

THE IMPACT OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ON COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT: THE STUDY ON FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT

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Abstract

Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, affective- motivational state of work-related well-being that is characterized by physical, emotional, and cognitive. Hence organizations may be better off improving on their employees with certain personality traits if they want to create an engaged workforce. This research investigates the impact of personality traits on cognitive engagement in a context of selected financial institutions in Trincomalee District. In this study, big five traits were used to measure various dimensions of personality which are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. To attain the objectives, the quantitative method was used and data were collected through questionnaires. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District and only 191 questionnaires were received from the respondents. The data were analysed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings exhibited that, personality traits of financial institutions in Trincomalee District is in high level because the mean value is 3.64 and also cognitive engagement of employees is in high level with the mean value of 4.6. Lastly, the regression analysis between personality traits and cognitive engagement indicated that 91% of total variance of cognitive engagement was explained by personality traits. In conclusion, it is observed that personality traits have influence on the employees' cognitive engagement. Results of this study suggest that the personality traits are useful for examining the dispositional source of cognitive engagement.

Keywords: *Personality traits, Cognitive engagement*

Introduction

In studying workers' well-being, attention has traditionally been focused on the construct of job satisfaction, a relatively passive experience of low to moderate activation. Recently, this type of well-being has been complemented by the more energized form referred to as work engagement. Engaged workers feel positively about their situation, but beyond mere satisfaction, they are motivated to expend energy on a task.

Work engagement is an integral factor for organizational performance and success,

as it seems to have a significant potential to affect employee retention, their loyalty and productivity, and also with some link to customer satisfaction, organizational reputation and the overall stakeholder value.

The cognitive engagement concerns employees' beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions (Kular et al., 2008).

Research Problem

Personality factors and cognitive engagement at workplace are yet as its

initial stages and has become an area for dearth of research. So, there is an empirical study in personality traits and cognitive engagement in financial institutions in Trincomalee District. Thus, there exists a clear the empirical knowledge gap. Researcher examines this problem in this study and attempts to fill this empirical knowledge gap. Therefore, the following research problem is advanced in this study. *“What is the impact of personality traits on cognitive engagement of employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District?”*

Research Questions

1. To what extent the personality traits exist in financial institutions in Trincomalee District?
2. To what degree the level of cognitive engagement of employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District?
3. What the impact of personality traits of employees on cognitive engagement in financial institutions in Trincomalee District?

Research Objectives

1. To determine the extent to personality traits, exist in financial institutions in Trincomalee District.
2. To examine the level of cognitive engagement of employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District.
3. To evaluate the impact of personality traits of employees on cognitive engagement in financial institutions in Trincomalee District.

Literature Review

Personality Traits

Personality concerns the most important, most noticeable parts of an individual's psychological life. Personality concerns whether a person is happy or sad, energetic or apathetic, smart or dull. Over the years, many different definitions have been proposed for personality. Most of the

definitions refer to a mental system a collection of psychological parts including motives, emotions and thoughts. The definitions vary a bit as to what those parts might be, but they come down to the idea that personality involves a pattern or global operation of mental systems.

Personality has a significant influence on the way of think, feel and relate to other people. This report is intended to give a general idea about how personality might be described and to stimulate to think about the implications for work and personal life. Subsequently, several different psychologists working independently and on different samples concluded that personality traits can be organized into five super ordinate dimensions. These five factors have been known as the big five since Goldberg (1971).

The big five factors are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (also called emotional stability) and openness to experience (also called intellect or culture. Extroversion is indicated by positive feelings (emotions) and tendency to seek company of others. It represents the tendency to be sociable, assertive, active, upbeat, cheerful, optimistic, and talkative. Agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring, considerate, generous, and gentle. Such individuals have an optimistic view of human nature. They are sympathetic to others and have a desire to help others; in return they expect others to be helpful. Conscientiousness individuals are purposeful and determined. They have the tendency to act dutifully, show self-discipline, and aim for achievement against a measure or outside expectation (John and Srivastava, 1999: 121). Neuroticism measures the continuum between emotional adjustment or stability and emotional maladjustment or neuroticism (Costa and McCrae, 1992). People who have the tendency to experience fear, nervousness, sadness, tension, anger, and guilt are at high end of neuroticism. Individuals scoring at the low end of neuroticism are emotionally

