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**The impact of personality traits on positivity at work  
and job performance of officers - An empirical investigation  
at the district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the influence of personality traits on positivity at work and officer performance at the district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi. Based on the information obtained from 420 officers, the structural equation modeling was adopted to assess the impact of the Big Five model of personality on positivity at work and job performance. The results show a positive relationship between personality traits, positivity at work, and job performance. At the same time, positivity at work positively impacts officers' job performance. These findings suggest recommendations for district-level administrative agencies to enhance positivity at work and improve officers' performance. This paper provides empirical evidence of the feasible application of the Big Five model of personality and serves as a reference for further research on organizational behavior in both public and private organizations.

**Keywords:** Personality traits, Positivity at work, Job performance, Officers

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**1. Introduction**

In a market economy with fierce competition, organizations must improve capacity, strengthen competitive advantages, and create conditions for development. Organizations need good employee performance to achieve their goals. Job performance is the total expected value to the organization given by their employees during a course of time (Borman *et al.*, 2003). If employees are highly positive at work, the organization will achieve the best efficiency (Elankumaran, 2004). The more active employees are at work, the more benefits they can

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bring to the organization by reducing absenteeism and avoidance (Mirvis and Lawler, 1977). Thus, organizations always aims to create positivity at work.

The importance of positivity at work highlights the proactive relationship between employee attitudes and their behaviors at work. The studies on organizational behavior reveal that personal characteristics help enhance intrinsic resources and increase job performance. In addition, employee attitudes at work are previously researched by the Big Five model of personality (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge *et al.*, 2002).

Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam. State agencies play a crucial role in growing and developing the local economy. To ensure economic growth and social security, the competence of state agencies is extremely important. Nevertheless, administrative agencies face difficulties in human resource management due to high turnover rate of competent officers. Some studies focused on analyzing the factors affecting employee performance (Tran and Phan, 2020; Nguyen and Tran, 2021). However, these studies do not take into account the personality traits and positivity at work. In addition, there is no prior empirical investigation in district-level administrative agencies. Hence, to fill the knowledge gaps, this study affirms the mediating role of positivity at work with personality traits and job performance of officers at the district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi. Our findings propose some critical recommendations to upgrade positivity at work and officer performance.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we provide a literature review, which helps develop the research hypotheses. We then describe the research methodology. The next section discusses the main findings. Finally, we conclude the study and suggest recommendations.

## **2. Literature review and hypotheses development**

### ***2.1 Literature review***

#### ***2.1.1 Big Five model of personality***

Personality has been studied in many fields. Erdheim *et al.* (2006) argue that personality traits study the employee's personality to evaluate those characteristics in the organization. A series of thoughts, actions, and feelings describes personality (Carpenter and Moore, 2009). Personality is unique to each individual. The Big Five personality traits have received much attention from scholars (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; Judge *et al.*, 2002; Smith and Canger, 2004), however, the elements of this model are not unified among scholars. Kuldeep and Bakhshi (2010) conclude that the Big Five personality traits model represents most of the common characteristics of personality based on five relatively independent factors. This model provides a meaningful explanation of the differences in people's personalities and how they react. Personality is a set of traits appearing and occurring together in each person. McCrae and Costa (1989; 1992; 1996) show that the personality traits model includes five elements: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, and openness

to experience. These elements are widely used in personality studies (Slocum and Hellriegel, 2009; Jabari *et al.*, 2013; Tran, 2015).

Agreeableness is the ability to fit in with others through trust, cooperation, approval, consensus, and flexible thinking. People with agreeable personalities are interested in agreeing and do not enter into disputes over all matters. They have an optimistic view of people. Otherwise, they believe human nature is honest and trustworthy.

Conscientiousness is associated with hard work, thoughtfulness, meticulousness, responsibility, and a careful work style toward achieving personal or organizational goals. Conscientious people focus on specific goals and execute them in the best possible way by working carefully, thoughtfully, reliably, and with great discipline.

Extraversion is characterized by being strong and enthusiastic, being interested in making friends, dynamic, and having positive emotions. In addition, extroverts enjoy group or social activities, have many social connections, have a unique working style (act first, talk later), assert themselves, and boldly give opinions.

Neuroticism represents the tendency to have negative emotions, worry, and easily be moved by surrounding factors. People with neuroticism often appear insecure, uncomfortable, preventative, and have difficulty overcoming work and life challenges. They worry about their relationships with other people.

