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THE VALUE OF INFORMATION TRANSMITTED BY THE BIG FIVE

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ABSTRACT

The recruitment situations lead to putting questions about the value of the candidates for a job, in terms of social desirability and social utility. This leads to two questions: will this candidate be useful to the organization? Will the members of the organization want to work with him? Knowing that personality is one of the main aspects of any recruitment situation, and, that this personality can, according to a quasi-consensus, be divided into five major bipolar factors (the Big Five model), the recruitment is seen in the assessment of candidates according to each of these factors. This assessment, however, requires previously an estimate on the value of knowing the positioning of candidates on each of these five factors: before asking ourselves if the candidate X is “good” at the level of the extraversion for example, it is necessary to have a clear head about the importance to be attributed to extraversion. This study aims to estimate this value. More exactly, it aims to know if the information about the personality traits, regardless of the trait considered and of its pole, is the subject of the same estimate of value, both in terms of utility and desirability. We proposed to a number of 400 students a list of 100 adjectives referring to the 5 big dimensions of personality, and we told them that they should meet a person whom they knew nothing about, except one of his personality characteristics summarized by one of these adjectives. The task of our students was to check the degree of utility and the degree of desirability of this unique information, then to explain the reasons of their assessment. The results allow us to determine, the degree of agreeableness and of social utility of the descriptive information and to study the relationship between these two dependent variables. These results highlight the very low frequency of negative utility reasoning, regardless of the possible disagreeability of the information provided. Also, these results show that all the dimensions are not subject to the same assessments and that there are numerous evaluation differences between men and women.

KEYWORDS: Big Five, personality, value, social desirability, social utility.

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INTRODUCTION

In an organizational environment, the assessment of others is a common activity: a recruiter evaluates the candidates for employment, a supervisor evaluates his subordinates and the subordinates often evaluate one another, either formally or informally. But to evaluate means to measure a value, *i.e.* to measure a social desirability and a social utility (Beauvois, 1995; Beauvois, Dubois, & Peeters, 1999; Cambon, 2002; Dubois, 2005; Dubois, & Beauvois, 2001; Le Barbenchon, Cambon, & Lavigne, 2005). The desirability would refer to the agreeable, attractive nature of each characteristic of the evaluated object, and the utility to the power that each of these characteristics might have either to allow the object to realize its objectives (thus Peeters, 1986, speaks about “profitability for the self”), or to allow the society, taken as a whole, to realize its objectives (thus Beauvois, 1995, speaks about “social utility”)[†]. Another way of saying: the desirability would respond to the emotional or motivational register, the utility to the ability to promote oneself within the social system in which the evaluation takes place (Beauvois, 1995). Thus, an evaluation will consist in measuring the utility and desirability.

In an organizational environment, the assessment is often based on the use of tests, and especially on personality tests. Thus, in the case of recruitments, it is often personality the one that can make the difference between several candidates. Among the instruments for evaluating personality, we find the projective methods, but also, more generally, within the differential approach, the methods based on the definition of traits. In this last perspective, the idea according to which the personality can be divided into five major factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, kindness, consciousness: Costa & McCrae, 1985) represents the subject of a quasi-consensus (Caprara, Barbaranelli & Borgogni, 1997, p. 13; Mignon & Mollaret, 2006, p. 218; Rolland, 1994, p. 65; or quoted by Pervin in 1994, p. 103). Thus, an essential component of the recruitment activity will be translated by assessing the usefulness and desirability of the candidates on each of its 5 factors, with two questions: will this person be useful to the organization? Will the members of the organization want to work with this person?

This assessment, however, requires previously an estimate of the value of knowing each of these five factors: before asking ourselves if the candidate X is “good” at the level of the extraversion, for example, it is important to be clear about the importance that should be given to “extraversion”, both in terms of desirability

[†] Add that it would exist, at least for utility, a differentiation on a conceptual level. Nevertheless, this differentiation would not be found at an empirical level: according to a study of Cambon, Djouary and Beauvois (2006) the characteristics profitable for the self would also be useful to the society (the correlations between the two utilities vary between 0.85 and 0.88).

and utility[‡]. This type of analysis of the organizational functioning leads to asking questions about the value of the knowledge transmitted by the personality descriptions based on the conventional methods of recruitment, *i.e.* based on the use of instruments referring to the five factors model.

Thus, this study focuses on the estimation of the social desirability and utility of the knowledge of each of these factors, considering their aspects (each trait is characterized by six interrelated aspects[§]) and the two poles (positive and negative) of each of these aspects/facets: we proposed to future potential candidates for employment to estimate the value associated to the knowledge of each factor. Thus, our objectives aim to know: on the one hand globally and dimension by dimension, which is the judgment, both for agreeability and for utility, supported by our respondents and if these judgments are equivalent in agreeability and in utility; on the other hand if differences of agreeability and of utility are made depending on the dimension considered.

Let us add here that this study is exploratory and that in this first approach, the analysis of the social value of the features of the Big Five is deliberately de-contextualized: before apprehending the value associated with the answers in a contextualized situation, thus ranging certain contexts, it seemed appropriate to start with a neutral situation, de-contextualized, which can later serve as a reference to the answers obtained in contextualized situations.

