

# Personality Traits of Admitted Students to an Asian Military University Compared to Their Future Job Requirements

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**Background:** Setting Military recruitments to training programs intended for individuals wishing to work in the military, security or intelligence services is a very sensitive task. The identification of the applicants' personality traits, skills and abilities constitutes an importance part of the recruitment procedure.

**Objectives:** The present study attempted to identify the major characteristics the military force must possess, as well as the current candidates' suitability in terms of their personality characteristics.

**Patients and Methods:** The authorities at an Asian country army were interviewed in order to identify the major characteristics they believed to be necessary for the military personnel willing to work in that organization. Furthermore, 195 randomly selected students from a military training center in the same region were examined to reveal the extent to which their personality traits matched those specified by the experts.

**Results:** It was observed that the majority of the students who were tested enjoyed a good status regarding personality traits relevant to the nature of the tasks they were to be assigned in the future. However, based on the participants' scores on the NEO Psychological Inventory, Revised, some individuals were identified as lacking the needed personality traits and as a result, were not suitable for such responsibilities.

**Conclusions:** The obtained results indicated that the existing admission procedure was not efficient and needed to be revisited. More psychological tests and background checks need to be included in the admission procedure. In addition, a thorough needs analysis should be done in order to identify the major characteristics such applicants should possess in order to be successful in that profession after they are finished with their education.

**Keywords:** Personality; Personnel Recruitment; Personality Traits; NEO Personality Inventory

## 1. Background

Human resources have always been considered as the main axis for development in any organization. It is only the human resources who can help an organization move forward by being thoughtful and creative. The more important and sensitive an organization, the need for having skillful staff. However, it is clear that not all individuals are similar in their characteristics, abilities and personality. As a result, some people may not be appropriate for certain jobs while some others are more likely to succeed in the same responsibilities. Although many variables are involved, it seems that in most cases the major variable playing a role in distinguishing individuals from each other is their personality. According to Holland (1), job satisfaction is the result of the correspondence between one's type of personality and his working environment. The more the two match, the more satisfied an individual feels. However, due to its diverse applications, Reber (2) considers personality very resis-

tant to definition. Reber claims that presenting a single unified definition for personality is impossible because each scholar and psychologist defines it differently based on the area in which they are using this concept. For instance, Allport (3) listed 50 different definitions for the concept of personality. These definitions range in domain from one's internal processes to observable behaviors resulting from one's interaction with the environment (4). In 1936, Allport and Odbert (5) worked on the adjectives listed in English dictionaries. They identified more than 18,000 adjectives and tried to categorize them. Their study formed the framework for the lexicology of personality. Cattell (6), working on the same adjectives, could reduce them to 4,500 adjectives which he categorized into 35 personality traits. Fiske (7) could later reduce those 35 factors to 22 traits, very similar in structure to the Big Five personality traits we know today. These factors were repeated in other psychologists' studies in the

following years and became famous as the Big Five (8). This, however, does not mean that all personality differences were reduced to five traits. Instead each factor is in fact one aspect of one's personality which covers a wide range of adjectives and characteristics. In the early 1980s, Costa and McCrae (9) developed a questionnaire to measure personality traits. They called it NEO, which covered only the three factors of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness. Later in 1985, they developed NEO PI-R or NEO Psychological Inventory, Revised to include the other two factors of agreeableness and conscientiousness. The NEO PI-R is a measure of normal personality, encompassing five meta-factors with six distinct facets for each factor, through the use of 240 five-point Likert scale items. One's responses to these items are compared to those of other adults in order to make a description of their personality in terms of their thoughts, feelings, goals, and manner. Though it is not designed to measure mental disorders or problems, it can help understand what distinguishes an individual from others in terms of their thoughts, feelings, and interaction with others. The higher the score one obtains on a scale, the more the suggested description for each scale matches their characteristics. This is also true for low scores (10).

