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ABSTRACT

The article presents an investigation of the relationship between the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment and the 'Big Five' personality traits. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was utilized to allow research participants to describe their perceived level of burnout while the most widely acknowledged tool for measuring personality traits, the 'Big Five', was also incorporated in the questionnaire, which was then distributed to 500 hotel managers. Findings indicate a positive association between emotional exhaustion and neuroticism, negative associations between depersonalization and both agreeableness and conscientiousness, and, finally, a positive association between personal accomplishment and conscientiousness. Industry implications and recommendations for stakeholders are discussed.

Key Words: Burnout, Personality, Hotel Managers, Cyprus

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Acknowledging how demanding and stressful work environments have become, studies focusing on human behavior and coping strategies have been conducted in order to better understand the association between personality and burnout. Researchers (Kim et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2009) have argued that individual differences are fundamental in explaining reports on burnout levels, and that personality traits play an important role, both in the experience of job-related distress, and also in the manner in which individuals handle stressful situations. For example, Tokar et al. (1998), in their review of the literature on the Big Five and occupational behavior from 1993 to 1997, noted that extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism were the most frequently emerging personality traits associated with vocational behaviors.

Our review of the literature highlighted the dearth of empirical research into the issues of burnout and personality within the hospitality industry, in general, and in Cyprus in particular. Cyprus has recently joined the European Union (EU) and has consequently had to realigning itself to the prevailing and new realities of organizational development and performance within a multicultural environment. These new realities have provided the impetus for an empirical investigation of this kind in order to facilitate a better understanding of the impacts of personality and burnout in the Cyprus Hospitality Industry. The paper describes the findings of an investigation of

the association between personality traits and burnout amongst managers currently working in the hospitality industry of Cyprus, by utilizing deductive reasoning (i.e. beginning from the general to the more specific).

The paper begins by reviewing the constructs of burnout and personality and the relevant literature which has investigated the relationships between them. This is followed by an overview of the methodology used in order to answer the hypotheses which were developed from the literature, and finally ends with a conclusion incorporating the implications and further research suggestions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Burnout

Maslach and colleagues (Maslach, 1993; Maslach et al. 1996; Maslach et al. 2001) describe burnout as a syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and professional accomplishment having detrimental effects for both the individual employee and his/her organization (*see also* Lee and Ashforth, 1990). The first dimension of burnout, emotional exhaustion, has been attributed to a number of probable causes ranging from work overload (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007), role conflict (Kuruuzum et al. 2008; Sethi et al. 1999), unrealistic personal expectations (Stevens and O'Neill, 1983), excessive interpersonal interactions (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993), and the lack of effective stress coping mechanisms (Erera-Weatherley, 1996). Depersonalization, the second dimension of burnout, has been attributed to causes such as work stress (Perrewe et al. 1993), excessive interpersonal interaction (Maslach, 1982), excessive workload (Burke, 1989), and the nature of job responsibilities, e.g. handling customer complaints or other difficult situations (Patton and Goddard, 2003). The third dimension, diminished personal accomplishment, has been attributed to lack of recognition and/or positive feedback (Jackson and Schuler, 1983), the feeling of inadequacy and/or incompetence (Janssen et al. 1999), the provision of pseudo-authority (Zopiatis and Constanti, 2005). Gill et al. (2006) suggest that diminished personal accomplishment is caused by the unrealistic expectations at work and poor management quality.

Personality

The most frequently used definition of personality is that of Allport (1937), "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychological systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment" (cited by Robbins and Judge 2007, p. 106). In other words it is the conglomerate of the ways in which we interact and react to those around us, and which is usually described via a set of measurable traits that we exhibit. One model which has been used extensively in personality research is the five-factor model of personality (Tupes and Christal, 1961 cited by Robbins and Judge, 2007) and constitutes the following:

- **Extraversion.** Comfort level with relationships. Extroverts tend to be gregarious, assertive, and sociable. Introverts tend to be reserved, timid, and quiet.
- **Agreeableness.** Individual's propensity to defer to others. High agreeableness people—cooperative, warm, and trusting. Low agreeableness people—cold, disagreeable, and antagonistic.
- **Conscientiousness.** A measure of reliability. A high conscientious person is responsible, organized, dependable, and persistent. Those who score low on this dimension are easily distracted, disorganized, and unreliable.
- **Emotional stability (sometimes referred to as neuroticism).** A person's ability to withstand stress. People with positive emotional stability tend to be calm, self-confident, and secure. Those with high negative scores tend to be nervous, anxious, depressed, and insecure.
- **Openness to experience.** The range of interests and fascination with novelty. Extremely open people are creative, curious, and artistically sensitive. Those at the other end of the openness category are conventional and find comfort in the familiar.