Openness to experience involves original thinking, creativity, imagination, and passion to experience new things. People who are open to experience are liberal, like a colorful life, prefer variety rather than confinement in a framework, love art and dream. These people so they often do not stay focused and are hard to predict.

### *2.1.2 Positivity at work*

The term “positivity at work” first appeared in the study of Lodahl and Kejner (1965). They believe that positivity at work is the psychological state of an employee that he feels the significant value of that job. Reitz and Jewell (1979) found that positivity at work is strongly linked to the importance of work in the employee’s routine or daily life. It means that if employees perceive their work as something vital, they are tentative to be loyal to the job and the organization. Positivity at work is the enthusiasm and consensus among employees for the job (Kanungo, 1982). It reflects in the employee’s level of interest and enthusiasm (Govender and Paramasur, 2010). Thus, from an organizational perspective, work positivity is the key to motivating employees (Lawler, 1986). From a personal perspective, it is also the key to growth and satisfaction with the organization (Hackman and Lawler, 1971). Work takes up 70% of people’s time and becomes a significant part of daily life. Increasing positivity at work would increase the organization’s efficiency and productivity through closer engagement between employees and work and making work an enjoyable experience (Brown, 1996).

### *2.1.3 Job performance*

There are many definitions of job performance, but no consensus exists among studies. Schermerhorn (1989) defines job performance as representing the quantity and quality of work done by an employee or a team. Job performance relates to employees' behavioral effectiveness in achieving organizational goals. Job performance is considered the total of values that the organization wants to get from their employees' work in a specified period (Motowidlo, 2003). Leach-Lopez (2007) points out that if an organization wants to achieve a high level of employee performance, it will depend on two factors: employee skills and cooperation between colleagues in the same organization. In Vietnam, Nguyen and Nguyen (2011) argue that job performance is the amount of work completed assessed on the quality of work and the time to perform the job. Job performance can be quantified by productivity and attitude to completing work comparing to the assigned plan. Rodwell *et al.* (1998), Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002), and Tran (2005) measure job performance by the employees' self-assessment, and they consider those results to be completely consistent with the managers' assessment.

## **2.2 Hypotheses development**

### *2.2.1 Big Five personality traits and positivity at work*

Liao and Lee (2009) state that work positivity is affected by the Big Five model of personality. However, neuroticism has an inverse effect on positivity at work. Nguyen (2015) concludes that extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness have a positive correlation to work positivity. In contrast, neuroticism has a negative relationship with positivity, and agreeableness has no significance. The study of Judge *et al.* (1999) indicates that personality traits affect job success, with conscientious people having a higher chance of success at work than neurotic ones. Smithikrai (2007) argues that extroverts have a great chance to succeed at work, especially those requiring communication and diplomacy. He believes that neurotic people will find it hard to succeed at work. Judge *et al.* (2002) show that agreeable people are more likely to succeed at work related to teamwork or customer service because they have good relationships in the workplace. Hence, an employee, who succeeds at work, shows a positive attitude towards his job. Stewart and Nandkeolyar (2006) argue that people with an openness to experience will actively participate in work because they want to learn, discover, and experience new things or find a way to rationally solve a problem. From this point, we put forward the hypotheses as follows:

*H1.1: Openness to experience has a positive impact on positivity at work.*

*H1.2: Conscientiousness has a positive impact on positivity at work.*

*H1.3: Extraversion has a positive impact on positivity at work.*

*H1.4: Agreeableness has a positive impact on positivity at work.*

*H1.5: Neuroticism has an inverse impact on positivity at work.*

### 2.2.2 Big Five personality traits and job performance

Bhatti *et al.* (2014) and Rashid *et al.* (2016) argue that employee performance is significantly affected by their personality, which could be analyzed using the Big Five model (Ghani *et al.*, 2016). They indicate that conscientiousness has the most impact, and openness to experience has the weakest effect on job performance. At the same time, it is proposed that emotional stability does not affect job performance. In Vietnam, Nguyen and Nguyen (2011) also concur that employee performance would be moderately affected by the personality traits, approached by the Big Five model. Tran (2019) agrees with Nguyen and Nguyen (2011). He argues that extraversion has the highest association, followed by agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, while openness to experience has the lowest association. We put forward the hypotheses as follows:

*H2.1: Openness to experience has a positive impact on job performance.*

*H2.2: Conscientiousness has a positive impact on job performance.*

*H2.3: Extraversion has a positive impact on job performance.*

*H2.4: Agreeableness has a positive impact on job performance.*

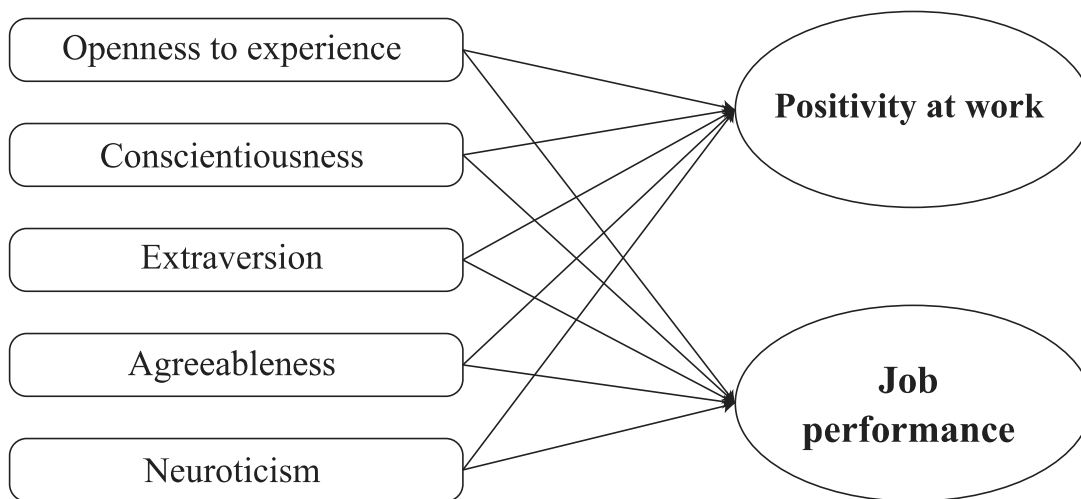
*H2.5: Neuroticism has an inverse impact on job performance.*

### 2.2.3 Positivity at work and job performance

Many scholars consider studying the link between work positivity and employee performance a fascinating topic. Brown (1996) and Mohsan *et al.* (2011) claim that work positivity significantly impacts work motivation and creates an effect on job performance. It means that employee motivation and work effort act as mediators in the relationship between work positivity and job performance. Brown and Leigh (1996) agree with this opinion. However, their study found a direct connection between work positivity and employees' job performance. Positivity at work is a determining factor in job performance and affects organizational performance. Job performance is consistent with activities that require meeting specific requirements and responsibilities (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). Ahmed and Islam (2011) indicate that if employees have a high level of positivity at work, they will tend to perform work with a good sense of responsibility. This means the employees focus on their work, do not avoid, and have few delays in work. As a result, employees who have a positive attitude at work try their best to complete their tasks. Consequently, they achieve the best results. Based on this reasoning, we posit the hypothesis as follows:

*H3: Positivity at work has a positive impact on job performance.*

Hence, based on the Big Five model of personality and previous studies, the conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research model

**Source:** Authors' suggestion

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1 *The development of scales*

We build a draft scale by reviewing and adopting various studies. The Big Five model of personality includes twenty observed variables of Tran (2015). The scale of positivity at work by Kanungo (1982) contains ten proxy variables, and the job performance scale by Nguyen and Nguyen (2011) includes four proxy variables.

We conducted a qualitative study through semi-structured in-depth interviews with five researchers in the field of organizational behavior and group discussion method with 24 department heads at the district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi to confirm the fit of the scale as well as to adjust the scale, if necessary. Due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews and discussions were done through the online platforms.

The results of qualitative research indicate that the scale of constructs in the proposed research model is good-fit. Related to the Big Five personality traits model, experts and discussion participants suggest that the neuroticism element needs to change with the inverted questions of the original scale (emotional stability). More importantly, 18 of 24 heads of department concurred with four researchers when suggesting adding one item for each factor in the Big Five model of personality to make the content better in the context of public institutions.

Related to the work positivity scale, 15 of 24 heads of department and three researchers advise us to remove two observed variables because they are similar in meaning to the conscientiousness element in the Big Five personality traits model. Finally, the scale of job performance is kept the same as the original scale by Nguyen and Nguyen (2011). Furthermore, we calibrated some words to make the scale easier to understand and more suitable for the cultural background of Vietnamese public organizations. The survey items for all the variables used in the study are presented in Table 1.

