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# Two profiles of the Dutch high performing employee

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to explore the profile of an ideal employee, to be more precise the behavioral characteristics of the Dutch high-performing employee (HPE). Organizational performance depends for a large part on the commitment of employees. Employees provide their knowledge, skills, experiences and creativity to the organization, which makes them critical to the success of the organization.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The behavioral characteristics of the Dutch HPE were identified on the basis of a literature review and a questionnaire distributed to 420 Dutch managers and employees.

**Findings** – Not one but two profiles for the ideal employee were found. First, an HPE profile was compiled based on the perspectives of managers, which can be used for evaluating employees and recruiting new employees. Second, an HPE profile was compiled based on the perspectives of employees themselves, which can be used for setting up development and coaching programs for employees.

**Originality/value** – Most organizations work with one profile of the ideal employee. This study shows, however, that two profiles are needed for such an employee, each with a particular application.

**Keywords** Employee profiles, High performance employees, HPE

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Employees dedicate their knowledge, skills, experiences and creativity to the organization, which makes them critical to the success of the organization (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2002). It is even stated that people play a large part in making or breaking the organization (Carney and Getz, 2009; Casullo, 2012; Huselid, 1995; Leary-Joyce, 2010). Collins (2001) argued that the power of an organization lies in the hands of good people. Considering this, the question arises: What is meant by “good people”? Not every employee is the same, individuals act differently under the same set of circumstances (Loftus and Higgs, 2010). Some employees are able to work independently with little or no supervision, while others require considerable guidance to perform a job well. The differences between employees can be measured by identifying and comparing their competencies and behavioral characteristics (Bartram *et al.*, 2002). Each employee has a unique set of competencies and related behaviors, which are of varying use to the organization. This study aims to further explore Collins’ concept of “good people” by constructing a profile of a Dutch high-performing employee (HPE). The research question is therefore as follows:

*RQ1.* What are the behavioral characteristics of a Dutch HPE?



A review of recent literature shows not only that there is ambiguity about what an HPE is, but also that managers and employees have different perceptions of the HPE. Furthermore, the literature does not provide a definitive set of characteristics of Dutch HPEs (Hoon, 2000; McKenna, 2002; Call *et al.*, 2015). Answering the research question will thus contribute to knowledge on HPEs by filling a gap in the literature. In addition, the HPE profile that was developed based on the study findings can be applied by (Dutch) organizations to evaluate the quality of their workforce and improve it by enhancing the HPE characteristics in employees. The HPE profile can also be used by organizations as a guideline during the recruitment process, to make sure only people with the required characteristics will enter the organization.

This article is structured as follows. The first section describes how the theoretical profile of the HPE was developed based on four validated behavioral and excellence models and gives a definition of the HPE. The section that follows presents the research approach and after that extensively discusses the research results. The article closes with a conclusion, a discussion of the implications of the research, the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

### Developing the theoretical profile of the HPE

Before we could develop a profile of the HPE, we first needed a definition of the excellent employee. Researchers in organizational theory argue that there is not a universal definition for excellence, nor for the excellent employee (Selvarajah *et al.*, 1995; Call *et al.*, 2015). The reason for this is that researchers generally concentrate on one specific determinant of excellence, such as the characteristics or the attitudes or the behaviors that employees must exhibit to perform well in their jobs (Sparrow and Hiltrop, 1997). To deal with the issue of fragmented research, we studied a number of concepts from the literature on excellent employees to formulate a working definition of the HPE. After that, we combined four validated models on employee characteristics to draw up a list of behavioral characteristic of an HPE and included these in a questionnaire. This questionnaire served to validate the identified behaviors in practice against the perceptions of respondents, who were both managers and employees. In this study, an excellent employee is defined as an individual who delivers a targeted effort to increase the productivity and quality of the organization (Møller, 1994). For building the questionnaire, we used several concepts found in the literature. The concept of “employee-ship” is about the behavior of employees to feel responsible for the results of the organization, be loyal to this organization and take initiatives to continuously improve the organization (Møller, 1994). According to another concept, excellent employees show high “in-role” performance and high “extra-role” performance (Williams and Anderson, 1991). The “in-role” performance is also called work performance and refers to the results that can be expected of employees on as part of their formal job description. “Extra-role” performance, also called engagement performance, concerns the efforts of employees that go beyond what can be expected from them in their function and is aimed at improving the organization. This kind of behavior can develop into “organizational citizenship behavior”, another concept which is defined as behavior that is not required because of the employee’s position in the organization but that is purely the employee’s own initiative (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1991). This behavior is aimed at improving the organization, but it is not necessarily acknowledged in the formal evaluation and reward system of the organization. Another

