Do Personality Traits Predispose the Employees' Commitment to Change in Large Companies? Empirical Evidence in Malaysia

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Abstract:

Employees' commitment seems to be vital in decision making for any organizations to be able in business competition and to adapt with changes. The commitment among employees can be a crucial tool for improving their performance in organizations. Personality characteristics are highly considered as a strong recommendation while choosing change recipients to cope with organizational change. Personality traits characterized employees' intention to commit to change in their company. The objectives of this study is to investigate the influence of personality traits on employee commitment to change. The present study attempts to add to the literature by exploring the role of personality traits in influencing employees' commitment to change. Five-hundred fifty employees in Malaysian large companies were selected to respond to a structured questionnaire. Multiple regressions indicated that personality traits were found to have significant relationship to employees' commitment to change (affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment). Implications to practice and theory are discussed.

Keywords

Employees' commitment to change, personality traits, organizational commitment, Malaysia, large companies

1. Introduction

The employees' role as a good team player in any organizations is needed in order to implement change. Employees acceptance and support strongly determined the success of organizational change 4, 18, 38]. Their perception about their social relationships in their work affect the manner that they respond to or show their commitment to change [9, 10, 34]. The successful implementation of change initiative can be done through the commitment to change itself by attaching the individuals to the necessary actions for change [17, 22]. It can be said that the employees' commitment to change is one of the solutions for the effective implementation of change in any organizations,

Apparent issues occurred among large companies such as more complex bureaucracy that can lead to the distortion of information, greater vagueness and lower the trust among employees [3, 23] that can affect their commitment to that company. Most of large companies failed to respond the unpredictable and rapid change of customer needs [21]. Meanwhile, large companies have a crucial role in the business market such as controlling a large amount of public wealth, producing a wide number of jobs and employment, engaging in creative and innovative activities and investing in research in a huge capacity [2]. Large companies in America pledged and committed to fight the climate change [19]. Competition and business change can affect the ability of companies to maintain or increase their company's profit. Whereas, the effect mostly affected in large companies due to their business circumstances. The change affect globalisation through the increasing of business competition and advanced of technology [41]. This kind of change mostly occur in large companies. The global crisis hits the French companies to the sectors that highly used in mediocre consumption particularly in consumer products and automotive industries [11], and yet in banking sectors as respond to the financial crisis (RT Television Network, 2015). Hence, it takes consideration of related factors that surrounds the change in order to understand the employees' commitment to change [10, 17].

This present study focused on the role of personality traits (PT) as the individual factor that is purportedly able to explain its impact on employees' commitment to change. Previous researchers highlighted the importance of personality traits towards the organizational commitment [16, 39, 42, 46], but rarely focused on the individual commitment thereby the employees itself. Moreover, the scarcity of study likewise occurred on examining the relationship between personality traits and the employees' commitment to change. Researchers put on more attention to study about emotions as it was increasingly being crucial due to its role as in the workplace interactions and affect the variety of outcomes [33]. Big-five theory on personality traits believed that individual characters can affect ones' interpretations and reactions to their environment [37]. According to Arnulf (2012), personality traits can affect the ability of organization to adapt the changing environment. For instance, the traits in personality such as agreeableness and extraversion are enable the

individuals to adapt to the new environment easily and react to the change quickly [45]. Personality is not solely being characterized as individual level, instead it could be upgraded into various levels of analysis for both improvement and decision making processes [13]. Personality characteristics are highly considered as a strong recommendation while choosing change recipients to cope with organizational change [34]. There are literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and attitudes towards organizational change that affect the readiness of employees to change [43, 12]. There are several literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and organizational culture [14, 44]. Moreover, the studies discussed on the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment recently [6, 39], but limited to the extension of how it can relate to the individual commitment to change.

