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Research Article

Necessary Skills and Personality Traits of Successful Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) K9 Dog Handlers: A Basis for Recruitment and Training Framework

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ABSTRACT

The study involved 33 purposively selected PCG K9 Dog Handlers and aimed to examine the necessary skills and personality traits (O.C.E.A.N.) that contributed to success in their field. It used a mixed-method design, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently through a validated research instrument. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, ranking, independent t-test, and one-way ANOVA, while qualitative data were examined through coding and thematic analysis.

Findings revealed that the top 10 skills commonly demonstrated by successful K9 handlers included: understanding canine behavior; conditioning dogs for basic obedience; emotional and psychological preparedness; skills in demonstrating fundamental dog handling techniques; nonverbal communication (gestures, expressions, body language); teamwork and interpersonal communication; responsible canine handling; physical stamina and agility; situational awareness in canine handling; and trust in the dog's natural indications. In terms of personality traits, results showed a moderate manifestation of Openness to Experience, high manifestation of Conscientiousness, moderate manifestations of both Extraversion and Agreeableness, and low manifestation of Neuroticism. Additionally, handlers were intrinsically motivated by their emotional attachment to dogs, their skills in managing difficult dogs, knowledge of canine characteristics, trust in dogs' natural inclination, and a strong sense of purpose in promoting public safety and the welfare of the community.

Finally, the study emphasized the need to integrate personality development in training programs. Key recommendations included the adoption of a proposed K9 Dog Handler Recruitment and Training Framework, creation of a K9 Reserve Unit, support for further education, and conducting broader longitudinal studies.

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Background

Dogs have become vital contributors to various service roles in human society, especially in law enforcement and public safety. Their heightened senses, ability to learn complex tasks, and loyalty have made them ideal partners in high-stakes environments such as search-and-rescue operations, bomb detection, narcotics control, and disaster response. In many national security institutions, K9 units serve as a force multiplier by extending the operational reach of human personnel.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) maintains a specialized K9 unit that deploys trained dogs and handlers to safeguard the country's maritime borders and critical infrastructures. To qualify as a K9 handler, personnel must pass a series of requirements including a qualifying exam, medical clearance, and a physical fitness test. Those accepted undergo intensive training on various modules such as canine behavior, first aid, search techniques, scent discrimination, and operational safety. The PCG K9 Training Center outlines a comprehensive process to ensure that handlers are physically capable and equipped with technical competencies required for the role.

However, despite the robust structure of the training process, the current recruitment system primarily focuses on general knowledge and physical fitness. The psychological and emotional preparedness of candidates, including their ability to bond with their canine partners, remains largely unmeasured. The training curriculum provides limited emphasis on personality traits or soft skills that could determine long-term success in the field. Given the nature of K9 work, where safety, trust, and quick response are critical, the absence of these considerations may pose operational risks.

The success of a K9 handler does not rest solely on technical training but also heavily depends on the quality of the human-animal relationship. According to Svartberg (2022), the handler's personality and emotional stability influence the behavior and responsiveness of

the dog. Similarly, Jamieson et al. (2018) emphasized that handlers require patience, emotional resilience, communication skills, and confidence to manage working dogs effectively, especially under pressure. These findings imply that personality traits and interpersonal competencies are just as important as operational skills in determining the effectiveness of a K9 team.

In practice, high-performing K9 handlers exhibit characteristics that go beyond physical strength and technical proficiency. They show emotional attachment to their dogs, possess the ability to manage challenging canine behavior, and maintain a strong sense of purpose in contributing to public safety. Furthermore, these handlers often demonstrate a positive work attitude, longer service tenure, and greater job satisfaction—traits that contribute to personal and professional success. Despite this, there is a lack of empirical studies, particularly in the Philippine context, that explore which specific traits and skills are consistently observed among successful K9 handlers.

This study aimed to address that gap by identifying the essential skills and personality traits of high-performing K9 handlers in the Philippine Coast Guard. The findings were used as the foundation for proposing an improved recruitment and training framework that reflects not only the technical competencies but also the psychological readiness and interpersonal qualities necessary for success in the field. By aligning recruitment strategies with these findings, the PCG can optimize the performance of its K9 units and reinforce its mandate of public service and safety.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research questions. Quantitative data were gathered through a survey questionnaire focused on the necessary skills and personality traits of K9 dog

handlers, while qualitative data were obtained through written interviews analyzed thematically. The skills reflected in the survey were derived from a review of related literature and organized into categories to group common working competencies among respondents. A concurrent parallel approach was adopted, allowing for the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data and the integration of findings to ensure both validity and a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were 33 K9 Dog Handlers from the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) who were identified as successful in the field based on specific criteria. These included: (a) having accomplished at least three successful contraband, drug, bomb, or other explosive detections within the past three years; (b) having handled the same K9 working dog for a minimum of three years; (c) maintaining a positive quarterly performance evaluation or an average rating of at least 85%; and (d) possessing at least three years of experience as a K9 handler. These 33 handlers were purposively selected from a total of 628 dog handlers in the Coast Guard K9 Force.

To ensure relevance and regional representation, the study focused on handlers assigned to ports and terminals with frequent K9 operations, particularly in areas known for high search activity such as the National Capital Region, Bicol, Southern Luzon, Eastern Visayas, South, Southeastern and Southwestern Mindanao, BARMM, and North and Northeastern Mindanao. Of the selected participants, 12 were from Luzon, 7 from the Visayas, and 14 from Mindanao. Despite the relatively small sample size, it was deemed sufficient for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. All 33 handlers participated in the survey questionnaire and served as written interview respondents, contributing to the study's comprehensive examination of the skills and personality traits of successful K9 Dog Handlers.