### 3.2 Sampling technique

According to Hair *et al.* (2010), the minimum sample size required for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is typically 5 or 10 times the number of observed variables. This study assesses a number of 37 variables, which means the sample size should contain equal or larger than 370 samples. Applying the convenient sampling technique, 444 survey forms were sent and collected from 1st June to 31st August 2021 by emails. The respondents are state officers in district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi. By the end of the surveying period, a total of 420 valid responses were obtained, accounting to a response rate of 94.6%.

Most correspondents are male, accounting for 68.3% of total surveyed population. The majority of respondents are above 35 years old (91.4%) and have acquired higher education (94%). Furthermore, 94.5% of the respondents have five to over fifteen years of working experience, 91.9% of the total surveyed officers are married. This result coincides with the practice of Vietnamese public organizations in which most employees are male, middle-aged, experienced, and married.

## 4. Research results and discussion

### 4.1 Scale reliability measurement by Cronbach's Alpha and EFA

Table 1 indicates that the estimation results related to constructs' indicator loadings in the model in a threshold are higher than 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the observed variables are trustworthy. Our findings also reveal that the scales achieve internal consistency because Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.6, with the lowest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.781 and the highest being 0.982 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the scales are satisfactory for further analysis.

**Table 1.** Survey items and reliability for measures in the study

Abbr.	Variables	Source	Cronbach's Alpha	Items loading
<i>Agreeableness (A)</i>				
A1	You have the same opinion as your colleagues.	Tran (2015)	0.832	0.898
A2	You often collaborate with colleagues to solve all problems at work.			0.891
A3	You regularly participate in community activities.			0.883
A4	You are comfortable with people.			0.870
A5	You have faith, sympathy, and a willingness to forgive everyone.	Self-developed		0.863

**Table 1.** Survey items and reliability for measures in the study (*continued*)

Abbr.	Variables	Source	Cronbach's Alpha	Items loading
<i>Conscientiousness (C)</i>				
C1	You can start work right away.	Tran (2015)	0.867	0.889
C2	You always work with a high sense of responsibility and discipline.			0.882
C3	You usually work according to the workflow.			0.879
C4	You pay attention to every little detail in dealing with work.			0.866
C5	You are a hard worker and have the zeal to work.	Self-developed		0.852
<i>Extraversion (E)</i>				
E1	You always actively participate in group activities at the agency.	Tran (2015)	0.892	0.878
E2	You often talk and discuss with colleagues about work.			0.871
E3	You can communicate with many different types of people at the agency.			0.868
E4	You always confidently present and contribute ideas at work.			0.860
E5	You are always ready and full of energy to do the work.	Self-developed		0.855
<i>Neuroticism (N)</i>				
N1	You are not calm in solving problems at work.	Tran (2015)	0.781	0.881
N2	You often appear stressed at work.			0.876
N3	You worry and get angry in difficult situations at work.			0.872
N4	You cannot control emotions because of the pressure at work.			0.864
N5	You do not maintain firm political stuff at work.	Self-developed		0.862
<i>Openness to experience (O)</i>				
O1	You often come up with new ideas if you face hard problems.	Tran (2015)	0.821	0.880
O2	You enjoy new ideas and initiatives.			0.875
O3	You can adapt to new ideas.			0.867
O4	You like variety and complexity in your work.			0.850
O5	You are always ready to accept any change of position in the agency.	Self-developed		0.848



