

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS ON ADAPTIVE PERFORMANCE IN SMES

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Abstract: *The current study attempted to investigate the effect of big five personality traits on adaptive performance in small and medium-sized organizations (SMEs). The study used a sample of 40 small- and medium-sized business owners. Costa and McCrae established the adaptive performance index scale, and Pulakos constructed the adaptive performance survey. A quantitative method of data analysis was carried out using SPSS v27. The findings demonstrated a significant connection between the big five personality traits and adaptive performance. Individuals who demonstrated agreeableness and extraversion were more likely to effectively utilize their personality in coping with a new environment, resulting in improved adaptive performance in managing their business. The data was analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. These results imply that a person's personality may contribute to excellent adaptability in unanticipated business management. The research's conclusions provide business owners with important information on how to deal with uncertainty work and adaptation.*

Keywords: *Big Five Personality Traits, Adaptive Performance, Agreeableness, Extraversion*

Introduction

The notion of adaptive performance (AP) has lately gained prominence in talks among employees in many organisations, while many individuals continue to overlook it (Park and Park, 2019). Dinibutun (2024) defines adaptation as the capacity of employees to swiftly acclimatise to evolving work situations. Conversely, individuals must adapt to emerging trends and transformations in the workplace. Employees, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), must proactively address workplace changes instead of only responding (Sukri, Zulkiffli, Mat, Omar, Mawardi, & Zaidi, (2023). The rationale for this is the dynamic and unpredictable character of the working environment for SMEs. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are crucial for stimulating innovation, enhancing employment, and driving economic growth (Gherghina, Botezatu, Hosszu, & Simionescu, 2020). Islam & Wahab (2021) assert that SMEs are crucial to Malaysia's economy by generating employment and promoting innovation. Despite their modest scale in income, assets, and workforce, these enterprises significantly influence Malaysia's economic framework and foster entrepreneurial zeal (Krishnan, Rani & Shinozaki, 2024). As on the most recent data from Azhar & Shakil (2021), over 98% of businesses in Malaysia are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are the foundation of the nation's economic framework. The significance of SMEs in enhancing economic activity and national competitiveness is highlighted by their considerable prevalence. Small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) are vital across all sectors, particularly in Malaysia. According to Lee, Park, Back, and Hyun (2023), qualified individuals possess commendable traits and characteristics. According to Zainal, Hashim, Salleh, Arif, & Mohamad (2024), insufficient knowledge, poor education, and interpersonal conflicts hinder small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia, potentially affecting the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation. The personalities of employees significantly influence the performance of small and medium-sized firms. Furthermore, the Big Five Personality Traits categorise an individual's characteristics as either cognitive (related to values and principles) or emotional (related to thought and behavioural patterns). Jassem, Al-Rawi, & Hussein Ali (2022) assert that the Big Five are the most prevalent metrics in personality research.

Research conducted by Bahari, Saufi, Zainol, Samad, & Yaziz (2023) identified that the personalities and attributes of entrepreneurs and their staff are the paramount elements influencing the success of an entrepreneurial endeavour. Awwad & Al-Aseer (2021) contended that due to the unexpected nature of entrepreneurial endeavours and the absence of a fixed work schedule, personality qualities serve as a more dependable and significant determinant of entrepreneurial activity. In contrast to other professions characterised by routine responsibilities, such as teaching, secretarial roles, and administrative positions, their performance is assessed through a distinct methodology. Given that SMEs contend with operational unpredictability, it is essential to establish a method for assessing employee performance that accounts for this factor. Consequently, the capacity to swiftly adapt to evolving work situations is a crucial element of an entrepreneur's success, and adaptable performance serves as an appropriate metric for this (Dinibutun, 2024). Considering that small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) constitute a significant portion of Malaysia's workforce, business proprietors require adaptive performance abilities to address workplace issues. Finally, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are integral to our national goal and economic advancement. We have identified adaptable performance as a crucial component in understanding the performance and success of entrepreneurs in SMEs. This is particularly evident in Malaysia, where a deficiency in adaptive performance among SMEs has been observed.

