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The Relationship between Personality Dimensions and Employee Job Commitment in Private Higher Learning Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of personality dimensions (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness) on job commitment. This study also aims to examine how gender differences and job level are associated with job commitment. This study adopted a cross-sectional design and collected quantitative data from 144 managerial and non-managerial level employees working in private higher learning institutes in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Findings of this study reveal that "conscientiousness" has a significant effect on job commitment. Among the moderators, "job level" also indicates a significant influence between personality dimensions and employees' job commitment. Private higher learning institutes in Malaysia should therefore focus on providing a supportive environment for employees to promote goal focus, dutifulness, self-discipline, and competence seeking behavior, which together leads to high job performance, career success, motivation, and job satisfaction.

Keywords: Personality Dimensions, Job Commitment, Job Level, Gender
JEL Classifications: I23, M

1. INTRODUCTION

Human capital or people are one of the valuable assets that are important to organizations because the capabilities or skills that they possess are difficult to imitate, rare, and cannot be copied (David, 2007). When a skill or capability cannot be copied and is hard to get, it can become a source of competitive advantage especially for an organization to move further. Elements such as skills, competencies, and capabilities produce greater outcomes allowing an individual to achieve high productivity and to be committed to the job in an organization. Higher productivity could also be achieved when individuals possess characteristics of a good personality.

According to Mowday et al. (1982), commitment consists of three parts of definition such as a strong belief and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to put forth effort on an organization, and a strong desire to remain in the organization. Thus, it is the relative strength of an individual's identification and involvement in organizations (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005). The employee will contribute more towards the organization's activities because of a strong attachment to the organization. To establish commitment, people need communication, training programs, education, and initiatives to increase the involvement and ownership and the development of a performance and reward management system (Tella et al., 2007). In another perspective, Northcraft and Neale (1996) note that commitment is an attitude that reflects an employee's loyalty to an organization and an ongoing process through which organizational members express their concern for the organization and continue the success and well-being. However, a similar definition of commitment also focuses on the importance of behavior by creating three features of behavior such as the visibility to act, the level to which the outcomes are irreversible, and the degree to which a person carries out an action voluntarily (Salancik, 1977). Essentially, committed employees are expected to extend greater efforts on the job and have a direct impact on the organization (Silva, 2006). Aremu and Adeyoju (2003) define job commitment as the degree of

commitment to one's profession or occupation and it can be an individual's motivation to work towards personal advancement in his/her profession. This study therefore intends to examine the effect of personality dimensions (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness) on job commitment; and examine the effect of gender differences and job level on job commitment among the managerial and non-managerial level employees working in private higher learning institutes in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The big five of personality dimensions represents the taxonomy to illustrate an individual's personality. It consists of the following traits such as extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. According to a previous study, an important relationship exists between these personality dimensions and a few elements such as job commitment, productivity, and performance in an organization (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Hurtz and Donovan, 2000). It shows that the more consistent the characteristics and the more frequently a trait occurs in diverse situations, the more important that trait is in describing the individual (Niehoff, 2006; Robie et al., 2005; Leung and Bozionelos, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2003). Personality could be a motivational driver for employees to achieve the work values in organizations. It refers to the employees' attitude regarding what is right about what an individual should expect in the workplace. Besides, it refers to an individual's personality with a unique combination of psychological traits needed to describe a person (Robbins and Coulter, 2002).

2.1. Extroversion

According to Niehoff (2006), extroversion can be described as an individual who is comfortable with social relationships such as warm, outgoing, assertive, and active. It shows that people under this trait will seek new relationships and volunteer in helping others. Employees who have high scores on extroversion would likely be engaged in a central position of work, enjoy being with people, have full energy, be enthusiastic and action oriented. They also prefer the outside world of people and things. At the same time, they tend to be high performers who are committed to the job and organization. Most of them will look for opportunities that lead to the satisfaction of their needs such as status, recognition, and power and this may cause them to have expectations that the organization would provide them with work and job that meet their needs (Bozionelos, 2004). Moreover, individuals with high extroversion will harmonize the interpersonal communication through positive emotions (Matzler et al., 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Extroversion has a significant relationship with job commitment.

