

## The Personality Test as an Instrument in Optimizing Human Capital Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Syed Mohamad Syed Abdullah and Mohd Arsad Johanis**

Universiti Sains Malaysia

### Introduction

Every individual person has his or her own characteristics, attitude, style and personality. Personality reflects the individual's personal characteristics, which distinguish oneself from another. Briefly put, personality refers to an organisational integration of dynamic characteristics covering the physical, mental and social aspects and qualities possessed by an individual, where it reflects how an individual reacts towards himself or herself, others and the surrounding objects (Lawrence, 2002). In other words, the personality of a person always changes according to the environmental influence. However, there is an assumption that some of the personality traits cannot be changed (Chek Mat, 2008).

In this world of globalisation, various methods have been implemented by the management especially in the professional field to make the decision to choose individuals (employees) who are qualified to fill in certain positions. Some include the interview session and the execution of personality tests to predict the personality deemed fit with the occupational scope. Industrial and Organisational psychologists, particularly personnel psychologists believe that if data related to the individual personality factor is absorbed and measured empirically, it will be able to become valid information in predicting work performance (Hogan, 1998). Generally, a test can be defined as a standard procedure which measures the sample's behaviour and the elaboration with categories or scores prevalent in a particular test (Gregory, 2004). Thus, a personality test means a set of measurement either objectively or projectively which depends on the structure and transparency of the task that need to be performed by the person being tested. (Chek Mat, 2008).

The aim of personality test is to explain about one's actual personal character or characteristics. Through the personality test, an individual would be able to know about the attitude, characteristics, style and the way one carries himself or herself, under the condition that they answer the inventory provided to them honestly and accurately.

Colour Personality Inventory (IPW) for instance, details individual inventory according to the dominant traits of every personality through the personality colour. This inventory classifies personality into four colours, Gold, Green, Blue and Orange. These personality colours have dominant characteristics which delve into the individual strength and positive traits (Sidek, 1997). In the meantime, Sidek's Personality Inventory (IPS) explores into human personality from the 15 personality traits namely aggressive, analytical, autonomous, dependent, extrovert, intellectual, introvert, diversity, endurance, self-criticism, controlling, assisting, supporting, structure and achievement (Yong, 2007). Other than that, 16 PF inventory (*Personality Factor*) is also used for the measurement of individual personality factors developed by Cattell (1950) where he makes the conclusion that there are 16 traits in an individual that can be measured. Cattell's instrument comprises of 187 items that can be reduced to 16 'factors (or personality trait) by following a marking scheme designed by the instrument creator himself (Noran Fauziah, 1990). Self-Directed Search (SDS) is thought of as a combination of personality test and career interest which is unique and popular. SDS is able to elaborate on their individual personality and career interest in six types namely Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. In reality, there are many more personality tests that can be used to explain about individual personality depending on the dimension of measurement and the purpose of use.

In the mission of achieving Vision 2020, the aspect of human capital development is seen as a very important aspect for Malaysia, in developing the national economy based on knowledge, competitiveness and survivability. According to Muhammad Hisham (2005), human capital or also known as human resource development is a value that can shape the direction of the country towards the vision targeted. He is of the opinion, that without quality human resource, a country would be weak due to the absence of human factor that ignites a new initiative in the socio-economic activities (Baharom & Mohamad, 2009). For Aini Jaafar (2006), she explains that the term (*human capital*) is a new economic term that clearly reflects that it comes from the school of capitalism. Humans are seen as a type of capital and it is named 'human capital' to mean 'energy asset' that is very important and meaningful to economic activities, national development and the progress of the ummah. According to Aini this capital needs to be 'dug', developed and tested to determine the capability before it is to be of benefit (Baharom & Mohamad, 2009).

Today, we are able to see various efforts being exerted by a country to develop the best human capital resource as we come to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Malaysia for example, the effort to strengthen and make robust the human capital in the field of education and the job sector is always given the priority. Other efforts like the implementation of the ICT or information technology in various fields enhance the skills of the workers, promote the workers' psychological wellbeing and boost professionalism development among workers. Human capital development is brushed up earlier on to cater for the transformational process that leans on technology and knowledge in ensuring that the country continues to compete internationally (Baharom & Mohamad, 2009). Therefore, the consolidation of human capital among the society is an effort that needs to be given due attention. One is through a match process-between the individual's character and the job concerned. This shall witness the use of optimal human capital in driving the productivity and economy of a country.

