

The Role of Personality in Understanding Job Stress and Employee Selection of Staff in Hospitality Industry.

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The provision of high-quality, caring, and optimal services is important for success in the field of hospitality and tourism. However, when employees deliver too many demanded services, many of them develop symptoms of depression [1] and burnout [2]. As a result, the quality of service and employees' organizational involvement may be reduced. Stress symptoms are traditionally attributable to contextual factors, such as long work hours, demanding customers, lack of organizational support, and lack of autonomy. However, the effects of individual factors on these symptoms have been seldom examined.

Recent research has attempted to understand the personality profiles of employees in the hospitality field and how these influence their career performance and success. One of the most common personality theories is the Big V theory, which involves five personality dimensions: [3] neuroticism (related to negative feelings, pessimism, and low self-esteem), extraversion (related to sociability and assertiveness), conscientiousness (related to the sense of purposefulness and responsibility, focus on task and achievement), agreeableness (related to tolerance, trust, acceptance, and respect of other people's beliefs and conventions), and openness (related to active imagination and independence of judgment). Kim et al. [4] showed that when considering workload and work autonomy, neuroticism is associated with the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization facets of burnout. These two facets reduce one's ability to provide warm and caring services to his/her clients and increase his/her tendency to quit the job. The effects of neuroticism on emotional exhaustion were replicated by another group of researchers using a larger sample size (N=544) involving employees at the managerial level [5]. In a subsequent study, Kim & Agrusa [6] reported that staff with high neuroticism is less likely to engage task coping and is more likely to adopt emotion-focused coping instead. This coping pattern suggests that employees with higher neuroticism might be less able to solve their problems in order to reduce their stress; they are also more prone to exert more effort to deal with their feelings, which leads to a less desirable life or work outcomes [7].

When companies observe that the performance problems of their staff is due to stress, they would provide appropriate stress-reduction trainings or change the work patterns of their staff, such as by arranging their work hours more efficiently. The goal is to reduce the stress symptoms of employees and hence maintain service standards. However, the aforementioned research finding indicates that personality is also a major contributing factor to work problems. Therefore, what step could be taken to improve staff's situation? Recent research has shown that neuroticism is modifiable by psychological [8] and biological intervention [9]. The cognitive behavioral therapy could reduce neuroticism and thus might facilitate the use of the task coping approach in dealing with stressors. As a result, quality service can be provided, and at the same time, employees can focus on their career development. However, additional research is necessary to examine the effect of the provision of such kind of training to employees. More important, a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to justify this special training. Further, personality research indicates that a well-validated personality questionnaire could be adopted as a useful

selection tool in determining the right candidates for the hospitality industry, in particular, those who really enjoy working in the field and have great chances of advancing in their career [10]. Overall, much more work on understanding the usefulness of personality assessment in hospitality staff selection, as well as its relationship with work performance and work stress, is necessary.

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Received January 18, 2012; Accepted January 27, 2012; Published January 30, 2012

Citation: Tse WS (2012) The Role of Personality in Understanding Job Stress and Employee Selection of Staff in Hospitality Industry. *J Tourism Hospital* 1:e107. doi:10.4172/jth.1000e107

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