The role of personality on resilience-moderated work stress in employees

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the entire business industry. Various companies are facing the post-pandemic situation and are trying to make adjustments to the current situation. The adjustments made by these companies create an impact on employees and lead to work stress for them. This study aims to examine the moderating effect of resilience on the relationship between personality and employee work stress. The results of previous research found inconsistencies in the results of the correlation between personality and employee work stress. Resilience, which can buffer the effects of work stress, is used as a moderating variable. The number of respondents who were actively involved was 499, who were employees aged 22–40 years and worked in various business sectors. All respondents have filled out three measurement scales: the personality scale, the work stress scale, and the resilience scale. Data collection was carried out using Google Forms. This study conducted a moderation analysis using the Hayes model 1 macro process to test the research model. Study findings show that the role of resilience moderates the relationship between personality and employee work stress (p = 0.007). The findings also show that resilience will be able to reduce work stress felt by individuals. Resilience is a component that can protect individuals from the impact of work stress. Companies need to provide assistance to improve their employees' resilience skills to reduce the daily effects of work stress.

Keywords

Personality, resilience, work stress

Introduction

Indonesia, as one of the countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, is currently in the post-pandemic process. The post-pandemic process is often called the "new normal" by the Indonesian government (Olivia & Maullana, 2023). In this situation, various companies are setting out to recover in terms of their productivity and economy. Employees who are part of the company are inevitably affected by this process. They are required to carry out work processes online from where they reside. In this online-work situation, there are challenges felt by the workers, such as the availability of work facilities, modifications of working hours, changes in workload, and the availability of places to work from home (Rosalina, 2020). A survey by Champion Health shows that, by 2023, as many as 76% of employees feel moderate and high levels of stress at work (Bliss, 2023). This figure increased by 13% compared to the survey result in the previous year. Of all participants, it was found that 35% of the employees felt that the stress they experienced had a negative effect on them. Survey results from Champion Health revealed that there are various factors that cause work stress in employees, and workload is the primary cause of stress in employees. Other research conducted on 2 age generations (Gen Z and Millennials) pointed out that 45% of respondents from each generation feel stress at work every day (Syafei et al., 2023). The results of an examination by the Association of Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialists (PDSKJI) on mental health self-examination participants found that 68% of the respondents experienced psychological problems during the pandemic (CNN Indonesia, 2020). These psychological problems include problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression. The individuals most commonly found to experience this problem are those under 30 years of age. Another study that looked at the level of work stress and anxiety in three generations (Gen X, Gen Y/Millennials, and Gen Z) in Indonesia found that 55.6% of Gen X respondents, 66.9% of Gen T respondents, and 68.3% of Gen Z respondents experience stress and anxiety related to their work life (Alvara, 2022).

Work stress can be defined as a process in which psychological experiences and demands (stressors) produce short-term and long-term changes in an employee's mental and physical health (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Work stress at a certain level can have a positive impact in the form of innovation in employees (Albort-Morant et al., 2020). Employees can be stimulated and feel challenged to innovate in facing various challenges and hurdles in their daily work. In addition to innovation, work stress can also play a role in improving employee performance (Hargrove et al., 2015). These challenges can motivate employees to achieve personal

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targets and development. However, oftentimes, individuals do not only feel work stress at a certain level, but also high and continuous work stress. When individuals are faced with continuous work stress, its impact on each individual may become negative, and work stress can actually reduce employee performance (Chen et al., 2022). In pandemic and post-pandemic situations, employees are faced with changes in their work, both in work systems, workload, and various other things. These changes result in protracted work stress for employees, which ultimately leads to a decline in employee performance. Not only that, but work stress can also affect an individual's well-being (Mensah, 2021). Excessive work stress will have an impact on the mental condition of every employee which will grow worse, and this will compound the situation faced by individuals, both at work and outside of work.

