Employees’ Commitment to Change: Personality Traits and Organizational Culture

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Abstract

This study examines the influences of personality traits on the employees’ commitment to change that moderated by the organizational culture. The employee’s commitment to change is important for the large companies to sustain in the global economy. The Lewin’s Three Step Model underpins this study at which it believes on the variables that affect the departure from the status quo to the current state. The quantitative data was collected from the employees in the large companies that are listed in Bursa Saham Kuala Lumpur (BSKL) Malaysia. The research used a simple random sampling and a cross-sectional survey. The results showed there is a relationship between the personality traits and the employees’ commitment to change; moderated by the organizational culture. This study meets the objectives that successfully discovered the connection among the identified variables that contributed to the organizational change and human resource literatures. The originality of the study is the establishment of the instruments and theoretical building on the personality traits, organizational change and employees’ Commitment to Change. Likewise, this study implies that both practitioners and leaders need to review how they could increase the employees’ commitment to change in the companies based on the various personalities.

Keywords: Employees’ commitment to change; Personality traits; Organizational culture; Large companies; Malaysia

Introduction

A company is a product of their people within it. The challenges to change that occurred should be faced by people in organizations. The participation of people through their job activities that comprises their thought, ideas, and actions in new ways leads to the increasing organizational capacity for change [1]. The employees’ role as a good team player in any organizations is needed in order to implement change. Employee’s acceptance and support strongly determined the success of organizational change [2-4]. Their perception about their social relationships in their work affects the manner that they respond to or show their commitment to change [5-7]. 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 [8,9]. 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 [10,11] that can affect their commitment to that company. Most of large companies failed to respond the unpredictable and rapid change of customer needs [12]. 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 [13]. Hence, it takes consideration of related factors that surrounds the change in order to understand 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 [14]. Big-five theory on personality traits believed that individual characters can affect ones’ interpretations and reactions to their environment [15]. According to Arnulf [16], 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 enabling the individuals to adapt to the new environment easily and react to the change quickly [17,18]. More interestingly, 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 [19]. Personality characteristics are highly considered as a strong recommendation while choosing change recipients to cope with organizational change. There are literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and attitudes towards organizational change that affect the readiness of employees to change [20,21]. There are several literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and organizational culture [22-24]. However, it did not relate to the real change that companies faced nowadays. Moreover, the studies discussed on the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment [25,26], but limited to the extension of how it can relate to the individual commitment to change.

This present study focused on the key determinant of personality traits as the individual aspect that is significantly able to describe its impact on employees’ commitment to change. Previous scholars such as Erdheim et al.; Tziner et al.; Zettler et al. [27-29] have focused on the importance of personality traits towards the organizational commitment, but barely focused on the individual commitment to change.

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thereby the subordinates within the companies. Moreover, the scarcity of study likewise occurred on investigating the relationship between personality traits and the employees’ commitment to change. Previous 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. Big-five theory on personality traits believed that individual characters can affect ones’ interpretations and reactions to their environment. According to Arnulf, 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 enabling the individuals to adapt to the new environment easily and react to the change quickly. 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. Personality characteristics are highly considered as a strong recommendation while choosing change recipients to cope with organizational change. There are literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and attitudes towards organizational change that affect the readiness of employees to change.

There are several literatures that studied the relationship between personality traits and organizational culture. Furthermore, Xenikou and Simosi [30], believed that organizational culture could utilize a considerable effect on the organizational performance and commitment. Organizational culture employed the significant impact on the organizational performance and commitment that results in the organizational outcomes [31]. A number of studies examined the relationship between organizational culture and organizational commitment that have shown the significant correlation among them [32-37]. However, the impact of organizational culture on the individual factors and commitment to organizational change should be examined further. Moreover the studies discussed on the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment recently but limited to the extension of how it can relate to the individual commitment to change.

**Literature Review**

**Personality traits**

Numerous studies have been discussed the importance of personality traits. There are some pros and cons regarding it. The dynamic characteristic of personality traits somehow cannot be underestimated. Personality traits as human resource practices were associated to link with employees’ attitude within organizations [38]. Some of the factors were the role of testing personality in employees’ recruitment and practicing the various assessments in the organizations. Apparently, although it is used for either organizational development or in making decision processes, it also can be applied in multiple levels analysis despite of its common perspective as only individual variable.

