Full Length Research Paper

The impact of personality type on Chinese part-time MBA students' performance

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The present study examines the relationship between personality types of part-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) students and their performance. A dataset was collected from the study sample, using questionnaires. From the study results, it can be deduced that the degree of part-time MBA students' performance is significantly relevant to their personality types, based on the five-factor model of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience. The major implication of the study is that it would provide business education stakeholders with a modest model to predict MBA students' performance from the perspective of personality type.

Key words: China, MBA, personality, performance.

INTRODUCTION

To deal with the new demands and challenges of knowledge economy, organizations depend heavily on their employees as a competitive resource. Hence training and development become indispensable for building competitive human resources (Rosow and Zager, 1988). Management education, as one of the management development strategies, provides trainees with a broad range of management knowledge and skills in formal classroom situations in degree-granting institutions (Keys and Wolfe, 1988). Among the formal management training programs, Master of Business Administration (MBA) course is probably the most popular for managers who want to upgrade their managerial skills (Cheng, 2000; Parvin et al., 2011).

Since long it has been evident that the effectiveness and efficiency of management programs is dependent not only on pedagogy, curriculum, and faculty expertise, but the trainees' attributes is also an important factor determining the quality of the program (Mintzberg, 1973; Herbert, 1980). Accordingly, to guarantee high quality MBA programs, business schools worldwide use diverse selection criteria to select high-quality students for their MBA programs. Different evaluating methods have been

developed that could accurately predict the potential performance of an applicant in the MBA programs. Generally, the primary criteria of selection to ensure the success of MBA program are as follows:

1. Undergraduate grade point average (GPA) (Fish and Wilson, 2007; Clayton and Cate, 2004),
2. Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) score (Fish and Wilson, 2009),
3. Number of years of work experience (Adams and Hancock, 2000; Dreher and Ryan, 2000).

However, while selecting, some other individual attributes, such as personality factors, which are also thought to be good predictors of MBA students' performance are not taken into account, (Herbert, 1980).

Due to a fierce competition in today's business environment, MBA students have to learn not only the knowledge in extensive fields such as accounting, marketing, finance, economics, management and information systems, but also the skills of teamwork, communication and leadership are part of their immense training. Moreover, they are supposed to acquire the skills for dealing with international business, multiple cultures, merger and acquisition and so on. Hence, it is a real challenge to complete the MBA education in a more profound way (Alam, 2009a; b). It becomes, even more difficult and

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challenging task for a part-time MBA student who is compelled to work full time, as he has a family to feed, and attends school at night or on weekends to earn the degree. For such a case, it becomes a prerequisite that the skills must be learned in less time and with greater efficiency (Randolph, 2008). Consequently, the part-time MBA students' performance may be seen as, particularly, relevant to their individual type of personality harnessed by a strong desire to obtain the MBA degree as a sine qua non for joining managerial ranks from a technical job function.

The earlier analysis provides a strong impetus for an examination of the relationship between personality traits of part-time MBA students and their performance in the program. Therefore, we study the personality types of part-time MBA students of a professional accreditation business program in careers provided by Zhejiang University and their influence on the students' performance which is represented by their reported grades on the national MBA Entrance Exam (MBAEE).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Literature review of personality traits

Although widely used in literature, the concept of personality has not been definite, until recently. Among various definitions of personality, the one presented by Phares (1988) seems more relevant to this study, which states as "personality is the pattern of characteristic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguishes one person from another and that persists over time and situations" (cited in O'Neil, 2007). Nevertheless, the five factors of personality have been accepted and identified extensively in the academic community. Since their findings, they have played an important role in psychology and management studies (Zhang, 2003; Taher et al., 2011). The five factors which are mostly referred to as the "big five" include: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience. The concepts of personality traits, the interactions between themselves and their impact on performance have become widely research hotspots over the past few decades (Whittingham, 2006).

Theoretically, personality may be viewed as a system (Mayer, 1998; McCrae and Costa, 1996). It is generally considered that personality might have three components, including the notion of individual traits; the notion of relative consistency across time; and the notion of relative consistency across situations (O'Neil, 2007). Consequently, an individual's experiences are the ongoing interactions, which the individual has to come across with his/her environment. The environment determines some aspects of those experiences, that is, location, time and events. Other aspects of an individual's

experiences are influenced by his/her personality or disposition, such as seeking new experiences or restricting novelty (Sloan, 2009). In the five-factor theory (FFT), personality is seen as a system in which an individual's characteristic adaptations are developed through dynamic processes that mediate their personality traits and experiences (McCrae and Costa, 1999). One of these dynamic processes is learning (Sloan, 2009). Hence, an individual's personality traits are good predictors of future training and learning performance (Wiggins et al., 1969), as personality traits show longitudinal consistency across the life span (Tomas et al., 2007). Numerous researches have supported the use of the FFT in personality testing (McCrae, 2001; Mccrae and Costa,1987, 1985), as a consequence, the development of the five personality factors has provided researchers with a reliable psychometric instrument to assess the predictive validity of personality traits in many domains, including educational settings (Tomas et al., 2007).