Instruments

The study utilized a researcher-made instrument composed of four parts to gather both

quantitative and qualitative data. Part I covered the demographic profile of respondents, aligning with the first research question. Part II consisted of a curated list of 44 essential skills in K9 dog handling, developed through a literature-based process of enumeration, categorization, refinement, and elimination of non-essential skills. Respondents were asked to identify the ten most essential skills based on their experience and had the option to add others. Part III measured the manifestation of personality traits using a modified version of Goldberg's (1992) Five-Factor Personality Item Pool (OCEAN). Each trait—Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—was assessed through ten contextualized indicators rated on a four-point Likert scale, omitting a neutral option to ensure clarity. Positively phrased items were used for all traits except Neuroticism, which retained negatively worded statements. Dual descriptive scales were used to interpret the degree of agreement and the level of personality trait manifestation.

Moreover, Part IV included a written interview guide composed of seven open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' intrinsic motivations and values related to K9 dog handling. The complete instrument underwent validation by four experts: two officers from the Philippine Coast Guard K9 Academy and two behavioral science professionals—a psychologist and a psychometrician. The PCG officers ensured contextual appropriateness to organizational standards, while the psychology experts reviewed the structure and clarity of the personality items and refined the interview questions. Due to the limited number of eligible participants in the purposive sample, the instrument was not subjected to statistical reliability testing, although expert validation was conducted to establish its content and construct validity.

Procedure

The researcher secured formal approval from the Dean of the PMMA Graduate School to conduct the study. Similarly, permission was obtained from the Commander of the Coast Guard K9 Force prior to the distribution of the

research instruments to the 33 identified respondents.

Before the administration of the validated instrument, each respondent was individually contacted. The researcher provided a clear briefing on the study's objectives, explained the ethical considerations being observed, and offered detailed instructions on how to accomplish each section of the instrument. Additionally, the procedure for submitting the completed responses was explained.

The research instrument was transmitted via the official organizational email addresses of the respondents. They were given sufficient time to review, answer, and complete the materials at their own convenience. Upon completion, the respondents were requested to scan and return the accomplished instruments to the researcher through email.

Data Analysis

The study applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analysed the data. Responses from Parts I, II, and III of the instruments were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and one-way ANOVA with post hoc Tukey test to answer the first four research questions. Meanwhile, responses from Part IV, which involved open-ended questions on intrinsic motivation, were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher manually coded the responses to identify recurring ideas and clustered them into meaningful themes that reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives. This combination of methods allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the data and ensured that both measurable

trends and personal insights were taken into account.

Ethical Considerations

Prior data collection, the researcher secured formal permission from the Philippine Coast Guard K9 Unit through a written consent letter outlining the study's objectives, scope, and expectations. Participation was strictly voluntary, and respondents were assured of their rights and the confidentiality of their responses in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. All participants gave their informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose and procedures. Identities were anonymized to ensure privacy, and responses were not linked to any individual. The researcher encouraged participants to raise any concerns or questions throughout the process. Data was securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. To uphold academic integrity, the paper was subjected to a plagiarism check via Turnitin and passed the acceptable similarity index of 20%. Ethical standards regarding confidentiality, transparency, and voluntary participation were observed throughout, following best practices outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Result and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the K9 Dog Handlers

The demographic characteristics of the 33 respondents were examined to provide context for interpreting the findings of the study. This included information on their age, gender, educational attainment, years of owning a personal or family dog, and length of service as K9 dog handlers. These variables offered insight into the respondents' background and qualifications relevant to the profession.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of K9 Dog Handlers

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	20-30 years old	7	21%
	31-40 years old	21	64%
	41-50 years old	5	15%
	Above 50 years old	0	0%
Gender	Male	32	97%
	Female	1	3%
Educational Attainment	Vocational/Technical	3	9%
	College Level	12	36%

Variable	Category	n	%
Years of Owning a Personal/Family Dog	Bachelor's Degree	18	55%
	Master's Degree	0	0%
	Doctorate Degree	0	0%
	0-5 years	17	52%
Years in the Field as a K9 Dog Handler	6-10 years	3	9%
	More than 10 years	13	39%
	Less than 3 years	7	21%
	3-5 years	7	21%
	6-8 years	7	21%
	More than 8 years	12	37%

As shown in Table 1, majority of respondents were in the 31–40 age group (64%), followed by 21% in the 20–30 age group, and 15% in the 41–50 age group. No respondent was aged above 50. In terms of gender, the group was predominantly male (97%), with only one female participant. Regarding educational attainment, 55% held a bachelor's degree, while 36% had reached college level, and 9% had vocational or technical training. None of the participants had pursued postgraduate studies.

More than half of the respondents (52%) reported 0–5 years of personal or family dog ownership prior to their professional assignment, while 39% had more than 10 years of experience. As for professional experience, 37% had more than eight years in the field as K9 handlers, while the rest were evenly distributed across experience brackets of less

than 3 years, 3–5 years, and 6–8 years (each at 21%).

Top 10 Necessary Skills Demonstrated by Successful K9 Dog Handlers Demonstrated in their work

The top 10 necessary skills were identified by the respondents as essential for successful K9 dog handling. The list was derived from a pool of 44 skill items included in the survey, which were initially compiled from eight relevant studies published between 2018 and 2023. These studies yielded 62 skills, which were refined and grouped into distinct categories to avoid redundancy. The responses reflect the competencies that K9 handlers considered most critical in their line of work, based on their field experience and professional judgment.

