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The Employee's Personal Character and its Imperative in the Post-Covid-19 Pandemic World

Osobisty charakter pracownika i jego imperatyw w świecie po pandemii Covid-19

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic unquestionably affects the triple bottom line of the organizations, especially profit. Employees are the most important asset of any organization. This results from a fact that an employee who is cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally committed to their job as well as to their organization (Bulińska-Stangrecka and Iddagoda, 2020; Iddagoda and Opatha, 2020) increases the organizational financial performance (Iddagoda and Gunawardana, 2017). Many organizations consider ways for saving financial resources through employee lay-offs, especially in crisis periods (Muthusamy et al., 2018; Madagamage et al., 2018; Dewasiri and Tharangani, 2014). However, some of these initiatives naturally lead to employees' frustration and uncertainty about the future. This crisis brings new challenges

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for leaders, who also have to make new decisions. Below findings from the Harvard Business Review also reveal significance of good personnel character among the employees.

Joly (2020) writes: "During the Covid-19 crisis, I've spoken with many CEOs who have shared that a key priority for them, naturally, has been the safety and well-being of their employee. Beyond safety, they're working to ensure security as well." The author adds: "Many have worked to keep people on the payroll for as long as possible – even if that required furloughs – and increased pay for front-line workers. Some have established employee relief funds to address urgent needs. At some companies, senior executives and board of directors took pay cuts; many have provided back-up childcare solutions and fronted their workers time off to take care of loved ones."

Knight (2020) states that when laying off an employee, a leader has to be direct and human. She presents the views of two experts, Joshua Margolis, a professor at the Harvard Business School, and Kenneth Freeman, Dean Emeritus at the Questrom School of Business, Boston University. Knight writes: "Your message should be 'clear, concise, and unequivocal,' says Margolis. For instance, 'I'm sorry, but at end of next week we are terminating your job.' Imparting an 'expeditious, direct message can feel cold, but it allows the other person to process what you're saying,' he says." Then she adds: "Express gratitude for their hard work and dedication. Then offer a short and simple explanation about the economic conditions that led to the layoff. 'Stress that this is not about a specific job performance,' says Freeman. 'This is not the employee's fault. This is about a global circumstance that none of us created.' Acknowledge, too, that one of the difficult things about being laid off during this crisis is that co-workers won't get a chance to say goodbye in person. For a lot people, 'colleagues are part of their extended family.' Try to convey the message, 'We all care about you.'"

Opatha (2010) states that, as per observations, the ability of a person with good character to lead a good life, perform at any situation in an acceptable way, contribute to their own development, contribute significantly to development of their family, organization, and community, as well as to others, to the country, and even the international community is high. A committed employee is a good team player, innovative, customer oriented, talks positively about their organization during their interaction with the society, and their job performance is high (Aon, 2018; Iddagoda et al., 2016; Iddagoda and Opatha, 2017a). Iddagoda and Opatha (2017a, 2020) found that there is a theoretical

and empirical linkage between a good personal character and employee's commitment. Therefore, researchers identify an employee with a good personal character as one of solutions for the organizations to rise from this crisis. This paper first explores the construct of personal character, next an instrument for the construct of personal character is presented. The presented concepts are summed in the paper's conclusion.

Methodology

The method used in the study was desk research, mainly based on the research papers available in the databases such as Sage, Taylor and Francis Online, Springerlink, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, Emerald and articles in the Google Scholar. Several scholar books and well known dictionaries were also included. The desk research included a review of existent literature available to the authors of this study.

Personal character

The concept of "character" has been subject of discourse of many religious leaders and philosophers since ancient times. "Character", as defined in the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013), is "the qualities that make a person different from other people". According to Murphy (2002), "character" derives from the Greek word *charakter*, which means "enduring mask". Berkowitz's (2002) definition of character specifies that it is an individual's set of psychological characteristics that affect that person's ability and inclination to function morally. The term "personal character" is preferred by the author of this study, because the word "personal" indicated that it belongs to a particular person. Personal character is a combination of virtues and vices; the virtue is a good habit useful for the betterment of the world, while the vice is a bad habit harmful to the world.

A character that is maximally virtuous and without vices can be called "the highest level of the good character". Every religious leader has emphasized the benefits of a good personal character; the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad and Hindu Gods taught how everyone should attempt to develop a good personal character. According to Opatha (2010), nurturing virtues

within the person while lessening or eradicating their vices helps in the development of a good personal character.

