship is stable in differing contexts, augmenting its generalizability.

More evidence for the connection between goal commitment and self-efficacy lies in a meta-analysis conducted by Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, Wright, and Deshon (2001). Among other variables, the piece by Klein et al. (2001) revealed that self-efficacy is an antecedent to the consequential behavioral of goal commitment. In addition to this finding, the researchers discovered that goal difficulty moderates the relationship between goal commitment and performance, in that higher performance was related to more commitment for less difficult goals (Klein et al., 2001). The data that was included in this meta-analysis were self-reported measures of the participant's perception of goal commitment. The assumption of this measure of commitment is that our feelings of goal commitment are reflective of our levels of goal commitment. While perceptions of our own commitment toward a goal appear to have a high level of face-validity; the issue with this assumption is that our perceptions or commitments may not

be a static event, but rather, may be malleable depending on the context in which they are nestled. Commitment measurement further serves to demonstrate its limitation – in that, it is often difficult to detect true levels of goal commitment due to a high possibility of extraneous influences, thus potentially limiting our certainty on its relationship to self-efficacy in this study. Regardless, self-efficacy appears to be predictive of goal commitment, per this study.

A more recent study by Lau (2012) further demonstrates the link between self-efficacy and goal commitment. It also highlights the importance of goal commitment as a mediator between personality and job satisfaction. The author hypothesized that self-efficacy would be positively related to goal commitment, and consequentially, job satisfaction. Self-efficacy was assessed with a 17-item scale, consisting of Likert-scale responses. Goal commitment was measured with Klein's goal commitment scale, and job satisfaction was measured on a Likert-scale. Using university students, the author found a significant relationship between the participants' level of self-efficacy and goal commitment; additionally, there was a link between goal commitment and job satisfaction (Lau, 2012). These results provide further evidence for the importance of self-efficacy, in addition to also demonstrating that goal commitment can serve as a mediator for positive organizational outcomes – such as job satisfaction or performance.

Another way in which the link between self-efficacy and goal commitment has been demonstrated is through the concept of core self-evaluations. This trait alludes to an individual's subconscious evaluations about their own capabilities,

control, and confidence in their ability to succeed. Per previous studies, this trait has four components: self-efficacy, neuroticism, self-esteem, and locus of control (Erez & Judge, 2001). A study by Erez and Judge (2001) aimed to assess the link between core self-evaluations, goal commitment, and work performance. Using core self-evaluation questionnaires, the authors discovered that goal commitment acted as a mediator between core self-evaluations and work performance; however, the strongest correlation was observed for self-efficacy component (Erez & Judge, 2001). The link between self-efficacy and goal commitment was the highest amongst the four components of core self-evaluations (including the correlation for the global trait) further strengthening this relationship. Interestingly, self-efficacy was not directly related to objective sales performance or subjective manager ratings, however goal commitment served as the mediator between these factors.

The above studies indicate that self-efficacy is related to goal commitment; one plausible mediation of this relationship is that the factors may be related through an inclination toward self-improvement and learning. It is true that pursuing goals and staying commitment does involve some degree of risk (failure), and those who score higher in self-efficacy may be more cognizant of these potential failures, thus they are willing to risk failure while those who exhibit a lower sense of self-efficacy are not willing to put themselves on the line. While self-efficacy has proven to make an impact on goal-setting theory's facet of goal commitment, there appears to be other traits at play. As such, we will examine

more personality traits – for this, we turn to the five-big and HEXACO personality taxonomies.

### Big-Five and HEXACO Models

Researchers in industrial/organizational and personality psychology have studied individual differences (personality) and their affects for decades; certainly, the most cited taxonomy is the big-five model. Since its conception in the late 1980s, it has been at the center of many research questions regarding performance and motivation. In concordance with several authors' hypotheses, earlier research in this domain has identified that the big-five traits – particularly extraversion and conscientiousness are predictive of several positive organizational outcomes, such as higher performance and higher supervisor ratings. Emotional stability (neuroticism) has manifested as a predictor to negative organizational outcomes (Judge et al., 2002).

It is plausible that earlier research on the relationship between the big-five personality traits and goal commitment has tended to focus more on neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness due to the predictive nature of these traits in alternate organizational contexts. Taking the positive effects of these traits into account, Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993) conducted a study to assess the relationship between these traits, goal commitment, and work performance. Sales representatives were given Goldberg's personality questionnaires (testing for levels of extraversion and conscientiousness) and their level of goal

commitment was measured using a Likert scale with direct questions about their level of commitment and motivation for their goals. The researchers discovered that conscientiousness yielded the strongest correlation to goal commitment, while extraversion was not significantly correlated to goal commitment (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993). In addition, goal commitment was significantly correlated to objective (sales performance) and subjective (supervisory ratings) measures of organizational performance. Neuroticism was found to be negatively correlated to goal commitment, as well as both objective and subjective performance measurements (Barrick et al., 1993). These early results indicate that the big-five traits are predictive of goal commitment, which in turn, translates into organizational performance.

Not unlike the data from self-efficacy studies, it would appear the relationship between the big-five traits and performance is mediated through goal commitment. In addition to these findings, we must evaluate the measurement of the goal commitment construct in the Barrick et al. (1993) study. The researchers measured goal commitment in two ways: through a self-reported measure and inferentially based on subjective and objective ratings – it was also revealed that these measures were correlated highly to each other (Barrick et al., 1993). The multi-dimensional nature of its measurement serves to strengthen the relationship, through a cross-validation process. Perhaps implementing multiple measurement systems can be used as a technique that closely resembles that of triangulation – providing more credence to empirical findings.



Since conscientiousness has been deemed to be predictive of goal commitment, researchers have introduced possible moderators to this relationship. One such explored moderator has been employee perception. Bipp and Kleingeld (2008) aimed to test this possible moderator by assigning employees in a chemical company to a condition that would be perceived negatively (low goal clarity) or a perceived positively (high goal clarity). Each participant's commitment to organizational goals was assessed through Klein's five-item self-reported measure; personality was also measured with a self-reported questionnaire. Consistent with the authors' hypotheses, the results revealed that conscientiousness significantly correlated to goal commitment, regardless of their perception of the goal (Bipp & Kleingeld, 2008). In addition to these results, neuroticism was found to have no significant correlation to goal commitment – contrary to results found in previous studies (Bipp & Kleingeld, 2008). The results of Bipp and Kleingeld (2008) indicate conscientiousness is a more powerful predictor of goal adherence than perception, thus strengthening the evidence for the notion that conscientiousness is a vital part of staying committed to goals. A plausible reason for this is that those who are low in conscientiousness are more susceptible to their negative feelings – they are less in control and give up easier. Perhaps those who exhibited the high degree of conscientiousness also exhibited high self-efficacy, evidenced in their reluctance to give up, despite the abstruse goal presented from management. Based on the results of Bipp and Kleingeld (2008), it is reasonable to presume that the

relationship between conscientiousness and staying committed to goals is impervious to outside influences – in other words, other variables are unlikely to moderate this relationship as those high in conscientiousness are likely to adhere to their goals, irrespective of difficulty. Furthermore, the lack of predictive power between neuroticism and goal commitment can be a measurement issue; the researchers used a unilateral form of measurement (self-report), it is possible that a supplemental form of commitment measurement could have been implemented, possibly altering the perplexing results. All in all, it appears the relationship between goal commitment and conscientiousness is quite potent as evidenced by Bipp and Kleingeld's study from 2008.

The literature on the direct relationship between the big-five taxonomy and goal difficulty is limited; however, Judge and Ilies (2002) conducted a meta-analysis assessing the relationship between the big-five traits and the different motivational sub categories. For this analysis, the authors defined goal motivation as goal difficulty as indicated in their coding methods. The results of this analysis revealed that three of the big-five traits showed a significant correlation to goal motivation. The trait that showed the strongest relationship to goal motivation was neuroticism; however, the direction of this relationship was negative, indicating lower goal motivation (or goal difficulty) was related to higher neuroticism (Judge & Ilies, 2002). The second strongest relationship observed was for conscientiousness, indicating higher goal motivation (goal difficulty) was related to higher conscientiousness. Specifically, the meta-analysis revealed

there to be an association of  $r = .22$  between conscientiousness and goal motivation. There were also significant correlations observed with agreeableness, openness, and extraversion. Agreeableness showed an inverse relationship, indicating agreeableness was related to lower goal motivation. However, the sample size of this measure was much smaller compared to the other traits so, the strength of this evidence is somewhat weaker (Judge & Ilies, 2002). The results also revealed a significant (but smaller) positive relationship between both extraversion and openness, indicating that these traits are associated with higher levels of goal motivation. The meta-analysis by Judge and Ilies (2002) reveals that conscientiousness and neuroticism are the most predictive of the big-five traits in relation to goal motivation – both in a positive and negative fashion. These results are consistent with those of the goal orientation in that there appears to be a correlation between learning orientation and conscientiousness in relation to self-set goal difficulty; additionally, there appears to be a correlation between task orientation and neuroticism in relation to self-set goal difficulty. These traits appear to be the strongest predictors per the literature, so if they are combined, then they should yield significant confidence in an organization's ability to predict who will set difficult goals.

As personality research progressed, lexical personality studies have produced a reliable six personality factors (expanding on the big-five model originally proposed). Psychologists noticed that facets of particular personality dimensions did not fit into any of the original proposed traits (e. g., reluctance to

exploit others) (Ashton & Lee, 2005). As a result, facets were realigned (namely agreeableness), and a new broad category named honesty/humility was added; this was the birth of the HEXACO model of personality (Ashton & Lee, 2005). The HEXACO model of personality has been shown to be reliable as the six dimensions have shown up repeatedly, and in several languages. In addition, the model covers more subsets of personality dimensions not covered in the big-five, making it a superior, more holistic model when compared to the big-five taxonomy.

Since humility is a relatively new personality dimension, there is limited research on its ability to predict organizational outcomes (e. g., job performance, turnover). Although nascent, there have been a limited number of notable studies. For instance, Ashton (2005) used the newly minted trait of honesty/humility to predict workplace delinquency and overt integrity test scores as studies using the big-five taxonomy have proven to be severely lacking in predicting both outcomes of interest (overt integrity and workplace delinquency). To assess the relationship, university students were surveyed. Each student completed a HEXACO personality inventory, workplace behavior questionnaire (to measure delinquency), and an Employee Integrity Index; the scores were then correlated to their honesty/humility score. The results of Ashton's (2005) study indicate that honesty/humility led to superiority in the model's ability to predict both outcomes – above and beyond the big-five traits alone (Ashton, 2005). Furthermore, the results indicated that the honesty/humility dimension

were the strongest predictor of workplace integrity, and showed the strongest negative association with workplace delinquency (Ashton, 2005). The data indicate that honesty/humility can be significant predictors of organizational outcomes – both positive and negative.

Research has also examined the relationship between honesty/humility and workplace performance. Johnson and Petrini (2011) assessed this relationship by administering surveys to employees in a rest-care facility. Each employee was given personality measures from the Personality-Item pool (consisting of 240 items). Personality scores derived were later correlated to supervisor performance in 35 different categories. The results of Johnson and Petrini's regression analysis revealed that honesty/humility was a predictor of performance for the care-giving staff, above and beyond the other five personality dimensions (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotionality, and openness) (Johnson & Petrini, 2011). In alignment with Ashton's (2005) study on workplace delinquency, the results of the Johnson & Petrini (2011) do an excellent job of highlighting the notion that honesty/humility can predict organizational outcomes. Combined, the two studies demonstrate that honesty/humility has a significant relationship to a diverse range of organizational outcomes. Research in this area is still recent, so there are several organizational outcomes that need to be studied in relation to the honesty/humility personality dimension. Literature on humility's relationship to

goal motivation or goal commitment, for example, is virtually non-existent today, which is why it has been omitted in the previous studies in this section.