Table 2. Top 10 Necessary Skills Demonstrated by Successful K9 Dog Handlers in Their Work

Item No.	Skills	n	%
5	Has the knowledge and understanding of canine behavior	19	1 st
1	Skills in conditioning dogs for basic obedience	18	2 nd
16	Emotional and Psychological Preparedness: Must always be emotionally and psychologically ready to handle stress, pressure, and challenges associated with dog handling	17	3 rd
2	Skills in demonstrating the fundamental techniques in dog handling	15	5 th
4	Nonverbal Communication Mastery – Builds strong connections with dogs through facial expressions, gestures, body language, and other nonverbal cues.	15	5 th
7	Teamwork and Communication Skills: Can collaborate and communicate with other dog handlers	15	5 th
24	Responsible Canine Handling Skill: Demonstrates accountability in managing dogs, ensuring their safety, well-being, and effective training through proactive assessment, ethical decision-making, and attentive care.	14	7 th

Item No.	Skills	n	%
11	Has the physical stamina and agility to perform work-related duties as a dog handler	13	8 th
25	Situational Awareness in Canine Handling: Demonstrates keen vigilance and perceptiveness in observing canine behavior, anticipating potential risks, and responding proactively to ensure effective training, safety, and well-being for both handler and dog.	12	9.5 th
27	Able to trust in a dog's indications	12	9.5 th

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently selected skill was knowledge and understanding of canine behavior ($f = 19$), followed by skills in conditioning dogs for basic obedience ($f = 18$). Emotional and psychological preparedness ranked third ($f = 17$), indicating the importance of mental resilience. Three skills shared the fifth rank with equal frequency ($f = 15$): fundamental dog handling techniques, nonverbal communication mastery, and teamwork and communication. Responsible canine handling ($f = 14$), physical stamina and agility ($f = 13$), and both situational awareness in canine handling and the ability to trust a dog's indications ($f = 12$ each) also emerged as key competencies.

These findings suggested that successful K9 handlers demonstrated a multidimensional skill set combining technical expertise, emotional preparedness, physical fitness, communication, and ethical responsibility. The skills identified supported existing literature, including the studies of Jamieson et al. (2018) which emphasized similar competencies such as reading canine behavior, obedience training, teamwork, physical stamina, and trust in dog-handler interactions.

The results also reflected five overarching themes:

1. Dog Handling and Training Knowledge (e.g., canine behavior, situational awareness, trusting dog indications);
2. Communication and Teamwork (e.g., collaboration with other handlers);

3. Physical and Mental Preparedness (e.g., stamina, agility, emotional readiness);
4. Dog Interaction and Handling Skills (e.g., obedience training, nonverbal cues, technique);
5. Care and Bonding (e.g., ethical and responsible canine handling).

Dog Handler's Level of Manifestation of the O.C.E.A.N Personality Traits in their Field of Work

The respondents' levels of manifestation across the big five personality traits outlined in the O.C.E.A.N. model—Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism were measured through their responses to statements reflective of their personality dispositions in the context of K9 handling. The analysis sought to understand how these psychological characteristics might have influenced their performance and interaction in the field. While the standard deviations did not exceed the 1.00 threshold typically used to indicate high variability, they were still considered relatively large due to the small sample size, suggesting some variation among respondents but within a limited scope. Consequently, findings were specific to the sample studied and could not be generalized to the entire population of K9 dog handlers. Future research with a larger and more diverse respondent base was recommended for broader applicability.

Table 3. Summary of Personality Traits

Personality Traits	Mean	SD	Level of Manifestation
Openness to Experience	3.19	0.67	Moderate Manifestation
Conscientiousness	3.82	0.39	High Manifestation
Extroversion	2.54	0.84	Moderate Manifestation

Personality Traits	Mean	SD	Level of Manifestation
Agreeableness	3.09	0.85	Moderate Manifestation
Neuroticism	1.23	0.55	Low Manifestation

Openness to Experience

Openness to Experience refers to curiosity, creativity, and receptiveness to novel experiences and ideas. The results ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.67$) revealed a moderate manifestation of this trait. This suggested that K9 handlers were capable of cognitive flexibility and imaginative thinking but may have prioritized practicality in their communication and decision-making. The moderate level aligned with the demands of the profession, which often favored structured and straightforward approaches over abstract thinking.

This supported the findings of Jackson et al. (2019), who observed that openness was more pronounced during early adulthood but may have declined over time due to preferences for routine and familiarity.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness indicates organization, reliability, goal-directedness, and a strong sense of responsibility. Respondents scored high on this trait ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.39$), with the highest indicator being "I always perform my duties and responsibilities" ($M = 3.91$). This demonstrated a strong work ethic and accountability among handlers—attributes that were essential in high-stakes operational environments.

These results affirmed Schöberl et al. (2012), who found that handlers with high conscientiousness positively influenced their dogs' stress levels and performance, strengthening the bond and effectiveness of the dog-handler partnership.

Extraversion

Extraversion encompasses sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. K9 handlers reported a moderate level ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.84$), indicating that while they were generally comfortable around others (e.g., $M = 3.36$ for "I feel comfortable around people"), they did not seek the spotlight ($M = 1.64$ for "I like being the center of attention"). This pointed to a professional

disposition marked by approachability without attention-seeking tendencies.

These findings aligned with those of Jamieson et al. (2018), who emphasized that extraversion played a vital role in professional success among handlers by fostering effective communication, confidence in high-pressure situations, and the ability to quickly establish rapport with both colleagues and animals. Their study demonstrated that handlers exhibiting moderate to high levels of extraversion were more adept at managing social dynamics during training and operations, which contributed to smoother teamwork and enhanced canine performance. Thus, the observed moderate extraversion among respondents may have been a functional trait that balanced sociability with the composure required in the field.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is related to compassion, cooperation, and concern for others. The mean score of 3.09 ($SD = 0.85$) indicated a moderate manifestation, with a high concern for fellow handlers ($M = 3.58$) but a lower inclination to involve themselves in others' personal issues ($M = 2.18$). This suggested a form of professional empathy that promoted teamwork while maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries.

This trend echoed the findings of Reitz and Diwan (2024), who observed that individuals in structured and collaborative professional roles often exhibited increased agreeableness as a response to occupational demands that required harmony and coordination. Moreover, the pattern aligned with the results of Chopik and Kitayama's (2018) cross-cultural study, which demonstrated that agreeableness tended to increase with age and life experience. Their research highlighted how maturity and accumulated interpersonal encounters, both in personal and professional contexts, contributed to heightened levels of empathy and cooperation, which may have been reflected in the handlers' responses.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism, or emotional instability, had the lowest manifestation among all traits ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.55$). Respondents reported minimal experiences of stress, sadness, and mood fluctuations, which indicated a high degree of emotional regulation and resilience. These qualities were deemed essential in navigating the unpredictable and often high-pressure demands of K9 work, where calm decision-making and emotional steadiness could significantly impact outcomes.

