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The Effects of Big-Five Personality Traits on Deviant Behavior

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the personality profile of the public sector employees and to examine its relationship with deviant behavior. In this study, surgency, agreeableness, adjustment, conscientiousness and openness to experience were used to measure organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. Studies indicate that age and gender are of significant influence in deviance studies and are the control variables. Through descriptive statistics and hierarchical regression analyses, all personality dimensions are highly evident, and personality have an association with organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance, with few dimensions have significant relationship. In conclusion, the study supports that personality inhibits negative behavior.

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1. Introduction

Workplace deviant behavior is the behavioral problem that exists in varying organizational context. This behavior is referred to as the inability of employees to meet the organization's needs and expectations. Employees show negative behaviors referred as organizational and interpersonal deviance which are contrary to the norms and culture that ultimately could cause harm to the organization. Studies by Biron, (2010), and Estes & Wang, (2008) show that deviant behavior exists in many organizations and also covers all categories of work, its prevalence in public organizations could be detrimental to the government and the public.

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Past studies show that, there is considerable evidence on the relationship between personality differences and deviant behavior (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009; Chauhan & Chauhan, 2001). However, in the context of the Malaysian public sector, it is still an unexplored issue. As such, this study showed that deviant behavior arises from employees' perception of the organizational collective personality. From past studies, it is identified that surgency, agreeableness, adjustment, conscientiousness and openness to experience are major personality classification at work which contribute to deviant behavior. Thus the study was carried out to assess the organization's personality profile by referring to the big-five personality traits and to examine the relationship between the big-five personality traits and the two classifications of deviant behavior.

2. Deviant Behavior

Deviant behavior could be termed as misconduct or resistance behavior, that is, behavior that deviates from the norm and culture of the organizations. Different terms have been used to refer to misconduct in the workplace. Among the terms used are misbehavior, incivility and counterproductive. Although various terms are used, the acts involve wrongdoing in the workplace. As a consequence, the organization and its members have to bear the social and economic risks, leading to financial meltdown and negative social relationships (Bolin & Heatherly, 2001). Most of deviance studies used the framework developed by Robinson and Bennis, (1995) which refers to organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. This deviance perspective is widely used as it classifies the negative behavior of different severity and targets, and coincides with the development of deviant problems at the organizational level.

In Malaysia, the data showed that public sector organizations are involved with both organizational and interpersonal deviances. This has caused inefficiency of public organizations in terms of distribution of resources, resulting in huge losses to the government, especially with respect to the financial resources and human resources available to them. Economic and social planning are hampered, thereby affecting organizational effectiveness (Jabatan Audit Negara, 2011). Thus, many studies took into account the personality of the individual in identifying the existence of deviant behavior (Al-Mutawa & Ibrahim, 2013).

3. Personality and Deviant Behavior

In many organizations, personality as a psycho-social dimension plays a significant role. Studies on personality have related this factor with various organizational outcomes, such as workplace motivation, attitude and also behavior (Bodankin & Tziner, 2009). The results indicate that personality is important as an internal factor that develops people's uniqueness and influences individuals' interpretation of the environment and is manifested through behaviors and communication (Chauhan & Chauhan, 2001). In this study, personality construct is based on the traits concept, where individuals' characteristics could be explained through big-five personality dimensions. These personality dimensions are present in everyone, and what makes them different is the level achieved in every dimension. The following is the discussion on the big-five personality traits.

3.1. Surgency

Surgency is a personality trait that is between extroversion and introversion. An extrovert person is outgoing, while an introvert is a shy and reserved person. Studies indicate that surgency is pivotal for social-relationship and task performance (Al-Mutawa & Ibrahim, 2013). This personality is empirically evidenced to have an association with organizational and interpersonal deviance, including bullying and working for personal interest (Mathisen et al., 2010; Jia et al., 2013).

Hypothesis 1a – Surgency is significantly associated with organizational deviance.

Hypothesis 1b – Surgency is significantly associated with interpersonal deviance.

3.2. Agreeableness

Agreeableness is the ability to get along with people. High level of agreeableness indicates that the person is easygoing, courteous, natural and compassionate. However, low level of agreeableness shows that, the person is

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