



THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND JOB INVOLVEMENT: AN INVESTIGATION OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS IN SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the Big Five Personality Traits and Job Involvement of university lecturers in south east, Nigeria. A total number of 724 lecturers drawn from the six private, four state and four federal universities in the south east participated in the study. This number comprised of 387 males and 337 females whose ages ranged from 25 to 64 years and a mean age of 45.24 (SD =9.57). The participants were administered with two instruments: Job Involvement Scale and The Big Five Inventory. It was hypothesized that job involvement will not correlate with each of the big five personality dimensions respectively. The findings revealed that, high scores on conscientiousness and low scores on neuroticism were significant predictors of job involvement ($P < .05$)

Keywords: personality traits, conscientiousness, neuroticism, job involvement, South Eastern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Job involvement which is the degree of psychological identification an employee has with his/her role in the workplace (Khan & Nemati, 2011); has been widely studied. The reason is that the success of any organization or institution depend inter-alia on the job involvement of its workers. Employees with a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and really care about the work they do (Robbins, Judge & Sanghi, 2009). Lodahl and Kejner (1965) were the first to use the term job involvement. They defined the concept as “the degree to which a person is identified psychologically with his work or the

importance of work to his total self image (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965, p.24). Other researchers (Khan & Nemati, 2011; Kanungo, 1982) have also emphasized psycho-logical identification with job as the main foci of job involvement.

Generally, job involvement has been approached from two dimensions. The first dimension conceptualizes it as an individual difference variable- job involvement occurs when the possession of certain needs, values or personal characteristics predispose individuals to become more or less involved in their jobs. The second dimension relates job involvement to a response to specific work situation characteristics. In other words, certain types of jobs or characteristics of the work situation influence the degree to which an individual becomes involved in his/her job (Chungtai, 2008). Chungtai's definition is in line with Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) conception. They argued that job involvement is an individual differences variable, whether primarily an attribute of the person or a response to the work environment. The "attribute of the person" links job involvement to personality characteristics, such that job involvement represents the employee's response to the psychological stimulation that characterizes the job (Liao & Lee, 2009). On the other hand, if job involvement is a response to the work environment, the employee's characteristics is insignificant while emphasis is placed on the work organization, work design and leadership styles. Some existing research assume that higher job involvement is attributed to an employee's personal (inherent) attribute (Mudrack, 2004, Mckelvey and Sekeran (1977). Thus many researchers have studied the relationship between personality variables such as the Big Five Personality dimensions.

The Big Five Model is a personality assessment model that taps five basic dimensions. They are extraversion, agreeableness conscientiousness, neuroticism (emotional instability), and openness to experience. These personality factors have been observed to greatly determine how people see their jobs and their relationship with the working environment, the job itself, and how their work and life are committed. Extraversion captures one's comfort level with relationships (Robbins, et al; 2009), and it is a prominent factor in personality as it appears in most personality measures (Judge et al; 1999). Because extroverted personality are sociable, assertive, gregarious, talkative and ambitious (Cooper, 2003), they often meet their aspirations and exhibit their talents in their working environment (Hurley, 1998). Studies have shown that introverts exhibit greater sensitivity to job involvement because they have lower pain threshold than extroverts (Stelmuck, 2007; Bullock, 1993). Contrary to the above finding, Smithikrai (2007) reports a positive relationship between extraversion and job success especially in jobs requiring interpersonal contacts. According to Berg and Feiji (2003), extroverted employees make better use of their competencies than do employees who are introverted. This explains the relationship between extraversion and job involvement. Also Penang, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) found that extraversion is positively related to job involvement. Wood and Wood (2001) reported a contrary finding. According to them, those who score high on extraversion stand to drop on their commitment level which invariably decreases their job involvement.

Agreeableness describes someone who is good natured, cooperative and trusting and eager to avoid conflict. Liao & Lee, (2009) found a positive correlation between agreeable personality and job involvement. In another study, research participants high in agreeableness factor were found to be cooperative, helpful, altruistic and highly involved in their job (Digman, 1990). When interacting and cooperating with others, agreeable employees also achieve better effects (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barick and Mount (1991), and Saldago (1997) found that a high level of agreeableness has a positive relationship with job involvement, which likely increases work efficiency and involvement. Also, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) found that agreeableness is positively related to job involvement. Contrarily, the relationship between the Big Five personality was investigated among 279 white collar workers. The hierarchical regression revealed that scores on agreeableness were negatively related to scores on work involvement and total hours worked in a week (Bozionelos 2004). Bozionelos reported that a low degree of relationship between agreeableness and work involvement would demonstrate higher involvement in their work and vice versa. Low agreeableness includes antagonism and selfishness; hence, those who score low on agreeableness may be more involved in their work in order to satisfy antagonistic and egotistical needs by means of advancing their career.

