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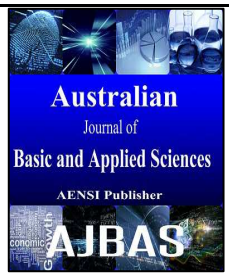

Personality Traits: Does Influence Training Transfer?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Training is the vital contributors to organizational success and will continue to sustain the business. Every year, billions of dollars were invested in the training process, but the return of investment is not as expected. **Objective:** The main objective of this study is to identify the relationship between personality traits and training transfer. The big five dimensions of personality traits are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience. **Results:** The results reveal that personality traits dimension of openness to experience have relationship with training transfer. **Conclusion:** The training program should be given greater emphasis to personality traits to enhance employees' abilities and competencies.

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INTRODUCTION

As organizations struggle to match in the worldwide economy, divergence of knowledge, skills, and ability of their workforce are important components to organizational success. Training is an initiative effort taken by employers to enhance the knowledge, skills, and ability of their employees. The target principal of training is to provide, obtain and enhance the necessary skills in order to help organizations achieve their goals and create competitive advantages by adding values to their key resources (Nikandrou *et al*., 2009). Therefore, it is a basic requirement to get the job done.

Training focuses on getting the knowledge in short and/or long term periods. In terms of success training, it significantly depends on whether employees effectively and sustainably learn and transfer new information in the form of effective work performance and profit for their companies (Schneider *et al*., 2014).

Training is a planned effort by organizations to facilitate learning of job-related competencies, knowledge, skills, and behaviours of their employees (Noe, 2013). Thus, training can be defined as a process to move individuals' knowledge, skills, and attitude in order to improve individual, team and organization effectiveness (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). The aim of training is to ensure that employees gain knowledge regarding their day-to-day activities in the workplace, besides enhancing their skills with an updated product or technology (Saks & Haccoun, 2010).

Investments in training will benefit in many ways. It can help organizations obtain and sustain competitive advantages. It can simplify organizational strategies, increase effectiveness, and improve employee recruitment and retention (Saks & Haccoun, 2010). The main goal of any organization is to survive and make profit. Therefore, training can help organizations to achieve their goals. The successful organization can carry out training employees so they have knowledge, skills, and the necessary ability to help organizations achieve their goals and objectives. By linking training and organization strategy, training can become a strategic activity that operates in the concepts of programs and activities to reach an organization's strategic business objective (Saks & Haccoun, 2010). Through appropriate training, it could help organizations to achieve their goals and also can increase their profit. Meanwhile, training also can help organization to

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develop their employees as they are the valuable asset in any organization.

In terms of effectiveness, trained employees can do better work, make fewer errors, require less supervision, and develop more positive attitudes. Also trained employees usually produce high quality product and services (Saks & Haccoun, 2010), so the benefits have positive effect on an organization competitiveness and effectiveness.

Training transfer involves the generalization and the maintenance of, trained skills, and behaviours from the training environment to the work environment (Alan & Monica, 2006; Baldwin & Ford 1988); or the length of time that trained material is used on the job following a training program. Training transfer is the emphasis of the researchers and practitioner because it is estimated that only a small percentage of the training actually results in transfer to the job (Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

The success of training is also based on the individual characteristics. Human's personality has a significant stimulus on how learners may or may not want to become involved in their learning process, self-determining of their personal interests or stage of cognitive development (Bayne, 2004). Therefore, the personality type might reveal the learners' preferences in processing information and making decisions through their learning process (Bayne, 2004). Hence, it is important to relate employee's personality with the training transfer.

Problem Statements:

Strategic human resources practice included training that can benefit individuals, teams, organizations, and society (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). The benefits to the organization outcomes can be in terms of human resource management such as positive job attitudes as well as organizational outcome, such as firm performance (Tharenou *et al*., 2007). Usually, the organization will invest in training, and the trainee must apply what they learn in training program into the job is known as the transfer of training (Saks & Burke, 2012). The basic purpose of training is to help employee to develop skills when applied to work, enhance job and organizational performance (Leimbach, 2010).

Every year organizations spend billions of money on formal training and development programs (Doleza-lek, 2005; Dirani, 2011; Azmawani et al., 2013), extremely waste of time, money and energy (estimated cost ranges from $50 billion to $200 billion annually) (Laker & Powell, 2011). The purpose of budget allocation for the training and development is to lead improvement in organizational performance or results criteria (Salas & Cannon-Bower, 2001). Results criteria are the primary goals of training. The main goal of training is to provide, obtain and improve the necessary skills in order to help organizations achieve their goals and create a competitive advantage by adding value to their key resources (Nikandrou, et al., 2009).