concept focuses on a special category of employees, the “stars” (Call *et al.*, 2015). These are defined as employees with disproportionately high and prolonged performance, visibility and relevant social capital. In this respect, “stars” are similar to “high potentials”, employees who are highly driven to improve the organization by taking advantage of opportunities without fear of change. These employees often make rapid career advancement because they work more productively and more effectively than their colleagues, and often, they are regarded as the future leaders of the organization (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). The concepts of employeeship, extra-role performance, organizational citizenship behavior and “stars” all provide descriptions of employees who are willing to go the extra mile to enhance organizational performance. Examination of these four concepts resulted in the following working definition of the HPE: An HPE performs better than an average employee and, therefore, contributes above-average to the overall performance of an organization.

The previous discussion of the literature shows that the HPE can be approached from many angles. To take these different angles into account, we decided to combine four scientifically validated models to draw up a draft list of desired behavioral characteristics of the HPE. This increased the probability of identifying as many relevant behavioral characteristics as possible, as starting from a single model would run the risk of yielding an incomplete picture. The first model we studied, the Great Eight Competencies Model, comprises 8 factors, 20 dimensions and 112 behavioral characteristics. Together, these describe the behaviors that are needed to be able to perform well in a work environment (Bartram, 2005). The eight factors are clusters of similar types of work behaviors (derived from Bartram, 2005, p. 1187):

- (1) *Leading and Deciding, defined by:* Taking control and exercising leadership, initiating action, giving direction and taking responsibility.
- (2) *Supporting and Cooperating, defined by:* Supporting others and showing respect and positive regard for them in social situations, putting people first, working effectively with individuals and teams, clients and staff.
- (3) *Interacting and Presenting, defined by:* Communicating and networking effectively, successfully persuading and influencing others and relating to others in a confident and relaxed manner.
- (4) *Analyzing and Interpreting, defined by:* Displaying evidence of clear analytical thinking, getting to the heart of complex problems and issues and applying own expertise effectively.
- (5) *Creating and Conceptualizing, defined by:* Working well in situations requiring openness to new ideas and experiences, seeking out learning opportunities, handling situations and problems with innovation and creativity, thinking broadly and strategically and supporting and driving organizational change.
- (6) *Organizing and Executing, defined by:* Planning ahead and working in a systematic and organized way, following directions and procedures, focusing on customer satisfaction and delivering a quality service of product to the agreed standards.
- (7) *Adapting and Coping, defined by:* Adapting and responding well to change, managing pressure effectively and coping well with setbacks.

- (8) *Enterprising and Performing, defined by*: Focusing on results and achieving personal work objectives; showing an understanding of business, commerce and finance; and seeking opportunities for self-development and career advancement.

Dutch high performing employee

573

These factors have been labeled the “Great Eight” because they appear to occupy a position within the work performance area similar to the “Big Five” in the personality predictor domain (Bartram, 2005). Research shows that these eight factors provide a complete account of work behaviors. Bartram’s Great Eight model is relevant to our study because it enables relating competencies to the workplace. In this respect, Bartram *et al.* (2002, p. 7) define competencies as follows: “Competencies are sets of behaviors that are instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes”.

The second model we studied, the Professional Expertise model, identifies the knowledge and skills an employee needs to gain professional expertise and subsequently show this expertise in the work setting (van der Heijden, 2000). The model consists of five factors with accompanying behavioral characteristics:

- (1) knowledge needed to perform the job well;
- (2) meta-cognitive knowledge needed to accurately assess one’s own skills and knowledge as well as discover any gaps which need to be further developed;
- (3) skills needed to perform obligatory professional tasks;
- (4) acquiring social recognition, the feeling that one is appreciated for the displayed expertise, which drives a person to further develop oneself; and
- (5) growth and flexibility, which enables an employee to develop multiple expertise and with that increases the own deployability.