The work stress felt by individuals stems from stressors. Stressors can either be internal or external to the individual (Bhui et al., 2016). External factors are factors from the environment, while internal factors from individuals are each individual's subjective assessment of what they do and of their environment. One of the elements that builds this internal assessment is the personality of each individual. Personality can be defined as a collection of related patterns of thinking, emotions, and behavior that are influenced by biological and environmental factors (Corr & Matthews, 2020). Each individual's personality is generally stable, but it can change in the face of significant changes in their life (Bleidorn et al., 2022).

According to literature, personality consists of 5 dimensions: openness to experience, which describes an individual's tendency when facing new and different ideas, experiences, and various things; conscientiousness, which is an individual's tendency to be disciplined, responsible, and determined to achieve success when faced with expectations from their environment; extraversion, which is the individual's tendency to undertake various activities and to receive positive emotions from activities with other people and energy from outside oneself; agreeableness, which is the individual's tendency to achieve social harmony in diverse settings; emotional stability, which is the individual's tendency to express stable emotions when faced with various situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

One study showed that personality has a relationship with work stress (Burgess et al., 2010). Openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion negatively correlated with work stress, while neuroticism positively correlated with work stress. Personality dimensions that negatively correlate with work stress may act as a protective factor, where the higher the score on this personality dimension, the lower the work stress experienced by the individual. Conversely, personality dimensions that positively correlate with work stress will be supporting factors for work stress. Other research shows that the majority of personality dimensions have a relationship with work stress (Ebstrup et al., 2011). Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion negatively correlated with work stress; neuroticism positively correlated with work; openness to experience does not at all correlated with work stress. The two studies demonstrated differences in the dimensions of openness to experience, which positively correlated with work stress in one study, but did not correlate at all when carried out in a different study. Moreover, there are also other studies suggesting that there is no relationship between personality and work stress (Kheirkhah et al., 2018). Based on these studies, there remain inconsistencies in the relationship between personality and work stress experienced by employees. This inconsistency can be considered evidence indicating that there are other components that influence the relationship between personality and work stress experienced by employees.

The different personalities of individuals can render perception and stress to be varying. Work stress that arises from work will be difficult to change. The post-pandemic situation necessitates various organizations/companies to move on from their downturn and continue to strive for the success that occurred pre-pandemic. This will certainly require employees to take on more responsibilities than during the pandemic. Therefore, each individual must be able to adapt to different amounts of responsibility, and one thing that can help in the process of adaptation is resilience that each individual has (Dogra, 2023).

Resilience can be defined as an individual's ability to face challenges/difficulties (Connor et al., 2003). Studies conducted in Turkey and China suggested that there was a significant, negative relationship between resilience and the stress experienced during COVID-19-19 (Hao et al., 2015; Shi *et al.*, 2015). Resilience is considered a buffer against the effects of individual work stress (Murat & Fatma, 2022). Similar findings were also identified, arguing that resilience can reduce the effects that arise on individual work stress (Lian & Tam, 2014). Individuals possessing high resilience will be able to better adapt and face stressful conditions at work, be it demands from their work and demands that transpire from their work environment (Shatté et al., 2017). Some of these findings note that resilience can relieve the impact arising from work stress because people who are resilient will be able to be more adaptable and able to come up with solutions to address the challenges they face (Dogra, 2023).

Citing other research that shares relevance with this research, there is one study that looks into the relationship between personality and anxiety levels, which was mediated by resilience, in medical students in China (Shi *et al.*, 2015). The study stated that it was important to develop resilience in individuals to achieve a situation that is more effective in dealing with anxiety to prevent excessive stress. Resilience is also considered to be a protective factor for each individual to be adaptive in the face of high-stress situations, such as those that occurred during the pandemic (Kocjan et al., 2020). The study also found that resilience positively correlated with overall personality, and both variables negatively correlated with individual stress.