[‡]The relations between these two dimensions are not, indeed, always clear: if Kim and Rosenberg (1980) show that desirability and utility are positively correlated, other researchers notice negative correlations (like Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002, who use the terms “warmth” for the desirability, and “competence” for the social utility), and others notice an independence (like Devos-Comby & Devos, 2001).

[§] The six facets of each of the five dimensions are: pleasant (trust, forwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty and tenderness), conscientiousness (competence, order, duty, looking for success, self-discipline and deliberation), extraversion (warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, search for positive emotions), openness (openness to dreams, aesthetics, feelings and actions, ideas and values), neurosis (anxiety, anger-hostility, depression, social shyness, impulsiveness and vulnerability).

METHOD

We used 100 adjectives referring to 5 dimensions of the Alter Ego (the family test of Big Five), that is 20 adjectives for each dimension, 10 adjectives for each of the two poles of a dimension. Thus, for the positive pole of the dimension “conscientiousness”, we have the following 10 adjectives: conscientious, meticulous, particular, persevering, determined, fierce, meticulous, thoughtful, tidy and tenacious. And for the negative pole of the same dimension, we have the opposite adjectives: “less conscientious”, “less meticulous”, etc.)^{**}.

The application of the 100 adjectives in a single questionnaire made delicate its application to a single population; so these 100 adjectives were divided randomly into 5 questionnaires, namely 20 adjectives on a questionnaire (10 with a positive pole and 10 with a negative pole). These questionnaires were distributed to 400 students from various disciplines (except psychology) divided into 5 groups, each student answered individually to the questionnaire that was proposed to him (or her). The distribution of the 5 questionnaires in the 5 groups is given in table n°1.

Table 1.

Distributing questionnaires to groups and distribution of subjects by gender

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Questionnaire 1 (20 adjectives) | 40 men and 40 women |
| Questionnaire 2 (20 adjectives) | 40 men and 40 women |
| Questionnaire 3 (20 adjectives) | 40 men and 40 women |
| Questionnaire 4 (20 adjectives) | 40 men and 40 women |
| Questionnaire 5 (20 adjectives) | 40 men and 40 women |
| Total : 100 adjectives | Total : 200 men and 200 women |

We also wanted to consider the information on the value of these adjectives, using new criteria for assessing this value. The tools typically used to measure the usefulness and desirability, in fact often refer to criteria showing a somewhat simplistic design of both the usefulness and the desirability. Thus, in their study of the value of professions and personological adjectives, Le Barbanchon and colleagues (2005) asked their subjects to indicate: for desirability if

^{**} As noted by one expert in the first reading of our manuscript, it is possible to be surprised that “less conscientious” was taken as opposed to “conscientious”. It is therefore important to emphasize that all the adjectives that we used and which are presented in Annex 1 by putting them in relation to the 5 dimensions of Big Five, have been validated by Pasquier in 2007, to obtain, depending on dimension and pole: alpha coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.90 and linear regression indices between 0.49 and 0.88.

the target “has everything to be loved” (vs “has nothing to be loved”) and “has many friends” (vs “has few friends”); and for utility if the target “has everything to succeed in professional life” (vs “has nothing to succeed in professional life”) and “has a high salary” (vs “has a small salary”). Or even if, according to these authors (Le Barbenchon et al., 2005, p. 312), “these two scales are commonly used to measure the social utility”, it seems that assessing the social utility as a function of a successful career and the salary is not the most relevant. Besides that, both Beauvois and the authors who use his model specify that they consider the utility in an economic sense (Beauvois, 1995, p. 378; Le Barbenchon et al., 2005, p. 309), which means that the utility may take another direction. Besides, the exchange value of an asset, value that may take the form of wages, is far from reflecting systematically its economic value, it seems unfair to talk about “social” utility, while neglecting the other of its components, namely its value of use. Finally, and again in terms of social utility, it seems to us unsatisfactory to take into account only the useful *versus* useless behaviour and to forget harmful behaviour (which Beauvois, 1976, named “perverse” behaviour). Or “having everything to succeed in life” can be the opposite of “not having anything to succeed in life” but also “having everything to fail in life”. And we could make similar reasoning for desirability (for example, couldn’t we oppose “has many friends” to “has many enemies”?). So we used here new criteria by measuring both the usefulness and the desirability by asking our subjects if the information that we provide was “pleasant, indifferent or disagreeable” (for desirability) and “useful, irrelevant or embarrassing” (for utility). Thus, the requirement was the following:

“In this questionnaire, you are asked to imagine that you will soon meet a person whom you do not know. You do not know if this person is a boy or a girl, if you are going to meet this person in a professional environment, a friendly one or another. In fact, you have only one information about this person. You should then indicate, on the one hand, if this information would be nice, or indifferent or unpleasant, then explain why, and on the other hand if this information will be useful (relevant) or irrelevant, or if you prefer not having this information because it bothers you, then explain again why” (An example of a complete item is presented in Appendix 2).

Each of the 5 questionnaires contains 20 adjectives (10 formulated positively and 10 formulated negatively) to which 80 students answered (in terms of agreeableness and in terms of utility); thus we have a total of 1600 utility answers and 1600 desirability answers on a questionnaire. Concerning the dimensions, since each dimension was characterized by 20 adjectives (10 adjectives x 2 poles) we also have 1600 utility answers and 1600 desirability answers for each of the 5

dimensions, being a total of 8000 utility answers and 8000 desirability answers for all five dimensions^{††}.