This model is relevant to our study because van der Heijden (2000) determined the nature of the knowledge and skills related to professional expertise and also developed means by which such expertise may be independently measured.

The third model is the Employability model. Employability means that an employee has many possibilities to be deployed in the organization. It is a critical condition for enabling both sustained competitive advantage at the company level and career success at the individual level. van der Heijden and van der Heijden (2006) proposed a competence-based model to employability derived from an expansion of the resource-based view of the firm. This model is composed of five dimensions:

- (1) *Expertise*: A precondition for being able to excel in the job.
- (2) *Anticipation and optimization*: Employees initiate actions to improve themselves.
- (3) *Personal flexibility*: Employees can adapt easily to changing organizational circumstances.
- (4) *Corporate sense*: Employees behave as part of a team striving to achieve organizational goals.
- (5) *Balance*: Employees balance their own interests with those of the organization.

At the employee level, employability is beneficial for both present performance on the job and long-term performance, and because an employee who scores high on

employability is able to deliver high performance to the organization, the Employability model is relevant as input for our research (van der Heijden and van der Heijden, 2006).

The fourth model is the High Performance Organizations (HPO) Framework, which describes the factors that create and sustain a high-performing organization. An HPO is defined as an organization that achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of time, of five years or more, by focusing in a disciplined way on that what really matters to the organization (de Waal, 2012). The HPO framework includes five factors:

- (1) *Continuous improvement and renewal*: An organization continuously improves, simplifies and aligns its processes as well as innovates its products and services.
- (2) *Openness and action-orientation*: An organization creates an open culture in which management values the opinions of employees and involves them in important organizational processes.
- (3) *Management quality*: Managers have characteristics such as being trustworthy, having integrity, showing commitment and enthusiasm and having a decisive, action-focused decision-making style.
- (4) *Employee quality*: Employees have characteristics such as being diverse and complementary, resilient and flexible and good at cooperating.
- (5) *Long-term orientation*: An organization grows through partnerships with suppliers and customers and shows long-term commitment to all stakeholders.

This framework is relevant for our study, as it provides the specific characteristics of employees that work in an HPO. Examination of the four models described above provided a large number of characteristics of excellent employees. The following section describes how these characteristics were integrated in a questionnaire and validated by means of a survey.

### Research approach

Saunders *et al.* (2009) distinguish two types of research approaches: deductive or inductive. A deductive approach entails that the research starts from already existing theories and models, from which propositions are developed and subsequently tested through empirical studies. This study uses this deductive research approach because it starts from four existing models which are validated for a new context (i.e. employees in The Netherlands), to come up with a new model (i.e. the HPE profile), thus contributing to human resource management theory. The four models described above were integrated into one instrument, by which the profile of an HPE was derived. This study uses the survey research strategy, because this allows the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in an economical way (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The survey strategy is usually associated with the deductive approach. Thus, in our study, the survey strategy allows us to collect quantitative data, which can be analyzed quantitatively. The behavioral characteristics of HPE as given by the four examined models were collected by one of the authors and similar types of characteristics were placed into categories. Subsequently, the other author challenged these categories, and after discussion, we arrived at a survey questionnaire with 98 behavioral characteristics that potentially describe the HPE. The behavioral characteristics were turned into statements to make them easier to react on by respondents. The questionnaire can be



downloaded from [www.hpocenter.com](http://www.hpocenter.com) (in the Knowledge & Inspiration/Scientific Studies section).

The questionnaire was distributed to Dutch managers and Dutch employees. "Manager" was defined in this study as a person with at least one subordinate. The Dutch managers and Dutch employees were both presented with the same 98 statements, only the introductions to their respective questionnaires were different. The questionnaire for the Dutch managers was designed as if they were assessing a subordinate's performance on the job, entailing they were supervisor-raters (Baruch, 1996). They were asked to indicate to which degree they thought the given statement was important for a subordinate to be able to deliver outstanding performance. In this way, the responses of the managers provided an ideal image of a high-performing subordinate. The questionnaire for the Dutch employees was designed as if they were assessing themselves, entailing they were self-raters (Baruch, 1996). They were asked to indicate their level of agreement as to whether the statement would help them to perform their job in an excellent manner. The questionnaire used a response scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree).

