

A novel constitution-based personality-job fit theory: harmonizing organizational psychology and traditional Chinese medicine theories

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Abstract

Employee mental health is closely associated with the interaction between individual personality traits and workplace demands. A poor fit between job requirements and an employee's personality profile can lead to psychological strain and decreased well-being. Existing psychological frameworks, such as Holland's Personality-Job Fit Theory and the Big Five Inventory (BFI-2), have been widely applied to optimise this alignment. This study proposes a novel integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) constitution theory into personality–job matching models. The TCM constitution framework, which encompasses physiological and psychological characteristics and predispositions to disease, offers a holistic perspective on individual differences. We demonstrate conceptual and structural compatibility by mapping the nine TCM constitution types to the Big Five personality dimensions, the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), and Holland's vocational typology. Incorporating TCM constitutional theory may enhance the granularity and personalisation of job-matching strategies to improve employee engagement, performance, mental health, and job satisfaction in organisational and human resource contexts.

Keywords TCM nine constitutions · Job allocation · Well-being · Big Five personality traits · Psychology

1 Introduction

Employees typically spend 35 to 60 h per week in the workplace, making the work environment a significant determinant of mental health. Since, workplace incivility has been shown to affect psychological well-being and increase anxiety levels negatively [5], employees who work in environments that align with their personality traits exhibit higher well-being and job performance [33], generating mutual benefits for both organisations and individuals.

Both internal factors (e.g., personality traits such as introversion or extraversion, and physiological characteristics such as strength or endurance) and external factors (e.g., family background, education, and socioeconomic status) influence how well an individual fits within a specific occupational role. While some degree of job crafting is often available, significant misalignments between personality and job demands (such as a highly creative individual in a rigid, process-oriented role) may contribute to impaired mental health and reduced performance if adaptation fails.

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The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is widely applied in human resource management to improve person-job fit by categorising individuals into four dichotomous personality dimensions: Introversion–Extraversion, Sensing–Intuition, Thinking–Feeling, and Judging–Perceiving [23]. Previous studies have examined the MBTI types with employee behaviour [18] and job satisfaction [19]. However, the MBTI has limited predictive validity for leadership effectiveness [37], and its overuse in occupational settings may result in stereotyping or misapplication [22]. Similarly, while the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2) offers a robust personality framework, it does not account for physiological or health-related attributes that may influence job performance and psychological well-being.

To address these limitations, we propose the incorporation of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) constitution theory into personality–job fit models. In contrast to Western personality models that primarily emphasise psychological traits, the TCM constitution framework incorporates psychological and physiological dimensions. The TCM theory categorises individuals into nine constitution types based on factors such as energy balance, stress resilience, and predisposition to illness [35]. This classification originates from the ancient medical text *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon) and has been systematised over decades through standardised assessment criteria issued by the China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine [9, 30].

By complementing existing models such as the MBTI and BFI-2 with the TCM constitution theory, a more holistic and individualised approach to personality–job matching can be achieved. This integrative framework may enhance job allocation, promote employee well-being, and optimise workplace performance. The present study proposes a conceptual model for person-job fit aligning the TCM nine-constitution classification with established psychological frameworks (MBTI, BFI-2) and International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) occupational taxonomies.

1.1 Theories of classifications

1.1.1 The TCM constitution theory

The concept of constitution (*tì zhì*) in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a long historical lineage from its earliest establishment found in *Huangdi Neijing* [9]. Within this canon, the *Lingshu Tongtian* section introduces a five-constitution typology based on the Yin–the Yang theory: Taiyin, Shaoyin, Taiyang, Shaoyang, and YinYang balanced types [7]. Another chapter in the canon, *Lingshu Yin-Yang Twenty-Five People*, classifies individuals according to the Five Elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water, which are believed to reflect intrinsic physiological and psychological traits [32]. Despite these differing classification systems, studies have identified areas of convergence and have proposed methods to harmonise the various typologies [32].

Modern scientific investigation into the TCM constitution began in the 1970s [27]. Professor Wang Qi played a pivotal role in systematising the theory by publishing *TCM Constitution Theory* in 1982, followed by the official *Classification and Determination Standards of TCM Constitution* in 2009 [15]. This framework defines nine constitution types: Balanced, Qi-deficiency, Yang-deficiency, Yin-deficiency, Phlegm-dampness, Damp-Heat, Blood stasis, Qi stagnation, and Special Constitution.