stable and even-tempered (Costa and McCrae, 1992; John and Srivastava, 1999). Openness to experience is the tendency of the individual to be imaginative, sensitive, original in thinking, attentive to inner feelings, appreciative of art, intellectually curious, and sensitive to beauty (Costa and McCrae, 1992; John and Srivastava, 1999). Such individuals are willing to entertain new ideas and unconventional values.

Cognitive Engagement

Schaufeli and Bakker review definitions of work engagement in the business context and in academia as a basis for considering the instruments assessing engagement. While the popularity of engagement in organizations confirms the concept's practical dimension, business consultants have applied the term to a range of concepts and measures that depart from those used in scientific research. People who are engaged in their jobs those who are enthusiastic and involved in their day to day to day work tend to do better work. People who are highly engaged in their jobs identify personality with the jobs and are motivated by the work itself. They tend to work harder and more productivity than others and are more likely to produce the results their customers and organizations want. Work engagement is related to organizational commitment but the two have important differences. People who are engaged in their jobs tend to be committed to their organizations and vice versa.

The definition of Kahn indicates that engagement have physical, cognitive and emotional engagement dimensions. In order to have a high engagement level, three dimensions of engagement should be occurred at the same time in the work environment. Cognitive engagement from the conceptualization of Kahn (1990) as attention to and absorption in one's job. The cognitive dimension of job engagement concerns employees' beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions (Kular et al., 2008).

The big-five model of personality is most widely used in psychology (John and Srivastava, 1999). According to Inceoglu and Warr (2012), lack of studies has yet examined the relationship between engagement and all five dimensions of personality that is, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. However, Mostert and Rothmann (2006) and Widermuth (2008) investigated relationship between all five traits and engagement. Extraversion is a strong predictor of positive well-being (Diener and Lucas, 1999) and neuroticism of negative well-being (Keyes et al., 2002). Relative to neurotic individuals, extraverted individuals are more likely to experience vigor, one of the core dimensions of work engagement (Brief and Weiss, 2002). With the help of literature, hypothesis was generated to properly test the relationship between Personality traits and cognitive engagement of employees of financial institutions in Trincomalee. The relations are depicted by a conceptual model.

H₁: Personality traits are positively and significantly related to cognitive engagement.

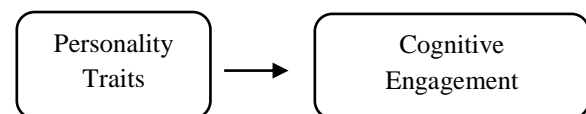


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Methodology

Researcher applied quantitative methodology for this study. Thus survey method has been adopted. Constructs such as personality factors and cognitive engagement are well defined and measurable. Therefore, researcher used quantitative methodology for this study. And this study will be conducted as theoretical based deductive type of study. The extent of researcher inference with the study is low because of it did not affect normal follow of activities. This study will

be carried out in a no contrived environment where things and events occur normally in the workplace.

Population and Sample Selection

The sample for the study comprises of all permanent employees to represent the population of all types of employees that total to 380 from selected seven financial institutions in Trincomalee District. 200 employees were selected by using Simple random sampling method.

Data Collection Method

This study was based on self-report questionnaires; all the data were gathered from the respondents' self-reports. Structure questionnaire was used to collect data necessary to meet the purpose and objectives of the study. . Following the survey method, self-reported questionnaires were distributed as the instrument for data collection, out of 200 questionnaires distributed only 191 questionnaires were accepted as properly filled.

Survey Instruments Development

Questionnaire was developed with the support of previous studies carried out by experts in the relevant subject areas.