#### *Survey procedure and sample*

The questionnaire was distributed electronically among approximately 3,000 contacts of two Dutch companies, HPO Center B.V. and Direction Europe B.V. The HPO Center is a knowledge and inspiration center in The Netherlands that uses continuous research to work with organizations from around the world that are driven to improve their performance. Direction Europe has years of experience in training and supporting individuals and organizations with personal development, leadership development, team development and coaching. Furthermore, calls to participate were distributed through LinkedIn, a worldwide social network of experienced professionals. Neither the respondents nor the organizations involved were known to ensure anonymity, thus encouraging participation. A total of 420 usable filled-in questionnaires were received: 275 of managers and 145 of employees. Of the respondents, 0.7 per cent enjoyed primary education, 3.3 per cent secondary education, 8.3 per cent tertiary education, 86.9 per cent higher education and 0.7 per cent another type of education. In addition, 63.3 per cent of the respondents were male, while 36.7 per cent were female.

#### *Factor analysis*

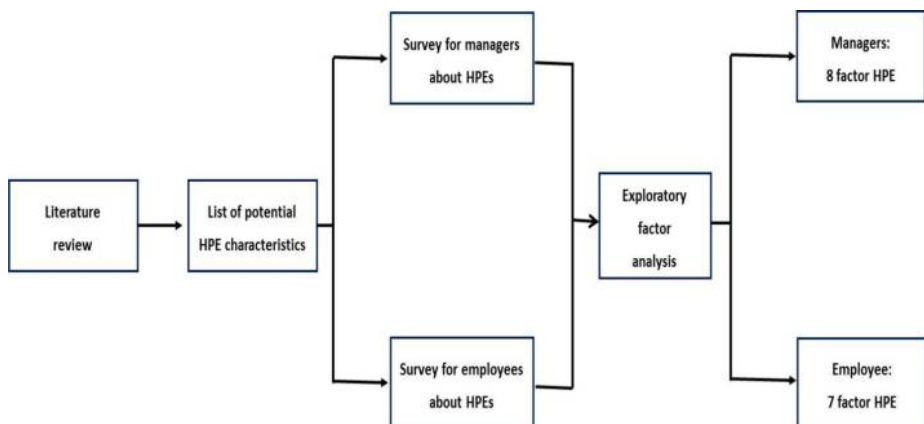
The factor analysis performed in this study was the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), because there were no well-specified a priori restrictions. EFA identifies the nature of the constructs underlying responses in a specific content area and determines what sets of items belong together in a questionnaire (DeCoster, 1998). Before performing the EFA, the assumptions of a factor analysis had to be tested first, that is reliability, communalities, Bartlett's test of sphericity, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, normal distribution and data points. The reliability analysis of the items in the data set yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.981, indicating that the data set has a very good reliability. Communalities are used to estimate how much of the variability is explained by the common factors. As all variables had a communality higher than 0.3, the variances of the variables were adequately explained by the factors (Quinlan, 2011). The significance level of the Bartlett's test of sphericity in this study was 0.000, indicating that sufficient significant relationships existed between the variables to carry out a factor analysis (Quinlan, 2011). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of

sampling adequacy for this study was 0.961, indicating that the variables were almost perfectly predicted by other variables in the factor analysis (Quinlan, 2011). All variables had a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance level of 0.000, indicating that none of the variables was normally distributed. As a consequence, only non-parametric techniques could be used for this data set (Quinlan, 2011). We needed a data set of at least 50 to 100 data points according to Quinlan (2011), while Comrey and Lee's (1992) guidelines for the sample size are: 50 (very poor), 100 (poor), 200 (fair), 300 (good), 500 (very good) and 1,000+ (excellent). A total of 420 usable questionnaires were received, which is, according to Comrey and Lee (1992), between "good" and "very good". In conclusion, the data set used in this study satisfies nearly all the requirements for the factor analysis. Only a normal distribution was not found, entailing that only non-parametric techniques could be used for this data set. Figure 1 gives a schematic overview of the research approach.

The aim of the factor analysis was to reveal any latent variables that could cause the manifest variables to co-vary. We chose the extraction method principal components analysis for this study, because it is more common and more practical, because it analyzes all the variances in each variable. In addition, we used the direct oblique rotation method because we expected that the factors would be related to each other, and because direct oblimin attempts to satisfy the principles of the simple structure with regard to the factor pattern matrix (Jennrich and Sampson, 1966). Hair *et al.* (1998) indicate factor loadings greater than 0.30 as the minimal level, loadings of 0.40 as more important, and loadings greater than 0.50 as practically significant. In this study, we used a minimal factor loading of 0.40, and all factor loadings below that were removed.

