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The Big Five Model of Personality and Career Development

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Abstract: The research paper attempts to explore the relationship between different personality dimensions of the Big Five model and career development. Based on the findings of the existing literatures of the Big Five personality model and career development, the study finds that the Big Five personality model has direct significant impacts on employee work performance and person-organization fits. Furthermore, the personality traits are significantly related to career decision-making.

Keywords: personality, Big Five model, work performance, career decision-making, job satisfaction, person-organization fit.

Introduction

Personality types and employability

Nowadays, the relationship between personality and individual's career development has become a hot issue (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). Many companies have been using personality tests or questionnaires as references before personnel selection, in order to recruit right employees (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). Experts in the personality field, such as Lucas and Donnellan (2011), view that individuals have a stable and long-term traits which affects their behavior and employability at work. Researches also indicated that there is a strong relationship between personality dimensions and job performance (Tett & Jackson, 1991).

Personality traits and career decision-making

Moreover, many career development theories show that personality traits play an important role in individuals' career decision-making. According to the trait-factor theory (Niles & Bowsbey, 2009), personality traits and job factors are the two main elements that can determine a person's career decision. By matching between personality traits and job factors, the closer the two elements are matched the greater possibility for successful career and job satisfaction (Niles & Bowsbey, 2009). Also, personality-oriented theory hypothesizes that employees in the same career categories share similar personality characteristics (Holland, 1959).

The Big Five Model of Personality

The Big Five Model of Personality is one of the highly accepted and appropriate personality theories, and has also been considered as a widely known personality model for decades (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002). The Big Five Model demonstrates that the

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human personality comprises of five reasonably self-determining dimensions. They are Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011).

Neuroticism is a dimension of normal personality, which indicating general tendency to experience negative influences, such as fear, embarrassment and anger (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). Neurotic individuals tend to be annoyed, stressed, unsociable, nervous, embarrassed, uncertain, doubtful, unconfident, and dejected (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Moreover, A higher score in this dimension indicates that an individual might tends to be less able to control his or her feelings and stress, and have more irrational ideas (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). On the other hand, people with lower scores in this dimension are more obedient, dependent, conforming, socially sensitive, ingratiating, pliable, and able to cope with stressful situations (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011).

Extraversion includes traits such as sociability, assertiveness, activity and talkativeness (Barrick & Mount, 1991). It is characterized by positive feelings and experiences. High Extraversion individuals have a tendency to be spontaneous, communicative, energetic, positive, and enthusiastic (Goldberg, 1990; Watson & Clark, 1997). They are longing for admiration, social acknowledgement, and control (Watson & Clark, 1997). Individuals who get high scores in this dimension are more energetic and optimistic than those who get low scores (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, people with low scores in Extraversion are more reserved and independent (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Moreover, when comparing with other four traits, Extraversion is more associated with emotional commitment (Goldberg, 1990; Watson & Clark, 1997).

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Openness to Experience refers to active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, a preference for variety and independence of judgment (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Individuals who scored lower on this dimension tend to be conventional in behavior and conservative in outlook (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, people who scored higher on Openness of Experience dimension tend to be unconventional, willing to question authority and prepared to entertain new ethical, social and political ideas (Barrick & Mount, 1991). They are curious about both inner and outer worlds, and their lives are experientially richer (Judge et al., 2002). This kind of people experience both positive and negative emotions more keenly than others (Judge et al., 2002).

Agreeable defines the features, such as self-sacrifice, helpful, nurturance, gentle, and emotional support at one end of the dimension, and enmity, indifference to others and self-interest on another end (Digman, 1990). This dimension consists of traits such as polite, flexible, naive, helpful, supportive, merciful, kind, open-minded, and tend to be generous, calm, trusting, truthful, and sincere (Judge et al., 2002). Individuals with agreeable personality are more altruistic, sympathetic to others and eager to help others (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, people with disagreeable personality are more egocentric, competitive, and skeptical of others' intentions (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Conscientiousness refers to self-control and the active process of planning, organizing and carrying out tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1991). People with higher scores in the Conscientiousness dimension tend to be more logical, diligent, reliable, responsible, and risk averters (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Additionally, these people are more focus on success which is also very significant characteristic for performing work tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Purpose and Importance

According to the background above, individuals' career choices could be more successfully realized through understanding their personalities and the relationship between personality and career. Companies who take applicants' personality types into consideration during selection and career development processes could hire staff to their right positions easier, better develop their potential, and enjoy higher profits. Moreover, the Big Five personality test is an effective and reliable tool that can give people a clear image of their personality characteristics, and be used in their career decision-making and predict their future job performance.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between different personality dimensions of the Big Five model and career development, in order to help individuals make better vacations choices and help organizations gain higher job performance and employee satisfaction in the future.

