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The Influence of Personality on Job Satisfaction of Public Sector Employees

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between personality and job satisfaction has garnered increasing interest from researchers in recent years. However, few studies have specifically examined the context of the public sector, which presents distinct organizational and cultural characteristics. This article aims to fill this gap by thoroughly examining the impact of personality traits on job satisfaction of public sector employees. A comprehensive review of empirical literature was conducted, including quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, and comparative studies. The results show that certain personality traits, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability, are particularly determinant for job satisfaction of public servants. These traits seem to be in line with the requirements of rigor, performance, and stress management inherent to the public sector. Conversely, other traits like extraversion and agreeableness, although more strongly related to satisfaction in the private sector, play a less crucial role in the public context. The article also explores the underlying mechanisms of these

relationships, drawing on qualitative studies that reveal the importance of recognition of efforts, balance between demands and resources, as well as the fit between personality and work environment. Practical implications for human resource management in the public sector are then developed, particularly in terms of recruitment, task assignment, and competency development.

Keywords : Personality, Job Satisfaction, Public Sector, Personality Traits, Human Resource Management.

I. Introduction

The relationship between personality and job satisfaction has been the subject of numerous empirical studies in recent years. Researchers have highlighted the importance of certain personality traits, such as conscientiousness, emotional stability, and extraversion, in predicting the professional satisfaction of employees. However, the majority of these works have focused on the private sector, leaving a gap

concerning the specific context of the public sector (Katebi et al., 2022) [1].

Yet, the public sector presents distinct organizational and cultural characteristics that can influence the way employees' personality interacts with their job satisfaction. Indeed, public sector work environments are often distinguished by a more pronounced bureaucracy, a focus on individual performance and public service, as well as an organizational culture that values rigor and compliance with procedures (Gu et al., 2022a) [2].

In this context, it is relevant to thoroughly examine how the personality traits of public servants shape their level of job satisfaction. A better understanding of this dynamic could allow public sector human resource managers to adapt their recruitment, career management, and organizational development practices, in order to promote the well-being and engagement of their employees.

This article therefore aims to fill this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive review of empirical studies on the relationship between personality and job satisfaction in the public sector. It draws on a critical analysis of quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, and comparative research conducted in this field, in order to identify the main personality traits influencing the satisfaction of public servants, the underlying mechanisms of this relationship, as well as the practical implications for human resource management.

2. Theoretical Relationship between Personality and Job Satisfaction

2.1 Key Hypotheses in the Literature on the Relationship between Personality and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between personality and job satisfaction is a research domain that has generated significant interest in organizational psychology. Researchers have formulated several hypotheses to explain how personality traits can influence an individual's satisfaction with their job (Adamopoulos, 2022; Wang et al., 2024) [3-4]. Personality is seen as a relatively stable internal factor that determines how an individual perceives their environment and responds to external stimuli, including work conditions, interpersonal relationships, and professional challenges (Gu et al., 2022b) [5].

One of the fundamental hypotheses is that certain personality traits predispose individuals to experience higher levels of job satisfaction. For example, individuals with high emotional stability (i.e., low neuroticism) are more resilient to stress and less likely to experience anxiety or frustration in the face of professional challenges, which contributes to a higher level of satisfaction. Similarly, conscientious individuals, who are

organized, responsible, and disciplined, tend to be more satisfied because they are able to manage their tasks effectively and meet set objectives, which provides a sense of accomplishment.

Another common hypothesis is that extraverted individuals, due to their tendency to seek social interactions, are more inclined to experience high satisfaction in work environments where collaboration and interpersonal exchanges are valued. Conversely, introverted individuals, who prefer quieter and less social environments, may be more satisfied in roles where autonomous work is predominant.

Finally, the person-environment fit (P-E Fit) hypothesis is a well-established theory in the literature. It stipulates that job satisfaction is influenced by the fit between an individual's personality traits and the characteristics of their work environment. In other words, when the job demands are in harmony with an individual's traits and preferences, they are more likely to be satisfied. For example, a person with high openness to experience may be more satisfied in an innovative and dynamic environment, while a highly conscientious individual would be better suited to a structured and orderly environment.

2.2 Summary of Studies Linking Specific Personality Traits to Job Satisfaction

The relationship between specific personality traits and job satisfaction has been the subject of numerous empirical studies. The Big Five model is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for analyzing this relationship, as it provides a universal classification of personality traits. Additionally, other aspects, such as locus of control, have also been studied to understand how the perception of control over personal and professional events influences satisfaction.

2.2.1 The Big Five and Job Satisfaction

The five dimensions of the Big Five model, namely Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability, each have a distinct impact on job satisfaction:

Emotional Stability: This trait is the most strongly associated with job satisfaction. Emotionally stable individuals are better equipped to manage stress and are less affected by work-related frustrations, which contributes to a higher level of satisfaction. Research shows that individuals with low emotional stability, or high neuroticism, are often prone to anxiety, doubt, and sensitivity, which undermines their overall well-being.