Although there are so many literatures discussed the various dimensions about personality traits, but still the Five Factor Model (FFM) is believed become the most appropriate model to assess human’s behavior in workplace in any places, cultures and times. FFM consists of five traits such as openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism. FFM was proved to be one of the most FFM of personality traits were studied and conceptualized by Goldberg [39] and McCrae and John but it actually was introduced by Thurstone firstly. FFM has been applied in various organizational programs such as emotional intelligence, selection, performance and also organizational change.

Personality traits define as psychological systems of viable organization that develop people’s characteristic pattern of feeling, thoughts and behavior. Personality traits become one of the main factors that affect human behavior due to its impact in controlling how people react to change. People’s behavior, cognitive and affective responses to the organizational change was determined by their personalities. These characteristic patterns determine their feeling, thought and behavior to commit to change. Various models of personality were created to explore the tendency or repulsion for change.

In the last two decades, FFM has been evolved into one of the most established frameworks extensively that elaborate the most significant factors of individuals’ personality. According to Judge et al. FFM facilitates all personality traits that can be concluded into five main factors such as agreeableness (cooperative vs. competitive), extraversion (sociable vs. introverted), neuroticism (emotional stability vs. instability), openness to experience (intellectual curiosity vs. preference for routine) and conscientiousness (organized vs. careless). A study by Farruk, Ying and Mansori has reported that there is a correlation between personality traits and organizational commitment. FFM has been proved to have a significant link to job-related behaviors and attitudes. Past studies found that the link between extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness to the organizational success that leads to the commitment to stay in the organizations. Moreover, personality traits have been found to have relationship on employees’ job satisfaction significantly according to recent studies.

Personality traits are one of the significant factors that basically placed the affective, cognitive and behavioral actions of employees to the organizational change. Openness to experience as one of facets from FFM portrays the adaptation to change virtually. Next, the high extraversion employees tend to enhance the useful impact and ensure their opinion about change is known. On the other hand, employees with high neuroticism ten to be stressed over change and feel anxious about it. The agreeableness and conscientiousness employees tend to display positive intentions in accepting change and perform their best performance to make the change successful.

A study by Vakola et al. positively found that there are relationships between support to change and agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to experience but there is a negative correlation with neuroticism. Moon, et al. have found that conscientiousness traits are linked to taking charge that indicates an initiative to execute the change. On the other hand, Brennan and Skarlicki reported that conscientiousness to be an influential factor of employees who involved in downsizing change to survive and to continuously perform their jobs.

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. The stressful situations as a part of personality among employees can affect the change initiatives. Nevertheless, there are very scarce studies that examined the correlation between organizational commitment and personality in terms of the individual commitment, specifically that focused on the individual of commitment to change. Traits theory as reviewed by Barkhuus and Csank [40] postulated that human being individually as a unique creature. Each individual is distinctive from one to another and therefore accordingly this study aims to explore it further. The theory believes that motivation occur independently from previous experiences and current objectives such as interest, life styles and attitude that determines an individual.
behavior. It highlights the close association between motive and cognitive process and perceives that the combination of these processes result in all the motives. There are plenty studies of unlimited numbers of traits potentially which have been developed over the years that could be used to elaborate personality. The result has shown that particular clusters of traits reliably correlate together through statistical technique of factor analysis [41]. 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.

Consequently, the "Big Five" theory as a new trait theory has been emerged that was referred frequently in previous studies. The five factor model consists of neuroticism, openness to experiences, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. FFM model then involves shaping the people's personality whereby it represents the five main traits. This model creates factors that are bipolar, continuous, and able to explain the individual differences and able to distinguished from temporary states. In addition, the five traits in FFM model are the highest level factors of a hierarchical taxonomy in the statistical technique of factor analysis. FFM model consists of the established traits that applied in the studies of organizational attitude and behavior whereby the dimensions consist of agreeableness, openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness [42-44]. Nevertheless, according to Salgado [45], personality traits could affect the additional performance outcomes such as voluntary turnover, absenteeism, organizational commitment, organizational satisfaction, and so forth whereby it highlighted that the importance of personality traits is legitimate due to its predictive validity is the most important factor that determines its usefulness on the theories or the concepts ultimately, despite its prediction on the different categories on organizational performance solely. 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 impact of specific type of traits (i.e. openness, neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness) 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.