### Research results

We performed separate factor analyses on the data set originating from the managers and the one originating from the employees, as we expected, based on our literature review, that both groups could have a different view on what constitutes high performance of an employee (Baruch, 1996; McKenna, 2002). These differences find their origin in the fact that managers evaluate the behavioral aspects of employees in the position of supervisor, while employees evaluate the behavioral characteristics based on self-ratings of how they should be doing in the workplace. There are three main reasons



**Figure 1.**  
Overview of the  
research approach



why differences exist between the two types of evaluators (Harris and Schaubroeck, 1988). The first reason is the egocentric bias which occurs when self-raters – in this case the employees – inflate their own ratings to increase their scores; creating is a defensive effect. The second reason is the fact that the evaluators work at different organizational levels, which causes differences in orientation and perspective, as a result of which they observe the behavior of successful colleagues – in the case of the employees – and successful subordinates – in the case of the managers – from different standpoints (Zammuto *et al.*, 1982). The third reason is a difference in observational opportunity (Lawler, 1967). Self-raters (the employees) have many more possibilities to observe themselves than supervisor raters (the managers) have to observe employees, which may mean that employees are in a better position than managers to know what is factually needed to be successful on the work floor.

#### *Perspective of the Dutch managers*

The factor analysis performed on the data set from the Dutch managers yielded 8 factors, comprising 31 items (Table I). Factors 1 and 8 both included five items or more, indicating solid factors. The remaining factors had four or less items per factor, yet these factors had generally high factor loadings, indicating that these factors were also solid. Factor 7 had only two items, which were both about decision-making. We performed a forced seven-factor analysis in SPSS, but these items remained together in one factor, and with both items having a high factor loading, we chose to keep this factor and its items as a separate factor. A factor with less than three items may be weak, but due to its strong factor loadings, it can still be seen as a solid factor (Costello and Osborne, 2005).

#### *Perspective of the Dutch employees*

The factor analysis performed on the data set from the Dutch employees yielded seven factors. Factors 1 and 5 both included five items or more, indicating these were solid factors. The remaining factors had four or less items per factor, but again these factors had generally high factor loadings and therefore also solid. Just as with the Dutch managers, Factor 7 had only two items, both about decision-making, which after a forced six-factor analysis remained together in one factor. It has to be noted that characteristics which have the same name can belong to different factors in the different HPE profiles.

The reliability of all factors, originating from the managers' perspective and the employees' perspective, was tested with Cronbach's alpha and they all were found to be reliable (Table I). In addition, we performed *t*-tests to determine whether there were differences in scores given by males or females and by respondents with different levels of education, but this proved not to be the case. Given the large scale of the study and the reliability of the data, the research results can be seen as offering a valid representation of the profiles of a successful Dutch-speaking employee. To be on the safe side, we specifically state "Dutch-speaking", as we cannot be a 100 per cent sure that only Dutch people filled in the questionnaire; it is well-possible that other people than Dutch who were able to speak Dutch also participated in the research.

#### **Analysis**

As mentioned above, we expected from the start that there would be a difference in opinion between managers and employees on the profile of an excellent employee. The research results confirm that there are indeed two profiles for the HPE: one resulting

**Table I.**  
The behavioral profiles of Dutch high-performing employees, according to Dutch managers and Dutch employees