The research is guided by the following main research questions:

- (1) How Personality Traits Impact Work Performance?
- (2) What is the Relationship between Personality Traits and Career Decision-Making?

Career Development and the Big Five Model of Personality

Personality Traits and Work Performance

Personality traits have been considered as an important factor for predicting job performance. Many studies have shown that personality traits have direct positive significant relationships with employee work performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991).

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According to Barrick and Mount (1991), Conscientiousness refers to self-control and the active process of planning, organizing and carrying out tasks. Current studies show that Conscientiousness dimension has the closest relationship with job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002) and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991) among all the five dimensions. High Conscientiousness people are logical, diligent, reliable, responsible, and risk averters (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In addition, these individuals are longing to success and more efficient in performing work tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In other words, people with higher scores in the Conscientiousness dimension are apt to have significant job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002).

According to Barrick and Mount (1991), Extraversion is characterized by positive feelings and experiences. Individuals who get high scores in this dimension are more energetic and optimistic than those who get low scores (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, people with low scores in Extraversion are more reserved and independent (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Previous studies show that people who get higher scores in the Extraversion dimension tend to have better job performance in administrations, social relation and sales fields (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002). Moreover, Judge and his colleagues state that people who get higher score in the Extraversion dimension are emotionally firm, confident, and easy to achieve contented life and job satisfaction (2002).

On the contrary, individuals with higher scores in the Neuroticism dimension tend to be annoyed, stressed, unsociable, nervous, embarrassed, uncertain, doubtful, unconfident, and dejected (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Moreover, according to Lucas and Donnellan (2011), a higher score in this dimension indicates that an individual might tends to be less able to control his or her feelings and stress, and have more irrational ideas. On the other hand, people with

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lower scores in this dimension are more obedient, dependent, conforming, socially sensitive, ingratiating, pliable, and able to cope with stressful situations (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). Previous studies show that these people are found to be negatively related with job satisfaction and would experience more adverse feelings in life (Judge et al., 2002) and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Moreover, according to current studies, negative affectivity is linked with Neuroticism (Watson & Tellegan, 1988), and high Neuroticism individuals also lack confidence and self-image (McCrae & Costa, 1991).

Agreeableness consists of traits such as polite, flexible, naive, helpful, supportive, merciful, kind, open-minded, and tend to be generous, calm, trusting, truthful, and sincere (Judge et al., 2002). High scores in Agreeableness dimension defines personality traits like self-sacrifice, helpful, kind, supportive, and open-minded, while low scores in this dimension presents indifference to others and self-growth (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1990). Personality psychologists have found that there was a very weak correlation between Agreeableness and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and same was the case with the correlation between Agreeableness and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002).

Openness to Experience personality refers to innovative, creative, curious, open-minded, diverse, insightful and aesthetic (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Digman, 1990; Judge et al., 2002). Individuals who scored lower on this dimension tend to be conventional in behavior and conservative in outlook (Barrick & Mount, 1991). On the other hand, people who scored higher on Openness of Experience dimension tend to be unconventional, willing to question authority and prepared to entertain new ethical, social and political ideas (Barrick & Mount, 1991). According to Judge and his colleagues' research, individuals with outstanding scores in this dimension tend to have positive job performances in their work (2002). Moreover, these

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individuals also have a very optimistic attitude towards training and learning experiences (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

However, previous studies found that, like the Agreeableness dimension, the relationship between Openness to Experience dimension and job satisfaction was also weak (Judge et al., 2002). Personality psychologists describe Openness to Experience as a double-edged sword, because this trait gives people both intense good feelings and intense bad feelings (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). In other words, people who get higher scores in this dimension tend to have both positive and negative feelings toward their jobs which directly influence their subjective well-being and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002).

