LOYALTY AND NEGLECT AS RESPONSES TO DISSATISFYING JOB CONDITIONS (THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY)

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ABSTRACT

This study clarifies the role of personality trait when reacting to dissatisfying job conditions by applying Hirschman's *exit, voice, loyalty,* and Rosbult's *neglect* as employees' response within Malaysian public sector employees. Structural equation modeling is used to fit the data provided by 150 public sector employees working in various government agencies. Due to the specific organizational culture, this study argues that employees in public sector will choose response either *loyalty* or *neglect* depending on which personality traits they belong to. Drawing on the Five Factor Model (FFM), the study finds out that *Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness* and *Extraversion* when something unfavorable happens in an organization, they will remain in organization but exhibit passive withdrawal behaviors such as reporting sick, coming in late, putting less effort into their, putting not enough effort into their work, and missing out on meetings (*neglect*) while *Agreeableness* and *Emotional Stability* will remain confident, assume that in the end everything will work out fine and finally wait and hope for improvement (*loyalty*).

Keywords : Five Factor Model (FFM), loyalty, neglect, personality trait, public sector

INTRODUCTION

Public organizations are structured and run differently from their private counterparts in terms of recruitment, promotion, work environment, and political expectations. Peter Drucker (1998), the management guru even acknowledged that when we talk about management we talk about business management (private sector).As such, public employees may have different views and motivations toward their job. In addition, the organizational culture of the two organizations is quite dissimilar with the later is more profit-focus in orientation. Given these differences, it is possible that the way of employees to express dissatisfaction toward the job would be different as well.

Hirschman's *exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect* (EVLN) model, which was developed to explain varieties of consumer (customer) behavior, has broad appeal to a variety of disciplines, including marketing and political science (Boroff & Lewin, 1997). The theory of exit, voice, and loyalty suggests at least three possible options as responses to dissatisfaction. Exit is equivalent to voluntary separation or turnover from the job. Members may either leave the job and the firm or seek a transfer within the

same organization as a means of leaving the dissatisfying job. The "painful decision to withdraw or switch" (Hirschman, 1970) requires considerable effort by the employee and usually means that the employee believes the situation is unlikely to improve. The exit option is regarded as
uniquely powerful and expected to produce a "wonderful concentration of the mind" for the abandoned employer (Hirschman, 1970).

Hirschman (1970) also contributed to organizational behavior by identifying a political response to job dissatisfaction: the "voice option," defined as "any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs." In a theory of organizational behavior emphasizing the repair of deteriorating conditions and the return to previous levels of performance, voice is a key concept. According to Hirschman, voice is a legitimate restorative mechanism, very likely to be active when members have substantial involvements.

The third category suggested by Hirschman (1970) is loyalty. When confronted with deteriorating conditions in the organization, some members choose neither exit nor voice; rather, they stick with the firm for a period of time before reacting to the problem, if at all. They "suffer in silence, confident that things will soon get better" (Hirschman, 1970). As Hirschman notes, however, most loyalist behaviour retains an enormous dose of reasoned calculation; "an individual member can remain loyal without being influential himself, but hardly without the expectation that someone will act or something will happen to improve matters."

Dissatisfaction with one's job also may result in lax and disregardful behaviour. Hirschman (1970) did not explicitly address this possibility. In a study of romantic involvements, generally inattentive behaviour, such as lack of caring and staying away, was termed neglect (Rusbult et al, 1982). Neglect aptly describes lax and disregardful behaviour among workers.

Since management is not cultural-value free (Hofstede, 2011), the way of society behaves is largely determined by cultural value within society. Under Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, Malaysia belongs to collectivism (Hofstede, 1980) which is defined by Triandis (1995) as:

a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, coworkers, tribe, nation).

This implies that collectivists identify themselves as belonging to the organization for which they work and must follow norm and/or duty imposed by their collective (the organization). This is reflected in Malayan culture which is classically uncertainty avoiding, tends to generate predictable behaviour and does not tolerate breaking the rules. *Bertolak-ansur* (tolerance), a characteristic of many Malayan relationships, is practiced in part to minimize risk among individuals. Conditioned this way, as other collectivists, when expressing dissatisfaction (Thomas and Au, 2002), loyalty and neglect exchange behaviour are the options.