2. Literature Review

This study utilized Traits Theory to justify the study of microanalysis of personality traits of individuals in an organization. Previous researchers studied about the importance of personality traits on the organizational change [5, 26]. The stressful situations as a part of personality among employees can affect the change initiatives [25]. Nevertheless, there are very scarce studies that examined the relationship between personality and organizational commitment [16, 42, 46], specifically that focused on the individual of commitment to change. Traits theory as reviewed by Barkhuus and Csank (1999) postulated that individual human as unique. Each person is different from the other and therefore need to be studied accordingly. The theory believes that motivation occur independent from previous experiences and present motives such as interest, attitude and life styles that govern a person behavior. It stresses the close relationship between motive and cognitive process and argues that all motives are a combination of these. This way the individual cognitive style is affected by individual self-perception and only directly affected by his past. It also explains that traits as a fusion of habit and endowment rather than colligation or chain of habit alone. There are a nearly unlimited number of potential traits which has been developed over the years that could be used to describe personality. The statistical technique of factor analysis, however, has demonstrated that particular clusters of traits reliably correlate together [28].

As a result, a new trait theory often referred to as the "Big Five" theory emerged. This five-factor model of personality represents five core traits that interact to form human personality. The five factor model contains openness to experiences, extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These traits are the highest-level factors of a hierarchical taxonomy based on the statistical technique of factor analysis. This method produces factors that are continuous, bipolar, can be distinguished from temporary states, and can describe individual differences [20]. The Big Five personality dimensions of neuroticism, extroversion,

agreeableness, openness to experiences and conscientiousness are established traits utilized in studies of work attitude and behavior [15, 27, 32, 40]. Salgado (2003) argued that personality traits, as described by the FFM, not only predict different facets of job performance, but they also affect a range of additional work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job commitment, voluntary turnover, absenteeism, etc., claiming that "the attention on traits is thus legitimate, because predictive validity is ultimately the most important criterion to decide on the usefulness of concepts or theories." Since the study is about investigating the employees' commitment to change and how personality traits play a role in contributing to influence that change phenomenon within companies, then personality traits as a general construct are postulated to link with employees' commitment to change. It is also possible to conjecture the effect of specific type of traits (i.e. neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) on employees' commitment to change. Although the literatures regarding the effect of personality traits on employees' commitment to change is barely exist, it is possible to postulate the link by invoking studies on the impact of personality traits upon commitment to change even despite the limited numbers.

One study worth mentioning is the one conducted by Spagnoli and Caetano (2012) who found empirical evidence of the relationship between personality traits and organizational level of commitment. Their study involved 190 new police officers. The study aims to test the mediating role of work satisfaction aspects such as satisfaction with the work itself and satisfaction with human resource practices in the relationship between Big Five personality traits and organizational commitment. Particularly, the predictive effect of personality traits on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment has some practical utility with regard to selection practices. A longitudinal study was conducted to extend the literature in investigating the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment. Distinctive components of organizational commitment were associated to different traits of personality. They found that extraversion was positively associated with affective, normative and continuance commitment; neuroticism, conscientiousness and openness were significantly associated with continuance commitment; agreeableness was positively associated with normative commitment. Likewise, Tziner et al. (2008) studied that agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness were positively associated with general measure of organizational commitment.

In India context, Arora and Rangnekar (2015) studied a cross-sectional survey-based research from 121 employees of public and private sector organizations in North India. The study suggested for fostering an occupationally committed workforce. It is critical for supervisory mentors to understand how to deal with employees of different personality traits. Hence the following research hypotheses are offered:
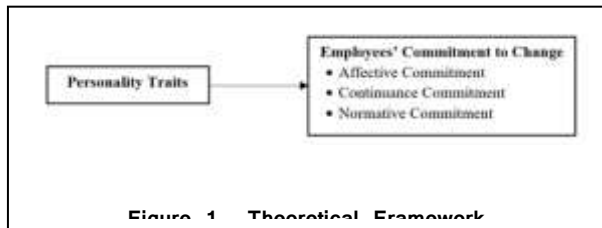
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

H1: *There is a significant relationship between personality traits and affective commitment to change*

H2: *There is a significant relationship between personality traits and continuous commitment to change*

H3: *There is a significant relationship between personality traits and normative commitment to change*

