

Effect of an agreeable boss on subordinate adaptive performance of Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent of influence an agreeable boss had on subordinate adaptively in the workplace. The study aimed at confirming the effectiveness of the agreeable dimension of personality trait in facilitating adaptive performance from subordinates in order to provide tropical evidence between both constructs. The research was quantitative and implored inferential statistic to analyze data generated from 300 staff of five federal universities in South East, Nigeria. The findings of the study unveiled that an agreeable boss was a statistical significant predictor of subordinate adaptive performance. The result of this study also bears practical implications.

Key Words: 1.Agreeable boss, 2.subordinate, 3.adaptive performance, 4.Federal universities, 5.South-East

Introduction

Most researchers have maintained that the trait of agreeableness helps an individual to build harmonious relationship with others (Lun, 2006) which in essence promotes co-operation. This may imply that where a boss is agreeable, this may be reflective in such attitudes as trust, soft-heartedness, kindness, considerate nature and so on towards subordinates. While many have applauded this dimension of personality as being imperative for a boss to stimulate performance from subordinate (Bandle, 2013) others view the attributes of this trait with mix feelings and one which may mar performance when subordinate begin to perceive such a boss as one who is so sympathetic and can easily buy into their excuses even without considering its effect on performance. In this case there may be tendencies for subordinates to regard such an agreeable boss as a weakling that does not have a firm hold on his position as a boss. Subordinate who do not possess such trait may have decreased perception of threat and retaliation (Altaf et al. 2020) and may leverage on this perception to display unfriendly work behaviour . These and many more are controversial issues that tend to cast doubt as to the actual efficacy of the agreeable trait in propelling performance from subordinate particularly gaining their genuine loyalty when there is need for change that requires that they have to adapt to such changes, hence the need for this study. The study will therefore evaluate

whether the possession of the agreeable trait by a boss in federal universities is instrumental to subordinate's ability to agree and co-operate with such a boss especially in situations when there is need for changes and new trend to be made (adaptive performance). There is no doubt that several works have been done on personality but the study on the effect of boss agreeableness on subordinate adaptive performance seems to be missing. This study intends to further evaluate and verify the actual effect of the agreeable trait of a boss on subordinate adaptive performance particularly of federal universities in South East, Nigeria. In view of the above, the study intends to test the following hypothesis:

H₁: An agreeable boss has a significant effect on subordinate adaptive performance.

H₀: An agreeable boss has no significant effect on subordinate adaptive performance.

Need for the study

The present turbulent business environment has called on the need for organizations to match their activities with current changes. It is therefore imperative that strategies be developed that will help business organizations align effectively with such changes which can be incorporated within the programs of an organization in such a way that employees will willingly buy into such changes and ensure survival and sustainability of the organization. The issues of having a boss that can drive such willingness from followers or subordinates seem to be a core aspect of such strategy in order to ensure adaptability when changes of any form occur.

Empirical Review

Boss Agreeableness

Rosebeger (2014) described an agreeable boss as: extent to which individuals value cooperation and social harmony, honesty, decency, and trustworthiness. Agreeable individuals also tend to have an optimistic view of human nature. Shi et al. (2018) stated that agreeableness refers to the tendency to be warm, kind, gentle, trusting, and reliable while Gupta& Gupta (2020) explained agreeable people as kind, gentle, cooperative, supportive and ready to help others. In summary the agreeable boss may then be seen as one who makes every effort to make himself acceptable by subordinates in order to crave for their support.

Adaptive Performance

Contemporary business environment is characterized by turbulence (Al-hawary & Al-hamwan, 2017, Jovanovic, 2017) hence the need to hire and retain employees who are easy in adapting to changes that are meant to facilitate positive developments for organizational growth. Ramawickram et al. (2017) referred to adaptive performance as an employee's proficiency in adapting to changes in a work system or work roles, it included adjusting goals and plans according to situation, generating new innovative ideas, learning new tasks and technologies, understanding other groups or cultures, being flexible and open minded towards others, showing resilience, quick analysis, remaining calm, and acting appropriately. Adaptive performance is a construct used to describe adaptation as action, referring to the behaviours displayed by workers to change according to job demands (Baard et al. 2014). Although, adaptive performance may look like task performance, it implies performing the same activity "to a greater degree, with greater intensity, or in a substantially different way" (Dorsey et al. 2017). In that sense, a longitudinal study developed by Griffin, Parker, and Mason (Griffin et al. 2010) found support for the distinction between proficient and emergent behaviours, each one involving different antecedents. Shoss et al. (2012) stated that at the individual level of adaptive performance can facilitate positive outcomes such as enhanced performance capability and career success