Personality traits as predictors of MBA students' performance: Hypotheses

Various researchers have described people on the basis of the five basic dimensions of personalities, as mentioned in FFT (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Hogan et al., 1994; O'Neil, 2007; Piedmont, 1998).

The first factor, agreeableness that refers to the quality of interpersonal relationships, is defined as a measure of an individual's sympathy, cooperation and warmth. It includes the facets of trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty and tender mindedness. The second factor which is extraversion focuses on both the quality and the intensity of relationships. Extravert people are considered to be energetic and tend to have the company of others. Extraversion includes the facets of warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking and positive emotions. The third factor, neuroticism which is inversely related to emotional stability, refers to a lack of adjustment describing people who are impulsive, irresponsible and not dependable. It includes the facets of anxiety, hostility, depression, self consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. The fourth factor, conscientiousness which refers to task behavior and impulse control, is attributed to individuals who work hard, persevere and are organized. It includes the facets of competence, order, dutifulness, achievement, self discipline and deliberation. Finally, the fifth factor is openness to experience, which indicates an individual's ability to be imaginative, broad minded and curious. It includes the facets of fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas and values.

Based on the above-mentioned theory, a significant link between personality traits and performance of part-time MBA students was hypothesized. It seems logical to assume that all the five factors of personality traits are
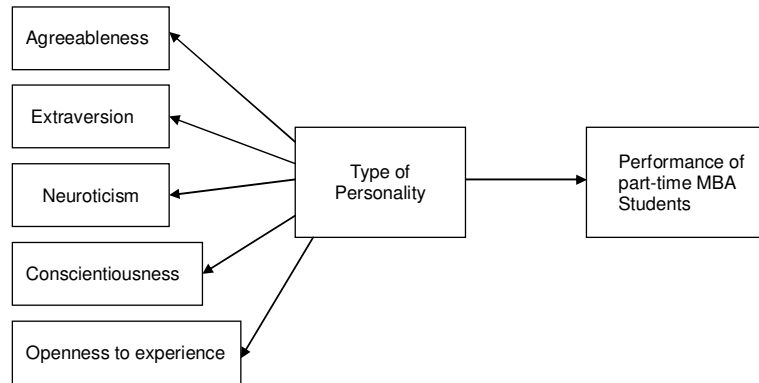
Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

correlated with the MBA students' performance. Nevertheless, it is vitally important to test these relationships among MBA students. Consequently, the following hypotheses were tested in this study:

H_1: Agreeableness is significantly and positively correlated with performance of part-time MBA students.
H_2: Extraversion is significantly and positively correlated with performance of part-time MBA students.
H_3: Neuroticism is significantly and negatively correlated with performance of part-time MBA students.
H_4: Conscientiousness is significantly and positively correlated with performance of part-time MBA students.
H_5: Openness to experience is significantly and positively correlated with performance of part-time MBA students.

Conceptual framework and proposed model

Considering the previous literature review and earlier-mentioned analysis, the personality type is supposed to have a great impact on the performance of part-time MBA students. We considered the personality type from the five dimensions (agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and openness to experience), and the performance of students is represented by their grades in the national MBA Entrance Exam (MBAEE). Therefore, the main objective of the present study was to seek the relationship between personality traits of part-time MBA students and their performance. Hence, the conceptual model in Figure 1 is suggested for depicting the relationship between the research variables.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and data collection

170 questionnaires, with each one encompassing two sections of items, were administered to the first grade of part-time MBA students of Zhejiang University during their class time session of 30

min. After omission of questionnaires object of responses with missing values, final number of valid questionnaires was 157 with the response rate of 92.4%. The profile of the participants is presented in Table1.