These findings supported the research of Kaleta et al. (2019), who found that individuals—particularly those in demanding professions like law enforcement—who exhibited low levels of neuroticism demonstrated stronger emotional control, better in-

terpersonal understanding, and improved decision-making in high-stakes situations. Their study emphasized that emotional stability not only contributed to the handlers' personal well-being but also enhanced their ability to manage and respond appropriately to their canine partners during critical operations.

Significant Difference of Respondents' Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based on their Demographic Profile

Personality Traits and K9 Dog Handlers' Age

Using ANOVA, the study tested for differences in the Big Five traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism) across different age groups.

Table 4. Summary of Significant Difference on Respondents Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based on Age

Personality Traits	Computed F	P-value	Decision If $p =$ or < 0.05 , reject H_0	Interpretation
Openness to Experience	0.657	0.526	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Conscientiousness	0.042	0.959	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Extroversion	2.991	0.065	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Agreeableness	1.738	0.193	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Neuroticism	2.083	0.142	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

The data revealed that none of the personality traits significantly varied based on age. For instance, Openness to Experience showed a slight decrease with age, but this trend was not statistically significant ($F = 0.657$, $p = 0.526$). While some studies suggest that openness may decline with age due to a preference for routine (Jackson et al., 2019), this was not strongly observed among the respondents.

Conscientiousness remained steady across age groups ($F = 0.042$, $p = 0.959$), aligning with research that indicates this trait tends to remain stable or increase slightly over time due to psychological maturation (Mottus et al., 2021; Asselmann & Specht, 2021).

Extraversion ($F = 2.991$, $p = 0.065$) showed a near-significant result but was still statistically insignificant. Minor declines in this trait with age have been noted in other studies (Sharp et al., 2019), yet these were not clearly evident in this context.

Agreeableness ($F = 1.738$, $p = 0.193$) and Neuroticism ($F = 2.083$, $p = 0.142$) also showed no significant age-related differences. Although agreeableness may increase and neuroticism may decrease with age due to emotional growth (Reitz & Diwan, 2024; Schweizer et al., 2019; Kaleta et al., 2019), the current findings do not reflect such patterns among the K9 handlers surveyed.

These findings suggest that the personality traits of K9 handlers remain relatively stable across age groups. This stability may reflect the influence of occupational demands, training, and situational consistency in their roles. Although some psychological studies support age-related changes in certain traits, the specialized nature of K9 handling may buffer or minimize these shifts (Mottus et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2019). It implies that personality development in this context might be more shaped by role expectations and work culture than by age alone.

Personality Traits and K9 Dog Handlers' Gender

An independent sample t-test was conducted to explore whether male and female K9

handlers differed significantly in their levels of personality traits based on the O.C.E.A.N. model.

Table 5. Summary of Significant Difference on Respondents Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based on Gender

Personality Traits	Male		Female		Computed t-value	p-values	Decision If p = or < 0.05, reject Ho	Interpretation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Openness To Experience	3.21	0.43	2.80	-	0.931	0.359	Failed to reject Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Conscientiousness	3.44	0.41	3.30	-	0.346	0.732	Failed to reject Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Extroversion	2.54	0.63	2.30	-	0.383	0.704	Failed to reject Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Agreeableness	3.10	0.56	2.80	-	0.532	0.598	Failed to reject Ho	NOT SIGNIFICANT
Neuroticism	1.19	0.45	2.30	-	-2.413	0.022	Accept Ho	SIGNIFICANT

The findings showed no significant difference between male and female handlers in Openness to Experience ($t = 0.931$, $p = 0.359$), indicating that gender did not influence how open they were to new ideas or creative approaches.

For Conscientiousness ($t = 0.346$, $p = 0.732$), results showed that both male and female handlers demonstrated similar levels of discipline and responsibility.

In Extraversion ($t = 0.383$, $p = 0.704$), both genders showed comparable sociability and assertiveness.

The result for Agreeableness ($t = 0.532$, $p = 0.598$) also showed no significant difference, suggesting that cooperation, empathy, and team orientation were evenly distributed among male and female K9 handlers.

However, a significant difference was found in Neuroticism ($t = -2.413$, $p = 0.022$), with female handlers showing higher levels. This suggests a greater tendency among females in the sample to experience stress or emotional

sensitivity. Manson et al. (2023) highlighted that women generally report higher neuroticism due to both biological and social factors, which can influence emotional responses in high-pressure environments.

These findings suggest that gender does not significantly impact most personality traits among K9 handlers, highlighting a level of psychological consistency in the profession. However, the higher neuroticism observed among female handlers points to potential needs for tailored emotional support and stress management strategies in the workplace. Recognizing such gender-based emotional patterns may help organizations develop more inclusive and responsive mental health programs.

Personality Traits and K9 Dog Handlers' Educational Attainment

One-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences across different educational levels and the personality traits among K9 Dog handlers.

Table 6. Summary of Significant Difference on Respondents Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based on Educational Attainment

Personality Traits	Computed F	P-value	Decision If p = or < 0.05, reject Ho	Interpretation
Openness to Experience	0.015	0.985	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Conscientiousness	0.266	0.768	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Extroversion	0.052	0.950	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant

Personality Traits	Computed F	P-value	Decision If $p = \text{or} < 0.05$, reject H_0	Interpretation
Agreeableness	0.459	0.637	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Neuroticism	0.162	0.851	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

The results showed no statistically significant difference in any of the five personality traits based on educational attainment, indicating that formal education does not meaningfully influence the personality profile of K9 handlers.

For Openness to Experience ($F = 0.015$, $p = 0.985$), results suggested that whether respondents had vocational training, some college, or a bachelor's degree, their openness to new ideas and unconventional thinking remained consistent. While education is often linked to increased exposure to diverse perspectives, this trait may be more influenced by shared professional experiences and K9 training than academic background.