Literature Review

Big Five Personality Traits

The contemporary workplace is highly competitive, and human resource management has grown increasingly intricate. Moreover, employees' personality traits significantly influence their work outcomes, and all employee-related factors are deemed crucial for cultivating an organization's competitive advantage (Rebecca & Gunasekara (2020). An individual's personality is inherently connected to their behaviour and actions; therefore, Mondak (2010) posited that personality is a psychologically sustained trait shaped by biological factors, which may elicit particular behaviours. Allport (1937) similarly defined personality as "the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adaptations to the environment." McCrae and Costa (1994) characterised personality traits as "intrinsically dynamic dispositions that interact with the opportunities and challenges of the present." Previous studies have established that personality is genetic and remains relatively constant over time (McCrae and Costa, 1994; Mondak, 2010). The Big Five personality traits have been utilised due to their capacity to create a thorough taxonomy of human personality, corroborated by prior empirical studies (McCrae and Costa, 1994; O'Connor et al., 2005). However, Şahin, Karadağ & Tuncer (2019) stated that there are very few number of studies for this personality traits that related to entrepreneurs. The Big Five personality traits, due to their validity and broad acceptance, have been extensively utilised in recent organisational and applied research (Elanain, 2007). Meta-analytic reviews indicate that particular personality traits, including conscientiousness, dependability, agreeableness, and extraversion, serve as reliable predictors of employee outcomes across various occupational categories (Barrick & Mount, 1996; Hough et al., 1990). This research will employ multiple theoretical frameworks to empirically examine the influence of personality traits on employee outcomes mostly in SMEs.

Agreeableness

According to John and Srivastava (1999), there are particular characteristics that are acknowledged as being associated with agreeableness when it comes to individuals. The qualities of altruism, tenderheartedness, trustworthiness, and modesty are some of the traits that are included in this category. According to their assertions, agreeableness is indicative of an individual who is socially conscious and community-oriented. Prior research indicates that individuals exhibiting elevated levels of agreeableness generally maintain superior relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. Among the reasons that they have a greater tendency to collaborate with other people and a lower likelihood of being hostile towards other people, Cha and Song (2024) list this as one of the reasons why they have this tendency. Additionally, they have a lower likelihood of being hostile towards other people. Furthermore, according to Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, and Panagopoulos (2013), an agreeable person makes a concerted effort to avoid conflict with other people. This idea is supported by the findings of the aforementioned researchers. These researchers' findings lend credence to this concept, which is supported by their findings. According to the argument that was presented by Colquitt (2013), individuals who are agreeable demonstrate high levels of empathy and support for other individuals to a significant degree. Sharma (2023) asserts that agreeability has a significant influence on all activities that fall under the umbrella of social entrepreneurship. Despite that, Salmony & Kanbach (2022) said that there are limited studies to prove this personality is related to the adaptive performance of entrepreneurs. To add, even though there are a few findings, Meddeb, St-Jean & Rauch (2024), state that entrepreneurs are less agreeable to adapting when facing new environments. Sharma et al. (2023) suggest that individuals who have low scores on his parameters may exhibit a number of characteristics, including arrogance, obstinacy,

aloofness, and skepticism. These characteristics may be exhibited by individuals who have low scores on their parameters. Based on the previous literature, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits (agreeableness) and adaptive performance*

Extraversion

The need for stimulation, sociability, and vitality are all characteristics that are associated with extraversion, which is characterized by a tendency towards assertiveness. Extraversion is connected to each of these characteristics. As stated by Preissler (2021), when an individual's extraversion score is high, they are more likely to be engaging, vivacious, affable, loquacious, cheerful, and predisposed to experiencing positive emotions. In addition, they are more likely to be able to feel positive emotions. People who have low extraversion scores, on the other hand, tend to be reserved, introverted, and serious in their approach to different aspects of life.

According to Mitchell, Lemoine, and Lee (2022), an individual is considered to have leadership qualities within groups and a significant status if they consistently exhibit elevated extraversion, a broad social network, notable professional achievements, and superior health. In addition, they must have a significant status. A dissertation written by Alam, Rafiq, Nasir, and Abdul Rehman (2023), individuals who are associated with these characteristics are those who exhibit elevated levels of extraversion. The research that Costa and McCrae carried out in 1992 found that extroverts are people who are sociable, talkative, and exhibit a heightened level of enthusiasm when undertaking a task that requires a lot of effort. In addition, Ernawati, Sinambela, Cici, Silviana, Azizah & Naudalia (2022) support that extraversion is very important in entrepreneurs because, with this personality, they can adapt with new environments and new tasks as they are not shy to ask or learn new things. These are the components that make up extraversion. Based on the previous literature, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits (extraversion) and adaptive performance*

