IMPACT OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ON ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Personality traits and ethical behavior have a significant psychological characteristics, which can be utilized as an important interpreters of many outcomes. However, they are commonly studied in separate ways, providing a path to create an understanding of their relationships. The research study has reviewed different perspectives in regards to understand the nature of the relationships between personality traits and ethical behavior and conceptualized them so that it can provide support for understanding the strength of these relationships. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the link between five factors of personality traits and ethical behavior. Neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness as the main factors of personality traits have been hypothesized to predict ethical behavior. By using an adapted survey questionnaire, data were collected from teaching staff at public sector higher education institutions of Sindh, Pakistan. Multiple regression analysis was applied to 150 samples and this showed that neuroticism has expected negative association with ethical behavior however extroversion has shown negative impact on ethical behavior, though openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness have shown positive and significant impact on the ethical behaviour of employees. This research study has developed

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the foundation that more perceptive based traits are more strongly related to ethics and more emotionally based traits are less strongly related to values. This is an empirical study which may contribute to the literature on ethical behaviour, psychology and employee development.

Keywords: *Personality Traits, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and ethical behaviour*

1. Introduction

In the course of the last decade, much has been argued about the highly publicized events of business misconduct that has been occurred in many organizations (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015). Such events have played an important role in increasing public, business, and academic awareness on the issues of ethical behavior. Such issues have provided a path for the researchers to re-emerge the significance of ethical behavior of employers among the organizations. It is not an easy task to explore the ethical behavior of the employers working in the organizations. Because such employers make different decisions each day that demand ethical sensitivity, rapidness in different situations like recession in economy and business failures. Organization's survival and job security can become the irresistible focus of business decision making, pushing employee and management concerns for ethical conduct into the background Enron and WorldCom are example of such events (Özbağ, 2016). Though, in such situations managers may ask their subordinates to attain the objectives of the organization is more important than the methods used to get them does not matter. A number of studies have demonstrated a link between employee outcomes, including citizenship behaviors, deviant behaviors, and employees' ethical conduct and cognitions (Zhu et al.,2004; Walumbwa et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Bouckenooghe et al., 2015). Ethical issues, however, are particularly important when a decline threatens to expose the downfall of the organization (Perry, 1991; Parks-leduc, Feldman & Bardi, 2015). Progressively, organisations are realizing the importance of ethics in the organizations (Özbağ, 2016). Influential moral directions can become key components for the success of any organization, by applying appropriate ethical actions among the employers of the organization. Certainly ethical behaviour, can serve both an organisation and its employers with best interests and can provide a great contribution to the success of long term planning and contribute to financial results. Thus, this research study will investigate that which personality factors of employers may affect the ethical or unethical decisions in different situations. An influential predictor of ethical

behavior is ethical decision-making that incorporates the behavior of any individual to act in different situations with ethical aspects. It involves a great menace while taking ethical decision as it may involve different reasons and consequences that may vary accordingly (Beu, Buckley & Harvey, 2003). Thus, ethical decision-making comprise of an individual's perception that takes into consideration the situation, possible consequences and implementation that provide the most appropriate outcome for the organization and its employers. Hence, decision making process has great importance in the execution of better ethical decisions (Christensen &Kohls, 2003; Özbağ, 2016).

However, both individual and situational factors are important to understand the ethical decision-making, in some research finding factors of individual personality are of particular interest for several reasons (Stead, Worrell & Stead, 1990; Treviño& Youngblood, 1990). Firstly, a huge research has been found that ethical decision making has a great influence on individual characteristics, whereas the results of such researches are volatile (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Özbağ, 2016). Some research studies have investigated ethical decision-making whereas others evaluate outcomes as different as behavioral intentions and moral judgment (Terpstra, Rozell& Robinson, 1993; Harrington, 1997; Bouckenooghe et al., 2015; Özbağ, 2016). Secondly, there is some research found in business context examining the relationship between individual personality factors and the ethical behavior, however, academic context still require a research. Thirdly, some researchers are of the opinion that some individual are naturally bad, due to which they behave unethically (Özbağ, 2016). The purpose of the present study was to examine the dimension of personality traits that causes the ethical or unethical behavior among the teaching staff at public sector higher education institutions of Sindh, Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ethical Behavior