The conscientious personality is dutiful, well-organized, dependable and goal achievement striving (Burch & Anderson, 2004). Liao & Lee, (2009) found a positive correlation between agreeable personality and job involvement. In another study, research participants high in agreeableness factor were found to be cooperative, helpful, altruistic and highly involved in their job (Digman, 1990). When interacting and cooperating with others, agreeable employees also achieve better effects (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barick and Mount (1991), and Saldago (1997) found that a high level of agreeableness has a positive relationship with job involvement. which likely increases work efficiency and involvement. Also, Penang, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) found that agreeableness is positively related to job involvement.

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Emotional stability is a personality dimension that characterizes someone as calm, self confident, secure. Penang, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) result that neuroticism was not related to job involvement. Liao and Lee found a negative correlation between neuroticism and psychoticism and job involvement. In a

related study, 48 healthy adult males were asked to keep detailed diaries of their problems and mood over their job for an 8-day period. The result showed that those (males) who score high in neuroticism reported having more frequent daily problems with their involvement in their job and finding them to be more distressing than did men who scored low in neuroticism (Suls, Green & Hillis; 2005).

Openness to experience which is the ability to be imaginative, curious, unconventional, broad minded and cultured (Clarke & Robertson, 2005) characterize this dimension. Individuals who exhibit this personality dimension are always open to new ideas and want to improve themselves as well as their job. Cross cultural research demonstrate that the Big Five Factor personality dimensions have been found consistently in more than 35 nations including China, Israel, Japan, Germany, Spain, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, and the United States (Paunonen, Zeidner, Engvik, Oosterveld and Maliphant 2000; McCrae, Costa, Martin Onyol, Rukavishnikov, Senin, Hrebickora, & Urbanek, 2004). However, differences exist on dimension and whether countries are predominately individualistic or collectivistic. For instance, Australians consider extraversion and agreeableness to be more desirable to have than others. Japanese and Chinese consider conscientiousness to be more important than agreeableness (Honk, 2004). Also, the Big five appear to predict a bit better in individualistic than in collectivist cultures (Church & Katigbak, 2000). A review of studies involving 15 nation European communities found that conscientiousness was a valid predictor of performance across jobs and occupational groups (Salgado, 1997).

The researchers therefore consider it imperative to replicate this study using samples drawn from university lecturers in Nigeria. The following hypotheses were therefore postulated:

1. High extroversion will not significantly relate to high job involvement.
2. High Agreeableness will not correlate with high job involvement.
3. Employees characterized by high conscientiousness will not exhibit high job involvement.
4. Neuroticism will not significantly correlate with low job involvement.
5. Employees characterized by high openness will not exhibit high job involvement.

METHOD

Design and Statistics

The design for the study was cross-sectional survey design. The statistic adopted was multiple regression analysis.

Participants

The participants for this study comprised 724 lecturers drawn through convenience sampling method from all the state, federal and private universities in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, except Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). This institution was not in session as at the time the

research was conducted. The participants included 387 males and 337 females who are on full-time employment. Their age range was between 25 and 64 years, with a mean age of 45.24 (SD=9.57).

Below is a rundown of participants' demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency	%
Age		
25 -35	203	28.0
36 – 45	289	39.9
46 - 55	175	24.2
56 & above	57	7.9
Gender		
Male	387	53.5
Female	337	46.5
Length of Service		
0 -5 years	189	26.1
6 – 10 years	266	36.7
11- 19 years	170	23.5
20- 25 years	63	8.7
25 – 20	11	1.5
31 – above	25	3.5
Rank/Designation		
Graduate Asst. - Lecturer 2	418	57.7
Lecturer I – Senior Lecturer	256	35.4
Professor	50	6.9
Marital Status		
Married	472	65.2
Single	217	30.0
Divorced	23	3.2
Married but separated	12	1.7
Type of University		
Private	188	26.0
State	262	36.2
Federal	274	37.8