A study by Gong *et al.* (2020) investigated the moderation of resilience in the relationship between personality and depressive symptoms. In that study, resilience was able to moderate the relationship between neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness aspects and depressive symptoms. Another study found that resilience was also able to moderate the relationship between personality and parenting stress (Claudia et al., 2022). Resilient people tend to have high levels of positive emotions (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Resilient people also demonstrate awareness of their abilities (Neenan, 2018). Additionally, resilient people will

have clear goals and can focus on what they want to achieve (Southwick & Charney, 2012). People who possess high resilience will understand what to do and be able to adapt to situations that come across as challenging and difficult to face. A high level of individual resilience will play a role in reinforcing the relationship between personality and work stress faced by individuals by strengthening positive emotions that manifest within the individual, both in high and low personality scores (Gong et al., 2020). Individuals with a high level of resilience tend to have a higher moderating effect than those with a low level of resilience because there are fewer positive emotions.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to observe the relationship between three variables, i.e., work stress, personality, and resilience. A previous study has looked into the relationship between personality, resilience, and stress in the context of caregiving stress (Claudia et al., 2022) and stress as a depressive symptom (Gong et al., 2020). This study offers novelty by attempting to explore stress in the context of employee work stress. Work stress felt by employees was included as a research variable to analyze the phenomenon in which the level of work stress for each age generation in Indonesia (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers) reached 40%, and the highest was 52% for Gen Z Mercer (2023). This figure is already relatively high, and prolonged stress conditions in employees will pose negative impacts on them and, eventually, the company. The aims of this study are: (1) to determine the relationship between personality and employee work stress, and (2) to determine the moderating role of resilience in the relationship between personality and work stress.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 499 active employees working in various companies in Indonesia. Data collection from the participants was carried out using non-probability sampling, which is a data collection process in which the researcher does not know the total number and list of members who are included in the target participant population. The type of sampling used was convenience sampling, where the research samples chosen are those who are easily accessible to the researcher. The majority of the participants here, which accounted for 283 people (56.7%), were women, and the remainder were male participants (43.7%). The majority of participants were 438 participants (87.8%) aged $\leqslant$ 30 years, and the remainder were participants aged > 30 years (12.2%). Data collection was carried out using an online survey distributed via various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Line, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Before filling in the information and questionnaire, the participants were asked to fill in informed consent beforehand as a written agreement to take part in the study.

Research Instruments

In this study, three measuring instruments were used. The first one was the measuring tool for work stress, which used the Job Stress Scale adapted from previous research (Lambert et al., 2006). The Job Stress Scale is a unidimensional measuring instrument. The context of work stress in this measuring instrument is the individual's response to the work situation. The Job Stress Scale consists of 5 statement items, a Likert scale with a value ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates higher individual job stress. The reliability value of this measuring instrument is 0.82.

Secondly, the measuring tool for personality uses the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) Indonesian Scale (Akhtar, 2018). TIPI is a multidimensional measuring tool and is based on the Big 5 Personality theory. There are five dimensions to this measuring tool: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability. The TIPI measuring tool consists of 10 statement items. The research scale uses a Likert scale with a value range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates the suitability between the individual's personality and the aspect being measured. The reliability value of this measuring instrument is 0.77.

Third, the measuring tool for resilience uses the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) 10, which was adapted from a previous study (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). CD-RISC 10 is a multidimensional measuring tool. There are 2 dimensions to this measuring instrument, which are hardiness and persistence. The CD-RISC 10 measuring tool consists of 10 statement items. The research scale uses a Likert scale with a value range from 1 (very unsuitable) to 5 (very suitable). A higher score indicates higher levels of individual resilience. The reliability value of the measuring instrument is 0.85.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used in this study was moderation analysis using Hayes Process Macro model 1. The software used in this process was SPSS version 26. This technical analysis was used to examine the relationship between two variables, i.e., the predictor (independent) variable and the response (dependent) variable, and how the role of moderating variables strengthens or weakens the relationship between predictor and response variables. In this study, the predictor variable is personality, the response variable is work stress, and the moderating variable is resilience. In other words, this study attempts to see the role of resilience in strengthening or weakening the relationship between personality and work stress. In the Hayes Process Macro model 1 process, no assumption tests needed to be carried out (Hayes, 2013).