The above studies indicate that the traits in the big-five personality and HEXACO taxonomies are predictive of goal commitment. Of the five traits, conscientiousness has proven to be the most positively related, followed by extraversion. Neuroticism has yielded mixed results, in some studies it is negatively related to goal commitment, and not related in other studies. Openness to experience and agreeableness have not been directly studied in relation to goal commitment, however research has shown that these traits have not revealed many significant correlations when compared to different criteria (e. g., goal difficulty, organizational performance) (Judge et al., 2002). Thus, it is unlikely that these traits would be predictive of goal commitment. So far, we have discovered two personality traits (generalized self-efficacy and conscientiousness) that have repeatedly manifested as strong predictors of goal commitment. Additionally, humility/honesty is presumably predictive of goal commitment because of the sub-facets which comprise the trait (more research needs to be done in this area as well). Although these traits are strong predictors, there are other traits which are prevalent in goal setting research. Next, the trait of goal orientation will be examined in relation to goal commitment.

## Goal Orientation

The concept of goal orientation is one that has received much attention in goal-setting literature. Goal orientation alludes to one's underlying disposition for demonstrating an ability or toward developing a skill (DeShon, 2005). Although there has been much disagreement regarding its viability as a stable trait, research in the field has supported its use as a personality dimension. Goal orientation is split into two categories: performance goal orientation and learning goal orientation. The former postulates that one engages in tasks because of a desire to perform and complete tasks; the latter postulates that one engages in tasks because of a desire to learn and grow (DeShon, 2005). An overwhelming majority of the research on this trait has been on goal difficulty; however, we will focus on the limited research assessing goal orientation's effect of goal commitment. The literature regarding goal difficulty will be discussed later in this paper.

Colquitt (1998) assessed goal orientation and conscientiousness as predictors of motivation to learn. Undergraduate students in a management class were assigned goals based off their previous academic performance, and their goal orientation and conscientiousness were measured via Likert scales. There were three exams in the course and students were given feedback after each exam with feedback stating how they were doing in relation to their assigned goal. Goal commitment was measured after the students were assigned their goals and after each feedback session via the same measure. It was discovered

that those with a learning goal orientation were significantly more likely to stay committed to their goals, even if they fell short; those in the performance orientation were less committed to their goals and this was exacerbated when their goals were not met (Colquitt, 1998). Furthermore, the results revealed that those with learning orientation and conscientiousness would be more motivated to succeed, as evidenced through their task commitment. These data indicate those high in performance orientation lose motivation to adhere to their goals after experiencing failure, while those high in learning orientation sustain motivation and persist toward their goals. This means that goal orientation may be particularly effective in predicting goal commitment, which in turn will augment performance; however, more research needs to be done in this domain. In addition, Colquitt's study provides more evidence for the importance of conscientiousness – perhaps its power is enhanced when coupled with learning orientation for the commitment to one's goals.

Phillips and Gully (1997) assessed the link between the difficulty of self-set goals and goal orientation. To test the relationship, the authors surveyed undergraduate students with items intended to measure goal orientation. Goal difficulty was measured by asking each student how many questions they planned on answering correctly on the upcoming exam; a regression analysis was then conducted to assess the relationship between these variables. The results revealed that those who rated higher on the learning orientation index, were more likely to set higher goals; while those who scored as having higher



performance orientation set lower self-set goals (Phillips & Gully, 1997). These results indicate that goal orientation can be an important predictor of setting more challenging goals; specifically, those who are more learning-focused set higher goals while those who are more focused on specific tasks set lower goals. One limitation to this study is the sample, it was comprised of undergraduate students, so it is plausible that this can limit its generalizability. However, these data do provide evidence for the predictive power of goal orientation for higher self-set goals.

Further research in the domain of goal orientation and goal difficulty comes from a study by Lee, Sheldon, and Turban (2003). The authors were interested in assessing how facets of personality self-determination (autonomy, control, and amotivated) interact with goal orientation patterns to predict the difficulty of self-set goals. *Autonomy* alludes to choices made on internal needs; *control* alludes to those who see their behaviors controlled by others, usually an authority figure; *amotivated* alludes to a low locus of control and an inferior sense of capability (Lee, Sheldon, & Turban, 2003). The authors used students in a business school and surveying them to assess levels of personality self-determination and goal orientation pattern. Goal difficulty was determined by the letter grade goal each student set for themselves (ranging from A to D). The results of this study indicate that students with a higher sense of control tended to set higher goals; this relationship was mediated by goal orientation, such that performance orientation explained the relationship between personality self-

determination and self-set goal difficulty (Lee et al., 2003). Furthermore, this study indicated that those with a higher sense of amotivation tended to set lower goals; this relationship was mediated by goal orientation such that performance-avoiding orientation explained the relationship between personality self-determination and self-set goal difficulty (Lee et al., 2003). These results indicate that goal orientation is an important vessel that can be used to predict how difficult of goals we set for ourselves.

The results of Lee, Sheldon, and Turban (2003) also indicate that the context in which the goal is nestled may moderate goal orientation's effect on setting difficult goals. The Lee et al. (2003) study was in an academic setting with a clear indicator of success (i. e., letter grade), so perhaps task orientation is more predictive in this setting, explaining the pattern of results. Perhaps task orientation would be less predictive in a setting that does not have a clear objective goal, showing that context can moderate this relationship. Those with an avoidance-performance goal orientation may be less willing to set challenging goals – regardless of the context because of their inability to see themselves as capable. Lee et al. (2003) does an excellent job of providing evidence for the notion that goal orientation is strongly related to self-set goal difficulty and can be a basis for future research frameworks. Furthermore, their results reveal that there may be some underlying constructs in common with goal orientation and personality self-determination (e. g., conscientiousness), which is why the pattern of higher goal-setting was observed. To conclude this section, we will turn to

research which has assessed the link between traits not covered in previous sections and goal difficulty.

### Miscellaneous Traits

Previous research has examined the relationship between achievement orientation and goal type and motivation. Achievement orientation alludes to one's drive to accomplish tasks and exceed a high degree of success; this is thought to be a stable personality trait (Elliot, 1994). This relationship was demonstrated by Elliot (1994) by placing college students through a pinball game, and assigning each student to a goal that was either task-focused or mastery-focused; their achievement orientation was assessed via a Likert scale. The results indicated that mastery goals were ideal for those who are low in achievement orientation. Conversely, those high in achievement orientation had a positive outlook and similar performance – regardless of the type of goal set (Elliot, 1994). A plausible explanation for these results is that the specific goal and emphasis on performance created anxiety in those with low achievement orientation, creating stifled performance. Those high in achievement orientation presumably did not experience this anxiety, thus they exhibited similar performance in both scenarios. Although further research needs to be done in this domain, it is possible that there are underlying traits (e. g., conscientiousness, neuroticism) that are related to achievement orientation. The direct link between self-set goal difficulty and achievement orientation is virtually

non-existent, but based on the similarities between goal orientation, conscientious, and achievement orientation, it is plausible to hypothesize a similar series of results. This is an area of much goal-setting theory research opportunity.

Brown, Cron, and Solcom (1998) examined the relationship between trait competitiveness, perceived competitive climate, and difficulty of self-set goals. The author measured sales representatives' trait competitiveness and their perception of climate competitiveness via 5-item Likert scales. The participants were then asked to set themselves a goal for the number of units they intended on selling over the next three months. A multiple regression analysis was conducted, revealing that those with high trait competitiveness set higher goals when they perceive the climate as competitive – the author refers to this as *congruence pattern* (Brown, Cron, & Solcolm, 1998). Additionally, there was an interaction observed such that those with higher trait competitiveness set higher goals, depending on their perception of a competitive climate; also, main effects for both trait competitiveness and competitive climate perception were observed (Brown et al., 1998). The results of this study also indicate that the inclination toward setting more difficult goals is reliant on several personality traits not mentioned in the previous sections (e. g., trait competitiveness). Additionally, these results reveal that there may be ways to moderate the effect of personality traits on self-set goal difficulty. Future research in this area should focus on trait competitiveness in conjunction with other personality traits – such as

conscientiousness or goal orientation -- to test the combined predictive power on self-set goal difficulty.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PRESENT STUDY

The studies cited in this review provide evidence for the notion that individual personality traits are predictive and influence the fundamental facets of Locke's Goal-Setting Theory. Locke's goal-setting theory heavily depends on the ability of an individual to stay in adherence to goals, to achieve the desired outcome. Thus, the major aim of this study was to examine how the aforementioned personality traits can predict goal commitment. In addition, possible moderating relationships were a focal point of concern for the current study. Much of the research in this literature review has examined the relationship between these personality variables and goal commitment in the context of self-set goals. However, using the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) as a foundational principle, it was plausible to predict that these relationships would hold still in the context of other-set goals (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). The behavioral outcome—using this framework—was goal commitment; in other words, it was believed that each personality dimension would interact with the environment (other-set goal) to create behavioral variance (differences in goal commitment). Namely, in this study we were concerned with the plausible reality that when goals are more difficult, the relationship between the specific personality trait and goal commitment will shift. Each trait and its accompanying hypothesis is revealed in the following paragraphs.

## Self-Efficacy

Among other studies, Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, Wright, and Deshon, (2001), provided evidence that self-efficacy is a large contributor to individuals staying committed to their goals. In fact, the studies cited in the aforementioned sections confirm that self-efficacy is a very strong predictor of goal commitment in a variety of different contexts. For instance, the study by Cardon and Kirk (2013) demonstrates that this relationship is strong, even in entrepreneurial environments. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Ho1:** *General Self-Efficacy will be positively associated with goal commitment.*

The trait of self-efficacy is characterized by a belief in one's own ability to accomplish tasks. This self-belief allows those high in this trait to pursue endeavors that those lower in this trait would never dream of. Presumably, this dichotomy seeps into the commitment that an individual has in relation to their goal; thus, those individuals high in self-efficacy should stay high in commitment; however, it is plausible that this relationship between self-efficacy and goal commitment would change depending on goal difficulty. Based on this premise, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Ho2:** *The difficulty of a goal will moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and goal commitment such that those high in self-efficacy will show high goal commitment irrespective of the difficulty of the goal, while those low in self-*

efficacy will show significantly lower goal commitment when faced with more challenging goals, as depicted below in Figure 1.

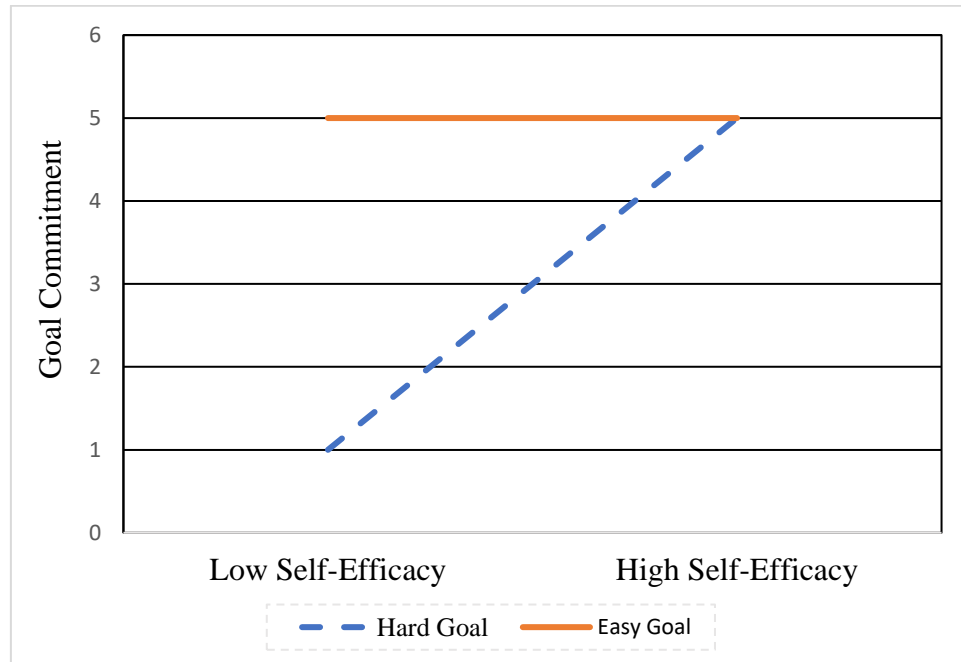


Figure 1. The hypothesized moderating effect of goal difficulty on the relationship between self-efficacy and goal commitment.

