

THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF NECESSITY: COMPARISON BETWEEN STUDENTS AND EMPLOYEES DATA

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ABSTRACT

Three different types of employees can be found in workplaces all over the world: “Necessities,” “Commoners,” and “Parasites.” A person is a Necessity if he/she is irreplaceable and crucial to the functioning of an organization. A Commoner is a person of normal ability and talent who has no significant impact on organizational success. Parasites are detrimental freeloaders who damage the functioning of an organization. To identify the principal characteristics of these three types of workers, a group of researchers led by Chong W. Kim conducted six studies in which they collected survey data from undergraduate and graduate business students in the U.S., India, Korea, Chile, and Japan. The summary of six published studies is reported in Kim, Smith, Sikula and Anderson (2011). The purpose of this article is to compare the results of these studies with newly collected data from working employees in order to identify the key trait differences of Necessity between students and working people's perception. The authors note the points of commonality and difference between these data sets and offer their thoughts on future research in this area.

Key Terms: *Employee traits, necessity, commoner, parasite*

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings, by nature, are relational creatures. At any given time all people, regardless of their individual differences (e.g., age, gender, religion, ethnic background), assume multiple roles in society, such as spouse, parent, employee, friend, club member, and citizen of a city, town, or country. Within each of these roles, there is always more than one person involved, from a very small number of members in an institution like a family, to a very large number of members comprising the citizenship of a nation. No matter what type of role a person plays in a group at any given time, however, that person falls into one of three categories: Necessity, Commoner, or Parasite.

The most desirable type of person is the Necessity. The person of Necessity focuses his/her efforts on achieving the group's goals, and thus consistently makes valuable contributions to ensure collective success. From the group's perspective, such a person is an invaluable asset. Indeed, without members who are Necessities, the group as a whole cannot function successfully. The loss felt within the group by the departure of such an individual, therefore, is significant. Necessities provide the social "glue" that holds an organization together and enables it to function and thrive as a cohesive whole (Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson, 2011).

Commoners have no significant impact on the success of the group. They do not contribute much to the accomplishment of group goals, but neither do they harm the overall group performance in any significant way. A Commoner is not a self-starter and tends to focus on "just getting by." They are easily replaceable and not missed much when they leave (Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson, 2011).

The third and least productive type of person is the Parasite. This individual not only fails to contribute to group performance, but also harms the organization by acting as a leech and a drain on others. The Parasite is a loafer who desires a free ride, complains about everything, blames mistakes on others, and exudes pessimism in the workplace. Many group members wish the Parasite would leave as soon as possible, since the organization would be better off not having such a person around (Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson, 2011).

Workplace settings can vary in many different ways. The traits and behaviors that characterize Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites, for example, may depend on the workers' occupations, assigned tasks, and positions in the organizational hierarchy. The structure of the organization itself also determines, in part, what traits and behaviors characterize each category of worker. More broadly, cultural attitudes towards age, gender, religion, or ethnic background, along with societal views on the nature of work and success, will also matter.

The summary of six studies reported in Kim, Smith, Sikula and Anderson (2011) was drawn upon our previous research (Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Magoshi, 2009; Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Smith, 2008; Kim, Cho & Sikula, 2007; Kim & Sikula, 2005; Kim & Sikula, 2006; Kim, Sikula & Smith, 2006) which made use of eight sets of survey data (three from the U.S., two from Chile, and one each from India, Korea and Japan). We recognized the

difficulty of this undertaking, for the respondents in these data sets operated in different types of workplaces and, more generally, in different socio-cultural environments.

People's perceptions of the traits and behaviors that characterize each of these three categories of workers may also vary across cultures. Human beings are by nature socio-cultural creatures. Their behaviors are influenced by the norms and values of the society to which they belong, and they act in a manner to suit the nature of their traditional cultures. For example, education and training received in childhood can create differences in personalities and cultural values, which in turn can make people perceive education and training differently (Newcomb, 1950). Hofstede (1980) focuses on the differences culture can make in a workplace setting. For example, Americans have a high degree of individualism and a short-term orientation, whereas Japanese score high on collectivism and on having a long-term perspective. Perceptions of the characteristics of Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites should therefore differ across U.S. and Japanese workplaces. More generally, we recognized that cultural differences across the U.S., Japan, Chile, Korea, and India may influence the ways in which each country's respondents perceive Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites (Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Magoshi, 2009; Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Smith, 2008; Kim, Cho & Sikula, 2007; Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson, 2011; Kim & Sikula, 2005; Kim & Sikula, 2006; Kim, Sikula & Smith, 2006).

