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## Conceptualizing Leadership Traits as Correlate of Trade Union Leaders' role Performance in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Various socio-psychological factors such as the effect of leadership traits on trade union leaders' role performance have not been receiving substantial attention. Hence, this study focused on the effect of leadership traits on trade union leaders' role performance. Descriptive research of ex-post facto was adopted. Multistage sampling technique was used to select 1,100 trade from the one-third industrial unions of all the registered labour unions under the Nigerian labour congress. The instrument used were leadership traits scale (LTS) with reliability coefficient,  $r = 0.82$ ; and leaders' role performance scale (LRPS),  $r = 0.76$ . Research question, and hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance were applied. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical (contingency) tools. The study revealed that leadership traits were potent factors in enhancing the role of trade union leaders of workplaces in Nigeria. Therefore, the design for effective leadership role performance should focus on leadership traits' enhancement towards leaders' role performance.*

**Key Words:** trade union leaders, roles performance, leadership traits, personality traits

### 1. Introduction

One of the generic attributes that is presumed to have effect on performance is personality traits. Cardova (1980), Farrant (1981), Shay & McConnon (2002), Draz (2007), Cherry (2023) conceptualise personality traits in terms of self-dimension. To them, the aspect of self-dimension entails those who are considerate, kind, honest, trustworthy and appreciative within the same group at workplace, whilst one may find others who have extreme opposite personality traits such as jealousy, dishonesty and insecurity. Brown & McCartney (2004) point out that the primary goal of understanding the personality traits under generic attributes of union leadership is to help workplaces achieve an understanding of union leadership performance.

Gilles (2004), Kester & Esan (2010) are of the opinion that individuals do not and cannot react to situations in the same way. This, they adduce to some biological and generic factors as well as to life experiences. Suffice it to say that each individual has some unified and enduring individual personality characteristics that tend to lead to certain behaviours and different fundamental building blocks of each individual's behaviour and response to issues and situations.

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Another factor that contributes towards personality traits' formation by an individual trade union at workplaces is the issue of competence skills and training. On the issue of training and competence skills as an aspect of psychological factor or attribute, Fin (1991) describes them as socio-cognitive and academic dimension. He explains that training and competence skills when acquired by union leaders change and modify their personal perceptions and attributes.

At workplace, general psychological attributes, also known as generic attributes, can be conceptualised in terms of capability and generic skills. Finn (1991), Mayer (1992), Yeung & Lee (1999), Jensen & Loaker (2001), Kearns (2001), Gilles (2004), Brown & McCartney (2004) point out the importance of psychological attributes, as contributing factors towards performance at workplaces; meaning psychological learning factors and performance, capability and generic skills as opined by Jensen & Loaker (2001). Kearns (2001) and Gilles (2004) refer to those psychological attributes that are learnable and transferable as generic skills. Karpin (1995) point out that there are some skills that could improve performance when they are acquired cumulatively by human beings through practice. And having assimilated these skills, they become patterns of life (modelling). This pattern of life will not only improve workers' productivity but also their personality. For Brown & McCartney (2004), further psychological attributes could be seen as capability, this capability encapsulates *potential and content*. They define the potential aspect of capability as the extent to which the individuals could achieve, having acquired skills and knowledge, while content, is being referred to as subject matter, which stands as standard upon which an individual leader can attain, by using his/her potential in terms of skills, knowledge and ability.

Applying personality traits towards performance, the Australian Education Ministry set up 'Organisation Development' in 2001/2002 for the purpose of studying generic skills in order to find out how to develop competency towards effective performance of workers at various Australian education sectors. This led to the outcome of the Australian Competency Blueprint: a workbook format towards performance at education sector, which was designed by using the competence skills' ideas of Finn (1991) and Mayer (1992). Meanwhile, Fin (1991), Mayer (1992) note that people in leadership positions and workers generally must have competence skills in order to successfully perform. Suck skills, according to Fin (1991), include psychological and interpersonal skills, language and communication, problem solving, cultural understanding, scientific and technology. The first four

items were categorised under socio-cognitive skills while item five was categorised under academic skills.