In terms of Conscientiousness ($F = 0.266$, $p = 0.768$), all groups showed similar levels of responsibility and reliability. This points to the nature of the work itself—highly structured, goal-oriented, and responsibility-driven—as a stronger influence on this trait than educational differences.

For Extraversion ($F = 0.052$, $p = 0.950$), the uniformity across groups suggested that sociability and assertiveness are developed through fieldwork, teamwork, and real-world demands rather than through educational pathways.

Agreeableness ($F = 0.459$, $p = 0.637$) also showed no significant variation. This may reflect that traits like cooperation, trust, and

empathy are cultivated through shared responsibilities and collaboration in the field rather than in academic settings.

Finally, for Neuroticism ($F = 0.162$, $p = 0.851$), the results implied that emotional regulation and resilience are consistent across educational levels. Given the high-pressure demands of K9 work, these qualities are likely shaped more by experience and repeated exposure to challenging situations than by formal education.

The findings suggest that educational attainment does not significantly shape the personality traits of K9 handlers. Regardless of academic background, traits like emotional stability, discipline, sociability, and openness appear to be more closely tied to the demands of the profession and shared practical experiences. This emphasizes the role of job training, field exposure, and occupational context in shaping personality expression in this line of work.

Personality Traits and K9 Dog Handlers' Number of Years of Owning a Dog

One-Way ANOVA was utilized to test determine whether the number of years of owning a personal or family dog was associated with differences in the five personality traits among K9 dog handlers.

Table 7. Summary of Significant Difference on Respondents Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based To Number of Years of Owning a Dog

Personality Traits	Computed F	P-value	Decision If $p = \text{or} < 0.05$, reject H_0	Interpretation
Openness to Experience	0.200	0.820	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Conscientiousness	1.328	0.280	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Extroversion	0.007	0.993	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Agreeableness	1.087	0.350	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Neuroticism	0.435	0.651	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

The analysis indicated no statistically significant differences in any of the five traits when grouped by years of dog ownership. The p-values for all traits exceeded the 0.05

threshold, suggesting that any observed differences were not meaningful but likely due to variation.

For Openness to Experience ($F = 0.200$, $p = 0.820$), the findings suggested that prior personal experience with dogs did not significantly influence respondents' willingness to explore new ideas or adapt to novel situations. Instead, the results point toward professional training and operational duties as stronger influences on this trait.

In terms of Conscientiousness ($F = 1.328$, $p = 0.280$), small variations in the mean scores—0–5 years ($M = 3.33$), 6–10 years ($M = 3.57$), and over 10 years ($M = 3.55$)—were not statistically meaningful. This suggested that conscientious behavior among handlers was likely shaped more by structured K9 work and its professional demands than by the duration of pet ownership. Supporting this, Wells and Treacy (2024) found that individuals with higher conscientiousness often formed stronger attachments to their pets, but this link may be more relevant in informal, domestic contexts than in professional working environments.

For Extraversion ($F = 0.007$, $p = 0.993$), results indicated that sociability and assertiveness are not significantly impacted by how long one has owned a dog. These traits may instead stem from collaborative work environments, structured field tasks, and professional training.

Regarding Agreeableness ($F = 1.087$, $p = 0.350$), the findings implied that cooperative and empathetic tendencies are more likely

developed through fieldwork and shared operational responsibilities than through personal experience with pet dogs. The job demands coordination, trust, and understanding with both canine partners and human colleagues, suggesting a stronger professional rather than personal influence.

Finally, for Neuroticism ($F = 0.435$, $p = 0.651$), emotional stability also did not differ significantly across years of dog ownership. This highlighted the importance of training, psychological preparedness, and real-world K9 operational experience in shaping the emotional resilience of handlers.

Overall, the results suggested that years of dog ownership do not significantly influence personality traits among K9 handlers. Instead, traits such as emotional regulation, responsibility, openness, and social interaction appear to be more strongly shaped by professional training, field experience, and occupational demands than by prior personal exposure to pet ownership. This reinforced the idea that the specialized nature of K9 work plays a more central role in shaping personality traits relevant to the role.

Personality Traits and K9 Dog Handler's Number of Years in the Field as Dog Handlers

One-Way ANOVA was used to compare trait scores across groups based on their years of experience.

Table 8. Summary of Significant Difference on Respondents Level of Manifestation of the Five Personality Traits (O.C.E.A.N.) based To Number of Years as Dog Handlers

Personality Traits	Computed F	P-value	Decision If $p =$ or < 0.05 , reject H_0	Interpretation
Openness to Experience	0.773	0.519	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Conscientiousness	1.541	0.225	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Extroversion	0.328	0.805	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Agreeableness	0.499	0.686	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Neuroticism	0.941	0.433	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

The results revealed no statistically significant differences in any of the five traits when grouped according to years of service in the field. All p-values exceeded the 0.05 threshold, indicating that any differences in means were not meaningful and likely due to

random variation. No post hoc testing was conducted due to the non-significant findings.

In terms of Openness to Experience ($F = 0.773$, $p = 0.519$), the findings suggested that the ability of handlers to embrace innovation and adapt to change is not significantly

influenced by tenure in the field. Although increased time in the profession may bring operational familiarity and refined strategies, openness appears to be more rooted in intrinsic personality characteristics and professional training than in accumulated years of service.

For Conscientiousness ($F = 1.541$, $p = 0.225$), the findings implied that discipline, reliability, and goal orientation among K9 handlers are shaped more by standardized procedures, operational expectations, and formal training rather than by years of experience. Although longer tenure may improve procedural efficiency, the core aspects of conscientiousness appear to be developed and reinforced early in the professional role. These results resonated with Mattes (2022), who emphasized the importance of personality traits—particularly conscientiousness and emotional stability—in occupational persistence, although that study focused on self-employed individuals.