Ethics in research of business and management has a narrow approach that has majorly emphasize on the performances of managers, employees and people to act ethically (Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986; Trevin˜ o and Weaver, 1994). This literature review will provide a clearly reflected organizational codes of conduct and moral guidelines issued by management (Adams, Taschchian and Shore, 2011; Weaver, 2001; Bouckenooghe et al., 2015). It has been considered as a fundamental assumption that individuals act according to their intentions knowing the effects of their actions. Thus, it emphases that most business scandals are the consequences of such actions of individuals (De Cremer, 2009). Ethicality and intentionality both have own different dimensions as in both individuals make

intentional and unintentional ethical and unethical decisions (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe, 2008). However, even good people sometimes act unethically and may not even realize about their act (Bersoff, 1999). Research studies on ethical diminishing declares that 'individuals do not ''see'' the moral components of an ethical decision, not so much because they are morally uneducated, but because psychological processes fade the ''ethics'' from an ethical dilemma' (Tenbrunsel and Messick, 2004, p. 224). Thus, it provides clear picture that individuals are not always rational in their behavior, such behaviors are not always highlighted by conscious reasoning processes, and it is supported by recent research on morality, intuition and affect (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015). According to Haidt (2001, p. 818), most individuals are involve in such activities which are within and outside the business world, are not acceptable in the organizations, the marketplace and society. However, the individuals working in organizations are well aware of ethical decision rules and moral behaviour implementation but irresponsible, unethical behaviour and decisions still exist. To understand such situations the management of the organization should maintain more ethical organizations. It can provide a basic idea in the developing field of behavioral ethics in the organization, because it focuses on the actual behaviour of an individual, research on ethical behavior largely draws from work in psychology. A connection has been found in 1996, by Messick and Tenbrunsel in between psychology and business ethics. Huge literature is gathered byDinehart, Moberg and Duska, (2001) in major these two fields of Integrating Psychology and Ethics. Bazerman and Banaji (2004, p. 115) noted 'that efforts to improve ethical decision making are better aimed at understanding our psychological tendencies'. The relationships between traits and values has provide a conceptual underpinning for understanding the strength of their relationships (Parks-leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2015). The ethical dimension of executive leadership is thought to be uniquely important because of the executive's potential to influence employee and organizational behavior (Özbağ, 2016).Thus; such authors have proposed that psychology can provide a basic concept to investigate the ethical or unethical behaviors of individuals.

2.2 Personality Traits

Many researchers have been found that predicts outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), organizational commitment (OC), satisfaction with the supervisor, perceived leader effectiveness (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; De Hoogh& Den Dartog, 2008; Mayer et al., 2012). According to which the importance of personality traits explores management's potential towards individuals' behavior at workplace. A number of studies are found developing a relationship in between personality

traits and ethical behaviour (Trevino et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2010). Traits are inborn or inherited qualities of an individual in the early research tradition. Many researchers are of the opinion that any trait's effect on ethical behaviour because it always depend on the situation (Yukl& Van Fleet, 1992; Huges, Ginnett, &Curphy, 1996). Personality is the consistent thoughts and behaviour of an individual's that are stable over time and relatively consistent across different situations (Roberts &DelVecchi, 2000; Burger 2006; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009). According to some researchers, a generally accepted classification would greatly facilitate the accumulation and communication of empirical findings by offering a standard vocabulary or taxonomy (John & Srivastava, 1999). Thus, personality traits are recognized as an influential factor towards individual behavior in the workplace expressing their experiences and perceptions (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Goodstein & Lanyon, 1999). Based on this idea, in this study, five factors of personality model is used as a tool to study specified domains of personality characteristics and ethical behavior.