Personality Traits and Organizational Culture

Current studies state that individuals' personality traits affect their organizational commitment and person-organization (P-O) fit (Barrick & Mount, 2000; Barrick, Stewart & Piotrowski, 2002; Chen & Schmitt, 2002). People's personality plays an important role in selecting the living societies and workplace culture in which they decide to stay (Barrick et al., 2002). Additionally, Barrick and Mount (2000) have found that one's preference for organizational environments, societies and the kind of activities he or she enjoys strongly relies on the individual's personality. Moreover, according to Silverthorne (2004), a greater culture and P-O fit can lead to higher organizational output and productivity. In this case, suitable employees' personality traits and organizational output have positive relationships. In other words, if the employees' personal traits match the organization's culture and conventions, the productivity will be increased.

Psychological researchers have noted that Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism can be interpreted based on individuals' desire to be socialized (Digman, 1997;

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Hogan & Holland, 2003; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Saucier & Goldberg, 2003). This socialization includes cultural propriety (Hogan & Holland, 2003), functional personality (Ones et al., 1993), respect for teamwork, and organizational commitment (Digman, 1997). In other words, people who achieve higher scores in these three personality dimensions would more tend to value culture, teamwork, socialization, solidarity, and communion (Saucier & Goldberg, 2003).

On the contrary, the remaining two traits, Extraversion and Openness to Experience, are associated with individuals' power and dynamism (Hogan & Holland, 2003). Moreover, individuals who get higher scores in these two personality dimensions have an inclination toward self-growth, self-esteem and actualization (Digman, 1997). Moreover, when comparing with other three traits, Extraversion and Openness to Experience are more associated with emotional commitment, but not organizational commitment (Goldberg, 1990; Watson & Clark, 1997). To sum up, Extraversion and Openness to Experience reflect attributes associated with positive dynamic qualities and individual ascendancy proclivities (Saucier & Goldberg, 2003).

On top of that, the study of Chiaburu and Oh found that Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience have greater incremental validity for organizational commitment than Conscientiousness and Agreeableness (Chiaburu & Oh, 2011). In addition, their study found that Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Extraversion have similar relationships with organizational commitment and task performance, while Openness to Experience and Agreeableness have stronger relationships with organizational commitment than with task performance (Chiaburu & Oh, 2011).

Personality Traits and Career Decision-Making

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Studies have shown that certain personality traits were found to be empirically associated with career decision-making difficulties (Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008; Wulff & Steitz, 1999). Moreover, researchers have found that emotional and personality-related career decision-making difficulties were significantly faced by college students (Saka et al., 2008). Additionally, career development consultants consider that personality-related difficulties are more severe than information-related difficulties, when making career decisions (Gati, Amir, & Landman, 2010), because these difficulties keep the individuals from making a conclusive decision. Also, Gati and his colleagues found that people with more significant personality-related career decision-making difficulties required long-term intervention which exceeded the career development counseling scope (Gati et al., 2010).

Saka and her colleagues stressed that people with higher level of anxiety and pressure would have more significant personality-related career decision-making difficulties (Saka et al., 2008). In other words, individuals who get higher scores in the Neuroticism dimension may have more difficulties with making career decisions.

On top of that, studies have shown that individuals who have more energetic and optimistic views tend to have less personality-related career decision-making difficulties (Saka et al., 2008). In other words, people with higher scores in the Extraversion dimension are more likely to make right career decisions. Moreover, according to Bing and Lounsbury, Extraversion dimension is a valid predictor of employees' future career success, especially those who hold positions that related to social interaction (2000). In other words, sales men, police officers and managers with higher scores in this dimension would have better performance in their jobs (Bing & Lounsbury, 2000).

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Additionally, previous researches also show that Openness to Experience is positive related to career success in consulting and training professions (Hamilton, 1988). Moreover, according to Salgado (1997), Agreeableness dimension is also a significant predictor of career success. It is found that high scores in this dimension are related to training success (Salgado, 1997). In other words, individuals who plan to do teamwork and customer service in their future careers might need higher scores in Agreeableness dimension. Finally, according to Zhao and Seibert (2006), individuals with higher scores on both Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience dimension may believe entrepreneurial activities more satisfying and fulfilling than others. Also, these individuals have higher potential to actually establish new ventures and become entrepreneurs (Zhao & Seibert, 2006).

