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## A study of the relationship and influence of personality on job stress among academic administrators at a university

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### Abstract

In universities academic administrators are an important group of people that provides leadership to the universities. They hold multiple administrative positions in addition to their teaching responsibilities, which increases their workload. Ignoring their well-being could be detrimental to the individual as well as to the organization as a whole. This study was conducted among 120 (55 males and 65 females) academic administrators of the National University of Malaysia with the purpose of studying the relationship and influence of personality on job stress. Two instruments used which were Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised Short-Version (EPQR-S) (1985), and The University Administrative Concern, Rasch (1986), all of which have good validity of between 0.6 to 0.9. To examine the relationship Pearson Correlation was used, while the Multiple Regression was used to determine the influence of personality on job stress. Results of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between personalities with work-related stress. Next, the results revealed that there is a meaningful positive correlation between job stress and psychoticism ( $r=0.17$ ) and neuroticism ( $r=0.38$ ), and a meaningful negative correlation was found between job stress and extraversion ( $r= - 0.26$ ) and lie ( $r= - 0.25$ ). However, only two of the personality dimensions which were neuroticism and lie scale showed as good predictors of job stress. Our results suggest that better knowledge of the influence of personality dimensions and job stress might be helpful for the choice of more effective interventions.

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### 1. Introduction

Work-related stress is generating increasing concern, so workplace health and safety researchers around the world are seeking solutions to the nature and causes of the problem as well as the legal requirements relating to its prevention and control. This is because stress can influence an individual's behaviour either negatively or positively.

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For example, Spielberg (1979), believe that work stress is one of the most important factors affecting productivity because of the direct relationship between the individual's behaviour and the stress he or she experiences.

### 1.1 Job stress

Job stress exists when stressors such as work demands, constraints, events or conditions cause strains (aversive psychological, physiological or behavior reactions) (Beehr & Glazer 2001) and can lead to poor health and even injury. According to Scott (2006), stressors at work place include unclear requirement, role overload, high stress times with no down times, big consequences for small failures, lack of personal control, lack of recognition and poor leadership. So, job stresses are harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. However, according to one school of thought, differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress or not. In other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a problem for another.

Organizational stress framework includes sources of work stress such as job factors, role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, and insufficient control. The biological/demographic variables such as age, sex, occupation, health status, education, and social support also can influence it (Matteson & Ivancevich 1989). Other variables investigated in the model by Matteson and Ivancevich (1989) include cognitive/affective variable such as need levels, locus of control, Type A/B traits, hardiness, and self-esteem. Kahn and Cooper (1993) develop another model that is the major categories of stress-at-work model, which includes stressors intrinsic to the job, such as working conditions, the role of the individual in the organization, career development, relationships with others, and organizational structure and climate – the interface between home and work.

Work stress studies in Malaysia have been conducted on various groups such as teachers (Leng 1999; Norkiah 1980; Suseela 1994; Rosli 1997; Awang 1993; Yong 1999), information technology professionals (Foen 1999), and sports (Lin 1999) and among Malaysian administrators (Mohamed 1993).

One source of job stress is role ambiguity, for example when managers are unclear about their role(s), lack of clear information about what is expected of them or are uncertain about the limits of their authority (Antonioni 1995). McLean (1979) stated that role ambiguity as when an individual has insufficient information about his/her work role (scope and responsibility). He found that individuals suffering from role ambiguity have high job-related tension which is similar to Caplan and Jones (1975) findings. According to Froiland (1993), role conflict occurs when an individual in a particular work is torn by conflicting job demands or doing things that he/she does not think as part of the job. Also, it occurs when an individual has to carry out tasks not perceived as part of his job (Sutherland & Cooper 1990).

Career development is another important source of work stress. McLean (1979) stated that career development refers to the impact of under-promotion, over-promotion, and status incongruence. Krohe (1999) attributed 40 percent of worker turnover to work stress.

The other source of job stress is role overload which occurs when the individual is unable to perform tasks that need high level of skills or/and knowledge. Kahn and Cooper (1993: 39) stated, "Qualitative overload occurs when an individual feels a lack of the skills and abilities needed to perform a given job". Schermerhorn et al. (2000) stated that role overload, both qualitative and quantitative occurs when too much is expected and the individual feels overwhelmed with work.

Another source is responsibility for others which includes many aspects. According to McLean (1980), individuals who are responsible for others at work, and who must motivate, reward and admonish them generally experience a higher level of stress than those without such responsibilities.

With respect to university administration, Rasch and her associates (1986) investigated the administrative side of the department chair role and discovered four factors of university administrators: task-based stress or stress arising from performance of day-to-day administrative tasks (similar to the faculty's time constraints factor); role-based stress or the role-set interactions and beliefs or attitudes about the role of the chair in higher education; and conflict-mediating stress which reflected pressures from resolving conflicts with colleagues and the dean, and handling

student problems. A fourth factor, social confidence, had too weak an association to be forwarded as a separate dimension of administrative stress.

## *1.2 Personality*

In psychology, personality is regarded as all that a person is and has about him which includes everything about the person, his physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual makeup that makes a person unique. According to Pervin (1999), “personality represents those characteristics of the person or of the people that generally account for consistent pattern of responses to the situation”. It is the total of one’s behavior towards oneself and others as well.