Adaptive Performance

According to Bienkowska and Tworek's research from 2020, one of the most important behaviours observed as being essential for the effective operation of an organisation is individual adaptive performance. The research conducted by Pulakos and colleagues in the year 2000 addresses a number of different aspects of adaptability that employees experience in response to various changes in the workplace (Pulakos et al., 2011). The ability to demonstrate interpersonal adaptation, cultural adaptation, and physically-oriented adaptation, as well as the ability to deal with volatile and unpredictable work situations, the ability to engage in creative problem solving, the ability to deal with emergency situations during times of crisis, and the ability to deal with work pressure. The rate of change and the acceleration of social change in society have resulted in the constant pressure that has been placed on businesses to be both agile and efficient (Miceli, Hagen, Riccardi, Sotti, & Settembre-Blundo (2021). Because of this, the acceptance and utilisation of technology has become increasingly important in order to maintain one's relevance and competitiveness in both the business world and the wider society. According to Miceli et al. research from 2021, ongoing technological advancements and digital working have altered the way in which people perform their jobs. Consequently, it would appear that individuals and organisations need to be aware of the actions or strategies that can be taken to enhance the positive development and capabilities of their employees in order to meet the

requirements of new environments, which is a concept that is sometimes referred to as Adaptive Performance (Marques et al., 2019). As a result, in order for an employee to be able to accommodate changes in the design of high-tech jobs, they need to be adaptable and ready (Kane, 2019). According to Okkonen et al. (2019), employees' perceptions of technological flexibility have been influenced by changes in the workplace that are closely aligned with technological advancements. In previous research, it was discovered that individuals who have a positive attitude toward technology are better suited to acquire new technical skills (Caffaro et al., 2020). Because of this, it is essential to have an understanding of the ways in which the adaptive performance of employees can be improved, particularly with regard to the acquisition of new technologies that will enable them to relate to their job structure in this digital age.

Big Five Personality Traits and Adaptive Performance

Over the past few years, the adaptive performance construct has become a topic of concentration among professionals. This action is taken with the intention of acquiring a knowledge of the ways in which this new performance is associated with the contemporary contemporary work environment. According to Pulakos et al. (2000), adaptive performance is defined as the adjustment of behaviour in order to satisfy environmental needs, specific occurrences, or novel conditions. This understanding is based on the findings of the aforementioned researchers. "Adaptive performance" "Adequate performance" refers to the ability of workers to adjust their conduct in reaction to changes in order to enhance the conditions in which they are working. This is what is meant by the term "appropriate performance." Because of this, it is likely that the policies and procedures that are now in place will need to be modified, and it is also possible that the way in which activities are carried out will need to be revised. According to Pulakos et al. (2000), the term "shifting behaviour" refers to the alteration of an individual's attitude when they are performing a function in the workplace by adopting a suitable persona. This definition was included in the definition of the phrase. This change takes place when the individual adopts a persona that is suitable for the part that they are playing. According to Yang and Hwang (2014), recent study has brought to light the significance of investigating the relationship that exists between an individual's personality and their ability to adapt to new situations. It has been demonstrated that this link is of the utmost significance. This is a requirement that has been acknowledged as being vital in the situation. This link and its influence on employee outcomes, such as individual performance, have not been thoroughly explored in the current study, according to Hayati et al. (2014). This is because the relevance of this link has not been adequately studied. Nevertheless, the significance of this connection has been demonstrated with certainty. Additionally, Mahmoud et al. (2020) present research that demonstrates a direct connection between three of the Big Five personality traits and intrapreneurial behaviour (IB). This connection is shown to exist. The characteristics that are included in this category are those that are characterised by consciousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability. Furthermore, the individual performance (IP) of production and operations managers has been shown to have a favourable connection with extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, as evidenced by the findings of the International Business School (IB). The findings allow for this to be the conclusion that can be formed from them. Consequently, on the basis of the positive side of the big five personality traits, which is to enable enterprises to cope with digitalisation, and a review of recent studies addressing adaptive performance, this study proposes that an empirical study be done to analyse the following:

Hypothesis 3: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits and adaptive performance*

Proposed Research Framework

A comprehensive model is proposed to examine the relationships between the Big Five Personality Traits and Adaptive Performance. This model was constructed based on a conducted literature review. In this model, the Big Five Personality Traits are regarded as independent variables, while Adaptive Performance is considered the dependent variable.