Iddagoda and Opatha (2017b) define religiosity as the extent to which a particular employee believes in and venerates a founder, gods or goddesses of the relevant religion, practices the relevant teaching and participates in the relevant activities. Religiosity involves one's being religious earnestly and truly, rather than being religious frivolously and nominally. Although personal character and religiosity are two different aspects, certain similarities are observed between these two constructs. As Opatha (2010) states, a good personal character possesses high levels of virtues. Most of the European countries are less religious; Truss et al. (2013) state, citing Gallup survey on religiosity (Crabtree, 2010), that level of religiosity in Sweden is low. Nevertheless, the researcher observes that regardless of people being agnostic or atheist, the virtues such as honesty and loyalty are still valued, as they represent a good personal character.

The personal character is a combination of virtues and vices; the virtue is a good habit useful for the betterment of the world, while the vice is a bad habit harmful to the world. Development of a good personal character involves nurturing virtues while eradicating vices; the latter requires a sound understanding of the vices. However, vices have been paid less attention in most of the literature. Adams (2006) states that, as goodness is more fundamental than badness, priority should be given to the virtues over the vices. The researcher of this study is of the view that a person should be conscious not only about the virtues, but also about the vices, as to eradicate badness, it is important to know what badness is, for no one can eradicate something they are not properly aware of. Opatha (2010) defines personal character as person's moral attributes. It is the nature of their moral qualities or characteristics. It is a degree of their morality and immorality. A good character is moral and civil, and a bad character is immoral or uncivil. The definition given by Opatha (2010) has been utilized as it emphasizes both the good character and the bad character. In classical interpretation of pedagogy, the way to achieve this state is to form a moral character (or simply character), which may be understood as an evaluation of an individual's moral virtues (Nowakowski, 2015). These concepts and definitions are not inconsistent with each other. When developing the instrument for measurements of the construct of the personal character the researcher of this study has provided a definition of

the personal character. The personal character is the person's strength or skill to contemplate the importance of having a high level of virtues in their life while eradicating the vices or badness. This definition serves as the working definition for this study.

Towards an instrument of a personal character

The character, as Berkowitz (2002) states, encompasses the features that lead an individual to do or not to do the right thing. Explaining Aristotle's views on the character, Murphy (2002) explains that "each man speaks and acts and lives in accordance with his character"; the virtue of a man will be "the state of character which makes him good and makes him do his own work well". One's personal character is measured by a degree of a person's virtues and vices; their ability to develop improve virtues while ironing out vices. When operationalizing the construct of the personal character, two dimensions of the personal character are identified, i.e. virtues and vices.

According to Solomon (1999), the virtue is an essential aspect of an individual, which provides the conceptual linkage between an individual and their society. McCullough and Snyder (2000), as cited in Shryack et al. (2010), define that the virtue is "any psychological process that enables a person to think and act so as to benefit him or her and society". Virtues are a set of moral principles universally accepted and they do not vary according to race, nationality, religion, culture or any other classification. On the contrary, values are not universal beliefs or ideals and may depend on the race, nationality, religion, culture or any other classification (Opatha, 2010).

Opatha (2010) states that "In order to excel in a particular field, country or organization a person must possess a good personal character, in addition to the enhancement of technical competence relevant to the particular field. A good personal character is of utmost importance." The author further explains that "absence of virtues results in the absence of a good personal character. Possession of virtues contributes to a good personal character, which leads to good personal quality. Good qualities or habits which do not harm a person are 'virtues'. These are advantageous and favourable for self-development, others' development and institutional development."

Barford (2019) points out that that establishing and developing virtues is the acquisition and enhancement of certain habits over time. González (2019)

states that virtues are widely recognized in society, as it already happens for lifelong learning. Hart et al. (2019) divulge the availability of set of virtues by several researchers. The virtues that Shryack et al. (2010) used in their research are, namely, wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence, which were originally adapted by from Peterson and Seligman (2004). Szutta (2020) identified benevolence, honesty and justice as their virtues set. Keppetipola and Dharmasiri (2020) provide a set of military virtues, i.e. loyalty, courage, respect, self-discipline, patience and caring. Their study is more focused on virtues in the military context.

The set of virtues Opatha (2010) provides includes honesty, patience, gratitude, humility, respect, benevolence, tolerance, self-discipline, caring, and loyalty, which the researcher of this study also selected, as it covers a broad area. The set of virtues provided by Opatha (2010) is considered elemental in the dimension of "virtues" when operationalizing the construct of personal character.

The quality of being frank is identified as being honest, which involves being free of deceit or fraud. The term "honest" is defined in the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) as "truthful and sincere". Zagzebski (1998) explains that an honest person always cares for the truth. Opatha (2010) mentions that "openness", "sincerity", "directness" and "being candid" are synonymous with "honesty".