### **The Use of Personality Test as an Instrument**

High level of awareness and interest towards the use of personality test for the process of selecting personnel arises from the emergence of the Five-Factor personality model (FFM) also identified as the personality five-global factor (Cattell, 1943). Normally, personality test is applied in various forms of situations or circumstances to identify the character more validly and effectively. Technically, a personality test is a scientific approach that is commonly used by career counselors in career guidance and counselling, like helping students choose a career that is consistent with the characteristics or traits that they have. Today, this personality test is used for multiple purposes and intentions.

In Malaysia, school counselors often use personality tests like Career Interest Inventory (IMK), Self-Directed Search (SDS), Colour Personality Inventory (IPW) or Sidek Personality Inventory (IPS) among secondary school students in Malaysia. They seek to help students identify the personality, self-potential, tendency, including career interest deemed suitable for themselves. Rather specifically, IMK has been executed to every student so they can explore into their career in a more focused manner. School counselors are requested to implement this test to every student to create student profile and further identify their true potential. Based on the data obtained, these students will be guided to explore into their future interests, potential and opportunities.

Other than the IMK, the personality test instrument is used a lot in the determination of teenage career exploration especially by career counselors for the processes of career guidance and counselling. According to Furnham & Stacey (1991), career selection is a time-consuming growth process that starts at the young age of six to the end of teenage years when one enters the job market. Therefore, personality test and career interest are important tools and deemed suitable for the creation of human capital, even at an early phase of adolescent. This test functions as an instrument in exploring into appropriate career field for teenagers proposing to proceed in their field of work or selecting their fields of studies at the higher learning level in the fields that they are interested in.

Other than that, the personality test instrument is also relevant in the process of career selection and placement for employee-candidates in a company. It is seen to assist the employers, organisation even company in getting employee candidates who are most qualified in the field selected. Also, the test carried out can also see and predict the personality of the candidates in carrying out the tasks and hold the most appropriate positions that cater for the employer's requirements. As an example, in the context of the government administration position, the PF 16 personality test has been used for the purpose of selecting Administrative and Diplomatic Officer since 1995 (Ahmad Sarji, 1995). The personality test or known as the aptitude test is also used by the Public Services Commission Recruitment Department Malaysia (SPA) to select 66 positions offered at the Public Service Department (Fatimah Wati & Arifin, 2010). This explains the importance of personality tests in selecting the employee candidates who are right and suitable with their fields of study.

In sum, personality test is seen to help an individual and other people know the potential within themselves through the characters or personality traits that exist. It plays a substantial role in introducing and expanding the extent of one's interest and personality especially when it comes to choosing a career that is suitable for them. In other words, it can actually give an idea and explanation to counselors and employers that one's personality differs and can consistently change as life itself is a process.

### **Optimizing Human Capital Development**

The development of a country must be based on a balanced development concept. It is not only balanced in terms of economic development, but it also has to be balanced in terms of the physical development and social advancement. The physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects must be developed towards the wellbeing of the community as a whole. Every individual has his or her own characteristics that contribute to the human capital resources. Human capital development needs to examine the potential, opportunity and usability in the right and appropriate market. Thus, human capital development must be optimised to achieve the actual purpose of the development. 'Optimum' as defined by *Kamus Dewan* (2000), is the best state or level, or doing something so the outcome will be good and profitable. Thus, optimum human capital development entails developing an individual's self-potential that fits his or her existing talent to the maximum, based on the self-awareness that they have on their characters and knowledge on appropriate fields. For instance, an entrepreneur needs to expand on the human capital that he has within himself by brushing up on, and broadening, his entrepreneurial skills, interpersonal skills, building business network, also being proactive and competitive.

According to Nooraini Othman (2008), intellect achievement and high level of skills are not enough, if they are not accompanied with a good personality. Hasan Langgulung (1991) is of the opinion that the existing personality theories in Western psychology are lacking in terms of the spiritual element as stressed in the Quran and Sunnah. They have given an emphasis on the physical and intellectual aspects in the national development and the nation, as compared to Islam where it is added with the spiritual aspect in determining the best human capital. Thus, to meet this aim, ummah and national development encompasses the well-balanced aspects of knowledge, skills and personality. Human capital that is creative, innovative and has calibre is not only an important asset to the success of an organisation, but it can also proffer good contribution to the development of a society (Baharom & Mohamad, 2009; Nooraini Othman, 2008).