3. Method

3.1 Sampling

Data were collected from 311 employees in Malaysian large companies. According to Bursa Malaysia (2015), there are 812 listed companies whereby all of them are the large companies that surpassed the requirements as reputable companies in Malaysia. This research will stratify its sample into 30 largest companies that listed in FTSE Bursa Malaysia Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (FBM KLCI) Malaysia. Cluster sampling was used to identify the number of large companies (and hence the participants) that need to be included in the sample. Out of 550 questionnaires sent personally by hand to the participants in different departments and sections of the university, only 311 questionnaires were usable for final data analysis. The omission of data was mainly due to excessive missing data in the questionnaire. The participants were informed that the objective of the study was to examine employees' commitment to change and their individual responses would be kept confidential. Surveys were distributed on-site with the participants, who took on the average between 15–20 minutes to complete the survey.

The 311 participants (160 males and 151 females) had a ranged age of (32.7%) 25-30 years, and on average had worked with their current company close to 5 years. As expected, the majority of the participants were Malay (84.3%). Very few of them were of non-Malay race, possibly are Chinese and Indian descent but they are local people mostly. The participants were having 5-10 years (33%) working experience and 1-5 years (32.1%) working experience. Most of the participants had attained on average undergraduate level at 67.6% (hold bachelor degree) of education. They worked in sales and marketing department (16%) and administration department (13.8%). They were also in entry level employees (24%) and supervisors (23.1%).

3.2 Measures

Employees' commitment to change. The measurement of employee commitment to change is based on the model of commitment to an organizational change of Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) in general theory of workplace commitment. Meyer and Allen (1997) stressed commitment as one of the most crucial factors that involved employees to support the change initiatives phenomenally. The instrument was adapted from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). There are there dimensions under commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment to change. Respondents were asked about their level of commitment in their companies, how strong their commitment towards it. They reported the scale of internal consistency of affective commitment at .92, continuance commitment at .71 and normative commitment at .78.

Personality traits. Personality traits items will be used to examine the effect of attitude and personality of employees to their commitment in company's change. It was constructed by Big Five/Five Factor Model (FFM) whereby it was an appropriate framework in learning the individual characters and attitudes towards organizational change [43]. This variable is the combinations of foreseeable characteristics of human's behaviour, at which it explains the difference individual actions in similar situation [27, 31]. Salgado (2003) believed that the predictive validity is absolutely important criteria to determine its effect for the concepts or theories. Personality traits predicts the different facets of the job performance and outcomes as it reflected by the employees' commitment. This variable refers to the personality traits from Big Five Inventory (BFI) that originally invented by Benet-Martinez and John (1998). This 10 items were constructed to give the efficient assessment on the personality traits dimensions (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). The reliability of the five dimensions that used BFI scales were .89, .74, .82, .86, .79 for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness by using Cronbach's itemized alpha coefficient [34]. All items were measured to on a 5-point *Likert* scale, ranging from '1' "Strongly disagree" to '5' "Strongly agree."

4. Results

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 22 Software. Data were first checked for descriptive statistics such as frequency analysis to detect missing values and outliers before they were subject to further tests. Factor analysis was run on the main constructs: employees' commitment to change (affective, continuance and normative commitment) and personality traits. Based on factor analysis, the employees' commitment to change was found to be unidimensional, contrary to the original theoretical exposition. The personality traits were also found to be unidimensional. Next, reliability, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were run.

Table 1. Mean, Intercorrelations and Reliability Coefficients of Main Variables.

	M	S.D	PT	AC	CC	NC
Personality Traits	3.2	.65	1(.84)			
Affective Commitment to Change	3.3	.99	.391**	1(.89)		
Continuance Commitment to Change	3.4	1.1	.428**	.423**	1(.91)	
Normative Commitment to Change	3.4	1.1	.406**	.422**	.331**	1(.92)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
PT = Personality Traits; AC = Affective commitment; CC = Continuance commitment; NC = Normative commitment

Table 1 shows the descriptive, correlations and reliability coefficients of the main variables. As indicated, the instruments that measured the main variables were deemed to be reliable, as the alpha coefficients were all beyond the acceptable level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Findings elaborate that all under study variables are significantly and positively correlated with each other.

