

Personality Traits and Career Strategies as Determinants of Career Satisfaction

(Ciri Personaliti dan Strategi Kerjaya sebagai Penentu kepada Kepuasan Kerjaya)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined individual's personality traits and career strategies that influence career satisfaction. Based on social cognitive career theory and an integrated model of proactive behaviours, the study proposed that career strategies would mediate the relationship between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction. Data were gathered through questionnaire survey of insurance agents (n = 531) located in the Northern States of Peninsular Malaysia. Regression results revealed that individual's personality traits and career strategies were correlated with career satisfaction. Results also provided partial support for the mediating role of career strategies (interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination) on the relationship between individual's personality traits (extraversion) and career satisfaction. The findings were discussed and implications were also put forward.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini melihat ciri personaliti individu dan strategi kerjaya yang mempengaruhi kepuasan kerjaya. Berdasarkan teori kerjaya kognitif sosial dan model bersepadu gelagat proaktif, kajian ini mencadangkan strategi kerjaya akan bertindak sebagai faktor perantara dalam hubungan antara ciri personaliti individu dengan kepuasan kerjaya. Data dikumpul melalui soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada ejen insurans (n = 531) di kawasan utara Semenanjung Malaysia. Keputusan regresi menunjukkan ciri personaliti individu dan strategi kerjaya mempunyai hubungan dengan kepuasan kerjaya. Keputusan kajian memaparkan sokongan sebahagian terhadap strategi kerjaya (tarikan antara perseorangan, mencari sokongan sosial dan pencalonan diri) sebagai perantara antara hubungan ciri personaliti individu (keterbukaan) dengan kepuasan kerjaya. Perbincangan tentang dapatan hasil kajian serta implikasi kajian turut disertakan.

INTRODUCTION

Change in the business environment during the end of 2008 have significantly impacted employees' employment contract. These changes have contributed to the decrement of employees' advancement opportunities, which cause a few employees to reach the top. As organisations face more complex business environments, career path has become increasingly vague and individuals must be responsible to manage their own careers, rather than rely on organisational support. One way employee may meet this need is to develop well-planned actions in order to enhance their employability and increase their career satisfaction. This approach is consistent with the suggestion that employees should take active role in managing their career through adopting strategies that meet their personal development needs and potentially increase their career satisfaction (Quigley & Tymon Jr. 2006).

While one the objective of this study is on the role that career strategies can play in employees' career satisfaction, it is important to also determine the mediating role of career strategies on the path of employees' personality traits and their career satisfaction, particularly given the trend that employees should be involve in career self-management process. Exploring the influence of

individual difference variables (personality traits and career strategies) on career satisfaction will result in a clear understanding of these relationships and also helps employees design an effective career plan. However, minimal research has explored the effects of personality traits on career satisfaction (Bozionelos 2004; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman 2005). There is a gap in the literature because personality is found to be important in many other related domains of organisational behaviour, including leadership, job performance, and job satisfaction. Very few studies have attempted a comprehensive examination of the effects of personality traits on career satisfaction (Bozionelos 2004; Ng et al. 2005). Besides, previous empirical researches have paid negligible attention on the mediating hypothesis (Nabi 2003; Barnett & Bradley 2007), and merely examined the direct relationship between independent variables (individual's personality traits and career strategies) and dependent variable (career satisfaction). To fill these gaps, this study intends to examine how career strategies develop the link between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction.

