

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY QUALITIES AND PERSONALITY PREFERENCE AS DETERMINANTS OF JOB PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined graduate employability qualities and personality preferences as determinants of job performance in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. Three hundred (300) respondents were screened and used from distance learning programme, University of Ibadan through simple random and purposive sampling methods. The Graduates' Employability Qualities and Personality Preference Scale (GEQPPS) ($r = 0.91$) was the research instrument used in gleaning the field data. Two hypotheses were tested and data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Results showed that there was significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria ($r = 0.622$; $P < 0.05$); also that the coefficient between graduate personality preferences and job performance has a weak positive relationship ($r = -0.244$; $P < 0.05$). Conclusively, the study recommended that career development support efforts should focus on helping early career adults to understand their career interests and motivation, career goals and aspirations as well as how their personality preferences can hinder or increase their employability strengths.

Keywords: Graduates, Employability Qualities, Personality Preferences, Job Performance

Introduction

The employability of graduates has become important in a technology-driven knowledge economy. Graduates who enter the world of

work today face a number of challenges, like decrease in employment opportunities and job security, fast-changing technology and an increasing personal responsibility for continual up skilling and lifelong learning as well as keeping up with changes in their fields of knowledge (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Marock, 2008). It is no longer sufficient for people to have only technical skills and academic knowledge in order to find employment (Fallows & Stevens, 2000). The 21st century requires young adults who enter the world of work to be work-ready, employable and to sustain their employability. Their employability constitutes a sense of self-directedness or personal agency in retaining or securing a job or form of employment. This uses a set of personal career-related qualities that employers and researchers generally promote as an alternative to job security in an uncertain employment context as its basis (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; Rothwell, Jewell & Hardie, 2009; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2011; Coetzee, 2012).

According to Savickas (2011) people are regarded as career agents who construct their careers in a more chaotic and unpredictable employment context. It requires them to develop the career meta-competencies or adaptive resources and capacities they need to design a meaningful life-career in an uncertain and more chaotic world of work (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The demand for sustained employability and a proactive career agency has led to a renewed interest in the dispositional and psychological attributes of graduates, like their personality and employability qualities. Research increasingly recognizes these as important factors that significantly influence the capacity of people to manage their career development proactively in a changing occupational world (O'Donoghue & Maguire, 2005; Simmons, 2009; Beukes, 2010; Bezuidenhout, 2011; Coetzee, 2012; Potgieter, 2012).

Research shows that employers' perceptions about the quality of the graduates they employ, their employability and general work readiness continue to influence graduate transition into employment and their sustained ability to secure job in a turbulent and uncertain employment context (Brown & Scase, 1994; Cranmer, 2006; Griesel & Parker, 2009). Organizations depend on the flexibility and capacity of their employees to adapt to a constantly changing and highly competitive business environment as well as their ongoing capability to develop and cultivate up-to-date knowledge and skills in order for these organizations to perform optimally in global markets. The increased concerns about the employability of young adults in the Nigerian context have resulted in organizations placing more emphasis on their employability and in helping them to increase and sustain their employability (Marock, 2008).

Several authors (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Hall, 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Raabe, Frese & Beehr, 2007) have emphasized the responsibility of people to obtain career information, skills, capabilities and competencies that potential employers require in order to obtain and sustain employment in existing and future situations. Career development support interventions could assist people to take ownership of their careers and act as proactive agents in managing their careers while, at the same time, reflecting about their career meta-competencies as vital resources in sustaining their employability (Baruch, 2004). However, people seem to differ in terms of their capacity to engage in proactive career behaviours. Therefore, researchers increasingly recognize personality as a career meta-competency that influences people's employability (Baruch, 2004; Sinclair, 2009; Potgieter, 2012).