Implications for Practice and Discussion

Implications for Practice

Current research findings have shown that there existed positive direct significant relationships between personality and employee performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002; Tett et al., 1991) and also between personality and P-O fits (Barrick & Mount, 2000; Barrick et al., 2002; Chen & Schmitt, 2002). In other words, the Big Five personality measures could provide positive facilities in job performance, organization culture fits, career development, and employee selection. Moreover, according to previous studies, the Big Five Personality traits are considered to be stable and steady throughout individual's work life span (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). In this case, the Big Five Personality could be a relatively stable and valid measurement model to help companies and individuals predict themselves or employees' future career success and work performance during selection and career development.

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Therefore, it is recommended that organizations, practitioners, human resources (HR) professionals and government officers should put the findings and conclusions that related to the Big Five Model of personality into practice. In this case, they can improve employee job performance, which in turn can lead to higher productivity and better organizational development. Furthermore, by understanding and applying the Big Five Model of personality, human resources development (HRD) professionals can better justify their efforts in designing appropriate learning and performance improvement interventions, as well as help organizations and employees structure better relations between professions and personality traits.

Discussion

However, the scores of the Big Five personality test are not the only criterion to predict individuals' job performance and future success. And the validity of this model can be influenced by cultural differences, gender differences, and languages that composed the test, however, studies regarding these relationships are quite few (Chiaburu & Oh, 2011; Hudson, Roberts, & Lodi-Smith, 2012). In the future, it is encouraged that more empirical and cross-culture researches should be carried out to explore the authenticity of these relationships.

Moreover, there are still disagreements about the relationship between organizational culture and personality traits. According to some previous researches, people with higher scores in the Neuroticism dimension tend to have no belief and faith on others (Goldberg, 1990), and have no social expertise to handle the situations that claim to take control (Judge et al., 2002). In other words, these researches show that Neuroticism has a negative impact on teamwork and organizational commitment. However, other studies, such as Digman (1997) and Hogan (2003), believe that Neuroticism is positively related to person-organization fit. Furthermore, although many companies have been using personality tests or personality

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questionnaires as references before personnel selection (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011), the relationships between job performance and some personality dimensions, such as Neuroticism and Agreeableness, are still unclear. In this case, it is recommended that the relationship between personality traits and job performance should be studied by future researches and practices. Also, more researches should be carried out to explore the relationship between personality and organizational culture.

Finally, most of the primary studies in this field are based on a cross-sectional research design (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge et al., 2002; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Tett et al., 1991). A cross-sectional design does not need to show causal conclusions, but understanding the causal relationship between personality traits and career experience is crucial for further researches. On top of that, most of the primary cross-sectional conclusions in this area are based on the fact that the personality dimensions exhibit considerable consistency (McCrae & Costa, 1997), but only few studies take longitudinal approaches to prove the stability of personality traits (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011). In this case, it is encouraged that future studies should take longitudinal approaches in to consideration, and researchers should try to explore the causal direction between personality traits and career development.

Conclusion

According to the basis findings of this research, the Big Five personality model is highly correlated with work performance, person-organization fits and career decision-making. Based on the above explorations, it can be expected that: (1) Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness and Extraversion have a positive impact on employee work performance and job satisfaction. (2) Agreeableness has a weak positive correlation with work performance and job satisfaction. (3) Neuroticism is negatively related with work performance and satisfaction. (4)

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Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism are positively related with teamwork and organizational commitment. (5) Extraversion and Openness to Experience are positive associated with individual ascendancy. (6) Neuroticism has a positive impact on career decision-making difficulties, while Extraversion is negative related with decision-making difficulties. (7) Extraversion dimension is positive related to future career success in social interaction. (8) Openness to Experience is positive related to future career success in consulting and training professions. (9) Agreeableness dimension is positive related to future career success in teamwork and customer service. (10) Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience are positive related to future career success in entrepreneurial activities.

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