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A personality trait and workplace deviant behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Workplace deviant behaviors have caused organizations to suffer losses. As such this study explored the relationships between employees' personality trait of emotional intelligence and workplace intelligences. One hundred and sixty-two participants completed the Self-Administered Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSREIT) and workplace deviance test. The findings showed a negative but significant relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace deviant behaviors. Also discussed were the level of respondents' emotional intelligence and workplace deviance according to demographic factors. Possible implications for intervention and treatment efforts are discussed.

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Introduction

Workplace deviance has become an increasingly prominent concern of both academicians and practitioners. The prevalence of deviant employee behaviors is especially disturbing considering their detrimental effects on organizations and employees. Organizations stand to lose millions of dollars through employees' theft and sabotages. Those employees who are targets of workplace deviance are more likely forced to quit, suffer stress-related problems, has decreased productivity, low morale, and lose work time (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Studies have shown that causes of workplace deviance can be the organization itself and the individual employees in the contexts of his or her personality. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the personality trait of emotional intelligence and workplace deviance.

Literature

Employees' workplace deviant behaviors have always been a bane to organizations. According to Robinson and Bennett (1995), workplace deviance is employees' voluntary behaviors that violate company norms, policies, or rules and threaten the well-being of the organization and/or its members. These behaviors, when directed towards the organization, may be in the form of theft, sabotage, and putting little effort into work. When directed towards individual employees (supervisors or coworkers alike), it is in the form of making fun of others, playing mean pranks, acting rudely, and arguing.

Studies have identified that organizational factors such as job stressors (Fox et al., 2001), organizational frustration (Spector, 1975), lack of control over the work environment (Bennett, 1998), weak sanctions for rule violations (Hollinger & Clark, 1983), and organizational changes such as downsizing (Baron & Neuman, 1996) are causes of workplace deviance. As such, these organizational factors make companies become more vulnerable to deviant behaviors committed by their employees.

Studies have also shown that individual employees' personality for example, socialization and impulsivity constructs are causes of workplace deviant behaviors. Socialization is the

process of internalizing societal and cultural norms (Gough, 1987); a construct based on Gough's role-taking theory of sociopathy which ranges from asocial to social personality types. Individuals with high asocial personality are low in social maturity, integrity, righteousness, and morality and are often perceived as rebellious, dissatisfied, and defensive (Gough and Peterson, 1952). According to Gough, individuals with this personality constructs not only find it difficult to conform but tends to resist rules and regulations. Individuals high in socialization on the other hand are considerate, dependable, well-balanced, patient, tactful, and easily able to conform. Empirical research thus far showed a link between socialization and deviant behavior. Megargee (1972) found that there is a relationship between socialization and deviance behavior of delinquency while Collins and Schmidt (1993) associated it with white-collar crime. Research by Collins and Rader (1996), as cited in Collins and Griffin (1998), also found a relationship between socialization with theft and disciplinary problems while, Sarchione et al. (1998) found relationship between socialization and sexual misconduct, substance abuse, and embezzlement.

Impulsivity, on the other hand, is the tendency to act with little forethought as to the consequences of one's actions (Eysenck, 1967). Individuals scoring high on impulsivity measures are characterized as rash, reckless, uninhibited, incautious, and foolhardy (Jackson, 1984). Impulsive individuals are also likely to act on the spur of the moment and to freely express their emotions. Individuals scoring lower on measures of impulsivity are thought to be self-disciplined and able to control their emotions (Megargee, 1972). In their study, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1993) have implicated impulsivity with deviant behaviors such as drug use, theft, workplace violence, and employment instability. Socialization, impulsivity and many other constructs are psychometrics properties of the emotional intelligence. Table 1 shows the facets of the trait of emotional intelligence as identified by Petrides (2009).