Conscientiousness: Conscientious individuals are organized, meticulous, and goal-oriented. This trait is positively correlated with job satisfaction, as these individuals are often able to achieve their goals and meet performance standards, which reinforces their sense of accomplishment and personal efficacy.

Extraversion: Extraverts derive satisfaction from work environments that value social interactions. This trait is also linked to higher levels of enthusiasm and motivation, which can positively influence the perception of the work environment.

Agreeableness: Agreeable individuals, who are generally empathetic and cooperative, often find satisfaction in harmonious work environments and in roles where collaboration is central. Their ability to establish positive relationships with colleagues and superiors fosters their satisfaction and integration within the organization.

Openness to Experience: Openness is often associated with satisfaction in jobs that require creativity and innovation. Individuals high in openness to experience appreciate dynamic and varied environments, and they find more satisfaction in roles that allow them to express and innovate.

2.2.2 Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction

Locus of control is another aspect of personality that has been studied to understand its link with job satisfaction. Locus of control refers to an individual's belief about the control they exert over the events in their life. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe they have direct control over their success or failure, while those with an external locus of control attribute these events to external factors (luck, circumstances).

Research shows that individuals with an internal locus of control tend to experience higher job satisfaction. This is because they perceive themselves as responsible for their results and are more inclined to view challenges as opportunities for learning and development. In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control may feel a sense of helplessness and be less satisfied, as they feel more dependent on external conditions and less capable of modifying their situation.

2.2.3 Personality Types and Job Satisfaction

In addition to the Big Five, studies have explored the relationship between personality types, particularly those proposed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and

job satisfaction. For example, personality types focused on perception, such as "Guardians" and "Diplomats," are often more satisfied in stable and collaborative work environments. Conversely, types oriented towards intuition and thinking may be more satisfied in analytical and decision-making roles. Although the MBTI is not as rigorously validated as the Big Five, it remains a popular tool for understanding how different personality types may react in various professional contexts.

2.3 Correlation and Causality Studies: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Research on the relationship between personality and job satisfaction has relied on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the correlations and causal links. These studies offer a nuanced view of the factors that influence employee satisfaction and demonstrate how certain personality traits can act as predictive variables.

2.3.1 Correlation Studies

Numerous studies have established positive correlations between specific personality traits and job satisfaction. For example, quantitative studies using psychometric questionnaires such as the NEO-PI-R for the Big Five have found that emotional stability, conscientiousness, and extraversion are reliable predictors of job satisfaction. These correlations allow for a better understanding of the personality factors that influence well-being at work, although correlation does not demonstrate direct causality.

Correlation studies show that personality has a significant impact on how individuals perceive their work environment. However, these studies also highlight individual variability, suggesting that other factors, such as job type or organizational culture, interact with personality to influence satisfaction (Taherdoost, 2022) [6].

2.3.2 Causality Studies

Causality studies aim to determine whether personality traits are direct causes of job satisfaction or merely associated variables. Longitudinal approaches, which follow individuals over an extended period, are particularly useful for analyzing causal relationships. For instance, longitudinal research has shown that conscientious or emotionally stable employees are more likely to experience increased satisfaction over time, due to their ability to cope with work demands.

Experimental studies have also been conducted, although their number is limited due to the difficulty of evaluating personality in a controlled manner. These experimental

studies, by manipulating certain aspects of the work environment, such as the level of autonomy or relationships with colleagues, allow for the analysis of how individuals with different personality traits react to these modifications and whether it influences their satisfaction.

2.3.3 Qualitative Studies

Qualitative studies offer a complementary perspective by exploring the individual experiences of employees in depth and examining how they perceive the link between their personality and job satisfaction. Interviews and focus groups allow for the collection of rich information on personal motivations, expectations, and challenges. These studies reveal that employees with different personality profiles seek distinct elements in their work environment, and they shed light on the subjective perceptions of satisfaction.

For example, qualitative research shows that employees with a high level of agreeableness value harmonious relationships and experience increased satisfaction when they feel supported and respected by their colleagues. Conversely, highly conscientious individuals find satisfaction in the recognition of their efforts and in the opportunity to develop new skills. These studies emphasize that job satisfaction is a complex phenomenon, influenced by the dynamic interaction between personality and the professional environment.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Studies on Personality Traits and Job Satisfaction in the Public Sector

Quantitative research conducted in the public sector has identified certain personality traits as significant predictors of job satisfaction among public servants.

A study by (Eshet & Harpaz, 2021) [7] with employees from various government administrations revealed that conscientiousness and emotional stability were the traits most strongly associated with high satisfaction. Conscientious public servants were more likely to achieve their goals and provide quality work, which reinforced their sense of accomplishment. At the same time, those with high emotional stability were better equipped to manage the stress related to bureaucratic constraints and high public expectations.

