

## Personality traits, job satisfaction and intention to stay among spa therapists in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The rapid emergence of the global spa industry, has contributed to 7.7% revenue annually, increasing from \$60 billion in 2007 to \$94 billion in 2013. Furthermore, a total of \$18.8 billion of this revenue came from the Asia-Pacific region, which was also determined by a 65% increment from 2007 to 2013. The number of spa workers needed is estimated at 2.7 million workers worldwide in 2018, due to consistent growth rates. In Malaysia, the spa industry has the potential to develop continuously as it has grown over 200% since 2002. As a result, the spa industry is categorized as one of the important sectors in the tourism industry since it showed great potential in terms of its contribution to the nation's economy. The greatest setback of the spa industry is the "lack of professional therapists" because of staff turnover problems or the unattractiveness of the industry. Thus, it is essential to encourage spa therapists to remain in their jobs due to the high cost of new recruitment and training. Personality is an important factor where dissatisfaction may occur when there is a mismatch with the job. Past studies from different industries also indicated that personality traits may influence staffs intention to stay. Other studies suggested that job satisfaction can be operational as a mediator role towards personality traits and staffs intention to stay.

**Key words:** *Intention to Stay, Job Satisfaction, Personality, Spa Management.*

### INTRODUCTION

The spa industry has opened its doors to spa operators and projected opportunities for growth in the tourism sector. With the rapid emergence of the global spa industry, it has contributed 7.7% revenue annually, increasing from \$60 billion in 2007 to \$94 billion in 2013. Meanwhile, a total of \$18.8 billion revenues came from the Asia-Pacific region which was also determined by a 65% increment from 2007 to 2013 [1]. The growth of the world's spa facilities by 47% influenced the increase of spa employees by 58% since 2007 to 2013. If the growth rates remain the same, it is estimated that 2.7 million spa workers will be needed by the spa industry in 2018.

In Malaysia, the spa industry has the potential to develop continuously as it has grown over 200% since 2002 [2]. The spa industry is categorized as one of the important sectors in the tourism industry since it is also known as spa tourism thus, making it vital to Malaysia's economic development.

Mosbah [3] elaborated that the support program by the Malaysian government showed great potential in terms of the contribution to the nation's economy. The tourism industry in Malaysia showed encouraging growth through the 24.44 million inbound tourists who visited the country [3]

The positive contribution of the spa industry in Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has made the government take initiatives in the launching of the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) to develop the spa industry as a high-yield industry [4]. Part of the programme's for tourism development to produce 3,540 jobs for spa therapists by 2020 and generate the Gross Net Income (GNI) to RM344.1 million. The main objective of the ETP is to develop the local spa industry which focuses on local expertise and better regulations of the industry in Malaysia. A range of educational and training programs had been launched and developed since the introduction of the ETP was to ensure the objective can be achieved successfully. The programmes which are called as

“Career Progression of Spa Therapists” are conducted by the registered private institutions under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia with guidelines, following the syllabus provided and is prepared by the government. This program is part of the Malaysian government’s effort for “Career Progression of Spa Therapists” as a higher level of education to provide more professional therapists and centres of excellence to cater their facilities for spa education. However, a survey conducted by Stenden University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with Rangsit University and Thai Spa Association in Spa Industry Study entitled “Opening the Spa Doors to ASEAN 2014”, indicated that Malaysia is still lacking skilled workforce and the availability of spa therapists in the industry, as compared to other countries like Thailand, followed by Indonesia and Singapore, which have higher skilled spa therapists and talents. In addition, the numbers of professional talents in Malaysia should be increased as there is still insufficient experts in the Malaysian spa industry, especially when the economic contribution is still below when compared with other segments in the tourism industry [4].