Agreeableness and Adaptive Performance

Cherry (2019) stated that agreeable personality dimension included attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other prosocial behaviors. People who are high in agreeableness tend to be more cooperative while those low in this trait tend to be more competitive and sometimes even manipulative. Liang & Chang (2014) defined agreeableness as referring to being cooperative, trusting, easy going, soft-hearted, altruistic and so on. Vedel & Propat (2017) stated that agreeableness was associated with accommodating and cooperative attitudes towards the social environment and a compliant response to social demands. Kandler et al. (2015) stated that agreeableness was associated with being compassionate, kind, trustworthy and tolerance. Camille (2019) stated that the trait of agreeableness helped individuals to build and maintain harmonious relationship with others to facilitate social interactions in general and social co-operations in particular. This may imply that agreeable bosses will be easily approachable and subordinates can readily meet them when their assistant is needed to enhance effective and efficient performance. Gupta & Gupta (2020) described agreeable people as kind, gentle, cooperative, supportive and ready to help others. This is to say that where a boss is agreeable there is tendency of willingness to support and assist subordinates when the need arises. Agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring, considerate, generous, and gentle and such individuals have an optimistic view of human nature. Zaldi et al. (2013) stated that agreeable individuals were sympathetic to others and had a desire to help others; in return they expect others to be helpful. Haung et al. (2014) stated that once employees derive a certain amount of perfection in their assigned tasks, they try to adapt their attitude and behaviour to the varied requirements of their job roles. Baard et al. (2014) emphasized that an effective adaptive performance necessitates employees' ability to efficiently deal with volatile circumstance. This implied that where the boss is agreeable, co-operating and relating with subordinates they will be ready to go with him all the way in total loyalty to ensure that expected objectives are obtained especially where there was need for organizational change. Luber et al. (2010) stated that adaptability associated with agreeableness makes it easier for students to make extra efforts with homework. Ramos-Villagrasa (2019) stated that being able to identify the most adaptable workers was a way to pursue organizational goals and at the same time to prevent the emergence of psychosocial risks in the workplace.

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Population and Sample

The South-East geographical zone of Nigeria is made up of five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) and each of these states has just one federal university (Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUAAU), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ikwo, Ebonyi state, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) respectively. The population is composed of both academic and non-academic staff of the Five Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria summing to a total of 17,272 staff. The universities were selected because they were the only five that existed in South-East, Nigeria from which a sample size of 377 was randomly selected.

Data and Sources of data

Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was achieved with the use of structured questionnaire while the secondary was from the review of related literatures. 377 copies of structured questionnaire based on the constructs were distributed randomly to participants through the aid of research assistants in the

respective universities and 300 copies were returned denoting a response rate of 80% (approximate). Responses were ranked using the Likertscale.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory and Agreeableness

The Social Exchange proposes that human relationship is based on an exchange process that aims to maximize the benefit of such relationship and minimize the cost of engaging in such relationship. In order words the relationship between a boss and his subordinates is expected to enhance increased adaptive performance but subordinates will give in to such relationship when they perceive their boss as a person who is easily touched by their feelings. Homan (1961) stated that people tend to weigh the potential benefits and risk of venturing into such relationship before taking a decision on whether to be part of it. This implies that the bosses may tend to analyze the benefits that will be achieved when they are agreeable with their subordinates. The expectation is that when bosses are agreeable they are likely to gain the loyalty of subordinates.