Table 2: Multivariate Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable	Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig
Affective commitment to Change	Intercept	1.4	.26	5.34	.00
	PT	.59	.08	7.46	.00
Continuance Commitment to Change	Intercept	1.0	.29	3.48	.01
	PT	.45	.09	5.03	.00
Normative Commitment to Change	Intercept	1.1	.31	3.58	.00
	PT	.43	.09	4.58	.00

Table 2 shows the findings of multivariate regression analysis. Results proved that personality traits has significant and positive association with affective commitment ($\beta = .597$, $p < 0.05$, t=7.46) and supported to H1. Similarly results also divulged that that there is significant and positive relationship between personality traits and continuance commitment ($\beta = 453$, $p < 0.05$, t=5.03) and supported to H2. Moreover, results also highlights that personality traits has significant and positive association with normative commitment ($\beta = .431$, $p < 0.05$, t=4.585) and supported to H3.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to prove the research objective: To examine the influence of personality traits on employee commitment to change. Based on the empirical evidence observed, it appears that personality traits are able to affect the collective employees' commitment to change of affective, continuance and normative commitment strongly in a company. Personality traits allow the employees to gain trust from their companies through the effective attitude, so that they will commit to their company to change. Generally speaking, the empirical observation lend support to existing literatures on the positive contribution of personality traits in organizational change [e.g., 5, 25, 26], suggesting that personality traits significantly affect the employees' commitment to change from all aspects [16, 38, 41]. However, the evidence somehow indicates that personality traits have different impact on different commitment. Yet, the impact for three aspects of commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment) remains strong.

According to McKay et al. (2013), affective commitment is one of the aspects that is being affected personality traits. Affective commitment refers to emotional attachment among employees to commit in a company [24]. Personality traits definitely related to the emotional, feelings and attitude that included in the affective commitment [16]. Next, continuance commitment refers to the consequences the employees perceived are connected to leave the companies [24]. Whilst to date not many studies have looked into the effect of personality traits towards the employees' continuance commitment to change, the result seems to be consistent with previous studies that found that personality traits on extroversion, openness and conscientiousness are significantly related to continuance commitment [16, 41]. On the other hand, the same results have been found that personality traits on agreeableness have positive relationship with normative commitment [16, 41]. Normative commitment refers to the pressures among employees to stay in their company as resulted from the company's obligations. The findings of the present study have a number of important implications to practice. Based on the findings, the present study recommends that managers and employees re-assess their current practices of managing their employees' attitudes. In particular, specific attention should be given to the implementation of right attitude and personality as this practice are likely to strengthen the occurrence of employees' commitment to change. In particular, the leaders need to understand that the employees display different characters and personalities that can affect their level of commitment to change in their company and how leaders can deal with it.

To conclude, the personality traits without doubt poses an interesting impact on the employees' commitment to change. As much as it offers limitless opportunities and benefits for mankind, it also poses remarkable challenges especially in the world of employment. The biggest challenge for organizations is how to capitalize on the advantages of the employees' commitment without falling into prey of the "dark side" of globalization change. From the theoretical point of view, the commitment to change will attract many researchers to embark on scholarly activities toward developing a better understanding of organizational change.

6. Implications

The study conducted have several significant implications for leaders to understand their subordinates, as the findings suggest that the certain sectors among large companies might give the more significant effect rather than others in terms of its employees' commitment to change. So that, for future study can be more focus on particular sector not entirely. In addition, the focus also should be made on the dimensions of personality traits variable itself. One dimension gave different impact more significantly than others.

Although the findings have shed some results into the role of personality traits in affecting employees' commitment to change, they ought to be interpreted carefully. Although the findings have shed some light into the role of personality traits practices in affecting employees' commitment to change, they have to be interpreted with caution. The issue of generalizability is one limitation that has to be considered. Even though attempts were made to include all participants identified to take part in the survey, many declined from participating either for voluntary reasons or because access to them was not formally granted by the HR management policy. This study has also a number of limitations, firstly the data collected is based on general sectors in large companies, and therefore its results cannot be identified precisely. Secondly for data collection has been made through questionnaire which may not capture the true responses of the respondents.

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