(p. 110)

This model has been labeled 'Big Five' having revolutionized personality psychology (Judge and Bono, 2000).

Burnout and Personality

Scholars have investigated the association of burnout with personality with noteworthy results (Deary et al. 2003; Storm and Rothmann, 2003; Goddard et al. 2004; Bakker et al. 2006). In particular, in Piedmont's (1993) longitudinal study among occupational therapists provided insight into the burnout phenomenon in relation to the Big Five personality traits. Within this study, high levels of neuroticism were associated with high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, thereby suggesting that individuals, who are anxious, depressed, and unable to deal with stressors may frequently experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. He also found agreeableness to be negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and positively with personal accomplishment, while conscientiousness was significantly associated with personal accomplishment.

Similarly, Deary et al. (2003) in a longitudinal study of nursing students noticed that neuroticism and emotion-oriented coping were significantly associated with emotional exhaustion. The authors suggest that "a small but significant increase in neuroticism could be indicative of a negative impact of stresses imposed upon the students by the nursing programme" (p. 77), while conscientiousness was significantly related to depersonalization and to feelings of personal accomplishment. In a similar vein, Storm and Rothmann (2003) suggest that neuroticism, low extraversion, low openness to experience and low conscientiousness could contribute to burnout.

Within the hospitality arena Kim et al. (2007) studied the effects of the Big Five personality dimensions on hotel employees' job burnout, and concluded that all personality dispositions, except openness to experience, affect the components of job burnout. More specifically, they found that agreeableness is negatively related with two burnout elements (cynicism and professional efficacy), while conscientiousness was positively related to professional efficacy, and extraversion was found to be negatively related to emotional exhaustion. Neuroticism and extraversion were reported to be the stronger and more significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, and which is often viewed as the core dimension of job burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1981).

In a more recent study, Kim et al. (2009) hypothesized that extraversion will be negatively related to burnout; agreeableness will be negatively related to burnout; and, neuroticism will be positively related to burnout. Their analyses found no relationship between extraversion and burnout; or between agreeableness and burnout. However, neuroticism was found to be the most critical and influential burnout predictor (Kim et al. 2007).

What then, is the association between burnout and personality in the Cyprus hospitality industry? The following section outlines how the investigation was carried out in order to answer this question.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate the association between personality traits and burnout amongst managers currently working in the hospitality industry of Cyprus by utilizing deductive reasoning (i.e. beginning from the general to the more specific). Informed by the literature, five hypotheses were tested (only alternative hypotheses are stated):

H1: Neuroticism will have a positive association with the burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a negative association with personal accomplishment.
H2: Extraversion will have a negative association with the burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a positive association with personal accomplishment.
H3: Openness will have a negative association with the burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a positive association with personal accomplishment.
H4: Agreeableness will have a negative association with the burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a positive association with personal accomplishment.

H5: Conscientiousness will have a negative association with the burnout dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and a positive association with personal accomplishment.

The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Costa and McCrae 1985, 1992) measuring perceived personality traits, and Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), measuring the burnout level of hospitality (hotel) managers in Cyprus were the instruments that we used, following the literature. Despite the fact that both instruments have been utilized separately by scholars in numerous studies, to our knowledge this is one of a dearth of research studies which investigate the personality-burnout relationship in the hospitality industry.