Table 1: Sampling Domain of Trait Emotional Intelligence in Adults

Facets	High scorers perceive themselves as...
Adaptability	...flexible and willing to adapt to new conditions.
Assertiveness	...forthright, frank, and willing to stand up for their rights.
Emotion perception (self and others)	...clear about their own and other people's feelings.
Emotion expression	...capable of communicating their feelings to others.
Emotion management (others)	...capable of influencing other people's feelings.
Emotion regulation	...capable of controlling their emotions.
Impulsiveness (low)	...reflective and less likely to give in to their urges.
Relationships	...capable of having fulfilling personal relationships.
Self-esteem	...successful and self-confident.
Self-motivation	...driven and unlikely to give up in the face of adversity.
Social awareness	...accomplished networkers with excellent social skills.
Stress management	...capable of withstanding pressure and regulating stress.
Trait empathy	...capable of taking someone else's perspective.
Trait happiness	...cheerful and satisfied with their lives.
Trait optimism	...confident and likely to "look on the bright side" of life.

Source: Petrides, K. V. (2009). *Technical manual for the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaires (TEIQue)*. London: London Psychometric Laboratory.

Emotional intelligence is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. Thus, emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. While some researchers claim that emotional intelligence is an inborn characteristic, others suggest it can be learned and strengthened. EI, to some extent, may be learned through life experience (Bar-On, 2000); training programs (Marrow, Jarrett & Rupinski, 1997); and executive education (Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1995). All these suggestions and research findings provide evidences that individuals' social and emotional competencies can be improved through sustained effort and a systematic program.

The famous "Sommerville" study showed the importance of EI traits in individuals. This 40 year longitudinal research studied 450 boys who grew up in Sommerville, Massachusetts where two-thirds of the boys were from welfare families, and one-third had IQ's below 90. Finding of the study showed that boys who acquired childhood abilities such as being able to handle frustration, control emotions, and get along with other people do well at work or in other aspects of their lives (Snarey & Vaillant, 1985).

In the famous "marshmallow studies" at Stanford University, researchers found the children who were able to resist temptation had a total SAT score that was 210 points higher than those children who were unable to wait. The research suggests that emotional and social skills actually help improve cognitive functioning (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990).

Feist and Barron (1996) who tracked 80 doctorate students in science who studied at Berkeley and had undergone a battery of personality tests, IQ tests, and interviews in the 1950s; found that those who became more successful 40 years later were those

with strong social and emotional abilities. Feist and Barron (1996) went on to conclude that social and emotional abilities are important in determining professional success and prestige.

In a study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and tobacco and cannabis use among university students, Joaquin, Joaquin, and Jordi (2006) find that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in term of their level of EI. However, their study did find that adolescents high in EI placed a higher value on the negative repercussions of such consumption to one's health.

Trinidad et. al (2004a) study on American adolescents aged between 10 and 13 found that those with high EI has a protective association with psychosocial risk factors for smoking. Accordingly, their findings showed that high EI is related to an increase perception of the negative social consequences on smoking, an increased perceived ability to refuse a cigarette offer, as well as lower likelihood of intending to smoke in the future. Also while adolescents with high EI are more likely to intend to smoke if they have previously experimented with cigarettes; those with low EI are more likely to intend to smoke if they are more hostile or have a low perceived ability to refuse a cigarette offer from a peer Trinidad et. al (2004b).

According to Goleman (1998), and Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (1998) while "emotional intelligence" is important for success in work and in life, however, by itself, emotional intelligence is not a strong predictor of job performance. Emotional intelligence only provides the competencies for individuals to have emotional competence, i.e., the personal and social skills that lead to superior performance in the world of work. As such, a certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary for individuals to learn the emotional competencies such as the ability to recognize accurately what another person is feeling, thus enabling one to develop a specific competency such as Influence. Similarly, people who are better able to regulate their emotions will find it easier to develop a competency such as Initiative or Achievement drive.