Regarding Extraversion ($F = 0.328$, $p = 0.805$), the findings indicated that assertiveness, communication, and social engagement are not significantly associated with field tenure. The relatively uniform extraversion scores suggested that handlers develop these traits during initial training and operational socialization, and that these levels remain stable over time, regardless of experience.

For Agreeableness ($F = 0.499$, $p = 0.686$), the results implied that interpersonal traits such as cooperation, trust, and empathy are likely formed through shared operational responsibilities and structured team environments, rather than being significantly altered by length of service. The nature of the role demands immediate collaboration, reinforcing stable patterns of agreeableness that do not appear to shift markedly over time.

Lastly, in the area of Neuroticism ($F = 0.941$, $p = 0.433$), the findings suggested that emotional stability and stress regulation are not strongly linked to years in the field. While extended experience may lead to greater comfort in navigating high-stress scenarios, the emotional resilience required for the role appears to be instilled through initial training and exposure, rather than through cumulative service alone. This supported the interpretation that

neuroticism levels in K9 handlers are primarily influenced by situational preparedness and occupational conditioning.

Overall, the data indicated that years of experience as a dog handler do not significantly impact the expression of core personality traits. Instead, the consistent scores across groups suggest that professional training, job demands, and workplace culture play more pivotal roles in shaping the personality characteristics necessary for effective K9 handling than tenure in the field. Personality traits relevant to emotional regulation, teamwork, openness, and conscientiousness appear to be reinforced early in the role and maintained through the structured and demanding nature of the profession.

Intrinsic Motivations' Influence on Participants' Perspectives on the Necessary Skills and Personality Traits of Successful K9 Dog Handlers

The following themes were derived from open-ended interview responses exploring the intrinsic motivations of K9 dog handlers and how these influence their perspectives on essential skills and personality traits for success in their role.

• Happiness and Excitement

Dog handlers expressed profound happiness and excitement in recalling experiences with their first dog. These early moments created a strong emotional bond, often equating their pets to companions or family members, which in turn fostered a deep sense of responsibility.

Participant 13 shared, "I was very happy... I became responsible as an owner," while Participant 29 emphasized commitment, stating, "I promised myself I would not abandon my dog... so he would grow up with positive behavior and skills."

This joy evolved into daily excitement and attachment. Participant 22 described, "The day I bought my first puppy, I was overflowing with excitement... sharing everyday moments was a gift to cherish forever."

Such emotional connections served as intrinsic motivators and form the basis of the handler's drive and work ethic.

- **Grief and Sadness**

Dog handlers also reported intense grief when losing a dog, often likening it to the death of a family member. Participant 18 expressed, “It hurts losing a best friend and like a brother,” while others acknowledged the pain but maintained a hopeful outlook. Participant 13 added, “But I believe there will be another to come for me,” reflecting resilience and emotional maturity.

This emotional duality—joy in companionship and grief in loss—cultivated strength, adaptability, and commitment in handlers.

- **Handler’s Affection Level Towards Dog’s Connection**

This theme captured the depth of emotional ties between handlers and their dogs, where affection stems from trust, loyalty, and shared experiences. Such connections influenced personality development, work ethic, and motivation.

Lefebvre and Diederich (2018) supported this by finding that military dog handlers are intrinsically motivated due to their affection for dogs, staying in the field not merely for employment but for passion. The participants’ shared narratives reinforce that dog handling is not just a profession, but a deeply personal calling.

- **Back to Fundamental Principles of the Training**

When managing difficult dogs, handlers emphasized returning to the foundational training principles. Participant 9 stated, “Always back to basic because basic is the fundamentals of everything,” while Participant 19 added, “Patience is a must,” referencing the 12 K9 Commandments.

Even experienced handlers rely on these core principles to maintain safety, discipline, and trust. Practical knowledge, combined with situational awareness, ensures consistent performance in unpredictable environments.

- **Patience is Virtue**

Patience emerged as a critical skill for successful dog handling. It involved remaining composed, empathetic, and consistent despite behavioral challenges. Participant 25 noted, “Handling a dog... needs patience, understanding, perseverance, and motivation.”

Participant 27 shared an experience handling an aggressive dog: “It’s crucial to

prioritize safety, communicate clearly, and educate both the dog and the owner,” highlighting the value of soft skills alongside technical proficiency.

- **Differentiated Strategies**

Participants acknowledged that dog behaviors vary significantly, requiring handlers to adapt techniques. Participant 17 observed, “It wasn’t about being in charge, but about building trust,” reflecting the importance of respect and positive reinforcement.

Others, like Participant 22, used operant and classical conditioning: “I used praise and reward... play method to divert his attention.” Tailoring strategies promotes better communication and strengthens the handler-dog bond.

- **Handling Difficult Dog**

This overarching theme captured the integration of training fundamentals, emotional regulation, and adaptive strategies. While even well-trained dogs may display aggression or stubbornness, handlers rely on trust, consistency, and communication to guide behavior.

As highlighted by K9 Mania Dog Training Academy (2025), effective handlers must be knowledgeable, patient, consistent in their cues and expectations, and maintain professionalism through ethical and credible conduct.

- **Discernment on Dog’s Body Language and Behavior**

Handlers displayed acute awareness of canine body language as essential to preventing issues and maintaining optimal performance. Participant 8 shared, “I can analyze signs of stress such as panting, lip licking, yawning...” indicating readiness to intervene.

Participant 22 described calmly redirecting his dog’s attention during triggering scenarios. Participant 31 also prioritized rest, stating, “Sleeping comfortably is important... to be ready for dispatch.”

Such insight allowed handlers to balance the dogs’ physical and mental health with operational needs.

- **Behavior Modification**

Behavioral reinforcement was a common strategy. Participant 20 reported using “counter-conditioning and desensitization,” while Participant 31 emphasized reinforcing commands through rewards.

This aligned with operant conditioning principles—positive reinforcement enhances desired behavior. More than control, this approach fosters a mutual, trusting relationship between handler and dog.