RESULTS

Firstly, we analyzed (by X^2) our data intra-dimensions: we examined all the dimensions together and then dimension by dimension, any differences regarding the distribution of the answers between:

1) The 3 categories of Agreeableness (to examine whether the distribution of responses between A+, A° and A- was or was not equal);

2) The 3 categories of Utility (distribution of responses between U+, U° et U-);

3) Between the 3 categories of Agreeableness in relation to the 3 categories of Utility (frequency of responses in A + compared to U +, and frequency of responses in A- compared to U-).

Secondly we made inter-dimensions comparisons by comparing, for each of the extreme poles (A+, A-, U+ and U-), any differences in ratings between the 5 dimensions. Our goal here was to establish a ranking of the five dimensions in terms of Agreeableness and of Utility.

Intra-dimensions analysis

Analyses on the 5 dimensions re-grouped

The Table 2 presents the answers obtained at the positive and negative poles together or separately, men and women together or considered separately.

The statistical analysis performed show that all differences are significant (in general $p < 0.01$)^{††}. This means (for example):

answers U+ are systematically more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- systematically more frequent than the answers U-^{§§}.

^{††} Due to some non-responses, the totals presented in the tables of results do not always reach those numbers. To answer to the remarks formulated at the expertise of our paper, we underline that each of our respondents was successively confronted with 20 adjectives and that at the presentation of each adjective an answer of agreeability and one of utility was provided. That is to say that our 100 adjectives were first separated from their membership dimension for a better independently examination of each other. Then, for the analysis of responses, these adjectives have been reinserted in their dimensional category and the total of the responses obtained on the 20 adjectives for each dimension was performed, firstly in terms of agreeableness, and secondly in terms of utility.

^{§§} Of the 81 comparisons made, 7 are insignificant and 74 are significant (70 with $p < 0.01$, one with $p = 0.01$, one at $p = 0.02$ and two with $p = 0.03$).

Only 7 differences (of 81 made here) are insignificant: between A+ and A°, positive and negative poles together, for men and women together (2748 compared to 2738), for the women (1389 compared to 1307) and for the men (1359 compared to 1431); between A° and A-, positive and negative poles together, for the women (1307 compared to 1230); between A+ and U+, at the positive poles, for the men as well as for the women (1096 compared to 1044 for the men, and 1153 compared to 1063 for the women); and between A° and U°, at the negative poles, for the men (784 compared to 851).

Table 2.

Answers of agreeableness and usefulness on the 5 dimensions grouped

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Positive poles | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 1153 | 1096 | 2249 |
| | Agreeableness 0 | 577 | 647 | 1224 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 233 | 230 | 463 |
| | Total agreeableness | 1963 | 1973 | 3936 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 1063 | 1044 | 2107 |
| | Usefulness 0 | 742 | 791 | 1533 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 148 | 125 | 273 |
| | Total usefulness | 1953 | 1960 | 3913 |
| Negative poles | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 236 | 263 | 499 |
| | Agreeableness 0 | 730 | 784 | 1514 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 997 | 922 | 1919 |
| | Total agreeableness | 1963 | 1969 | 3932 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 697 | 738 | 1435 |
| | Usefulness 0 | 817 | 851 | 1668 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 437 | 357 | 794 |
| | Total usefulness | 1951 | 1946 | 3897 |
| Total | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 1389 | 1359 | 2748 |
| | Agreeableness 0 | 1307 | 1431 | 2738 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 1230 | 1152 | 2382 |
| | Total agreeableness | 3926 | 3942 | 7868 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 1760 | 1782 | 3542 |
| | Usefulness 0 | 1559 | 1642 | 3201 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 585 | 482 | 1067 |
| | Total usefulness | 3904 | 3906 | 7810 |

^{§§} Before making the comparisons between the 3 categories of A answers and the 3 categories of U answers, we checked quantitative equivalence of the amount of A answers and the amount of U answers (this check was also made for the dimension by dimension analyses).

- for agreeableness: at the positive poles, that there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° than A-; at the negative poles, that there are significantly more answers A- than A°, A- than A+, and A° than A+;

- for utility: at the positive poles, that there are significantly more answers U+ than U°, U+ than U-, and U° than U-; at the negative poles, that there are more answers U° than U+ (or than U-), and U+ than U-;

- that, at the positive poles, the answers A+ are more frequent than the answers U+ when we put together the men and women, and the answers A- systematically more frequent than the answers U-; that, at the negative poles, the

EXTRAVERSION

The answers concerning the extraversion are presented in Table 3. Applying the same comparisons as above leads again to a great majority of significant differences (of 81 comparisons made, 64 are significant, in general $p < 0.01^{***}$).

Table 3.