Table 1. Questionnaire development

Dimension	No. of Items	Adopted from Authors
Personality Traits		
Extraversion	10	Neo et.al. (1991)
Agreeableness	09	Neo et.al. (1991)
Conscientiousness	07	Neo et.al. (1991)
Neuroticism	06	Neo et.al. (1991)
Openness to experience	12	Neo et.al. (1991)
Cognitive Engagement		
Cognitive engagement	10	Rich et.al.(2010)

Method of Data Analysis

Data has been presented using tables. Meanwhile descriptive analysis was used

for data analysis. Hence under the descriptive analysis, mean and standard deviation were derived. Statistical package of SPSS 19.0 has been used for this purpose. This was established to determine the degree of both personality traits and cognitive engagement. "Five points Likert's rating scale" was used for this research.

Method of Data Evaluation

In this study each dimension is given a scale from 1 to 5 to show the extent of importance based on responses Univariate measures are calculated for each dimension. To tedious work involve in the calculation the Univariate measures and SPSS (19.0) windows have been used for deriving distribution, measure of central tendency, measure of dispersion. The mean value is lying in the range of 1 to 5 and the value of each respondent for a dimension is compared with the medium value of 3. In evaluating the samples as a whole the mean value of the respondent is compared with the medium.

Results and Discussion

This study provides findings and discussion on personality traits and cognitive engagement of employees in financial institutions in order to meet the first and second objective of this study. Table 2 and 3 presents the summary of the findings on personality traits and cognitive engagement.

Table 2. Summary of the findings on personality traits

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Personality	3.64	.289
Extroversion	3.43	.402
Agreeableness	3.95	.429
Conscientiousness	3.51	.388
Neuroticism	3.46	.462
Openness to experience	3.87	.343

As presented in table 2, financial institutions in Trincomalee District are having high level of personality traits since

the mean value of personality traits construct is 3.64. It shows companies in financial institutions sector has to take steps to each employees change their attitudes related to work and retaining them through the good personality traits.

So financial institutions employees' have to more concentrate to develop their personal characteristics which will be high influenced on employees' positive attitudes and behaviours. Regarding agreeableness, it has the mean value of 3.95. The influence of agreeableness in the dimension of personality indicates as high. Most of the respondents consist of agreeableness personality about the work. Engaged individuals tend to be helpful, trusting, considerate, and likes to cooperate with others. Moreover, they are kind to almost everyone. The reason could be the attitude of the agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring, considerate, generous, and gentle. Such individuals have an optimistic view of human nature (Ongore, O. 2013).

Conscientiousness affects work engagement through internal motivational process. Reason is that conscientious individuals are more likely to have high levels of achievement orientation and are less affected by external interferences (e.g. family), and thus exhibit more energy at work (Halbesleben et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2009). Therefore, this study is consistent with the previous study. Extroversion has the lower mean value of 3.43. Because, extraversion implies an energetic approach and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness and negative emotionality. Different financial institutions employees have different personality but in overall views it has moderate influence.

As in table 3, cognitive engagement of employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District is in higher level because mean value of cognitive engagement is 4.65. Furthermore, mean values of four dimensions of cognitive engagement such as focused on job (4.66), absorbed by job (4.64) and concentrate on

job(4.65) are lower than the great deal of attention on job(4.69). Meanwhile employees in financial institutions in Trincomalee District has to be achieve their individual and team targets through the more energy, dedication and high job concentration.

Table 3. Summary of the findings on cognitive engagement

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Great deal of attention on job	4.69	0.824
Focused on job	4.66	0.849
Absorbed by job	4.64	0.859
Concentrate on job	4.65	0.851
Cognitive Engagement	4.658	0.6907

Employees of financial institutions in Trincomalee District are having high work demands and high control. Therefore, higher work engagement of them in the companies. The result was consistent to empirical evidence in the literature (Demerouti et al. 2001), which reported that high-work demands and high control were associated with higher engagement.

This is caused by the higher level of cognitive engagement contribution made by employees. Thus work with intensity on job, devote a lot of energy to job and hardest to perform well on job are in the high level of employees of financial institutions in Trincomalee District. It has resulted in the significantly higher level of cognitive engagement. As such mind focused on job and engrossed in the work to such activities are at higher level of employees. This has led to the higher level of cognitive engagement.