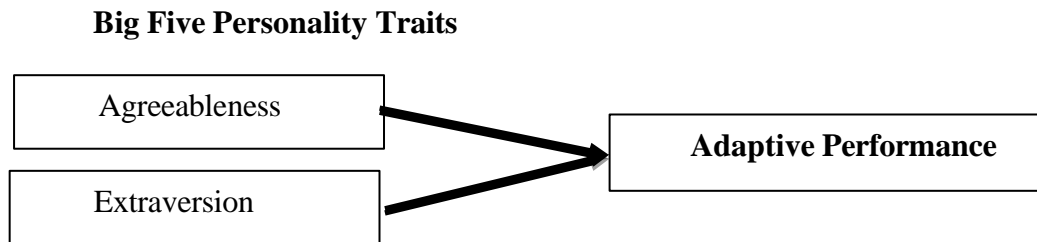


Figure 1: Conceptual Model Proposed Research Propositions

This study investigates the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and adaptive performance (AP) among entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). In 2018, Malaysian SMEs markedly increased their use of information and communication technologies, with over 80% utilizing computers and mobile phones, and more than 70% incorporating the internet into their business operations. Nevertheless, only 46.1% of SMEs employed digital finance and accounting systems (Jaish, Murdipi, Razak, & Alwi, 2023). Moreover, SMEs exhibit a lower propensity to access and utilize the internet relative to other firms, signifying their insufficient adaption to digitalization, a contemporary trend aimed at improving corporate operations. They typically emphasize fundamental technologies above advanced digital solutions (Mushtaq, Gull, & Usman, 2022). In the swiftly changing domain of information technology, organizations face the task of overseeing digital transformation, requiring entrepreneurs with the expertise and mentality to effectively adapt to the constantly evolving demands of their positions. This study seeks to investigate the impact of the Big Five personality traits on adaptive performance inside small and medium-sized organizations (SMEs). This study seeks to provide entrepreneurs and organizational leaders with essential insights to develop strategies that foster a flexible workforce, consequently improving performance and productivity in SMEs through the use of modern technologies in their operations. Subsequent to the discussion, the following study proposal is presented:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits (agreeableness) and adaptive performance*

Hypothesis 2: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits (extraversion) and adaptive performance*

Hypothesis 3: *There is a significant relationship between big five personality traits and adaptive performance*

Research Methodology

The current study was conducted on 40 entrepreneurs in SMEs who were selected intentionally. The required criteria for this study are included for all SMEs in Malaysia including all sectors regarding products or services. All the data from respondents will be collected using a Google Form questionnaire. The questionnaire link will be sent to each respondent using WhatsApp and cluster sampling will be used in this study. Initially, participants were apprised of the study's objective. A collection of questionnaires was provided. Data were collected by a questionnaire-based survey method, employing a self-administered questionnaire approach. Statistical approaches, including SPSS v27, will be employed for demographic analysis to assess the

measurement. A seven-point Likert scale will be employed to assess participant responses, and the constructs will be based on prior research studies.

Pilot Study

This study's conceptual framework outlines numerous overarching themes derived from literature reviews on the Big Five personality traits and adaptive performance. A pilot study was done to assess the framework's utility in assisting academics in analysing entrepreneurs' adaptability to the current unpredictable work environment. Pilot studies are seen a suitable initial phase for evaluating the effectiveness of research instruments and analytical methods. The constructed questionnaire has been sent to 40 entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This pilot study seeks to furnish essential data for determining the sample size and evaluating all other facets of the main investigation, so reducing superfluous exertion from researchers and participants, as well as conserving research resources.

Table 1: Correlation Test for Technology Readiness and Adaptive Performance

Hypothesis	Relationship	<i>p</i> -value	Pearson Correlation	Decision
H1	Agreeableness -> Adaptive Performance	<0.05	0.557	Moderate
H2	Extraversion -> Adaptive Performance	<0.05	0.852	Strong
H3	Big Five Personality Traits -> <u>Adaptive Performance</u>	<0.05	0.886	Strong

Results

The correlation between variables presented in Table 1 indicated a significant relationship between the Big Five personality traits (agreeableness and extraversion) and adaptive performance, since all *p*-values were below .05. The table indicates a Spearman's Rank Order Correlation of 0.557 for H1 (*p*-value <0.05). A moderately positive correlation existed between agreeableness and adaptive performance. The outcome for H2 is 0.852 (*p*-value < 0.05). A significant positive correlation existed between extraversion and adaptive behaviour. The *p*-value for H3 is less than 0.05 (0.886). A robust positive correlation existed between the Big Five personality traits and adaptive performance.

Conclusion

In the modern, rapidly changing workplace, entrepreneurial organisations have the challenge of adapting to new trends and skills to effectively address existing business operations and increasing job demands. Understanding the considerable importance of the Big Five personality traits and adaptive performance for entrepreneurs seeking to develop a highly engaged and flexible workforce. This study investigates the correlation between the Big Five personality traits and adaptable performance in entrepreneurs, providing potential insights into the factors influencing their adaptability in response to changing business trends. Entrepreneurs can manage uncertainty, innovate, and achieve lasting success in the dynamic and competitive business environment by developing and adopting particular personality qualities. This is a strategy via which entrepreneurs can improve their enterprises. The findings of this research study are anticipated to clarify the essential role in promoting adaptive performance among entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs will understand how their adaptability to the dynamic business environment is influenced by their personality traits. Entrepreneurs can utilise these insights to create specialized strategies and approaches that enhance their businesses' adaptability.

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