At the same times, training is the continuing concern by organizations all around the world (Machin, 2002). The aim of training is to help employees to gain skills and knowledge but there is no guarantee that training results improved performance (Azmawani et al., 2013). Reports indicate that only 10 per cent (Fitzpatrick, 2001) what learned in training is applied on the job. In addition findings by Burke and Baldwin (1999) reveal 40 per cent of that what learned in training is applied on the job. The money that invested in training by the organizations and the failure to reap the full potential from the trained employees is still being reported by the researchers (Abdul Rahman & Bennett, 2009; Lager & Frishammer, 2010). It is a serious problem for organizations because training influences the organizational outcomes and results (Kozlowski *et al*., 2000). Hence, organizations should incorporate into their training program strategies to improve transfer of training (Saks & Belcourt, 2006).

Because of the importance of training, a large amount of money was invested into the training programs, but the results were not as expected from the organization. The individual differences may influence the success of training transfer (Rowold, 2007). It is because the individual characteristics that influence and determine the individual ability to acquire the provided knowledge during training courses. Different personality traits will influence different types of motivation, instructional methods and learning strategies (Moldasheva & Mahmood, 2013). The basic line of this study is to examine personality traits that can lead to the preferred learning and thinking style among the employees according to the nature of their personality type. It is important to assess the effectiveness of training strategies with different personality traits (Moldasheva & Mahmood, 2013). Because the different personality traits, will influence the ability of the employees to acquire the knowledge and skills during training, and transfer it to the workplace.

Research Objectives:

This study examines the training transfer dependence on personality traits.

- To examine the relationship of personality trait dimensions on training transfer.

Training Transfer:

Training transfer involves the induction of learning, trained skills and conducts from the training environment to the work environment, as well as the sustainment of trained skills and conducts or the length of time that trained substantial is used on the job pursue a training program (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Training transfer is one of the important elements in the training effectiveness criteria to improve organization performance (Awais et al.,

2013). Training transfer refers to the consistent application of knowledge, skills and attitudes that have been gained during training in the workplace (Blume et al., 2010; Awais et al., 2013).

In addition, Holton *et al*., (1997) defined transfer of training as "the degree to which trainees apply their job knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes they gained in training". In this study, the definition by Blume *et al*., (2010) and Awais *et al*., (2013) will be used. Training transfer generally refers to the use of the knowledge and skills back into the job. An adequate understanding will help the organization to enrich the application of new learned knowledge, skills and attitude in the plant (Yamkovenko et al., 2007). If employees gain the new knowledge, skills, behaviour, they can give the best impact to apply those training outcomes in their work context. It's been supported by the previous research studies conducted in various organizations such an electronics industry (Xiao, 1996), bank sectors (Liebermann & Hoffmann, 2008; Awais et al., 2013), academicians (Bossche, 2010), local governments (Hua *et al*., 2011), training and development association (Saks & Burke, 2012), insurance company (Lee *et al*., 2014). It shows that training transfer occurs in all sectors as long as the people gain new knowledge, skill and ability.

Training transfer is vital to human development. About 40% of the trainees failed to transfer directly after training, 70% falter in transfer one year subsequently the training program, and 50% of training investment result in organizational or individual improvement (Saks, 2002). It's maybe the ability of the trainee to acquire the knowledge during the training programs and also the content of the training program itself. After the training course, it is important to apply the training immediately to ensure that the knowledge transfer is still fresh into the real job. Application of the knowledge immediately will help the employees to perform better and reduce the false task. It's because, when the employees immediately apply the knowledge, skills, and ability to the real job, they will enhance their quality and effectiveness to produce that thing. The management can play important roles to ensure that the employees can apply their knowledge after attended the training course.

There are two reasons why training of transfer has a positive impact on human resource development. Firstly, training transfer can enhance the employee's ability to use various cognitive and behavioural tactics or strategies to apply their training outcomes to their job with adequate supportive work atmosphere (Roberson *et al*., 2009). Second, training transfer can increase their responsiveness to practice what they get in terms of skills and knowledge during training transfer (Liebermann and Hoffmann, 2008).