According to Inceoglu and Warr (2012), no study has yet examined the relationship between engagement and all five dimensions of personality that is, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. However, Mostert and Rothmann (2006) and Widermuth (2008) investigated relationship between all

five traits and engagement. Hence these findings fill the knowledge gap identified by above authors. In this study the outcome or value of dependent variable (cognitive engagement) depends on one independent variable (personality traits). Therefore, to quantify the effect of different independent variables on the behaviour of dependent variable, it is necessary to apply the technique of multiple regressions (Cooper & Schindler, 2007; Levin & Rubin, 1991).

Table 4. Multiple Regression Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	
Constant	1.030	.163	.000
Extroversion	.341	.051	.000
Agreeableness	.917	.052	.000
Conscientiousness	.953	.063	.000
Neuroticism	-.014	.090	.875
Openness to experience	.530	.098	.000

R square between components of personality traits and cognitive engagement 0.914 which means that 91% variance in cognitive engagement can be attributed to the variance in personality traits. Hence it can be derived that personality traits significantly impact cognitive engagement in the financial institutions in Trincomalee District. 91% of cognitive engagement of employees can be explained with the personality traits variables ($p < 0.05$). Regression equation for cognitive engagement can be formed as follows:

$$CE = 1.030 + 0.341(E) + 0.917 (A) + .953 (C) + 0.530 (O)$$

Personality traits were found to be a significant factor in exerting cognitive engagement in this particular study. The result was consistent to findings in previous studies (e.g. Costa and McCrae, 1992; John and Srivastava, 1999) that showed positive and significant influence of training and

development on employees' outcomes like commitment, engagement and motivation. Personality traits are significantly influenced on work engagement of all types of employees because of that this research mainly focused all types of employees. Therefore, each and every employee is having good personality and ability needed to perform jobs at this level.

Another most likely reason is that basic personal characteristics are considered sufficient for employees to perform the required tasks. And also good personality traits from previous employment might be enough to perform their present job/task in very effective manner.

Conclusions

Personality traits are at high level in selected financial institutions in Trincomalee District. Human resource is essential for any organization and no organization can achieve its objective without a certain level of commitment and effort from its employees. All employees have to direct towards organizational goals.

According to finding among the five personality traits of different employees, Agreeableness has the high influence. Agreeableness is needed to work in peace and resolve the conflicts. Agreeable employees can be more positive and motivated to resolve the problems and conflicts. Therefore, agreeable employees can be more engaged to their job because they can save their energy and flow it to their work roles (Ongore, O., 2013).

Thus, their engagement towards the job and organization is at higher level. In addition, cognitive engagement is critical to business success (Bhagawati, Shailaja & Aralelimath; 2010). In the current scenario, the financial institutions in Trincomalee District have to comprehend that high levels of cognitive engagement will lead to improve employee commitment and involvement towards job thus creating a motivated workforce that will work together to achieve the common goals of the organization.

Managerial Implications

This study gives several implications to the managers. This study found that Personality traits have highly impact on cognitive engagement of employees. Thus, the results of this study support the need for HR managers to develop and implement new human resources strategies to improve the work engagement of employees.

This research results showed that Personality traits greatest importance in promoting high level of engagement. Practically, HR managers should more concern to assessing the strategic role of all Personality traits to ensure high level of engagement among employees.

Directions for Future Research

Researcher has suggested some areas for future research first, this research has designed cross sectional basis, and it means that data were collected from respondents at single point of time. Therefore, there is a bias about causal relationship between variables. Thus future research will be recommended to use longitudinal designs in order to avoid causal relationship biases in future.

Second, this research has mainly used self-report questionnaires to collect the data. So that responses may be affected by social desirability response bias. So it is recommended for the future research in this area which will be used multiple sources such as quantitative or qualitative data like archival data from organizational records.

Furthermore, this study concerns the generalizability of the findings. The data were collected form only permanent employees of in financial institutions sector thus, the findings of this study may not generalize to financial institutions sector in other contexts or other cultures; research in other settings or geographical areas might yield different results. So it recommended using the present findings across different context.

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