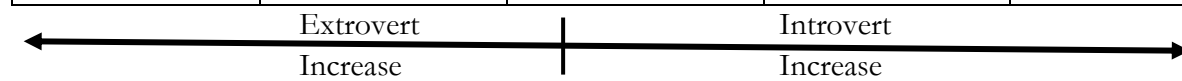
Further, Meyer & Turner (2002) stress the importance of generic competency towards effective performance by leaders in an organisation. They listed seven competence skills for measuring performance at workplaces, such as communicating ideas and information; solving problems; collecting, analysing and organising information; planning; organising; using mathematical ideas and technique, and using technology. They categorised the first five under socio-cognitive skills, and the last two as academic competencies.

In a related manner, the Education Commission of Hong Kong (ECHF) (2000) suggested and worked on nine types of psychological skills as essential components towards effective performance in such places as educational institutions and leadership performance at workplaces. These nine psychological skills are collaborating skills, communication, and creativity, problem solving skills, team work, critical thinking skills, numeracy skills, information gathering process and technology skills.

As initially given in Cardova (1980) and supported by Farrant (1981), Shay & McConnon (2002) and Ahiauzu (2008), that performance by union leaders could be determined by their personality traits and that trade union leaders with different personality traits determine different degree of performance at workplaces; this is revealed in Table 1.0

**Table 1.0: Personality Traits Reflecting Leadership Traits**

(A) Traits as displayed when very strongly developed	(B) Traits as displayed when strongly developed	(C) Traits as developed by the average person	(D) Traits as displayed when very weakly developed	(E) Traits as displayed when weakly developed
Aggressiveness: Lead to a kind of performance	Non-compromised leaders: lead to a kind of performance	Assertiveness, conscientiousness, even temperance, perseverance, and sociability: lead to a kind of performance	Reserved: lead to a kind of performance	Submissiveness: lead to a kind of performance



Source: Adapted from Farrant (1981)

Based on Table 1.0 on personality traits, union leaders with traits as developed by 'the average person' (C) are of more emotional intelligence or emotional stability than trade union leaders with traits 'strongly and weakly developed'. These various personality traits make union leaders exhibit different attitudes and life styles at workplaces, which invariably contribute differently to their performance. Cardova (1980) opines that union leaders typified by desperation, tempera mentality, strong desire for public recognition and love several jobs at a time may be classified as aggressive; and that aggressive leaders may in some cases be prone to achieve more for their unions than assertive union leaders with such characteristics as rarely competitive, desire little or no public recognition, not ambitious, does not lose temper easily. As a result of differences in personality traits, there follows a significant difference in performance among union leaders because of their different emotional stabilities of personality traits (Shay & McConnon, 2002).

However, Ahiauzu (2008) alluding to Reddin, Thomas, Redding, Hersey & Blanchard (1970) is of the opinion that two dimensional situations (traits and leadership style) cannot be effectively used to measure leaders' performance without considering environmental influences such as government policies, regulations and laws, societal culture and traditions. Ahiauzu (2008) is of the opinion that these environmental influences in most cases had effect on personality traits and ultimately on performance outcome. In this vein, the task, the labour and the environmental influences give the tri-dimensional measures that determine effective union leaders' performance at workplace as opined in Kester & Esan (2010).

Further, Cherry (2023) reveals that ingredients such as openness to experience, consciousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neurotism (emotional stability) are essential parameters that constitute yardsticks of measuring personality traits of an individual.

All told, leadership traits would be exhibited during negotiation, participation, consultation, regulation and in all other overriding purposes of establishing trade union when owners of industries, especially through their representatives, and union leaders, representatives of workers, are involving in matters concerning workplaces. This is another focus in conceptualising personality traits as the works of Hamlin (2002) revealed. Hamlin (2002) towards leaders' performance suggested two different areas – traits development and skills attainment – towards collective leadership traits in achieving performance. This is given in Table 2.0 below.