Reviewing the literature reveals that researches about five factor personality traits and ethical behavior are limited. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature by determining the effect of five factor personality traits on ethical behavior. The relationships among five basic dimensions named as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness and conscientiousness and ethical behavior is investigated. First trait, neuroticism stands for anxiety, worry, anger, trouble, impulsive, acting uncontrolled, insecurity and stressed. Brown and Trevino (2006) suggested that a more neurotic individual is less likely to be perceived as an ethical individual, because he/she will tend to be "thin-skinned and hostile toward others". In addition, Judge et al. (2002) found that high score on neuroticism trait affects leadership emergence negatively and make it difficult for a leader to be an effective role model. The Big Five personality model has been accepted widely in the scientific community and has contributed to a revival of personality research in organizational behavior (Digman, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Certainly, this model has been used to study relationships between personality and variables of interest to organizations such as leadership, job satisfaction, job performance and turnover (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Bono & Judge, 2004; Zimmerman, 2008).This research stream has generally supported the notion that "personality is an important determinant of individual behavior in the workplace" (Penney, David, & Witt, 2011, p. 297). Some research findings has exert less reliable relationships between workplace integrity and extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and

openness to experience, but they all are interconnected in general at workplace (Murphy, 2000; Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001; Ones &Viswesvaran, 1996).

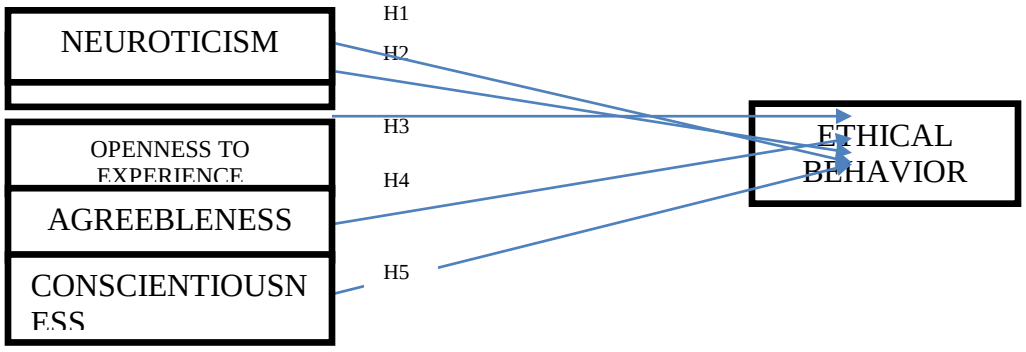
3. Conceptual Framework

Personality traits can be known as the descriptions of people in terms of relatively stable patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions; it refers the perception and behavioral patterns of individuals that varies according to the situations (McCrae & Costa, 2003; Cattell, 1965). Personality is composition of an individuals' characteristic relating to their perceptions and behavior, it explores five basic dimensions, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Myers, 2007; McCrae & Costa, 2003). Openness to experience deals with creative personalities. Conscientiousness denotes the quality of being dependable, responsible, and deterministic. Extraversions are very friendly, bold, and talkative in nature. Agreeableness reveals a good-natured, easy-going, cooperative characteristic of personality. Finally, neuroticism reflects the negative aspects and emotional instability of human nature. Some of the research studies have explored the reliability of individual personality at workplace and have shown positive relationships between conscientiousness and integrity (Murphy, 2000; Ones, Viswesvaran& Schmidt, 1993). Individual's attitudes, beliefs, cognitions, and behaviors are in part determined by their personality; it can be further explained as it is psychological predispositions that have main effects upon a number of individual level variables. Personality reflects the unique characteristics of each individual, the traits define the reality that reflects in ones thoughts and actions. Thus, many personality psychologists have considerably agreed that the features of personality traits can be well described by five superordinate constructs (Digman 1990). Thus, the personality classification has become renowned as the Five Factor Model (FFM) that is considered to be a wide-ranging model of personality and most useful taxonomy in personality research (Barrick et al. 2001). It has been described as a breakthrough that has restored confidence in personality psychology and as the model of choice for the researcher wanting to represent the domain of personality variables broadly and systematically (Costa and McCrae 1980; Briggs 1992; Costa and McCrae 1992).