Regarding personality in work settings, organizational psychologists make the assumption, that people will be happiest, and do their best work when person-job fit is high; when the individuals who hold various jobs have characteristics that suit them for the work they do. In one large scale study, Salgado (1997) reviewed previous research conducted with literally tens of thousands of participants that examined the relationship between individual’s standing on the big five dimensions and job performance. Results showed that conscientiousness and emotional stability (neuroticism) were both significantly related to job performance across all occupational groups and across all measures of performance. In other words, the higher an individual’s scores on these dimensions, the better the job performance.

To date no systematic research has been undertaken to get evidence of personality traits as predictors of job stress among academic administrators at Malaysian Research Universities. So the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between job stress and type of personality traits and to determine the influence of personality traits on job stress among employees working in a research university.

## **2. Material and Methods**

### *2.1 Research Design*

This study adopted a survey research design that utilised questionnaires to obtain data from the respondents.

#### *2.1.1 Participants*

The participants were 120 (55 males and 65 females) academic administrators at the National University of Malaysia. Data on demographic characteristics of respondents were collected via a demographic questionnaire developed by the researcher. Characteristics addressed by the questionnaire were (a) gender, (b) years of teaching experience, and (c) posts.

#### *2.1.2 Assessment instrument*

Job stress was measured by means of The University Administrative Concern (Rasch et al. 1986), is a 28-item questionnaire that measures occupational stress factors viz: role, task, conflict mediating and social confidence. Items are responded to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all disturbing me (1) to always disturbing me (5). Range of score is 28-140. The reliability of the scale is high with Cronbach’s alpha,  $r = 0.95$ . Another instrument is the reduced 48-item translated Malay version of the Eysenck Personality Inventory-Revised (EPQ-RS) that consists of four scales of 12 items: EPQ-E (Extraversion vs Introversion); EPQ-N (Neuroticism or emotionality); EPQ-P (Psychoticism or tough mindedness) and EPQ-L (Lie). Each question has a binary response, ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Each dichotomous item was scored 1 or 0, and each scale had a maximum possible score of 12 and minimum of zero.

#### *2.1.3 Procedure*

The assessment is done electronically and each participants were notified through the e-mail and were requested to log on to a dedicate URL sites to answer The University Administrative Concern (Rasch et al. 1986) related to their job stress and Eysenck Personality Inventory-Revised (EPQ-RS).

#### 2.1.4 Statistical Analysis

To examine the relationship Pearson Correlation was used, while the Multiple Regression was used to determine the influence of personality traits on job stress.

### 3. Results

Results of the study revealed that there is a meaningful positive correlation between job stress and psychoticism ( $r=0.17$ ) and neuroticism ( $r=0.38$ ), and a meaningful negative correlation was found between job stress and extraversion ( $r= - 0.26$ ) and lie ( $r= - 0.25$ ). However, only two of the personality dimensions which were neuroticism and lie scale showed as good predictors of job stress.

### 4. Discussions

The results of Pearson Correlation test showed that there is a meaningful positive correlation between job stress and psychoticism and neuroticism. It was proposed that the neuroticism dimension indicated emotional instability and reactivity, and that individuals who score high on this dimension tend to be anxious, depressive, overly emotional, shy, and have low self-esteem. Individuals with these traits of personality will easily experience job stress. The psychoticism dimension highlights more bizarre personality characteristics, such as being distant, cold, insensitive, absurd, and unable to empathize with others (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1976). Academic administrators with these type of personality will be more prone to job stress compared to other personality type. The association of psychoticism and neuroticism with job stress can be justified based on the characteristics of negative mood adjustment. Psychoticism and neuroticism are indicative of the tendency to experience negative emotions and this tendency will acts toward job stress. The positive link between job stress and neuroticism is endorsed by several research findings (Srivastava 2001; Kumaresean 2004; Grant & Langan- Fox 2006; Smithikrai 2007). However the result also showed that extraversion and lie showed negative correlation with job stress. As the extraversion dimension represents sociality and impulsivity, individuals in this dimension were defined as enjoying social interactions, energetic, and preferring social situations to loneliness. It is possible that extraversion increases the tendency of an individual to experience pleasure. Moreover; extraversion prepares individuals to experience positive emotions. These situations can help individuals to be more capable especially in interpersonal and social interactions. So respondents with high extraversion will have low job stress level. In this study neuroticism and lie scale showed as good predictors of job stress, because neuroticism is suggested to be linked to individual differences in emotional reactivity to stress (Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1987). Neurotic individual has the tendency to experience negative emotions such as emotional instability, depressive mood, nervous breakdown, hyper reactivity, over anxiousness and this tendency will acts toward job stress.

### 5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that all the personality dimensions showed significant correlation with job stress and two of the dimensions (neuroticism and lie) showed as predictors. The results suggest that lecturers that are also working as administrators need to know their personality characteristics so that they will be aware of their own personal dispositions that may reduce or aggravate stress. Career counsellors should conduct personality assessment for all academic administrators and appropriate coping responses they use in dealing with work-related stress noted for improvement or retention as appropriate, and teach the lecturers appropriate coping strategies in order to reduce the use of maladaptive coping strategies.

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