For measuring burnout levels, the most widely acknowledged and cited tool for measuring burnout within the hospitality industry, Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), was utilized. The MBI consists of 22 statements that measured the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, where one's emotions are 'used up', thus feels drained when interacting with others. Depersonalization is a result of the stressors of the job, whereby one feels detached from work and people with whom we interact become objects rather than humans, and personal accomplishment, feeling incompetent and doubting one's abilities in achieving anything (Maslach, 1982). Respondents were asked to state on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (every day) how often they fell that a particular statement applies to them. A high degree of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in relation to a low level of personal accomplishment indicates high burnout. In particular, according to Maslach (1982), high burnout exists when the scores of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization components fell in the upper third of the normative distribution and for personal accomplishment in the lower third. The reliability and factorial validity of Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) has been confirmed by a number of related studies (Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984; Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Richardsen and Martinussen, 2004; Worley et al. 2008).

The 'Big Five' personality dimensions, despite their long academic and linguistic research history (Allport and Odbert, 1936; Cattell, 1946; Norman, 1963) gained wide acceptance among academia during the late 80's and early 90's as research into personality flourished when many scholars attempted to establish a valid instrument to study this phenomenon (Costa and McCrae, 1989; Goldberg 1981, 1990; Gough, 1987). A valid and reliable instrument is the five-factor model propounded by Costa and McCrae (1985, 1992), which measures five personality dimensions; neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The original NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI) consisted of 180 items from which Costa and McCrae (1989) selected 12 items for each scale in order to develop the 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), a shorter version of the inventory and the one utilized in the current research activity.

The research population included individuals currently holding full time managerial positions (entry-level supervisors, mid-level and upper level managers), in hotel establishments of Cyprus. According to government statistics, provided by the country's Ministry of Labour and Social Security, cross-referenced with figures provided by local hospitality associations, one thousand individuals are currently working in such capacities. A simple random sample of 500 questionnaires was administered to individuals working in 100 hotel establishments currently operating in the country. Due to the typical low response rate of hospitality related studies in Cyprus (Zopiatis and Constanti, 2005), a mixed method, which included post mail followed by a telephone reminder and face to face individual distribution, was utilized in order to increase the response rate.

The questionnaires were pilot-tested for reliability with the utilization of the test re-test method and for validity with a panel of experts prior to their administration, culminating in data analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (*SPSS v. 16*). Descriptive statistics were primarily utilized to analyze the data from the two instruments. In addition, inferential statistics, namely reliability analysis (*Cronbach's Alpha)* and bivariate correlations (*Pearson's r two-tailed*), were used respectively, in order to determine the extent to which the items in each factor relate to each other, while multiple regression analysis was utilized to measure the association (strength) and direction (positive-negative) of the relationship between the variables.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The questionnaires were distributed to five hundred individuals currently working in the Hospitality industry of Cyprus in managerial level positions. One hundred and forty (140) questionnaires were returned, nine of which were incomplete, and thus excluded from the study, reducing the number of usable surveys to one hundred and thirty-one (131). The overall response rate of 26.2% was viewed as satisfactory considering the low response rates experienced by similar hospitality studies which investigate so called 'sensitive' issues (Keegan and Lucas, 2005).

Table 1 displays the demographic profile of the participants in relation to six different variables: gender, age, years working in the hospitality industry, current employer, hotel divisions currently working and managerial level.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=131)

	Frequency*	Valid Percentage
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	93	71.0
Female	38	29.0
<u>Age</u>		
20 – 30	24	18.5
31 – 40	44	33.8
41 – 50	44	33.8
Over 50	18	13.8
<u>Years working in the Hospitality Industry</u>		
Less than 5	14	10.9
5 – 10	26	20.3
11 – 20	44	34.4
More than 20	44	34.4
<u>Current Employer</u>		
Hotel 5 Star	46	35.7
Hotel 4 Star	73	56.6
Hotel 3 Star	4	3.1
Other	6	4.7
<u>Division Currently Working</u>		
Upper Management – Top Administration	33	26.0
Food and Beverage Division	46	36.2
Rooms Division	28	22.0
Marketing and Sales Division	2	1.6
Human Resources Division	8	6.3
Accounting Division	3	2.4
Other	7	5.5
<u>Employment - Managerial Level</u>		
Entry Level - Supervisory	21	16.5
Middle Level	65	51.2
Upper Level – Top Administration	41	32.3

Note *: Some demographic questions were not answered by all participants, thus, the variation in the actual frequency number.