### Big-Five and HEXACO Traits

Previous literature has demonstrated that traits within the big-five and HEXACO taxonomies are strong predictors of staying commitment to goals. Per Judge and Illes (2002), conscientiousness is the strongest positive predictor of goal commitment. Additionally, Bipp and Kleingeld (2008) demonstrate that this relationship is consistent and impervious to moderating factors. Based on this research, the following hypothesis was formulated:



**Ho3:** *Conscientiousness will be positively associated to goal commitment.*

The expansion of personality taxonomies led psychologists to develop a sixth dimension known as honesty/humility. Although a recent classification, studies have been done to assess its link to organizational outcomes. For instance, Ashton (2005) determined that the trait of honesty/humility can predict both workplace delinquency and scores on overt integrity assessments (Ashton, 2005). Also, Johnson and Petrini (2011) determined that the honesty/humility dimension can significantly predict work performance of care-givers (Johnson & Petrini, 2011). Since previous studies have shown the link between honesty/humility and positive organizational outcomes, it is plausible to predict relationships to additional positive associations. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Ho4:** *Honesty/Humility will be positively associated with goal commitment.*

The trait of humility/honesty is characterized by sincerity, modesty, greed-avoidance, and fairness (Ashton & Lee, 2009). Therefore, those high in humility/honesty should be more honest with themselves and to others, presumably. Although it has yet to be studied, based off the nature of the humility/honesty trait, it is plausible to speculate that those high in this trait would be more committed to their goals – to avoid any kind of cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, it is plausible to predict that more difficult goals would lead to an inverse relationship of humility/honesty and goal commitment/motivation; this is

presumably because high humility should lead to an underestimation of one's ability – especially in face of a challenging goal. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated

**Ho5:** *Goal difficulty will moderate the relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment such that those high in this trait will be significantly less committed to their goals when the goal is difficult, as depicted below, in Figure 2.*



Figure 2. The hypothesized moderating effect of goal difficulty on the relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment.

## Learning Orientation

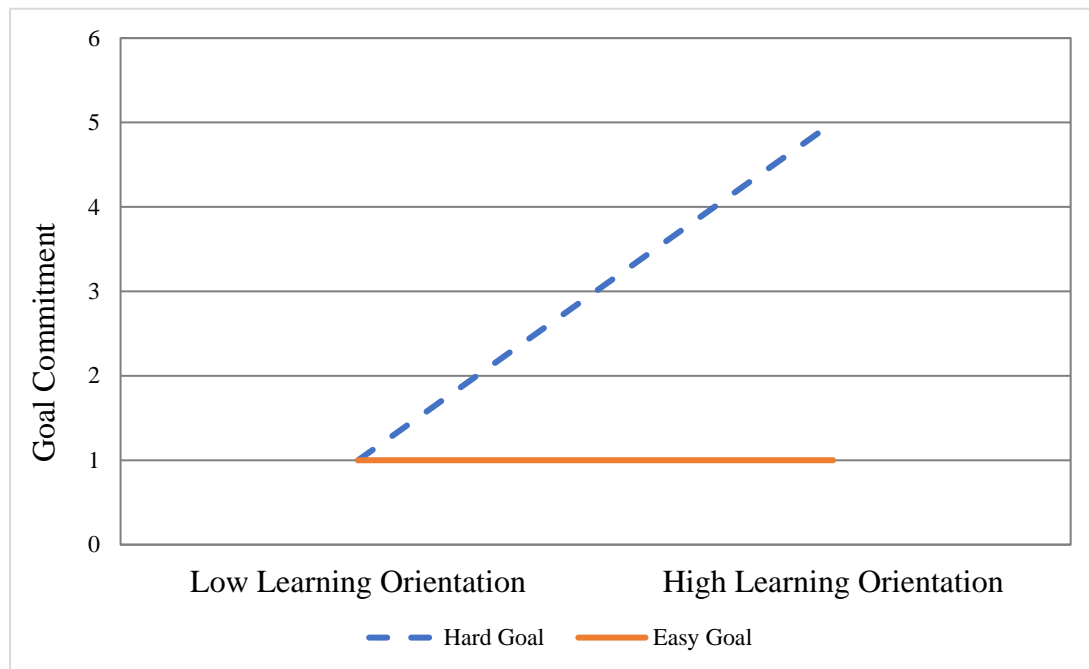
Previous research has shown that those with higher learning goal-orientation are more likely to stay committed to their goals. For instance, a study by Colquitt and Simmering (1998) demonstrated that students higher in this dimension were more committed to their goals. Based on previous findings, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Ho6:** *Learning goal-orientation will be positively associated with goal commitment.*

Research has also demonstrated that a learning goal-orientation is positively correlated with setting higher goals, and is susceptible to moderating effects (Lee, Sheldon, & Turban 2003). Specifically, those high in a learning-centered goal-orientation are more likely to set higher goals, presumably because these individuals have a desire to learn and grow, no matter the obstacle in their way; in a sense, they are blind to the real challenge at hand and focus only on the growth that results from the objective. This focus on growth is presumably fueled more in the face of a challenging goal, as the individual is only concerned with their improvement, as challenges tend to foster self-development. Therefore, it is doubtful that someone high in a learning orientation would respond the same in response to an easy goal as in response to a more difficult goal. Those high in learning orientation would likely view the more challenging goal as a greater opportunity to grow, while an easier goal as a potential stagnation in their quest for perpetual growth; thus, it is plausible to assert that

those high in learning goal orientation will respond more favorably and have a higher sense of commitment to more difficult tasks. In concordance with this logic, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Ho7:** *Goal difficulty will moderate the relationship between learning orientation and goal commitment such that those higher in learning orientation will be more committed to their goals when the goal is difficult as depicted in Figure 3 below.*



*Figure 3.* The hypothesized moderating effect of goal difficulty on the relationship between learning orientation and goal commitment.

## Hypothesized Model Framework

In concordance with the above hypotheses, the following model framework was proposed to summarize the findings from the literature reviewed and illustrate the hypothesized relationships between variables as depicted below in Figure 4:

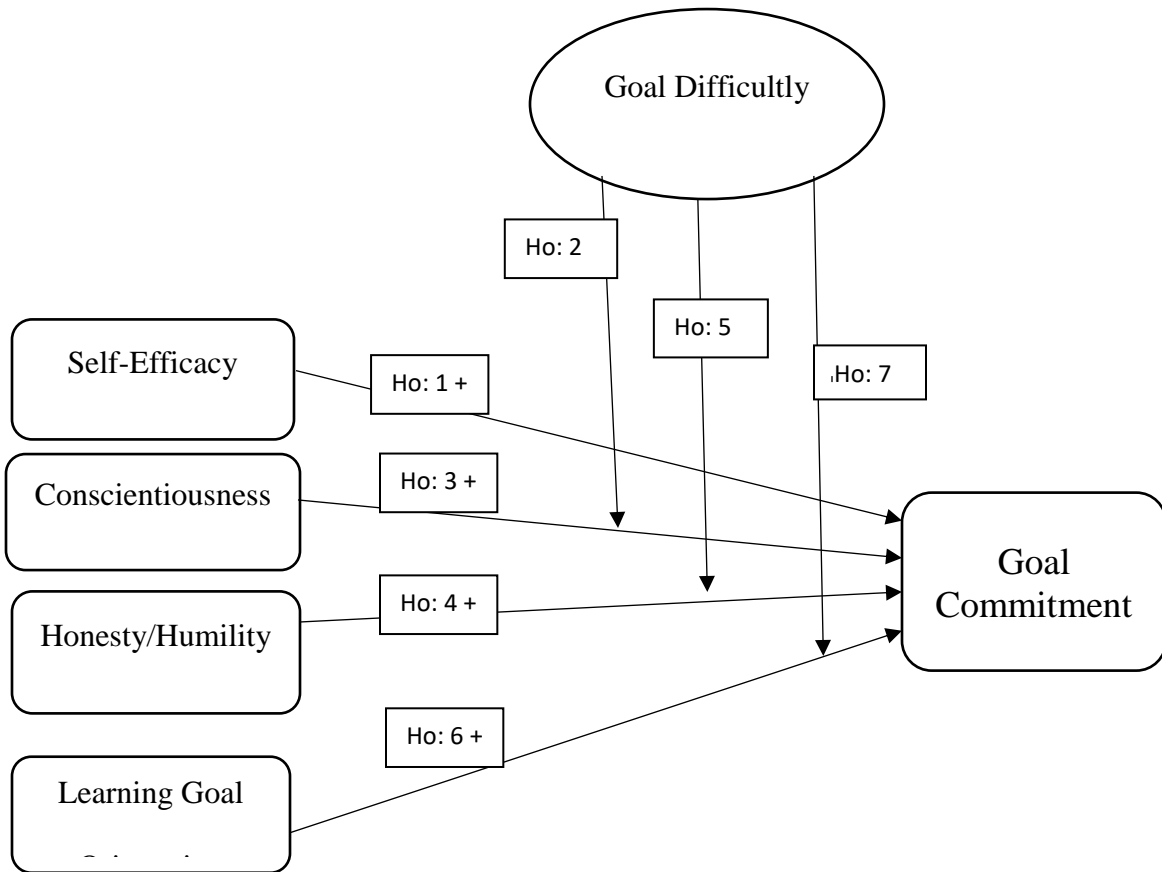


Figure 4. The proposed model framework illustrating hypotheses 1-7.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHOD

#### Participants

The present study consisted of an initial sample of 260 undergraduate students at California State University, San Bernardino. This sample size was based on a power analysis using G-Power Software, with an effect size of 0.15 (Pearson R), 4 predictors, and a power level of 0.95. The analysis returned an estimate of 130 to achieve the desired power, but to account for incomplete or invalid data, as well as to increase the power and precision of the study even more, the proposed sample size was doubled. Criteria for inclusion in this study was to be a minimum age of 18 and have prior work experience, either part-time or full-time. All participation was voluntary and every participant was awarded extra course credit for their time. The original data contained 260 data points; however, six cases were discarded due to computer malfunctioning during the data collection process. Specifically, during the discarded cases, the timer associated with the word scrambling task did not move in sync with real time (i.e., the glitch caused one second on the timer to be equivalent to several seconds of real time). Thus, in an attempt to salvage the integrity of the data and honor the time of the participant, these six cases were not part of the final sample ( $N = 254$ ). Additionally, there were no attention checks embedded within the questions. Since data were collected in person, the researcher observed

participants and their level of effort and concentration on the task. All data collected was deemed by the researcher to have been collected in good faith (i.e., proper effort and attention was put forth) through observation and completeness. Furthermore, the words typed in the unscrambled word boxes represented a good faith effort as several participants answered the easier words correctly; the correct responses reflect a conscious and concerted effort from participants.

## Measures

### Demographic Information

The age range of the sample was 18-36 ( $M = 21.06$ ,  $Mdn = 20$ ,  $SD = 3.328$ ). In regard to ethnicity, 6.8% of the respondents identified as white; 73.1% Latino; 6.4 % black; 8.8% Asian, and 4.9% as other. Women made up 73.5% of participants, while men were 26.5% of participants. For the question, "Have you ever been employed", 14.9% of the respondents reported that they worked full-time; 43.1% reported part-time employment; 40.3% reported they have been employed both part-time and full-time; 1.6% (4 respondents) reported they had never been employed. Since these four respondents did not meet the requirements for the study, they were excluded in subsequent analyses ( $N = 250$ ). For the question, "are you currently employed", 29.6% of respondents reported they were working full-time; 47.8% reported part-time, and 22.6%

reported no current employment. A full list of demographic variables can be found in Appendix A.

### Self-Efficacy

This construct was measured on an 8-item Likert scale devised by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001). A sample item from the Chen et al. (2001) scale reads: *“I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself”*.

Participants were then instructed to respond to each item using the following response scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree. See Appendix B for the complete scale.