Career satisfaction demonstrated the accumulated interaction between a variety of individual, organisational and societal norms, behaviours and work practices. Understanding factors associated with career satisfaction are essential to organisations by means to enhance the

ability to share information with employees, to make the necessary resources available and to support employees in managing their careers. Thus, this paper examines the predictors of career satisfaction and addresses how career strategies influence the relationship between individual’s personality traits and career satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CAREER SATISFACTION

Generally, career satisfaction is defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s work experiences (Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, Jr. 1995; Nabi 2001; Bozionelos 2008). Recent researches (Barnett & Bradley 2007; Hofman, Dries & Pepermans 2008) indicated that the level of income, status and promotion that used to determine an individual’s career achievement appear to be less relevant once employees achieved a certain level of compensation. What is important to them is the personal satisfaction derived from their careers (Barnett & Bradley 2007; Hofman et al. 2008). The change

in focus to career satisfaction is understandable because the criterion for satisfaction is more related to individual inner feeling of happiness. Since every individual will have their own measure of achievement and aspiration that they want to attain, which is different with others needs of achievement, thus subjective measures that stress on self-evaluation of intrinsic (happiness and interpersonal success) fulfillment were perceived as important to be studied.

CAREER STRATEGIES

Career strategies are the actions that individuals take to decrease the time required to meet their career objectives (Gould & Penley 1984). These actions will be taken when individuals desire to manipulate their career situation and so help them to achieve career satisfaction. These actions are referred to alternatively as “career-management behaviours” (Barnett & Bradley 2007). According to Gould and Penley (1984) these actions may include interpersonal attraction, self-nomination and seeking social support as briefly discussed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Definitions of career strategies dimensions

| Career Strategies Dimensions | Definitions |
|------------------------------|--|
| Self-nomination | Communicating to superiors a desire to assume greater responsibility in the organisation and presenting oneself in the best possible light. |
| Seeking social support | Getting support, information and advice from experienced people or from a group of relevant friends either inside or outside the organisation. |
| Interpersonal attraction | Holding a sound opinion or thinking highly of one’s superiors, and expressing a favorable evaluation of the superiors. |

Note: Data derived from Gould and Penley (1984) and Chang (2002)

INDIVIDUAL’S PERSONALITY TRAITS

Individual’s personality traits are the dynamic and organized set of characteristics of an individual that influences his/her thinking, feeling, motivation and behaviours (Furnham & Heaven 1999). There are lots of personality traits that could be used to describe an individual’s behaviours or characters such as aggressive,

shy, ambitious, lazy, sociable, responsible, loyal and trustable. The most popular approach among researchers for studying personality traits is the Big Five Model, which were related to the measures of individual performance in the workplace (Howard & Howard 2001; Trouba 2007). The definitions and characteristics of each of the Big Five Model’s dimensions are outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Big five model’s dimensions

| Dimensions | Definitions |
|------------------------|---|
| Neuroticism | A dimension of personality defined by instability and anxiety at unknown environment. |
| Extraversion | People who are outgoing, talkative, sociable and assertive. |
| Conscientiousness | Refers to those who are orderly, get their work done, arrive on time and care about doing things right. |
| Openness to experience | Refers to how willing people are to make adjustments in notions and activities in according to new ideas or situations. |
| Agreeableness | A person who tends to compatible to others by being tolerant, agreeable and acceptable. |

Note: Data derived from McCrae and Costa (1997), and McShane and Von Glinow (2005).

INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CAREER SATISFACTION

Researchers such as Bozionelos (2004) and Ng et al. (2005) revealed that individual's personality traits play an important role in determining individual's career satisfaction. This is because personality traits are the inherent characteristics that can override individual's career-related decisions. A study by Harper and Irvine (2005) revealed that besides their education level, hotel managers perceived their personality traits as one of the influencing factors that will make them successful in the future. This suggests, besides higher education, personality traits are important to determine an individual's career satisfaction. Stable personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience will influence individual's cognition, motivation, mobility and behaviour to feel satisfied (Dole & Schroeder 2001). For instance, extroverts have strong human relation skills due to their specific characteristics of sociable, joyful, energetic and outgoing that are important in developing harmonious relationship with superiors, colleagues, subordinates and friends within and outside the organisation. Such close relationship among employees is important for the individual because then the person can dominate the work environment in order to obtain valuable career information and support for future career advancement.