Patience, according to DeMarco (1996), makes a person flexible so that they find worthwhile pursuits in an absence of other opportunities. As DeMarco states, patience allows us to bear foolishness without being angry and endure tedium without being bored. According to Opatha (2010), patience is person's ability to accept unpleasant, difficult or upsetting things, situations or persons bravely, and deal with them mentally and physically.

Gratitude, defined in the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) is a "feeling of being grateful". DeMarco (1996) identifies gratitude as the easiest of all virtues, mentioning how saying "thank you" in return for a favour incur no costs; one of the best bargains we will ever get. Stating that gratitude correlates with spirituality and religiousness, Peterson and Seligman (2004) further emphasise that those who are regular with religious services and religious activities, such as reading religious material or prayer, are likely to be more grateful. The researcher of this study maintains a similar view. Religious leaders taught the quality of gratitude and its importance to their followers. For instance, the Buddha's gazing at the Bodhi Tree (pipal tree: *ficus religiosa*)

was offering gratitude for the shelter it had given him; the Buddha showed to the entire world the virtue of gratitude by his example.

The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) defines humility as the "quality of being humble", with "humble" defined as "having or showing a modest or low opinion of one's own importance." A humble person is not driven by pride in their achievements. As Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified, religious figures, such as Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Moses and Saint Paul, taught the importance of this virtue to the world. At once instance, Jesus Christ washed his disciple's feet, showing the world the practice of humility. In Opatha's (2010) opinion, humility is an acknowledgement that an achievement resulted from the involvement of others.

The virtue of respect involves admiring a person or thing with good qualities such as ideas, achievements or contributions, organizations, nation and even the world. According to Opatha (2010), a person may respect things as well; religion (religious teachings), sacred religious records (scriptures), books used for education, schools (alma maters) and universities, a status of religious leaders and very important contributors, monumental buildings and sculptures of a particular culture and history, a national flag, an anthem, a national tree, a national flower, etc. and other physical and natural entities which were immensely useful for person's development. Nowakowski (2018) emphasises the importance of demonstrating mutual respect in professional contacts as well.

The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) defines "benevolent" as "well-meaning and kindly". "Benevolence", according to Opatha (2010), is kindness and helpfulness. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka stated that "Man's prime duty is to serve Mankind". All societies have accepted that to serve the mankind is a good human quality, and the researcher believes that a person should be kind not only to humans, but also to animals.

Tolerance is a great virtue, similarly as patience, which according to the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) means "the ability to accept things you dislike or disagree with". Opatha (2010) describes tolerance as allowing others to think of and/or do things which are not acceptable to them. People are different due to various reasons; religion, cast, nationality, age, gender, ethnicity, values, interests, hobbies, etc., character development and personalities and views. Hence, tolerance is the only successful way to live with people that differ from us.

Self-discipline is accepting right things and rejecting those that are wrong (Bennett, 1997). Enhancing self-discipline, according to Opatha (2010), includes consciously respecting and abiding by the rules and regulations, with no direction or supervision of another person. Consistent adherence to rules and regulations helps in building and enhancing self-discipline. There is no need for a self-disciplined person to be forced, asked or ordered to follow the rules and regulations.

"Caring" is offering love and attention to living and non-living things that matter to a person. Caring involves spending time, energy, money, and other resources. For this reason, caring itself is considered an important virtue.

Healy (2013) mentions that a particular person can be loyal to different things; including families, friends, favourite sports teams, or favourite shops. According to Healy, what is particular about loyalty is the belief of a person that they have a connection with a particular object. Keller (2007) states that when a person is loyal, what they are loyal to has an effect on their actions, and that their loyalty is shown by following orders, promoting and prioritizing the interests of that object over other potential choices.

Table 1. Statements to measure virtues

Virtue	Statement
Honesty	I am not a person who lies and breaks promises.
Patience	I can manage a thing or situation, which others would find annoying, without getting annoyed.
Gratitude	I have made a significant contribution to help every person who have helped me earlier, without the intension of receiving any form of appreciation or recognition for being grateful.
Humility	There are certain people who have contributed to or worked for my achievements and success.
Respect	I respect anyone who made a significant contribution to the development, and I respect the things one should respect e.g., a national flag.
Benevolence	I do things that have a positive impact on others' lives without expecting any help/benefit in return.
Tolerance	I tolerate differences among other people, despite the actual disagreements I have when dealing with them.
Self-discipline	I accept and follow the rules and regulations which I believe to be right, without being compelled by anybody.
Caring	I treat my loved ones with great attention and thought.

Loyalty	I make a priority of and have a strong sense of support and commitment to my country, my organization and my family, and I am willing to sacrifice on behalf of them.