Researchers and practitioners in industrial and organizational psychology have long been intrigued by the potential for measures of personality to describe, explain, and predict the behaviour of individuals at work. The Big Five Inventory developed by McCrae (2006) holds that the common variance among almost all personality trait variables can be summarized by the factors of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness has gained popularity and widely accepted. The five-factor model (FFM) of personality has been used to great effect in management and psychology research to predict attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours, but has largely been ignored in the public management field. I demonstrate the potential utility of incorporating this model into public management research by using the FFM personality factors in the context of expressing dissatisfaction in public sector.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN) typology remains the most popular conceptualization of response strategies and has earned substantial theoretical and empirical support in various relationship situations, including romantic involvement (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982), employee-supervisor relationships (Thomas & Pekerti, 2003, Tjemkes & Furrer, 2010).

Hirschman (1970) proposed that important behaviours of employees in organisations are "exit", which refers to turnover intentions, and "voice", referring to the active and constructive efforts to improve the situation at work. "Loyalty" is a passive but positive behavioural style, such that loyal employees remain positive about the organisation under all circumstances and wait passively until the effects of negative events are extinguished. Later, "neglect" was recognized as a potentially important behaviour (Rusbult et al., 1988), referring to people who silently allow that things get worse in the organisation, for instance by turning up late and by spending little effort. Exit and voice are considered active behaviours, whereas loyalty and neglect are passive behaviours. Voice and loyalty are seen as constructive behaviours, while exit and neglect are destructive behaviours (Rusbult et al., 1988).

FIGURES 1. DIMENSIONS OF RESPONSE TO DISSATISFACTION
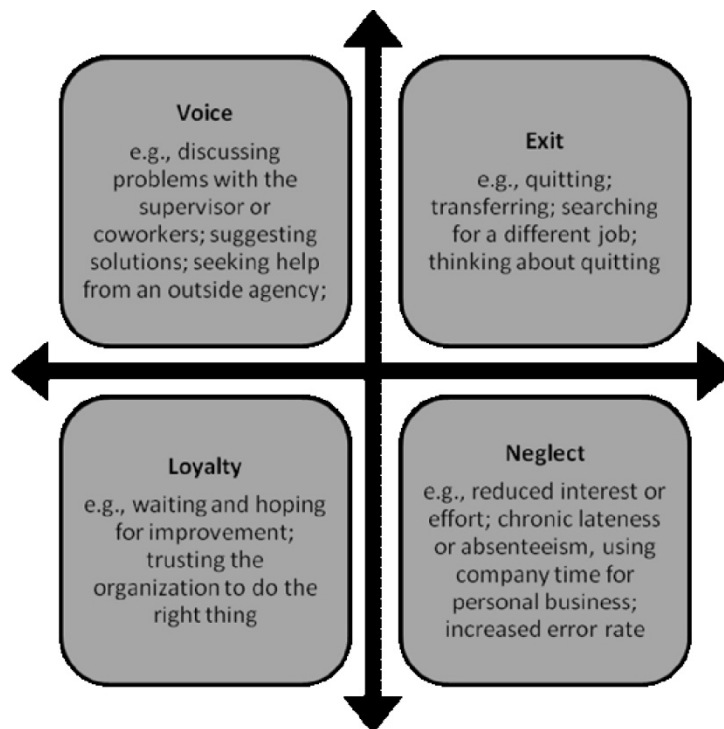
Source: Thomas and Pekerti (2003)

While Rusbult et al (1988) demonstrated that different behavioral responses to imbalance in the exchange relationship can be predicted based on exchange variables such as job satisfaction and quality of job alternatives, they did not consider the

societal or cultural context in which the exchange was embedded (Thomas & Au , 2002).

Economic, legal, and political systems develop over time and are visible manifestations of a more fundamental set of shared meanings (Schwartz, 1994). Societal culture reflects the institutions of society, but is represented in the relatively stable values, attitudes, and behavioral assumptions of individuals. By focusing on this more fundamental and stable construct the writer presents an opportunity to understand systematic variation in individual responses that has relevance for public management which is notably different from business management. A basic question addressed in this paper is the generalizability of the Rusbult et al (1988) framework and findings to other cultures. Addressing questions of cross cultural generalizability is fundamental to combating the implicit universalism that pervades much organizational research.

Psychologists have long been interested in understanding the factors that lead an individual to favour some dissatisfaction strategies exposure over others. Studies show that a person who feels a strong prosocial motivation (high concern for the other and the relationship) is likely to respond with relationship-maintaining responses such as voice and loyalty, whereas a person who feels low prosocial motivation (little concern for the other and the relationship) is likely to respond with relationship-undermining acts such as exit and neglect (Kammrath and Dweck, 2006). Incremental theorists believe that individuals can, through effort, change even their most basic qualities, whereas entity theorists believe that people are stuck with their personality strengths and flaws for life. When people believe in the power to change an unpleasant situation, they gravitate toward active, problem-solving strategies. When they doubt the feasibility of change, on the other hand, they switch to other responses, including acceptance or disengagement (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991).