In TCM, the constitution reflects an individual’s intrinsic state of vitality and is considered a determinant in disease susceptibility and progression. Recent clinical research has supported the utility of constitution typing in enhancing treatment outcomes. For example, TCM constitution types have been used to personalise chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) interventions, yielding improved patient outcomes [13]. Similarly, the Yin–Yang constitution theory has helped clinical management of uremic patients undergoing haemodialysis [38]. These findings underscore the constitution theory’s robustness and clinical relevance in contemporary medical practice.

Given its efficacy in clinical settings, we propose that the TCM constitution framework can be applied beyond health-care to broader societal domains. Specifically, this study explores its potential application in occupational psychology, particularly in enhancing personality–job matching models to promote employee well-being and work performance.

1.1.2 The Big Five personality traits in psychology

Research on individual differences has long emphasised the utility of neutral and scientifically grounded terminology in describing personality traits as a replacement for arbitrary or emotionally charged language. In a seminal effort to address this issue, Allport and Odbert [2] compiled a comprehensive list of approximately 18,000 English-language trait descriptors, laying the foundation for the development of the Big Five Personality Traits model [2, 25]. This lexical

approach culminated in the classification of five broad personality domains: Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Negative Emotionality/Neuroticism, and Open-Mindedness/. Openness to Experience [6, 16].

Since its conceptual consolidation, the Big Five framework has become a dominant model in personality psychology. It has been extensively applied in numerous fields, including organisational behaviour [3], educational psychology [4], medical education [20], and technology-related behaviour such as mobile application preferences [24]. Given its empirical robustness and cross-cultural applicability, the Big Five is widely regarded as a validated and authoritative model for assessing personality traits.

Building upon this foundation, recent research has explored conceptual correspondences between TCM constitution theory and Western personality models [32] harmonized three of the most frequently applied TCM constitution classifications to the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2), an updated Big Five framework consisting of 30 items that assess the five broad domains and 15 facet-level traits [26].

In the present study, we adopted the BFI-2 as a reference model and extended the mapping process to include Holland's Personality-Job Fit Theory and the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08; [14]). By synthesising these frameworks with the TCM nine constitution theory, we aim to propose an integrative personality–job alignment model that incorporates psychological and physiological dimensions.

2 Methodology

A conceptual, qualitative research methodology was employed to develop a novel integrative framework combining the TCM constitution theory with established occupational psychology models. This study was grounded in secondary data analysis, synthesising insights from pre-existing theoretical frameworks in psychology, TCM, and occupational classification. Specifically, the models utilised the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2), the TCM Nine Constitution Theory, the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), and Holland's Personality–Job Fit Theory.

Given the conceptual scope of this research, there was no human participants involved. Instead, we employed a structured narrative synthesis of scholarly literature, classification systems, and theoretical models across the relevant domains of TCM and psychology. This approach identified and reviewed articles and sources from the different domains to extract key definitions and concepts related to the nine TCM constitutions and corresponding personality and occupational frameworks. All authors collaboratively engaged in the matching process: where there was joint evaluation of the descriptions and characteristics from the TCM constitution literature alongside those from the Big Five, ISCO-08, and Holland's typologies, before coming to a consensus of the mapping. This ensured that the correspondence between TCM and Western frameworks reflected a shared interpretation.

The research team manually cross-referenced descriptive elements of each framework (TCM constitution types, Big Five trait profiles, ISCO-08 occupational descriptors, and Holland's vocational typologies) to map shared psychological and behavioural characteristics, allowing for the construction of theoretical linkages. This collaborative analysis culminated in a comparative synthesis that examined the degree of alignment between TCM constitution types and occupational categories (as defined by ISCO-08) to form the constitution-based personality–job fit model, incorporating both psychological dispositions and physiological characteristics.

2.1 Personality types in the TCM nine constitution theory

The Standards for the Classification and Determination of TCM Constitution [15] provide a comprehensive framework for identifying constitution types based on multiple dimensions, including psychological characteristics, emotional tendencies, physical manifestations, general well-being, and adaptability to environmental factors. The present study used previously established mappings between the nine TCM constitution types and personality traits (Supplementary Materials, Table S1) as a foundational template for further conceptual integration. Earlier studies have associated the Balanced Constitution with personality traits such as emotional stability, optimism, and sociability, which align closely with the extraversion and agreeableness dimensions of the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2). Conversely, individuals with a Qi Deficiency Constitution have been described as physically fatigued, socially withdrawn, and risk-averse, characteristics that correspond with higher levels of introversion and negative emotionality within the BFI-2 framework. These mappings illustrate the potential for meaningful conceptual correspondences between TCM constitution types and established Western personality dimensions, providing a theoretical basis for further integration into personality–job fit models.

