

## The Influence of Personality Traits on Volunteers' Workplace Deviance

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### Abstract

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The aim of this study was to empirically investigate a set of personality traits based on self-evaluations in relation to workplace deviance among volunteers at one of the national Emergency Relief departments, and to determine the importance of personality characteristics in contributing to volunteers' workplace deviance. A cross-sectional research was conducted with self-reported questionnaire. The participants were 200 volunteers attached to six emergency relief centers in Peninsular Malaysia. Data were analysed using SPSS version 19.0 software. Data analysis procedures; descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were conducted. The findings confirmed the importance of taking personality traits into consideration during the process of recruitment of volunteers to minimise workplace deviance. This study contributes on the crucial role of volunteers' personality traits that can be an imperative factor to minimise workplace deviance.

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### 1. Introduction

According to Bennett and Robinson (2000), workplace deviance described the voluntary behaviour of an employee that has violated significant organisational norms and, by doing this, he/she has threatened the well-being of the organisation or its members, or both. It has been estimated that up to \$50 billion annually were attributed to employee theft and fraud (Dineen, Lewicki, & Tomlinson, 2006). Prior to this, a meta-analysis by (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007) showed personality traits has potential to influence an employee to engage in workplace deviance. However, it is unclear whether the personality traits of volunteers provide unique prediction of workplace deviance in the voluntary



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sector. Most volunteer organisations required their supporters to be willing to share their expertise, manpower and financial resources (Knickerbocker, 2015), thus the choice of where to focus their knowledge, human capital and other intervention efforts is an important decision (Knickerbocker, 2015; O'Neill, Lewis, & Carswell, 2011). To ensure the organisation efforts are efficient to help the people in need, there is a need for the organisation to determine whether the personality trait of volunteer is related to workplace deviance as workplace deviance resulted detrimental effects onto organisational productivity and performance.

In light of the influence of personality traits on volunteering behaviour (Carlo, Okun, Knight, & T de Guzman, 2005), the purpose of this current study was to determine whether the personality traits of volunteer is a valid predictor for explaining and understanding workplace deviance. This will assist the organisation to save on a significant amount of human capital and financial resources in considerations of decision-making.

In an attempt to determine which personality traits of volunteer that related to workplace deviance, the current study makes two contributions. First, this study answered to the call for workplace deviance research in non-profit context (Nair & Bhatnagar, 2011); the aim of this study is to examine if the personality traits correlated with workplace deviance using sample of volunteers at one of the national Emergency Relief departments. Next, whereas the workplace deviance typology was developed in the West (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), this study has contribute to an understanding of the role of personality traits in determining workplace deviance in the Asian context.

## **2. Personality traits and workplace deviance**

Organisations have spent many resources in attempts to predict workplace deviance at the time of hire (Ones, 2002). According to Mount, Ilies, & Johnson (2006), deviant behaviours at work are likely to be subjected to individual's personality traits rather by ability-related factors because individuals make conscious choices when they decided to or to not engage in deviant behaviours. In the area of research on personality, the Big Five Model (McCrae & Costa, 1987) was identified as the most widely used and empirical supported personality measure in industrial psychology (Salgado, 2002). There are five personality traits in the Big Five Model of Personality. First, the agreeableness personality dimension includes traits related to getting along with people (Lussier, 2008, p.40). According to Waldman and Korbar (2004), agreeableness personality behaviour is strong when called warm, courteous, good-natural, cooperative, tolerant, compassionate and friendly while it is weak when called cold, difficult, uncompassionate, unfriendly and unsociable. Second, the conscientiousness personality dimension includes traits related to achievement (Lussier, 2008, p.40). Locke and Latham (2004) found conscientiousness trait was characterised as willing to work hard and put in extra time and effort to accomplish goals to achieve success. Third trait of the Big Five Model of Personality is extraversion (McCrae & John, 1992), and extraversion personality behaviour is strong when called outgoing, sociable, assertive and comfortable with interpersonal relationships and willing to confront others (Lussier, 2008, p. 40). The next personality trait is neuroticism or low emotional stability. The neuroticism personality dimension is on a continuum between emotionally stable and unstable (Lussier, 2008, p. 40). According to Daft (2010, p. 450), an emotionally stable person will demonstrate

