

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND ADAPTIVE PERFORMANCE: A CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE IN MALAYSIA HEALTHCARE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework on the personality traits and adaptive performance of nurses working at the public hospitals in Malaysia. Current paper is intended to examine the relationship between personality traits using Big Five personality elements and its impact to adaptive performance. Moreover, five personality traits have been used as independent variables which are “openness to experience, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness and extraversion”. Adaptive performance acts as a dependent variable. The findings of the study are supported by the personality theories which is Affective Event Theory (AET). It is assumed to form significant relationship between the personality traits and adaptive performance. For a practical implication, intense focus should be stressed to the factors that can increase employees’ performance especially in public sector to assure the employees is performed well and can deliver the best service to customers. Social implication for this study is the application of adaptive performance will drive to harmonious working environment which can influence to healthy social life, and practice fast respond to reduce the patients’ complaints regarding staff performance in public hospitals.

Key words: *Adaptive Performance, Big Five Personality, Malaysia healthcare sector*

INTRODUCTION

Recently, today's organizations are faced with dynamic and changing working environments due to several factors like globalization, modernization and others. Furthermore, living in the modernization era is very challenging. Almost everything has changed from the previous time. This is important for today's worker to adapt with these changes. Due to this, the demand for adaptive workers has increased drastically as today's work place is also changed (Edwards & Morrison, 1994; Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999; Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). Even though adaptive concept is previously debatable among researchers and industry practitioners to understand more about adaptability in the work environment, however the gradual change in current workforce drive scholars to study more about adaptive performance (Pulakos et al, 2000).

Similarly, health care sector is also facing with these changes and create new challenging situation to all employees. For example, in public hospitals, employees have to deal with new situation when unexplored diseases have been found while the specialist around the world still

struggling to find a cure for it. For example, in 2016 health sector around the world was awakened by in Zika Virus that can cause fatal heart and nerve damage especially to children and pregnant women (US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention). Furthermore, not only new diseases are still unexplored, technology advancement also one of the changes occur nowadays. Changing in technologies advancement continue to modify the work's nature (Patrickson, 1987; Thach & Woodman, 1994) demanding nowadays employees to learn different ways to complete their work.

In the other word, not only they have to learn new things in using of new technology, technology advancement also can create a new challenge to all public hospitals' employees. For instance, when they have to deal with rumors spread by the dissatisfied patients in social media. Patient's disappointment towards the services provided will be spread fast and became viral in media social within second. This situation may effect to employee's feeling that will subsequently effect employee's performance. Some of the cases not only involved the employee's performance but also public hospital's reputation. Due to these changes in workplace, it is important to all public hospital's employees to prepare themselves wisely to handle this challenge by control their emotion and carry good personalities under any circumstances in order to maintain their performance.

Thus, personality have significant relationship to worker's performance in workplace. Especially, for employees involved in critical job like emergency unit such as firemen, nurses, doctors, army, and police. This is because they are dealing with different working condition every day since emergency cases are unpredictable and unexpected. Specially to nurses who are direct contact with critical illness and often death (Le Blanc, Bakker, Peeters, Van Heesch, & Schaufeli, 2001) when working with patients in public hospital. Thus, the concept of adaptive performance is relevant to be conducted in healthcare sector since it proves that health care sector as one of the important sector in each country (United Nation Statistic Department) especially in Malaysia's context. Thus, maintaining the performance and quality of the service, especially nurses in public hospitals should be highlighted and improved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of nursing job is a stressful occupation (Karimi et al, 2014). Nurses job is a part of stressful job because they are involving in irregular working hours or depends on shifts, almost stand on their feet and always in rush condition (Yavas et al, 2014). Additionally, the nature their jobs participate in emotional stress which require them to portray emotional display actions; always smiling even dealing with troublesome patients, prohibiting undesirable behaviors to patients and suppressing negative feelings (Hochschild, 2012).

Due to this requirement on their job, each nurse has to have the correct personality to match with this job requirement that strongly needed to control their emotion to ensure they performance is at satisfied level. Arguably by previous researcher, personality is described as "*cognitive and behavioral patterns that show stability over time and across situations*" (e.g. Cattell, 1965). Hence, as suggested by previous studies and proved by personality's scholars, it is sensible to assume that personality traits have influence to personal values and attitudes (Olver and Mooradian, 2003).

Additionally, according to Bartone et al (2008), adaptive performance is "*a constellation of personality qualities found to characterize people who remain healthy and continue to perform well under a range of stressful conditions*". Due to this, this study uses Big Five

Personality which consists of the following traits: “emotional stability, extroversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness” (e.g. Digman, 1990).

Due to its familiarity and wide acceptance, Big Five has been used extensively in current organizations and academic research (e.g. Barrick and Mount, 1991; Hertz and Donovan, 2000; Judge et al., 1999; Judge et al., 2002; Salgado, 1997). In fact, it has been argued that most or all dimensions in “Big Five” personality (i.e., “Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience;” see Costa & McCrae, 1985) become effective predictor of work performance (Barrick & Mount, 1993) and across the variety types of professions (Riggio & Taylor ,2000) including nurses.

