

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND DIFFERENCES OF GENERATIONS: DO THEY AFFECT THE PUBLIC SERVANTS' JOB PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract

Each individual has vary and unique personality and characteristics. This paper studies on the personality traits as the contributor to the job performance for employees compared to three generations; Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y in public service setting. The instrument used is Mini International Personality Item Pool (Mini IPIP) which is adapted from Donnellan, Oswald, Baird and Lucas (2006), which is the established measures based on past literature to minimize the items' variance pertaining to patterns of the relationship. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to three generations of public servants in Putrajaya. A total of 59 respondents were involved in this study. Data was analyzed using Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 to investigate the relationship among all variables involved. The results provide evidence that personality traits indicate a positive influence towards job performance based on dimensions accordingly to generations.

Keywords: *Personality Trait, Job Performance, Generations*

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Introduction

The main concept of *Merakyatkan Perkhidmatan Awam* (or *Popularizing the Public Service*), has been introduced in public service as to enhance the commitment and determination of public servants in providing better service to Malaysian citizens. As the community of Malaysia today has acquired themselves with high levels of education and facilities for accessing information almost everywhere, then it is imperative for public administration to accept their views and criticism and making improvements though scarifying more in the effort of building better nation for future progress.

Hence, the various issues regarding the availability of public servants and a close relationship to the service provided to the citizens in Malaysia, the government looks upon human resource development and performance as mainly important in correlation to realization of the government's goals. Since the human capital in the organization has been highlighted, the

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attention in this study is the factor of personality itself. The focus on an individual whom having an internal and external nature which is different to each other towards performing job is highlighted in this study.

As there were differences of generations working together in a workplace in current Malaysian civil service, Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y might bring impact on the variability of personality traits in them. Echchakoui (2013) indicate that “*personality traits are a critical factor of employee performance*”. There is an interest of this study to have a more profound look on how an employee reacts to his job, with the parallel study of three generations as stated. As differences of generations start entering workplace today (Haynes, 2011), it can be said that managing various group of employees in an organization is one of the vital issues need to discussed.

Literature Review

Job Performance

Rothmann and Coetzer (2003) defined job performance as “a multi-dimensional construct which indicates how well employees perform their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they show in solving problems”. In reality, public servants in Malaysia are placed in various agencies and departments under the supervision of the various ministries that have their own scope of work. As challenges are continuously posed by the publics, it is hoped that through this placement, the civil servants’ performance, the effectiveness of their job interest, their responsibility, work conditions and also the services delivered to the public are measured, to which their best level of performance is calibrated, and in which they are identified with and accountable to.

It is undeniable that each organization is keen on achieving their goals in measuring the level of job performance, but still considers human element to achieve them (Abdel-Razek, 2011). If a worker has a positive work attitude with the allocation of support from the organizational commitment; it might help to increase the job satisfaction (Susanty, Miradipta and Jie, 2013).

The conceptual job performances can be visualized by considering any task given by the superior, and the employee has his or her own responsibility to perform and meet the expectation they required. As for the task performance, it refers to the patterns of behaviors that are directly involved in producing goods or services and are related to the organizational support (Jankingthong and Rurkkhum, 2012; Johnson and Meade, 2010; and Kahya, 2007). Such being the case, this study grab the idea on how to indicate the job performance among employees (specifically refer to public servants).

Personality Traits

Personality can be explains as an individual’s preferred or typical way of behaving, thinking and feeling (Wong, Gardiner, Lang and Coulon, 2008). Personality traits can affect the job productivity, performance and an individual behavior. Each individual has different personalities with a significant relationship in personality traits in previous study (Askarian and Eslami, 2013).