Answers of agreeableness and usefulness for extraversion

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| <i>Positive poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 182 | 183 | 365 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 126 | 142 | 268 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 90 | 65 | 155 |
| | <i>Total agreeableness</i> | 398 | 390 | 788 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 199 | 198 | 397 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 154 | 161 | 315 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 46 | 30 | 76 |
| | <i>Total usefulness</i> | 399 | 389 | 788 |
| <i>Negative poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 75 | 73 | 148 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 193 | 178 | 371 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 130 | 143 | 273 |
| | <i>Total agreeableness</i> | 398 | 394 | 792 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 173 | 151 | 324 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 166 | 183 | 349 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 58 | 52 | 110 |
| | <i>Total usefulness</i> | 397 | 386 | 783 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 257 | 256 | 513 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 319 | 320 | 639 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 220 | 208 | 428 |
| | <i>Total agreeableness</i> | 796 | 784 | 1580 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 372 | 349 | 721 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 320 | 344 | 664 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 104 | 82 | 194 |
| | <i>Total usefulness</i> | 796 | 783 | 1579 |

*** Specifically, of 64 significant differences, 54 are at $p < 0.01$ and 10 with p between 0.05 and 0.01.

Thus, it was found:

- for agreeableness: at the positive pole, that there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° than A-; at the negative pole, there are significantly more responses A° than A- (or than A+), and A- than A+;

- for utility: at the positive pole, that there are significantly more answers U+ than U°, U+ than U-, and U° than U-; at the negative pole, that there are more answers U° (or U+) than U-;

- that, at the positive pole, the answers A- are more frequent than the answers U-; that, at the negative pole, the answers U+ are more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- more frequent than the answers U-^{†††}.

The 17 insignificant differences are the following: at the positive and negative poles considered together, between A+ and A- for the women (257 compared to 220), between U+ and U° for the men (349 compared to 344) as well as for the men and women together (721 compared to 664), between A° and U° for the men (320 compared to 344) and for the women (319 compared to 320) or for the men and women together (639 compared to 664); at the positive pole between A+ and U+ (regardless of gender or grouped genders), and between A° and U° (regardless of gender); at the negative pole, regardless of gender or grouped genders, between U+ and U°, and between A° and U°.

Openness

Table 4 concerns openness. The statistical analyses lead here to 62 significant differences^{†††}, namely:

- for agreeableness: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° than A-; at the negative pole, there are significantly more answers A- (than A°) than A+;

- for utility: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers U+ than U°, U+ than U-, and U° than U-; at the negative pole, there are more answers U° than U- (or than U+);

- at the positive pole, the answers A- are more frequent than the answers U-; at the negative pole, the answers U+ are more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- more frequent than the answers U-.

^{†††} Cf. note 6

^{†††} 48 are at $p < 0.01$ and 14 at p between 0.05 and 0.01.

Table 4.
Answers of agreeableness and usefulness for openness

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| <i>Positive poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 233 | 223 | 456 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 125 | 138 | 263 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 37 | 36 | 73 |
| | Total agreeableness | 395 | 397 | 792 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 210 | 216 | 426 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 165 | 162 | 327 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 18 | 21 | 39 |
| | Total usefulness | 393 | 399 | 792 |
| <i>Negative poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 34 | 42 | 76 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 169 | 181 | 350 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 197 | 165 | 362 |
| | Total agreeableness | 400 | 388 | 788 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 103 | 96 | 199 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 181 | 193 | 374 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 107 | 88 | 195 |
| | Total usefulness | 391 | 177 | 768 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 267 | 265 | 532 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 294 | 319 | 613 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 234 | 201 | 435 |
| | Total agreeableness | 795 | 785 | 1580 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 313 | 312 | 625 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 346 | 355 | 701 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 125 | 109 | 234 |
| | Total usefulness | 784 | 776 | 1560 |

The 19 insignificant differences are: at the positive and negative poles considered together, between A+ and A° (or A-) for the women (respectively 267, 294 and 234), between A+ and U+ for the women (267 compared to 313), between A° and U° for the men (319 compared to 355), and between U+ and U° for the women (313 compared to 346) and still for the men (312 compared to 355); at the positive pole between A+ and U+ (in all cases), between A° and U° for the men; at the negative pole, systematically A° and A-, between A° and U-, and between U+ and U-.

Conscientiousness

The analyses carried out on the “conscientiousness” (*cf.* Table 5) lead to 66 significant differences^{§§§}, mainly:

Table 5.

Answers of agreeableness and usefulness for conscientiousness

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Positive poles | <i>Agreeableness</i> + | 185 | 181 | 366 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> 0 | 132 | 144 | 276 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> - | 63 | 74 | 137 |
| | Total agreeableness | 380 | 399 | 779 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> + | 171 | 188 | 359 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> 0 | 161 | 164 | 325 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> - | 43 | 40 | 83 |
| | Total usefulness | 375 | 392 | 767 |
| Negative poles | <i>Agreeableness</i> + | 58 | 58 | 116 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> 0 | 143 | 184 | 327 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> - | 185 | 148 | 333 |
| | Total agreeableness | 386 | 390 | 776 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> + | 119 | 123 | 242 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> 0 | 191 | 218 | 409 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> - | 77 | 51 | 128 |
| | Total usefulness | 387 | 392 | 779 |
| Total | <i>Agreeableness</i> + | 243 | 239 | 482 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> 0 | 275 | 328 | 603 |
| | <i>Agreeableness</i> - | 248 | 222 | 470 |
| | Total agreeableness | 766 | 789 | 1555 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> + | 290 | 311 | 601 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> 0 | 352 | 382 | 734 |
| | <i>Usefulness</i> - | 120 | 91 | 211 |
| | Total usefulness | 762 | 784 | 1546 |

- for agreeableness: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° than A-; at the negative pole, there are significantly more answers A- (or A°) than A+;

- for utility: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers U+ (or than U°) than U-, at the negative pole, there are more answers U° than U+ (or than U-) and, U+ than U-;

^{§§§} 56 are at $p < 0.01$ and 10 at p between 0.05 and 0.01.