Drawing under incremental theories and bound by cultural nom as well as organizational culture within the public sector, I believe that the dissatisfaction   will be expressed in both relationship-maintaining responses (loyalty) and relationship-undermining acts (neglect) which is consistent with the conflict avoidance norm observed in Malayan cultures. However in organization setting, as it is necessary to differentiate between good apple and bad apple, the Five Factor Personality Model (FFM) or The Big Five is used to predict which will show *loyalty* and *neglect*.

The Big Five model implies that personality consists of five relatively independent dimensions that altogether provide a meaningful taxonomy for the study of individual differences. The first factor is Extraversion .The behavioural tendencies used to measure this factor include being sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The second factor is Neuroticism. It represents individual differences in the tendency to experience distress (McCrae & John, 1992). Typical behaviours associated with this factor include being anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, emotional, worried, and insecure (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The positive pole of this dimension is called Emotional Stability. Agreeableness is third factor. It describes the humane aspects of people— characteristics such as altruism, nurturance, caring, and emotional support at one end of the dimension, and hostility, indifference to others, self-centeredness, spitefulness, and jealousy at the other end (Digman, 1990). The behavioural tendencies typically associated with this factor include being courteous, flexible, trusting, good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, soft-hearted, and tolerant (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The fourth factor is referred to as

Conscientiousness. It is related to dependability and volition and the typical behaviours associated with it include being hard-working, achievement- oriented, persevering, careful, and responsible (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The last factor is Openness to Experience, which is related to scientific and artistic creativity, divergent thinking, and political liberalism (Judge et al., 2002; McCrae, R.R.,& Costa, P.T, 1996). The behavioural tendencies typically associated with Openness to Experience include being imaginative, cultured, curious, original, broad-minded, intelligent (Digman, 1990), and having a need for variety, aesthetic sensitivity, and unconventional values (McCrae & John, 1992).

Thus, the following hypotheses are postulated:

> H1: When dissatisfied with the organization, employees scoring high in *Extraversion* will reply with relationship-undermining acts of *Neglect*.

> H2: When dissatisfied with the organization, employees scoring high in *Conscientiousness* will reply with relationship-undermining acts of *Neglect*.

> H3: When dissatisfied with the organization, employees scoring high in *Openness to Experience* will reply with relationship-undermining acts of *Neglect*.

> H4: When dissatisfied with the organization, employees scoring high in *Agreeableness* will reply with relationship-maintaining responses of *Loyalty*.

> H5: When dissatisfied with the organization, employees scoring high in *Emotional Stability* will reply with relationship-maintaining responses of *Loyalty*.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study intends to analyze the specific employees' personality type and how they respond to job dissatisfaction in Malaysia public sector. This way, the writer applies purposive sampling technique as it is the most effective when one needs to study a certain domain (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling has been used through the years including comparisons of organizational culture practices (Neupane et al, 2002). Sample of 253 employees was obtained from various government agencies in Melaka. Big Five personality is measured with questionnaires developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) and items used to measure neglect and loyalty use questionnaires developed by Naus and Iterson (2007). Items measuring neglect consists of *reporting sick because do not feel like working, coming in late because do not feel like working, putting less effort into work than may be expected , not putting enough effort into work and missing out on meetings because do not feel like attending them*. Items measuring loyalty consists of *trusting the decision-making process of the organization ,trusting the organization to solve the problem , remaining confident that the situation will be taken care, assuming that in the end everything will work out fine and optimistically waiting for better times.*

Model evaluation is one of the most unsettled and difficult issues connected with struc-tural modeling as no model fit criterion can actually meet all these criteria (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). The most commonly employed statistic is χ^2. Although this statistic is routinely included in reports of structural equation modeling results, it rarely is interpreted (Robins, Fraley and Krueger, 2007). In this study, the χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 2293.3$) could not determine the goodness-of-fit of the model, perhaps as a result of the complexity of the model. This way, alternative means of evaluating model fit are required. Hu and Bentler (1999) argue that cutoff values close to 0.95 for Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), close to 0.06 for Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) would justify the conclusion of a relatively good fit between the hypothesized model and the data. The other goodness-of-fit statistics recommended includes CMIN/DF (The Minimum Sample Discrepancy Function) expected ≤ 2,0 (Arbuckle, 2005); GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) close to 0.90, AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit

Index) close to 0,90 or higher (Hair et al,1998) to indicate the acceptable fit between model and data. Model in this research presents an acceptable fitness of the mode

The relationship among variables are observable on the following figure.

