

## **FIT and Workplace Aggression**

Aggression in the workplace can result in stress for employees, reduced productivity and lowered workplace morale. Being able to identify it and offer a solution would be valuable since no organisation wants to condone workplace bullying and aggression.

Aggression can take a number of forms. For example, in addition to the verbal and physical expressions of aggression that might normally be considered aggressive behaviour, research highlights hostility as an important factor and one which may be expressed more covertly in the workplace.

Another factor linked to aggression is that of poor reasoning ability, with aggressive people more likely to make quick, implicit, but often incorrect, judgements about a situation.

This research reported here considers the relationship between FIT Science dimensions and both overt and covert workplace aggression.

The FIT framework takes account of the core aspects of thinking architecture and the nature and flexibility of behaviour. FIT Science offers a psychometrically robust and valid measure of FITness – in the form of The FIT Profiler. Additionally, it also offers training to improve FITness levels. The FIT Profiler assesses FIT Integrity or the architecture of inner thinking, perceiving and reasoning. It also measures outward behaviours and Behavioural Flexibility, or the range of possible behavioural responses a person has to different situations.

This study sought to examine whether there is a relationship between FIT factors, a score of explicit aggression and also the more subtle or implicit ways in which aggression comes out in how people conditionally reason.

In other words, do people who score low on FIT Science dimensions also have a greater predisposition to show overt and covert aggression in the workplace?

In this study scores on The FIT Profiler are compared against both an explicit measure of aggression, called the 'Aggression Questionnaire', and an implicit measure of aggression, the 'Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression'. Both of these tools are well established and valid measures of aggressive tendencies.

## **Participants**

The sample comprised 38 participants, 24 of whom were male. All were aged between 18 and 51 and the average age was 22. The participants were employed by a private telesales company and ranged from telesales operators and customer service staff to supervisors, manager and directors.

## **Procedure**

In addition to providing demographic information about themselves, the participants completed three questionnaires: The FIT Profiler, The Aggression Questionnaire and The Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression.. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

The FIT Profiler measures how people **think** and perceive (Inner FITness, or FIT Integrity), **behave** (Outer FITness or Behavioural flexibility) and **feel** (in terms of Anxiety and Depression). The components of FIT Integrity are Awareness, Balance, Conscience, Fearlessness and Self-Responsibility.

The Aggression Questionnaire measures self-reported anger, self-reported physical aggression, self-reported verbal aggression and self-reported (SR) hostility. In addition, it provides an overall aggression score. Higher scores across each scale equate to higher aggression levels.

The Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression assesses whether a person is cognitively prepared to justify aggression and therefore likely to behave aggressively in the future. It assesses an individual's ability to reason and indicates whether this reasoning is logical, aggressive or illogical. It provides a more reliable way of

assessing aggressive predispositions and in a way that is not liable to the distortions of self-report data. The test involves 22 reasoning problems and the number of aggressive answers selected is indicative of the extent of aggressive predispositions. Higher scores therefore equate to more aggressive reasoning.

## Outcomes

The data were used to examine relationships between FITness, self-reported or explicit aggression and aggressive reasoning. Table 1 presents the relationships between The FIT Profiler scores and scores on the Aggression Questionnaire. Only those findings which were statistically significant are presented. Higher scores on The FIT Profiler and Aggression Questionnaire equate to higher levels of FITness and aggression, respectively.

**Table 1: Relationships identified as statistically significant between The FIT Profiler measures and The Aggression Questionnaire.**

<b>FIT measure</b>	<b>Aggression measure</b>	<b>Correlation coefficient (r)</b>
FIT Integrity	Overall Aggression	-.41*
FIT Integrity	SR Hostility	-.61**
Self-responsibility	SR Anger	-.40*
Self-responsibility	SR Hostility	-.34*
Awareness	SR Hostility	-.42**
Balance	Overall Aggression	-.44**
Balance	SR Anger	-.45**
Conscience	SR Hostility	-.45**
Fearlessness	SR Hostility	-.62**
Extremity	SR Anger	.34*
Extremity	SR Verbal Aggression	.47**
Anxiety	SR Hostility	.39*
Depression	SR Hostility	.39*

\*Correlation significant at  $p < 0.05$  level. \*\*Correlation significant at  $p < 0.01$  level.

The results suggest that it is mainly the thinking and affect aspects of FIT that relate to self-reported aggression, not the behavioural aspects. FIT Integrity shares a strong relationship with Overall Aggression and Hostility. The negative directions of these relationships indicate that FITter people have lower levels of aggression. Similarly, four of the Constancies show negative relationships with Hostility and this indicates that people who are FIT in their thinking are less hostile.

Being behaviourally FIT means behaving in a flexible manner or having Behavioural Flexibility. The opposite of this is behaving rigidly in a particular way and this is measured by the 'Extremity' score on The FIT Profiler. As can be seen from Table 1, this score is positively related to Anger and Verbal Aggression indicating that people who are not flexible, i.e. not FIT, in their behaviours, are more aggressive.

Emotional FITness or anxiety and depression, also relates to Hostility. Thus those who are more anxious and depressed are also more Hostile.

Table 2, below, presents the relationships between FIT scores and mean scores for implicit aggression (aggressive answers and logical responses) on the Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression (CRTA).

**Table 2: Relationships between FIT scores and CRTA scores (significant correlations only).**

CRTA response	FIT Measure	Correlation coefficient (r)
Aggressive answers	FIT Integrity	-.42*
	Awareness	-.46*
	Balance	-.34*
	Conscience	-.39*
Logical answers	FIT Integrity	.46**
	Awareness	.44**
	Conscience	.41*
	Fearlessness	.34*

\*Correlation significant at p<0.05 level. \*\*Correlation significant at p<0.01 level.

As with the explicit measure of aggression, there were a number of significant relationships between The FIT Profiler scores and the implicit aggression measures on the Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression. As expected negative relationships were found between measures of FITness and aggressive answers, whilst positive ones were found with the logical answers. As with the explicit measures of aggression, it was FIT Integrity, rather than Behavioural Flexibility, that accounted for the clearest relationships (and in particular Awareness and Conscience). This is interesting, since one might have thought that it is paucity of behaviours, rather than thinking aspects, that relate to aggression.

## **Conclusion**

FIT Science dimensions were found to be related to aggressive tendencies. This was true for both explicit aggression measures and the more subtle implicit aggressive reasoning scales.

The findings in this study indicate that Inner FITness is more strongly related to aggressive tendencies than are the Outer FIT measures. One way of interpreting this is that aggressive tendencies are a result of paucity of thought rather than lack of the behavioural repertoire to cope with situations. Instead of the workplace situation determining behaviour, it is the way an individual perceives and reasons about that situation that is likely to determine their interaction with the situation and subsequent behaviour. What a FIT person infers about a situation is likely to differ from that of a less FIT person and this influences aggressive thoughts and behaviour. These findings reflect both implicit and explicit measures of aggression.