2.2. Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to individuals who stick to the norms of appropriate behavior such as trustworthy, modest, compliant, and altruistic (Niehoff, 2006). On the other point of view, agreeableness refers to the nature of trust among others, being friendly and sensitive (Leung and Bozionelos, 2004). It could also be considered the enhancement of personal worth and esteem (Bozionelos, 2004) and could make someone have a high value and work ethics. This can be seem when agreeable employees who stress on high value in getting along with others and have optimistic views of human nature by believing that people are honest and well mannered. Thus, agreeableness is significantly related to job commitment.

H_2: Agreeableness has a significant relationship with job commitment.

2.3. Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to the tendency to experience negative emotions or emotional instability such as anger, anxiety and depression (Niehoff, 2006). In another study (Vakola et al., 2004), negative emotions have been found to affect work activities. This can be seen through the resentment and resignation experienced by managers who feel anger, cynicism, and anxiety. In line with that, Leung and Bozionelos (2004) state that neuroticism could be defined as being nervous, pessimistic, and worried with low confidence. Employees with confidence will less likely develop ambitions and it would be difficult to set a performance target.

H_3: Neuroticism has a significant relationship with job commitment.

2.4. Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness refers to goal focus, dutifulness, self-discipline, and competence (Niehoff, 2006). Apart from that, it can also be considered an obligation towards work that leads to high job performance, career success, motivation, and job satisfaction (Judge and Ilies, 2002). Generally, the other characteristics of conscientiousness are people who prefer to follow a schedule, such as orders, never make a mess of things, and never avoid the duties. Here, conscientiousness significantly relates to job commitment.

H_4: Conscientiousness will have a significant relationship with job commitment.

2.5. Openness

Referring to Niehoff (2006), individuals with a high level of openness to experience will have more opportunities in learning new perspectives and dealing with ambiguous situations. Bozionelos (2004) suggests that openness to experience includes the diversity of interest, receptivity of new ideas, flexibility of thought, and tendency to develop idealistic ideas and goals. In addition, they are intellectually curious, appreciative of art, close to people and are aware of others' feelings. Tallman and Bruning (2008) mention that employees would seek for challenging and interesting work and would expect the organization to satisfy their needs. Thus, openness to experience is significantly related to job commitment.

H_5: There is a significant relationship between openness to experience and job commitment.

2.6. Moderators: Gender and Job Level

The differences between women and men relates to how they define themselves in their world. Women possess feminine traits such warmth, kindness, selflessness, sensitivity, nurturance,

interdependence, and sympathetic. Compared to men, they tend to be independent, autonomous, aggressive, forceful, rational, competitive, decisive, strong, self confident and superior (Kundu and Rani, 2007). Therefore, gender significantly moderates the relationship between personality dimensions and job commitment.

H_6: Gender significantly moderates the relationship between personality dimensions and job commitment.

As mentioned by Singh et al., (2004), the importance of a job in an individual's life and the degree to which the person identifies with the job in terms of position, are both integral parts that lead to commitment. Here, it shows that a position could be considered one's self image when the people are highly committed in the job. Thus, job level significantly moderates the relationship between personality dimensions and job commitment.

H_7: Job level significantly moderates the relationship between personality dimensions and job commitment.

In this study, job level can be described as top managers, middle managers, first line managers, and non-managerial employees. Top managers typically refer to the people who hold titles such as chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and managing director. In addition, the middle managers are the people who manage the first line activity and have titles such as department head, division manager, and project leader. Then, the other job level in organizations is the first line managers refer to the lowest level of organization that manages the work of non-managerial employees (Robbins and Coulter, 2002). Therefore, managerial and non-managerial levels significantly relate to job commitment.

H_8: There is a significant relationship between managerial and non-managerial levels towards job commitment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional design to examine the effect of personality dimensions (i.e., extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and conscientiousness) on job commitment. The sample consisted of 144 employees in managerial and non-managerial levels from private higher learning institutions (PHLI) with a 72% response rate. Both male and female have the same population number in terms of percentage, which represents 50% each. Other than that, more than half of the respondents who responded to this study are working as a non-managerial staff which is 72.9%, whereas the rest are working in a managerial level as a chief operation officer (4.9%), manager (10.4%), and head of department (11.8%).