Moreover, the greatest issue of the spa industry is the “lack of professional therapists” due to staff turnover problem or the unattractiveness of the industry [5]. This is supported by Cohen’s study [6] which stated that the turnover among spa therapists is high, compared to other segments in the hospitality industry. Unfortunately, not much attention has been given to the issue of intention to stay among the spa therapists in the spa industry, specifically in Malaysia. Previous researches have also suggested that the lack of spa therapists could be due to their unwillingness to stay in the spa industry or the unattractiveness of the spa industry in terms of rewards or job satisfaction [7]. However, past studies had indicated that the rewards were very competitive [8] but the lack of interest by therapists to work in the spa industry are due to the working conditions and unpleasant pay when compared to other industries, and consequently, this resulted in the unavailability of spa therapists and turnover [9]. Thus, it is essential to encourage spa therapists to remain in their jobs due to the high cost of new recruitment and training. Furthermore, it is also to avoid talented skilled workers from getting poached [10]. Besides the monetary loss, Sandhya [10] argued that loss of talent can also cause an organisation to lose valuable information, customers, and their skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Intention to stay is referred to as the workers loyalty and the degree of their planning to remain in the company [11]. Perrachione [12] suggested that the determination of retention is not influenced by the job, but it is determined by the profession. Job satisfaction would create employee loyalty towards the company since the higher the satisfaction level, the more the employees are willing to commit with the company [13]. Retaining workers could be done by improving job satisfaction in a condition when external influence is low or during organization support [14]. Ramlall [15] suggested that a combination of employment practices or retention effort in organizations may lead to sustained employee retention. In terms of the relationship with personality traits, it would impact workers in their job satisfaction and influence in job retention as Levy [16] stated that accountants who had high conscientiousness personality traits should be rewarded and promoted in fairness due to the sensitivity they perceived in order to retain them in the workplace [16]. Eckhardt [17] explained how the big five personality traits influenced job satisfaction and retention, for example, those IT workers who had high in openness in experience, would be high in turnover intention if they were assigned administrative tasks, and same goes to extraversion IT workers whom are assigned to software programming and development projects.

Hence, a spa therapist must have specific personality traits such as passionate about his/her job and having the “spa feeling”, or the power and benefit of the human touch. It is essential for them to have the connection of mind, body and spirit, besides hard (job related) and soft (communication and interpersonal) skills [7]. According to Levy [16], personality played an important role to predict someone’s compatibility and job satisfaction which influenced their job retention in the company. It was found that the changing of the work climate in the accounting line of work required accountants to be extraverted and have more interactions with co-workers, rather than being introverted. Job dissatisfaction occurred when there was a mismatch in the personality of the workers with the tasks attributed which will have negative impacts to job performances [18]. However, the opposite factors will directly lead to job satisfaction and organizational commitments, hence reducing turnover [17]. The results of the relationship between personality traits, job satisfaction and intention to stay from previous

studies showed some inconsistency. A study by Cheng [19] found only specific Big Five personality traits were related to job satisfaction. Zimmerman [20], in a study of the impact of personality traits on individuals' turnover decisions using meta-analytic path model, posited that conscientiousness and agreeableness traits can predict the turnover rate, as compared to the others traits. Thus, it can be concluded that only specific personality traits suited s certain specific job areas. This emphasis brought some concerns with the spa therapist profession whereby personality should be developed and nurtured to create an excellent spa therapist. According to Cohen [6], a spa therapist must have a complete understanding of the job role, the technical skills, and require the best fit personality type of spa therapist in the profession for effective recruitment, to minimize time and effort while new recruitment and training are provided. Personality testing had s been used to predict potential candidates of spa therapists during the interviewing process which is provided to decrease bias, increase consistency and enhance a prediction for future job performances. Thus, personality will be considered as the effective recruitment dimension for this study.

Hence, based on past studies, it can be concluded that personality traits can influence job satisfaction and intention to stay among spa therapists. The results from previous studies showed inconsistent outcome from each other. In the past, there were spurious studies on intention to stay in relation to different contexts and industries but limited study were conducted to determine which personality traits have a relationship towards intention to stay, mediated by job satisfaction among spa therapists in Malaysia. Thus, a proposed research framework was developed to demonstrate the relationship between the dependent variable, independent variables and mediating variable as in figure 1.0. The dependent variable in this research is intention to stay and the independent variables is the Big Five Personality traits. In addition, job satisfaction will be operationalized as the mediating variable.

In a study conducted in Malaysia among

SMEs, job satisfaction was found to be significantly related to turnover when the factor of communication was included [21]. Past studies have found that communication was directly influenced by employees' job satisfaction [22-23] while other studies predicted that job satisfaction should be considered as a mediating role between communication competency and retention [12],[24],[14]. Thus, it is interesting to find out whether the communication competency among spa therapists in Malaysia has a relationship with intention to stay.

## *2.1 Definition of Terms*

### *Personality Traits*

The big five personality traits consist of five dimensions which have been known as neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness [25]. The five elements definitions used for this study are as follows:

#### *2.1.1 Openness to Experience*

Individuals who have an openness to experience personality trait are described as aesthetically reactive, values intellectual matters, wide range of interests, rebellious, non-conforming [25].

#### *2.1.2 Conscientiousness*

People with high conscientiousness are productive; behave ethically, possess high aspiration level, dependable, and responsible [25].