Emotional intelligence also enables individuals to develop a construct called "learned optimism", the causal attributions individuals make when confronted with failure or setbacks (Schulman, 1995). Research has shown that new salesmen who were optimists sold 37 percent more insurance in their first two years than did pessimists (Schulman).

Another aspect of emotional intelligence is that it enables individuals to manage feelings and handle stress. The abilities considered important for success in life (Lusch & Serpkenci (1990). Emotional intelligence also enables one to know when and how to express emotion as it does with controlling it. According to Barsade and Gibson (1998) managers having the ability to infect a work group with their emotions, and good feelings will lead to improved cooperation, fairness, and overall group performance. Bachman (1988) also found similar findings that effective leaders were warmer, more outgoing, emotionally expressive, dramatic, and sociable. Empathy is also an important aspect of emotional intelligence, and researchers have known for years that it contributes to occupational success. According to Rosenthal (1977), people who were best at identifying others' emotions were more successful in their work as well as in their social lives. Pilling and Eroglu (1994), in conducting a survey of retail sales buyers, found that buyers preferred sales representatives who could listen well and really understand what they wanted and what their concerns were. Based on the above discussion while EI in itself does not relate

directly with individual success, it provides the necessary emotional competencies to enable one to be successful. Ultimately it is these social and emotional competencies that will help individuals cope with challenges, perform, and succeed at work or in the rest of their personal lives. Joaquin, Joaquin, and Jordi (2006) suggested that these competencies can be enhanced through training programmes where individuals can be taught in dealing and handling one's own emotions, and restructuring their perception of the highly stressful factors that surround them especially from peer group pressure. Through training sessions, individual employees can also be taught the use of techniques that can help strengthened their social skills; assertiveness techniques and educational health programmes, which could help them achieved more adaptive behavior and use these personal skill to improve one's own resistance to social pressures.

Since personality trait can be a source of workplace deviance therefore, this study tries to look at EI trait and workplace deviance orientations among Malaysian workers and the relationship between these two variables. These objectives were achieved through the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in the level of EI trait among employees based on demographic factors of gender and age?
2. Is there a difference in the level of workplace deviance orientation among employees based on demographic factors of gender and age?
3. Is there a relationship between EI trait and workplace deviant behaviors?

Methodology

This descriptive study used two self-reporting questionnaires; the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSREIT) and workplace deviance test. SSREIT measures a person's self-perceived ability to monitor private feelings or the feelings of others. The test was developed by Schutte et al. (1998) based on their reading of Salovey and Mayer's (1990) early model of EI, which pertained to the ability to monitor and discriminate emotions and to use emotions to guide one's thinking and actions. A pool of 62 self-report items was identified and factor analysis resulted in a single-factor, 33-item SSREIT. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) was reported as 0.90 (Schutte et al.). As the SSREIT consisted of 33 items evaluated by respondents on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) the score when averaged would yield a summary score of between 33 and 165, hence reflecting respondents' level of EI. In order to categorize respondents' level of EI the score is was divided into three. A score of between 33 and 77 was considered as low EI. Between 78 and 121 was moderate while between 122 and 165 was considered as high EI.

The workplace deviance test developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used to measure employees' frequency (never to daily) in engaging in deviant behaviors targeting the organization and individuals within the organization. An example of a question that measured deviant behavior directed toward the organization was "Taken property from work without permission." A question that measures deviant behavior directed towards individuals within the organization was, "Acted rudely toward or argued with someone at work". This self-reporting questionnaire was considered suitable to gauge deviant behaviors because supervisors and co-workers were unlikely to have knowledge of these behaviors since they were often performed covertly. Furthermore, research has shown that self-

reports are accurate measures of behavior (Spector, 1992), and that no study has demonstrated different results for self-reports in comparison to other methods of assessing workplace deviance (e.g., Fox & Spector, 1999). As this 19-item scale questionnaire evaluated respondents on a Likert scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very often), the averaged summary score was between 19 and 95, hence reflecting respondents' orientation toward being deviant at workplace. In order to determine the level of deviant orientation the score is divided into three. A score of between 19 and 31 was considered as low deviant orientation, between 32 and 81 was moderate, while between 82 and 95 was considered as high deviant orientations. According to Fox and Spector (1999), this questionnaire has the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of coefficient alpha .86.