Personality is not fixed, said to change accordingly due to economic factors such as income, job status and wage determination with at least more interested to involve changes in life satisfaction and achievements (Boyce, Wood and Powdthavee, 2013). Hence, personality is influenced by the environmental factor, not static and may change verily in line to the situation. In addition, it is assume that different people with different kind of personality might see conflict from different perspectives (Hashim, Wan Edura, Othman, Hamzah and Sunai, 2012). That is one of the reasons that personalities of each individual complement each other in the organization too. This paper assumed that personality traits had positive influence on job performance. Past researches had looked into the relationship between personality and job performance (Askarian and Eslami, 2013; Abdullah et al., 2013; Chu et al., 2013; Hashim et al., 2012). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between personality traits and job performance;

The main personality trait is synchronized with the five (5) dimensions which are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Neuroticism or the emotional stability (Berings, De Fruyt and Bouwen, 2003) can bring negative moods for employees (Hashim et al., 2012). It is defined as the dimension of a person's normal personality in experiencing the negative effects, such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). This group of people are steadfast, dependable, and stable, yet uneasy, depressed, nervous, and upset (Askarian and Eslami, 2013). According to Abdullah, Rashid and Omar (2013), Askarian and Eslami (2013), and Cox-Fuenzalida, Swickert and Hittner (2004), neuroticism has negative relationship on job performance, whether on task or contextual type. Therefore:

H₂: There is a negative relationship between neuroticism and job performance;

Extraversion is described as sociability, assertiveness, activity, talkativeness, energetic, and optimistic (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003), power, positive emotionality and interpersonal involvement (Block, 2010). The positive traits are outgoing person, talkative, assertive, and gregarious whereby the negative side is cautious, retiring and shy (Askarian and Eslami, 2013). As for this personality traits, Abdullah et al. (2013) found that extraversion has a significant and positive relationship and it is a good predictor of job performance for the employees. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H₃: There is a significant relationship between extraversion and job performance;

Openness to experience is defined as the active imagination (Hashim et al., 2012; Abdullah, Rashid and Omar, 2013), aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese and Thoresen (2004) and Mohan and Mulla (2013) found that the relationship is significant towards job performance and contributes to the following hypotheses assumptions.

H₄: There is a significant relationship between openness to experience and job performance;

The agreeableness dimension refers to the *altruistic, sympathetic to others, eager to help them, and in return, believes that others will be equally helpful* (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). This personality dimensions are lovers, however, do not really care to others, selfish, and difficult to adhere to compliance (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig and Dollard, 2002). Echchakoui (2013), Askarian and Eslami (2013), Cook (2008), and Rothmann and Coetzer (2003) found that the agreeableness is the best predictor for job performance in their studies and give significant result between the relationship. Therefore, based on the previous studies, the following hypothesis is posited:

H₅: There is a significant relationship between agreeableness and job performance;

Conscientiousness is defined as the *purposeful, strong-willed, and determined person with self-controlled of planning, organizing, and responsible on tasks given* (Mohan and Mulla, 2013; Askarian and Eslami, 2013; Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). Conscientiousness person is conflict avoidance and they find that conscientiousness is the strongest and a consistent predictor of performance motivation (Blickle et al., 2012; Hashim et al., 2012; Blickle et al., 2008). According to Abdullah et al. (2013), Hashim et al. (2012) and Thoresen et al. (2004), they revealed that there is a positive relationship between conscientiousness and job performance. Hence:

H₆: There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and job performance;

Differences of Generations

Changing demographic trends means a unique characteristics with variety generations working together, have unique opportunities and challenges. According to Lin and Huang (2008), managers identify good combinations of differences of generations to achieve effective job. Hence, it is assumed that the positive attitude help to increase the job satisfaction among the employees and lead to greater performance of a worker in an organization (Susanty and Miradipta, 2013).

Generation is a group of people having more or less the same year of birth, age categories and sharing life activities in each of their development stages and these groups are distinguishable from one another. Each group is formed according to the way they have grown up and have a unique experience respectively according to their generations (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Baby Boomers, who was born between year 1946 and 1964, the coming age of civil rights era are referred to Baby Boomers (Bennett, Pitt and Price, 2012), Gen X whom were born between 1965 and 1978 (Bennett et al., 2012) and Gen Y, or known as Millennials, the second largest generation (Shamsul Bahri, 2012) born between 1979 and 2000 (Bennett et al., 2012) is classified as having a participative approach to work and prefer to achieve a balance between work and family in their life (Bennett et al., 2012).