In this regard, managers, career counselors, industrial psychologists and human resource practitioners need to be aware of how people's personalities influence their ability to engage in proactive career behaviours that increase their employability; hence, the importance of this study is to investigate graduate employability qualities and personality preferences as determinants of job performance in Nigeria. In order to achieve the factors mentioned above, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria'.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between graduate personality preferences and job performance in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Some people believe that sustained employability contributes to their career success and satisfaction in an increasingly unstable and chaotic global business environment (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011). Employability is advantageous for present performance on the job as well as for career and business outcomes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employability presupposes pro-active career behaviours and capacities that help people to fulfill, acquire or create work through the optimal use of both occupation-related and career meta-competencies (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). In this regard, employability is a psychosocial construct that represents the career-related attributes that promote adaptive cognition, behaviour and affect, and increase one's suitability for appropriate and sustained employment opportunities.

Researchers have related people's personalities to their jobs, contextual performance and characteristic behavioural patterns that distinguish them from others (Moyo & Theron, 2011). Jung (1971) and Myers, McCaulley, Quenk and Hammer (2003) contend that people's natural

personality preferences cause them to develop habits of behaviour and personality patterns that characterized their preferred decision-making and problem-solving processes. Research has shown that self-perceived employability promotes feelings of being in control of one's career and the confidence that one is able to secure one's labour market position (Moyo & Theron, 2011). In addition, Choong and Britton (2007) found the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) preferences to have significant relationships with character strengths and moral values (also called signature or cognitive strengths), like creativity, perspective, love of learning, love (caring) and open-mindedness (flexibility).

According to Tomlinson (2007), people's values and identities drive their employability, while their personal dispositions and biographies influence their career behaviour. Higgs (2001) found a positive link between people's personalities and their employability. He further suggests that people could develop their weaker, underdeveloped personality preferences and, thereby, develop better well-rounded behaviour, which could influence their employability. Jung (1971) saw personality as characteristic psychological types that act as intrinsically preferred motivational forces in pursuing goals in the unconscious. He further posits that psychological type is predisposition within human beings and is, therefore, a universal attribute.

Between the 1940s and 1970s, Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers extended Jung's ideas of psychological types into the well-known Personality Type Theory and operationalized them into a questionnaire called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & Myers, 1995). The MBTI embodies the practical application of Personality Type Theory. It enables people to understand their own and others' psychological or personality types and the use of their natural personality preferences of mental or cognitive functioning in their everyday lives (Myers *et al.*, 2003). The MBTI typology comprised four pairs of opposite preferences called dichotomies or dimensions of personality. These dichotomies represent the natural ways that people use their minds (Myers, 1998). The first three dichotomies were part of Jung's original theory while Briggs and Myers added the fourth (Garrety, 2007; Leary, Reilly, & Brown, 2008). The four dichotomies are presented as:

1. Orientation of energy: Extraversion (E) versus Introversion (I), or relative interest in outer (E) and inner (I) worlds.

2. Preferred modes of perception: Sensing (S) versus Intuition (N) – whether people perceive through their senses (S) or through indirect perception by way of the unconscious (N). Sensing people focus on the here and now and intuitive people prefer to focus on future possibilities.

3. Decision making: Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F) – whether people make decisions using logic (T) or subjective values (F).

4. Preferences for dealing with the outer world: Judging (J) versus Perceiving (P), which refers to a general method of dealing with the world. Judging people prefer order and a planned and organized approach to life and to have things settled. Perceiving people embrace ambiguity, tend to like a flexible and spontaneous approach to life and prefer to keep their options open.

The MBTI preferences are complex and consist of many distinct, but related, facets. The facets (five per dichotomy) of each of the eight preferences (E-I, S-N, T-F, J-P) identify some of the distinctive ways in which people express their personality types (Kummerow & Quenk, 2003). The MBTI assessment sorts people into one of 16 different and equally valuable personality types. Depending on the preferences the MBTI reports, it identifies people as extraverted or introverted, sensing or intuitive, thinking or feeling and judging or perceiving. It gives them a four-letter designation (like ESTJ) that indicates their dominant preferences and, therefore, their personality type. While people have and use qualities for both poles of each dichotomy, the MBTI assessment allows for the recognition of those that people prefer, or use, to respond first, most often and most comfortably (Myers *et al.*, 2003). People's natural preferences cause them to develop habits of behaviour and personality patterns characteristic of the preferred mental processes (Jung, 1971). Myers *et al.* (2003) observed that some people are able to use their type preferences more effectively than others. Torrington (2001) found a positive relationship between the MBTI preferences of Extraversion (E), Intuition (N) and self-actualization.