CAREER STRATEGIES AND CAREER SATISFACTION

Gould and Penley (1984) study revealed that, those individuals who made greater use of career strategies were making rapid advancements in their careers than who were not. Support for the relationship between career strategies and career satisfaction was also found in the studies of Chang (2002), Bozionelos (2003, 2008) and Akrivos, Ladkin, and Rektilis (2007). The studies of Nabi (2001, 2003) also revealed a similar result where career strategies were determined as one of the significant predictors of an individual's career satisfaction. This showed that career strategies are one of the factors related to rapid promotion and achievement of career satisfaction. The reason being, that individuals who are engaged in high level of particular career strategies such as networking with external social groups can gain several advantages including maintaining career flexibility, and establishing beneficial relationship with significant person, who may assist them in their career advancements. Besides, the social capital theory also suggested that extensive relationship between individual and powerful social groups such as organisation's top management, professional bodies and trade associations can be used for multiple purposes such as direct access to information, position and power (Bozionelos 2003), which in turn will promote individual's satisfaction towards their career performance.

MEDIATING ROLE OF CAREER STRATEGIES BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL'S PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CAREER SATISFACTION

The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and integrated model of proactive behaviours predicts that in addition to a direct relationship between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction, individual's personality traits may also indirectly influence satisfaction via implementation of particular career strategies (Crant 2000; Lent 2004; Lent & Brown 2006). From the propositions of SCCT and integrated model of proactive behaviours, it can be assumed that individuals' career outcomes are largely determined by their personality traits. In turn, such inherent characteristics will affect individuals' choice to initiate a certain career-related action such as formulation of career strategies. According to Guthrie, Coate, and Schwoerer (1998) and Dougherty, Chueng, and Florea (2008), it is important for individuals to adopt career strategies that suit their personality traits because it will help them to be successful their career in future. For example, extroverts are the perfect individuals to engage in seeking social support (one type of career strategy) because they are sociable and like to make friends, and have the capability to expand their network to get valuable career information, which can be important to achieve career satisfaction. This point has been supported by Lent and Brown's (2006) study. They revealed that individual's personality traits can affect individual's interests, and such interests can promote career-relevant choices (such as enrolling in a particular career strategy) for important career outcomes. Besides, the study of Metz (2004) and Chiaburu, Baker, and Pitariu (2006) also revealed that individuals with positive personality traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and openness to experience are more eager to engage in career self-management activities as a means to get career satisfaction.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 proposes the research framework which consists of independent variable (individual's personality traits), mediating variable (career strategies) and dependent variable (career satisfaction). There is direct relationship between (1) individual's personality traits and career satisfaction; and (2) career strategies and career satisfaction. This research framework also proposes that individual's personality traits also influences career satisfaction via career strategies.