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Admitting candidates to military universities in order to be prepared for being assigned responsibilities in military organizations in the future, in particular for intelligent services, security guards, special forces, and critical positions is a sensitive task and needs a precise and detailed procedure. Those working in such sensitive positions must be unique. They should enjoy high intelligence and certain personality traits in line with the tasks they may be assigned. In fact, it is the combined effect of these individuals' abilities and personality traits that determine the extent to which an organization succeeds in reaching its predefined objectives.

## 2. Objectives

The present study, which was carried out in a military university in an Asian country, whose name is kept unknown due to confidentiality reasons, was an attempt to check current students' personality traits and the extent to which they matched the characteristics believed to be important for those wishing to work in the army.

## 3. Patients and Methods

### 3.1. Participants

Two groups of individuals were targeted in the present study. The first group consisted of all the students present at the studied military university, which was responsible for training future staff for that country's army. The second group consisted of the top and middle ranking

directors in the army as the expert panel who were familiar with the kind of people suitable for the tasks and responsibilities assigned to that organization. The total number of students was 390, consisting of 108 freshmen, 120 sophomores and 172 juniors. The training program at that university lasted for three years. Based on Cochran's (11) sample size formula, 195 students were selected using stratified random sampling. The second target group consisted of 90 top directors, vice-presidents, and heads of offices as the experts familiar with the type of personality traits one should have in order to succeed in such a job. Based on Cochran's sample size formula, 71 participants were selected from this group using stratified random sampling.

### 3.2. Materials

The main data collection tool used was the NEO Personality Inventory, Revised. It is a 240 five-point Likert scale questionnaire measuring five major personality factors with each factor being further specified with six more facets. The NEO PI-R measures the 'Big Five' personality traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Neuroticism specifies the extent to which an individual is prone to psychological distress. Extraversion indicates the way one would interact with the social and material context. Openness evaluates an individual's mental and experiential life. Agreeableness considers one's orientation towards others, and finally conscientiousness considers the extent to which one's behavior is goal-directed. Each of these five factors encompasses six facets that help further specify an individual's personality (10). The neuroticism (N) factor consists of six facets, namely, anxiety, anger, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability. The Extraversion factor consists of warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions. Openness (O) involves the facets of fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas and values. Being Agreeable (A) is further specified by trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness. Finally, conscientiousness (C) consists of competence, order, dutifulness, achievement-striving, self-discipline, and deliberation (10). In addition, an open-ended question was used to collect data on the panel of experts' opinions regarding the major characteristics an individual must have in order to be considered a suitable person for the kind of job they were being prepared for.

### 3.3. Procedure

The present study was an attempt to identify the major characteristics the students, who were being prepared for being assigned responsibilities in the military, security or intelligence services in the future, have as well as the major characteristics they must possess. In order to do so, the authorities of the major departments and offices in which the future graduates of the military uni-

versity were supposed to work were asked to list major characteristics and skills an individual suitable for such responsibilities must possess. By doing so, the major characteristics one should have in order to succeed in fulfilling the assigned responsibilities were identified. The features identified in this phase of the data collection were classified based on their themes and were then prioritized based on the frequency of being mentioned. In the second run, the randomly selected student participants were asked to fill in the NEO PI-R. Based on the results of this phase of data collection, the participants being categorized as very low, low, average, high, and very high for each of the five meta-factors as well as the 30 facets were identified. Finally, the extent to which students' characteristics matched those specified by experts was checked.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The present study was an applied research intended to identify specific characteristics of students at a military university and the extent to which their characteristics matched those specified by experts. As such, due to the nature of the study, only descriptive statistics were used.

## 4. Results

A number of personality traits and characteristics were mentioned by the panel of experts. However, only some of them were among those checked by NEO PI-R. In addition, a number of relevant characteristics checked by this questionnaire, were not among those mentioned by the authorities, although they were quite relevant to their job. This could be due to the nature of data collection. Since it was an open-ended question, it is natural to expect some characteristics not to be mentioned. The characteristics specified by experts in the field were categorized into four groups: manner, cognition, affection, and external image. A number of features were identified in each category and were ranked based on the frequency of being mentioned by experts. Table 1 presents the four categories and the characteristics under each as well as the number of times each characteristic was mentioned.