Using MBTI information, career counselors can help clients to increase their energy and optimism by reframing the way they interpret difficulties that arise from their differences with others and difficulties in their environment. They can then adapt their behaviour and communication styles to interact with others more effectively and pursue their goals (Myers *et al.*, 2003). Although personality preferences may predict the behaviour of people in any given situation, personal qualities, like people's belief about what they can do, their plans and strategies for enacting behaviours, their expectations of success and their self-concepts may override their behaviours in certain situations (Coetzee, 2005).

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Three hundred (300) respondents comprising of working class students from distance learning programme, University of Ibadan were screened and used through the simple random and purposive sampling methods. The Graduate Employability Qualities and Personality Preferences Scale (GEQPPS) ($r =$

0.91) was used in gleaning the field data. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Results

The results of the data analyzed are presented in this section.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria.

Table 1: **Correlation between** Graduate Employability Qualities and Job Performance in Nigeria

Variables	N	(X) Mean	Std. Deviation	R	Significant Level
Graduate Employability Qualities	300	26.45	10.961	0.622.000*	
Job Performance	300	24.24	11.083		

$R^2 = 0.387$; *Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 1 show that there is significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria. The coefficient $r = 0.622$; $P < 0.05$ implies that the higher the graduate employability, the better their job performance.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between graduate personality preference and job performance in Nigeria.

Table 2: **Correlation between** Graduate Personality Preference and Job Performance in Nigeria

Variables	N	(X) Mean	Std. Deviation	R	Significant Level
Graduates' Personality Preferences	300	27.68	4.365	- 0.244.000*	
Job Performance	300	24.24	11.083		

$R^2 = 0.060$; *Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that there was no significant relationship between graduate personality preference and job performance in Nigeria as coefficient $r = -0.244$; $P < 0.05$ between graduate personality preference and job performance has a weak positive relationship. This implies that when there is positive improvement in the graduate personality preference, there will be positive increase in their job performance.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one says there is no significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria. The finding shows that there was statistical significant relationship between graduate employability qualities and job performance in Nigeria. The finding is in line

with Myers et al. (2003) who submitted that people may be enthusiastic, idealistic and creative in pursuing their careers; feel confident in pursuing a career that interests them; quite sociable and demonstrate good skills; need to live life in accordance with their inner values and may be excited by new ideas, but bored with details; and as well be open-minded and flexible, with a broad range of interests and abilities. Corroborating this finding, Coetzee and Schreuder(2010) and Schreuder and Coetzee (2011) found that employability presupposes pro-active career behaviours and capacities that help people to fulfill, acquire or create work through the optimal use of both occupation-related and career meta-competencies. In this regard, employability is a psychosocial construct that represents the career-related attributes that promote adaptive cognition, behaviour and affect, and increase one's suitability for appropriate and sustained employment opportunities.

Hypothesis two says there is no significant relationship between graduate personality preference and job performance in Nigeria. The finding shows that the coefficient between graduate personality preference and job performance has a weak positive relationship, which implies that when there is positive improvement in the graduate personality preference; there will be very little positive increase in their job performance. This finding supported Higgs (2001) findings, which suggested that people could develop their weaker, underdeveloped personality preferences and, thereby, develop better well-rounded behaviour, which could influence their employability.

Conclusion

The results from this study provided evidence that one needs to consider people's personality preferences when developing the employability qualities that are needed in order to sustain their employability in a changing employment and occupational world. Managers, career counselors, industrial psychologists and human resource practitioners need to note the findings of this study and how the preferred personality types relate to the participants' employability qualities. Also the study provided insights that can be useful for addressing the employability needs of a diverse group of people in the Nigerian multi-cultural organizational context.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned findings, the study recommends that:

- There is the need to establish career development support practices that will help people become more aware of their career interests and motivations, their employability strengths and development areas.
- There should be career development support that will help people know how to pursue their career goals and aspirations as well as how their

personality preferences hinder or increase their chances of career success and employability.

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