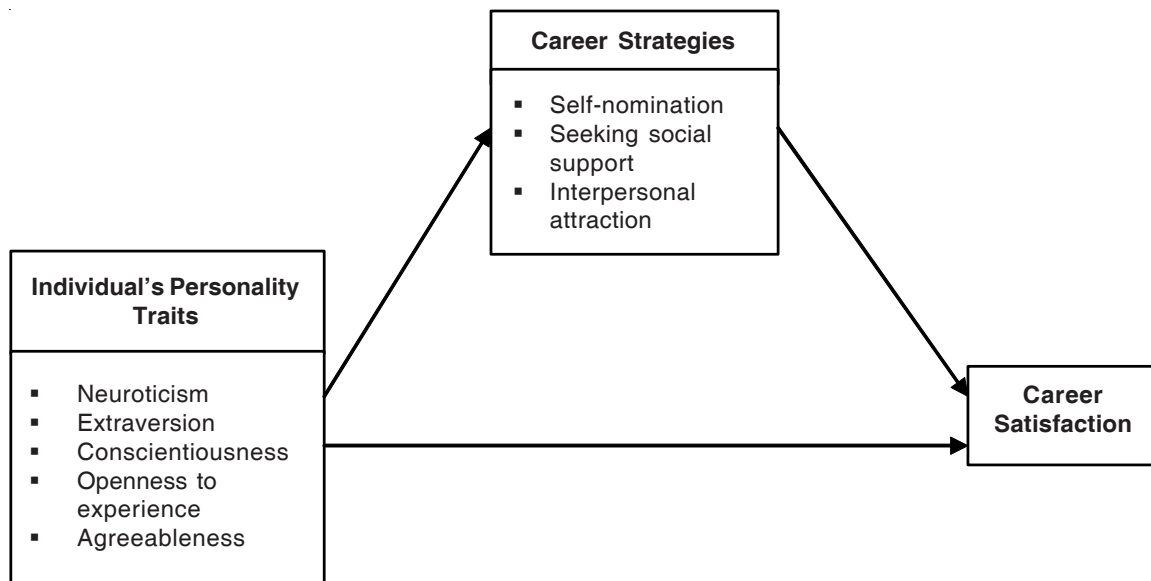


FIGURE 1. Research framework of the relationship between individual's personality traits, career strategies and career satisfaction

METHODOLOGY

RESPONDENTS

The sample of this study consisted of 531 full time insurance agents located at the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia. Since most of the insurance companies were unable to reveal the number of insurance agents, the disproportionate sampling was utilized by dividing equally the number of questionnaires that is 25 set for each of the 30 participated branches (750 set questionnaires distributed). The response rate was 70.8%. The respondents included 312 men and 219 women. Most of the respondents were married (71.6%), and majority of respondents' age ranged between 26 – 43 years old (58.1%). In terms of educational achievement, 233 respondents (43.9%) had SPM, while 133 respondents (25.0%) were Diploma holders. Besides that, 271 of the respondents (51.0%) were Life and General insurance agents. Majority of the respondents (44.6%) indicated that they have worked in the current insurance companies between 2 to 5 years.

MEASUREMENTS

5-item regarding career satisfaction were adapted from Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990). These items were widely used in previous empirical studies with the consistent reliability result of 0.88. Besides, personality traits were assessed with a 50-item adapted from Goldberg's (2001) International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). This IPIP measurement has demonstrated an internal consistency reliability of 0.85 (Lim & Ployhart 2006). Meanwhile, 17-item was adapted from Gould and Penley (1984) to measure career strategies. This 17-item will determine the extent to which (1 = never to 5 = very often)

they had engaged in each of the predetermined career strategies (that is interpersonal attraction, self-nomination and seeking social support). All the study variable scales (personality traits and career satisfaction) were measured on a five-point scale which ranged from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

DATA ANALYSIS

Reliability test for each study variables were conducted. Subsequently, Hierarchical Multiple Regression was used to examine the relationship between individual's personality traits, career strategies and career satisfaction.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, internal reliability and Pearson correlation for the variables of interest are shown in Table 3. All the variables obtained internal consistency reliability above 0.60 (refer Table 3). Besides, there was a weak relationship between dimensions of individual's personality traits, career strategies and career satisfaction.

Apart from that, to examine the relationship between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction, a two step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used. Respondents' demographic factors such as income, gender, marital status, age, and education level were controlled and entered into the regression equation in the first step (Gould & Penley 1984; Nabi 2001; Bozionelos 2003). Meanwhile, the five dimensions of individual's personality traits were entered in the second step. As shown in Table 4, after controlling for demographic variables, individual's personality traits predicted an additional 6% variance in career satisfaction (R^2 change = 0.06, F -change = 6.63, $p < 0.01$). Of the five dimensions of individual's personality traits, only extraversion (= 0.22, $p < 0.01$) was significantly