Measures

The primary data used in the study were directly obtained from the earlier-mentioned questionnaire which had been splitted into two sections. The first section consisted of 20 items; four items for each of the five personality factor variables (agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and openness to experience), developed based on a review of the short Five-Factor Personality Inventory of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) (Buchanan et al., 2005). The second section was about the respondents' personal information such as age, gender, work experience and their performance indicator measured by their reported grades in the national MBAEE. After translated into Chinese, the questionnaire was then pre-tested for reliability and validity. The data was obtained based on a five-point likert scale, ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree. Reliabilities of the scales on alpha coefficients were 0.76 for conscientiousness, 0.72 for openness to experience, 0.70 for extraversion, 0.72 for agreeableness and 0.88 for neuroticism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the purpose of the present study, the impact of personality type on Chinese part-time MBA students' performance was examined through the degree of correlation between the independent variables, namely agreeableness (Agree), conscientiousness (Consc), extraversion (Extra), neuroticism (Neurot) and openness to experience (Openn) and the dependent variable, MBA students' performance as represented by the national MBA Entrance Exam (MBAEE).

Pearson correlation was used to analyze the relationship between variables of this study, as shown in Table 2. Pearson correlations between target variables of the study indicate a significant and positive correlation between the three factors of Agree (0. 201**, $p < 0.01$), Consc (0.169*, $p < 0.05$) and Openn (0.111, $p < 0.05$),

Table 1. Profile of the respondents.

Description	Number (%)
Sample	
Participants	170
Respondents	157
Gender	
Male	105
Female	52
Age (Years)	
27–30	75
31–35	67
36–40	11
>50	4
Marital status	
Married	91
Un-married	66
Work experience (Years)	
4–5	68
6–10	43
11–15	26
>15	20
Employment status	
Full time worker	116
Part time worker	33
On leave	8

Table 2. Pearson correlations between variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
MBAEE	1					
Agreeableness	0. 201[**]	1				
Extraversion	- 0.023	0.740[**]	1			
Neuroticism	- 0.017	-0.033	-0.015	1		
Conscientiousness	0.169[*]	0.597[**]	0.624[**]	-0.028	1	
Openness to experience	0.111	0.695[**]	0.742[**]	-0.003	0.570[**]	1

$**p < 0.01$; $*p < 0.05$; N = 157.

and MBA students' performance. Meanwhile, the result shows a negative correlation with the factors of Extra (-0.023, $p < 0.05$) and Neurot (- 0.017, $p < 0.05$).

Then regression analysis was used to examine the degree of relationship between independent and dependent variables of the study and to measure the impact of an independent variable on the dependent variable, as shown in Table 3.

The result of regression analysis reflects a good prediction of MBA students' performance by the personality traits of Agree (t = 3.190), Consc (t = 1.925) and Openn (t = 0.928). On the contrary, personality traits of Extra (t = -3.913) and Neurot (t = -0.087) are proved to predict a negative impact upon MBA students'

Table 3. Regression analyses.

Variable	Beta	t-value	p-value
Constant	215.909	12.188	0.000
Agreeableness	2.581	3.190	0.002
Extraversion	-3.633	-3.913	0.000
Neuroticism	-0.098	-0.087	0.931
Conscientiousness	1.536	1.925	0.056
Openness to experience	0.854	0.928	0.355

N = 157, R^2 = 0.135, adjusted R^2 = 0.107, F = 4.731, p < 0.000. Dependent variable= MBAEE.

performance.

The personality attributes of the present study sample are likely dominated by the three factors of agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience that correlate positively with MBA students' performance. Therefore H_1, H_4 and H_5 are supported. H_3 is also supported, as the factor of neuroticism was found negatively correlated with MBA students' performance. However, H_2 is not supported because the factor of extraversion indicated a negative correlation with MBA students' performance.

Conclusion

In summary, the present research supports, to some extent, that the individual differences in MBA students' performance can be more accurately predicted by the Big Five personality factors along with individual attributes of the trainees, such as qualifications and work experience. Thus, an accurate prediction of MBA students' performance that takes the personality traits of students into consideration may have important implications for MBA education in China.

However, this study has undergone some limitations inevitably as follows:

1. Data of the sample were collected through self-ratings. When participants rate themselves, there is always possibility that they intentionally or unintentionally bias their ratings.
2. Because the original survey materials were in English, the translated questionnaires in Chinese may not have conveyed the meaning intended very well. Although the translations were done by native Chinese speakers who were also very good at English, it is possible that the construct meanings were not equivalent.

For furthering investigations about the impact of personality traits upon MBA students' performance, we suggest to extend the research to the full-time MBA program participants and to include more indicators of students' performance, such as the major course grades during the terms of their academic year and the success rate of the students to get an MBA degree.

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