- **Knowledge of Dogs' Characteristics**

This broader theme reflected how understanding canine temperament, instincts, and responses informs effective handling.

Tactical Police K9 Training (2019) mentioned that the ability to read dog body language is a critical competency. Handler responses support this, showing that successful K9 work relies not just on obedience but a deep understanding of the animal's personality and instincts.

- **Trusting Dog Instinct**

Trust in the dog's instinct was seen as vital during high-stakes operations and evaluations. Participant 4 recounted, "I had second thoughts... my dog insisted... the bag had the item," emphasizing the importance of canine intuition.

While most participants affirmed their trust in their dogs, Participant 5 offered a balanced view, suggested that handler judgment and experience must complement canine instincts.

Jamieson et al. (2018) echo this, asserting that trust in a dog's indications and the ability to read signals are key skills for successful handlers.

- **Work Aspirations and Fulfilment of the Dog Handlers**

Despite the physical and emotional demands of the role, handlers find great satisfaction in their work. Thematic analysis yielded four interrelated motivators:

- **Attachment with the Dog**

The emotional bond was a major driver of job satisfaction. Participant 24 shared, "The trainability of the dog supports me in law enforcement... it made me enjoy my job."

- **Emotional Connection**

Handlers derived personal fulfillment from seeing their dogs learn and thrive. Participant

22 stated, "Witnessing my dog learn skills... brings me satisfaction and fulfillment." Participant 4 added, "I have a companion in doing my job properly... that's why I enjoy it."

- **Work Accomplishment**

Recognition boosted intrinsic motivation. Participant 6 shared, "I won Narcotics of the Year 2022," while Participant 12 stated, "To accomplish tasks with them makes the job enjoyable."

- **Community Service**

The most profound motivation stemmed from public service. Participant 10 noted, "Knowing that you are helpful to others... is the most rewarding." The handlers viewed their work as contributing to a safer society, which deepen their commitment and pride.

- **Work Motivation and Satisfaction of K9 Dog Handlers**

All sub-themes culminate in this core finding: intrinsic motivation among K9 handlers was rooted in emotional connection, purpose-driven service, and fulfillment from mastery and recognition. These factors foster key traits such as loyalty, patience, empathy, and dedication.

This was supported by Bubna (2022), who found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations among volunteer K9 handlers contribute to high job satisfaction, longer tenure, and commitment to public safety roles.

Proposed K9 Dog Handler Recruitment and Training Framework

To address the gaps identified in the study—particularly the lack of structured integration of personality traits, motivation, and skill alignment—a recruitment and training framework is proposed. This aims to provide a consistent, evidence-based approach for selecting and developing K9 dog handlers who possess the necessary competencies and characteristics aligned with both job demands and organizational goals.



Figure 1. K9 Dog Handler Recruitment and Training Framework

STAGE 1. RECRUITMENT STAGE

1. Eligibility Criteria

To gather relevant demographic data, recruitment must incorporate:

- Age Requirements: Minimum of 21 years old, with targeted age distribution to include those with an age range up to 50 years old.
- Gender Inclusion: Encouraging diversity while acknowledging male-majority trends.
- Educational Background: High school diploma required; preference for advanced training certifications or educational qualifications.
- Dog Ownership History: Assess prior ownership to determine familiarity and bonding experience.
- Industry Experience: Even a novice or with an experience of less than one year may be accepted as an applicant.

2. Preferred Qualifications

- Similar to the eligibility criteria, recruited personnel may have military experience or any law enforcement agency.
- Have experiences in handling dogs regardless of the breed; and
- Possesses clear, efficient, and dynamic communication skills

3. Application Process

a. Preliminary Screening

Once the qualified personnel have been identified, background checks, medical assessment, and physical fitness tests can be performed. This process immediately identifies potential personnel and eliminates disqualified ones, saving time and resources for both parties. After which, an initial interview will be conducted to measure the applicant's behavior, reasoning skills, emotional response and stability, and work motivation. Questions included in Part IV of the survey's research instrument on intrinsic motivation may be included as questions to be raised during the initial interview. Once an applicant passes the first stage, he/she proceeds to the next stage.

STAGE 2. NEED-ASSESSMENT

Prior to the start of the training program, each applicant must undergo a preliminary need-assessment to identify if the dog handler applicant already possessed the essential skills and traits required for a successful dog handler.

Based on research, the Top 10 Skills essential for K9 Dog Handlers include:

- 1.1 Canine Behavior Mastery – Understanding animal psychology.

- 1.2 Obedience and Command Training – Effective communication techniques.
- 1.3 Tracking and Detection Skills – Specialized training in scent detection.
- 1.4 Crisis Response and Emergency Handling – Rapid problem-solving in fieldwork.
- 1.5 Physical Endurance and Agility – Maintaining high fitness levels for demanding tasks.
- 1.6 Situational Awareness and Tactical Thinking – Adapting strategies for security operations.
- 1.7 Canine First Aid and Welfare – Veterinary care and injury prevention.
- 1.8 Public Engagement and Communication – Managing community interactions.
- 1.9 Law Enforcement and Security Integration – Coordinating with police and military units.
- 1.10 Adaptability and Stress Management – Handling unpredictability with composure.

This will determine the extent of time, mode of training, and areas to focus with in case the applicant already manifested an above average result of the diagnostic test. In other words, if the result of the assessment indicates that the applicant already has the knowledge on the basic training, he/she can skip this part on the actual training stage and just merely focus with the other skills and traits needed for the program.

The need-gap preliminary assessment aims to identify the gap between the current situation to the desired training outcomes. This ensures that all resources such as time, budget, and manpower are optimizing as to prevent wastages. Hence, this allows the program to be tailored to address the specific need of the applicant rather than going to the entire process as part of the tradition of the organization.

STAGE 3. SKILLS AND PERSONALITY TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Every K9 dog handler must undergo several training courses on the premise of the following:

1. Basic Training (Weeks 1-4)

- Introduction to K9 handling principles.
- Understanding canine behavior and communication.