Table 2 presents the number of student participants who were categorized as being very low, low, average, high and very high in the 'Big Five' personality traits identified by NEO PI-R. In addition, the details of the same categorization based on the 30 facets underlying the 'Big Five' personality traits are presented in Table 3.

**Table 1.** The Characteristics Specified by Experts<sup>a</sup>

No.	Manner		Cognition		Affection		External Image	
	Facet	Results	Facet	Results	Facet	Results	Facet	Results
1	Trustworthiness	54 (60)	Love of the Job	61 (67.7)	Honesty	48 (53.3)	Physical Readiness	53 (58)
2	Love of Writing	51 (56.6)	Talented in Security Services	60 (66.6)	Self-Devotion	43 (47.8)	Handsomeness	44 (48)
3	Skillfulness	48 (53.3)	Being intelligent	58 (64.4)	Adherence to Religious Beliefs	40 (44.4)	Eloquence	28 (15.2)
4	Good Communication Skills	47 (52.2)	Being Analytical	55 (61.1)	Fame for the Good	38 (42.2)	Drug Independence	12 (13.3)
5	Self-Confidence	46 (51.1)	Creativity	50 (55.5)	Patience	15 (16.6)	Wealth	3 (3.3)
6	Hardworking	45 (50)	Vigilance in Speech & Confidentiality	42 (46.6)	Cheerfulness	12 (13.3)	-	-
7	Love for Education	43 (47.8)	Being Realistic	25 (27.7)	Self-Respect	8 (8.8)	-	-
8	Being Religious	30 (33.3)	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Extroversion	9 (10)	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	Flexibility	7 (7.8)	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Interest in Politics	6 (6.6)	-	-	-	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as No. (%).

**Table 2.** The Status of Student Participants for the Big Five Personality Traits<sup>a</sup>

Factors	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
Neuroticism	77 (39.48)	62 (31.79)	48 (24.61)	7 (3.58)	1 (0.5)
Extraversion	8 (4.1)	49 (25.12)	75 (38.46)	43 (22.05)	20 (10.25)
Openness	16 (8.20)	70 (35.89)	72 (36.92)	30 (15.38)	7 (3.58)
Agreeable	31 (15.89)	78 (40.00)	61 (31.28)	22 (11.28)	3 (1.53)
Consciousness	18 (9.23)	62 (31.79)	35 (17.94)	41 (21.01)	39 (20.00)

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as No. (%).