2.2 The international standard classification of occupations (ISCO-08; [14])

The International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08), developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), provides a standardised framework for classifying occupations based on similarities in job content and required skill levels. The ISCO-08 comprises ten major occupational groups and 439 sub-major, minor, and unit-level categories, allowing for hierarchical and detailed classification of global labour roles. The ten major groups include: (1) Managers, (2) Professionals, (3) Technicians and Associate Professionals, (4) Clerical Support Workers, (5) Service and Sales Workers, (6) Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Workers, (7) Craft and Related Trades Workers, (8) Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers, (9) Elementary Occupations, and (10) Armed Forces Occupations. These categories are the basis for aligning job roles with skill demands and are widely used in workforce analytics, policy-making, and academic research. A comprehensive summary of the ISCO-08 major groups and their definitions is provided in Supplementary Materials Table S2.

2.3 Personality-job fit theory [10, 12]

The Personality–Job Fit Theory, initially proposed by John Holland in *The Psychology of Vocational Choice* [10] and further elaborated in subsequent editions [11, 12], classifies individuals and work environments into six distinct types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. According to the theory, individuals are more likely to experience job satisfaction, higher performance, and psychological well-being when there is congruence between their personality type and the characteristics of their occupational environment. The six environments are defined by activities, competencies, values, and personality traits closely aligned with occupational categories.

In the present study, we utilised detailed descriptions from Holland’s original 1966 framework, supplemented by the expanded definitions and trait descriptors in his 1985 publication, to facilitate theoretical integration. The classification of occupational environments and their corresponding personality characteristics, as applied in this research, are summarised in Supplementary Materials Table S3. Building on prior conceptual linkages between the TCM constitution theory and Western personality models, we extended this mapping to include Holland’s vocational typology. This allowed for developing a novel constitution-based personality–job fit model, which aligns constitution types with compatible occupational environments based on shared psychological and behavioural characteristics. This integrative framework aims to enhance the precision of occupational matching by incorporating constitution-specific personality profiles into established vocational psychology theories.

3 Results

The conceptual integration of the psychological characteristics of the nine Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) constitution types with the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2) personality dimensions, personality–job fit types, and the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) is presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows job classifications defined by the International Labour Organization [14], summarized in Supplementary Materials Table S2, that were conceptually

Table 1 Table showing the match of the Job-Personality fit theory types [10–12] and ISCO-08 [14]

Personality-job fit theory types/ environment	ISCO-08 major groups
Realistic	“Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers”; “elementary occupations”
Intellectual/ investigative	“Professionals”; “technicians and assistant professionals”; “plant and machine operators, and assemblers”; “craft and related trades workers”
Social	“Service and sales workers”
Conventional	“Clerical and support workers”; “service and sale workers”
Enterprising	“Managers”
Artistic	Professionals-artist ^a

^aArtist is a subcategory in the Professionals category

Table 2 Combined matching of the personality job-fit theory, BFI-2, TCM nine constitutions, and the ISCO-08

Personality job-fit theory types	BFI-2 traits	The nine constitutions of traditional Chinese TCM	ISCO-08
Realistic Intelligent/ investigative	"Low extraversion" "High open-mindedness" "high conscientiousness" "low negative emotionality" "low agreeableness"	"Phlegm-dampness" "Blood stasis" "Yang-deficiency", "Qi stagnation"	"Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers" "elementary occupations" "Professionals"; "technicians and "assistant professionals"; "plant and machine operators, and assemblers"; "craft and related trades workers"
Social	"High agreeableness" "high extraversion" "high open-mindedness"	"Yin-deficiency" "Qi stagnation" "normal"	"Service and sales workers"
Conventional ^a	"Low open-mindedness" "high conscientiousness"	"Phlegm-dampness" "Qi-deficiency" "Yang-deficiency" "Yin-deficiency"	"Clerical and support workers"
Enterprising	"High extraversion" "low agreeableness"	"Qi stagnation" "Yang-deficiency" "blood stasis" "Yin-deficiency"	"Manager"
Artistic	"High negative emotionality" "low extraversion" "High open-mindedness"		Professionals-artist ^a

^aArtist is a subcategory in the Professionals category

aligned with Holland's Personality–Job Fit Theory [10, 12], see Supplementary Materials Table S3). Holland's six vocational types were mapped to corresponding occupational groups within ISCO-08 based on shared traits and job demands.