Since the respondents were Malays, the administration of both SSREIT and workplace deviance test were done using the Malay translated version accompanied with its original English version. This will enhance the respondent's understanding and their responses. The Malay versions of both scales were developed through careful translation and back-translation techniques as suggested by Brislin (1970) and McGorry (2000). By getting the assistance of bilingual experts, the 33-item SSREIT and 19-item deviant behaviors questionnaires were first translated into Malay and then back-translated into English. This process minimized the differences between the English and the Malay measurements. This is consistent with Berry's (1980) suggestions that the goal of translation is to obtain an instrument that draws responses which communicate similar meanings to members of various groups (i.e. "conceptual equivalence"). Accordingly, a literal translation of an instrument is not sufficient in conveying the equivalent of the original instrument in cross-cultural research, and Phillips (1959) also noted that a complete semantic equivalence in cross-cultural studies is a statistical fiction.

A total of 162 employees in a government-owned company were randomly selected and responded to both self-administered Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSREIT) and workplace deviance questionnaire.

In analyzing the hypotheses, the overall mean score was used as a basis to determine level of EI and workplace deviance. Independent sample comparison of means is used to see the differences, and to test for significant differences, *t*-test analysis and ANOVA test were used. Correlation analysis was used to see the relationships between the two variables.

Results and Discussions

Overall the result of this study showed that the respondents (N=162) recorded a moderate means score of 113.09 (SD = 16.33) on emotional intelligence. Therefore, it could be concluded that the respondents had moderate EI.

Table 2 shows the respondents' EI based on gender and age differences. It was found that both female and male respondents scored moderately on the self-report EI; M=113.85 (SD=15.67) and M=112.03 (SD=17.26) respectively, and that the difference was not significant [$t(160) = -.700, p = 0.49$]. In terms of independent sample comparison of means between age groups, the results indicated that respondents in all age groups (21–30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, and 51 years and above) also scored moderately on the self-report EI. Results of the ANOVA test on age groups sample size (N=162) showed that the differences was not significant [$F(3, 158) = 2.30, p=0.08$].

Table 2: Respondents' EI mean score according to demographic factors (N=162)

Demographic Factors		n	Mean (M)	SD
Gender				
•	Male	68	112.03	17.26
•	Female	94	113.85	15.67
Age				
•	21-30 years old	31	113.58	16.43
•	31-40 years old	49	110.47	16.15
•	41-50 years old	35	109.86	20.46
•	51 and above	47	117.89	11.70

Overall, the findings of this study showed that regardless of gender and age differences, the respondents had a moderate EI. In the contexts of gender differences result of this study is in support of Joaquin, Joaquin, and Jordi (2006) finding that, there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in term of their level of EI.

Finding of this study that there is no significant difference in EI among respondents from different age groups is also in support of findings of Trinidad et. al (2004a) and Joaquin, Joaquin, and Jordi (2006) studies. Both groups of researchers respectively found that high EI adolescents and young adults are able to shield themselves from psychosocial risk factors.

While many researchers claimed EI can be learned and strengthened and Bar-On (2000) suggested that EI may be learned through life experience therefore, in order to acquire high EI individuals employees must be placed within a conducive environment. Alternatively, organizations can enhance employees' EI through proper and systematically training programs (Marow, Jarrett, and Rupinski, 1997) and executive education (Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb, 1995). Joaquin, Joaquin, and Jordi (2006) also suggested that competencies such as dealing and handling one's own emotions, and restructuring their perception of the highly stressful factors that surround them especially from peer group pressure can be enhanced through training sessions. Others that can be taught in training sessions are; techniques that can help strengthened their social skills; assertiveness techniques and educational health programmes which could help them achieved more adaptive behavior and use these personal skill to improve one's own resistance to social pressures.