**Table 3.** The Status of Student Participants for the NEO PI-R 30 Facets<sup>a</sup>

Facets	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
<b>Neuroticism</b>					
Anxiety	49 (25.12)	91 (46.66)	35 (17.97)	19 (9.74)	1 (0.5)
Angry Hostility	37 (18.97)	74 (37.94)	57 (29.23)	26 (13.33)	1 (0.5)
Depression	43 (22.05)	101 (51.79)	43 (22.05)	8 (4.10)	0 (0)
Self-consciousness	29 (14.87)	65 (33.33)	77 (39.48)	23 (11.79)	1 (0.5)
Impulsivity	3 (1.53)	70 (35.89)	82 (42.05)	33 (16.92)	7 (3.58)
Vulnerability	44 (22.56)	74 (37.94)	56 (28.71)	19 (9.74)	2 (1.02)
<b>Extraversion</b>					
Warmth	19 (9.74)	54 (27.69)	85 (43.58)	31 (15.89)	6 (3.07)
Gregariousness	8 (4.10)	71 (36.41)	73 (37.43)	29 (14.87)	14 (7.17)
Assertiveness	6 (3.07)	17 (8.71)	51 (26.15)	113 (57.94)	8 (4.10)
Activity	20 (10.25)	50 (25.64)	74 (37.94)	45 (23.07)	6 (3.07)
Excitement seeking	7 (3.58)	51 (26.15)	76 (38.97)	57 (29.23)	4 (2.05)
Positive Emotion	8 (4.10)	26 (13.33)	92 (47.17)	57 (29.23)	12 (0.60)
<b>Openness</b>					
Fantasy	9 (4.61)	63 (32.30)	67 (34.35)	49 (25.12)	7 (3.58)
Aesthetics	34 (17.43)	89 (45.61)	51 (26.15)	19 (9.74)	2 (1.02)
Feelings	30 (15.38)	22 (11.28)	77 (39.48)	54 (27.69)	2 (1.02)
Actions	15 (7.69)	30 (15.38)	67 (34.35)	56 (28.71)	27 (13.84)
Ideas	11 (5.64)	33 (16.92)	94 (48.35)	51 (26.15)	6 (3.07)
Values	19 (9.74)	61 (31.28)	96 (49.23)	13 (6.66)	6 (3.07)
<b>Agreeable</b>					
Trust	18 (9.23)	65 (33.33)	63 (32.30)	36 (18.46)	13 (6.66)
Straightforwardness	20 (10.25)	84 (43.07)	70 (35.89)	20 (10.25)	1 (0.5)
Altruism	27 (13.84)	58 (29.74)	63 (32.30)	34 (17.43)	13 (6.66)
Compliance	12 (6.15)	42 (21.53)	89 (45.64)	44 (22.56)	8 (4.10)
Modesty	31 (15.89)	84 (43.07)	59 (30.25)	15 (7.69)	6 (3.07)
Tender-mindedness	41 (21.02)	60 (30.76)	72 (36.92)	17 (8.71)	5 (2.56)
<b>Conscientiousness</b>					
Competence	14 (7.17)	38 (19.48)	35 (17.94)	62 (31.79)	46 (23.28)
Order	31 (15.89)	41 (21.02)	61 (31.28)	54 (27.69)	8 (4.10)
Dutifulness	45 (23.07)	34 (17.43)	63 (32.30)	42 (21.53)	11 (5.64)
Achievement Striving	8 (4.10)	45 (23.07)	52 (26.66)	63 (32.30)	27 (13.84)
Self-Discipline	18 (9.23)	52 (26.66)	62 (31.79)	84 (42.61)	15 (7.69)
Deliberation	12 (6.15)	35 (17.94)	52 (26.66)	80 (41.02)	16 (8.20)

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as No. (%).

Regarding the traits being measured by NEO PI-R, there are some which seem to be more relevant to the personnel working in a military or security contexts. Almost 72% of the student participants had a low or very low score on the anxiety (N1) scale. Cheerfulness was among the characteristics mentioned by the panel of experts. About 73% of the participants scored low or very low on the depression (N3) scale, which can be regarded desirable. Feeling confident among others can be checked by self-conscien-

tiousness (N4); only 12% of the participants indicated having a problem by being categorized as high or very high on this scale. The ability to be in control of one's urges and resist temptations, checked by impulsiveness (N5), is an important trait for military personnel. More than 37% of the participants had a low or very low score with another 42% scoring average on this scale. In addition, such personnel may repeatedly face very stressful situations. The ability to handle stressful situations, as checked by

vulnerability (N6), must be an important criterion in the admission process. Fortunately, only 11% of the participants showed a very low or low ability to handle such situations. Working in the army, particularly in the security or intelligence services could mean being distant from others for security and confidentiality issues. About 40% of the participants obtained a low or very low score on warmth (E1) and gregariousness (E2) scales with another 40% scoring average. These individuals also need to be strong and enthusiastic. They should be able to act as group leaders when necessary. Assertiveness (E3) measures this ability. More than 62% of the participants had a high or very high score for this trait. Excitement-seeking (E6) could be another trait matching the nature of the kind of job these individuals were being prepared for. However, only 31% could obtain a high or very high score on this scale with about 39% scoring average.