Measures

Two instruments were used in this study. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) and Job Involvement Scale (JIS). The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was used to measure personality dimensions of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to experience. The scale was developed by John, Donahue and Kentle (1991). John, Donahue and Kentle provided the psychometric properties for American samples; while Umeh (2004) provided the properties for Nigerian samples. The norms reported for the Nigerian sample in all the dimensions are: Extraversion M (n=60) 28.45, F (n=60) = 27.10; Agreeableness M (29.75), F (28.73); Conscientiousness M (29.10), F (29.60); Neuroticism M (23.43) F (24.48); Openness M (38.07), F (35.18). The researcher obtained an internal consistency reliability of .82 (appendix E) for the overall scale (BFI). The second scale which is the Job Involvement Scale (JIS) is a 20 item scale developed by Lodahl and Kejner (1965) which measures the degree in which a worker psychologically identifies with his job and actively participates in it. Lodahl and Kejner obtained a Spearman Brown internal reliability coefficient of .72 and .80 for females and males respectively. Mogaji (1977) provided the psychometric properties for the Nigerian samples. He reported a norm of 41.76. Score lower than the norm indicates adequate job involvement while score above the norm means poor job involvement. The instrument has direct score items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 20; and reverse score items: 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 19. It is scored on a four point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). The researcher re-validated the scale and obtained a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .73 and a mean of 46.36 which were similar to that reported by Lodahl and Kejner (1965) as well as Mogaji (1977) respectively

Procedure:

A cover letter introducing the researcher and the aim of the study was attached to each questionnaire distributed to the lecturers drawn from the institutions mentioned above. The questionnaire has a demographic section which elicited the demographic characteristics of the participants. A total of 1,150 copies of the questionnaires were distributed. Any lecturer met at his/her office and who was willing to respond to the items was given a copy. These were retrieved after a minimum of two days depending on the institution and lecturers involved. Out of the 1,150 copies distributed, 780 (67.8%) were returned. However, 56 (4.9%) copies were discarded due to incomplete responses. Thus, 724 (62.9%) were used for

data analysis. It took the researcher and her assistants eleven (11) weeks to distribute and retrieve the questionnaire

RESULTS

To test the hypotheses for the study, a multiple regression analysis was used to calculate the predictive relationships of the five personality dimensions (predictor variables). Results are presented in table 2

Table 2

Summary of Results of a Standard Multiple Regression Analyses of job involvement and the big five factor

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	B	Df	T	P
	.250	.062	.056	9.50		5		
Extraversion					-.049		-.800	.424
Agreeableness					.036		.550	.582
Conciensiousness					-.402		-5.92	.000**
Neuroticism					.224		3.52	.000 **
Openness to Experience					.014		.302	.763

Dependent variable Job Involvement, **= significant

The table above gives the R² value standing at .062, the implication is that 6% of the variance in job involvement (criterion variable) can be explained by a combination of the various causal factors. Also, the regression plane for these variables significantly departs from 0, meaning that we can predict job involvement from the Big Five personality factors (F(5,718)=9.55, p<.05).

From the result also, the 1st hypothesis was accepted. No significant relationship was found, b = -.032, t (723) = -.800, P = .424. In other words, high scores in extraversion did not predict job involvement. Smithikrai (2007); Anderson and Kring (2001); and Liao and Lee (2000) reported in their respective studies that high Extraversion relates positively to job success and job involvement, thus contradicting the

result of the present study. Other studies reported that high Extraversion leads to low job involvement (Stelmuck, 2007; Bullock, 1993; Wood & Wood 2001). Stelmuck, and Bullock reported in their separate studies that introverts (low score on extraversion scale) exhibit greater sensitivity to job involvement than extroverts. According to Wood and Wood (2001) those high on extraversion stand to drop in their commitment which decreases job involvement. In this research, high score on extraversion neither predicted high job involvement nor low job involvement.

Similarly, hypothesis 2 which stated that high Agreeableness will not correlate with high job involvement is confirmed, $b = .022$, $t(723) = .550$, $P = .582$. Previous studies by Liao and Lee 2009; Digman 1990; Barrick and Mount 1991) did not concur with the finding of this study. They found a positive correlation between agreeable personality and job involvement in their different studies. A quite different finding is that reported by Bozionelos (2004). According to him, a low degree of agreeableness leads to a higher job involvement. A likely explanation for this variation in research findings could be the different samples and population used. Similarly, their measure of job involvement differed from that used in this study. For the Nigerian sample (lecturers in South east) agreeableness which describes someone who is cooperative, tolerant, forgiving and good natured, do not predispose a lecturer to be involvement in his job. Thus, agreeableness can pay off in jobs where developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships is of utmost importance and not on personal involvement to work.