Baby Boomers is seen as goal oriented and work harder in the workplace (Dries et al., 2008). They tend to be optimistic, being greater rationale in teamwork, even both at home and at work (Bennet et al., 2012) and have low loyalty value (Angeline, 2011). Gen X employees were looked as being committed to their job and well organized, as said to work smartly as compared to their seniors one (Kian and Wan Yusoff, 2012). This suits well with the concept of getting job done even though they were not working formally in the office (Fenzel, 2013).

Hence, this condition leads to benefits the employees and organization as they are capable to grab the job responsibility. As for Gen Y, they are opined to advance the continuity of the success of a working place and be responsible to their occupations in the future. They are open minded, optimistic, and always look forward in terms of work expectation such as higher salary, fast in getting promoted and have work life balance (Bissola and Imperatori, 2010; Dwyer, 2009). Other than that, this generation is the hard core users of IT related appliances (Bennett et al., 2012). Each of the hypotheses are tested for these three generations, which refer to the Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y of public servants. Hence;

H₇: There is a significant difference in job performance between the respondents who are in generation Y and generation X;

H₈: There is a significant difference in job performance between the respondents who are in generation X and Baby Boomers;

H₉: There is a significant difference in job performance between the respondents who are in generation Y and Baby Boomers

Methodology

Procedures

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to three generations respondents in eight public departments in Putrajaya. The researchers went to the organizations and personally gave the questionnaires to the contact person (officer in charge) who have dealt with researcher before. The research objective and guidelines to answer the questionnaires had been informed.

The researcher used established measures based on past literature to minimize the items' variance pertaining to patterns of the relationship. Job performance consists of two constructs; namely contextual and task performance. Contextual performance is measured by 16 items adapted from Motowidlo and Scotter (1994) while task performance is measured by 7 items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991). As for the personality traits, the scale items refer to the five dimensions; neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. It consists of 20 items scales of Mini International Personality Item Pool (Mini IPIP) which is adapted from Donnellan, Oswald, Baird and Lucas (2006). Respondents were asked to respond to the items by indicating their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

Sample

Purposive sampling method was utilized for the data collection stage among respondents. A set of questionnaire (refer to Set A) was given to the supervisors to rate his/her subordinates' job performance. The chosen supervisors then need to pass the questionnaires to each employee that had being rated with the second set of questionnaire (refer to Set B). The sets of questionnaires is given by numbers and alphabets coding for each supervisor to his/her subordinates. This stage had been done since the needs to get accurate three generations as respondents were met in this study. For instance, the first supervisor (coded as A) gives rating to four or three subordinates (1, 2, 3 or 4) respectively with any four contains of three generations, refer to Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y.

The unit of analysis in this study is dyad where the supervisors were excluded from the priority criteria (based on selective generations basis) and the public servants (refer to employees) must be from three generations with the range age between 20 to 59 years. In total, 59 questionnaires from 18 supervisors were analyzed from the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The 59 public servants involved in this study comprised of the supporting groups of employees, Grades 1 to 40. There were 32 (54.2%) male and 27 (45.8%) female public servants involved. In terms of the respondents' age, 21 (35.6%) are aged from 20 to 35 years old [refer to Gen Y], 19 (32.2%) are 36 to 50 years old [refer to Gen X] and 19 (32.2%) are 51 years old and above [refer to Baby Boomers]. In terms of marital status, 12 (20.3%) were single and the rest were married. The study consist of 45 (76.3%) Malays, five (8.5%) Chinese, seven (11.9%) Indian and two (3.4%) other races. In terms of educational level, a (1.7%) public servant hold a PMR certificate, 22 (37.3%) holding SPM certificate and Diploma holders respectively, 10 (16.9%) have STPM certificate, followed by four (6.8%) holding degrees. Majority of the public servants with the number of 32 (54.2%) were working for four to seven years followed by 15 (25.4%) public servants works for more than seven years and 12 (20.3%) of them have less than three years working experience.