In the context of workplace deviance, it was found that the respondents' (n = 126) overall mean score was 57.40 (SD = 11.84). This is clear evidence result shows that the respondents had moderate orientation toward workplace deviance.

Table 3 shows the respondents' workplace deviant behaviors based on gender and age differences. The results showed that both female and male respondents scored moderately on the workplace deviance test [M=57.03 (SD=11.99); and M=57.90 (SD=11.71) respectively, and that the difference was not significant [$t(160) = .458, p = 0.65$]. In terms of independent sample comparison of means between age groups, the results revealed that respondents in all age groups (21-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, and 51 years and above) also scored moderately on the workplace deviance test. Results of the ANOVA test on age groups sample size (n= 162) showed that the difference was not significant [$F(3, 158) = 2.49, p=0.06$]. These results indicated that regardless of gender and age differences, the tendency of respondents engaging in deviant behaviors was moderate. Organizational factors, as suggested by Bennett (1998) and Hollinger and Clark (1983), may account for the moderate orientation towards workplace deviance. Government agencies are well known for their strict

supervision over their staffs and strong disciplinary procedures. Therefore, with the organization having full control over the work environment and strong sanctions for rule violations, it leaves little room for employees to display workplace deviant behaviors.

As for the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace deviance, the results of this study revealed that the relationship, while negative and weak, was significant ($r = -.33, p < .05$). Thus the result shows that the degree of dependency between the two variables is not strong, or in other words, the degrees to which the two variables vary oppositely were weak. The correlation when squared is .10, which means that among the respondents constituting the sample 10 percent of their variance on the two variables is in common (or 90 percent is not in common). As such the finding showed that the corresponding variables did not closely vary together in opposite directions.

Table 3: Respondents' workplace deviance means score according to demographic factors (N=162)

Demographic Factors		N	Mean (M)	SD
Gender				
▪	Male	68	57.90	11.71
▪	Female	94	57.03	11.99
Age				
•	21-30 years old	31	57.58	10.47
•	31-40 years old	49	56.57	14.23
•	41-50 years old	35	61.80	9.11
•	51 and above	47	54.85	11.16

While EI correlates significantly with workplace deviance behaviors however, the inverse relationship between the two variables is weak. Nonetheless, the finding did show that EI do provide the necessary emotional competencies [for example, socialization (high) and impulsiveness (low)] that will enable employees to avoid themselves from committing deviance act at workplace. To an extend, this finding lent support to findings of other researchers (e.g: Bennett, 1998; Hollinger & Clark, 1983; Megargee, 1972); Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1993) that causes of workplace deviance can be the individual employees themselves that is, their personality trait.

Limitation and Conclusion

Several limitations may account for the results of this study. First, this study involved a small sample size and was confined to respondents from only one of the many government agencies. To this extent this study cannot truly reflect that these respondents represent the whole population of Malaysian employees. However, the results were reflective of the relationship between EI and workplace deviance. Second, since the data being reported came from questionnaire surveys, therefore, several other limitations are associated with it such as; general issues of questionnaire understandability and readability, scaling issues, and measurement errors. Furthermore, there is no assurance that the respondents' responses were a true reflection of their ethical judgments as some of the respondents could have provided socially desired answers. As such, findings of this study should be viewed with caution and should not be generalized.

The exploration of EI and workplace deviance among employees is intended only to show a general idea of the relationship between these two variables. As stated earlier, workplace deviance can have substantial financial, physical, and psychological consequences. Since organizations consist of individual employees, therefore, understanding their personality and its relationship with deviant behavior become all the more important. Finally, as much as it is good for EI test to be included as screening tests in employees' selection program it

should be used with caution by organization because of the shortcoming of a self-report test.

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