A study conducted by Warr *et al*. (1999) find that correlation between learning and transfer of training was small. The same finding by Alliger *et al*. (1997). Shown that some barrier to apply the knowledge after training transfer process in terms of individual factors and environment. Various analysts have called for research that inspects potential mediators of the relationship between learning and transfer of training (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). The trainees characteristics, including their behaviour toward job are the factors that can affect the success of transfer of training in the plant (Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

The study conducted by Rahim (2013) at the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) is consistent with previous research that indicate employees are able to transfer the skills, knowledge and their behaviour of the plant (e.g. Liebermann & Hoffmann, 2008). But it depends on the percentage they transfer the knowledge that they gain from the training transfer process in the job. The transfer of knowledge into the plant takes a time. It's because, the individual factors will determine the ability his/her to adapt and acquire the new knowledge during training courses. The percentage of knowledge they get will influence their ability to transfer in nature of job.

However, evidences from previous research showed that such transfers have not taken place. Many factors influence to transfer problem. A well-known framework for training transfer problem by Baldwin and Ford (1988) reveal that the three main factors are trainee characteristic (or individual factors), work environment (or environmental factors) and training design factors (or situational factors). Trainee characteristics include motivation, skills and personality factors. Work environment included factors of climate such as peer support or supervisor as well as constraints and opportunities to perform a learned behaviour on the task. Training design factors included principles of learning, training content and sequencing, and also learning retention.

However, the individual characteristics, individual attitude and attributes also affect the transfer of learning-training (Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Noe, 1986). A study by Kirwan and Birchall (2006) found that learner readiness affects transfer motivation directly and transfer motivation affect the learner personal capacity for transfer. Different factors that directly or indirectly affect the transfer of learning-training were identified by researchers (Awais, 2013). These factors are categorized as situational, individual, environmental or contextual and training design factors. This study will focus on individual and environmental factors. It's because, the main factor of successful of training transfer comes from the trainee him/herself. His/her commitment, ability, adaptability will determine individual capability to transfer the knowledge into the organization. Also, environmental factor plays important roles to ensure that knowledge transfer is

totally supported.

Personality Traits:

According to Allport (1937), personality is "the dynamic organization within somebody of those psychophysical systems that shape his unique adaptation to his surroundings". Robbins (1996), described personality as the aggregate total of ways in which an individual reacts to and interacts with others. Meanwhile traits are enduring features that distinguish an individual's behaviour (Buss, 1989). It's also seen as stable characteristics or nature that exhibit particular patterns of attitudes, cognitions, and emotions (Just, 2011; Allik, 2012; Vesealka *et al*., 2012).

In the twentieth century, the five personality factors (Big Five) proposed by Costa and Mc Crae have played a major theatrical role in psychology studies (Zhang, 2003). Many researchers in personality have proven and reached that Big Five Model is more sufficient to follow the basic dimensions of individual personality traits (Guthrie *et al*., 1998, Chiaburu *et al*., 2010). The Big Five Model consists of five dimensions, namely neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. The characteristics of each dimension are described below; Extraversion: The extraversion dimension captures our comfort level with relationship. Extraversion tends to be gregarious, assertive, and sociable. Agreeableness: The agreeableness dimension refers to an individual's propensity to submit to others. Highly agreeable people are cooperative, affectionate, and believing. Conscientiousness: The conscientiousness dimension is a measure of reliability. A high conscientiousness person is responsible, organized, dependable, and persistent. Emotional stability: The emotional stability dimension often labeled by its converse, neuroticism – taps a person's ability to withstand stress. People with positive emotional stability tend to be calm, self-confident, and secure. Openness to experience: The openness to experience dimensions addresses range of interests and fascination with novelty. Extremely open people are creative, curious, and artistically sensitive.

Relationship Between Personality And Training Transfer:

Personality traits consist of five dimensions which are neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness.

First, neuroticism defined as the negative aspects of instability and concern about the uncertainty environment. Hence, neuroticism is the inability of an individual to manage his/her psychological or emotional stability. Neuroticism encloses characteristics that are included anxiety, depression, low confidence, and tendencies to experience negative emotions (Naquin & Holton, 2002) intrusive thoughts and worry (Barbara, Susanne, Martin, & Walter, 2012). Because their tendency to emotion under negative manner, an individual who scores high on neuroticism should be less likely to have positive attitudes towards their training transfer Barbara *et al*., 2012; Eysenck & Calvo,1992). It will likely be negatively related to training transfer. This is because characteristics such as emotional stability and anxiety are likely to reduce the performance of training transfer. This is because individuals who score high on neuroticism are more likely to experience a variety of problems such as incomplete tasks, low performance and unhappiness relationship between classmates. All of these problems will hinder an individual's motivation and mobility to acquire knowledge, skills, and ability during training.