Regarding the feelings (O3) facet, it can be hypothesized that responsibilities and missions of military or security organizations need less affectionate and less talkative individuals. However, only about 25% of the participants scored low or very low on this scale. These people need to be conservative about the values they believe in. Being persistent in their religious beliefs was one of the major characteristics mentioned by the expert panel as well. Accordingly, such personnel should not be willing to re-examine their political and religious values. Therefore, a low score on the values (O6) scale is desirable. Based on the obtained results, only 10% of the participants had high or very high score on this scale. Moreover, military personnel need to be skeptical of the information they receive and new people they meet. As such, a low or at least an average score on the trust (A1) scale is desirable. According to Table 3, about 42% scored low or very low, with more than 32% of the participants obtaining an average score on this scale. In the meantime, these people need to be honest and trustworthy. However, only about 11% had high or very high scores for straightforwardness (A2) with about 36% scoring average. Self-devotion and being ready for sacrifice for one's country and people is another important trait also emphasized by the expert panel. However, only 24% of the participants could obtain a high or very high score on the altruism (A3) scale, with almost 32% scoring average. Being effective and skillful or talented were other characteristics emphasized by the expert panel. High scores on the competence (C1) scale indicate having such characteristics. More than 55% of the participants could obtain a high or very high score on this scale. In addition, being in the army is associated with order and discipline. However, only less than 32% could obtain a high or very high score on the order (C3) scale. Being diligent and hardworking, which roughly matches the achievement-striving (C4) scale, was another trait emphasized by the group of experts. More than 46% of the participants could score high or very high on this scale with another 26% obtaining an average score. Finally, self-discipline (C5) is another personality trait relevant to the

possible tasks to be assigned to these individuals. More than 31% scored high or very high with another 32% obtaining an average score on this scale.

## 5. Discussion

All organizations have a specific plan and procedure based on which they select and screen their personnel. This procedure is usually defined based on the needs analyses done in the organization and the goals and objectives set for that organization. The sensitivity of selecting the right staff is much higher in military organizations. Not only do they need to know about the applicants' background, but they should also be aware of their personality traits in order to check whether they match the necessities of the tasks they are going to be assigned as well as the environment they should work in. The present study was an attempt to explore those characteristics that top and middle ranking directors at the military, security and intelligence services believed to be important for an individual to be suitable to work in such organizations. In addition, the personality traits of the students were examined. These students were being prepared to work at military, security or intelligent services. The expert panel emphasized four groups of characteristics. Regarding their manner, being trustworthy, skilled, confident and interested in education were among the most important characteristics. In the case of the cognitive characteristics, being interested in their job, talented, intelligent, analytic, creative, vigilant, and realistic were the most important adjectives listed by the expert panel. Being honest, self-devoted, and consistent in religious beliefs were adjectives included under the affection category. Regarding their external image, individuals were expected to be handsome and physically ready and in a good shape. Not all these characteristics were checked by NEO PI-R. However, for those characteristics which were common to both the experts' list of necessary personality traits and that of the NEO, it was observed that while there were individuals whose personality traits could well-match the specified traits, there were some who could not be regarded as suitable candidates for the job they were being recruited to. For each facet, there were a number of students who were categorized as not being suitable or matching with the needed characteristics. In addition, there were some traits such as feelings, straightforwardness, altruism and order for which the majority of the participants could not pass the cut off scores. The present study checked the characteristics of the students studying at a military university in an Asian country in order to later work at the security or intelligence services. Though the identification of suitable or non-suitable candidates does not do any good to the educational system at that university, the results obtained indicate that the current admission procedure is not efficient, and some individuals lacking the personality traits necessary for intended responsibilities are being admitted. Any military organization needs to revisit their admission pro-

cedure in order to make it more efficient. In addition, it seems that the authorities at that country and the studied university lack a predefined set of criteria for screening applicants. The numerous and different adjectives mentioned by those involved in the profession show that there is no predefined set of criteria for the evaluation of those wishing to work at such organizations. Doing a thorough need analysis in those organizations seems necessary in order to come up with a plan for admitting or rejecting applicants. It is suggested that all applicants be examined in terms of their different personality traits, talents, intelligence, and skills in order to identify the most suitable individuals to work as military personnel. In this regard, in addition to the needs analysis in the field, more psychological tests should be included in the admission procedure.

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