*Validity.* Chen et al. (2001) trimmed down a larger, 14-item scale through a factor analysis procedure. The result of their analysis revealed there to be six redundancies in the measure, providing evidence for the 8-item unidimensional measure of self-efficacy. Content validity for this measure was also demonstrated via the fact that 95% of graduate students identified the items in this measure to belong to generalized self-efficacy rather than an alternate construct (Chen et al., 2001).

*Reliability.* Chen et al. (2001) determined the scale to have sound reliability, Cronbach’s alpha = .86; additionally, the retest coefficient = .67, over an average interval of 22 days between measures. The range of retesting was 9-44 days. For the current study, the self-efficacy measure was deemed reliable; Cronbach’s alpha = .862.



### Conscientiousness

This construct was measured on a 10-item Likert scale derived from the HEXACO-60 shortened personality index created by Ashton and Lee (2008). A sample item from the scale reads: *“I plan ahead and organize things to avoid scrambling last minute”*.

Participants were then instructed to respond to each item. A rating scale of 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree is used. See Appendix C for the complete scale.

*Validity.* The HEXACO-60 scale takes items from the larger HEXACO-PI inventories that have high primary loadings and low secondary loadings. Items with high secondary loadings are omitted due to potential overlap. Ashton and Lee (2008) conducted an item-level factor analysis to confirm the existence of a clean, six-factor structure, resulting in 10 items per personality trait; providing evidence for the 10-item nature of conscientiousness in this scale.

*Reliability.* Ashton and Lee (2008) found the conscientiousness portion of the HEXACO-60 inventory to have sound reliability; Cronbach’s alpha = .79. For the current study, the conscientiousness measure was deemed reliable; Cronbach’s alpha = .743.

### Honesty/Humility

This construct was measured on a 10-item Likert scale derived from the HEXACO-60 shortened personality index created by Ashton and Lee (2008). A

sample item from the scale reads: *“I wouldn’t use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed”*.

Participants were then instructed to respond to each item using a rating scale of 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree. See Appendix D for the complete scale.

*Validity.* The HEXACO-60 scale takes items from the larger HEXACO-PI inventories that show high primary loadings and low secondary loadings. Items with high secondary loadings are omitted due to potential overlap. Ashton and Lee (2008) conducted an item-level factor analysis to confirm the existence of a clean, six-factor structure, resulting in 10 items per personality trait; providing evidence for the 10-item nature of honesty/humility for the HEXACO-60 inventory.

*Reliability.* Ashton and Lee (2008) found the honesty/humility portion of the HEXACO-60 inventory to have sound reliability; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .78$ . For the current study, the honesty/humility measure was approaching a range deemed reliable; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .696$ .

### Learning Orientation

This construct was measured using a five-item Likert scale devised by Vandewalle (1997). A sample item from the scale reads: *“I prefer to work on tasks that force me to learn new things”*.

Participants were then instructed to respond to each item, with a scale ranging from 1-6. A response of 1= strongly agree, while a response of 6 = strongly disagree. See Appendix E for the complete scale.

*Validity.* Vandewalle (1997) first constructed a pool of 50 items, all with the intent of capturing different dimensions of goal orientation (learning, avoiding, performance). The items were analyzed by faculty and other graduate students to achieve face validity. Vandewalle (1997) subsequently conducted a factor analysis, which confirmed 6-items for learning orientation; however, one was removed to enhance the scale's reliability. The process provides validity evidence for the five-item nature of Vandewalle's learning orientation scale.

*Reliability.* Vandewalle (1997) found the five-item learning goal orientation to have sound reliability; Cronbach's alpha = .89. For the current study, the learning orientation measure was deemed reliable; Cronbach's alpha = .816

### Goal Commitment

This construct was measured using a seven-item Likert scale devised by O'leary, Klein, and Hollenback (1990). A sample item reads: *"It's hard to take this goal seriously"*

Participants were then instructed to respond to each item, with a score ranging from 1-5. A score of 1 = strongly disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = strongly agree. This construct was measured twice and the sum of the two measures represented the overall goal commitment. See Appendix F for the complete scale.

*Validity.* O’leary, Klein, and Hollenback (1990) conducted an exploratory factor-analysis which trimmed down the original scale of 9 items down to 7; the remaining two items substantially loaded onto the second factor in the matrix. Additionally, O’leary et al. (1990) also achieved convergent validity as the scale showed significant relationships with two other measures of the same construct. This provides evidence for the validity of the seven-item nature of O’leary et al.’s goal commitment scale.

*Reliability.* O’leary, Klein, and Hollenback (1990) found the 7-item version of their scale to have sound reliability; Cronbach’s alpha = .80. While the original goal commitment scale was comprised of seven items, due to experimenter error, the scale in this study only contained six of the seven items due to an inadvertent omission of one of the items. Therefore, the reliability estimates for the present study are based on the six-item version. Goal commitment was measured twice in the current study, and the final score was a composite of both measures. Therefore, the reliability of the goal commitment measure was based on the response to the measure (12 items). The goal commitment scale was deemed reliable; Cronbach’s alpha = .886. Please see Table 1 for descriptive statistics for each variable. Please see Table 1 below for a correlation matrix between the independent variables and dependent variables.

Table 1.

*Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Predictors and Dependent Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-efficacy					
2. Conscientiousness	.411*				
3. Honesty/Humility	.154*	.287*			
4. Learning Orient.	-.539*	-.354*	-.219*		
5. Goal Commitment	.137*	.063	.167*	-.237*	

*Note: asterisk denotes a significant correlation at the  $p < .05$  level.*

Goal Difficulty

Goal difficulty was experimentally manipulated where each participant was randomly assigned to be in either the high difficulty condition or low difficulty condition. The level of difficulty was operationalized by instructing participants to solve several anagrams in a five-minute period; the frequency of the word's appearance in the English language and number of items assigned to answer varied depending on condition. This method of manipulation for task/goal difficulty was consistent with that of Panayiotou and Vrana (2004), who used word frequency to manipulate the difficulty on lexical tasks. See Appendix G for complete goal difficulty conditions.

*The low-difficulty condition* contained words that appear most frequently in the English language (in the top 100 as determined by the Corpus of Contemporary American English); additionally, participants were assigned the

goal to complete 20 puzzles in a 15-minute period (consisting of three five-minute phases). The words in the low-difficulty were also shorter, making them more recognizable. An example of a high-frequency word is “have”. A total of 121 participants were randomly assigned to the easy goal condition.

*The high-difficulty condition* contained words that appear much less frequently in the English language (classified as ranking between 5000-10000 most frequently), as determined by the Corpus of Contemporary American English (2015); additionally, participants were assigned the goal to complete 30 puzzles in the 15-minute period (consisting of three five-minute phases). The words in the high-difficulty condition were longer, and appear less frequently, thus making the goal more difficult to accomplish. An example of a low-frequency word in this condition is “sophisticated”. The complete listing of words in each condition can be found in Appendix G. A total of 123 participants were randomly assigned to the hard goal condition.

### Manipulation Check

Panayiotou and Vrana (2004) conducted manipulation checks on the high/low frequency conditions in their study. They found participants to react slower in the lexical task to the condition with lower frequency than higher frequency, lending confidence to the manipulation. For the current study, a manipulation check was conducted at the end of the final task trial. Each participant was asked to assess how difficult they believed their goal to be. The question was worded as follows:

“How difficult was this task?”

Each participant then rated their response from 0-9, 0=very easy; 9=very hard.

To test the strength of the manipulation, an independent sample t-test was conducted by grouping the item, “how difficult was this task”; 0 = extremely easy and 9 = extremely difficult by condition. There was a significantly higher mean rating for the hard goal condition ( $M = 7.77$ ,  $SD = 1.070$ ) than the easy goal condition ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 1.802$ ),  $t(242) = -30.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .797$ . This indicates that the participants perceived the hard goal condition as substantially harder than the easy goal condition, showing that the intended manipulation was successful.

### Procedure

The study was conducted in a computer research lab with approximately 10 working networked computers at the California State University, San Bernardino campus. Data were collected at specific, designated times throughout the week (according to researcher and room availability). Although this was an individual study, multiple participants completed their participation concurrently. Due to computer availability in the lab, a maximum of 10 participants were studied at a time. All sign ups to participate were done online using the SONA research management software. Prior to arrival, each participant was randomly assigned to either a low-difficulty or high-difficultly goal condition.

Upon arrival, each participant was instructed to take a seat at a computer, and fill out a questionnaire consisting of demographic information, followed up by 33-items intended to measure self-efficacy, conscientiousness, honesty/humility, and learning goal orientation (no time limit was imposed for this portion). Following the demographic and personality inventory completion, participants were presented with their task experimental condition, which contained the anagram task and goal commitment measures. The screen immediately following the personality and demographic questionnaires read differently depending on which condition the participant was assigned. Please see Appendix G for complete wording and words used in each condition.

In both conditions, participants were given a total of 15 minutes to unscramble every word in their list. The 15 minutes were divided up into three equal phases (consisting of five minutes per phase). Participants were able to begin as soon as they complete the previous inventories (personality and demographic variables). Once started, participants worked on their puzzles until stopped and automatically re-directed (after the 5-minute period) by the Qualtrics software. At this time, participants were presented with the 6-item goal commitment scale. All participants were given 2 minutes to complete survey. If subjects finished this portion in less than two minutes, they were automatically brought to the next phase of the task. This process was repeated after phase two. When participants complete the third phase, they were asked to complete the manipulation check item, located on the screen following phase three. No



goal commitment survey was given at the end of phase three. The two goal commitment scores were added together, and represented the overall goal commitment score for the individual. A further analysis of the goal commitment measures revealed that the average goal commitment score was higher on the first trial ( $M = 22.41$ ,  $SD = 4.33$ ) than on the second trial ( $M = 21.59$ ,  $SD = 5.33$ ). Upon completion of the three phases, goal commitment inventories, and manipulation check item, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time – regardless if they completed the anagrams or not.

#### Analysis Plan

*To test Ho1*, a simple regression was computed to assess the predictability of general self-efficacy on goal commitment. A substantial, positive B-weight would provide evidence to support this hypothesis.

*To test Ho2*, a moderated regression was computed using the path PROCESS macro (Hayes 2012), to assess if the relationship between general self-efficacy and goal commitment changes depending on goal difficulty. A substantial, significant interaction coefficient between goal difficulty and self-efficacy, derived from the PROCESS macro, would provide evidence for this hypothesis. In addition, a larger positive B-weight for the high-difficulty goal condition over the low-difficulty goal condition would provide supplemental support. That is assuming the relationship is in line with Figure 1.

*To test Ho3*, a simple regression was computed to assess the predictability of conscientiousness on goal commitment. A substantial, positive B-weight would provide evidence to support this hypothesis.

*To test Ho4*, a simple regression was computed to assess the predictability of honesty/humility on goal commitment. A substantial, positive B-weight would provide evidence to support this hypothesis.

*To test Ho5*, a moderated regression was computed using the path PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012), to assess if the relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment changes depending on goal difficulty. A substantial, significant interaction coefficient between goal difficulty and honesty/humility, derived from the PROCESS macro, would provide evidence for this hypothesis. In addition, a substantially larger positive B-weight for the low-difficulty goal condition over the high-difficulty goal condition would provide supplemental support. That is assuming the relationship is in line with Figure 2.

*To test Ho6*, a simple regression was computed to assess the predictability of learning goal orientation on goal commitment. A substantial, positive B-weight would provide evidence to support this hypothesis.

*To test Ho7*, a moderated regression was computed using the path PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012), to assess if the relationship between learning goal orientation and goal commitment changes depending on goal difficulty. A substantial, significant interaction coefficient between goal difficulty and learning goal orientation, derived from the PROCESS macro, would provide evidence for

this hypothesis. In addition, a substantially larger positive B-weight for the high-difficulty goal condition over the low-difficulty goal condition will provide supplemental support. That is assuming the relationship is in line with Figure 3.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

#### Univariate and Multivariate Outliers

Prior to conducting the analysis, data were screened for outliers using the criterion of  $z = \pm 3.3$ ,  $p < .001$ . Using this standard, there were four potential univariate outliers detected; however, upon further investigation, it was determined that not all of these values were true outliers due to skewness and continuity of scores. In concordance with this logic, self-efficacy contained two outliers, with raw scores ranging from 8-21 ( $z = -.3577$  to  $-6.879$ ). These scores were deemed outliers due to the large gap between them and the next largest scores in their respective group, indicating they are likely not from the same population, thus they were deleted from the main analysis.