For instance, the Realistic type, characterised by a preference for physical activity, practical tasks, and lower social interaction, is aligned with ISCO-08 categories such as "Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Workers" and "Elementary Occupations," which require manual labour, motor coordination, and physical endurance. The Investigative (also referred to as Intellectual) type emphasises problem-solving, analytical thinking, and independence. This type corresponds to ISCO-08 groups such as "Professionals," "Technicians and Associate Professionals," "Plant and Machine Operators," and "Craft and Related Trades Workers," where cognitive ability and task orientation are central. The Social type, associated with interpersonal sensitivity and strong communication skills, is aligned with "Service and Sales Workers." The Conventional type, preferring structure, order, and routine, is mapped onto "Clerical Support Workers." The Enterprising type, which values leadership, assertiveness, and persuasion, is aligned with "Managers." Lastly, the Artistic type, emphasising self-expression and creativity, corresponded to subsets of "Professionals" in artistic and cultural industries.

Table 2 expanded this classification framework by incorporating the TCM nine constitution types and BFI-2 personality traits. For example, the Enterprising vocational type is associated with high extraversion and verbal assertiveness, features reflected in the Yin-deficiency Constitution and high extraversion scores in BFI-2. While low agreeableness (often seen in competitive or persuasive roles) is also characteristic of this type, no corresponding constitution was identified in the TCM framework. To align with the six vocational types, the five BFI-2 domains were expanded into bipolar trait expressions (e.g., high vs. low extraversion), improving specificity in trait–occupation mapping.

The Realistic type corresponds to low extraversion, favouring solitary, physical, and task-based work environments. However, the Qi-deficiency Constitution, characterised by fatigue and low physical stamina [32], was deemed unsuitable for this category due to the physical demands of such occupations. The Investigative type aligns with high open-mindedness, high conscientiousness, and low negative emotionality, reflecting traits often associated with the Yang-deficiency and Qi-stagnation Constitutions. These individuals typically exhibit introspection, cognitive focus, and intellectual engagement.

The Social type requires high interpersonal interaction, emotional sensitivity, and social adaptability, corresponding to high extraversion, high agreeableness, and high open-mindedness in the BFI-2, and mapping onto the Yin-deficiency, Qi-stagnation, and Balanced Constitutions in TCM. The Conventional type, suited to structured, repetitive work, aligns with low open-mindedness and high conscientiousness, corresponding to the Phlegm-dampness, Qi-deficiency, and Yang-deficiency Constitutions, which reflect a preference for order, predictability, and discipline.

The Artistic type requires emotional expressiveness, creativity, and independence, and is aligned with high open-mindedness, high negative emotionality, and low extraversion in the BFI-2. These traits correspond to the Qi-stagnation, Yang-deficiency, Blood-stasis, and Yin-deficiency Constitutions, which are often associated with emotional depth, sensitivity, and introversion.

It is important to note that the TCM constitution model allows for mixed or overlapping constitution types, allowing individuals to exhibit characteristics across multiple categories. For example, the Special Constitution, which is characterised by allergic tendencies, could not be conceptually matched to any occupational group due to its primarily medical and physical focus. Similarly, while present in the BFI-2, low conscientiousness was excluded from the matching process due to its non-specificity and broad applicability across occupational roles.

The integrative model demonstrates that multiple BFI-2 traits and TCM constitution types can correspond to more than one personality–job fit type- reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of human behaviour and occupational roles. The nuanced combinations of constitution traits and psychological dimensions allow for a more individualised and culturally informed approach to occupational matching.

4 Discussion

This conceptual and theoretical study establishes a framework for aligning employee personality characteristics with occupational roles by examining the commonalities between the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Nine Constitution Theory, the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), and Holland's Personality–Job Fit Theory. The proposed integrative model serves as a conceptual foundation for incorporating TCM principles into occupational psychology, similar to how established Western tools such as the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2) and the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) are used to explore personality–job fit. Given the differing epistemological origins of TCM constitution theory and personality-based vocational models, perfect categorical alignment is inherently tricky. Overlaps among

categories are expected, and instead of seeking rigid one-to-one correspondences, this framework provides a structured yet flexible approach to guide job-personality matching across paradigms.

The matching process was conducted through systematic semantic and content analysis, utilising the respective models' trait descriptors, behavioural characteristics, and occupational attributes. Acknowledging the foundational differences between TCM and occupational classifications, this integrative framework is not intended to enforce rigid classification but to provide a pragmatic tool for enhancing job-personality alignment, particularly in regions where TCM is widely practised and culturally embedded. As with the BFI-2 and MBTI, the TCM-based job fit model represents an initial theoretical foundation for future empirical validation and application in human resource management and vocational counselling.

The TCM constitution theory, rooted in thousands of years of experiential knowledge, holistically classifies individuals based on physical, psychological, and environmental factors. Key constructs such as Qi, Blood, Yin, and Yang represent the dynamic equilibrium of an individual's physiological and psychological state [34]. These foundational attributes allow for meaningful conceptual correspondences with BFI-2 personality traits. While ISCO-08 lacks fine-grained psychological detail, interpretative cross-matching enabled its integration with the personality-job–job fit theory and the TCM constitution framework.