Bad states of a moral character, as Adams (2006) explains, are identified as vices, meaning traits that count against the overall excellence of a person. Opatha (2010) states that the vices are bad qualities or habits which impede the development of a person or an institution. Therefore, a person influenced by vices possesses a bad personal character. The vices recognised by Opatha include jealousy, deception, desire for others' things, greed, selfishness, anger, hostility, reprobation and retaliation. The vices identified by Opatha are the elements for the dimension called vices.

The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) defines "jealousy" as being "envious of someone else's achievements or advantages", which Bauminger-Zviely (2013) recognizes as an unpleasant social emotion. Opatha (2010) states that inferiority complex generated as a result of a comparing another's achievements or development with own relative decline is the main cause of jealousy. Explaining this idea, Opatha states that jealousy is caused by the understanding that one's development is less advanced when compared to another person, together with a feeling that own development is insignificant.

The description of "deception" in the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013) is "deceiving someone into believing something that is not true". In Carson's (2010) view, "deception" is intentionally causing someone to have false beliefs, which, according to Opatha (2010), prompt a person to make others believe something is untrue, not happening or impossible to happen in reality; a person with no qualifications pretending to be a well-educated is one example here. People deceive other for a gain; profit or, sometimes, recognition.

Signs of the vice of desire for others' possessions include a situation when a person suffering from this vice does not recognise their value while craving for what others have, even when possessions of that person are more valuable than that of the others. As a result, that person may struggle to gain things that they do not possess. Greed, as Schweiker (2004) maintains, is the rapacious desire for more goods or wealth than one needs or deserves, and a person driven by greed is often in need of more as long as they get more. The desires for material things become a massive internal vice.

When a person cares only for themselves and not for others, they are called "selfish". Similarly, a person who cares for other people's needs and interests over their own, is called selfless or unselfish. "Unselfish", as Buss (2005) defines,

is "an individual refraining from fostering one's own interests at the expense of the interests of others."

According to DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (1994), anger is an internal mental state and a subjective feeling, associated with cognitions and physiological arousal patterns; an impolite and destructive vice generated within a person. Long term continuous and frequent anger is called "hostility" or "fury", which is also identified as Repeated Severe Anger. Reprobation is also known as "curse" and "imprecation", and when a person curses another, the intention is to cause harm to that particular person. Teachings of many religions state that curses directed at another person reflect on their originator. Retaliation, which is understood as "making an attack in return for a similar attack" according to the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (Waite, 2013), is reprisal or taking a revenge for unpleasant experiences, and an angry person arranges for another equally unpleasant events, with the intent of them to have the same unpleasant experiences.

Nine elements belonging to the dimension of "vices" have been identified; jealousy, deception, desire for others' things, greed, selfishness, anger, hostility, reprobation and retaliation. The statements used to measure these elements are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Statements to measure vices

Vice	Statement
Jealousy	Generally, when comparing, I do not feel negative about the persons who are higher or greater than me.
Deception	I do not make others believe something that is not true.
Desire for others' things	I have never had a desire to acquire a thing that does not belong to me
Greed	I do not have a habit of acquiring things unnecessarily or more than it is needed.
Selfishness	I usually think about others and their interests, rather than thinking about myself only.
Anger	I am not annoyed or made angry by the things that make other people annoyed or angry
Hostility	I never keep thinking about events that angered me for a long period of time.
Reprobation	I do not curse a person who did something wrong to me.
Retaliation	When someone makes me angry or annoyed, I do not think about inflicting the same feeling/s upon that person.

Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions and elements of the variable aspects of the personal character. Letter "D" stands for a dimension and "E" for an element of the variable of the personal character.

Figure 1. Dimensions and elements of the variable of the personal character

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │  Personal character │
                        └─────────────────────┘
         (D)                                              (D)
   ┌──────────────┐                          ┌──────────────┐
   │   Virtues    │                          │    Vices     │
   └──────────────┘                          └──────────────┘