-at the positive pole, the answers A- are more frequent than the answers U-; at the negative pole, the answers U+ are more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- more frequent than the answers U-.

Concerning the 15 insignificant differences, they are noticeable: at the positive and negative poles considered together, between A+ and A- (in all cases), and specifically for women between A+ et A° (243 compared to 275) and between A° and A- (275 compared to 245); at the positive pole, systematically between A+ and U+ as well as between U+ et U°, and for the men or the women considered separately between A° and U°; at the negative pole, for the men and women together between A° and A-, and for the men between A° and U°.

Kindness

Table 6.

Answers of agreeableness and usefulness for kindness

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| <i>Positive poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 294 | 262 | 556 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 72 | 104 | 176 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 31 | 29 | 60 |
| | Total agreeableness | 397 | 395 | 792 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 266 | 240 | 506 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 104 | 135 | 239 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 28 | 17 | 45 |
| | Total usefulness | 398 | 392 | 790 |
| <i>Negative poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 30 | 38 | 68 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 101 | 121 | 222 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 256 | 248 | 504 |
| | Total agreeableness | 387 | 407 | 794 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 147 | 166 | 313 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 134 | 136 | 270 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 101 | 102 | 203 |
| | Total usefulness | 382 | 404 | 786 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 324 | 300 | 624 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 173 | 225 | 398 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 287 | 277 | 564 |
| | Total agreeableness | 784 | 802 | 1586 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 413 | 406 | 819 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 238 | 271 | 509 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 129 | 119 | 248 |
| | Total usefulness | 780 | 796 | 1576 |

For the “kindness” dimension (*cf.* Table 6), they lead to 69 significant differences^{****}, mainly:

- for agreeableness: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° than A-; at the negative pole, there are significantly more answers A- than A°, A- than A+, and A° than A+;

- for utility: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers U+ than U°, U+ than U- and U° than U-; at the negative pole, there are more answers U+ (or U°) than U-;

- at the negative pole, the answers U+ are more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- more frequent than the answers U-.

The 12 insignificant differences are: at the positive and negative poles considered together, between A+ and A- (in all cases); at the positive pole, systematically between A+ and U+, and for the men or the women considered separately between A- and U-; at the negative pole, systematically between U°+ and U°, and specifically for men between A° and U°.

Emotional stability

At last, for emotional stability (Table 7) 70 significant differences were obtained^{††††}, especially:

^{****} 62 are at $p < 0.01$ and 10 at p between 0.04 and 0.02.

^{††††} 64 are at $p < 0.01$ and 6 at p between 0.05 and 0.01.

Table 7.

Answers of agreeableness and usefulness for emotional stability

| | | Women | Men | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| <i>Positive poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 259 | 247 | 506 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 122 | 119 | 241 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 12 | 26 | 38 |
| | Total agreeableness | 393 | 392 | 785 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 217 | 202 | 419 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 158 | 169 | 327 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 13 | 17 | 30 |
| | Total usefulness | 388 | 388 | 776 |
| <i>Negative poles</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 39 | 52 | 91 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 124 | 120 | 244 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 229 | 218 | 447 |
| | Total agreeableness | 392 | 390 | 782 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 155 | 202 | 357 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 145 | 121 | 266 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 94 | 64 | 158 |
| | Total usefulness | 394 | 387 | 781 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>Agreeableness +</i> | 298 | 299 | 597 |
| | <i>Agreeableness 0</i> | 246 | 239 | 485 |
| | <i>Agreeableness -</i> | 241 | 244 | 485 |
| | Total agreeableness | 785 | 782 | 1567 |
| | <i>Usefulness +</i> | 372 | 404 | 776 |
| | <i>Usefulness 0</i> | 303 | 290 | 593 |
| | <i>Usefulness -</i> | 107 | 81 | 188 |
| | Total usefulness | 782 | 775 | 1557 |

- for agreeableness: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers A+ than A°, A+ than A-, and A° then A-; at the negative pole, there are significantly more answers A- than A°, A- than A+, and A° than A+;

- for utility: at the positive pole, there are significantly more answers U+ (or U°) than U-; at the negative pole, there are also more answers U+ (or U°) than U-;

- at the positive pole the answers A+ are more frequent than the answers U+; at the negative pole, the answers U+ are more frequent than the answers A+, and the answers A- more frequent than the answers U-.

Inter-dimensions analysis

We also found interesting to study any possible differences of inter-dimensions answers, by comparing for each of the extreme poles (A+, A-, U+ and U-) the answers given.

For agreeableness

For agreeableness + (information considered agreeable) and at the positive pole of each of the 5 dimensions, we obtain, both for the men and for the women, the following inequalities: openness, kindness and emotional stability > extraversion and conscientiousness. We also notice, but only in the case of women, that kindness > openness.