FIGURES 2. RELATIONSHIP AMONG VARIABLES
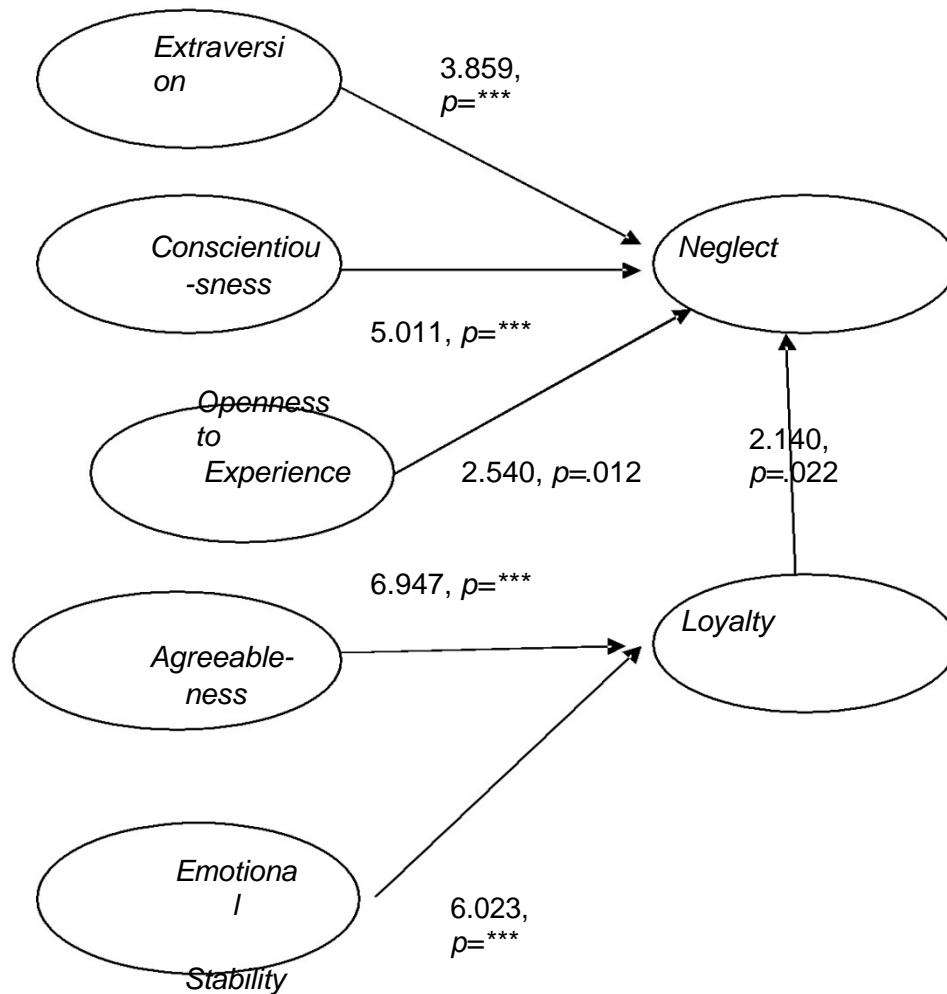
*Notes: *** = p < 0,001*

The direct effects of the latent independent variables on the dependent variables are depicted in Figure 2. The figure lists the path coefficient and probability value for the variables. These provided support for all hypotheses. Though not hypothesized, the positive path on Loyalty to Neglect indicates that people will not respond positively forever to deteriorating work atmosphere. One day they will respond negatively. This is in line with Incremental theorists believe that individuals can, through effort, change even their most basic qualities not only from bad to good, but it can be from good to bad.

CONCLUSION

With respect to the applicability of the theory of Loyalty and Neglect to the responses of job dissatisfaction, the fact that all of hypotheses were supported provides initial evidence of the generalizability of the theory to Malaysian public sector employees. Employees with Agreeableness and Emotional Stability personality trait are more loyal and show greater tendency to express dissatisfaction in workplace in relationship-maintaining responses (loyalty) than persons who score high on Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience personality traits. When something unfavourable happens in organization, the first cluster will remain confident, assume that in the end everything will work out fine and finally wait and hope for improvement (*loyalty*) meanwhile the other cluster will remain in organization but exhibit passive withdrawal behaviors such as reporting sick, coming in late, putting less effort into their, putting not enough effort into their work, and missing out on meetings (*neglect*). Within Malaysian public sector setting one cannot directly assumes that people who respond to job dissatisfaction in neglect way cannot be changed into the loyalty one. The same things may happen to someone who respond in loyalty way. This support the Incremental theorists (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991) that individuals can, through effort, change even their most basic qualities. When they doubt the feasibility of change, they switch to other responses, including acceptance (loyalty) or disengagement (neglect).

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