calmness, enthusiasm, and self-confident whereas emotionally unstable people will have the tendency to be tense, depressed, moody and insecure. Finally, Openness to experience describes the traits of a person which are related to being willing to change and try new things (Lussier, 2008, p. 41), imaginable and creative individuals (Johnson & Ostendorf, 1993) and artistically sensitive and willing to consider new ideas (Daft, 2010, p. 450).

The Big Five Model was linked with forms of workplace deviance, however the empirical results remain inconsistent (Cullen & Sackett, 2003; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 2003; Salgado, 2002). Berry's et al., (2007) meta-analysis has indicated that agreeableness and conscientiousness were the strongest predictors of overall workplace deviance score where agreeableness predicted interpersonal deviance and conscientiousness predicted organisational deviance. Moreover, Bolton, Becker and Barber (2010) found that agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion were valid predictors of workplace deviance where agreeableness was a valid predictor of interpersonal deviance and conscientiousness predicted organisational deviance. These empirical findings, however were contradicted with workplace deviance in Asian context. For example, in a study using hotel employees in Malaysia, Kozako, Safin and Rahim (2013) found extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience were valid predictors of interpersonal deviance, while agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience to be valid predictors of organisational deviance. However, Santos and Eger (2014) conducted an online survey on a project management consultancy firm in Singapore and they only found extraversion to be a valid predictor for interpersonal and organisational deviance, but not agreeableness and conscientiousness This suggests a systematic investigation of whether personality traits of volunteer may offer predictions beyond one appear to be absent in the study of workplace deviance.

### **3. Method**

Cross-sectional data were gathered by multi-stage cluster sampling. There were 300 survey questionnaires distributed to all six Emergency Relief centres in Klang Valley which resulted in 200 respondents, i.e. 66.7% response rate. The volunteers were aged between 18 to 35 years old and most of them were very new (less than 3 years) to the centre. Prior to conducting the study, written consent was obtained from headquarter of Malaysia's Emergency Relief department. The participants were assured that the data collected would adhere to strict standards of confidentiality, anonymity and data protection. The researcher had coordinated with the centre coordinator to distribute and collect back the questionnaires at an agreed time.

The independent variable in this study was the Five Factor Model personality traits and the dependent variable was workplace deviance. Personality traits were rated by each participant using the 44-item scale from (John & Srivastava, 1999). Scales comprised of eight items of agreeableness ( $\alpha = .61$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .63$ ), extraversion ( $\alpha = .67$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .60$ ) and nine items of openness to experience ( $\alpha = .65$ ). Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The 19-item workplace deviance scale developed by (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) was used to measure workplace deviance. Response options were on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (daily). Nine items measured interpersonal deviance ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and twelve items measure

organisational deviance ( $\alpha = .80$ ). The averaged interpersonal and organisational deviance scores were computed to be overall workplace deviance ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The data collected were screened, reverse coded and analysed using the SPSS version 19.0 whereby descriptive statistics, Pearson moment correlation coefficient and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were performed. After examining previous studies on workplace deviance, three demographic factors i.e. sex, age and tenure have impacts on workplace deviance (Berry et al., 2007; Hemdi & Aizzat, 2006), these three factors were controlled in the statistical analyses.

#### 4. Result

##### 4.1 Participants' Profile

**Table 1.** Participants' Profile

Demographic variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	105	54.1
	Female	89	45.9
Marital Status	Currently single	139	71.6
	Married	55	28.4
Educational Level	O'Level and below	142	73.2
	Certificate/ Diploma	44	22.7
	Degree	8	4.1
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	
Age (year)	27.55	9.31	
Tenure (year)	3.02	4.30	

A total 200 returned completed, 105 (54.1%) were males and 89 (45.9%) were females. For the entire sample, 139 (71.6%) were currently single and 55 (28.4%) were married, 142 (73.2%) had completed at least higher secondary education, 44 (22.7%) completed certificate or diploma and 8 (4.1%) have completed their degree. For the entire sample, the mean age was 27.6 years with a standard deviation of 9.31 years and on average, participants have been involved as a volunteer for 3.02 years with a standard deviation of 4.30 years.