Second, extraversion is defined as feeling high-spirit, energetic, love to hang out and to socialize. They are able to function efficiently and competently, and to expand their networks to obtain job information, which may be important to achieve the aim of training. Extraversion people are outgoing, energetic, joyful, ambitious and assertive; represent preferences for interacting with others, sociable, active, energetic, bold, dominant, and status seeking (Mount *et al*., 2005). Extravert people tend to be socially oriented, whereby they like to socialize and make friends. Thus, extroverts are more likely to have a greater number of close friends compared to neurotic people. Their tendency in the training may excel is the active stance they take towards learning (Cullen *et al*., 2013). Take an active stance to learning may improve learning and transfer by increasing the ability to planning, monitoring, and evaluating which will return related into training (Bell & Kozlowski, 2008).

Third, conscientiousness individual is organized, able to complete assignments on time and very concerned about the completeness of a task carried out correctly. There are three main characteristics of conscientiousness, which are achievement orientation (hard working and persistent), dependability (responsible and careful), and orderliness (organized). Thus, conscientiousness could be related to an individual's degree of self-control, as well as the need for achievement, order, and persistence. According the study conducted by Taher *et al*., (2011), conscientiousness has a significant interaction between learning approach. It is because, conscientiousness are more responsible for what they see and well organize the knowledge that they learned. Meanwhile, finding by Salgado (1997) indicate that conscientiousness is more related to training outcomes. Individuals who have high conscientiousness are likely to pay attention to the training material, training content, and will use the meta-cognitive strategies of planning, observation, and evaluation to enrich their learning process (Cullen *et al*., 2013). It also affects learning by

affecting motivation to learn (Komarraju & Karau, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000) and most positive influence on training performance (Tziner, Fisher, Senior, & Weisberg, 2007).

Fourth, openness to experience is how people are willing to make adjustments in notions and activities in accordance with new ideas or situations are more thoughtful, tend to fit the opinions of others with more tolerance, agree to and accept. Openness to experience is characterized by intellections and unconventionality. Hence, It generally refers to openness people that are sensitive, flexible, creative and curious. Thus, openness to experience traits represented the desire for personal growth (Mount et al., 2005). Meta-analysis findings show that openness to experience is positively related to learning (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997).

Fifth, agreeableness personality contains features good-hearted, well-mannered, friendly, sympathetic, collaborative and fun approachable. In terms of training transfer, the agreeableness individual will easily adapt the training environment. It is because the individual's friendliness, collaborativeness and approachablility that will help his/er behavior. However, not many literatures discuss about agreeableness and training transfer.

Based on the above literature, it is postulated that:

H1: There is a relationship between personality traits and training transfer.

H1a: There is a negative relationship between neuroticism and training transfer.

H1b: There is a positive relationship between extraversion and training transfer.

H1c: There is a positive relationship between conscientiousness and training transfer.

H1d: There is a positive relationship between openness to experience and training transfer.

H1e: There is a positive relationship between agreeableness and training transfer.

Methodology:

Sample and procedure:

This is a cross-sectional study, which utilized questionnaires to collect the primary data. This study was conducted at a manufacturing in Penang Free Trade Zone. Based on the information collected from HR department, the employees numbered 350 for the study period. Table introduced by Krejic and Morgan (1970), the sample required for a population of 350 was 191. Questionaire was distributed to 191 operators attached, overall returned survey was 87, which constituted 39.5% response rate. Out of these 87 questionnaires, 11 were incomplete. Thus, only 76 questionnaire (34.5%) was coded and used for further analyses. The response rate was low, but an acceptable level of quantitative study. The response rate of 34.5 percent was higher than the standard 20 percent acceptable response rate (Samat et. al., 2006) for quantitative study.

93.4 per cent respondents were male with ages ranging from 16 to 60 years. Their occupational tenure ranged from under 1 year to 4 years above. Most of the respondents attended training course 1 – 3 times per year.

Data coding involves assigning a number to the participants' responses so they can be entered into a database (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this study, the compile data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

Instruments:

The training transfer was assessed using the 6-item scale developed by Xiao (1996). 6- items use a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7). Multiple researcher (Burke & Sak, 2009; Jiadev & Chirayath, 2012) had used this instrument. The Cronbach Alpha for this instrument is 0.83 which makes this instrument valid and reliable.

The personality traits were assessed by using the 50-item scale by International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). The main reasons for choosing this instrument because of its high-reliability value of Coefficient Alpha between 0.79 to 0.89. In this study, 50-items of IPIP were selected to measure the five dimensions of personality traits which is neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between personality traits and training transfer. Although, personality traits literature has determined that personality traits would enhance training transfer, there is lack of knowledge based on Malaysia context.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between personality traits dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) and training transfer. Based on the finding the dimension of personality traits (openness to experience) have a positive and a significant relationship with training transfer.