TABLE 3. Cronbach's alpha, means, standard deviations and correlations of study variables

| Variables | α | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-----------------------------|----------|------|-----|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Neuroticism | .86 | 2.60 | .77 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Openness to experience | .80 | 3.52 | .64 | .11* | - | | | | | | | |
| 3. Extraversion | .74 | 3.54 | .65 | -.14** | .15** | - | | | | | | |
| 4. Agreeableness | .67 | 3.63 | .61 | -.25** | .08 | .24** | - | | | | | |
| 5. Conscientiousness | .71 | 3.62 | .84 | -.34** | .16** | .05 | .21** | - | | | | |
| 6. Interpersonal attraction | .86 | 2.73 | .80 | -.10* | .05 | .21** | -.08 | -.22** | - | | | |
| 7. Seeking social support | .80 | 3.73 | .65 | -.14** | .12** | .27** | .19** | .10* | .12** | - | | |
| 8. Self-nomination | .78 | 3.57 | .66 | -.11** | .10* | .28** | .13** | .06 | .19** | .42** | - | |
| 9. Career satisfaction | .89 | 3.53 | .74 | -.12** | .09* | .26** | .09* | .02 | .26** | .29** | .26** | - |

Note: n = 531; *p < .05, **p < .01

and positively related to career satisfaction, which indicated that extraversion had the strongest relationship with career satisfaction compared to others.

TABLE 4. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis of individual's personality traits and career satisfaction

| Predictors | Model 1 Std. β | Model 2 Std. β |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Step 1: Control Variables | | |
| Income | .23** | .20** |
| Gender | -.11* | -.07 |
| Marital status | .03 | .01 |
| Age | .01 | .01 |
| Education level | -.03 | -.04 |
| Step 2: Individual Personality Traits | | |
| Neuroticism | | -.07 |
| Openness to experience | | .05 |
| Extraversion | | .22** |
| Agreeableness | | .00 |
| Conscientiousness | | -.04 |
| R ² | .07 | .13 |
| Adjusted R ² | .06 | .11 |
| R ² change | .07 | .06 |
| F-change | 8.15** | 6.63** |

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01; Dependent variable = career satisfaction

Besides, to examine the relationship between individual's personality traits' dimensions and career strategies, another set of hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. As indicated in Table 5, only extraversion was positively correlated with all the career strategies dimensions namely, interpersonal attraction ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.01$), seeking social support ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.01$) and self-nomination ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$).

Research framework in this study also proposed that career strategies would mediate the relationship between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction (refer Figure 1). As indicated by Baron and Kenny (1986), the

TABLE 5. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis of individual's personality traits and career strategies

| Predictors | Criterion Variables | | |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Att Std. β | Supp Std. β | Nom Std. β |
| Step 1: Control Variables | | | |
| Income | -.01 | .02 | .05 |
| Gender | -.08 | .01 | .02 |
| Marital status | .03 | .02 | -.01 |
| Age | -.12* | .01 | .00 |
| Education level | -.05 | .05 | -.00 |
| Step 2: Individual's Personality Traits | | | |
| Neuroticism | .03 | -.08 | -.07 |
| Openness to experience | .05 | .08 | .06 |
| Extraversion | .23** | .21** | .25** |
| Agreeableness | -.07 | .10* | .04 |
| Conscientiousness | -.20** | .02 | .00 |
| R ² | .13 | .10 | .09 |
| Adjusted R ² | .11 | .09 | .07 |
| R ² change | .09 | .09 | .08 |
| F-change | 10.92** | 10.24** | 9.24** |

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01; Att = Interpersonal attraction, Supp = Seeking social support, Nom = Self-nomination

first condition of mediation requires that the independent variable (individual's personality traits' dimensions) relate to the dependent variable (career satisfaction). As shown in Table 4, only extraversion was correlated with career satisfaction ($= 0.22, p < 0.01$). While, second condition was independent variable must also correlate with mediating variable (career strategies' dimensions). The results indicated in Table 5 represented the second conditions, which only extraversion was related with all career strategies' dimensions namely, interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination. And, the last condition was career satisfaction was regressed on the mediating variables (interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination) along with the independent variable (extraversion).

As indicated in Table 6, the effect of extraversion on career satisfaction was slightly weakened in the presence of interpersonal attraction ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), seeking social support ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$) and self-nomination (β

$= 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). The findings suggested that interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination partially mediate the relationship between extraversion and career satisfaction.