HPE profile according to managers	Loading	HPE profile according to employees	Loading
<i>Factor 1: Ambition (Cronbach's alpha = 0.810)</i>		<i>Factor 1: Attitude (Cronbach's alpha = 0.806)</i>	
Is ambitious	0.724	Is able to cope with pressure	0.807
<i>Focuses on new challenges</i>	0.657	Has self-control	0.701
Has a high work tempo	0.520	<i>Maintains a positive outlook</i>	0.701
Is inspiring	0.460	Has a can-do attitude	0.694
Speaks clearly and concisely	0.445	Is flexible	0.661
		Negotiates well	0.638
<i>Factor 2: Organizational orientation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.827)</i>		<i>Factor 2: Organizational orientation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.788)</i>	
Is involved in achieving the organization's mission	0.726	Contributes ideas for alternative working methods	0.853
Applies newly acquired knowledge and skills well	0.703	Helps to set the course for the organizations	0.845
Accepts that others will make mistakes	0.703	<i>Focuses on new challenges</i>	0.712
Contributes to the creation of a learning organization	0.698		
<i>Factor 3: Quality of work (Cronbach's alpha = 0.667)</i>		<i>Factor 3: Quality of work (Cronbach's alpha = 0.841)</i>	
<i>Acts with honesty and integrity</i>	0.806	<i>Focuses on the tasks at hand</i>	0.876
Sets high standards for quality of work	0.634	Acts logically in solving problem	0.729
Accepts responsibilities for mistakes	0.613	Performs tasks accurately	0.575
<i>Factor 4: Goal orientation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.696)</i>		<i>Factor 4: Goal orientation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.790)</i>	
<i>Focuses on the tasks at hand</i>	0.745	Manages resources well	0.752
Follows procedures well	0.660	Shows awareness of safety issues on the work floor	0.748
Fits the culture of the organization well	0.526	Controls costs	0.717
Returns favors	0.451	Focuses on maximizing productivity	0.440
<i>Factor 5: Affectivity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.779)</i>		<i>Factor 5: Affectivity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.810)</i>	
<i>Cares for others</i>	0.681	<i>Cares for others</i>	0.834
Has a multicultural orientation and approach	0.508	Appeals to emotion	0.733
<i>Supports colleagues in their work</i>	0.490	Has a sense of humor	0.621
Achieves a balance in reaching own goals and supporting others in achieving their goals	0.478	Does what is morally right for oneself and the organization	0.524
		<i>Supports colleagues in their work</i>	0.498
		<i>Acts with honesty and integrity</i>	0.486

(continued)

HPE profile according to managers	Loading	HPE profile according to employees	Loading
<i>Factor 6: Technical expertise (Cronbach's alpha = 0.712)</i>		<i>Factor 6: Technical expertise (Cronbach's alpha = 0.777)</i>	
<i>Constantly evaluates emerging technologies</i>	0.720	<i>Constantly evaluates emerging technologies</i>	0.849
<i>Has and applies technical expertise</i>	0.660	<i>Has and applies technical expertise</i>	0.843
<i>Shares own expertise with others</i>	0.470	<i>Is competent to engage in specialist discussions</i>	0.670
		<i>Shares own expertise with others</i>	0.568
<i>Factor 7: Decision-making skills (Cronbach's alpha = 0.697)</i>		<i>Factor 7: Decision-making skills (Cronbach's alpha = 0.581)</i>	
<i>Makes decisions quickly</i>	0.840	<i>Makes decisions quickly</i>	0.792
<i>Makes decisions without depending too much on others</i>	0.790	<i>Makes decisions without depending too much on others</i>	0.768
<i>Factor 8: Interpersonal relationship skills (Cronbach's alpha = 0.820)</i>			
<i>Sets and achieves objectives and goals</i>	0.779		
<i>Makes sound judgments</i>	0.686		
<i>Takes calculated risks</i>	0.570		
<i>Maintains a positive outlook</i>	0.535		
<i>Is resilient</i>	0.514		
<i>Focuses on customer needs and satisfaction</i>	0.475		

**Note:** Matching characteristics are in italics and shaded

from the managers' response, and another, different one resulting from the employees' response. Table I gives both HPE profiles, listing the behavioral factors and characteristics in order of importance (i.e. the weight of the loadings, which are also given in Table I). There are 11 behavioral characteristics that were found in both profiles, these have been printed in italics and shaded.