This concept of behavior provides a path of research towards ethical behavior of individuals. Ethics is explored as the right and wrong, and morality of choices made by individuals. Morf, Schumacher & Vitell (1999) described ethics as the moral principle that individuals utilize while decision making process and that them to maintain the last outcome to secure the norms of the society. Mahdavi (2003), defining the functionality of ethical principles, suggests that they have very profound function of making behavior predictable. According to Beekun (1997), ethics is a normative field because it prescribes what one should do or

abstain from doing. Ethics are the study of right and wrong and the beauty of choice made by a person. Ethical or Unethical behaviors in work setting lead the failure of corporations and the great anxiety of the general public (Haroon, Fakhar, & Rehman, 2012). With the increasing interest in personality by researchers, have provided the evidence of associations between personality and work attitudes and behavior (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Bono, 2001), however the factors by which personality affects organizational behavior have not been well specified. This is a serious omission in light of the fact that the disappoint the particular personality traits or dimensions to criteria that is in part responsible for the earlier demise of research on personality in the organizations (Hough & Schneider, 1996). Personality traits with personal values (Parks-leduc et al., 2015), personality traits and ethical leadership (Özbağ, 2016).Thus, the researcher hypothesizes that the five factors of personality traits that are neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness and conscientiousness will be associated with the ethical behavior.

Conceptual Framework Model (Figure)



One of the factor of personality traits known as Neuroticism describes the personalities with depress, low confidence, and have normally found with negative thoughts, because of such attitude some of the personalities remain fail to perform positively at their workplace to achieve the desired career as well organizational goals. Moreover, many observations have been found having negative relationship of neuroticism towards the tendency of goal-oriented, work performance motivation (Malouff et al., 1990; Judge and Ilies, 2002). Individuals with neuroticism characteristics majorly focus on extrinsic motivating features rather than intrinsically (Furnham et al., 1999). On the basis of such arguments, researcher has proposed the following hypothesis:

H1. Neuroticism will have negative impact on ethical behavior.
Second factor of personality traits known as Extroversion describes the features of individual as friendly, having determination to achieve the desired goals and positive intellectual. Individuals having extroversion characteristics remain dominant at their work place because of their ambitious and dictatorial tendencies. Extroversion are confident and action trends individuals which are positively and empirically found to relate with work involvement and found intrinsically motivated towards job features and work performance (Kimlicka et al., 1988; Judge and Ilies, 2002; Furnham et al., 1999). Thus, on the basis of such argument the researcher has proposed the following hypothesis:

H2. Extroversion will have positive impact on ethical behavior.
Third characteristic of personality traits is openness to experience in which the individuals take huge interest, initiator of new ideas and capability to achieve idealistic goals. Such individuals are majorly involved in their work, because it helps them to explore new perspectives for which they are much curious. Most of the quantitative researches have explored that openness to experience have positive relationship with work drive, along with work involvement and also such individuals are positively motivated towards the accomplishment of self-set work goals (Lounsbury and Gibson, 1998; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Judge and Ilies, 2002). In regards of such point of view, the researcher has proposed the following hypothesis:

H3. Openness to experience will have positively impact on ethical behavior.
Fourth characteristics of personality traits is agreeableness that deals with self-sacrifice, responsiveness and reserve on the other side low agreeableness comprises of anger, offense and selfishness. Agreeableness personalities found dedicated towards their work and career achievement because it provide them satisfaction by means of personal worth and esteem (Jans, 1982; Rabinowitz and Hall, 1977). Individuals with low agreeableness are much devoted to their work because of their aggressive and impression seeking nature. Whereas, individuals having unselfishness, modesty and good nature are found having positive relationships over work and career success (Judge et al., 1999). On the basis of this review the researcher has propose the following hypothesis.