Data were also screened for multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis distance. There were several values which exceeded the critical  $\chi^2$  value, however, due to the skewed nature of the variables and the continuity of values in the distance, many were not deemed as multivariate outliers. The increase in distance was gradual until 20, where the value starkly increased to 50—thus this was the threshold used. The sole multivariate outlier found in the data overlapped with the univariate outlier found in self-efficacy, therefore only two cases were removed from the analysis. Thus, the final sample size was 248.

## Normality

Data were assessed for normality using the criterion of  $z = 3.3$ ,  $p < .001$ —any z-score for skewness or kurtosis exceeding this threshold was deemed significantly skewed or kurtotic. A z-score for skew greater than 3.3 was deemed positively skewed, and any z-score for skew less than -3.3 was deemed negatively skewed. Furthermore, a z-score for kurtosis greater than 3.3 indicated leptokurtosis, and a z-score for kurtosis less than -3.3 indicated platykurtosis. There was evidence that univariate normality was violated for three variables. After the removal of the outliers three of the variables were still skewed. Goal commitment was significantly negatively skewed;  $z$  skewness = -3.41,  $p < .001$ . Self-efficacy was significantly negatively skewed;  $z$  skewness = -4.23,  $p < .001$ . Learning orientation was significantly positively skewed;  $z$  skewness = 4.99,  $p < .001$ . Due to the skewness of these three variables, bootstrapping was utilized in the PROCESS macro (5000 resamples). There was evidence that one of the variables (learning orientation) carried a leptokurtotic shape;  $z$  kurtosis = 3.5. The remaining variables (self-efficacy, honesty/humility, goal commitment and conscientiousness) were within the normal range for kurtosis.

## Missing Value Analysis

A missing value analysis revealed that data were not missing in a systematic way, but rather, randomly. There were no significant patterns of missing data between any variables; furthermore, Little's MCAR test was non-

significant, indicating that data were not missing systematically, but completely at random,  $\chi^2 (52) = 57.895, p < .001$ . Since there are no patterns in the missing data, only complete cases were used in the main analyses. Please see Table 2 below for a detailed description of missing data as well descriptive statistics. The sample size of each analysis is presented along with the respective hypothesis in the sections below.

Table 2.

*Descriptive Statistics, Missing data, and Skewness*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	% Miss.	Miss.	( <i>z</i> ) Skew
Self-efficacy	240	35.30	3.42	25	40	3.2%	8	-4.23*
Conscientiousness	236	37.58	5.84	22	50	4.8%	12	-1.86
Honesty/Humility	238	35.93	6.68	15	50	4.0%	10	-1.78
Learning Orientation	241	11.28	3.68	2	24	2.8%	7	4.99*
Goal Commitment	228	43.88	9.20	12	60	8.1%	20	-3.43*
Age	247	21.02	3.32	18	36	0.4%	1	11.00*
Sex	245	-	-	-	-	1.2%	3	-
Ethnicity	245	-	-	-	-	1.2%	3	-
Currently employed?	247	-	-	-	-	0.4%	1	-
Ever employed?	244	-	-	-	-	1.6%	4	-

Note:  $n=248$ ;

\*denotes  $p < .001$ .

## Hypotheses 1-2 (Self-Efficacy)

A total of 220 cases (after the removal of outliers) contained complete data for hypotheses regarding self-efficacy. The goal commitment scale was deemed reliable, with both phases combined; Cronbach's alpha = .886. Self-efficacy, goal difficulty and the interaction between self-efficacy and goal difficulty could significantly predict goal commitment, Multiple R = .4219, Multiple R<sup>2</sup> = .1780, F (3, 216) = 15.58, p < .001. This indicates that self-efficacy and goal difficulty, plus the interaction explained 17.80% of the variance in goal commitment. Self-efficacy was significantly positively associated with goal commitment, unstandardized coefficient = 1.15, t (220) = 2.22, p < .05, 95 CI = .1338, 2.173. Therefore, *hypothesis 1 was supported*. However, goal difficulty was not significantly associated with goal commitment. Furthermore, the interaction between self-efficacy and goal commitment did not significantly improve prediction above and beyond the presence of two predictors alone, R<sup>2</sup> change = .0093, F (1, 216) = 2.45, p > .05. Therefore, *hypothesis 2 was not supported*. Please see Table 3 below for complete results for this sequential regression. The interaction for hypothesis 2 is graphed below in Figure 5.

Table 3.

*Sequential Regression of Self-Efficacy, Goal Difficulty, and Self-Efficacy-Goal Difficulty Interaction on Goal Commitment (Hypotheses 1 and 2)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	95% CI	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$
						L	U		
Constant	14.30	5.31	18.24	.784	.433	-21.65	50.27	-	-
Self-efficacy	1.15*	.42*	.517	2.22	.026	.1338	2.173	-	-
Goal difficulty	11.00		11.73	.938	.349	-12.12	34.12	-	-
Self-efficacy x goal difficulty	-.518		-.331	-.1.56	.119	-1.17	.134	.009	2.44

*Note: asterisk denotes significance at the  $p < .05$  level.*



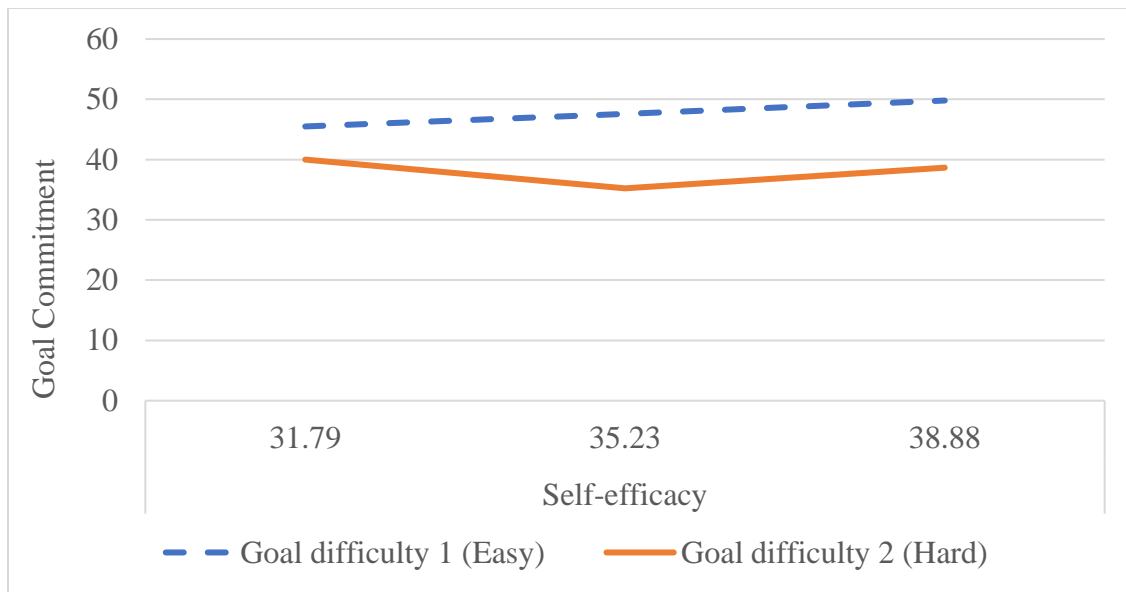


Figure 5. Graph of interactive effects of goal difficulty on the relationship between self-efficacy and goal commitment.

### Hypothesis 3 (Conscientiousness)

A total of 218 cases contained complete data for the hypothesis regarding conscientiousness. The conscientiousness measure was deemed reliable; Cronbach's alpha = .743. Conscientiousness could not significantly predict goal commitment, Multiple R = .063, Multiple R<sup>2</sup> = .004, F (1, 216) = .872, p > .05. Conscientiousness was not significantly associated with goal commitment, unstandardized coefficient = .100, standardized coefficient = .063, t (216) = .934, p > .05, 95 CI = -.111. -.311. Therefore, *hypothesis 3 was not supported.*

#### Hypotheses 4-5 (Honesty/Humility)

A total of 220 cases contained complete data for the hypotheses regarding honesty/humility. The honesty/humility measure was approaching a range deemed reliable; Cronbach's alpha = .696. Honesty/humility goal difficulty and the interaction between honesty/humility and goal difficulty could significantly predict goal commitment, Multiple R = .4169, Multiple R<sup>2</sup> = .1738, F (3, 216) = 15.14, p < .001. Honesty/humility was significantly positively associated with goal commitment, unstandardized coefficient = .595, t (216) = 2.143, p < .05, 95 CI = .0478, 1.142. Therefore, *hypothesis 4 was supported*. However, goal difficulty was not significantly associated with goal commitment. Additionally, the interaction between honesty/humility and goal commitment did not significantly improve prediction above and beyond the presence of two predictors alone, R<sup>2</sup> change = .0082, F (1, 216) = 2.154, p > .05. Therefore, *hypothesis 5 was not supported*. Please see Table 4 below for complete results for this sequential regression. The interaction for hypothesis 5 is graphed below in Figure 6.

Table 4.

*Sequential Regression of Honesty/Humility, Goal difficulty, and Honesty/Humility-Goal Difficulty Interaction on Goal Commitment (Hypotheses 4 and 5)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	95% CI	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$
						L	U		
Constant	32.93	23.91	10.16	3.24	.001	12.91	52.96	-	-
Honesty/humility	.595*	.432*	.277	2.14	.033	.047	1.14	-	-
Goal difficulty	2.13		6.23	.342	.732	-10.14	14.41	-	-
Honesty/humility x goal difficulty	-.250		.170	-1.46	.143	-.587	.086	.008	2.15

*Note: asterisk denotes significance at the  $p < .05$  level.*

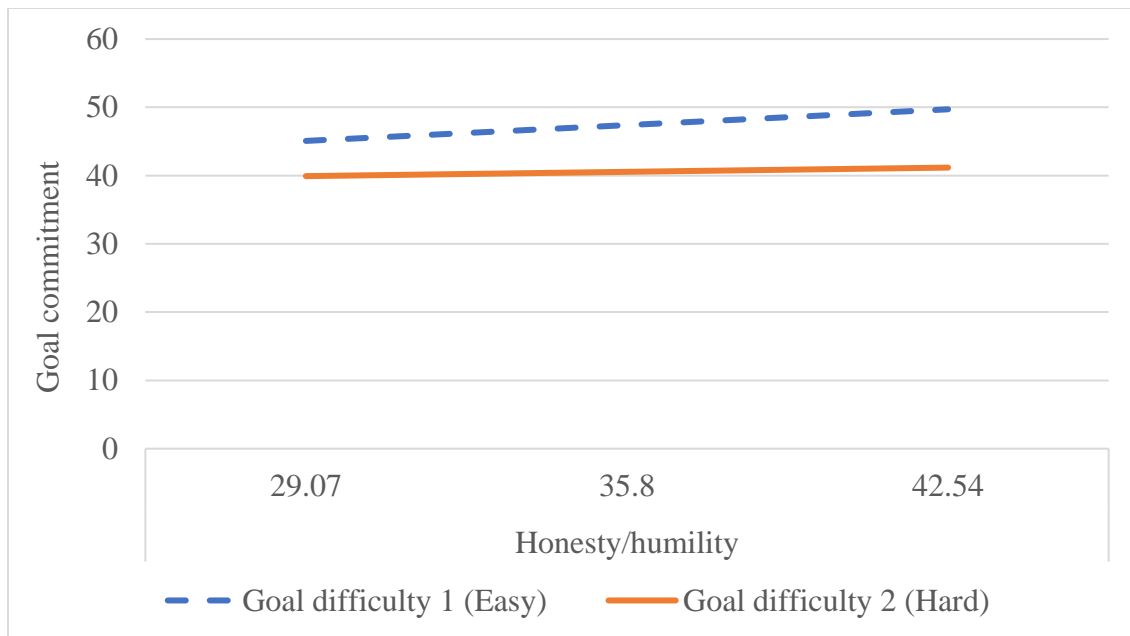


Figure 6. Graph of interactive effects of goal difficulty on the relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment.