*The HPE profile according to managers*

Factor 1 of the HPE profile by managers, "Ambition", is the attitude of employees who are striving to improve themselves by: taking on new challenges to grow; achieving results by working hard; and inspiring others through word and deed to achieve great deeds. "Organizational Orientation" (Factor 2) is the positive attitude of employees to contribute to the success of the organization by: committing themselves to realize the organization's mission and strategy; improving the organization by learning from successes and failures; continuously applying new knowledge and skills that help to perform the work better; and being patient with colleagues who make mistakes, so that they remain willing to cooperate. "Quality of Work" (Factor 3) is created by an underlying attitude of honesty of integrity, a willingness to take responsibility for mistakes and an aspiration to always achieve higher quality. Factor 4, "Goal Orientation", entails that employees first focus on their tasks at hand and are willing to follow procedures and guidelines. To achieve organizational goals, employees are willing to adapt to the prevailing organizational culture and to return favors to colleagues to generate goodwill. Factor 5, "Affectivity", is about employees showing a caring attitude to colleagues by supporting them in their work, achieving a balance in reaching own goals and supporting others in achieving their goals and having a multicultural orientation and approach which allows them to put themselves in someone else's position. Employees need to have "Technical Expertise" (Factor 6) to execute their work properly. This expertise is developed and maintained by: constantly evaluating emerging technologies on usefulness for improving the organization; sharing own expertise with colleagues; and together applying the gained technical expertise. Employees also need to have "Decision-Making Skills" (Factor 7), which allows them to independently make quick decisions. Finally, Factor 8, "Interpersonal Relationship Skills", refers to the interrelationships between people, how one sees himself/herself and how others see that person. Managers think good employees are: setting and achieving objectives and goals; making sound judgments; taking calculated risks; maintaining a positive outlook; being resilient; and focusing on customer needs and satisfaction. By displaying these behaviors, employees can be a positive force in the organization and a source of inspiration to others.

*The HPE profile according to employees*

Six of the seven factors in the HPE profile according to employees correspond in name with the HPE profile according to managers. Factor 1, "Attitude", has a different epithet from Factor 1 in the HPE profile according to managers because the behavioral characteristics of this factor focus primarily on the attitudes of employees on the work floor. Employees are capable of making a positive contribution to the organization by being able to cope well with pressure; showing self-control; maintaining a positive outlook; having an entrepreneurial and can-do attitude; and having a flexible work ethic and being flexible during negotiations with others. "Organizational Orientation" (Factor 2) is the positive attitude of employees to: make suggestions for alternative working methods that can help increase quality; focus on new challenges; and help set

the course for the organization. “Quality of Work” (Factor 3) refers to employees focusing on the tasks at hand; performing these tasks as accurately as possible; and acting logically in solving any problems that might arise during the execution of these tasks. Employees see “Goal Orientation” (Factor 4) in a broader perspective than managers do. They look at the preconditions for goals rather than the goals themselves. Employees think in terms of resource management, cost control and a safe work environment. Only after these preconditions have been met, employees start focusing on maximizing productivity. Factor 5, “Affectivity”, is about employees caring for colleagues and supporting them in their work, and treating them with emotion and a sense of humor. In addition, it is important for employees to be honest and integer and to do what is morally right for oneself and for the organization, so that colleagues can trust and rely on them. Employees also need “Technical Expertise” (Factor 6) to perform the job well. This expertise is developed and maintained by: constantly evaluating emerging technologies; applying and sharing knowledge and expertise with others; and engaging in specialist discussions. Finally, employees need to have “Decision-Making Skills” (Factor 7) to make quick decisions without depending too much on others.

#### *Similarities in the HPE profiles*

A comparison of the two HPE profiles according to managers and employees shows that they have several behavioral characteristics in common. These 11 common behavioral characteristics can, on the basis of this commonality, be grouped together in five HPE categories (Table II).

Both managers and employees consider these important to an HPE and, therefore, deserve specific attention in employee development programs. The first category, “Personality Traits”, included the behavioral characteristics “Acts with honesty and integrity” and “Focuses on the tasks at hand”. These characteristics are similar to the ones discussed in the five-factor model of personality, a model which is often used in psychology and human resource management (Costa and McCrae, 1992). This model distinguishes five broad personality dimensions that are used to describe someone’s personality traits (Digman, 1990). The second category, “Decisiveness”, contains the behavioral characteristics “Makes decisions quickly” and “Makes decisions without depending too much on others”. Both characteristics have to do with the decisiveness of employees in taking decisions when and where these are needed. Decisiveness is necessary to select a

HPE category	HPE characteristics
Personality traits	Acts with honesty and integrity Personality traits
Decisiveness	Makes decisions quickly Makes decisions without depending too much on others
Teamwork	Cares for others Supports colleagues in their work Maintains a positive outlook Shares own expertise with others
Basic skills	Has and applies technical expertise
Innovation	Constantly evaluates emerging technologies Is focused on new challenges