The purpose of optimizing human capital development is none other than to avoid the wastage of human resources, and to prevent high rate of unemployment. In facing such a challenging world we are in today, the agenda of human capital development through the determination and execution of optimal human capital development can actually leave a great impact to a country's development and economy. We do not need a country that prospers only in terms of material wealth alone, but we also need to build on the empowerment of humanity values. Clearly, the human capital development must be given attention at both the micro and the macro levels. Empowerment can be done through increased capability and competency of the individuals involved. It requires effort at the macro level through the creation of

various appropriate institutions, and makes available sufficient investment in various fields, especially in the education, health domains, and quality facilities and infrastructures which contribute to better, more quality life. As for agencies at the micro level, they need to take the opportunity to accomplish the process of building their capability and contribute to the country (Abdul Rahman, 2007). Automatically, the empowerment of the human capital can give a good effect in generating products, or products generated by an individual whenever the values of human capital are applied at the best level. Apart from that, work motivation and satisfaction by employees in an organisation, accounted for in the human development aspect can offer an optimal production, which is not only beneficial to oneself but also to the society and to the country at large.

Through a variety of personality tests, human capital development can be optimised. Parson's Theory for instance, proposes a very simple, yet practical idea where it encompasses three elements, namely : i) Self-Identification (identifying the potential, personality, character); ii) Occupational Knowledge (have good information about career choice); and iii) Making a match between both elements aforementioned. The final aim of this theory is to ensure that personal characteristics are in parallel with the needs and requirements in a particular occupation. This aspect is substantial as there should be a consistency between personal characteristics and work requirements where it can contribute to increased motivation, work satisfaction, achievement and productivity (Sidek, et. al., 2006). Simply put, Frank Parson's idea proposes that every job is suitable for certain personal characteristics, and this implies that not all career suits everybody. Every individual has his or her own unique and different characteristics. For example, an individual who has a tough personality, who is brave and efficacious when it comes to using equipment, likes to investigate would be suitably working as a policeman.

Meanwhile, John L. Holland through his idea on the uniformity of personality and environment has developed a compelling theory regarding the relationship between individual personality and work environment. This theory is formulated based on the assumption that vocational interest is one of the personality aspects. Holland (1973) assumes that there are six types of personality and six types of work environment measurable using *Self-Directed Search* (SDS) and *Vocational Preference Inventory* (VPI). Thus, the matching process will become easier as the SDS and VPI measure both these aspects (personality and career). There are dominant six types of personality and work environment for every individual as shown below:

a. Realistic :

Realistic individual personality is characterised as practical, hands-on, structured, athletic, reserved and hardworking. In this realistic domain, an individual is said to have eclectic or mechanical skills. He or she would love to work with objects, machines, equipment, plants and animals. They also prefer to work outside than inside the building. The examples of occupation under this category are Engineer, Machine and Equipment Operator, Mechanic and so on.

b. Investigative :

The individual personality of Investigative is characterised as logical, scientific, intellectual, independent, curious and reserved. The investigative field is one that involves individuals who like to make observations, learn, research. Analyse, evaluate and solve problems through research. They also tend to have scientific and mathematical skills and engaged in scientific and technical career like meteorologists, biologists, chemists, paleontologists, science researchers and so on.

c. Artistic :

The individual personality of artistic is characterised as idealistic, imaginative, expressive, original, creative and independent. Artistic individuals are those that possess artistic and innovative abilities. They have intuitive ability and like to work in situations that are less or not at all structured. They also like to use their imagination and creativity and are not comfortable with routine or repetitious work. Artistic individuals include Architects, Cartoonists, Interior Decorators, Poets, Actors, Composers, Lyricists, Journalists and so on.

d. Sosial :

Social individual personality is characterised as friendly, connected, accepting, concerned, loyal and generous. They are naturally hardworkers and they love interacting with others. They are very interested in informing, assisting, training, developing, treating and making charity to others. They have the skills in using words and are skillful in communicating with others. The group's main aim is to do good. Examples of career for Social individuals are Teachers, Principals, Counselors, Public Relation Officers, Lecturers, Sociologists and so on.