#### *2.1.3 Extraversion*

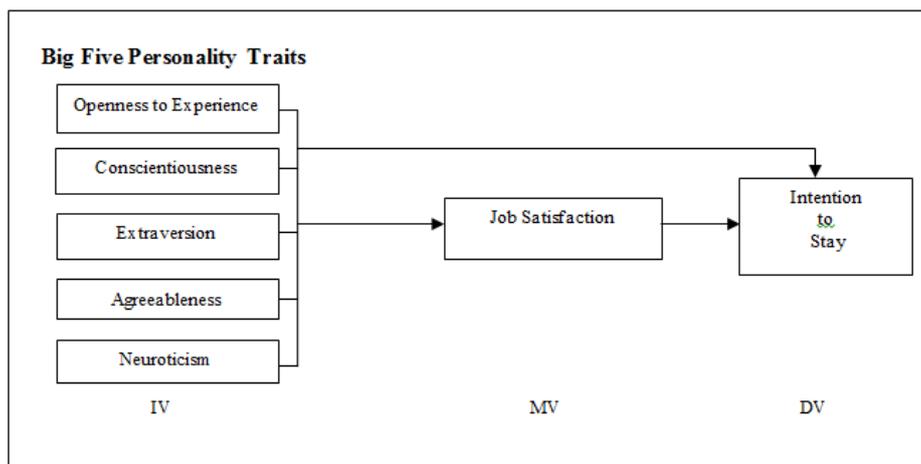
Extraversion persons have more warmth, sociability, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and closely related to positive emotions [25].

#### *2.1.4 Agreeableness*

Agreeableness persons are described as sympathetic, considerate, friendly, warm, compassionate, and behaves in giving way [25].

#### *2.1.5 Neuroticism*

Neuroticism described individuals are persons with high anxiety and emotions. Those with high neuroticism are found as anxious, angry hostile, self-conscious, impulsive, and vulnerable [25].



**Figure 1.0:** Research Framework

## METHODOLOGY

A pilot test has been conducted to test the instruments of the study. A total of 80 questionnaires were distributed randomly among hotels and resorts spa therapist in the Klang Valley, and 72 were returned. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used in this study to check on the reliability of the scales based on internal consistency of the items in each scale. Meanwhile, the content validity test was used to ensure that the measurements scale items represented and delineated the concept under study. For this study, two professors who are research specialists in quantitative methodology and human resource management disciplines evaluated the content validity of the measurement. The collected data was analysed by using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0.

### 3.1 Instrumentation and Measurement of Variables

The instrument for this study adapted published instruments from various scholars. In order to measure personality traits, the Big Five personality traits factors had been adapted from Costa and McCrae [25]. However, due to time and cost constraints, the original 240 items has been revised by Cheng [19] and Eckhardt [17] and were used for this study. The reliability analysis of Cheng [19] showed that, other than emotional stability, all items measured had a Cronbach's coefficient above 0.7. The Herzberg Hygiene and Motivation Theory is widely used to predict job satisfaction in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The items measured obtained from previous studies [27] in the education industry were also applicable in the health care industry [28]. Therefore, the items measured for job satisfaction variable was based on the Herzberg Hygiene and Motivation Theory adapted from

Smerek [27]. Overall job satisfaction reliability test by Smerek [27] is 0.874, while for measuring the intention to stay, the items were adapted from Wetprasit [29] and Kyndt [30]. Overall, the reliability of the items measuring retention resulted in 0.91 [30] and 0.76 [29].

The questionnaire for the study had been translated in two languages, namely English and Malay. The questionnaire was structured into 5 sections which included s general information and variables measurement i.e. personality traits, job satisfaction and intention to stay. All variables were measured using the five-point Likert scales which range from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5).The instrument for this study adapted published instruments from various scholars.

### 3.2 Results of Reliability Test

In this study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to check on the reliability of the scales based on internal consistency of the items in each scale. As a result, all items showed Cronbach's coefficient alpha which was above 0.7. Based on Nunnally's [31] guideline, scale reliability of 0.70 and above is preferred.