#### Hypotheses 6-7 (Learning Orientation)

A total of 222 cases contained complete data for hypotheses regarding learning orientation. The learning orientation measure was deemed reliable; Cronbach's alpha = .816 Learning orientation, goal difficulty, and the interaction between learning orientation and goal difficulty could significantly predict goal commitment, Multiple R = .4561, Multiple R<sup>2</sup> = .2080, F (3, 218) = 19.08, p < .001. However, learning orientation was not significantly positively associated with goal commitment, unstandardized coefficient = -.6532, t (222) = -1.349, p > .05, 95 CI = -1.605, .3004. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was not supported. Goal difficulty was also not significantly associated with goal commitment.

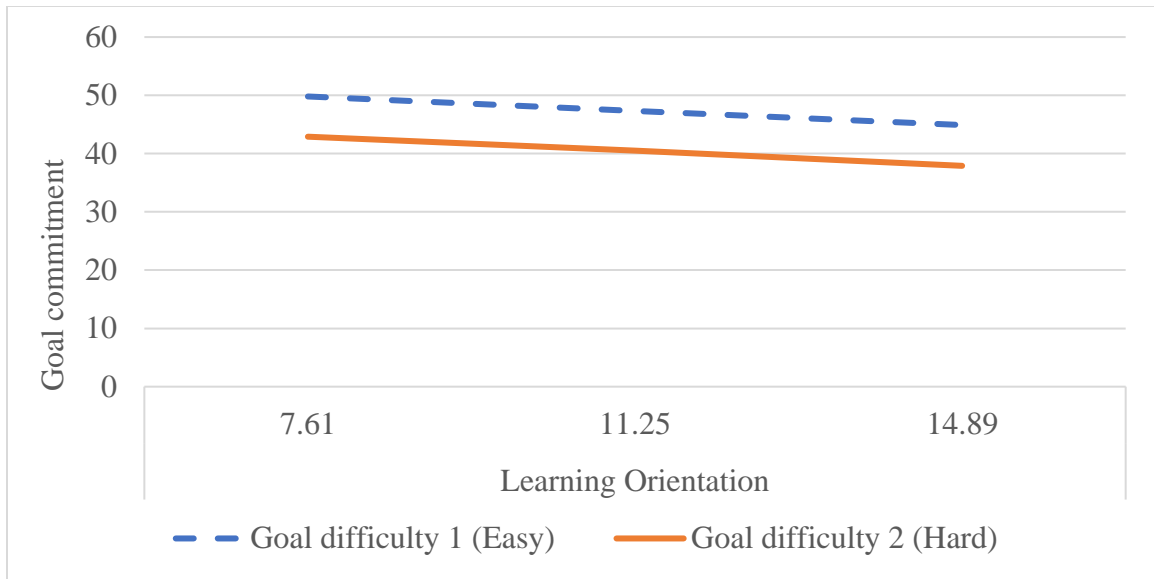
Furthermore, the interaction between learning orientation and goal commitment did not significantly improve prediction above and beyond the presence of two predictors alone,  $R^2$  change  $< .001$ ,  $F(1, 218) = .0026$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, *hypothesis 7 was not supported*. Please see Table 5 below for complete results for this sequential regression. The interaction for hypothesis 7 is graphed below in Figure 7.

Table 5.

*Sequential Regression of Learning Orientation, Goal Difficulty, and Learning Orientation-Goal Difficulty Interaction on Goal Commitment (Hypotheses 6 and 7)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$
						L	U		
Constant	61.64	24.65	5.75	10.71	< .001	50.30	72.98	-	-
Learning orient.	-.652	-.26	.483	-1.34	.178	-1.60	.300	-	-
Goal difficulty	-6.75		3.59	-1.87	.061	-13.84	.338	-	-
Learning orient. x goal difficulty	-.015		.304	-.050	.959	-.614	.583	< .001	.002

*Note: asterisk denotes significance at the  $p < .05$  level.*



*Figure 7.* Graph of interactive effects of goal difficulty on the relationship between learning orientation and goal commitment.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Findings

The goal of the current study was to assess how specific personality traits can influence fundamental aspects of Locke and Latham's Goal-Setting Theory. Specifically, the study focused on how influential the most commonly appearing traits—from the body of literature—are in predicting goal commitment. The second purpose was to assess if these demonstrated relationships are susceptible to moderating effects; specifically, the prospect of the goal difficulty moderating the relationship between these personality traits and goal commitment was explored. The findings of the current study suggest that two of the four personality dimensions (general self-efficacy and honesty/humility) were able to significantly predict goal commitment. Additionally, the findings suggest that goal difficulty does not moderate the relationship between the aforementioned personality traits and goal commitment.

#### Current Self-Efficacy Findings and Previous Research

The finding of hypothesis 1 (self-efficacy is positively associated with goal commitment) is consistent with what has been found in previous research. Numerous studies throughout the years have demonstrated that self-efficacy is strongly linked to goal commitment. For instance, in the nascent years of goal-

setting theory as a motivational technique, research deemed that those high in self-efficacy tended to set higher goals for themselves (Locke et al., 1989). This trend has also been shown by a meta-analysis conducted by Klein et al. (2001), and in more recent studies; for instance, Lau's (2012) demonstration that self-efficacy leads to higher goal commitment. The positive association between self-efficacy and goal commitment was also found to hold up in unique contexts—such as entrepreneurship (Cardon & Kirk, 2013). Additionally, the current study yielded a correlation of .137 between self-efficacy and goal commitment. This effect size is consistent with what has been demonstrated in previous studies. For instance, Erez and Judge (2001) observed a correlation of .11 between self-efficacy and task persistence. Thus, the current study provides evidence that aligns with previous research, therefore it serves to strengthen the credence of this relationship.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported in the current study. This indicated that the difficulty of a goal did not change the relationship between self-efficacy and goal commitment. Instead, the results indicate that those low in self-efficacy are less committed to their goals, regardless of task difficulty. Conversely, those higher in self-efficacy are more committed to their goals no matter the difficulty of the task presented. Previous literature has not looked at this specific relationship; however, researchers have looked at the link between goal commitment, performance and goal difficulty. For example, Klein et al. (2001) found that goal difficulty could significantly moderate the relationship between goal commitment



and performance. Although no direct relationship had been laid out in the literature, the evidence of a moderating relationship between goal difficulty and goal commitment, coupled the notion that higher self-efficacy would lead an individual to strive for more ambitious endeavors, provided sufficient logic for the hypothesized relationship. Per the results, it would appear that the link between self-efficacy and goal commitment is impervious to goal difficulty for the current sample.

One possible reason for this pattern of findings is that those low in self-efficacy tend to underrate their ability—even in the face of easy tasks. This assertion is in line with ideas presented by Bandura, whom is regarded as the originator of self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura, self-efficacy is derived from four sources: past experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional cues (Lunenbergh, 2011). Most salient for the current study would be the source of emotional cues, which alludes to the demand of a task leading to physiological symptoms (e.g., increased blood pressure or an increased heart-beat). The lower the level of self-efficacy the person has, the harder they may perceive the task to be, thus triggering these physiological symptoms easier. Presumably, it is difficult to stay focused and committed to a goal when in a state of distress. It is possible that the participants (with lower self-efficacy) perceived even the easier task as an insurmountable goal, therefore triggering negative emotional cues, and consequently, lower commitment to the presented task.

## Current Conscientiousness Findings and Previous Research

The finding of hypothesis 3 indicated that conscientiousness was not significantly associated with goal commitment. This result was surprising because it goes against the large body of literature that exists on this topic. For instance, a meta-analysis conducted by Judge and Illes (2002) demonstrated that conscientiousness is a strong predictor of goal motivation; in fact, the study suggests that it yielded the strongest positive association ( $r = .22$ ) of the big-five taxonomy (Judge & Illes, 2002). This is at odds with the current study as only an association of  $r = .063$  was observed. Furthermore, Bipp and Kleingold (2008) demonstrated that conscientiousness was highly predictive of goal commitment—even in the face of potential moderators. Interestingly, the results of the current study indicate a nearly non-existent relationship between the two variables.

Since the overall conscientiousness score was not associated with the goal commitment measure, looking at the individual facets of the scale may provide more insight into the pattern of results discovered. Per the HEXACO measure, conscientiousness is made of four distinct facets: diligence, prudence, organization, and perfectionism. None of the individual facets were significantly associated with goal commitment; additionally, all facets yielded a small effect size in relation to goal commitment. The perfectionist facet contained the largest effect size ( $r = .111$ ), while the organization sub-dimension contained the

smallest effect size ( $r = .012$ ). Please see Table 6 below for a correlation matrix of each facet of conscientiousness and goal commitment.

Table 6.

*Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Conscientiousness, Facets of Conscientiousness, and Goal Commitment*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Diligence						
2. Organization	.308*					
3. Perfectionism	.429*	.412*				
4. Prudence	.295*	.334*	.324*			
5. Conscientiousness	.642*	.691*	.749*	.754*		
6. Goal Commitment	.068	.012	.111	.044	.063	

*Note: asterisk denotes a significant correlation at the  $p < .05$  level.*

A plausible explanation for the unanticipated result for conscientiousness can be found when considering Mischel and Shoda's (1995) piece on cognitive-affective system theory (CAPS). Essentially, this theory alludes to how behavioral differences manifest when static personality traits interact with mediating influences (e.g., capability to self-regulate). Unlike the other variables in this study, the interactive effects of goal difficulty on the relationship between conscientiousness and goal commitment was not tested; thus, any mediating or

interacting effect that goal difficulty may have had on the relationship was not considered. According to the CAPS framework, disparate interacting or mediating variables should lead to different behavioral outcomes. There are four mediating variables, according to Mischel, in the personality mediating system: encodings; expectancies and beliefs; goals and values; affects; self-regulatory plans (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). It is possible that differing degrees of self-regulatory capabilities, or the goal itself, shifts the relationship; if the relationship did vary based on these mediating factors, it may have led to the illusion of there being no correlation between conscientiousness and goal commitment (as the correlations depended on the third variable). For instance, a poor self-regulatory system may have led participants to higher stress, and thus, would exhibit a lower commitment toward the word anagram task. Another possible hidden moderator is the trait versus behavioral manifestation of conscientiousness; the participants displayed high conscientiousness, so perhaps the context of the study did not allow for the behavioral manifestation of the trait conscientiousness to emerge. In essence, not considering moderating and/or mediating variables and their interacting effects with conscientiousness could have led us to the very small association found in this study.

Another plausible explanation for the pattern of results between conscientiousness and goal commitment emerges when perceptions toward the task in the study is considered. In addition to providing evidence for the association between conscientiousness and goal commitment, Bipp and

Kleingeld (2008) determined that perceived issues with the content of tasks or goals, yields a negative correlation to goal commitment. Perhaps this is at play in the current study. During data collection, several students did ask if there was error with the experiment due to repeating the exact same task trial three times. It is possible that the participants may have seen this an issue with the content of the goal. Therefore, this negative perception may have interacted in the relationship between conscientiousness and goal commitment, thereby creating an illusion of no association between the variables. Perhaps adding a perception measure in the future may lead to a pattern of results more in line with the hypothesized relationships.

#### Current Honesty/Humility Findings and Previous Research

Hypothesis 4 was supported—this indicated that honesty/humility was significantly positively associated with goal commitment. This result was consistent with what was expected from previous research. Although the direct relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment has not been explored in previous research, positive organizational outcomes have been shown to be positively correlated with the trait. For instance, honesty/humility can predict both workplace delinquency and scores on overt integrity assessments (Ashton, 2005); as well as performance of care-givers (Johnson & Petrini, 2011). The current study provides evidence that honesty/humility is associated with goal

commitment, therefore it serves to strengthen the credence that this trait can be used to predict positive organizational outcomes.