e. Enterprising :

The individual personality of Enterprising is characterised as dominant, persuasive, outgoing, competitive, optimistic and ambitious. Individuals of this type also like to work and interact with humans. They are interested in influencing, directing, leading and managing other individuals. They are clever and skilled at manipulating others. The final aim is to achieve the profit or the organisation and economic profit. Example of career in this category are Company Directors, Hotel managers, Bank managers, Lawyers, Politicians, Advertising executives, Business Executives and so on.

f. Conventional:

The individual personality of Conventional is characterised as organized, detail oriented, structured, precise, responsible and careful. Individuals of this type are said to be grouped in individuals who like to work with data and number. They usually have skills in clerical jobs also have the ability and skills in using numbers. They can also perform a certain task in detail, obedient and they follow orders. Examples of career in this category Accountants, Auditors, Computer operators, Tax experts, Insurance sellers, Bank Clerks, Surveyors and so on.

The uniformity of personality and work environment by Holland is seen as a cluster of information that is very suitable and strong for optimal human capital development. If the match between the characters and the career can be executed well, it would not be impossible for us to produce the best human capital resources. Thus, for a precise and effective match, the use of the personality test as an instrument is very much needed to support this process.

Thus, if we are sensitive enough to this, the effort to optimize the human capital development in a society or country would be easier. Nevertheless, it should start earlier on which is from young age and not at the final stage of teenager or adulthood. This refers to Super's Career Development Theory (1957) which rules out that the early stage of childhood (up to 14 years of age) is the stage of the individual career development whereas the age of 15 to 24 years of age is the career exploration stage that is thought to be the most challenging for individuals a career that suits them best. Therefore, the use of the personality test must be executed first in this age range to help teenagers identify his or her personality first and foremost (Super, 1972). With this in mind, the use of personality test is thought as a strategy that optimizes human capital development among individuals as early as the teenage stage.

### **The Challenge in Optimizing Human Capital Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

As a developing country, Malaysia faces a daunting task to achieve Vision 2020. There are multiple challenges that have to be braved to ensure that the aim of Vision 2020 meets the target. The challenges inferred are not only based on economic and technological growth, but it also encompasses the whole developmental aspect in terms of social, culture, intellect and spirituality. Thus, human capital development serves as a determinant in improving the competitiveness and productivity of a country. Consistent with the industrial demand and the current and future markets, human capital development must be planned well so that the younger generation of Malaysia is made more capable towards trained and competitive energy use, compatible with, and sufficient for the requirements of the country for the future. It has become the responsibility of the researcher as well as thinkers to unravel this issue and find the answers to the conflicts and challenges put forth.

Among the challenges that arise in implementing personality test as a strategy in optimizing human capital development in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is the usability of this test in mirroring the actual character of the individual. There is a possibility that there is an issue whereby individuals would make the effort in

manipulating the test on their own reasons. For instance, in a career choice as a teacher, an individual will try to display himself or herself as a candidate who had the right personality for the career although the actual character is different from it. Limited job opportunities in this era force an individual to compete with one another as to make sure that he is able to seize the opportunity. If he or she is honest with the personality test, chances are that their opportunity to get the job would be slim. Thus, this can create a conflict whereby the use of the personality test and the actual character of a person can be arguable as people tend to want to grab the job opportunities.

Additionally, the reason for the challenge being more daunting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is due to the increased characterization of jobs that is experiencing gradual transformation. This has made it possible for a job function to also change. As an example, the role and the occupational scope of a teacher used to be rather small, but these days, teachers not only teach students in the classrooms, but they also work as data administrators and student information processors like the data clerk. The change of role in every career may require the determination of a more complex personality trait. This automatically leaves an impact to one's wellbeing stemming from the disharmony of personality, interests and occupation (Sidek, et. al., 2008). This poses a challenge to the counselors to have more knowledge in relation to the latest personality tests which are deemed compatible with the present situations so that the future human capital development can be generated in an optimal manner.