##### 4.2 Factor Analyses of Study Variables

A principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted to validate the underlying structure of personality traits. In interpreting the factors, only items with a loading of 0.40 or greater one on factor are considered (Field, 2000). Out of the 44 items, 21 items were excluded from further analysis due to low factor loadings. The results of the factor analysis revealed that 23 items loaded on five factors solution and the total variance explained was 58.78%. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.859 indicating sufficient inter-correlations while the Barlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2 = 1861.557$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Factor 1 comprised of four items related to agreeableness (i.e. is helpful), Factor 2 consisted of five items related to conscientiousness (i.e. does a thorough job), Factor 3 encompassed of four items related to extraversion (i.e. is outgoing), Factor 4 consisted of five items related to neuroticism (i.e. can be moody) and finally, Factor 5 consisted of five items related to openness to experience (i.e. has an active imagination).

Another factor analysis was undertaken to examine the dimensionality of the dependent variable. The results of the factor analysis revealed that 19 items loaded on two-factor solution as originally conceptualised by (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) where the total variance explained was 54.32%. One

item of was excluded due to its high cross loadings. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.905 indicating sufficient inter-correlations while the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2=2183.387$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Factor 1 consisted of seven items related to interpersonal deviance (i.e. made fun of someone at work) and Factor 2 comprised of 11 items related to organisational deviance (i.e. put little effort into your work).

#### 4.3. Mean, Standard Deviation, Inter-item Correlations and Reliability

Table 2 reported the means, standard deviations, reliability and zero-order correlations the study variables.

**Table 2.** Mean, Standard Deviation and Inter-item Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	4.00	.76	(.76)						
2	3.93	.64	.71**	(.71)					
3	3.73	.73	.64**	.67**	(.74)				
4	2.87	.78	.13	.10	.25**	(.67)			
5	3.81	.68	.70**	.73**	.70**	.22**	(.74)		
6	1.58	.67	-.01	.05	.20**	.27**	.09	(.85)	
7	1.41	.54	-.01	-.03	.10	.27**	.02	.69**	(.90)
8	1.46	.54	-.01	.01	.15*	.29*	.05	.90**	.94**

Notes: \*\* $p<0.01$ , \* $p<0.05$ ; values in the parentheses indicated Cronbach’s alpha  
 1 = agreeableness; 2 = conscientiousness; 3 = extraversion; 4 = neuroticism; 5 = openness to experience; 6 = interpersonal deviance; 7 = organisational deviance; 8 = overall workplace deviance

From Table 2, the mean scores for the personality traits of agreeableness ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=0.76$ ), conscientiousness ( $M=3.93$ ,  $SD=0.64$ ), extraversion ( $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=0.73$ ), neuroticism ( $M=2.87$ ,  $SD=0.78$ ) and openness to experience ( $M=3$ ,  $SD=0.68$ ). Respondents of this study indicated a low level of workplace deviance with mean scores of 1.58, 1.41 and 1.46 for the interpersonal, organisational and overall workplace deviance respectively. The reliability coefficients for all study variables from the factor analysis is acceptable and above 0.7 (Field, 2000; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Results indicated that extraversion has significant positive correlation with interpersonal deviance ( $r=0.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and overall workplace deviance ( $r=0.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), while neuroticism has significant positive correlations with interpersonal deviance ( $r=0.27$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), organisational deviance ( $r=0.27$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and overall workplace deviance ( $r=0.29$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). However, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience were found not significantly correlated with any dimensions of workplace deviance. Finally, the correlation coefficients between the workplace deviance dimensions were positively significant, ranging from 0.69 to 0.94 ( $p<0.01$ ).