The personality traits constructed was adapted from Cheng [19] in the study of personality traits and simultaneous reciprocal influences between job performance and job satisfaction, while Eckhardt [17] studied the effect of personality on IT personnel's job-related attitudes, established a dispositional model of turnover intention across IT job types. However, Cheng [19] had to remove two items in the personality traits measurement but did not specifically mentioned which dimension the item belonged to. Two items measured which are "I like to try new things" and "I take a holistic approach" were used to measure openness to experience by Cheng [19] while the "imaginative"

item as used by Eckhardt was not shown in the study. Table 1.0 reported the results of the Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this study. reliability of the scales based on internal consistency of the items in

each scale. As a result, all items showed Cronbach's coefficient alpha above 0.7, as in table 1.0 below:

**Table 1.0** Reliability Test

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
<b>Personality Traits</b>	
Openness to Experience	0.805
Conscientiousness	0.777
Extraversion	0.864
Agreeableness	0.729
Neuroticism	0.813
Job Satisfaction	0.935
Intention to Stay	0.930

## CONCLUSION

Based on previous literatures in management and organisational behavior, it will be interesting to find out whether personality traits can influence job satisfaction and intention to stay among spa therapists. Apparently, a spa therapist must have a certain kind of personality that is passionate and have the "spa feeling", the power and benefit of human touch, the connection of mind, body and spirit [5]. The bad perceptions towards the image of spa therapists which some considered as a minimal profession has led to some concerns to enhance the spa therapist's profession [31]. It is also vital to develop the spa therapist profession as the industry has a high economic contribution to make for Malaysia and globally, as well. Each element of the big five personality traits i.e. openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism and all the variables was discussed based on various past researches. Among all the Big Five personality traits, openness to experience was considered as the lowest factor.

As a conclusion, every job task and career will only suit certain types of personality. It hardly confirmed that all the personality traits will be significant to the job or task. Thus, the inconsistent findings from past studies should be considered for this research in predicting what is the personality traits that can influence most on the intention to stay among spa therapists in Malaysia. A small scale data that was collected during the pre-test of this study has been analysed for the reliability test. The reliability test revealed that all item was above the Cronbach Alpha benchmark of 0.70.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study basically aims at examining the relationship personality traits towards intention to stay mediates by job satisfaction. Findings in this study may be of utmost importance particularly for the academic leaders and policy makers. This study will benefit spa operators, spa managers, and spa owners in managing their outfit, human capital development especially in the ever changing environment of the spa businesses, specifically in Malaysia. In terms of the recruitment process, the study will be beneficial to human resource managers to determine which kind of personalities are required for potential spa therapists which matches with the demand of the career. This will benefit human resource managers since they can avoid investment costs in terms of training and development.

This study represents the efforts made to develop a conceptual framework of the relationship between spa therapist's personality traits towards intention to stay mediates by job satisfaction. Basically, it provides the ground work in integrating two disciplines which are: organizational behaviour and human resources theories in spa industry. It will provide different integrated views of the factors that were previously researched on the relationship between Big Five personality traits, and intention to stay. This study also looks into job satisfaction with taken into consideration the Herzberg dual theory as a mediator role in relationship between personality traits intention to stay. Thus, this study will be useful for both spa operators and academicians to deeply understand about personality traits specifically in Malaysia's spa therapist's intention to stay and also to the human resources practice theories. It also

attempts to add on to the existing literature and render support for the past theories on the mediating effect of job satisfaction that may have an impact on the competencies and personality traits' towards intention to stay. Past researches carried out study to determine the state of job satisfaction in other industries such as education [32], Herzberg's application theory in determining job satisfaction in Malaysia, especially the spa industry compared to other industries in Malaysia such as retailing [33] and education [34] might be different due to social and cultural factors. In order to achieve the objectives of the Malaysian Economic Transformation Program (ETP) under the EPP 9a, this study will aid in determining the causes of employee turnover in the Malaysian spa businesses thus could be useful towards addressing issues of the lack of therapist expertise and the spa quality as mentioned in the EPP 9a.

Furthermore, research on personality traits and intention to stay among spa therapists in Malaysia is still limited and thus there is more to be explored. Subsequently, this study will be able to provide and contribute some insights to the spa industry in Malaysia on how they can enhance the spa business operation in Asia since it can contribute to the economic growth and development potentially in Malaysia, as well as globally.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of the study is that the respondents will be choosing spa therapists from 103 certified spa hotel and resorts registered by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture throughout Malaysia. Although there are still a number of spas businesses that have not taken part or become a member with the Malaysian Spa Association and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture although the businesses are registered with the Malaysia Company Commission. Therefore, samples will be collected from only Malaysian spa therapists and is limited to the 103 certified spas by the Malaysia Ministry of Tourism and Culture. This study also limited spa therapist respondents and future findings might not be suitable to use in other spa job position i.e. spa managers, spa directors and spa owners due to different levels of knowledge and expertise between spa therapists and other job positions in the spa industry.

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#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Ms. Nor Fairuz Syazana Nor Fauzi and Dr. Raemah

Abdullah Hashim developed the idea and had an important role in the result and material section. Ms. Nor Fairuz Syazana Nor Fauzi crafted the introduction, literature, method and performed the statistical analysis of data.

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