- Obedience training techniques.
- Safety procedures and handler responsibilities.

2. Specialized Training (Weeks 5-10)

- Scent detection and search techniques.
- Tracking and trailing operations.
- Patrol and protection exercises.
- First aid and veterinary care basics.

3. Top 10 Necessary Skills Training (based on the results of the study and literature) (Weeks 11-16)

Other skills indicated therein are reinforcement, since these have already been introduced in the previous stage. These will be the focal skills to focus on.

- Knowledge and understanding of canine behavior
- Conditioning dogs for basic obedience
- Emotional and psychological preparedness
- Fundamental dog handling techniques
- Nonverbal communication
- Teamwork
- Communication skills
- Responsible canine handling
- Physical stamina and agility
- Ability to trust a dog's indications

4. Field Training (Weeks 17-20)

- Real-world simulations and supervised fieldwork.
- Exposure to high-pressure environments.
- Scenario-based exercises (crowd control, narcotics detection, disaster response)

5. Personality Traits Training

Training modules incorporate psychological evaluations to determine:

- 2.1 Openness to Experience: Analyzing adaptability and problem-solving abilities.
- 2.2 Conscientiousness: Measuring discipline and task-oriented reliability.
- 2.3 Extroversion: Assessing communication skills and teamwork.
- 2.4 Agreeableness: Evaluating ability to bond with K9 partners and colleagues.
- 2.5 Neuroticism: Identifying stress tolerance and emotional stability in high-pressure scenarios.

These personality traits must be observed throughout the training process. While many of them cannot be fully developed within the three months, most will naturally emerge and solidify over time during actual work operations. Therefore, applicants should demonstrate these traits at a moderate (satisfactory) to highly demonstrative (excellent) level. However, if a handler exhibits a high degree of neuroticism, their application will be placed on hold and will be subject to management discretion, along with recommendations from a licensed psychologist.

3. Written and Practical Assessment

Each dog handler is evaluated on both theoretical knowledge and principles, along with practical hands-on skills.

If the applicant fails on this stage, he/she will be given a chance to have a refresher before taking the assessment again. This will ensure that handlers have the drive and intrinsic motivation to pass the assessment, as it already manifests the personality traits essential for the profession.

4. Final Interview for Comparative Analysis for the Integration of Essential Skills and Personality Traits

Applicants will be subject to the panel final interview wherein each applicant is tested of theoretical, hypothetical, and practical situations applying all the skills and traits for K9 dog handlers. Questions range from individual or collective method to reinforce any situational assertion of the applicant's candid responses.

STAGE 4. DEPLOYMENT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW

If an applicant successfully passes all the requirements and assessments, he/she will now be an official K9 Dog handler of the Philippine Coast Guard. Hence, the dog handler proceeds to the following:

1. Issuance of official certification;
2. Deployment to assigned units or areas, and;
3. Every month or quarter, as needed, each K9 dog handler undergoes a continuous re-evaluation of their skills and fitness to support ongoing professional development and career growth.

The PCG must consider the results of the Personality Assessment before deploying personnel to support their development. Dog handlers who exhibit low levels of openness to experience and conscientiousness should be paired with handlers who demonstrate high levels of extroversion and agreeableness. Simply put, their personalities must complement each other to reinforce and strengthen the team's core foundation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provided valuable insights into the essential components that contribute to the success of K9 dog handlers within the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). The findings highlighted the significance of educational background and field experience, both of which serve as the foundational pillars of a K9 dog handler's career. These qualifications support the physical, mental, and emotional demands of the profession and enhance overall job performance.

The proficiency in dog handling skills exhibited by the respondents reflected not only their technical knowledge but also their unwavering commitment, passion, and resilience. These competencies are shaped by years of service, rigorous training, and real-world application, contributing to effective performance and operational readiness.

The manifestation of positive personality traits, such as conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, was found to be strongly associated with work success. These traits help handlers meet and exceed organizational expectations, address work-related challenges, and maintain job satisfaction and longevity in service.

Furthermore, the study underscored the vital role of intrinsic motivation in shaping the perspectives and behaviors of successful K9 handlers. Respondents prioritized internal drivers, such as a sense of purpose, empathy for their canine partners, and a strong commitment to public service, over external rewards. The emotional bond between handler and dog, along with a sense of civic duty, significantly contributed to the development of essential skills and the consistent demonstration of desirable traits.

In light of these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the recruitment, training, and professional development of K9 dog handlers in the PCG:

1. Adopt the Proposed Recruitment and Training Framework

Replace the current selection process with the proposed multi-level, comprehensive, and inclusive recruitment and training framework. This model ensures that incoming K9 handlers possess the minimum qualifications, required skills, desirable personality traits, and intrinsic motivation necessary for long-term success in the field.

2. Establish a K9 Reserve Unit

Develop a K9 Reserve Unit composed of previously certified and evaluated K9 handlers who can be readily deployed based on operational needs. This proactive strategy allows the PCG to address manpower shortages efficiently without compromising the quality of personnel.

3. Promote Continuing Education

Encourage all K9 handlers to pursue post-education as part of a structured pathway for professional growth. Making continuous education a prerequisite for promotion can reinforce competence, ethical practice, and compliance with legal standards.

4. Address Gender Disparity in the Field

Given the underrepresentation of women in K9 dog handling, future efforts must examine and address the barriers preventing female participation. Promoting diversity and inclusion in this specialized field is essential for equitable opportunities and organizational growth.

5. Provide Support for Neuroticism Management

Incorporate specialized training and support programs, particularly for female handlers, to help manage indicators of neuroticism. Addressing this personality dimension may enhance emotional resilience and overall job performance.

6. Conduct Further Longitudinal Research

Future studies with a larger and more diverse sample are recommended to explore the long-term impacts of personality traits, demo-

graphic factors (such as age, gender, and tenure), and motivation on K9 handler effectiveness and retention.

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