The Characteristics of Necessity, Commoner, and Parasite with Multicultural Data Comparison

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Three different types of employees can be found in workplaces all over the world: "Necessities," "Commoners," and "Parasites." A person is a Necessity if s/he 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 results of this research effort are reported in Kim & Sikula (2005), Kim & Sikula (2006), Kim, Sikula & Smith (2006), Kim, Cho & Sikula (2007), Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Smith (2008), and Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Magoshi (2009). The summary of these six studies has been reported in Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson (2011). The purpose of this article is to compare the results of the summary study with a new set of data, which was collected from a multicultural student body. The authors note the points of commonality between the data sets and offer their thoughts on future research in this area.

1. Introduction

Human beings, by nature, are relational creatures. At any given time 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, citizen of a city, town, country, etc. 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 nuclear 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 person is the Necessity type. 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 this person the group as a whole cannot function successfully. The loss felt within the group by the departure of such an individual, therefore, is significant. Comments made in the workplace about a person of Necessity would include "It would be hard to fill his shoes" or "She is an excellent person; it's a shame to lose her." Necessities provide the social "glue" that holds an organization together and enable it to function and thrive as a cohesive whole.

The characteristics that identify a Necessity in group relations are, to some extent, role specific. In other words, the traits and behaviors that characterize a person of Necessity in one particular role may be different from the traits and behaviors that characterize a person of Necessity in a different role. For example, to be a Necessity as a spouse one must display patience, a loving and caring attitude, and the ability to compromise. To be a Necessity as an academic administrator, however, one should demonstrate self-confidence, intelligence, responsibility, dedication to work, and an ability to supervise.

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." S/he does not provide significant input into group activities and shows little willingness to participate in improving the functioning of the group. Commoners do only what they are told, or what is absolutely required, but nothing extra like volunteering their own time or effort. Employees in this category are the "deadwood" of an organization, going through the motions and often just waiting for retirement. They are easily replaceable and not missed much when they leave.

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. S/he is not loyal to the organization and cannot be trusted to contribute productively to attaining the group's goals. Such a worker is like the proverbial bad apple in the bunch, corrupting much of what s/he touches. 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.

For more than ten years, a group of researchers have tried to identify the key traits and behaviors that characterize Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites across a wide variety of cultural settings. To identify such characters we drew upon our previous research (Kim & Sikula, 2005; Kim & Sikula, 2006; Kim, Sikula & Smith, 2006; Kim, Cho & Sikula, 2007; Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Smith, 2008; Kim, Arias-Bolzmann & Magoshi, 2009) and made use of eight sets of survey data (three from the U.S., two from Chile, and one each from India, Korea and Japan). A summary of these six studies with eight data sets was reported in Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson (2011). We recognize the difficulty of this undertaking, for the respondents in these data sets operate in different types of workplaces and, more generally, in different socio-cultural environments.

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 may determine, 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.

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 behavior is 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) focused 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 recognize 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.

Nevertheless, our analysis of the data used in these previous studies does in fact reveal a general set of traits and behaviors that characterize each of these three categories of workers—particularly for Necessities and Parasites. This knowledge should be very useful for managers of organizations. Managers in any organization are interested in finding and attracting people labeled Necessity. Knowing the general traits and behaviors that characterize people as Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites will help managers recruit the right people, and decide how to make good use of their current employees. The purpose of this article is to compare the results of the summary study (Kim, Smith, Sikula & Anderson, 2011) with a new set of data, which was collected from a multicultural student body.

2. Collection and Organization of the Data

The process of collecting and organizing the data in all previous studies was identical to that used in Kim & Sikula (2005) including these new data sets. After explaining the definitions of Necessity, Commoner, and Parasite to the students, each student was to voluntarily turn in a list of 10 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 contains 17 headings such as "Dependable" and "Hard Working," with a varying number of subheadings under each.