H4. Agreeableness will have positive impact on ethical behavior.
Last characteristics of personality trait is conscientiousness that are inherently motivated to achieve and enthusiastic perform best in their jobs (Costa et al. 1991; Barrick and Mount 2000). As conscientious natured individuals are sincere, having sense of duty and are motivated to achieve success, they remain conscious

to work with other personalities. Thus, many meta-analytic studies are of the opinion that conscientiousness have positive relationship with job performance across all types of jobs and occupations (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Mount and Barrick, 1995; Salgado, 1997). According to the meta-analytic review of Brown (1996), a positive relationship between job involvement and conscientiousness. Thus, the researcher has proposed the following hypothesis:

H5. Conscientiousness will be positively associated with ethical behavior.

4. Methodology

4.1 Selection of Sample and Respondents Demographics

The participants of this research study are the teaching faculty at public sector higher education institutions of Sindh, Pakistan. Data was collected randomly to achieve the research objectives; the research used a cross-sectional self-administered survey method on the academic staff in the public universities of Sindh. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to the academic staff.

4.2 Measures

Personality Traits including 5 items in each dimensions named as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness was measured by using the survey items that have been adapted by Panaccio and Vandenberghe, (2012). These original items were modified by John, Donahue, and Kentlein 1991. However, ethical behavior was measured by using a six-item scale taken from Baker et al. (2006) and Fraedrich (1993), originally developed by Forrell and Skinner (1988). All ratings were made on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

5. Data Analysis and Results

For testing the reliability of the scales used in the study, Cronbach Alpha scores were calculated for each scale. The overall Cronbach Alpha scores for each scale reported in between 0.75-0.81. Moreover, in order to identify the underlying structure of various measures exploratory factor analysis using principle components of factor extraction and varimax rotation techniques was performed. Though, in different factors it is found that some items constitute a low correlation with other items. After deducting such items factor analysis is employed again (Hatcher, 1994). Most factor loadings were above 0.50 which can be assumed a high level of significance.

Table 1. Factor Loading of Scale Items

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
EXTPT2	.881									
EXTPT7	.856									
EXTPT4	.851									
EXTPT3	.810									
EXTPT5	.748									
CONSTPT5		.876								
CONSTPT9		.868								
CONSTPT2		.851								
CONSTPT7		.845								
CONSTPT6		.842								
NEUTPT1			.922							
NEUTPT2			.852							
NEUTPT6			.825							
NEUTPT3			.800							
NEUTPT7			.776							
ETHBH6				.866						
ETHBH2				.862						
ETHBH4				.832						
ETHBH3				.825						
ETHBH5				.823						
AGRBPT8					.888					
AGRBPT1					.886					
AGRBPT5					.851					
AGRBPT9					.774					
AGRBPT2					.659					
OPENPT6						.863				
OPENPT7						.800				
OPENPT3						.792				
OPENPT10						.773				
OPENPT2						.761				

Descriptive statistics, reliability and Pearson's correlation

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for all of the variables in this study. The overall reliability of the survey instrument was found to be .91 that is of conscientiousness and the lowest for openness to experience factors (see Table 2). However, Pearson's Correlation test was conducted and significant correlations between the scales were determined at two levels such that p = 0.01 and p = 0.05. The results indicate that there is a negative correlation between Neuroticism and Ethical Behavior. As predicted, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are associated positively with Ethical Behavior whereas Extraversion is not. (See Table 2).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics, reliability and Pearson's correlation

	Variables	M	SD.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Neuroticism	4.08	0.55	(.89)	.209	.368**	.107*	-124*	-.340**
2	Openness to Exp.	3.95	0.42		(.86)	-.148**	.405**	.326	.177*
3	Agreeableness	3.75	0.89			(.88)	.015	.255**	.406**
4	Extraversion	2.12	0.74				(.90)	.127	.011
5	Conscientiousness	3.78	0.41					(.91)	.259**
6	Ethical Behavior	3.99	0.54						(.90)

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
M = mean, SD = standard deviation

Model Testing Results

This research study has applied regression analysis to examine the hypothesized relationships between Big Five factors of personality traits and ethical behavior. According to the results Neuroticism (β=-,372) have negative effect on ethical behavior., also the extroversion has not shown any significant relationship between extraversion and ethical behavior (β= . ,265, p> .05). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Though, the results of hypothesis 3,4 and 5,

Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are found to be important precursors to maintain the ethical behavior.