The finding of hypothesis 5 indicated that the difficulty of a task did not change the relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment. Rather, the results revealed that those low in honesty/humility are less committed to their goals, regardless of the difficulty of the task. On the contrary, those who were higher in honesty/humility were more committed to the task no matter the difficulty of the task. Previous literature has not examined the possibility of task difficulty serving as a moderating variable between the relationship of honesty/humility and goal commitment; however, due to modesty being a fundamental component to the trait, it provided sufficient logic to hypothesize that those high in this trait would experience less commitment to their goals when they were more difficult. Per the results, however, it would appear that the link between honesty/humility and goal commitment is not moderated by goal difficulty in the current study.

A plausible explanation for the pattern of results observed can be found when the sub-dimensions of honesty/humility are considered. Honesty/humility is comprised of four dimensions: sincerity, modesty, greed-avoidance, and fairness (Ashton & Lee, 2009). When these dimensions are examined more closely, the stark differences can be seen. For instance, the HEXACO scale contains items regarding greed-avoidance (e.g., not wanting to have flashy things), fairness (e.g., not cheating on others for self-aggrandizement), and modesty (e.g., not

thinking too highly of one's self). Although the items are part of the same scale, they do appear to be tapping into unique constructs, and the hypothesis formulated in the current study was essentially crafted with modesty as the focal dimension. Perhaps the results would have turned out differently if modesty was separated and the moderation was tested on the independent relationship between modesty and goal commitment. Since modesty only comprises a quarter of the scale, the moderating effects may have been drowned out by the other three facets. This is a plausible explanation as it is logical that sincerity, greed-avoidance, and fairness would all show positive correlations with goal commitment—regardless of goal difficulty. In short, the composite variable of honesty/humility may have led to the absence of a moderating effect from goal difficulty.

In concordance with the logic displayed above, each of the facets of honesty/humility were correlated with goal commitment, and subsequent moderation analyses were conducted by goal difficulty. Only the sub-dimensions of modesty ( $r = .150$ ) and fairness ( $r = .149$ ) were significantly correlated with goal commitment. Please see Table 7 below for a correlation matrix between the facets of honesty/humility and goal commitment. Furthermore, the modesty facet was placed in a PROCESS moderation model, with goal difficulty serving as the moderator. Although goal difficulty was speculated to moderate the relationship between modesty and goal commitment, this was not the pattern of results discovered. Goal difficulty did not improve prediction, above and beyond the

presence of the two predictors alone,  $R^2$  Change = .0008,  $F(1, 223) = .2240$ ,  $p > .05$ . The remaining three facets (greed-avoidance, sincerity, and fairness) were also placed in a moderation model with goal commitment and goal difficulty; however, none of the interaction terms improved prediction.

Table 7.

*Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Honesty/Humility, Facets of Honesty/Humility, and Goal Commitment*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sincerity						
2. Fairness	.381*					
3. Greed-avoidance	.304*	.301*				
4. Modesty	.178*	.187*	.327*			
5. Honesty/humility	.720*	.746*	.671*	.576*		
6. Goal Commitment	.058	.149*	.106	.150*	.154*	

*Note: asterisk denotes a significant correlation at the  $p < .05$  level.*

A plausible explanation for the pattern of results observed for hypotheses 4 and 5 can be found when considering the nature of the honesty/humility trait. Hypothesis 5 was formulated on the premise that those high on this trait would tend to underestimate their ability in the face of a challenging task; however, the results indicated that the positive correlation between honesty/humility was not



susceptible to the moderating effect of goal difficulty. Although a logical premise, it may have been an incorrect characterization of the trait. In addition to modesty, the honesty/humility dimension also contains: sincerity, honesty, and greed-avoidance. Perhaps honesty/humility is more characterized by an honest, sincere and “pure” manifestation of intentions (when it comes to task commitment). Perhaps those high in this trait may still question their ability (if high in modesty), but their drive to give the task an honest attempt may supersede their modest nature. Thus, the good faith honest portion of honesty/humility may have been the main player present in the findings, rather than the modesty portion.

#### Current Learning Orientation Findings and Previous Research

The finding of hypothesis 6 indicated that learning orientation was not significantly positively associated with goal commitment. Rather, the result indicated that there was not a significant association between goal orientation and goal commitment. Interestingly, this result is not consistent with what has been found in previous studies. For instance, Colquitt and Simmering (1998) demonstrated that higher degrees of learning goal orientation led to higher degrees of task commitment in students—even when students fell short of their targeted goal. Additionally, Phillips and Gully (1997) showed a similar pattern; in their study, higher learning goal orientation was positively correlated with harder self-set goals. Per the result regarding hypothesis 6 in the current study, there is not a significant relationship between the two variables.

The finding of hypothesis 7 indicated that the difficulty of a task did not change the relationship between learning orientation and goal commitment. Rather, the results indicated that goal difficulty has virtually no ability to moderate the relationship between learning orientation and goal commitment. Instead, those who were presented with the easier goal tended to be more committed to the task—regardless of learning orientation. This is at odds with what researchers have uncovered previously. For instance, Lee, Sheldon and Turban (2003) determined that learning goal-orientation is positively correlated with higher self-set goals; this result coupled with the logic that those high in learning orientation should view more challenging endeavors as an opportunity to grow, provided plausible reason to hypothesize that those high in this trait would experience more commitment to their goals when difficult. Per the results, however, it appears that the relationship is not susceptible to the moderating effects of goal difficulty.

A plausible explanation for the pattern of results found in hypotheses 6 and 7 can be found when the cognitive load of the task is considered. In the present study, participants were assigned to solve either a hard or easy anagram task. Not a lot of practice is required, nor do new skills need to be acquired; presumably, the cognitive demands of the anagram task were low (regardless of condition). Researchers in task difficulty and cognitive demand have built the case that learning orientation is most beneficial in the early task learning—especially when cognitive demand is high and the task is novel in nature (Steel-

Johnson, Beuregard, Hoover & Schmidt, 2000). Perhaps the anagram task did not stimulate cognitive load enough, thereby failing to yield a significant correlation between learning orientation and goal commitment. Since the interaction term was essentially zero, it indicates that the slopes in the two conditions were virtually identical; this lends further credence to this explanation. The cognitive load exhibited by both conditions were likely similar, therefore the relationship did not change. Perhaps if a more cognitive-rich task were presented (e.g., organization or analysis), then the data may have matched the hypothesized relationships.

### Implications

The current study results contain important theoretical implications. First, the significant relationship between honesty/humility and goal commitment provides supplemental evidence for its existence as separate personality trait, as well as strengthens the notion that it can be used to predict positive organizational outcomes. Two personality dimensions from the HEXACO model were present in this study, and of the two, honesty/humility was the only one which displayed the significant positive relationship. This indicates that honesty/humility should be thought of more universally as the sixth trait and can be used to predict a wide range of positive outcomes above and beyond what has been discovered previously.

Second, the results may indicate that conscientiousness is not a strong predictor of short-duration or other-set goals. One of the facets of conscientiousness is diligence, which is a large contributor to staying committed to longer-term goals. In this study, the task was only comprised of three five-minute segments; thus, the degree of diligence may have a minimal effect. Perhaps it is the case that conscientiousness is not well suited for these smaller, more tedious goals set by others.

Third, the results of the present study may provide further evidence for the notion that a learning goal orientation is not ideal for goals or tasks that require lower-level processing. It is possible that a performance-goal orientation would be better suited for easy or lower-level processing tasks. It is possible that learning-orientation is only optimal for goal commitment when the task is novel and new skills need to be acquired; thereby summoning high-level cognitive processes.

Fourth, the results may show us that Locke and Latham's goal setting theory may be more intricate than has been realized in the past. Currently, goal-setting theory rests on five premises; however, none of the five of the foundational principles accounts for individual differences. Instead, the theory may make the erroneous assumption that these premises hold true—in all circumstances. The results of the current study contradict this assumption as goal commitment appears to vary with particular personality dimensions (self-efficacy and honesty/humility), demonstrating the need for a more complex,

dynamic, model when it comes to the premises of goal-setting theory. Perhaps this research—in conjunction with other studies—can expand Locke and Latham’s Goal-Setting theory to include individual differences as they seem to have profound interactions with fundamental elements of the theory.

Fifth, the results of the present study provide important theoretical implications for the nature of workplace motivation as a malleable construct. In the introduction of this paper, motivation was identified as a fundamental aspect of employee performance. Per AMO theory, performance is a composite of three factors: ability, motivation, and opportunity. Psychologists and managers alike have long focused on increasing employee motivation with the hopes of augmenting employee performance. In this study, motivation was operationalized via goal commitment in concordance with Locke and Latham’s theory. Goal commitment was higher when levels of self-efficacy and honesty/humility was higher; this indicates that motivation is impacted by outside factors—whether they are internal (personality traits) or external (environment). Thus, this shows us that motivation is a malleable construct, and is susceptible to seemingly unrelated factors. Therefore, the current study provides valuable insight about the nature of motivation and lends further credence to the notion that enhanced employee performance can be achieved via augmented motivation.

Furthermore, the current study provides important practical implications. First, the results suggest that organizations may be better off if they avoid tailoring short-term goals to learning orientation and conscientiousness.

Additionally, organizations may reap the benefit of higher goal commitment if short-term goals are tailored to the degree to which the employee displays self-efficacy and honesty/humility. Perhaps it would be more optimal if employers implemented a universal short-duration goal-structure when considering the level of employee conscientiousness and learning orientation.

Second, organizations should not expect much difference in how committed their employees are toward goals assigned to them based on the difficulty of the goal. In the current study, none of the moderating hypotheses were supported, thus it appears the difficulty of a task has very little bearing on determining how committed individuals are to their goals. For organizations that work long, grueling hours this is certainly a benefit as this indicates that employees should not lose steam—even in the face of difficult tasks. Instead, organizations should be more concerned with selected candidates who exhibit high degrees of self-efficacy or honesty/humility as those high in this trait tend to be more committed to the task—regardless of difficulty.

Third, organizations may want to measure and select for individuals who score high in the self-efficacy and honesty/humility personality dimensions—particularly for difficult jobs--as they are more likely to stay committed to organizational goals, leading to more success and augmented performance. Occupations such as lawyers, police officers, and doctors are professions that require much attention, long hours, and strenuous projects. Since self-efficacy and honesty/humility are predictive of staying committed to goals (no matter how

difficult), someone with this pedigree would make an excellent candidate. Perhaps implementing assessments measuring these traits would help to improve the selection processes of these occupations.

Fourth, the current study highlights that an employee with too high of self-efficacy may actually be deleterious for organizational outcomes. If those high in self-efficacy stay committed to goals, even though they are difficult and above what they can accomplish, then it may be a waste of cognitive resources. Rather, it would be more beneficial for a goal outside of reach to garner less commitment, so the person can focus on a goal that is more within reach. Someone who is very high in self-efficacy is likely not to notice their shortcomings, and therefore would remain committed to the task. Those lower in self-efficacy may be more realistic about their skills and abilities, and thus would be less committed and willing to invest their time in something that is out of their reach. It is also important to note that someone too low in self-efficacy is likely to under-perform and not adhere to their goals because they will perceive every task as beyond their capacity. Therefore, the current study implies that perhaps there is a sweet spot to self-efficacy to maximize positive organizational outcomes.

Fifth, our understanding of goal orientation (e.g., performance or learning) and task type is potentially enhanced as a result of this study. The results indicated that a learning goal orientation had a near zero correlation with goal commitment, meaning that those lower in learning orientation did not fare worse

in their degree of goal commitment than those who displayed a high level of learning orientation. Perhaps this indicates that a learning goal orientation is not predictive of accomplishing smaller, less pristine tasks. Perhaps the learning goal orientation would be more highly correlated to a task which clearly offered room to grow in some substantial way; presumably, the task of the current study did not offer this opportunity. It is possible that a performance goal orientation would have been more predictive of goal commitment in the current study, given the nature of the task. Perhaps organizations should match the employee's primary goal orientation (performance or learning) to the nature of the task that is being performed to maximize commitment.