According to the Big Five (NEO FFI), each personality trait, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness, is measured by 12 statements; some worded positively while others negatively. The negatively worded items were reversed prior to any further analysis. In our initial reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), two personality traits, openness and agreeableness, exhibited unacceptably low levels of reliability. As a result, we decided to exclude four items from the openness dimension and two items from the agreeableness dimension in order to improve the overall reliability of the model. Following this modification the reliability of the five personality traits ranged from 0.645-0.819, indicating that they were all within the parameters of the widely acceptable level of reliability of 0.700 (Nunnaly and Bernstein, 1994). We acknowledge that on two personality traits, openness and agreeableness, the reliability score is slightly lower than 0.700, nevertheless, it was decided to include that in the analysis due to its explained context.

Bivariate correlations (Pearson's r two-tailed), presented in Table 2, were used to measure the association (strength) of the relationship between the variables. The findings suggest that emotional exhaustion has a positive correlation with neuroticism and negative correlation with the other four personality traits. Similarly, depersonalization is positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. No signification correlation was revealed between depersonalization and openness. In contrast, personal accomplishment is negatively correlated with neuroticism and positively with extraversion, openness and conscientiousness. No significant correlation was revealed between personal accomplishment and agreeableness. Another noteworthy finding is the strong correlation amongst the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This strong relationship has also been reported in other work (Koeske and Koeske, 1989; Lee and Ashforth, 1990; Zopiatis and Orphanides, 2009).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics, Alpha Reliability (*Cronbach's*) and Correlations (*Pearson's r*) of the MBI and the NEO Big Five

	Variable	Mean	SD	Number of Items *(Alpha Reliability)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Emotional Exhaustion	2.23	1.168	9 *(.909)*	1							
2	Depersonalization	1.64	1.212	5 *(.827)*	.536**	1						
3	Personal Accomplishment	4.14	.777	8 *(.733)*	-.174*	-.190*	1					
4	Neuroticism	2.62	.523	12 *(.718)*	.493**	.365**	-.208*	1				
5	Extraversion	3.72	.445	12 *(.712)*	-.396**	-.409**	.305**	-.449**	1			
6	Openness	3.42	.531	8 *(.645)*	-.218*	-.113	.211*	-.239**	.371**	1		
7	Agreeableness	3.56	.503	10 *(.693)*	-.234**	-.527**	.160	-.370**	.408**	.248**	1	
8	Conscientiousness	4.05	.449	12 *(.819)*	-.385**	-.437**	.337**	-.474**	.616**	.322**	.380**	1

Scale Big 5 = 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
Scale MBI = 0 = Never to 6 = Every day
* Correlation in significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
** Correlation in significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In order to further examine the relationship of the five-factor model of personality with Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), three different multiple regression models, all presented in Table 3, in which the five personality traits were treated as the independent variables, were computed. The first model, which was significant (p<0.001), explaining a total of 26.1% of the variance, investigated the relationship between the 'big five' and emotional exhaustion. Out of the five independent variables only neuroticism is positively related to the burnout dimension of emotional exhaustion.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis Examining whether Personality Traits Predict Burnout Dimensions

	Emotional Exhaustion		Depersonalization		Personal Accomplishment	
Independent Variables	Beta (β)	t	Beta (β)	t	Beta (β)	t
Neuroticism	.369	4.115***	.096	1.139	-.029	-.293
Extraversion	-.156	-1.529	-.125	-1.295	.128	1.138
Openness	-.042	-.510	.119	1.538	.088	.971
Agreeableness	.017	.195	-.393	-4.855***	-.008	-.087
Conscientiousness	-.107	-1.057	-.203	-2.138*	.219	1.969*
R²	**.290**		**.368**		**.136**	
Adjusted R²	**.261**		**.343**		**.102**	
F (5,125)	**10.203**		**14.579**		**3.945**	
Significance p Value	**.000**		**.000**		**.002**	

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
Beta (β) = Standardized beta weights
Dependent Variables: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment.