Statistical Tools

Boss agreeableness was measured using the Big Five Personality Model developed by McCrae et al. (2010), Subordinate Adaptive Performance was measured by adopting the scale developed by Pradhan & Jena (2016). Five questions strongly related to each construct were adopted with two of the questions negatively waded to avoid biases from responses and the questionnaire was in accordance with Likert 5-point scales. Collected data were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted using linear regression utilizing SPSS version 21 in order to further verify the effect of an agreeable boss on subordinate adaptive performance.

Descriptive Statistics

Boss Agreeableness

Table 1: He tries to help subordinate in need

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	42	14.0	14.0	14.0
	disagree	25	8.3	8.3	22.3
	undecided	24	8.0	8.0	30.3
	agree	53	17.7	17.7	48.0
	strongly agree	156	52.0	52.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 1 indicates that, 42 (14.0%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 25 (8.3%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 24 (8.0) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 53 (17.7%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas 156 (52.0%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree', hence we strongly agree that the boss tries to help subordinates in need.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	19	6.3	6.3	6.3
	disagree	25	8.3	8.3	14.7
	undecided	34	11.3	11.3	26.0
	agree	42	14.0	14.0	40.0
	strongly agree	180	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS Computation]

Table 2 indicates that, 19 (6.3%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 25 (8.3%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 34 (11.3) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 42 (14.0%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas 180 (60.0%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree', hence we strongly agree that the boss is generally considerate.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulate Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	29	9.7	9.7	9.7
	disagree	22	7.3	7.3	17.0
	undecided	58	19.3	19.3	36.3
	agree	27	9.0	9.0	45.3
	strongly agree	164	54.7	54.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 3 indicates that, 29 (9.7%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 22 (7.3%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 58 (19.3) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 27 (9.0%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas 184 (54.7%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree', hence we strongly agree that the boss is insulted, he just tries to forgive and forget.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	120	40.0	40.0	40.0
	disagree	89	29.7	29.7	69.7
	undecided	24	8.0	8.0	77.7
	agree	40	13.3	13.3	91.0
	strongly agree	27	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 4 indicates that, 120 (40.0%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 89 (29.7%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 24 (8.0) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 40 (13.3%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 27 (9.0%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree', hence we strongly disagree that the boss is a selfish person.

Table 5: He always finds fault with subordinate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	92	30.7	30.7	30.7
	disagree	131	43.7	43.7	74.3
	undecided	9	3.0	3.0	77.3
	agree	42	14.0	14.0	91.3
	strongly agree	26	8.7	8.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 5 indicates that, 92 (30.7%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 131 (43.7%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 9 (3.0) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 42 (14.0%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 26 (8.7%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'disagree', hence we disagree that the boss always finds fault with subordinates.

Subordinate's Adaptive Performance

Table 6 : Always ready to manage change in my job					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	86	28.7	28.7	28.7
	disagree	12	4.0	4.0	32.7
	undecided	16	5.3	5.3	38.0
	agree	49	16.3	16.3	54.3
	strongly agree	137	45.7	45.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 6 indicates that, 86 (28.7%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 12 (4.0%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 16 (5.3) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 49 (16.3%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 137 (45.7%) respondents

affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'; hence we strongly agree that the subordinates are always ready to manage changes in their jobs.

Table 7: I am very comfortable with job flexibility

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	55	18.3	18.3	18.3
	disagree	53	17.7	17.7	36.0
	undecided	8	2.7	2.7	38.7
	agree	34	11.3	11.3	50.0
	strongly agree	150	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 7 indicates that, 55 (18.3%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 53 (17.7%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 8 (2.7) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 34 (11.3%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 150 (50.0%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree', hence we strongly agree that the subordinates are very comfortable with job flexibility.

Table 8: I do cope with change from time to time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	66	22.0	22.0	22.0
	disagree	35	11.7	11.7	33.7
	undecided	23	7.7	7.7	41.3
	agree	55	18.3	18.3	59.7
	strongly agree	121	40.3	40.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 8 indicates that, 66 (22.0%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 35 (11.7%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 23 (7.7) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 55 (18.3%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 121 (40.3%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly agree', hence we strongly agree that the subordinates do cope with change from time to time.