**Table 2.0: Hamlin’s Leadership Model on the Effective Formation of Personality Traits towards Performance**

<b>(Personality traits naturally expected of a trade union leaders)</b>	<b>Competence skills and trainings needed towards some further improvement on personality traits and self-concept</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage emotion in yourself and others</li> <li>• Show compassion</li> <li>• Ambitious and achievement oriented</li> <li>• Assertive</li> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Decisive</li> <li>• Dependable</li> <li>• Dominant (desire to influence others)</li> <li>• Energetic (high activity level)</li> <li>• Persistent</li> <li>• Self-confident</li> <li>• Tolerant of stress</li> <li>• Willing to assume responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clever intelligent</li> <li>• Conceptually skilled</li> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Diplomatic and tactful</li> <li>• Fluent in Speaking</li> <li>• Manage work horizontally</li> <li>• Build personal credibility</li> <li>• Manage time and resources</li> <li>• Support individual effort</li> <li>• Share information</li> <li>• Make decision that solve problems</li> <li>• Display professional ethics</li> </ul>

*Source: Adapted from Hamlin (2002)*

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The overriding expectation from the owners of industries is the optimum performance of workers. Once this expectation is fulfilled by the workers, they also expect the reward for better conditions of service from the owners and the management at workplaces. Therefore, for the attainment of good performance and the subsequent gaining of better rewards, the wage earners put in place, representatives, and their union leaders, who they believed have the same aspirations in the world of works. Yet, the representatives nowadays are increasingly become less visible and articulate since workplace is increasingly becoming complex and unprecedented rise in information and social matters. The issues of information and social matters as well as the personality of an average trade union leader could determine his performance. The challenge therefore is whether the personality traits’ factor impact performance. If the answer is in the affirmative, what is the relationship between personality traits’ factors and trade union leaders’ role performance at workplaces? To what extent leadership traits determine the performance of trade union leaders in Nigeria? It is against this background that this study investigated the effect of personality traits as determinant factor of trade union leaders’ performance using some registered industrial unions affiliated to Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in Nigeria.

## 2. Research Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study, an *ex-post facto* type since the independent variables tested in the study (Personality traits' factors) would not be manipulated. The population for the study consisted one-third of all the registered unionised industries attributed to the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in Nigeria. A total of 1,100 respondents constituted the sample size of the study being drawn from the union leader's middle and high cadre. The main instrument leadership traits scale (LTs) was an 8-item modified version from the Hamlin's (2002) leadership traits model towards effective performance. This model was preferred, for it covered essential areas of personality traits such as social psychological, sociological, economic and political factors. Typical items in the scale read.

- i. "I can manage my emotion during union matters' meeting"
- ii. "Union leader need to be always cooperative in order to achieve performance"
- iii. "Government should regulate measures but general economic situation should determine worker's job satisfaction"

The scale was pilot tested using split-half method; it yielded reliability coefficient,  $r = 0.82$

The second instrument leaders' role performance scale, LILPs, gave  $r = 0.76$ . It was a 10-items modified version of the performance issues of capability procedure scale constructed by the NICs of the University of Exeter for the Directorate of Human Resources in the UK. The directorate constructed its scale based on capability, which involves employees' skills, aptitude competence and their application on the performance issue existing rules and regulations governing work performance. This scale was once applied by Ahiauzu (2008).

### 2.1 Research Question

**Question 1:** To what extent would personality traits' factors relatively (individually) influence the trade union leaders' role performance?

### 2.2 Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis will be tested for the study at 0.05 level of significance.

H<sub>01</sub>: There would be no significant difference between the influence of personality traits' factors and the trade union leaders' role performance at workplaces in Nigeria

### 3. Results and Findings

**Q1:** To what extent would personality traits' factors relatively (individually) influence the trade union leaders' role performance?

**Research Question:** To what extent would personality traits' factors relatively (individually) influence the trade union leaders' role performance?

H<sub>01</sub>: There would be no significant difference between the influence of personality traits' factors and the trade union leaders' role performance at workplaces in Nigeria

**Table 3.0: Personality Traits' Factors as Determinants of Trade Union Leaders' Role Performance**

	Items/Factors	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	S.D	Remark
1	Union leader should be dominant and aggressive in order to influence performance	45 44.0%	325 18.1%	187 31.2%	66 6.1%	2.35	0.531	NS
2	Union leader need to be always cooperative in order to achieve performance	44 4.1%	204 29.7%	540 32.4%	134 13.1%	2.64	0.788	S
3	Leaders need to be creative since they have knowledge of the rules and regulations of the workplace	15 1.4%	545 53.3%	88 8.3%	378 36.9%	2.90	0.814	S
4	Inborn aptitude and environmental traits developed by a trade union leader could determine his/her performance	16 1.6%	92 9.0%	450 46.9%	436 42.6%	3.62	0.937	S
5	Management of emotion determines leaders' performance	323 31.5%	20 2.1%	160 16.0%	514 50.2%	2.63	0.763	S
6	There should be opportunity for trade union leaders and co-workers on attaining knowledge and acquisition of skills towards performance generally at workplaces	24 2.3%	120 11.7%	439 12.9%	441 43.1%	3.64	0.975	S
7	Trade union leaders' academic self-concept and social self-concept determine their performance	50 5.0%	400 40.3%	250 25.1%	328 32.0%	3.52	0.715	S
	Average Mean Score						3.04	S