Hypothesis 3: Employees characterized by high conscientiousness will not exhibit high job involvement. Contrary to the above finding, this hypothesis was rejected, $b = -.232$, $t(-5.93) = P < .05$. As conscientiousness Scores increases, scores on the job involvement scale decreases (an indication of high job involvement). Therefore high conscientiousness predicts high job involvement. This result is in agreement with Lin and Chen (2007) study, which found that conscientious employees experience greater psychological achievement to their jobs. Smithikrai (2007); Liao and Lee (2009) studies also support this finding. They found high conscientiousness to be a predictor of high job involvement. To be job involved is a moral obligation for workers. Because conscientious lecturers are responsible, dependable and persistent, their likelihood of being not involved in their job will be very low. Penang, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) study did not concur with the result of this hypothesis tested. They reported that conscientious did not show any significant relationship with job involvement in a foreign based financial institution in the Northern region of Malaysia.

Hypothesis 4: Neuroticism will not significantly correlate with low job involvement. A significant relationship was found for neuroticism and low job involvement. This hypothesis is rejected, $b = .131$, $t(723) = 3.52$, $P < .05$. Therefore, the higher a lecturer's emotional instability (neuroticism) the lower his/her job involvement. Previous studies support this finding. Suls, Green and Hills, (1998) discovered that men who scored High in neuroticism reported having more frequent daily problems with their job involvement. Liao and Lee also found that employees characterized by high neuroticism (emotional instability) involved

less in their jobs. Fumham and Zacheil (1986) research finding is also in line with the result of this research work. Penang, Eswaran, Islam and Yusuf (2011) found that neuroticism was not related to job involvement which differed from the other findings. The reason is not farfetched, if a lecturer is emotionally unstable, he/she will be nervous, and can easily be distracted and more distressing which increases his/her behavioural risks. For such individuals devotion to work will be less likely.

Hypothesis 5: Employees characterized by high openness will not exhibit high job involvement.

The multiple regression analysis revealed a support for the above hypothesis, ($b = .012$, $t(723) = .302$, $P = .763$), meaning that openness to experience did not predict job involvement. Results of studies conducted outside Nigeria were in contrast with the result of this hypothesis tested. Liao and Lee (2009); and LePine, Colquitt & Erez, (2000) found that openness to experience enhances job involvement. For lecturers in south east, openness to experience is not important variable in predicting job involvement -that an individual is curious (fascination with novelty), sensitive and imaginative is not a guaranty that he will be involved in his job. There is every tendency that once his curiosity (resulting from his job) is satisfied; he may relent, thus becoming less involved in his job. Again, staffs that are low in this dimension may have learnt better ways of performing their jobs through their experience on the job. So instead of expecting low job involvement, they compare favourable with their counterparts who are high in this dimension.

Implications of the Study

Implicated in this study is that an individual's level of uncontrolled emotionality can hinder him from engaging in his job. Employing emotionally stable, responsible, dependable and persistent (conscientious) work force is one of the panaceas to ensuring adequate/appropriate job involvement in the universities.

Limitations of the Study

Being a cross sectional survey, this research work did not establish causal relationships and did not control other variables that could influence job involvement, such as job satisfaction, length of service, age, marital status etc. Another limitation is on the use of questionnaire as the only means of data collection. The researcher advocates for multi- source method in future research. Similarly, the sampling method used does not allow adequate representation of the population of study. Based on this, caution should be made when making generalizations from this finding.

Summary/Conclusion

This research focused on the roles of the big five personality factors on job involvement of university lecturers in the south eastern part of Nigeria. The study revealed that conscientiousness and emotional stability were significant determinants of job involvement among the personality dimensions measured. It is therefore recommended that Routine medical and psychological checkups/screening should be made

compulsory for lecturers with a view to identifying psychological\medical problems which could deter job involvement. If such problems are identified, adequate steps should be taken to manage the situations.

The researchers also recommend that workshops and symposia should be organized by university management. These workshops will provide avenues for lecturers to air their views on some of the issues that militate against their job involvement. This will help management address the issues raised thereby increasing the likelihood of job involvement.

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