A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF SELF-MONITORING IN RELATION TO THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF THAI AND FOREIGN STUDENTS AT ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

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Abstract

This study examined if differences in self-monitoring which is a specific dispositional trait are related to differences in the big five general dispositional traits of personality for both Thai and Foreign BBA students at Assumption University. Out of a sample of 321 students, 151 were low and 170 were high self-monitors. The only trait that students differed on was extraversion with low self-monitors having higher scores on extraversion. The Thai and Foreign students were further divided into high and low self-monitors. Results indicated that both groups, high and low self-monitors for both Thai and Foreign students have differences in extraversion, emotional stability and conscientiousness traits.

INTRODUCTION

Some people readily change their behavior to match each situation they encounter, and they strive to make the best possible impressions on others. As a result they adopt one style when dealing with their subordinates and another-perhaps more respectful style when dealing with their boss. This aspect of personality is referred to as "*Social Chameleons*" or "*High Self-Monitors*". In contrast, other individuals are less willing to change their personal style in this manner; with them, "*what you see is what you get*" across a wide range of contexts. Such people are unlikely to behave differently toward members of different groups with whom they interact. This aspect of personality is referred to as "*Devil's Advocates*" or "*Low Self-Monitors*".

"Personality is the combination of stable physical and mental characteristics that give the individual his or her identity". (McCrae, 1993). These characteristics or traits are a product of genetic and environmental influences. Personality psychologists Gordon Allport, Raymond Cattell and Hans Eyesenck tried to extract adjectives that they believed described observable and relatively permanent traits. Today, most researchers use the Big Five as a common basis for making comparisons between persons. Each of the Big Five, which include extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience can be called "*Super Traits*" because each of these broad dimensions comprises smaller number of narrow traits. Because support for the Big five can be found in many different countries researchers conclude that the basic structure of human personality arises from some universal living experience rather than being shaped by individual cultures. (McCrae & Costa, 1999; Katigbak et al, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences between high and low self- monitors with regard to the big five dimensions of personality because this can lead to important differences between high and low self-monitors regarding important factors such as task performance, career success and relations with others.

RELATED LITERATURE

Previous research has found that that high self-monitors, compared with low self-monitors, perform better in boundary spanning positions (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982). High self-monitors have also been found to emerge as group leaders (Dobbins, Long & Dedrick, 1990; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991). High self-monitors are likely to resolve conflict through collaboration and compromise rather than through

avoidance and competition (Baron, 1989). High self-monitors are likely to be promoted (Kilduff & Day, 1994). High self-monitors are also more likely to perform organizational citizenship behaviors (Blakely, Fuller & Smith, 1996). High self-monitors also perform better in jobs which require good communication skills (Larkin, 1987) So far, one research has examined self-monitoring as a moderator of the relationship between personality traits and performance (Barrick, Parks & Mount, 2005). The preceding suggests that self- monitoring could be related to dimensions of personality.

The Big Five personality traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability, extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience have been shown to strongly relate to performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In addition, conscientiousness has been found to be the strongest and most generalizable predictor of these personality traits (Mount & Barrick, 1995). The Big Five traits have been found to be related to individual-level outcomes such as happiness, physical and psychological health, spirituality, and identity; interpersonal-level outcomes such as quality of relationships with peers, family, and romantic others; and organizational- or social-level outcomes such as occupational choice, satisfaction, performance, community involvement, criminal activity, and political ideology (Ozer & Benet-Martfnez, 2006). These personality traits have also been found to be positively related to entrepreneurship (Zhao & Seibert, 2006), cultural intelligence (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006), and satisfaction with teams (Peeters, Rutte, van Tuijl, & Reymen, 2006) and negatively associated with undesirable outcomes such as burnout (Bakker, van der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006). Further contribution to the prediction of job performance beyond each of the global Big Five personality traits has recently been attributed to the "narrow traits" that constitute those traits (Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006). A recent promising trend in personality research has also been to study the interactions between the Big Five personality traits and more transient states or situational factors that can enhance or dampen their impact on various work-related outcomes (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; Stewart & Nandkeolyar, 2006).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The two major variables of this study were self-monitoring and the big five personality traits. Self-monitoring which is the dependent variable, can be either high or low. In the present study the researchers examined two groups namely Thai and Foreign students who were either high and low self-monitors. The big five personality traits which was the independent variable consists of five dimensions (Burger 2004) namely:

1. **Extraversion (E)** consists of traits such as outgoing, gregarious, optimistic and sociable.
2. Neuroticism (**N**) or (inversely) **Emotional Stability (ES)** consists of traits such as anxiety, anger and depression.
3. **Agreeableness (A)** consists of traits such as trust, tender-mindedness and cooperation.
4. **Conscientiousness (C)** consists of traits such as reliable, hardworking, competence, order and self-discipline.
5. **Openness to Experience** (OP) consists of traits such as imagination, creativity, originality, and fantasy.

HYPOTHESES

Six Null hypotheses were formulated:

1) There is no significant difference in the degree of extraversion between low and high self-monitors.

2) There is no significant difference in the degree of emotional stability between low and high self-monitors.

3) There is no significant difference in the degree of agreeableness between low and high self-monitors.

4) There is no significant difference in the degree of conscientiousness between low and high self-monitors.

5) There is no significant difference in the degree of openness to experience between low and high self-monitors.

6) There is no significant difference between Thai and foreign students regarding the level of self-monitoring and personality traits.

METHODOLOGY:

The random sampling technique was used to collect data from 321 students, of which 151 were Foreign and 170 were Thais from the BBA faculty at Assumption University, Bang-na campus only.

MEASURES:

a) Self-monitoring was measured with the 25 item true-false scale developed by Snyder (1974) in which the responses are coded 0 and 1, with a 1 indicating high self-monitor. The Cronbach's Alpha for the present study was .72.

b) The Big Five Traits scale containing 41 items, 19 positively and 22 negatively worded, using a 5 point Likert-type response was developed by the researchers themselves. The Cronbach's Alpha for the present study was .82.

DATAANALYSIS

In the descriptive analysis the mean and the standard deviation was calculated in order to find out the differences between low and high self-monitors with regard to each of the big five traits. In the inferential analysis one-way ANOVA was used to test hypotheses 1 to 5 and students were grouped based on their nationality and level of self-monitoring into 4 groups, then a one-way ANOVA procedure was performed to test hypothesis 6.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Hypothesis 1 was rejected since there was a significant difference between low and high self-monitors on extraversion trait ($F=17.989$, $p<.01$). The mean extraversion score for students with high self-monitoring score was 2.57 and the mean extraversion score for students with low self-monitoring score was 2.88.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Openness to new experience	Between Groups	.445	1	.445	1.191	.276
	Within Groups	119.077	319	.373		
	Total	119.522	320			
Emotional Stability	Between Groups	.461	1	.461	1.192	.276
	Within Groups	123.255	319	.386		
	Total	123.716	320			
Extraversion	Between Groups	7.721	1	7.721	17.989	.000
	Within Groups	136.924	319	.429		
	Total	144.645	320			
Conscientiousness	Between Groups	.030	1	.030	.092	.762
	Within Groups	104.760	319	.328		
	Total	104.790	320			
Agreeableness	Between Groups	.349	1	.349	.761	.384
	Within Groups	146.367	319	.459		
	Total	146.716	320			

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5 failed to be rejected.