In a comparative perspective, (Tung, 2021) [8] examined the differences between the public and private sectors in terms of personality and job satisfaction. Their results showed that extraversion and agreeableness were more powerful predictors of job satisfaction in the private sector, where social

interactions and teamwork are often valued. In contrast, in the public sector, characterized by greater formalization and a focus on individual performance, the traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability were more determinant for employee satisfaction.

These quantitative studies highlight the importance of certain personality traits, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability, in predicting job satisfaction of public servants. They suggest that these traits are particularly well-suited to the demands of the public sector, in terms of rigor, performance, and stress management.

3.2. Qualitative Studies on Personality and Job Satisfaction in the Public Sector

Qualitative approaches have also provided a complementary understanding of the mechanisms linking personality and job satisfaction in the public sector context.

A study by (Ortiz Gómez, 2021) [9] explored the work experiences of a sample of public servants through in-depth interviews. The results revealed that conscientious employees derived great satisfaction from their ability to comply with procedures and contribute effectively to the public service mission. However, some also emphasized that their sense of duty could sometimes expose them to high stress, underscoring the importance of a balance between job demands and personal resources.

Furthermore, the interviews highlighted the role played by recognition of efforts in the satisfaction of conscientious public servants. When their supervisors valued their rigor and reliability, these employees reported higher levels of satisfaction.

These qualitative studies provide a better understanding of how personality traits, such as conscientiousness, interact with the specificities of the public sector to shape the job satisfaction of employees. They underscore the importance of the fit between personality and organizational environment, as well as the support and recognition from managers.

3.3 Longitudinal and Comparative Studies on Personality and Job Satisfaction in the Public Sector

Longitudinal and comparative research has also provided additional insights into the relationship between personality and job satisfaction in the public sector.

A study by (H. S. Shaukat et al., 2023)V [10] followed a group of professionals in the field of education, which is an

integral part of the public sector, over a three-year period. The results showed that employees with high levels of conscientiousness and emotional stability reported increasing job satisfaction over time. Their ability to overcome professional challenges and consistently achieve their goals seemed to play a crucial role in this positive evolution.

In a comparative perspective, (Muhammad et al., 2021; O. Shaukat et al., 2021) [11-12] examined the differences between the public and private sectors in terms of the impact of personality on job satisfaction. Their findings revealed that extraversion and agreeableness were more powerful predictors of satisfaction in the private sector, while conscientiousness and emotional stability were more determinant in the public sector. This study underscores the importance of considering the specific organizational context when examining the relationship between personality and job satisfaction.

These longitudinal and comparative approaches allow for a more refined understanding of the dynamics at play, highlighting the personality traits most suited to the public sector and their evolution over time.

3.4. Practical Implications for Human Resource Management in the Public Sector

The results of these empirical studies on the relationship between personality and job satisfaction in the public sector present important implications for human resource management.

First, recruitment processes should pay particular attention to personality traits that foster job satisfaction among public servants, namely conscientiousness and emotional stability. Indeed, these traits seem particularly well-suited to the requirements of rigor, performance, and stress management inherent to the public sector.

Next, task assignment should also take into account the fit between employees' personality profiles and the characteristics of the positions to be filled. For example, conscientious public servants could be assigned to roles requiring a high level of reliability and attention to procedures, while those with strong emotional stability would be better suited to positions involving frequent management of stressful situations.

Finally, competency development and employee well-being programs should integrate a personality-related dimension. Managers could implement training aimed at helping public servants better understand their personality traits and

optimally leverage them in their work. Similarly, initiatives to support and recognize the efforts of employees, particularly those with a conscientious profile, could contribute to enhancing their satisfaction.

Conclusion

The comprehensive review of empirical literature on the relationship between personality and job satisfaction in the public sector highlights the importance of certain personality traits, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability, in shaping the satisfaction of public servants. These traits appear to be particularly well-suited to the demands and cultural characteristics of the public sector, which values rigor, performance, and stress management.

The qualitative studies provide a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms, revealing the role of recognition, balance between demands and resources, and the fit between personality and work environment. Longitudinal and comparative analyses further refine this understanding, underscoring the evolution of the relationship over time and the differences between the public and private sectors.

These findings have significant practical implications for human resource management in the public sector. By considering personality in recruitment, task assignment, and competency development, organizations can optimize the fit between employees and the specific requirements of public service, ultimately contributing to higher levels of job satisfaction, well-being, and organizational performance.

Future research could explore the interplay between personality, job satisfaction, and other relevant outcomes in the public sector, such as organizational commitment, citizenship behaviors, and service quality. Additionally, investigating the potential moderating or mediating role of organizational factors, leadership styles, and person-organization fit could further enhance our understanding of this complex dynamic.

In conclusion, this comprehensive review highlights the importance of considering the personality of public sector employees as a key determinant of job satisfaction. By aligning human resource practices with the specific personality traits that thrive in the public sector context, organizations can foster a more engaged, satisfied, and productive workforce, ultimately benefiting the citizens they serve.

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