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities Results and Correlations of Variables

Data was analyzed by using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation for each independent variables' dimension – Personality Traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) and dependent variable which is job performance, reliabilities results and correlations of variables. The reliability test of instruments which is conducted by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α) is reported. The alpha value of 0.7 and above may indicated the high level of internal consistency which is an ideally reliability coefficient that must be fulfill (Hee, 2014).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities Results and Correlations of Variables

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job Performance	3.84	0.53	(0.93)					
2. Neuroticism	2.72	0.56	0.317**	(0.62)				
3. Extraversion	3.51	0.72	0.083**	0.047**	(0.74)			
4. Openness	3.52	0.83	0.025**	0.055**	0.013**	(0.87)		
5. Agreeableness	3.34	0.64	0.027**	0.438**	0.081**	0.062**	(0.83)	
6. Conscientiousness	3.81	0.69	0.000	0.202**	0.000	0.026**	0.008	(0.80)

Note: The reliability results are in the parenthesis. ** $p < 0.01$

Based on the significant level of 0.01, it indicated that there exist relationship between neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience and agreeableness towards job performance. The positive value of Pearson correlation indicates the association between the

variables mentioned ($r = 0.317, 0.083, 0.025, 0.027$). Therefore, hypothesis 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are accepted.

Regression Result

Multiple regression was carried out to test the hypotheses in this paper. The results in Table 2 reveal that 69% (R Square = 0.690, F Value = 3.556) of the variance in job performance was explained by neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The result indicated that only the agreeableness ($\beta = 0.765, p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($\beta = 0.209, p < 0.01$) was positively associated to job performance. Hence, the hypothesis 4 and 5 were supported.

Table 2: Regression results of personality traits dimensions on job performance

Independent Variables	Standardized Beta	t
Neuroticism	-0.025	-0.084
Extraversion	-0.305	-1.183
Openness to Experience	0.209	0.660
Agreeableness	0.765	2.387
Conscientiousness	-0.248	-0.796
F Value	3.556	
R ²	0.690	
Adjusted R ²	0.496	

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The one-way ANOVA in this paper refers to the significance value that is greater than 0.05 which means the assumption of homogeneity of variance is met. The results of ANOVA for differences of generations with job performance are shown in Table 3. Based on the results, there was no significant difference in job performance between the respondents of all generations. Hence, hypotheses 7, 8 and 9 were rejected.

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons for Generations

		Sig. Value
Generation Y	Generation X	0.982
	Baby Boomers	0.954
Generation X	Generation Y	0.982
	Baby Boomers	0.994
Baby Boomers	Generation Y	0.954
	Generation X	0.994

Conclusion

This paper examines whether the differences of generations in public service and personality traits dimensions does affect public servants' job performance. Differences of generations at the workplace may result in the identification of an important influences at the workplace. The personality traits' instrument used is a reliable instrument that could possibly use by differences of generations in the future.

Although every generation is unique and have special characteristics, they were complementing each other as there were evidences through the findings of past studies. Managers need to look into the element of generation gap to create a better workplace environment due to collaborative working and use of strengths of all generations for a better work culture and environment to lead the government to better handle its manpower. The findings of this paper found that regardless of any generation does not reflect to the valid and reliable pattern of job performance in public service setting.

Even though it is suggested to be a good evidence for measurement, there exists a limitation where this study is specifically aimed for public servants in Malaysia. Therefore, it is recommended that further study should be conducted since personality traits and differences of generations in the workplace may indicate the employees' job performance and managing various groups in a workplace is not that easy.

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