In developing the frequency table for the Parasite category, we were able to group many responses under subheadings such as Arrogant, Antagonistic, and Disrespectful. These subheadings were then placed under the broader heading of "Trouble Maker." The final frequency table for the Parasite category contains 15 headings such as "Trouble Maker" and "Lazy," with a varying number of subheadings under each.

The frequency tables from the six previous studies can be found in Appendix I, which includes the overall results for the entire research effort in the past, making use of all eight data sets collected from five countries (U.S., Korea, India, Chile and Japan). These eight data sets collected in the past were all homogenous in nature. For example, samples collected from Korea were all from Korean students. Likewise, this homogeneity occurred in the other four countries. In contrast, the new data sets collected for this study differ because the Solbridge International School of Business in Daejeon, Korea is composed of multi-national student body with 35% Chinese, 25% Korean and the remaining 40% from 30 other countries. The classes are being taught in English. The frequency table collected from 27 usable responses of one undergraduate organizational behavior (OB) class can be found in Appendix II, and the frequency table collected from 31 usable responses of one graduate OB class can be found in Appendix III.

Appendix I has a sample size of 296 respondents, and contains 1850 usable responses for Necessity, 1714 for Commoner, and 2086 for Parasite. Appendix II contains sample size of 27 respondents with 269 usable responses for Necessity, 270 for Commoner, and 257 for Parasite. Appendix III has sample size of 31 with 317 usable responses for Necessity, 282 Commoner, and 297 for Parasite. Below, in Table, 1, we summarize the findings in Appendix I, II, and III by highlighting the six characteristics most frequently identified for each category.

Table 1: The Characteristics of Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites:
Comparing Between Six Previous Studies and the Solbridge Data

	Six Studies: 8 data sets (296 Samples)	Solbridge: Undergraduate Class (27 Samples)	Solbridge: Graduate Class (31 Samples)
Necessity (Responses)	Hard Working (316) Reliable (270) Friendly (238) Motivated (192) Knowledgeable (175) Good Communication (161)	Good Communication (47) Hard Working (43) Reliable (37) Friendly (29) Motivated (28) Knowledgeable (26)	Reliable (56) Hard Working (52) Friendly (41) Good Communication (29) Knowledgeable (29) Motivated (28)
Commoner (Responses)	Ordinary (267) Conformer (264) Unmotivated (190) Reliable (167)	Ordinary (56) Conformer (43) Friendly (24) Reliable (23)	Ordinary (57) Conformer (36) Unmotivated (29) Friendly (27)

	Hard Working (117)	Unmotivated (23)	Reliable (22)
	Friendly (111)	Unreliable (20)	Unreliable (22)
Parasite (Responses)	Trouble Maker (658)	Trouble Maker (93)	Trouble Maker (96)
	Unreliable (255)	Unreliable (50)	Unmotivated (56)
	Unmotivated (247)	Unmotivated (34)	Unreliable (49)
	Lazy (236)	Immoral (24)	Immoral (22)
	Incompetent (198)	Incompetent (15)	Incompetent (22)
	Immoral (181)	Ordinary (13)	Ordinary (15)

3. Analysis and Conclusions

As shown in Table 1, the key traits and behaviors that characterize a person of Necessity in the workplace are all positive and consistent and are identical among the three data sets. The principal characteristics of the Parasite are negative, and as expected, they are almost identical. The perceptions of what characterize really good workers (people of Necessity) and really bad workers (Parasites) appear to be the same in all five countries as well as in the new data sets, which were composed of students from many countries.

These results imply that companies in all countries should seek to hire employees who are *Hard Working*, *Reliable*, *Friendly*, *Motivated*, *Knowledgeable*, and who have *Good Communications Skills*. They should avoid those who appear to be *Trouble Makers*, *Unreliable*, *Unmotivated*, *Lazy*, *Incompetent*, or *Immoral*. The only different characteristic in a Parasite shown by the new data was "Ordinary."