The interesting fact was found in an empirical study by Spagnoli and Caetano who proved that there is an association between commitment in organizations and personality traits. Their study involved 190 new police officers. The study purposely tested the particular impact of personality traits on both organizational commitment and job satisfaction that has the practical utility that related to the selections practices. Specifically, the study found the moderating role of the factors of organizational satisfaction that refers to the work satisfaction and employees' satisfaction that related to the human resource practices in the correlation between organizational commitment and personality traits. Next, in order to grasp their study, they further conducted the longitudinal study in order to expand the studies in examining the correlation between organizational commitment and personality traits. Each trait in personality traits was correlated to different kind of organizational commitment whereby it depends on its specialty. It was found that the extraversion traits were correlated positively to the normative, contingency and affective commitment. Meanwhile, the

 traits of openness to experience, neuroticism and conscientiousness were correlated to the continuance commitment significantly and agreeableness was significantly related to the normative commitment. Meanwhile, a study by Tziner et al. has investigated that conscientiousness; agreeableness and openness to experience were significantly related to the common organizational commitment.

Organizational culture

The concept of organizational culture seems to be a very captivating topic, yet an abstruse one as well among researchers [46] due to social nature that can be in many facets such as organization, group, or even individual behaviours [47]. The organizational outcomes were resulted from studying the organizational culture through the effect they employed on organizational commitment and performance. For instance, the vital role on organizational culture in making a set of core values, understanding and an effective working environment, at which it was contributed positively by employees to give their commitment for the company's well-being [48,49]. Moreover, socialization as one of dimensions in organizational culture encouraged social exchange that creates the organizational commitment.

Numerous literatures have proved the correlation between organizational culture and organizational commitment whereby organizational culture positively affects organizational commitment. It shown that the previous studies indeed support the link between organizational commitment and organizational culture. The correlation between human resource practices and organizational culture entices the attention of researchers. Ortega-Parra and Sastre-Castillo [50] studied on the potential differences on culture dimension that perceived by employees whereby it analysed the values and the impacts on organizational commitment. Employees play a critical role in affecting the organizational performance to change. The higher the employees' commitment, the higher the organizational performance [51]. Likewise, Akyürek et al. [52] stated that a higher employees' commitment is resulted from a strong organizational culture.

The present study considers organizational culture as possible moderating variable in elevating our theoretical concept of the influences of personality traits on employees' commitment to change. Culture was defined as collective programming of the mind by Hofstede that distinguishes group members of people to the others [53]. The personality structures from classic theory were supported by it and it will internalize group-like characteristics with premise members of a specific culture. The culture improves a corresponding personality structure whereby the theory predicted that cultures shape personality and it's varying as well as in individuals. However, there is a resolution in differentiating the levels of culture in organizational level and national level whereby the personality was at the individual level as well [54]. Behaviours in a specific culture might have a different psychological significance to another culture. For instance, the extraversion in personality traits is being aligned by the assertive behaviour. Study has shown the dominant trait predicts the perspective group of outspoken people [55]. For instance, group members tend to assume that the individuals who expressed assertive behaviour have a higher competency level rather than the individuals who expressed the less assertive behaviour, although the results of the study have shown that there is no connection between personality traits and competency as an indicator of cultural values. Meanwhile, Dutch perspective on culture believed that assertive behaviour as an arrogance and more in perceived as a boaster or people who cannot make keep they promised. Whereas, culture in US tends to interpret assertive behaviour as a facet.
of leadership and it reasserts a general faith that those who talk a lot have more to give to people and those who do not talk much are usually more competent people.

On the other hand, a survey that is conducted by Chuttipattana and Shamsudin examines the role of organizational culture as moderator on the association of individual competencies and personality. Their study on rural places among primary care managers in Southern Thailand highlighted that certain personality traits have an impact on individual competencies within certain organizational cultures. As a result, the leadership and altruistic culture should be improved in primary health care units. The study that focused on improving conscientiousness in managers should not be neglected. Hence, the following hypothesis is offered (Figure 1).

Method

Sampling

Out of 384 questionnaires were sent directly to the respondents who were the employees in Malaysian large companies, but only managed to get 294 questionnaires in returned and usable for the data analysis. The negligence of the data collected was generally due to the multitude of missing data in the questionnaires. Nevertheless, the respondents were told that the purpose of this study was to investigate the employees’ commitment to change and their information would be remained confidential. There are 812 listed large companies whereby they are the large companies that qualified to be the prominent companies in Malaysia. This study stratified the samples into 30 largest companies that are included in the FTSE Bursa Malaysia Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (FBM KLCI) in Malaysia. Then finalized it by using the simple random sampling. The surveys were mainly distributed based on their sector and company whereby researcher found the representatives of each company. The average period for the respondents to fill the questionnaires approximately took 15-20 minutes.