The next challenge is to prepare human capital resource which is in tandem with the demand of the development of a country. For a country, the focus of development may differ according to its own respective mould of development. For instance, Malaysia has targeted to have efficient energy resource use in the field of science and technology in the future. Nonetheless, the actual energy use demand may be somewhat different from human capital resource possessed. Although the use of personality test helps prepare for efficacious energy resource, the actual demand towards a particular job still remains to be the constraint. The government has to equip the much needed energy resources rather than managing the existing human capital resources. This is also a big challenge for a country. The use of personality test can still be adopted as a strategy to develop the human capital optimally but it should be more open and capable of giving room to individuals who happen to have similar characters.

## **Conclusion**

As the conclusion, the use of personality test is perceived as an important strategy in order to develop human capital optimally. The test itself may need to undergo a transformation process harmoniously with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The personality test does not just work as a personality test alone, but it can also changes role and form to a method of assessing individual talent comprehensively and holistically. The assessment method also has to have its own mechanism as to address test manipulation issues. This is essential to adhere to the aim of using the test as an instrument for optimal human capital development.

Meanwhile, the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges must be taken into account as they serve as instant demands that overcome the conflicts that arise. The personality test can be formulated in a more flexible manner and it provides wider information at par with the challenges that exist. Optimal human capital development refers to using the potential of the individual based on the characteristics identified for relevant field of occupation.

If we assume that the human capital development planning can adhere to the views and ideas of Frank Parson and John L. Holland through the personality and occupation fit, then we may be able to see this effectiveness through an improved national productivity outcome. The human capital development, as we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not merely developmental, but we must come up with ideas for the development to produce the best, most profitable outcome, harmonious with our increasingly challenging lives.

## **References**

- Abdul Rahman Embong. (2007). *Pembangunan Negara, Komuniti Dan Insan Melampaui 2020*. Bangi: Institut Kajian Malaysia Dan Antarabangsa.
- Ahmad Sarji bin Abdul Hamid (1995). *Ucapan Persidangan Keempat Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia dan Suruhanjaya-suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam Negeri*. 14 Disember 1995, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Baharom Mohamad & Mohamad Johdi Salleh. (2009). 'Pembangunan Modal Insan Sebagai Satu Pelaburan Penting Dalam Konteks Pembinaan Negara'. Prosiding Seminar Pembangunan Modal Insan 2009, Kecemerlangan Modal Insan. 23-24 Mac 2009. Pusat Sumber Pendidikan Negeri, Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bharu Kelantan.
- Cattell, R. B. (1943). The description of personality: Basic traits resolved into clusters. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, Vol. 38: 416-506.
- Chek Mat. (2008). *Ujian psikologi dan pengurusan*. Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors.
- Fatimah Wati Halim & Arifin Hj Zainal. (2010). Analisis Pengesahan Faktor Personaliti Super Factor Utama. *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia*, Vol. 21: 13-29.
- Holland, J., L. (1973). *Making Vocational Choices: a theory of careers*. Prentice-Hall.
- Hogan R, Shelton D. (1998). Asocioanalytic perspective of job performance. *Hum. Perform*, Vol. 11 (1): 29-44.
- Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat. (2000). *Kuala Lumpur*: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Lawrence, R. James. (2002). *Personality in Work Organizations: Foundations for Organizational Science*. Michigan: SAGE Publications.
- Nooraini Othman. (2008). Keseimbangan Personaliti dan Akademik sebagai Teras Pembangunan Modal Insan. *Jurnal UiTM, Bil. 1: 1-11*.
- Noran Fauziah Yaakub. (1990). Personality Patterns of Teacher Trainees from a Malaysian Training College. *Pertanika*, Vol. 13 (1): 139-144.
- Sidek Mohd Noah, et. al. (2008). Pendekatan P-P Fit dalam Proses Pemilihan Calon Guru di Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam Di Malaysia. *Malaysian Education Deans Council (MEDC), Volume 2: 71-82*.
- Sidek Mohd Noah. (2006). *Perkembangan kerjaya: Teori dan praktis*. Serdang: Penerbit Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Sidek, et. al. (1997). *Penilaian Dalam Kaunseling*. Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Super, D.E. (1972). *The Psychology Of Career*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Yong C.Y. (2007). Hubungan Personaliti dan Pencapaian Akademik dalam kalangan Pelajar Tingkatan Empat Daerah Batu Pahat. *Tesis Sarjana*. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.