The picture painted of the Commoner across all eight data sets in the summary study, however, was not as clear-cut as the respondents' views of Necessities and Parasites. The new data sets also show the same pattern. First, the principal traits and behaviors of the Commoner, as shown in Table 1, are mixed; some traits of Commoners are positive, some are negative, and some are neutral including the new data sets. For example, our respondents view Commoners as Unmotivated yet Hard Working and as Reliable yet Ordinary. These results show us that people's perceptions of Commoners in the workplace are complex and nuanced.

In our previous summary study, we offer an explanation for this aggregate complexity, which may be due to cultural differences across countries. The respondents in the U.S. and Japanese data sets view Commoners in a relatively positive light—as acceptable workers who have some things in common with people of Necessity. This would mean, for example, that U.S. and Japanese workers may be more accepting of the ordinary, or perhaps more willing to accept that in any work setting there will be people who merely fulfill their minimum job obligations and collect their paychecks without contributing in any special way to an organization's success. As long as these workers do not harm an organization, they are viewed in a positive light.

Moreover, the Japanese respondents consider Commoners to have more positive characteristics than the U.S. respondents. Ordinary people who fulfill their duties without being exceptional performers may thus be more readily accepted in Japanese society than in western society. This interpretation is consistent with the cultural analysis presented by Hofstede (1980). As noted earlier, Japanese culture has a strong collectivist streak, as opposed to the individualism prevalent in the U.S. This may result in Japanese viewing Commoners in the workplace, i.e.,

those simply doing their duty by fulfilling their obligations to the company, in a very positive light.

In the summary study, the Chilean, Indian, and Korean students, on the other hand, take a relatively negative view of Commoners. More than half of the identified characteristics of the Commoner in these countries are negative. Reality, we hypothesize, may be perceived in Chile, India and Korea as distinctly dichotomized; there is the good and there is the bad without much in between. In these countries, simply being average may not be a desirable outcome given that society places considerable status and esteem on those who excel. One has to be the best or risk being labeled a failure. If this is true, then the responses of the Chilean, Indian, and Korean students would naturally reflect this "black-and-white" sense of reality in which everything is either very good or very bad. Therefore, they perceive a Commoner negatively.

In the new data sets (one undergraduate and one graduate class), the data analysis has shown an identical characteristic documented between these two data sets in all three categories. As we have indicated, the characteristics for Necessity and Parasite were almost identical with the summary study, which reinforces and supports the previous findings. Regardless of the nature of the sample differences, human beings view the good and the bad the same way. On the other hand, these multicultural samples view the Commoner as having mixed characteristics: 1) two items are neutral (Ordinary and Conformer), 2) two items are positive (Friendly and Reliable), and 3) two items are negative (Unmotivated and Unreliable). It is understandable to have the equally mixed results when we have multicultural samples that do not have any particular cultural representative. Therefore, the Commoners are viewed equally mixed between the Necessity and Parasite.

To develop our analysis of different types of employees further, and to make it more practically useful, we would first like to collect 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 the Necessity more carefully and completely because 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, promotion, and retention efforts on those individuals with the most desired characteristics. Such a scale, therefore, would be invaluable in human resource management. However, more data must be collected and different questions must be asked of our respondents to create such a scale and establish its validity.

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Appendix I

The Combined Frequencies for Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites
(The 8 data sets in Appendices II–VI)

NECESSITY (1850 Responses)

1. Hard Working (316 entries)

2. Reliable (270)

3. Friendly (238)

4. Motivated (192)

5. Knowledgeable (175)

6. Good Communication (161)

7. Leader (97)

8. Committed (69)

9. Dependable (61)

10. Collaborator (53)

11–17. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Creative, Proactive, Confident, Visionary, Caring, Trustworthy, and Honest.