These were assessed with a 25 items scale developed by Geller (2004). Respondents indicated the extent to which (1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree) they determine the perception of the degree to which each situation is presented in their job. In this part, the items explain the traits such as extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. In each dimension, there are two items contrary or being reversed to the actual traits. The purpose of having the contrary elements of traits is to make it more balanced in predicting the relationship towards job commitment.

The 10 items were developed by Tallman and Brunning (2008), and it uses the five point response scales (1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree). In this part, the respondent will be asked on how much they personally value each element. All of the 10 items are based on the job itself and its condition.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this study, the multiple and hierarchical regression analysis is carried out to determine the relationship between the independent variables (extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) and the dependent variable (job commitment). In addition, the purpose is to determine the moderating effects by the moderators (job level and gender).

As depicted from Table 1, the results of the statistical analysis for multiple linear regression models can be seen. At 5% significant level, with F = 12.569; significant = 0.000, the model's R^2 is at 0.313, which means that 31.3% of the five independent variables can explain the dependent variable (job commitment).

In Table 2 presented, at the 5% significant level, conscientiousness (t = 3.459; significant = 0.001) has a significant effect on employees' job commitment in PHLIs. As for extroversion (t = 0.783; significant = 0.435), agreeableness (t = 1.875; significant = 0.063), openness to experience (t = 1.766; significant = 0.080) and neuroticism (t = 0.310; significant = 0.757), the relationships are not statistically significant at the chosen 5% level of significance. According to the table, the standardized coefficient for conscientiousness is 0.316, agreeableness is 0.171, openness is 0.152, extroversion is 0.064, and neuroticism is 0.023. Based on the standardized coefficients noted in Table 3, the effect of conscientiousness is relatively higher than other selected personality dimensions examined in this study.

The result shows that r^2 at Step 2 and Step 3 is at 0.313 and 0.321 respectively. Meanwhile, the "Significant F Change" value for Step 2 and Step 3 are no longer significant, which indicate that gender is not significantly moderate the relationship between personality dimensions and employees' job commitment.

From Table 4, it shows that r^2 at Steps 2 and 3 are at 0.324 and 0.401, respectively. The "Significant F Change" value for Step 2 and Step 3 are significant at a 5% level. This indicates that job level is significantly moderate; the relationship between personality dimensions and employees' job commitment.

Based on the Table 5, the mean for managerial level is 4.0897 while for non-managerial level, it is 4.3638. According to the

Table 1: Model summary of multiple linear regression analysis

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Significant (F)
1	0.559	0.313	0.288	12.569	0.000

Table 2. Regressions coefficients

Variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant	Hypotheses
	Beta	Standard error	Beta			
Constant	1.679	0.513		3.276	0.001	
Extroversion	0.055	0.071	0.064	0.783	0.435	Not supported
Agreeableness	0.173	0.092	0.171	1.875	0.063	Not supported
Openness	0.161	0.091	0.152	1.766	0.080	Not supported
Conscientiousness	0.292	0.085	0.316	3.459	0.001	Supported
Neuroticism	0.034	0.109	0.023	0.310	0.757	Not supported

Table 3: Gender with independent variables

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Significant	B	Significant	B	Significant
Extroversion	0.055	0.435	0.056	0.431	0.054	0.604
Agreeableness	0.173	0.063	0.173	0.064	0.198	0.150
Openness	0.161	0.080	0.161	0.082	0.055	0.728
Conscientiousness	0.292	0.001	0.292	0.001	0.338	0.008
Neuroticism	0.034	0.757	0.033	0.766	0.142	0.392
Gender			−0.013	0.879	0.422	0.697
Moderator 1 (Extroversion*Gender)					0.035	0.824
Moderator 2 (Agreeableness*Gender)					−0.059	0.771
Moderator 3 (Openness*Gender)					0.160	0.415
Moderator 4 (Conscientiousness*Gender)					−0.094	0.593
Moderator 5 (Neuroticism*Gender)					−0.200	0.379
R^2	0.313		0.313		0.321	
Adjusted R^2	0.288		0.283		0.264	
Significant F change	0.000		0.879		0.908	