**Table II.**  
The common behavioral HPE characteristics

decision among several alternative scenarios (Reason, 1990). Third category “Teamwork” includes the behavioral characteristics “Cares for others”, “Supports colleagues in their work”, “Maintains a positive outlook” and “Shares own expertise with others”. Teamwork is essential for delivering high-quality work and, to perform certain tasks in a team, employees have to be able to cooperate with colleagues, care for them, share expertise to help them improve and have a positive outlook on matters (Leonard *et al.*, 2004). The fourth category, “Basic Skills”, contains only one behavioral characteristic: “Has and applies technical expertise”. Nowadays it is common for a person to have a certain degree of technological expertise to be able to perform well in the job, therefore technological expertise is seen as a basic skill. The fifth category is “Innovation” and encompasses the behavioral characteristics “Constantly evaluates emerging technologies” and “Is focused on new challenges”. Both characteristics are related to innovation which is driving organizations to keep strengthening core competencies (de Waal, 2008).

### Conclusions, limitations and further research

The study findings contribute to the literature on high performance and excellence by filling a gap, as there is not yet an unambiguous profile of the HPE available in the literature. The two HPE profiles presented in this study take away some of the ambiguity around HPE. Having a well-defined HPE profile is important because to create a high-performance organization, it is essential that all employees perform well. The fact that this study yielded not just one but two profiles for the HPE could explain why people often hold different views on what exactly constitutes excellence on the work floor (Landy and Farr, 1980). Managers and employees have different views on high performance of employees based on differences in perspective and background, and apparently, there is quite a distance between the two views in practice (Borman, 1974). This distance may be reduced by managers and employees sharing and discussing each other’s HPO profiles. Organizations can use the HPE profiles to evaluate employees in terms of the required qualities for their functions as well as desired behaviors and work orientation, to subsequently bring the organization’s development, evaluation and coaching programs in line with these. It means organizations can offer their employees customized human resource development programs that are tailored to the needs of both employees and managers. In addition, organizations can use the HPE profiles in the recruitment process to make sure job candidates satisfy the required profiles right from the beginning. Applying the HPE profiles in this manner will increase an organization’s chance of becoming a high-performance organization significantly.

The HPE profile according to managers can well be used in the evaluation and recruitment processes, because these processes involve assessment of whether a new employee can contribute sufficiently to the success of the organization, from the viewpoint of the manager. For development and coaching programs, the HPE profile according to employees seems to be a better choice, as employees often have a more complete view of what is actually needed on the work floor to perform well every day. Aligning training and coaching programs to the employees’ view will provide employees the opportunity to grow and develop in such a way that they will increasingly satisfy the HPE profile according to managers.

There are several limitations. The self-ratings of employees were not directly linked to the supervisor-ratings, so a direct one-on-one comparison of HPE profiles was not



made. Also, no distinction was made between industries as a result of which a general profile was constructed. It can be expected that HPEs in different industries display different characteristics. Another limitation of this study is that it is confined to The Netherlands and thus culturally specific. Furthermore, this study may be affected by mono-method bias because only a single research method (i.e. survey) was used for answering the research question. Each research method has its own strengths and weaknesses and by using multiple methods, different methods could complement each other to create a more complete picture. An additional limitation can be found in the applied data collection method. Although social media is becoming more and more acceptable as a means to collect data (Castelli *et al.*, 2013), it is still possible that bias was created because of the type of respondents. A final limitation of the study is that some items in the questionnaire, as derived from the validated models in the theory, contain multiple qualitative elements. For example, one of the items reads: "is socially and environmentally responsible". These are actually two items included in one, which could have been misleading to respondents and, thus, may have caused an error in the generalization and interpretation of the items.

For future research, we suggest researchers apply multiple methods, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. In-depth interviews could provide insights not provided by the questionnaire. This ensures the research question is investigated from different angles, using different methods. Another opportunity for research is evaluating whether the HPE profiles are industry- and country-related. Additional research is also needed to establish whether the two Dutch HPE profiles have predictive validity over time, for instance in terms of individual success and organizational success. Such research should use a longitudinal research design to test causality. A qualitative study is especially useful to obtain further insight into the importance of the identified items in the light of both future individual performance and future organizational performance.

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