**Table 1.** Survey items and reliability for measures in the study (*continued*)

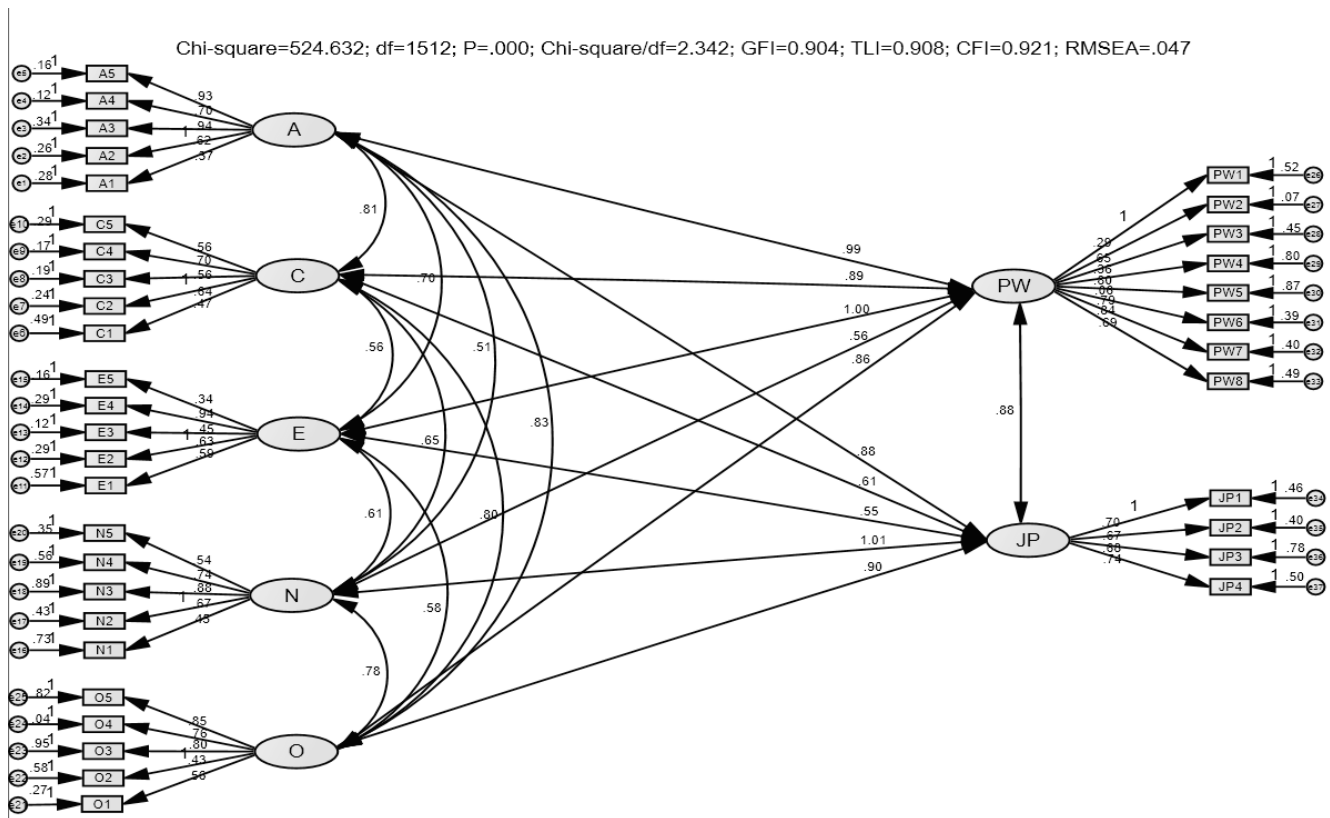
Abbr.	Variables	Source	Cronbach's Alpha	Items loading
<i>Positivity at work (PW)</i>				
PW1	You realize that important things are related to work.	Kannungo (1982), Self-developed	0.835	0.872
PW2	You realize that work holds a special place in your life.			0.869
PW3	You notice a strong connection between yourself and your work.			0.861
PW4	You find that your goals are all work-related.			0.854
PW5	You always spend all your time at work.			0.851
PW6	You are always passionate about your work.			0.847
PW7	You are always interested in all matters at work.			0.842
PW8	You find work is everything to you.			0.838
<i>Job performance (JP)</i>				
JP1	You always see yourself as an efficient person.	Nguyen and Nguyen (2011)	0.808	0.868
JP2	You are always satisfied with the results of your work.			0.860
JP3	Your superiors always see you as an effective worker.			0.850
JP4	Colleagues always rate you as an effective worker.			0.835

**Source:** Authors' calculation

The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient is 0.812, with Bartlett's test not exceeding 0.05 (0.000), and Eigenvalue is 1.421, total variance explained is 81.212% above the threshold of 50%. It proves that in the rating of 100% variation, these seven factors explain 81.212% of 37 observed items involved in the factor analysis. Thus, the scales are satisfactory for further analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

#### 4.2 The analysis of confirmatory factor

The model fit statistics for the analysis of confirmatory factor (Figure 2) is  $\chi^2/df = 2.342$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ; TLI = 0.908; GFI = 0.904; CFI = 0.921; and RMSEA = 0.047. The revision index comes out to be pointedly low, and so there is no scope for further improvement. The index  $\chi^2/df$  ratio is below the threshold of 3.0. Our TLI, GFI, and CFI, which have the values of 0.908, 0.904, and 0.921, respectively, are the best since it has to be over threshold 0.9 and RMSEA is below the threshold 0.08 for the model to be assessed as a good fit (Hair *et al.*, 2016).



**Figure 2.** Results of the analysis of confirmatory

**Source:** Authors' calculation

We found that the average variance extracted index exceeds 0.5, and the composite reliability index exceeds 0.7, as shown in Table 2. So, our findings provide evidence that the scales have convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Hence, the scales are satisfactory for the SEM analysis.

