

# The Mediating Role of Conflict on Personality Traits and Performance in Ghana

Moses Agyemang Ameyaw<sup>1</sup>, Wang Yong Yue<sup>1</sup>, Duffour Kwame Asare<sup>1</sup>, Gbolonyo Patrick Kweku<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Business Administration, Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Statistics and Mathematics, Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou, China

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – The difference in personality may play a significant role in the performance of an employee. And it can equally affect the type of Conflict (Relationship or Task) that an employee quickly gets entangled. This study aims to explore the role of personality traits in determining performance through conflict.

**Methodology:** A random sampling technique was used to gather the data. Using R statistics, this study explored 360 employees of Ghana's public sector within the capital city – Accra.

**Findings** – According to the results, Openness to Experience and Agreeableness was significantly related to performance. Also, Agreeableness was negatively associated with task and relationship conflict. On the other hand, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were also negatively associated with both types of conflict. Also, conflict as a mediator wasn't statistically significant in determining the relationship between personality traits and performance.

**Practical implications** – Knowing and understanding personality traits of employees, play a crucial role in employee performance and the type of perceived conflict. Culture has a possible influence on how employees handle conflict.

**Originality/value** – This is the first research to use conflict as a mediator between personality traits and performance within the context of Ghana and Africa at large. It also adds to literature by investigating the role of personality traits on performance.

**KEYWORDS:** Performance, Personality Traits and Conflict.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of the public sector in the development of Africa has been downplayed over the past three decades. Nonetheless, for some time now, there has been an awakening and a shift of attention in discovering the significant role of the state towards a more competent public sector (Gyaama Darkwah, 2014). In developing economies such as Ghana, adopting an effective and efficient measure to ensure growth, better performance, and sustainability is highly imperative (Brenyah & Darko, 2017). To provide a boost in performance, attention needs to be given to the system within the public sector as well as the recruitment of employees (M. Haybatollahi & Gyekye, 2015).

As part of the qualification for most jobs, an employee's personality is one of the least things that are possibly considered (Barrick et al., 2005). Meanwhile, employees enter and influence their work environment with their unique personality features (Ayub et al., 2017). Employee's personality traits influence them in different ways such as in their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and enthusiasm (Mkoji & Sikalieh, 2012) as well as their behaviour preferences and several aspects of workgroup processes and performance.

Despite these differences, for any organizational goals and objectives to be accomplished, it largely depends on the collaboration of its team or other members of the organization (Peeters et al., 2006). Kinicki, 2008 argues that personality speaks to a steady arrangement of attributes that are liable for an individual's identity. In most cases, personality influences the individual's expectations, assumptions about work, others and also their way of living (Barrick et al., 2005). Aside from the differences among employees, another paramount and yet inevitable process, every employee and employers will experience is Conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). As employees work with others, their differences may lead to some disagreements and incompatibilities that affect their general attitude at the workplace.

In Ghana, the government serves as the primary provider of services for the poor. Which is one of the main reasons, the researchers are of the view that attention needs to be given to the personality of the employees and how it influences the performance of the organization. In a developing country like Ghana and especially in the public sector (government

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organizations), there is no particular study probing into the role of conflict as a mediator between employee's personality and job performance in Africa, particularly Ghana. Though researchers like (Oppong et al., 2015; Gyaama Darkwah, 2014) have conducted some research between personality and performance. Also, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no researcher has undertaken research even between personality and performance using the R statistical package.

The researchers, therefore, seek to determine the mediating effect of conflict on the different personality traits and their performance. Hence, this paper will fill the gap by exploring not just the impact of personality traits on job performance but by further finding out the role perceived conflict plays among these variables and particularly in the public sector of Ghana.

## Literature Review

### Personality traits and conflict

In modern-day organizational settings, understanding the personality trait of an employee is essential to the overall growth of the organization. This is mainly because the misunderstanding of a particular personality can be devastating as it can create a lot of unnecessary friction and conflict among workers. The Big-Five framework of personality conceptualizes personality as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of five components: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience (Mkoji & Sikalieh, 2012; McCrae et al., 2005). The premise of this framework is that the various traits of individuals do not change and also are consistent over time and situations (Robertson & Callinan, 1998).