The observation in this study is consistent with the finding by Petrides et al., (2005), Stumn & Furnham (2012) that personality traits in several ways have been reported contributing to learning process (transfer of knowledge). They indicated that personality traits influence the individual ability to acquire the process of transfering knowledge based on the individual differences of attitude and action. The previous study suggested that there is link between training transfer and personality traits (Moldasheva & Mahmood, 2014).

Personality traits could determine the behaviour or nature of the employees adaptability to the

environment during training lessons. Personality traits will enhance the ability of the person to communicate during training as this will help them to understand the knowledge more comparing to those who are passive or introvert. In training transfer process, the ability to adapt the training environment will influence one's ability to acquire the knowledge during training. A passive person who does not like to socialize will acquire the knowledge that comes to him or her. If that person missed the knowledge, he/she just leaves it because he/she is shy or not confident to ask the trainer. Thus, they are not able to utilize the knowledge again because they are shy or have low confidence if it is not existed.

Thus, personality traits have strong linkage with the learning process or training transfer. This is because the difference in personality traits will influence nature. Thus, it would be demonstrated by his/her action, attitude, either that person like to be alone or in public. That differentiation will affect his/her attitude, action during the pre and post training.

The personality traits also will determine his/her effort and ability in the training transfer process. Either his/her effort to take-in the process of training transfer being important or not. If they are commited to the training transfer process, it would transfer what they gained during training in the post training to the workplace. Consequencely, the training transfer becomes successful in terms of transfer of knowledge in the organization. Otherwise, if the person has the personality traits that allow him/her to see new things such as knowledge, idea as something that is bored and they are not interested in the training process, they would just ignore the knowledge during the training program and the chances for them to transfer the knowledge into the workplace becomes less due to the low concentration and acquiring the new knowledge during the training process.

Personality traits have been linked to determine the success of the training transfer. This is because the individual differences of personality traits will make the training transfer smooth or not in terms of the individual ability and the capacity to acquire the new things. The personality will influence the way they learn and get the new knowledge.

As a dimension of personality traits, openness to experience have a significant relationship to training transfer. The correlation revealed that the only dimension of personality traits that have significant correlation with training transfer is openness to experience (correlation result of 0.524, $p< 0.01$ and regression results of $\beta = 0.367$, $p< 0.05$).

Openness to experience also have a positive relationship to learning in each phase of training transfer according to Barrick & Mount (1991) as cited by Herold et al., (2002). Openness to experience is related to the level of intellect, curiosity about the environment, and willing to explore the unfamiliar things (Herold et al., 2002). Because training is a process of putting an individual into the new situation, the personality traits associated with it should assisst the person in the training program as they are compulsory to accept and manage the new information explore and adopt the new behaviour patterns. On other hand, openness to experience are also related to the adabtability when changing the tasks contexts the contexts of tasks as indicated by LePine et.al., (2000). They explained adaptability as "learning or performance in a task that is complex, novel or just ill-defined". The Complexity of stage by stage training programs represents such changing task contexts (Herold et al., 2002). In the beginning, training task may be viewed as new and often multifaceted, and as one enters each new stage of training, the change in task context introduces a new and different undertaking environment to which the trainee necessarily adapt.

People, who are open to experience, are more likely to engage in new things and settings with some level and willingness to assess what they need to do to adapt (Herold et al., 2002). Creating a positive view of training and learning will serve trainees well in all multistage of training, as well as influencing the motivation to uphold direction and level of effort which called for new training tasks. This is because they have more adaptability to the changing conditions. Furthermore, they are intellectually curious about new circumstances.

Conclusion:

The purposes of this study were to investigate the relationship between personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience) and training transfer.

The study had met all the four research objectives as outlined in Chapter 1. The research objectives were to examine the relationship between personality traits and training transfer. The results of this study had either fully support and not support the tested hypotheses as outlined.

Based on the findings, personality traits have significant relationship between training transfer namely openness to experience. Athough not all the dimensions indicated positive result, but it show that personality has an impact on the training transfer.

Results from the study have some implications to employees, and also employer. It does affect the training need analysis, recruiting process, and also selection for training courses. The personality traits being the main factor to determine the capability of individual to acquire the knowledge and training provided by the employer.

This study was conducted in a manufacturing sector among the operator, and further work need to be done to establish data from the middle and upper level management to gain various data related to personality traits and training transfer.

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