COMMONER (1714 Responses)

1. Ordinary (267 entries)

2. Conformer (264)

3. Unmotivated (190)

4. Reliable (167)

5. Hard Working (117)

6. Friendly (111)

7. Trouble Maker (100)

8. Unreliable (72)

9. Uncommitted (60)

10. Introverted (57)

11–19. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Occasional slacker, Lazy, Laissez-faire, Follower, Incompetent, Indifferent, Responsible, Inflexible, and Average

PARASITE (2086 Responses)

1. Trouble Maker (658 entries)

2. Unreliable (255)

3. Unmotivated (247)

4. Lazy (236)

5. Incompetent (198)

6. Immoral (181)

7. Conflictive (58)

8. Gossiper (47)

9. Irresponsible (38)

10. Manipulative (37)

11–15. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Disloyal, Negative, Conformer, Selfish, and Introverted.

Appendix II

The Frequencies for Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites
(Solbridge Undergraduate OB class with 27 usable responses)

NECESSITY (269 Responses)

1. Good Communicator (47)	
2. Hard-working (43)	9. Honest (9)
3. Reliable (37)	10. Flexible (5)
4. Friendly (29)	11. Independent (4)
5. Motivated (28)	12–18. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Take risk, Speak etiquette, Charming, Authoritative, Arbitrary, Eternal, and Survive a long time. (7)
6. Knowledgeable (26)	
7. Visionary (21)	
8. Confident (13)	

COMMONER (270 Responses)

1. Ordinary (56 entries)	
2. Conformer (43)	11. Inflexible (8)
3. Friendly (24)	12. Indecisive (8)
4. Reliable (23)	13. Good Communicator (3)
4. Unmotivated (23)	14. Honest (3)
6. Unreliable (20)	15. Hard Working (2)
7. Introverted (14)	16. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Creative, Intelligent, Assertive, Vulgar in manners, Polite, Equity in society, Independent, No common hobby, Not good at listening, Easy fulfilling, Realistic, and Inversion. (13)
8. Incompetent (13)	
9. Motivated (9)	
10. Trouble maker (8)	

PARASITE (257 Responses)

1. Trouble Maker (93 entries)	
2. Unreliable (50)	9. Desire things for free (3)
3. Unmotivated (34)	10. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Inflexible, Tininess, Rebarbative, Persuasive, Pushover, Intuitive, Cling to bad habit, Dependent, Unconsciousness, Driven, Carefree, Poor self-esteem, and Inferiority. (13)
4. Immoral (24)	
5. Incompetent (15)	
6. Ordinary (13)	
7. Introvert (8)	
8. Impatient (4)	

Appendix III

The Frequencies for Necessities, Commoners, and Parasites
Solbridge Graduate OB class with 31 usable responses)

NECESSITY (317 Responses)

1. Reliable (56)	
2. Hard-working (52)	9. Honest (16)
3. Friendly (41)	10. Flexible (6)
4. Good Communication (29)	11. Independent (3)
4. Knowledgeable (29)	12–18. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: Extroverted, Charming, Taught, Good sense of humor, Healthy, Central, and Mature.
6. Motivated (28)	
7. Visonary (26)	
8. Confident (24)	

COMMONER (282 Responses)

1. Ordinary (57 entries)	
2. Conformer (36)	11. Honest (6)
3. Unmotivated (29)	12. Motivated (5)
4. Friendly (27)	13. Non-confident (5)
5. Reliable (22)	14. Incompetent (4)
5. Unreliable (22)	15. Knowledgeable (3)
7. Trouble Maker (19)	16. Flexible (2)
8. Introverted (16)	17-19. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: The Golden Mean philosophy (2), Independent, Creative, Generous, Earthy, Have babies, Stay away from politics.
9. Inflexible (12)	
10. Hard-working (9)	

PARASITE (297 Responses)

1. Trouble Maker (96 entries)	
2. Unmotivated (56)	9. No confident (5)
3. Unreliable (49)	10. Dependent (3)
4. Immoral (22)	11. Other characteristics cited by the respondents: No leadership, Impatient, Lack of education, Disrespectful, Poor psychological quality, Discouraged, Unintelligent, Unstable, Inconsistent Behavior, and Being hated. (11)
5. Incompetent (22)	
6. Ordinary (15)	
7. Inflexible (9)	
8. Introverted (9)	