Table 3.The Impact of Big Five Personal Traits on Ethical Leadership

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	R^2	B	T	p
Neuroticism	Ethical behavior	.156	-.372	-4.72**	0.000
Openness to Experience	Ethical behavior	.078	.178	2.46*	0.000
Agreeableness	Ethical behavior	.207	.433	5.61**	0.000
Extraversion	Ethical behavior	.028	.120	.820	.265
Conscientiousness	Ethical behavior	.174	.360	4.19**	0.000

*Significant at 0.05 (one tailed)
**Significant at 0.01 (one tailed)

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research study has determine the effect of big five factors of personality traits on ethical behaviour, it can be concluded that three factors of the Big Five personality traits in individuals, that include agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience, were positively related to the perceptions of ethical behavior. The agreeableness factor as an independent variable has shown the most powerful dimension that predicts ethical behavior. Though, this result can be estimated as Brown et al. (2005) explored those individuals that are of nature having agreeableness qualities are more concerned about appropriate and benevolent treatment of people. They are considerate, helpful, honest, decent, trustworthy, understanding, and responsive to the needs and goals of others. These behaviors are essential to develop an ethical behavior among the individuals working in the organizations (Brown et al., 2005; Brown &Trevino, 2006), and therefore a trait that predicts stability in such behaviour is likely to contribute in the positivity of an individual ethical behavior. According to Judge and Bono (2000) various personality predictors, like agreeableness was most strongly related to the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership qualities.

The another factor of personality traits creates, conscientiousness that has been considered as one of the most commonly studied traits in work psychology (Bono

& Judge, 2004). The individuals having conscientious quality experience a high degree of moral obligation; they value truth and honesty, typically are well organized, responsible and dependable. Such predispositions built up a link between conscientiousness and the behaviour pattern that is required to be perceived as an individual having ethical behavior. Brown et al. (2005, p. 120) is also of the opinion that ethical behaviors include openness and honesty, reliability, and truthfulness that are the attributes of conscientiousness. Along with, conscientious individuals are goal and detail oriented and they may be more likely to communicate clear principles and standards for ethical behavior to their subordinates (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

Brown and Trevino (2006) does not support the relationships between ethical leadership and openness to experience or extroversion because according to their research such personality traits factors are more related such qualities which are not a part of the ethical leadership construct. They suggest that leaders can be highly extraverted and open to new experiences but completely apart from ethical considerations. However, the results of this research study has explored that extroversion has no significant relationship with ethical behavior. A part from it, the results specify a positive and significant relationship between openness to experience and ethical behavior. Though, it is conceivable to develop an ethical environment among the individual at their workplaces and make organizations a better place in terms of ethics, build new structures and procedures that changes unethical behaviors. Therefore, the individuals should respect the new ideas and evaluate them equally no matter where they come from.

As a final point, the results indicate a negative relationship between neuroticism and ethical behavior. With the support of Lim and Ploy hart (2004) observation that military leaders with high trait negative affect were perceived as unpromising and unstimulating by their followers. According to Brown and Trevino (2006) the neurotic individual is less likely to be perceived as an ethical leader, because they tend to be thin-skinned and hostile toward others. It is therefore reasonable that individuals having neuroticism nature are likely to be rated lower on ethical behavior.

This research study conclude firstly, a link between five factor personality traits and ethical behavior that is measured with analysis from the teaching faculty of higher educational institutions of Sindh, Pakistan. Secondly, this study resolute the effect of five factor personality traits on ethical behavior, however the future studies can explore other personal characteristics which may have an effect on other outcomes of organization like job satisfaction, commitment, etc. while

having mediating and moderating variables, to clarify the relationship between ethical behavior and personality traits.

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