To determine whether the personality traits of volunteer predict workplace deviance in the Emergency Relief department, five personality traits were regressed on to three models of workplace deviance separately. Table 3 indicated the controlled variables of age, sex and tenure explained 8.9% amount of variance in interpersonal deviance, 1.7% amount of variance in organisational deviance and 4.7% amount of variance in overall workplace deviance. When personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience were added to the model, an additional of 9.1% increase in interpersonal deviance variance ( $F_{change}=4.119$ ,  $p>0.05$ ); an additional of 8.0% increase in organisational deviance variance ( $F_{change}=3.276$ ,  $p<0.01$ ); and an additional of 8.9% increase in overall workplace deviance variance ( $F=3.790$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). First, the personality traits of agreeableness was found to have a negative effect on interpersonal deviance ( $\beta=-$

.227,  $p < 0.05$ ). Second, extraversion was found to have positive effect on interpersonal deviance ( $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and overall workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.228$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, neuroticism has positive effect on interpersonal deviance ( $\beta = 0.194$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), organisational deviance ( $\beta = 0.250$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and overall workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The personality traits of agreeableness, extraversion and neuroticism are valid predictors of interpersonal deviance, neuroticism predicted organisational deviance and lastly, extraversion and neuroticism predicted overall workplace deviance.

**Table 3.** Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses

	<u>Interpersonal Deviance</u>		<u>Organisational Deviance</u>		<u>Workplace Deviance</u>	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Control Variables</b>						
Age (Year)	-.354**	-.299**	-.142	-.077	-.258**	-.194*
Sex (1 = Male)	-.063	-.069	.045	.048	-.001	-.002
Tenure (Year)	.174*	.197*	.056	.085	.116	.144
<b>Model Variables</b>						
Agreeableness		-.227*		-.040		-.121
Conscientiousness		.014		-.105		-.058
Extraversion		.265*		.177		.228*
Neuroticism		.194**		.250**		.240**
Openness to Experience		-.003		-.056		-.041
R square	.089	.180	.017	.097	.047	.136
Adjusted R square	.075	.145	.002	.058	.032	.098
R square change	.089	.091	.017	.080	.047	.089
F change	6.182**	4.119	1.112	3.276**	3.138*	3.790**

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

## 5. Discussion

The objective of this study is to determine whether personality trait of volunteer is a valid predictor of workplace deviance. The results showed that the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism have significant positive relationships with workplace deviance. This finding implies that volunteers' personality trait plays an important role in determining their behaviour at the volunteer organisation. These findings were consistent with past study that personality traits (particularly extraversion and neuroticism) are positively correlated with interpersonal deviance and workplace deviance (Kozako et al., 2013; Santos & Eger, 2014) which indicated that they are more likely to engage in deviant acts when they scored high in these personality traits.

The results also revealed that the personality traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience have no significant relationship with workplace deviance. This finding seems to contradict with past results. One plausible explanation for the non-significant relationship could be due to the high scores these personality traits (i.e. agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience) have implies their tendency to share, volunteer and help others may deter them to be not interested in acts that harming other volunteers and/or organisation. Finally, the regression findings also suggested that personality traits appear to explain greater variance in interpersonal deviance rather than organisational deviance (Berry et al., 2007). Thus, the study suggests that continued attention be paid to the personality traits to inhibit workplace deviance.

## 6. Implication, limitations, and future research

From a practical point of view, it is concluded that in order to deter volunteers to engage in workplace deviance, managers of this volunteer organisation shall select and screen individual with traits that are prone to workplace deviance as this will assist the organisation to retain their volunteers, fostering a positive workplace and to allocate funds for their human capital development.

This study suffers from certain theoretical and methodological limitations. First, this study utilised a limited number of variables where future research is needed to take into consideration of other factors which may be significantly associated with workplace deviance. Second, the sample which was derived from one of the national voluntary organisations that provide emergency relief services, as a result the findings may not be generalised to other samples or industry. Finally, data were collected from respondent himself/herself where it's subject to respondents' perception, it may be worth considering peer-reporting data in future research.

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