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. This paper is designed to study 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 expected to produce significant relationship between the personality traits and adaptive performance. For a practical implication, deep focus should be given to the factors that can enhance employees’ performance especially in public sector to ensure the employees in their organization is fully performed and deliver the best service to customers. Social implication for this study is the application of adaptive performance will promote a healthy and positive working environment that can contribute to positive and healthy life in social community and practice fast respond to reduce the patients’ complaints regarding staff performance in public hospitals.

Keywords: Adaptive performance, Big Five Personality Traits

1.0 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 adaptability is not a new concept, the pace and types of change increasingly grow from time to time, which has caused academic researchers and industry practitioners become more interested to understand and enhancing adaptability in the work environment (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 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 alter the nature of work tasks (Patrickson, 1987; Thach & Woodman, 1994) requiring nowadays employees to learn new ways to perform their jobs. 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 close contact with severe illness, suffering, and death (Le Blanc, Bakker, Peeters, Van Heesch, & Schaufeli, 2001) when dealing 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.

2.0 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; they are on their feet most of the time and they are almost in a rush condition (Yavas et al, 2014). Furthermore, their jobs entail emotional stress. Their job requirement also is to portray emotional display actions like always smiling when dealing with unpleasant 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 refers to cognitive and behavioral patterns that show stability over time and across situations (e.g. Cattell, 1965). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that personality traits influence personal values and attitudes, as most recent empirical research has demonstrated (Olver and Mooradian, 2003).

Additionally, 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 (Bartone, Roland, Picano & Williams 2008). 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). Because of its validity and wide acceptance, the big five has been extensively utilized in recent organizational and other applied research (e.g. Barrick and Mount, 1991; Hurtz and Donovan, 2000; Judge et al., 1999; Judge et al., 2002; Salgado, 1997). In fact, it has been suggested that many or all of
the core “Big Five” personality factors (i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience; see Costa & McCrae, 1985) might be useful in predicting effective work performance (Barrick & Mount, 1993) and general personality constructs, such as those represented in the Big Five taxonomy, may indeed be predictive of performance in a variety of occupations (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 to examine the 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 among 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 predictive of employees’ adaptive performance for a specific occupation, that is 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 a model developed by organizational psychologists Howard M. Weiss and Russell Cropanzano in 1996. It explains how emotions and moods influence job performance (Thompson & Phua, 2012). The model explains the linkages between employees’ internal influences (e.g., cognitions, emotions, mental states) and their reactions to incidents that occur in their work environment that affect their 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, in several reviews of the literature, personality has been found to have a significant effect on job performance (Hersen, 2005; Hurtz and Donovan, 2000). The theory proposes that affective work behaviors are explained by employee mood and emotions. According to AET worker’s performance is influenced by their emotional reaction to whatever happens to them on their job. This means, workers’ reactions to these work events are also influenced by their personal dispositions (personality and moods). A person who is not emotionally stable responds solidly to negative events as compared to those who are emotionally stable. Big Five is a parsimonious model that distinguishes between differences among individuals’ dispositions. (Rolland & De Fruyt, 2003). Thus, personality research on the Big Five Personality and the employees’ adaptive performance supports AET.

3.0 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:

![Big Five Personality Traits](image)

**Figure 1: Proposed Framework**

### 4.0 Research Propositions

Even there are a lot of factors that have been recognized as important determinants of employee performance, this study is aim to reach 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.

### 5.0 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.

6.0 References