**Table 2.** Model validity measures

Constructs	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Maximum shared variance (MSV)	O	C	E	A	N	PW	JP
A	0.813	0.612	0.442	<b>0.783</b>						
C	0.834	0.554	0.456	0.623	<b>0.845</b>					
E	0.767	0.667	0.326	0.556	0.524	<b>0.778</b>				
N	0.800	0.589	0.478	0.412	0.453	0.634	<b>0.823</b>			
O	0.843	0.532	0.455	0.586	0.273	0.509	0.494	<b>0.848</b>		
PW	0.856	0.613	0.490	0.648	0.467	0.432	0.536	0.677	<b>0.812</b>	
JP	0.832	0.686	0.343	0.612	0.534	0.267	0.241	0.724	0.662	<b>0.809</b>

**Source:** Authors' calculation

### 4.3 The analysis of structural modeling

The model fit statistics for the structural equation modeling (SEM) is  $\chi^2/pdf = 2.552$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ; TLI = 0.911; GFI = 0.906; CFI = 0.925; and RMSEA = 0.053. The revision index reveals no scope for improvement. The index  $\chi^2/df$  ratio is below the threshold of 3.0. Our TLI, GFI, and CFI, which have the values of 0.911, 0.906, and 0.925, respectively, are the best since it has to be over threshold 0.9 and RMSEA is below the threshold 0.08 for the model to be assessed as good fit (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, the p-value of the correlation between the constructs is not exceeded 0.05. So, the SEM is statistically significant (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Table 3 summarizes the hypothesis test outcomes.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis test

Variables	Positivity at work			Job performance		
	Hypotheses	Direction of impact	$\beta$	Hypotheses	Direction of impact	$\beta$
A	H1.1	+	0.421*	H2.1	+	0.429**
C	H1.2	+	0.431**	H2.2	+	0.430**
E	H1.3	+	0.417**	H2.3	+	0.407*
N	H1.4	-	-0.142*	H2.4	-	-0.122**
O	H1.5	+	0.303*	H2.5	+	0.301*
PW	—	—	—	H3	+	0.449**

\*  $\beta$  with significant at 90 percent; \*\*  $\beta$  with significant at 95 percent.

**Source:** Authors' calculation

### 4.4 Discussion

The research results reveal that positivity at work and officer performance are positively affected by the facets of the Big Five model of personality. Conscientiousness has the highest impact when significant at 95 percent ( $\beta = 0.431$  and  $\beta = 0.430$ ). On the contrary, neuroticism has an inverse impact on positivity at work and job performance. If officers do not have emotional stability, they will have a hard time achieving job performance. Finally, positivity at work has a positive impact on job performance, with a standardized estimate of 0.449. If officers have positivity at work, job performance will be high. Hence, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are accepted. Our findings are in line with Liao and Lee (2009), Ghani *et al.* (2016), and Mohsan *et al.* (2011).

Our findings differ in the study context, location, and impact factors compared to Tran and Phan (2020) and Nguyen and Tran (2021) since we studied in the district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi. Moreover, we tried to unravel the facets of the Big Five model of personality, which significantly impact work positivity and officer performance. The findings are unexplored

in prior studies and it can be used to develop further research frameworks in the organizational behavior in either public or private organizations.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence to resolve some of the controversies in the literature concerning the role of the facets of the Big Five model of personality in positivity at work and job performance. The findings support the notion that personality traits provide a foundation for enhancing positivity at work and achieving job performance. In addition, positivity at work positively impacts officers' job performance at district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi.

Our findings suggest recommendations for leaders who head district-level administrative agencies in Hanoi to improve the positivity at work and job performance of officers. First, when the heads of district-level administrative agencies select officers consistent with work, we encourage them to focus on the personality traits of officers. Second, managers should organize training courses twice a year to enhance their soft skills such as time management. Third, for officers with extroverted characteristics, the heads of agencies need to organize training courses on public presentations and teamwork skills. Fourth, managers should encourage enterprising officers, which will help them upgrade their self-confidence, improving their degree of neuroticism at work.

Although this study achieved crucial results, some limitations cannot be avoided. First, our research still has a drawback because it was conducted only in Hanoi's district-level administrative agencies. Second, we employed only a convenience sampling method to collect data. Therefore, to overcome these limitations, future studies can upgrade the survey sample size or expand the research scope.

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