**Source:** Field Survey

Table 3.0 reveals that personality traits combining, is a good determinant of trade union leaders' performance at workplace, with the average mean score of 3.04. The factors/items of leadership traits



such as cooperation, creativity, inborn and attitudinal characteristics enhance leaders' role performance, as earlier pointed to in Table 2.0.

In the same vein, the result of item 4 indicates that inborn, aptitude and environment contribute to the leadership traits which invariably will contribute to the chance of performance by the trade union leaders at workplaces. This is in consonance with the studies of Gilles (2004), Kester & Esan's (2010) that individuals do not and cannot react to situations in the same way. This being adduced to some biological and generic factors as well as to life experiences. Similarly, the Table 3.0 reveals that the issues of self and academic trait concept, and the management of emotion by trade union leaders, with mean scores 3.52 and 2.62 respectively are significantly important towards determining performance at workplaces. Based on the low mean score (2.35) the table reveals that to be dominant or domineering (as a trait of a trade union leader) would not promote performance at workplaces. The point being made here is that a dominant trade union leader would not likely perform. Yet, the reverse is the case with the opinion of Cardova (1980) which expressed that union leaders of aggressive and dominant characteristics with life styles typified by desperation, temperamentality, strong desire for public recognition, and love several jobs at a time may in some cases be prone to achieve more for their unions than assertive union leaders with such characteristics like competitiveness, desire little or no public recognition, not ambitious, not lose temper easily. The implication of leadership traits as determinant of a trade union leaders' role performance may be borne in the fact that trade union leaders with different biological and generic factors, and different experience from environmental situations would not and cannot react to situations in the same way. This is because they (trade union leaders) have different and enduring individual personality characteristics that lend to certain behaviors and different fundamental building blocks that form each individual's behavior and responses to issue and situation, which invariably may impact different degree of performance at workplaces.

H<sub>01</sub>: There would be no significant difference between the influence of personality traits' factors and the trade union leaders' role performance at workplaces in Nigeria

**Table 4.0: The joint impact of personality traits’ factors of respondents on their performance at workplaces (model summary)**

Model	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10003.327	4	2500.832	177.251	0.05
Residual	14898.961	1956			
Total	24902.288	1060	14.109		

- a. *Predictor (consonant) Effective Leadership Traits’ Factors: cooperation, creativity, inborn, attitudinal characteristics*
- b. *Dependent Variable: Trade Union Performance*

Table 4.0 shows that the linear combination of leadership traits’ items is potent determinant since it had relative significant effect of  $F(4, 1956) = 177.251; p < 0.05$ . The result of the effective leadership traits is in consonance with the earlier studies of Cardova (1980), Farrant (1981), Brown & McCartney (2004), Kester & Esan (2010), Cherry (2023) that reveal effective leadership trait as a strong determinant factor for predicting the trade union leaders’ performance at workplaces.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that no trade union can perform in isolation without putting some necessary factors into consideration, such as personality traits, that would enhance performance. This emphasizes the fact that indicators for workers’ performance at industrial organization level should not be limited to economic, political and government measures only.

The findings of this study have implications for social and psychological development with respect to effective performance of trade union leaders’ role at workplaces. The study will promote positive determinants such as leadership traits of the trade union leaders’ role performance in industrial unions as investigated and confirmed in this study as significant and worth of note by educational planners, policy makers, labour/management practitioners, labour and productivity official and related others. As revealed in tables 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0, militancy in resolving all forms of industrial actions should be discouraged. The degree of solidarity towards achievement by the trade union leaders should be based in worker education.

Suggestion for further research that the study could be replicated by using other government agencies, corporations, and micro and multinational private organisations to find out if the findings can be generalized.

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