Result

Based on Table 1, the results show that personality and work stress are significantly correlated (p = 0.0028). The direction of the relationship between these two variables is negative (coefficient: -0.1766). This means that when the personality score increases, the work stress score will decrease, and vice versa.

Moreover, Table 1 also points out that resilience is able to moderate the relationship between personality and work stress (p = 0.007). The direction of the interaction relationship is positive (coefficient: 0.0001). This means resilience will be able to strengthen the relationship between personality and work stress.

Table 1. Hypothesis testing of the relationship between personality and job stress and the moderating effect of resilience

Variable	Coefficient	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Work Stress	10.73	54.40	0.000	10.40	11.05
Personality * Work Stress	−0.18	−3.05	0.003	−0.27	−0.08
Resilience * Work Stress	0.00	−2.25	0.025	0.00	0.00
Interaction (M * Work Stress)	0.00	2.69	0.007	0.00	0.00

Discussion

The aim of this study is to observe the moderating role of resilience in the relationship between personality and work stress. From the study findings, it was found that personality has a significant relationship with work stress. Previous research suggests that personality negatively correlates with employee work stress—the higher a person's personality score, the lower their work stress (Burgess et al., 2010). Someone who has a high score on each personality dimension, i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience tends to experience lower work stress in their work (Ebstrup et al., 2011). People who have high extraversion will be calmer and show more enthusiasm in interacting with other people in their place of work, and this will minimize the stress they potentially experience. Those demonstrating high openness to experience are better able to regulate stress that arises from new things occurring in their office because of their tendency to like new things (Williams et al., 2009). Employees with high conscientiousness organize their work schedules well and experience lower work stress (Ebstrup et al., 2011). Individuals possessing high scores for each aspect of their personality can be more accepting of things that take place at work and prepare themselves to face them. This tendency will protect employees from the effects of stress or burnout due to their work (Angelini, 2023).

Furthermore, based on the study results, resilience is able to moderate the relationship between personality and work stress. The level of individual resilience will play a role in strengthening the relationship between personality and work stress faced by individuals by reinforcing positive emotions that emerge from within individuals, both in high and low personality scores (Gong et al., 2020). Positive emotions that arise when people become resilient include being cooperative, responsible, and determined (Eley et al., 2013). Previous research concluded that resilience negatively correlated with work stress (Hao et al., 2015), and people who were resilient would experience fewer effects of work stress (Murat & Fatma, 2022).

From the study results, the moderation effect was only significant when the level of resilience was low or moderate. When resilience is high, the moderating effect that appears does not seem to be significant. These results are different from the results obtained in other studies, which show that the moderating effect is significant at all levels of resilience (Gong et al., 2020). The results of this study show that when the resilience score is high, there is no moderating effect of resilience in the relationship between personality and work stress. What may be a factor in this difference is the resilience measuring tool used. In this study, the measuring tool used was CD-RISC 10, which is a shortened version of the CD-RISC 25 resilience measuring tool used in other previous studies. This can influence individual resilience outcomes and the resulting moderation effect. Additionally, upon looking at the research data, work stress shows the lowest level when personality and resilience scores are both high. This can also indicate that when the resilience score is high, the moderation effect that appears is no longer significant, but resilience is still associated with a decrease in work stress scores.