The respondents dominantly were Malays (84%) and the rest consists of Indians and Chinese people who are local people. From 294 respondents, there are 148 men and 146 women who averagely had age 26-30 years old and had worked in their current company for 1 to 5 years period. In addition, the respondents also have 1-5 years working experience and work as the middle managers mostly as well as frontline managers that valued 15% in both. The respondents had pursued their education mostly in bachelor degree that valued 69.7% and followed by diploma 16.3%. Most of them worked in marketing and sales department (15.6%) and in the second place is administration department (13.3%).

Measures

Employees’ commitment to change: The general theory of organizational commitment by Mowday, Steers and Porter was used to measure the employees’ commitment to change from the items that based on the organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ). It was a precise instrument to measure the employees’ commitment to work in any organizations. Somehow, this study used the nine administered items that used only positively worded items from fifteen items originally whereby it was applied in several studies before. They formulated that the scale of internal consistency of employees’ commitment to change was ranged 0.82 to 0.93. The respondents were asked about how high their level of commitment to change in their companies. In addition, the commitment itself is one of the most important factors that determine the success of change initiatives whereby likewise involving the employees to be part of it [56].

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 one of the best models in learning the individual characters and attitudes towards change in the organizations. This variable is the combinations of foreseeable characteristics of human are behaviour, at which it explains the difference individual actions in similar situation [57]. Salgado believed that the predictive validity is absolutely important criteria to determine its effect for the concepts or theories. Personality traits predict 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 [58]. These 10 items were constructed to give the efficient assessment on the personality traits dimensions (Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Openness). The reliability of the five dimensions that used BFI scales were 0.89, 0.74, 0.82, 0.86, 0.79 for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness by using Cronbach’s itemized alpha coefficient [59].

Organizational culture: The employees’ commitment to change was strengthened by the organizational culture within company [60,61]. Organizational culture instrument was developed by Glaser. There were 20 items use the Likert scale that included in questionnaire. On the previous study, this instrument is created to measure organizational culture in order to develop an empirical measurement that based on six components such as teamwork, climate moral, information flow, involvement, supervision and meeting. Instead, this study improvised the components into four topics: teamwork, climate moral, information flow and involvement; due to the similarity of meaning from other instruments based on Pearson, Bahmanziari, Crosby and Conrad [62].

![Figure 1: H1: Organizational culture moderates the correlation between personality traits and employees’ commitment to change.](image-url)
Internal reliability was demonstrated with Cronbach Alpha and Split-half Reliability Coefficient that was scored 0.886.

Results

Due to this study only examines the simple hypothesis of single variables; the data were analyzed using SPSS Version 22 Software. Firstly, the data already has been checked for the missing values and outliers by using the descriptive statistics before being tested to the further analysis. The employees’ commitment to change and personality traits were found to be unidimensional due to this study examined the general factors of each variable that was run on the main constructs of employees’ commitment to change, personality traits and the moderating variable of organizational culture. Likewise, the factor analysis determined the intercorrelations and the reliability coefficients of those main variables as shown at Table 1. On the other hand, the results also showed the effect of moderating variable of organizational culture for personality traits to the employees’ commitment to change (Table 2).

As mentioned before, Table 1 shows the mean, correlations and reliability coefficients of the main constructs. As indicated, the instruments have proved that the main variables were deemed to be reliable, as the alpha coefficients were all above the acceptable level of 0.70 [63]. It means that the results elaborate that there are significant and positive relationship among all variables that constructed.

The first formula proved about the effect of personality traits on employees’ commitment to change was 0.210 percent that indicated 0.70 [63]. It means that the results elaborate that there are significant and positive relationship among all variables that constructed.