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Openness to new experience	Low	151	2.5356	.59200	.04818	2.4404	2.6308	1.00	4.50
	High	170	2.4610	.62732	.04811	2.3660	2.5560	1.25	5.00
	Total	321	2.4961	.61115	.03411	2.4290	2.5632	1.00	5.00
Emotional Stability	Low	151	2.9561	.63508	.05168	2.8540	3.0582	1.33	4.67
	High	170	3.0320	.60938	.04674	2.9397	3.1242	1.00	4.83
	Total	321	2.9963	.62178	.03470	2.9280	3.0646	1.00	4.83
Extraversion	Low	151	2.8805	.64500	.05249	2.7768	2.9842	1.25	4.57
	High	170	2.5697	.66404	.05093	2.4692	2.6703	1.00	4.29
	Total	321	2.7159	.67232	.03753	2.6421	2.7897	1.00	4.57
Conscientiousness	Low	151	2.8368	.62588	.05093	2.7361	2.9374	1.20	5.00
	High	170	2.8562	.52172	.04001	2.7772	2.9352	1.40	4.40
	Total	321	2.8470	.57225	.03194	2.7842	2.9099	1.20	5.00
Agreeableness	Low	151	2.2437	.65651	.05343	2.1381	2.3493	1.20	4.80
	High	170	2.1776	.69536	.05333	2.0724	2.2829	1.00	4.80
	Total	321	2.2087	.67712	.03779	2.1344	2.2831	1.00	4.80

For hypothesis 6, the ANOVA test with nationality and level of self-monitoring as grouping variables revealed a significant difference only in the degree of extraversion among Thai and foreign students who have low and high self-monitoring levels ($F=6.43$, $p<.01$).

ANOVA could not detect differences among overall scores for emotional stability and conscientiousness but an LSD post-hoc analysis revealed a significant difference in emotional stability scores between high self-monitoring foreign students and low self-monitoring Thai students with a mean difference of .23482 ($p<.05$). There is a significant difference in conscientiousness scores between high self-monitoring Thai and foreign students (mean difference of .19167, $p<.05$).

Regarding extraversion scores, there are significant differences between high self-monitoring and low self-monitoring foreign students (mean difference of -.39765, $p<.05$), high self-monitoring foreign students and low-self monitoring Thai students (mean difference of -.35885, $p<.05$), low self-monitoring foreign students and high self-monitoring Thai students (mean difference of .28490, $p<.05$), high self-monitoring and low-self-monitoring Thai students (mean difference of -.24611, $p<.05$).

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Openness to new experience	Between Groups	1.501	3	.500	1.344	.260
	Within Groups	118.020	317	.372		
	Total	119.522	320			
Emotional Stability	Between Groups	2.152	3	.717	1.871	.134
	Within Groups	121.563	317	.383		
	Total	123.716	320			
Extraversion	Between Groups	8.297	3	2.766	6.430	.000
	Within Groups	136.348	317	.430		
	Total	144.645	320			
Conscientiousness	Between Groups	1.553	3	.518	1.590	.192
	Within Groups	103.236	317	.326		
	Total	104.790	320			
Agreeableness	Between Groups	.615	3	.205	.445	.721
	Within Groups	146.100	317	.461		
	Total	146.716	320			