For agreeableness - (information considered unpleasant) and still at the positive pole of the dimensions, the following hierarchies are noticed systematically (*i.e.* both for the men and for the women): extraversion and conscientiousness > openness, kindness and emotional stability. On the other hand, but again only in the case of women, openness and kindness > emotional stability and extraversion > conscientiousness.

For agreeableness +, now at the negative pole of each of the 5 dimensions, the following hierarchies are obtained: extraversion and conscientiousness > kindness; extraversion > openness. Also still only in the case of women, extraversion > conscientiousness and emotional stability and conscientiousness > openness.

For agreeableness - (and again at the negative pole of the dimensions), we obtain: kindness > extraversion, openness and conscientiousness; emotional stability > extraversion and conscientiousness. Finally, we also observe that openness and conscientiousness > extraversion for the women and that emotional stability > openness for the men.

For utility

For usefulness + (information considered useful) at the positive pole of each of the 5 dimensions, we notice systematically the following differences: kindness > extraversion and conscientiousness. But some additional differences are also detected for the women: kindness > openness and emotional stability, openness and emotional stability > conscientiousness.

For usefulness - (information considered harmful) at the positive pole of the dimensions, two inequalities are observed: conscientiousness > openness and emotional stability. Finally, only in the case of women, we notice four complementary differences (extraversion > openness, kindness and emotional stability, and kindness > emotional stability), and for the men one last difference (conscientiousness > kindness).

For usefulness +, now at the negative pole of each of the 5 dimensions, four differences are systematic: extraversion, kindness and emotional stability > openness, and emotional stability > conscientiousness. On the other

hand, specifically for the women, extraversion > conscientiousness and specifically for the men kindness > conscientiousness; as well as emotional stability > extraversion.

Finally, for usefulness - (and again at the negative pole of the dimensions), the systematic hierarchies are the following: openness and kindness > extraversion, and openness > conscientiousness. Only for the women, we also obtained emotional stability > extraversion. Finally, for the men, we have: openness and kindness > emotional stability, and kindness > conscientiousness.

DISCUSSION

First of all, let us summarize the results of the intra-dimensions analyses, recalling that these analyses were intended to examine 1) whether the distribution of responses between A+, A° and A- was or was not equal, 2) whether the distribution of responses between U+, U° and U- was or was not equal, 3) if the frequency of responses A+ was identical to that obtained in U+, and if the frequency of response A- was identical to one obtained in U-.

We see than mainly (Table 8), that regardless of the dimension that was examined and of the respondent's gender, the positive information (positive poles) is subject to an assessment of agreeableness systematically more favourable than unfavourable, the negative information leading to an inverse hierarchy.

Table 8.

Summary of inter-dimensions results (NB: the charts submitted in this table are significant for both men and women clustered and separately).

| | A positive poles | A negative poles | U positive poles | U negative poles | A/U positive poles | A/U negative poles |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Global | A+>A°>A- | A->A°>A+ | U+>U°>U- | U°>U+>U- | A->U- | U+>A+ A->U- |
| Extraversion | A+>A°>A- | A°>A->A+ | U+>U°>U- | U° or U+>U- | A->U- | U+>A+ A->U- |
| Openness | A+>A°>A- | A- or A°>A+ | U+>U°>U- | U°>U+ or U- | A->U- | U+>A+ A->U- |
| Conscientiousness | A+>A°>A- | A- or A°>A+ | U+ or U°>U- | U°>U+>U- | A->U- | U+>A+ A->U- |
| Kindness | A+>A°>A- | A->A°>A+ | U+>U°>U- | U° or U+>U- | | U+>A+ A->U- |
| Emotional stability | A+>A°>A- | A->A°>A+ | U+ or U°>U- | U° or U+>U- | A+>U+ | U+>A+ A->U- |

We also observe that, in terms of utility, the positive information is always considered more useful than embarrassing, which is usually also the case of negative information (except for the dimension “openness”, where no preponderance appeared between useful and embarrassing). In other words, either when the information provided are pleasant (positive pole) or unpleasant (negative pole), the respondents consider that, almost always, they are useful and wish to obtain them. Such results, which confirm those obtained by Gangloff and Mazilescu (2007) with the same procedure (but using other target adjectives than those from *Big Five*), are confirmed if we put in correspondence the rankings of agreeableness and of utility. We note here that negative information is always considered more unpleasant than embarrassing (last column of Table 8), which is observed also, almost always, for the positive information when they are considered unpleasant.

That the positive information is judged or considered agreeable and the negative information is considered disagreeable, nothing more logical. But we also note, in terms of utility, that the information considered disagreeable is not rejected. This is logical : it is quite understandable that when one expects to encounter a stranger, and we invited our participants to do so, any information on this stranger is considered useful, even if this information is of a characteristic apparently unpleasant. This information helps to anticipate the behavior of the speaker and thus to prepare for this encounter. Then, we can ask ourselves whether we have obtained similar results in the case of utility if our questions would have judged not the information but more directly the personologic features. We can then make the assumption that the answers of rejection would have been frequent. This absence of rejection of the disagreeable information also coincides with some data, for example from cognitive dissonance, research showing that the disagreeable information is frequently rejected, except considering the function of knowledge as predominating the cognitive consistency function.