The finding has shown that the organizational culture significantly moderates the link between personality traits and employees’ commitment to change. An expert of organizational culture, Hofstede and Hofstede believed that culture as the group of people who have their own collective system of mindset that distinctive to one and another. The classic theory of personality structures was supported by it and it will internalize group-like characteristics with premise members of a specific culture. The culture improves a corresponding personality structure whereby the theory predicted that cultures shape personality and it does vary as well as in individuals [64]. However, personality traits according to Hofstede et al. were categorized in the individual level whereby it was the resolution to differentiate the levels of culture in organizational level and national level. The trust of employees from their companies was resulted from the personality traits with the effective behaviour in order to improve the commitment to change among them. Previous literatures have been supported by the empirical observation to contribute on the personality traits in organizational change positively [65], at which they recommended that personality traits related to the employees’ commitment to change significantly from various aspects.

This finding is congruent with traits theory that justifies 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. The stressful situations as a part of personality among employees can affect the change initiatives. Previous researchers highlighted the importance of personality traits towards the organizational commitment. Therefore, from the hypothesis we could sum that personality traits are associated to the employees’ commitment to change positively and significantly.

In addition, Spagnoli and Caetano who found the empirical evidence about the relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment also agreed that positive relationship between personality traits and employees’ commitment to change is consistent with their findings positively. They said that distinctive components of organizational commitment were associated to different traits of personality. For instance, extraversion related with continuance, affective, and normative commitment positively; meanwhile, agreeableness was related with normative commitment positively. Likewise, Tziner et al. studied that conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness were positively associated with common measure of organizational commitment positively.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research intended to examine the moderating effect of organizational culture on the correlation between personality traits and employees’ commitment to change by testing the research objective.
Study has shown the dominant trait predicts the perspective group of outspoken people. For instance, group members tend to assume that the individuals who expressed assertive behaviour have a higher competency level rather than the individuals who expressed the less assertive behaviour, although the results of the study have shown that there is no connection between personality traits and competency as an indicator of cultural values. Meanwhile, the assertive behaviour was defined as one of the characteristics of leadership that was believed by US culture and literally it was confirmed the common belief that people who are talkative are more competent and potential rather than people who did not talk much. On the other hand, the Dutch culture seems to have different point of view whereby they tend to believe that assertive behaviour expressed negative behaviour as arrogant people and displayed incompetent behaviour and cannot keep their promises.

According to McKay et al. [66], personality traits are one of the factors that affect the organizational commitment. For instance, the emotional attachment that resulted from affective commitment was referred to the employees within the companies to commit to change [67-70]. Personality traits definitely related to the emotional, feelings and attitude that included in the affective commitment. In addition, another commitment type such as continuance commitment also related to the employees’ commitment about their perception towards the consequences if they leave the companies. Although consistently, the previous studies by Erdheim et al. and Tziner et al. also supported that the openness, conscientiousness and extraversion as parts in personality traits are connected to the continuance commitment significantly, but apparently there is still few studies that really investigate the effects of personality traits towards the employees’ commitment to change. On the other hand, the same results have been found that personality traits on agreeableness have positive relationship with normative commitment [71-73]. This type of commitment forced the employees to stay in their companies as the consequence of their responsibility to their companies. The present study has several interesting contributions practically of the findings. It was suggested from this study that the companies should ensure the well-established collaboration among their stakeholders (esp. leaders and employees) regarding their current practices. Especially, the right culture within companies indeed determines the personalities that the employees revealed when they performed at work that affect their commitment to change. It is important to grasp the employees’ attitude that was displayed the different characters and personalities that can affect their level of commitment to change in their company and how leaders can deal with it.

To sum up, the personality traits and organizational culture undoubtedly present an intriguing effect on the employees’ commitment to change. Moreover, it triggered the interesting challenges in the world of human resources and change management as well as its various opportunities and advantages in the global change. One of the hardest obstacles could be the ability to differentiate the lessons that could be learned on how to potentially able to engage on the employees’ commitment to change without possessing the negative sides of organizational change. Furthermore, the commitment to change also could persuade a number of scholars to initiate the research activities in improving the understanding of towards organizational change, especially in the large companies.

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 their 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 each dimension of personality traits variable itself because each dimension might give different impact more significantly than others.

The organizational culture indeed gives insight to the correlation between personality traits and employees’ commitment to change. Nevertheless, although the result has proved the organizational culture in affecting into the role of personality traits in influencing the employees’ commitment to change, they ought to be interpreted carefully. On the other hand, the researcher has attempted to involve all of respondents to participate in this survey, but the awareness towards them regarding the research purpose is still lack that caused the negligence in participation. It was added by the policy in HR department in most of large companies that obstructed the researcher to reach the respondents. The issue of generalizability is one limitation that has to be considered. 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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