TABLE 6. Summary of the mediation analysis of career strategies on the relationship between individual's personality traits and career satisfaction

| | Criterion variables | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Interpersonal attraction (Att) | Career satisfaction (without Att) | Career satisfaction (with Att) | Seeking social support (Supp) | Career satisfaction (without Supp) | Career satisfaction (with Supp) | Self-nomination (Nom) | Career satisfaction (without Nom) | Career satisfaction (with Nom) |
| | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β | Std. β |
| Extraversion | .23** | .22** | .18** | .21** | .22** | .17** | .25** | .22** | .18** |
| R ² | .13 | .13 | .17 | .10 | .13 | .17 | .09 | .13 | .16 |
| Adjusted R ² | .11 | .11 | .16 | .09 | .11 | .16 | .07 | .11 | .14 |
| R ² change | .09 | .06 | .10 | .09 | .06 | .10 | .08 | .06 | .08 |
| F-change | 10.92** | 6.63** | 30.62** | 10.24** | 6.63** | 31.50** | 9.24** | 6.63** | 25.67** |

Note: ** $p < .01$; Att = Interpersonal attraction, Supp = Seeking social support, Nom = Self-nomination

DISCUSSION

This study examined how individual's personality traits and career strategies relate to career satisfaction. This was achieved by testing a relationship proposed by SCCT and integrated model of proactive behaviours. Consistent with previous research (Barnett & Bradley 2007; Dougherty et al. 2008), this study found that extraversion was positively related to interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination. This means extravert tend to engage in strategies involving relationships with others such as interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination. Individuals with sociable and outgoing characteristics can handle social situations well (Guthrie et al. 1998) as they know how to subtly develop good relationship with significant people who are valuable to their career advancement.

Besides, the proposal that individual's personality traits (extraversion) correlated with career satisfaction also received support. This result supports the studies done by Ng et al. (2005), Robie, Brown, and Bly (2005) and Silva (2006). The study also found that career strategies namely, interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination partially mediated the relationship between extraversion and career satisfaction. These results support the proposition of SCCT and integrated model of proactive behaviours, which suggests that stable personality traits such as extraversion would affect individuals' cognitions, motivations and behaviours towards their desire to achieve satisfaction. For instance, the genetic characteristics of extraversion such as sociability and expressiveness could shape employees with excellent human relation skills that are important to develop favorable relationship with customers and superiors. Such relationships are important for employees because it could provide them with several advantages including easier entry into the organisational and personal social structure for getting access to extra

resources, supports and information from relevant individuals within and outside the organisation. These advantages could result in significant enhancement of performance that could consequently affect employees' career satisfaction.

In this study, insurance agents could be categorized as a group of individuals that possess higher level of interpersonal skills (Lee 1986), which were more likely to engage in the development of good relationship with superiors, colleague, friends and customers. The reason being, that insurance agents' businesses were generated by themselves, which they need to initiatively seek for potential customers by means to sustain their sales performance. Therefore, insurance agents would formulate themselves as extravert individuals that would constantly take part in the social activities to widen their network of businesses. Besides, the characteristics of friendly, sociability and expressiveness could ease insurance agents to get along with others and develop new network of contacts, in which could help them to obtain valuable career support and therefore influence their career satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully attained the research objective that is to examine the relationship between individual's personality traits, career strategies and career satisfaction. From the regression results, it was found that only extraversion was related to career satisfaction; and career strategies (interpersonal attraction, seeking social support and self-nomination) partially mediated the relationship between extraversion and career satisfaction. The results of this study will provide some insights to the present Human Resource (HR) practitioners of the assessed insurance organisations. For example, HR professionals at

the insurance organisation might be encouraged to recruit insurance agents whom processed personality that suits the industry. Hence, it is hope that the findings from this study will provide ideas to human resource professionals in designing a more conducive policies and procedures that can support the employees' career development needs.

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