Multiple Comparisons

LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) fourgroup	(J) fourgroup	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Openness to new experience	F-low	F-high	.01093	.10185	.915
		T-low	-.16439	.09931	.099
		T-high	-.01909	.09246	.837
	F-high	F-low	-.01093	.10185	.915
		T-low	-.17532	.10217	.087
		T-high	-.03002	.09553	.753
	T-low	F-low	.16439	.09931	.099
		F-high	.17532	.10217	.087
		T-high	.14529	.09281	.118
	T-high	F-low	.01909	.09246	.837
		F-high	.03002	.09553	.753
		T-low	-.14529	.09281	.118
Emotional Stability	F-low	F-high	-.06690	.10337	.518
		T-low	.16792	.10079	.097
		T-high	.05712	.09384	.543
	F-high	F-low	.06690	.10337	.518
		T-low	.23482*	.10369	.024
		T-high	.12402	.09695	.202
	T-low	F-low	-.16792	.10079	.097
		F-high	-.23482*	.10369	.024
		T-high	-.11080	.09419	.240
	T-high	F-low	-.05712	.09384	.543
		F-high	-.12402	.09695	.202
		T-low	.11080	.09419	.240
Extraversion	F-low	F-high	.39765*	.10948	.000
		T-low	.03880	.10674	.717
		T-high	.28490*	.09938	.004
	F-high	F-low	-.39765*	.10948	.000
		T-low	-.35885*	.10982	.001
		T-high	-.11275	.10268	.273
	T-low	F-low	-.03880	.10674	.717
		F-high	.35885*	.10982	.001
		T-high	.24611*	.09976	.014
	T-high	F-low	-.28490*	.09938	.004
		F-high	.11275	.10268	.273
		T-low	-.24611*	.09976	.014
Conscientiousness	F-low	F-high	.10817	.09526	.257
		T-low	.02534	.09288	.785
		T-high	-.08350	.08647	.335
	F-high	F-low	-.10817	.09526	.257
		T-low	-.08282	.09556	.387
		T-high	-.19167*	.08934	.033
	T-low	F-low	-.02534	.09288	.785
		F-high	.08282	.09556	.387
		T-high	-.10884	.08680	.211
	T-high	F-low	.08350	.08647	.335
		F-high	.19167*	.08934	.033
		T-low	.10884	.08680	.211
Agreeableness	F-low	F-high	.04644	.11332	.682
		T-low	-.07740	.11050	.484
		T-high	.01507	.10287	.884
	F-high	F-low	-.04644	.11332	.682
		T-low	-.12384	.11368	.277
		T-high	-.03137	.10628	.768
	T-low	F-low	.07740	.11050	.484
		F-high	.12384	.11368	.277
		T-high	.09247	.10326	.371
	T-high	F-low	-.01507	.10287	.884
		F-high	.03137	.10628	.768
		T-low	-.09247	.10326	.371

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

DISCUSSION

Analyses of the results indicate that Thai and Foreign students who are low self-monitors achieved higher scores for extraversion, the reason being that low self-monitors tend to form fewer but deeper and more sincere relationships with others compared to high self-monitors who are preoccupied with trying to make an impression on others. Low self-monitors tend to be more reliable, consistent and less manipulative compared to high self-monitors who tailor their behavior to fit a given situation. In addition high self-monitors generally seek different friends for different settings and tend to change their behavior across situations. Low self-monitors could be less sensitive and less concerned with their impact on others since they are guided more by their internal feelings and attitudes rather than by situational cues and hardly pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues which makes them form more stable and less shallow relationships with others compared to high self-monitors.

Further analysis revealed that high self-monitors foreign students are more emotionally stable- that is they tend to control their emotions compared to low self-monitor Thai students because it could be that high self-monitors try hard to make an impression and often learn to emphatize with others-that is to 'walk in their shoes' and adjust behavior according to what the situation demands.

Finally, high self-monitor Thai students are more conscientiousness than high-self monitor foreign students. This could be associated with high Power Distance - that is the degree to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980; 2001). In Thai culture children are socialized towards obedience and initiative and dutifully obey the orders they receive from parents and teachers. Thai society would be described as a developing economy and it could be that people from these economies tend to be more conscientious than people from wealthier countries. Prosperity allows people to behave less conscientiously or more wasteful (Smith and Bond, 1993).

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Although one study of self-monitoring with the big five personality traits provides limited evidence about the nature of the differences between high and low self-monitors there are potential implications for management. Managers might use such knowledge when considering an applicant for particular assignments. For example one may take into consideration self-monitoring when making assignments into teams, which require a great deal of collaboration and cooperation or when boundary-spanning activities have to be performed. High self-monitors may have higher ability to empathize with colleagues-that is to see the world through their eyes compared to low self-monitors. On the other hand when putting together a decision group, perhaps too many high self-monitors might suffer from group think compared to low self-monitors.

Further research can be conducted to study the relationship between high self-monitoring and job satisfaction, leadership, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors of both teachers and students in Thai culture since there are individual differences in the traits of the Five Factor Model. Studies could be conducted on the dimensions of culture and personality traits. It would be possible to conduct experimental studies of the effects of personality on organizational culture.

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