 (E)                                        (E)
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │   Honesty    │                           │   Jealousy   │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │   Patience   │                           │  Deception   │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────────────┐
    │   Gratitude  │                           │ Desire for others' things │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │   Humility   │                           │    Greed     │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │   Respect    │                           │  Selfishness │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │  Benevolence │                           │    Anger     │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │   Tolerance  │                           │   Hostility  │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │Self-discipline│                          │  Reprobation │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                           ┌──────────────┐
    │    Caring    │                           │  Retaliation │
    └──────────────┘                           └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐
    │    Loyalty   │
    └──────────────┘
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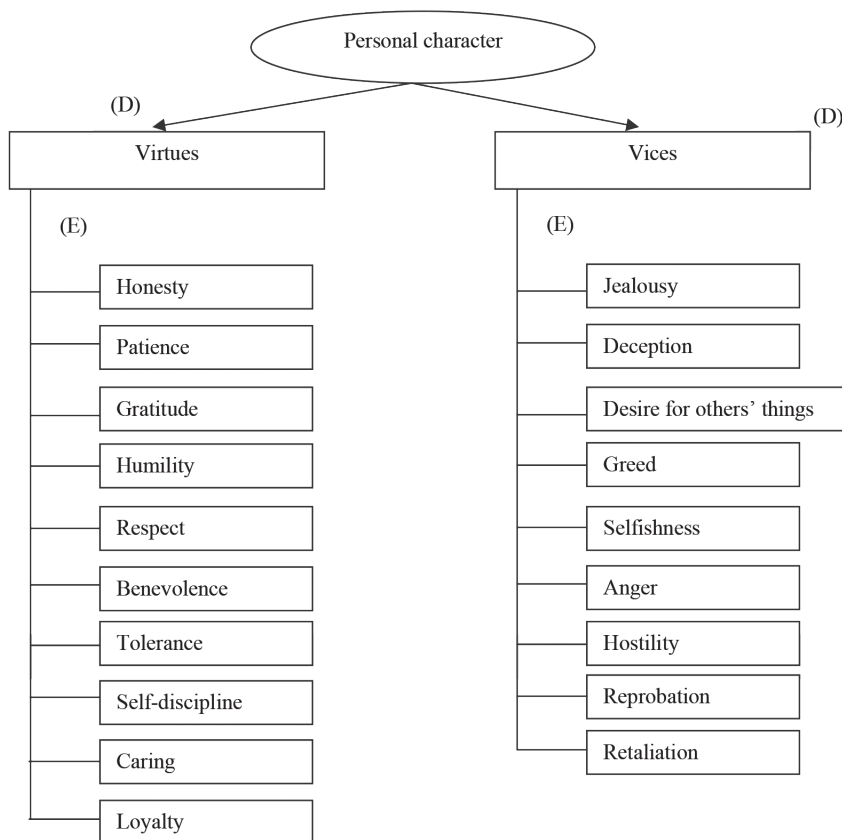
Conclusion

In the post-Covid-19 pandemic world an employee with high level of virtues, i.e., a person with good personal character, is needed more than ever. As an old saying has it, "you cannot pour from an empty cup". Therefore, first the leader should have a good personal character. Then they unquestionably become an example for their subordinates. The personal character is a

combination of virtues and vices; the virtue is a good habit useful for the betterment of the world while the vice is a bad habit harmful to the world. The personal character is the person's strength or skill to contemplate the importance of having a high level of virtues in their life, while eradicating the vices or badness is the definition presented by the researcher of this study. A questionnaire containing nineteen statements was developed to measure the construct of personal character. Virtues and vices are the identified dimensions when operationalizing the construct of the personal character.

Abstract: It is a known fact that all organizations, other than philanthropic ones, are concerned about increasing their financial performance. The Covid-19 pandemic indisputably affects the organizations' triple bottom line, especially profit. Hence, it is essential to make plans for the post-Covid-19 pandemic world. Consequently, one solution is to pay more attention to the increase in the level of advantageous personal character traits among the employees. The personal character is a blend of virtues and vices. The highest level of virtues will enrich the level of the advantageous personal character traits. The aim of this paper was to provide a definition of the personal character and to present an instrument for the construct of the personal character. The importance of having a good personal character is also addressed as a part of this study.

Keywords: personal character, employee, post-Covid-19 world, virtues, vices

Streszczenie: Powszechnie wiadomo, że wszystkie organizacje, niebędące organizacjami filantropijnymi, troszczą się o zwiększenie swoich wyników finansowych. Pandemia Covid-19 bez wątpienia wpływa na trzy filary organizacji, zwłaszcza na zysk. Zatem istotne znaczenie ma przygotowanie planów na potrzeby świata po pandemii Covid-19. W konsekwencji, jednym z rozwiązań jest zwrócenie większej uwagi na podnoszenie poziomu pozytywnych cech charakteru wśród pracowników. Osobisty charakter stanowi mieszankę zalet i wad. Najwyższy poziom zalet wzbogaca poziom korzystnych cech osobistego charakteru. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie definicji osobistego charakteru oraz przedstawienie instrumentu dla konstruktu osobistego charakteru. W ramach badania zajęto się również istotnym znaczeniem posiadania dobrego charakteru osobistego.

Słowa kluczowe: charakter osobisty, pracownik, świat po Covid-19, zalety, wady

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