Finally, we mention briefly, to close these intra-dimensions analyses, the differences which appear between men and women: they concern only the intermediate answers (A° or U°). They are therefore of very limited interest and therefore we will not deepen them here.

As for inter-dimensional analysis, they were intended to establish a ranking of dimensions against each other on the plan given by the agreeableness and the utility. The results are summarized in Tables 9 (for agreeableness) and 10 (for utility). We ascertain here that the importance of the information, both for agreeableness and for utility, varies depending on the dimension considered. For agreeableness, we notice for example that kindness is systematically differentiated of extraversion and of conscientiousness: finding out that someone is “kind” is always a piece of information more agreeable than finding out that someone is extrovert or conscientious; corollary, it is more unpleasant to know that someone is not friendly than to know that he (or she) is introverted or not conscientious. Similarly, for the utility, it is considered more useful to know that someone is

nice/friendly, than to know that he is extrovert or conscientious, and corollary it is more embarrassing to know that someone is not friendly than to know that he is introverted or (for men) that he is not conscientious. Such results can be explained by the fact that “kindness” is a feature that translates into more social interactions as “being conscientious” or not and probably more emotionally charged as being introverted or extroverted.

Still at the level of the inter-dimensions, we notice many differences of judgments between men and women, finding that joins those already made by Gangloff and Mazilescu (1997). Thus, for agreeableness, of 30 significant comparisons, 1/3 are specific to either men or (more generally) to women; and for utility, this percentage passes to 59% (of 27 significant differences, 16 are either for the men or for the women). Without going into details regarding the nature of the dimension considered more agreeable (or useful) for the men or for the women, we notice, mainly, that the women make more differentiations than men, both on the plan of agreeableness (9 are specific to women compared to only one for men) and of utility (respectively 10 and 6). One of the consequences, for example in the situation of assessment of others (in the case of an assessment of skills, a professional orientation, a recruitment...), is that the men and the women will not examine in the same discriminative way the different information that they could have (the women discriminate more frequently than men, they will attach more differentiated importance to these information than the men). And this will be reflected, obviously, especially regarding the plan of the content of the diagnosis made.

Table 9.

Summary of inter-dimensions results for agreeableness (in italics, there are presented the results obtained only for women or only for men)

| | A+ Positive poles | A+ Positive poles | A- Negative poles | A- Negative poles |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| E/O extraversion / openness | O>E | E>O | E>O | <i>O>E for W</i> |
| E/C extraversion / conscientiousness | | | <i>E>C (for W)</i> | <i>C>E (for W)</i> |
| E/G (extraversion / kindness | G>E | E>G | E>G | G>E |
| E/N extraversion / emotional stability | N>E | <i>E>N (for W)</i> | E>N | N>E |
| O/C openness/ conscientiousness | O>C | <i>C>O (for W)</i> | C>O | |
| O/G openness / kindness | <i>G>O (for W)</i> | | | G>O |
| O/N openness / emotional stability | | | <i>O>N (for W)</i> | <i>N>O (for M)</i> |
| C/G conscientiousness / kindness | G>C | C>G | C>G | G>C |
| C/N conscientiousness / emotional stability | N>C | <i>C>N (for W)</i> | C>N | N>C |
| G/N kindness / emotional stability | | | <i>G>N (for W)</i> | |

Table 10.

Summary of inter-dimensions results for usefulness/utility (in italics, there are presented the results obtained only for women or only for men)

| | U+ Positive poles | U+ Negative poles | U- Positives poles | U- Negative poles |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| E/O extraversion / openness | | E>O | <i>E>O (for W)</i> | O>E |
| E/C extraversion / conscientiousness | | <i>E>C (for W)</i> | | |
| E/G (extraversion / kindness | G>E | | <i>E>G (for W)</i> | G>E |
| E/N extraversion / emotional stability | | <i>N>E (for M)</i> | <i>E>N (for W)</i> | <i>N>E (for W)</i> |
| O/C openness/ conscientiousness | <i>O>C (for W)</i> | | C>O | O>C |
| O/G openness / kindness | <i>G>O (for W)</i> | G>O | | |
| O/N openness / emotional stability | | N>O | | <i>O>N (for M)</i> |
| C/G conscientiousness / kindness | G>C | <i>G>C (for M)</i> | <i>C>G for M)</i> | <i>G>C (for M)</i> |
| C/N conscientiousness / emotional stability | <i>N>C (for W)</i> | N>C | C>N | |
| G/N kindness / emotional stability | <i>G>N (for W)</i> | | <i>G>N (for W)</i> | <i>G>N (for M)</i> |

CONCLUSION

We wanted, in this study, to know the judgments of agreeableness and of utility concerning not the personological traits, but the information related to these traits: it was not about judging whether a particular personality trait was pleasant, unpleasant, useful or embarrassing, but to judge whether the information indicating that an individual was a carrier of this personality trait (or of this normative trait^{****}) was pleasant, unpleasant, useful or embarrassing^{§§§§}.

It was then found that any information, be it pleasant or unpleasant is almost always useful: to know that you will meet someone intolerant, self-centred is certainly unpleasant, but useful. On the contrary, if, as in the regular (usual) studies concerning the consideration of value, the question would have concerned the

^{****} Following the results of a recent study (Gangloff, 2003), we can ask if the five dimensions of the Big Five cannot be attributed to social norms more than to personological dimensions.