In addition, there are few previous researches studied the relationship between personality and performance (Mount et al 1998, Hough and Ones 2001) and the relationship between personality and nursing (Gambles et al,2003; Murrells et al,2008). Despite many studies have been conducted in both marketing literature and psychology to assess the relationship between personality traits and performance, however data about this relationship in the health care sector is limited (Mosadeghrad, 2014). Previous study by Echchakoui (2013) used Big Five personality as to examine relationship between personality and performance using adaptive behavior as mediator to study call center employees. In addition, there is also a study of adaptive performance using cross cultural competence among Jordanian military leaders (Shdaifat,2014). Also, even though a lot of previous studies studied about the relationship between personality trait to contextual and task performance (Geukes et al, 2017; Speckbacher et al, 2014; Barrick et al, 2001; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Tett & Burnett, 2003) but only limited studies study about adaptive performance since it is new facet of performance. Hameed (2016) also agreed that only few studies studied about personality and adaptive performance since it was new construct of performance.

Thus, up to researcher’s knowledge also, until now there is dearth of research finding studied the relationship between Big Five personality traits and adaptive performance of nurses in a single study especially in Asia context, to be specific Malaysia. Thus, this study attempt to fill the research knowledge to identify the personality traits, that would be reasonable predictor of employees’ adaptive performance in a critical unit occupation; nurses in emergency department of public hospitals.

To support this framework, the relevant theory that lies between personality and performance is Affective Event Theory (AET). AET is introduced by organizational psychologists; Howard M. Weiss and Russell Cropanzano in 1996. It explains on how job performance can be influenced by employee’s emotions and moods (Thompson & Phua, 2012). AET explains the relationship between employees' internal influences such as cognitions, emotions and mental states with their reactions to particular incidents, in which involves in their work place that may affect their job’s performance. This is match with the nurses’ job in emergency department which require them to portray the good manner in order the perform well even in critical and stressful working place. Furthermore, previous reviews of the literature found that personality have a correlation with job performance (Hersen, 2005; Hertz and Donovan, 2000) in which theory suggested that affective work behaviors are depends on employee’s mood and emotions. In addition, according to AET, worker’s performance is affected by their emotional reaction based on what happens in their surrounding during performing a job. This means, workers’ reactions to any events or conditions are characterized by their personal dispositions; personality and moods. With this regards, a person who is unstable emotion responds directly to negative events while those who are in emotionally stable will react positively. Hence, Big Five is a parsimonious model that differentiates individuals’

dispositions (Rolland & De Fruyt, 2003). Thus, personality research on the Big Five Personality and the employees' adaptive performance supports AET.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the framework designed below, there are two variables used in this study which are independent variable and dependent variable.

Independent variables for this research consist of five dimensions of personality traits' which are; "Openness to experience, Emotional stability, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Extraversion". Finally, adaptive performance acts as dependent variable with eight suitable dimensions which are; "solving problems creatively, dealing with uncertain work situations, learning new tasks, technologies and procedures, demonstrating interpersonal adaptability, demonstrating physical-oriented adaptability, handling work stress and handling emergencies and crisis situations and demonstrating cultural adaptability".

Below is the framework as mentioned above:

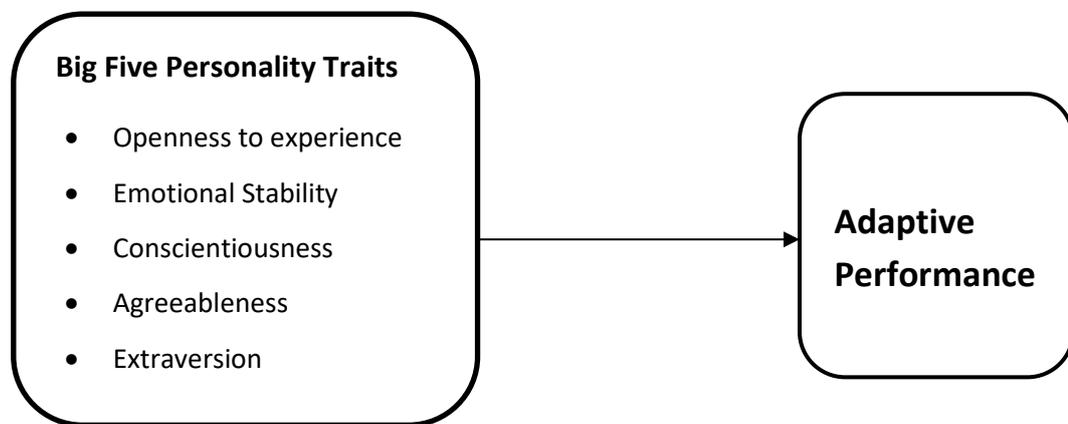


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Although, there are a lot of predictors that have been recognized as essential determinants to employee performance, current study is aim to achieve the objective as to study the relationship between personality and adaptive performance using Big Five Personality dimensions. Thus, the research proposition are as follows:

P1: There is a relationship between extraversion and adaptive performance

P 2: There is a relationship between agreeableness and adaptive performance

P 3: There is a relationship between emotional stability and adaptive performance

P 4: There is a relationship between conscientiousness and adaptive performance

P 5: There is a relationship between openness to experience and adaptive performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As health care sector plays an important role in everyone's life especially public hospitals. Thus, this sector is very crucial to be highlighted in order to improve its efficiency and services. In addition, this study may also help to reduce the number of patients' complaints regarding staff's performance in public hospitals especially nurses. The implication from this study is to help Ministry of Health to allocate the right person with the right personality to perform a nurse's job. This is important to ensure they are willing to perform extra role even in uncertainty and critical condition.

More research in this area of adaptive performance especially regarding employee's behavior in today's workforce is encouraged to further the study in different context and job scope.

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