Table 9: I lose my temper when faced with criticism from my boss

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	144	48.0	48.0	48.0
	disagree	91	30.3	30.3	78.3
	undecided	12	4.0	4.0	82.3
	agree	29	9.7	9.7	92.0
	strongly agree	24	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 9 indicates that, 144 (48.0%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 91 (30.3%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 12 (4.0%) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 29 (9.7%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 24 (8.0%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree', hence we strongly disagree that the subordinates lose their temper when faced with criticism from their boss.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	154	51.3	51.3	51.3
	disagree	82	27.3	27.3	78.7
	undecided	10	3.3	3.3	82.0
	agree	22	7.3	7.3	89.3
	strongly agree	32	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey 2021 [SPSS computation]

Table 10 indicates that, 154 (51.3%) of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree'; 82 (27.3%) respondents affirmed 'disagree'; 10 (3.3) of the respondents affirmed 'undecided'; 22 (7.3%) respondents affirmed 'agree'; whereas, 32 (10.7%) respondents affirmed 'strongly agree'. From the result, majority of the respondents affirmed 'strongly disagree', hence we strongly disagree that the subordinates feel bad whenever they are told to make a change in their work.

Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The research instrument was validated using Content validity while the reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Below is indicated the result of reliability in Table 11. The value of 0.802 obtained for boss agreeableness and 0.839 for subordinate adaptive performance were regarded as good which implied that the instruments were reliable and valid for the study.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Boss Agreeableness	0.802
Subordinate Adaptive Performance	0.839

Regression

Simple linear regression analysis was employed to verify the effect of an agreeable boss on subordinate agreeable performance. This is shown in Tables 12, 13, 14

Table 12:

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.148 ^a	.022	.019	3.65662
a. Predictors: (Constant), BA				

Table 12 showed that the dependent variable was Subordinate Adaptive Performance (SAP) while the independent variable was boss agreeableness (BA).

Table 13

Anova ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	112.973	1	112.973	8.449	.004 ^b
	Residual	5014.088	375	13.371		
	Total	5127.061	376			
a. Dependent Variable: SAP						
b. Predictors: (Constant), BA						

Table 14

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.238	1.211		8.457	.000
	BA	.213	.073	.148	2.907	.004
a. Dependent Variable: SAP						

Results and Findings

Tables 1 – 10 showed the frequency tables to the responses on various questions regarding the constructs of agreeableness and adaptive performance. Data in tables 12, 13 and 14 for the regression analysis of the hypothesis with (F- ratio of 8.449 and P < 0.05) indicated that the model is a good predictor and fit for the data. The result of t-statistics 8.457 revealed that an agreeable boss was a statistical significant predictor of subordinate adaptive performance and this was also confirmed by the P-value of 0.004 < 0.05 which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and hence the conclusion that an agreeable boss had a positive and significant effect on subordinate adaptive performance. The value of R = .148 shows that the strength of the relationship between an agreeable boss was not so strong. This may mean that the ability of subordinates to accept and adapt to changes may not totally rely on the fact that they have an agreeable boss but also due to other factors such as the fear of

losing their job, getting a query or any other punishment that may result from their refusal to adapt or any other reason. In order words although an agreeable boss had a positive effect on subordinate adaptive performance but this is not enough to determine a subordinate adaptability to change. The findings are highly consistent with the findings of most studies (Chiaburu et al. 2013, Echchakoui, 2013). Chiaburu et al. (2013) also implied that support from a boss can enhance subordinate adaptive performance especially as it relates to workplace. Terryima (2019) also reiterated that agreeableness significantly influenced job performance behavior which may include the adaptability capability of subordinates. Pahwa (2015) also emphasized that personality trait such as agreeableness had adaptive value. Malendez (2020) found that agreeableness predicted coping strategies. Again Terryima (2019) reiterated that agreeableness significantly influenced job performance behavior of which subordinate capability to adapt may be inclusive.

Conclusion

The result of the analysis revealed that an agreeable boss had a positive significant effect on adaptive performance of subordinates in federal universities of South- East, Nigeria. The findings hold practical implications for federal universities and unveil the need for bosses to express such trait as agreeableness; however its implication for other institutions may further be explored.

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