Nevertheless, our analysis of the data used in these previous studies revealed a general set of traits and behaviors that characterizes each of these three categories of workers -- particularly for Necessities. Managers in any organization should be interested in finding and attracting people labeled as a Necessity. Knowing the general traits and behaviors that characterize people as Necessities will help managers recruit the right people, and decide how to make good use of their current employees.

From the previous studies on this topic by Kim et al., the authors have concluded that 1) there was a high degree of commonality in Necessity traits among different socio-cultural environments compared to the traits for the Commoners and the Parasites, 2) it may be highly practical to pursue finding the Necessity traits for business practitioners as their human resource tool to select the right persons for their organizations, and 3) we needed to collect data from actual working people instead of only collecting data from students to increase the reliability and validity of the concept.



OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to use descriptive analysis to identify the key traits and behaviors that characterize Necessities among working employees and compare it with the previous studies whose data were collected only from business school students.

Methodology

We have adopted the following procedure for collecting the required samples of students and employees for the further

research and the analysis of data .

1. Student samples

The process of collecting and organizing the data in all six previous studies was identical to that used in Kim and Sikula (2005). After explaining the definitions of Necessity, Commoner, and Parasite to the students, one of the authors in each country asked each student voluntarily to turn in a list of ten traits and behaviors describing each type of worker, for which the students received bonus points as an incentive to participate. The responses were tabulated for frequency within each category (Necessity, Commoner, and Parasite). If a response was too generally stated, or too similar to the overall descriptor of each category, it was discarded. For example, responses such as “hard to replace” and “vital person” define a Necessity and hence are not traits or behaviors that characterize the person who is a Necessity. These were discarded.

The usable responses were then grouped together according to the words' meanings through a two-step process. First, a simple table for each category was created by listing all the responses, from most frequent to least frequent. Second, a more specific frequency table was constructed by organizing all the responses in each category into a set of headings and subheadings. The following two examples illustrate the process. In developing the frequency table for the Necessity category, we were able to group many responses under subheadings such as Responsible, Punctual, Dedicated, and Organized. These subheadings were then placed under the broader heading of “Reliable.” The final frequency table for the Necessity category contained 17 headings such as “Dependable” and “Hard Working,” with a varying number of subheadings under each.

2. Employee samples

To collect the data from working employees, a survey was designed closely following the same method that we gave to the student sample but in a written statement. Part I of the survey asked the employee to identify ten typical traits that a “Necessity” possess and/or behaviors they conduct. Part II of the survey consisted of four questions related to demographic information. As stated, we included only the traits and behavior of Necessity excluding Commoner and Parasite. The rest of data handling process was identical to the previous studies.

FINDINGS

The finding of the study have been ascertained as under -

1. Eight student sample data sets from the six studies of five different countries were combined to analysis in this study. As a result, 1850 usable responses for Necessity were identified through 296 respondents (see Table 1). Regarding to the employee participants, 94 participants included 52 males (56.5%) and 40 females (43.5%) participated in this study. The majority of the participants work in the Health Care industry (40.4%), were over 55 years old (36.6%), and have worked in the current company between 5-10 years. A total of 778 usable responses were successfully collected through these 94

employees (Table 2).