### Limitations

Although the current study provides interesting and meaningful information regarding individual differences and their ability to predict goal commitment, it is not without its limitations. First, the sample was comprised completely of undergraduate psychology students. The narrow scope of the sample potentially hurts the generalizability of the obtained results because their perspectives and life experiences may be substantially different than those outside of this population.

Second, some of the participants experienced computer issues during the data collection process; some of the issues were severe to the point that data were omitted from the analysis. Many of the participants who experienced the



computer issues stayed throughout the duration of the experiment. The primary issue experienced was a malfunction in the computer's timer—essentially, the timer ran slowly and the experiment took longer than usual (e.g., 45 minutes instead of 25 minutes). This frustrated many of the participants, and presumably led to a loss of focus and attention, thereby creating a limitation for this study.

Third, upon further reflection, the experimental manipulations (e.g., easy task and hard task) may have been too extreme on both ends of the spectrum. Participants who were assigned to the easy condition frequently finished their task rather quickly (on the first phase) and accurately. This often led to the participants to appear bored and wait for the time to pass. The obvious signs of boredom are an indication that perhaps the task was too easy. Conversely, participants in the hard condition often only answered very few anagrams (less than 10), or the answers were incorrect. Like participants in the easy condition, those in the hard condition also tended to display signs of boredom. However, this was presumably due to the task being too difficult to solve, so they likely gave up. Perhaps having a third condition (moderate difficulty) --or having the hard condition and easy condition be closer in their difficulty—may have led the moderation hypotheses to turn out as expected. This possibility becomes more plausible when the Cognitive-affective personality systems (CAPs) is considered. One of the foundations of this framework asserts that personality traits interact with the environment to create specific behavioral outcomes; however, particular environments are necessary to elicit specific behaviors. It is possible that the task

did not create the appropriate environment for goal commitment to manifest—regardless of the degree to which an individual possessed the targeted personality dimensions. Perhaps the personality dimensions in this study were more proximal (malleable) than distal (constant) than originally hypothesized. Furthermore, the high difficulty condition may have created hardship for some participants; the student body is comprised of some individuals who are not native English speakers. The words in the hard condition appear rather infrequently, so perhaps the language barrier created less commitment toward the task and contributed to pattern of results observed.

Fourth, this study was limited by the nature of the task itself. First off, the task was short-term in nature. It is possible that a different pattern of results could have occurred if the goal spanned over a longer time period; however, this would necessitate a different design—longitudinal, for example. Another potential issue is that anagrams do not necessarily represent real-world objectives, so this potentially hinders the generalizability of these results to real-world employees. Many of the participants did appear to become bored and uninterested with the task, so it is possible that another task would have yielded different results. Furthermore, the tasks were conducted in a lab, not out in the field. There is a stark contrast in the environment between a lab setting and a real-world organization; thus, this creates less potential for generalizability of results.

Lastly, the study was framed in the context of already-set goals. Much of the literature present on goal-setting is in the context of self-set goals. It is

possible that the results of the study may have turned out different if goal commitment was measured in relation to a self-set goal; perhaps this would have created a higher sense of saliency and foster higher levels of commitment in line with the hypothesized relationships.

### Directions for Future Research

The current study creates several pathways for future research in the field. First, future researchers may want to include task complexity, in addition to goal difficulty. Perhaps goal difficulty interacts with task complexity and can reveal more nuanced relationships that exist between the personality dimensions mentioned in this paper and goal commitment (namely learning orientation), via different levels of cognitive processing.

Second, it may be beneficial for researchers to study honesty/humility in separate facets as the construct is still in its early years. It would be interesting to examine the relationship that each of the four facets of honesty/humility have with any other positive organizational outcome. Perhaps this can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the HEXACO model, and a potential re-alignment of this model.

Next, in concordance with the cognitive affective-social personality systems (CAPS) framework, it would be interesting to see if different mediating variables (per Mischel's four mediators) can be used to explain or moderate some of the relationships laid out in this study. Only goal difficulty was used in

the current study, so implementing new variables—such as encodings or self-regulatory systems—could potentially lead to a new level of understanding regarding behavioral outcomes from personality traits.

Furthermore, future research should look at a more diverse range of goals and tasks. For instance, this study was limited to the context of already-set goals; however, not all goals in the real-world are under this context. Perhaps measuring goal commitment in regard to a self-set goal would reveal additional information. Another possibility is to have the difficulty of the self-set goal be the outcome and assess if the traits in this study predict the difficulty of goals people set for themselves. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore the relationship that the personality traits in this study have with long-term goal adherence. One possibility would be to follow students over the course of a semester and observe if scores on the personality inventories correlate with goal commitment in relation to goals set by the student; it may also be enlightening to observe if this relationship changes over the course of the semester. If the relationships change based on whether the goal was short-term or long-term, it may reveal something profound about the nature of these personality dimensions.

### Conclusion

The focal point of this study was to explore the relationship that individual differences have on our motivational processes. Consistent with what has been found in previous research, the current findings illustrate the notion that

personality traits can be predictive of who maintains motivation to complete their goals. Although personality traits appear to be linked to goal commitment, the association that goal difficulty has in the relationship is still unclear. It would appear, however, that the relationship between goal commitment, goal difficulty and personality dimensions is quite nuanced and complex. Thus, there is a lot of potential research needed in this area to bolster our understanding of these complex relationships. This study highlights the notion that we still have a long way to go before we can fully understand the interaction between individual differences and situational factors on motivational outcomes. Perhaps further advancing knowledge in this area can lead to an increase in company profits and employee well-being simultaneously; thereby creating a win-win for both employees and organizations.

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

**Please answer the following questions: (select one of each response)**

*What is your sex?*

Male or Female

*What is your age in years? (write in)*

*What is your ethnic background?*

White/Caucasian/European

Latino/Hispanic

African American/Black

Asian

Other

*Have you ever been employed?*

No

Yes, on a part-time basis (20 or less hours a week)

Yes, on a full-time basis (21+ hours a week)

Yes, on both a part-time and full-time basis

*Are you employed currently?*

No

Yes, on a part-time basis (20 or less hours a week)

Yes, on a full-time basis (21+ hours a week)

APPENDIX B

8-ITEM NEW GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY SCALE



## DIRECTIONS

On the following pages you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Then type your response in the space next to the statement using the following scale:

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure of your response.

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself. \_\_\_\_
2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them. \_\_\_\_
3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me. \_\_\_\_
4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind. \_\_\_\_
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges. \_\_\_\_
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks. \_\_\_\_
7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well. \_\_\_\_
8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well. \_\_\_\_

Chen, G. , Gully, S. M. , & Eden, D. (2001). New General Self-Efficacy Scale.

*PsycTESTS Dataset*. doi:10. 1037/t08800-00

APPENDIX C

10-ITEM HEXACO-60 MEASURE OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

## **Conscientiousness**

### **Organization:**

1. I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute. \_\_\_\_
2. When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**

### **Diligence:**

3. I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal. \_\_\_\_
4. I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**

### **Perfectionism:**

5. When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
6. I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time. \_\_\_\_
7. People often call me a perfectionist. \_\_\_\_

### **Prudence:**

8. I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
9. I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
10. I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**

Ashton, M. , & Lee, K. (2009). The HEXACO-60: A Short Measure of the Major Dimensions of Personality. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91(4), 340-345. doi:10. 1080/0022389090293587

APPENDIX D

10-ITEM HEXACO-60 MEASURE OF HONESTY/HUMILITY

## ***Honesty/Humility***

### **Sincerity:**

- 1 I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed. \_\_\_\_
- 2 If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
- 3 I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me. \_\_\_\_

### **Fairness:**

- 4 If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars. \_\_\_\_ **(Reversed Scored)**
- 5 I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large. \_\_\_\_
- 6 I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**

### **Greed-Avoidance:**

- 7 Having a lot of money is not especially important to me. \_\_\_\_
- 8 I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**

### **Modesty:**

- 9 I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
- 10 I want people to know that I am an important person of high status. \_\_\_\_ **(Reversed Scored)**

Ashton, M. , & Lee, K. (2009). The HEXACO-60: A Short Measure of the Major Dimensions of Personality. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91(4), 340-345. doi:10. 1080/00223890902935878

APPENDIX E  
5-ITEM LEARNING ORIENTATION SCALE

## DIRECTIONS

On the following page you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Then type your response (ranging from 1-6) in the space next to the statement using the following scale:

6=strongly disagree; 1=strongly agree.

Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure of your response.

1. I am willing to select a challenging assignment that I can learn a lot from. \_\_\_\_
2. I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge. \_\_\_\_
3. I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks where I'll learn new skills. \_\_\_\_
4. For me, development of my ability is important enough to take risks. \_\_\_\_
5. I prefer to work in situations that require a high level of ability and talent. \_\_\_\_

VandeWalle, D. (1997). Development of a work domain goal orientation instrument. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 57, 995-1015

APPENDIX F  
7-ITEM GOAL COMMITMENT SCALE



## DIRECTIONS

On the following pages you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Then type your response in the space next to the statement using the following scale:

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure of your response.

1. It's hard to take this goal seriously. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
2. It's unrealistic for me to expect to reach this goal. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
3. It is quite likely that this goal may need to be revised, depending on how things go. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
4. Quite frankly, I don't care if I achieve this goal or not. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
5. I am strongly committed to pursuing this goal. \_\_\_\_
6. It wouldn't take much to make me abandon this goal. \_\_\_\_ **(Reverse Scored)**
7. I think this is a good goal to shoot for. \_\_\_\_

Hollenbeck, J. R. , Klein, H. J. , Oleary, A. M. , & Wright, P. M. (1989). Goal

Commitment Scale. *PsycTESTS Dataset*. doi:10. 1037/t02238-000

APPENDIX G

GOAL DIFFICULTY CONDITIONS AND WORDS USED

**High-difficulty goal condition:**

On the following page(s) you will find a list of 30 anagrams (word scrambles) with blank spaces below each.

**Your goal:** To answer **all 30** puzzles within a 15-minute period.

This will be separated into three phases (5 minutes each). After each phase, you will be handed a survey to complete before beginning the next phase.

If you happen to finish all puzzles before the time is up, please remain seated and wait for proctor for further instructions.

Begin when the proctor instructs.

**Words Used:**

Somebody	Operating	Magazine	Abroad	Inflict
Professional	Institutional	Relation	Clever	Tablet
Sophisticated	Tribute	Obligation	Follower	
Composition	Congregation	Survivor	Classic	
Reflect	Awkward	Appointment	Ranking	
Discrimination	Nominate	Campaign	Trout	
Manufacturing	Athletic	Exit	Navigate	

**Low-difficulty goal condition:**

On the following page(s) you will find a list of 20 anagrams (word scrambles) with blank spaces below each.

**Your goal:** To answer **all 20** puzzles within a 15-minute period.

This will be separated into three phases (5 minutes each). After each phase, you will be handed a survey to complete before beginning the next phase.

If you happen to finish all puzzles before the time is up, please remain seated and wait for proctor for further instructions.

Begin when the proctor instructs.

**Words Used:**

Have	Year	Which
That	Think	Could
With	When	People
This	Would	Other
They	Make	
From	About	
What	Know	
Their	Because	

APPENDIX H  
IRB APPROVAL FORM

**Human Subjects Review Board  
Department of Psychology  
California State University,  
San Bernardino**

**PI:** Ken Shultz and Matthew Mellegers  
**From:** Donna Garcia  
**Project Title:** The Role of Personality Traits on Goal Commitment  
**Project ID:** H-17FA-04  
**Date:** 11/13/17

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**Disposition: Administrative**

Your IRB proposal (The Role of Personality Traits on Goal Commitment, Shultz & Mellegers, H-17FA-04) is approved. You are permitted to collect information from 335 participants from SONA. This approval is valid from 11-13-17 to 11-13-18.

**Good luck with your research!**



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Donna Garcia, Chair  
Psychology IRB Sub-Committee

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