^{§§§§}, ¹⁶ Let's state, of course, that our results are to be considered complementary, and not as opposing those obtained with other procedures.

usefulness of encountering someone intolerant, self-centred, it is very likely that the negative answers would have been the majority. Well we must remember that before we ask ourselves whether an individual possesses this feature or another, we wonder if it is useful to know whether or not this individual possesses this feature: this is because the information on this feature is useful that we test whether the individual possesses it or not.

We also notice, through inter-dimensions analysis, that the judgments vary depending on the dimensions and that (for example) “kindness” is always subject to more intensive assessments (whether they are for agreeableness or for utility) than “extraversion” or “conscientiousness”. If the fact of these hierarchies can be considered as general, the component of these hierarchies may reveal the conjuncture and may come from the instructions given to our subjects: it was for them, in this study that we wanted to be exploratory, to make reasoning towards a person they had to meet without a stated purpose of this meeting. Then, it is very possible that if the context had been different, other results would have been obtained (for example, if this meeting had had the objective of achieving, in a cooperative manner, a meticulous task, conscientiousness would have become undoubtedly more important). And even if, for Peeters (1992), most personological adjectives seems to lead to a similar assessment whatever the context, it is not certain that this similarity is still obtained when, as here, an information is evaluated.

Finally, we notice that men and women react differently, especially with more inter-dimension discriminations in the case of women. Due to the complexity of the gender variable, we refrain from an explanation. Nevertheless, we mentioned in our discussion some practical implications of this finding stressing the importance of the evaluator’s gender at the level of the diagnosis realized in situations of assessment of others. Obviously, further studies are now needed to clarify the materialization of these implications.

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ANNEX 1

The 100 adjectives used, in relation to the 5 dimensions of Big Five

| | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----|------------------------|----|---------------------------|----|-----------------------------|
| N- | Easily offended (<i>person</i>) | N- | Vulnerable | N+ | Well-balanced | C- | Little fighter |
| N- | Rowdy/ boisterous | G+ | Pleasant | E+ | Stubborn, cantankerous | C+ | Organized |
| N+ | Compos mentis; self-possessed | O+ | Reader | O- | Narrow-minded | C+ | Stubborn |
| N- | Restless | O- | Traditionalist | G+ | Courteous | E- | Silent |
| C- | Indolent/idle | O- | Uncultivated | C+ | Determined, resolute | O+ | Frank |
| G- | Individualist | G- | Insensitive | E+ | Determined, decided | G+ | Sincere |
| N- | Irritable | E+ | Confident | O+ | Progressive | O+ | Innovative |
| C- | Indecisive/ irresolute | E- | Retired | C- | Irresponsible | G+ | Submissive |
| O- | Uncommunicative | C+ | Meticulous | C+ | Fierce | O+ | Curious |
| C | Conscientious | G+ | Accommodating | G+ | Conciliatory | E+ | Direct |
| N- | Irritated, annoyed; nervous | C- | Untidy | C+ | Meticulous | G- | Intolerant |
| E+ | Overbearing (<i>person</i>) | E- | Introverted | N- | Worried, anxious | O+ | Broad-minded |
| O- | Normative | E- | Discreet | G- | Egocentric | N+ | Calm |
| N+ | Strong | N+ | Calm | G- | Suspicious | O+ | Hungry for culture |
| N+ | Controlled | O- | Sectarian | G+ | Humanist | G- | Distrustful, mistrustful |
| E- | Withdrawn | G+ | Sociable | O+ | Cerebral | E- | Reserved (<i>person</i>) |
| G- | Disagreeable, unpleasant | O+ | Cultured, Educated | C+ | Thoughtful | E+ | Persuasive |
| E | Ambitious | G+ | Cooperative | N+ | Self-control | E- | Retiring |
| C- | Expeditious | N- | Anxious | O- | Ignorant | C- | Rough |
| G- | Antisocial | C- | Jerk | C- | Unembarrassed | O- | Ethnocentric |
| G- | Uncivil | E- | Solitary, withdrawn | G- | Solitary | O- | Traditional |
| E+ | Firm | E- | Distant | N- | Aggressive, fierce | G+ | Devoted, faithful |
| N+ | Calm, Impassive | C+ | Pernickety | N+ | Self-controlled | E- | Reserved, reticent |
| E+ | Passionate | C+ | Persevering | C- | Weak | N+ | Peaceful |
| O- | Conservative | E+ | Active | O+ | Inventive | N- | Concerned/worried |

E= Extraversion, Energy, O= Openness (to experience), C = Conscientiousness, G= Agreeableness, N= Emotional stability

ANNEX 2

Example of question

Question 1. Imagine that you will be soon put in contact with someone you do not know, and that the only information you have about this person is that he/she is tenacious.

1.1. Is this information pleasant/agreeable **or** indifferent **or** disagreeable for you?

- It is **pleasant information**:
- This **information** is **indifferent** for me:
- This **information** is **unpleasant**:

Why?

.....

.....

.....

1.2. Is this information useful **or** irrelevant **or** annoying (and in this case you would rather not have this information)?

- This **information** is **useful for me and I am pleased to have it**:
- This **information** is **of no interest** to me:
- I would rather **not have this information because it would bother me much**:

Why?

.....

.....

.....