Table 4: Job level with independent variables

Variables	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Significant	B	Significant	B	Significant
Extroversion	0.055	0.435	0.061	0.390	0.028	0.724
Agreeableness	0.173	0.063	0.142	0.134	0.276	0.023
Openness	0.161	0.080	0.175	0.057	0.068	0.520
Conscientiousness	0.292	0.001	0.287	0.001	0.146	0.113
Neuroticism	0.034	0.757	0.050	0.646	0.005	0.966
Job level			−0.154	0.134	−3.188	0.008
Moderator 6 (Extroversion*Job level)					0.098	0.550
Moderator 7 (Agreeableness*Job level)					−0.385	0.050
Moderator 8 (Openness *Job level)					0.246	0.248
Moderator 9 (Conscientiousness*Job level)					0.548	0.007
Moderator 10 (Neuroticism*Job level)					0.374	0.158
R^2	0.313		0.324		0.401	
Adjusted R^2	0.288		0.295		0.351	
Significant F change	0.000		0.134		0.007	

Table 5: Independent sample t-test

Categories	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's test
Managerial	39	4.0897	0.90809	F value 20.232
Non managerial	105	4.3638	0.45513	Significant 0.018

Levene's test score, significant is 0.018 and F = 20.232. Here, it shows that the significant value is <5%, and there is a significant relationship between managerial and non-managerial levels. The results indicate that the non-managerial level is highly committed to their job. These findings have been supported by a study, which reports that most of the managerial levels are reluctant to be open to the organizations especially for their people (Gallen, 2006). This happens because of their personality in managerial positions that have a limited time to do so.

5. CONCLUSION

In line with the hypotheses, only conscientiousness has a significant relation to the job commitment. Based on the descriptive analysis, the mean for conscientiousness is 3.80. This indicates that most of the respondents are strongly agreeable and have high knowledge that job commitment plays a role in an organization. This has been supported by Niehoff (2006) and Judge and Ilies (2002) who claim that conscientiousness are a strong trait and most consistent means to relate to job commitment. This can be seen when the individual is committed in doing the task right away with their initiative. To relate with the above, one of the factors that drove to the conscientiousness is achievement. Achievement is important to drive the inner motivation so that the people will be able to attain the goals. In order to perform the job better, they always have a

positive approach and focus on long term basis. Basically, they have the tendency to set goals for themselves and be accountable in whatever they do. Plus, they like to get feedback as to how well they are doing and show more initiative in exploring their environment (Parkinson et al., 2003).

Besides, this study has found that job level is significant to relate the personality dimensions and employees' job commitment. Both managerial and non-managerial levels have a significant relationship to job commitment. Based on the analysis, the non-managerial level is highly committed compared to the managerial level towards their job. Previous study has mentioned that most managerial levels are unwilling to be open to the organizations especially for their people. This happens because of their personality in managerial positions that has limited them from doing so. Meanwhile, through this finding, gender differences do not significantly moderate the relationship between personality dimensions and employees' job commitment.

Clearly, there are a number of limitations inherent to this study. First, some of the questionnaires were not fully responded by the respondents. 200 questionnaires were distributed but only 144 were usable. This has made the sample size become smaller. In other areas, some of the respondents do not fully understand the items in the questionnaire. This has created a difficulty to the researcher in interpreting the result. Second, since this study has focused on employees in PHLIs in Kota Kinabalu, the researcher has found that it is still not adequate in collecting the data. The reason is, not many PHLI are located near the Kota Kinabalu area.

Despite these limitations, it might be more interesting if the researcher could conduct in a wide area, for instance around Sabah. By doing this, the researcher will get more responses from the respondents. Besides, the researcher can broaden the study by comparing the personality aspects between public and PHLIs. Perhaps, they might have different views in terms of personality traits. Later on, the finding will be more interesting and maybe there will be new discovery related to the employees' job commitment. Other than that, the researcher needs to add more variables in this study because the R^2 shows we only achieved 31.3%, which is low. The reason is there might be other important variables that are not included in this study. Perhaps, the researcher can add more items or variables from the other personality aspects so that the model will be consider it as being strong.

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