The results of this study revealed that there is a moderating effect of resilience in the relationship between personality and work stress, which reinforces the negative relationship between the two variables. Personality is an element that can protect individuals from work stress, but personality tends to be stable and does not change much over time (Harris et al., 2016). This study also found that resilience can protect individuals from work stress, and this is in accordance with the results of other past studies arguing that resilience can alleviate the effects that arise on individual work stress (Lian & Tam, 2014). Unlike personality, resilience is something that can be trained (Riopel, 2019). Training resilience in individuals therefore proves essential considering the positive impact it offers on individual work stress levels. Resilience is one of the abilities that helps the coping process in individuals (Sampogna et al., 2021). People who demonstrate high resilience also tend to have a positive form of coping in dealing with various life problems (Wu et al., 2020). Resilience training for individuals must be taken into account by companies as it will help employees develop more positive coping skills and lower levels of work stress.

When viewed from a cultural context, the work stress felt by individuals relatively shows a difference across generations. This finding is confirmed by a study showing data in which, globally, 46% of Gen X, 46% of Millennials, and 52% of Gen Z suffer from work stress (Mercer, 2023). This research is further corroborated by data stating that work stress in generations X, Y, and Z is different, where 55.6% of Gen X respondents, 66.9% of Gen Y respondents, and 68.3% of Gen Z respondents experience work stress (Alvara, 2022). This difference in stress levels is also supported by research in America, which found individuals from Asia felt the highest levels of stress (Miller et al., 2011). Other studies in America also found that individuals from Southeast Asia felt higher stress compared to individuals from South Asia and East Asia (Misra et al., 2020). The negative stigma that comes with being a minority group and adjusting to American culture are some of the things that cause the most problems for individuals from Asia. In terms of age generation, Gen Z is the individual who feels the highest level of work stress globally (Mercer, 2023). This is in line with the results of a study conducted in Indonesia, which revealed that the highest level of work stress was felt by Gen Z (Alvara, 2022). This data regarding stress suggests that companies must pay attention to the stress-related conditions of their employees, especially

employees who fall into the Gen Z category. Resilience training for individuals can be undertaken by companies for all employees to minimize the negative impacts of stress.

Although the findings of this study can offer insights into the field of science, this study still has several limitations. The first limitation relates to the participant population, as the authors did not control the proportion of employees from each business industry. This resulted in the number of participants from each business industry unequal in distribution. The lack of balance in distribution renders the overview of employee conditions less reliable for a generalization of all business industries, especially in business industries where there are fewer participants. The second limitation is related to the data obtained. The average resilience score obtained tends to be high (4.2 out of 5). This high score indicates that the number of participants with low resilience in this study is comparatively small. This can lead to a lack of depiction of the moderating effects that appear on individuals, especially in groups that have low resilience. The third limitation is related to the measuring instrument that was used; CD-RISC 10, which is a more concise version of CD-RISC 25, was the measuring tool used in this study. A smaller number of measuring instrument questions contributes to fewer aspects of the measuring instrument that can be observed.

Conclusion

The study findings here indicate that there is a relationship between personality and work stress. In other words, for employees, their personality can predict the level of work stress they experience. Therefore, employees must understand that the personality they have is related to the work stress they will experience, and they need to consider factors that can protect them from work stress, such as selecting coping strategies against stress. Moreover, this study also found that resilience can moderate the relationship between personality and work stress. This goes to show that resilience proves essential for each individual to reduce work stress. As a result, companies must factor in the importance of resilience in their employees. Providing training on resilience can foster good mental health in employees and allow for the development of abilities in dealing with various situations at work.

From the analysis that has been carried out, there are several things that can be explored further regarding the work stress situation in Indonesia. This study was carried out on participants who were employees in various business sectors in Indonesia. The results of this study cannot necessarily act as a generalization when given limitations on the industrial sector taken and company location. Therefore, further research needs to be carried out by testing the moderating role of resilience on the relationship between personality and work stress in certain industrial sectors or company locations. Then, from the results obtained, most participants had moderate levels of stress. It is important for companies to know the level of stress that their employees have and to ensure proper interventions in individual situations. Intervention can take the form of counseling related to stressful situations in each individual. In addition, companies can also carry out interventions such as providing resilience training to minimize the impact of stress so that they develop the necessary protection against events in their work that can lead to stress.

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