When investigating the relationship between depersonalization and the five personality traits (model significant p<0.001; explaining a total of 34.3% of the variance), agreeableness and conscientiousness have a significant negative association. In terms of personal accomplishment (model significant p<0.01; explaining only a total of 10.2% of the variance) only one significant positive association, that of conscientiousness was revealed. It is important to note that with the utilization of SPSS, both the level of multicollinearity, which refers to the excessive correlation of the predictor variables, and the Durbin-Watson test were examined and both found in acceptable ranges (Multicollinearity VIF less than 4; Durbin-Watson between 1 and 3) (Field, 2009).

Based on the above, **H1** is partially supported by the findings since a significant positive association exists between neuroticism and emotional exhaustion but not between depersonalization. In addition, a negative but insignificant association was revealed between neuroticism and personal accomplishment. It is important to note that a positive association between neuroticism and emotional exhaustion was revealed by the Kim et al. (2007) study. **H2** and **H3** cannot be supported since no significant associations were revealed between extraversion and openness respectively and the three burnout dimensions. In contrast, **H4** can be partially supported since a significant negative association was revealed between agreeableness and depersonalization. Finally, **H5** can be partially supported since both a significant positive association was revealed between conscientiousness and depersonalization and a positive association between the same personality trait and personal accomplishment.

DISCUSSION, INDUSTRY IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The quest for employees with the 'right' personality is crucial for the hospitality industry since it is perceived as the determining factor in the provision of a quality service able to meet or even exceed customers' expectations; the key to the hospitality industry's financial success. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that personality traits may seriously affect numerous other elements of our operations, for example, the employees'

levels of burnout; a psychological state that can disrupt the seamless operations of even the most sophisticated hospitality operations.

Utilizing a quantitative research approach and two established tools both in terms of reliability and validity (Maslach's Burnout Inventory and NEO-FFI), we set out to investigate the relationship between personality traits and burnout dimensions of hotel managers currently working in Cyprus. Our findings indicate a positive association between emotional exhaustion and neuroticism, negative associations between depersonalization and both agreeableness and conscientiousness, and, finally, a positive association between personal accomplishment and conscientiousness.

The findings have a practical relevance to both hotel stakeholders and academic scholars who wish to further explore the burnout-personality association. If, as the findings suggests, neuroticism has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion, for many the prime dimension of burnout, then the rationale exists to recruit, promote and invest in developing those individuals who do not exhibit such a trait. Hotel establishments can utilize the findings when developing their recruitment, selection and training strategies for management and leadership positions. This can be combined with selection procedures that take into account the personality traits of individuals particularly agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the local hotel industry fails to recognize the value and purpose of psychometric and other employment testing during the selection process. Instruments, such as the 'Personality Audit' developed by Kets de Vries et al. (2006), could be utilized by the industry in order to scientifically identify the most 'suitable' individual for the position. For example, the Personality Audit, mentioned above, can be utilized at any stage of the human resources cycle, from recruitment to behavior modification initiatives, in order to proactively intervene and identify 'blind spots' of individuals, thus consequently mitigating the negative effects caused by burnout.

Future studies should further investigate the demographic aspects of burnout and personality. Those intending to 'take up the gauntlet' should attempt to investigate a broader sample of hospitality leaders and managers, including the moderating variables of ethnicity, gender, age, type of work (Hotel Division) and tenure. In addition, the association between conscientiousness and depersonalization; and between conscientiousness and personal accomplishment need further investigation as our findings are inconclusive. Furthermore, propensity to burnout among those employed in arena of hospitality might further harm the reputation of the industry, an issue which is also worthy of further investigation.

Limitations

It is widely acknowledged that surveys measuring sensitive issues, such as burnout levels and personality traits, have inbuilt limitations either within the instruments used or based on the fact that the tools used for data collection are based on the self-report format. Regarding the latter issue, we have to bear in mind the human dimension; the integrity and honesty of reporting personal views, while assuring that the statements within the questionnaire are clearly understood by the population being investigated.

In addition, the small sample size (n=131) and the homogeneity of the sample (all Greek Cypriot hotel managers), limits the generalizability of the findings. A further research study of other culturally homogenous groups, and larger samples sizes, would add to the existing knowledge regarding the cultural specificity of the investigation. Even though the literature does not delineate industry sectors, the generalizability of the findings may also come into question as the research was carried out in one specific organizational sector, that is, the hotel sector.

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