Despite the promising theoretical integration, several areas of ambiguity and complexity emerged. For example, both the “Conventional” and “Enterprising” types in Holland's framework exhibit traits related to extraversion (referred to as “extraversiveness” in [10]). However, the qualitative nature of this extraversion differs: the Conventional type favours routine and structure, while the Enterprising type thrives on initiative and persuasion. This nuanced distinction was better captured by the Phlegm-Dampness Constitution, described as steady and tolerant [32] rather than relying solely on the BFI-2 trait of high extraversion.

Empirical validation of this constitution-based personality–job fit framework poses significant challenges. A large-scale, multicentre study with sufficient representation across all constitution types, personality traits, and occupational categories would be required. Such a study would also need to account for confounding variables such as individuals exhibiting mixed constitutions, jobs encompassing multiple personality requirements, and self-initiated job redesigns. Furthermore, sociocultural and economic factors, such as education, local labour markets, and cultural norms, heavily influence career choices, limiting the real-world applicability of theoretical ideal matches. For example, individuals with a Qi-deficiency Constitution, who may be more physically vulnerable, may still undertake labour-intensive “Realistic” jobs out of economic necessity rather than constitutional suitability.

Although empirical testing remains difficult, future studies could focus on retrospective observational designs by selecting individuals with occupations that align with their constitution types and assessing outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement, mental health, and workplace behaviour. Based on the model, we hypothesise that a more significant mismatch between constitution and job characteristics would be associated with increased stress-related symptoms, job dissatisfaction, and higher job turnover. In contrast, alignment would predict higher engagement and overall well-being. Nonetheless, these relationships are inherently influenced by external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic shifts, and industrial restructuring that can affect aspects of mental health [17].

On an individual level, employees often resort to job crafting to proactively modify their job tasks and interactions to suit their abilities and preferences better. Tims and Bakker [29] have observed that most roles afford some opportunity for such personal adjustments. The present model does not dismiss the value of job crafting, rather, it acknowledges that underlying physiological predispositions may limit how much a person can adapt in extreme person–job misfit. Since even with proactive job redesign, a profound mismatch might not be fully rectifiable through crafting alone, especially in cultural contexts where job flexibility is low. In such scenarios, while personal initiative in reshaping one's role is important, complementary changes to the job environment or role expectations may be necessary to achieve a sustainable fit.

Ethical considerations are also paramount when applying this constitution-based person–job fit framework. One concern is that assigning or restricting individuals to roles based solely on their TCM constitution type could lead to unwarranted labelling or bias in employment decisions. We emphasise that the constitution framework should complement (not replace) existing person–job fit practices and workplace accommodations. Any implementation must be sensitive to context and individual differences, ensuring that constitution insights are used alongside other assessments and with respect for personal agency. In practice, the optimal approach is to pursue mutual adaptation of supporting the individual (through training, development, or health interventions) and adjusting the job context or expectations, rather than rigid matching.

Importantly, this integrative model offers new insights for applied research in organisational psychology while at the same time providing access of traditional Chinese organizations to utilize the western theories. Employers and career

counsellors in both Western and Chinese organizations may deliver more personalised, culturally informed career guidance by understanding constitution-based psychological tendencies. Organisations may also benefit from increased employee productivity, reduced workplace incivility [5], and improved psychological and physical health outcomes, as previously linked to life satisfaction and optimism [36].

Moreover, constitution in TCM is regarded as relatively stable yet modifiable, shaped by both innate predispositions and environmental influences Wang and Wang [31]. Interventions such as acupuncture, gua sha, cupping, and massage therapy have effectively treated constitution-related conditions [1, 8, 21, 28]. While these therapies traditionally target somatic and disease-related symptoms, their potential influence on psychological traits and workplace adaptation warrants further investigation. Improving employee's constitution-related well-being may indirectly enhance job fit and occupational outcomes.

5 Conclusion

By integrating the nine constitutions of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) with established Western occupational psychology frameworks: Holland's Personality–Job Fit Theory, the Big Five Personality Traits (BFI-2), and the ISCO-08 classification, we propose a novel conceptual model for personality–job alignment. This interdisciplinary approach bridges Eastern and Western paradigms and enriches the theoretical landscape of vocational psychology by incorporating holistic, constitution-based human classifications. The framework serves as a foundational model for future research and a potential tool for personalised human resource management and vocational counselling, ultimately aimed at enhancing job satisfaction, productivity, and psychological well-being in diverse work environments.

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Declarations

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