Table 1 Descriptive Information of Student Necessity Characteristics

Necessity Worker Characteristics	No of Entries	%
1. Hardworking	316	17.08
2. Reliable	270	14.59
3. Friendly	238	12.86
4. Motivated	192	10.38
5. Knowledgeable	175	9.46
6. Good Communication	161	8.70
7. Leader	97	5.24
8. Committed	69	3.73
9. Dependable	61	3.30
10. Collaborator	53	2.86
11. Other characteristics Creative, Proactive, Confident, Visionary, Caring, Trustworthy, Honest.	218	11.78%
Total	1850	100.00

Table 2 Descriptive Information of Necessity Employee Characteristics

Necessity Worker Characteristics	No of Entries	%
1. Trustworthy	163	20.95
2. Caring	134	17.22
3. Dependable	101	12.98
4. Hardworking	62	7.97
5. Goal oriented	48	6.17
6. Conscientious	36	4.63
7. Cooperative	35	4.50
8. Intelligent	30	3.86
9. Leader / Influential	29	3.73
10. Visionary	24	3.08
11. Problem solver	22	2.83
12. Positive attitude	22	2.83
13. Outstanding communication skills	21	2.70
14. Ethical	21	2.70
15. Confident	21	2.70
16. Calm	6	0.77
17. Successful	3	0.39
Total	778	100.00

2. As shown in Table 3, below the key traits and behaviors that characterize a person of Necessity in the workplace were all positive and were very similar between the two samples. The perceptions of what characterizes a worker as Necessity appeared to be similar among students and working employees. These results implied that companies in all organizations should seek to hire employees who are Hard Working, Reliable (Trustworthy & Dependable), Friendly (Caring), Motivated (Goal Oriented), and Knowledgeable.

Table 3 The Comparison between Student and Employee's perceptionon Principle Characteristics of Necessities

Student's Perception 296 Participants with 1850 Responses			Employee's Perception 94 Participants with 778 Responses		
Hardworking	316 entries	17.08%	Trustworthy (Reliable)	163 entries	20.95%
Reliable	270	14.59	Caring (Friendly)	134	17.22
Friendly	238	12.86	Dependable (Reliable)	101	12.97
Motivated	192	10.38	Hardworking	62	7.97
Knowledgeable	175	9.46	Goal oriented (Motivated)	48	6.17

3. At a glance, there appeared to be some differences between Student Necessity Characteristics (SNC) and Employee Necessity Characteristics (ENC). It looked like Hard Working was the only identical trait and behavior among five identified ones. It was very interesting that Trustworthy is the number one characteristics in ENC. Loyalty and trust must be very important traits/behaviors among working people. One CEO of a company mentioned to one of our authors while collecting data that Loyalty is the only important trait/behavior for his company. At the same time, we may consider Trustworthy as one source leading to Reliable. Although it may not clear the cause and effect relations among these traits/behaviors, we may also consider Dependable as one source leading to Reliable. Likewise, we may also consider Caring and Friendly as very similar concepts.

According to Ed Locke's (1968) goal setting theory, setting specific goal(s) would lead to an individual's strong internal motivation to achieve it; therefore, we may consider that Goal Oriented would lead to Motivated. Upon these analyses, we

could consider 80% of traits/behaviors are the same concept. Hard Working is identical (20%), and Trustworthy-Reliable, Dependable-Reliable, and Goal Oriented-Motivated are similar (60%) in both studies.

It is also interesting that Knowledgeable does not appear to be important in ENC, which is 5th place in SNC (see Table 1 & 2). The closest traits/behavior to knowledgeable in ENC is Intelligence, which is 8th ranked in SNC, although it is a slightly different concept. One more big difference between these two studies is communication skills, ranking 6th in SNC and ranking 13th in ENC. Knowledge and communication skills are not considered important traits/behaviors among working people.



SUGGESTIONS

The present study suffers from certain limitations as detailed below. We shall like to make the following suggestions for further increasing the utility of the study.

To get the SNC, we had eight data sets from five different countries, and for our current study, we have collected data from 94 employees from five different companies in the same region. To develop our analysis of different types of employees further, and to make it more practically useful, we would first like to collect more data from employees and managers in various industries to see whether their responses differ significantly from those of the students we have already surveyed. Second, for practical purposes we should explore the category of Necessity more carefully and completely, since our goal is to provide Human Resource departments with the ability to identify those individuals who are most likely to promote the success and growth of organizations and businesses.

One way to do this would be to create a scale along which we can rank the differential importance of the key characteristics of Necessities. This scale would allow managers to focus their hiring and promotion/retention efforts on those individuals with the most desired characteristics. Such a scale, therefore, would be invaluable in Human Resource Management.

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