Research has produced substantial evidence that individual differences in these five factors account for variations in the ways people feel, think, and interact with others (Forrester et al., 2017) (McCrae et al., 2005). For example, extraverts are very outgoing, sociable, and can easily lose friends (Peeters et al., 2006); agreeable individuals can connect and maintain relationships well hence they are more likely to have successful relationships with others (Costa, 2017). Conscientiousness is described as having strong willpower and achievement-orientation, Openness to experience often ask a lot of questions, dares to know more, hence are intellectuals and creative (Ayub et al., 2017). Emotional stability describes individuals who are calm, self-confident, and patient, in contrast, to Neuroticism which describes tension, insecurity, and irritability (Forrester et al., 2017).

So far as these different personalities seek to work together, there shall be conflict. Conflict is a disagreement emerging from team members' tension in reality or perceived differences (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). There are three types of sources of conflict as reviewed by literature relationship conflict, task conflict and process conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997). Relationship conflict is more of a personal level of dispute that arises among team members on issues that are very personal, like personality differences and dislikes feelings (Jehn, 1997). And also, process conflict comprises of disagreement that arises as a result of the accomplishment of a given task (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). It's called a process conflict because it happens in the process of getting a job done. On the other

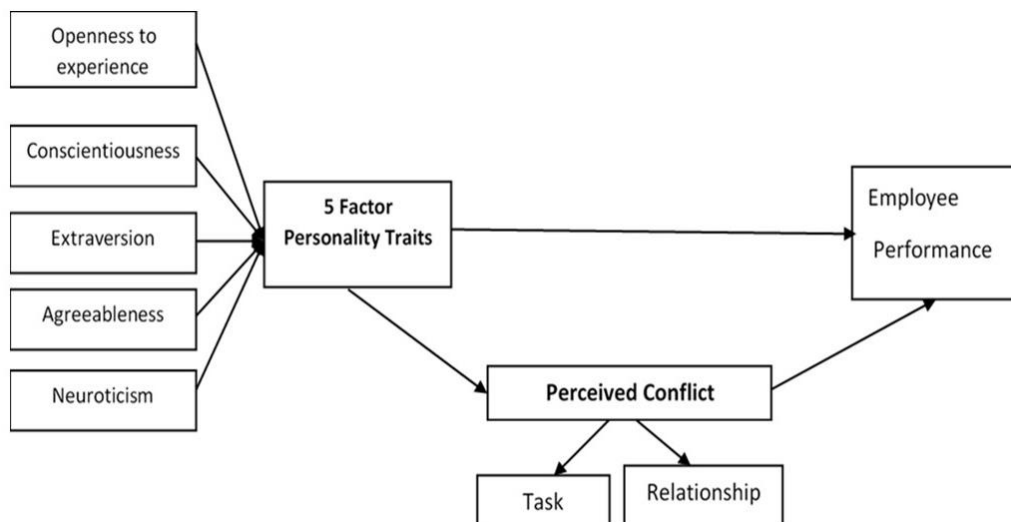
hand, task conflict is related to disagreements based on work details and goals such as differences in viewpoints and opinions about an expected task (Guerra et al., 2005; Martínez-Moreno et al., 2009)

The relationship between the five-factor personality traits and how they relate to conflict has interested many researchers over some decades now. Some scholars consider the differences between the degree of conflict and their conflict management styles (Ayub et al., 2017) while others consider the different personality and how they relate with the sources of Conflict (Bono et al., 2002). This study follows the later and hence relates the personality traits of employees to the following types of sources of conflict; relationship and task conflict.

Extraversion (or extroverts) are like Agreeableness but not that calm and co-operative; instead, they are more assertive and often seek to be recognized or status-oriented (Costa, 2017). Hence, such individuals are more likely to have relationship conflict than task conflict (Peeters et al., 2006). Agreeableness is mostly concerned about interpersonal relationship; they are more calm, co-operative, affective (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Those high in Agreeableness are highly interested in human relations, and they also show a lot of care to others. Such people do their possible best to live amicably with others.

Conscientiousness is exhibited by people who are much concerned about procedures, methods, systems (Forrester et al., 2017), and they believe everything should be done in an orderly manner. Those high in Conscientiousness are detailed planners, but those low care less about structure and system (Bradley et al., 2013). The downside of this trait is that those obsessed with it, easily get irritated when things change, and as observed by (Bono et al., 2002), they have more issues when it comes to task conflict, although not over time. Openness to experience, on the other hand, are imaginative, curious, open-minded and seeks to have a lot of new experience (Prewett et al., 2018). Due to their mindset towards work, they can manage task conflict well more than relationship conflict (Ayub et al., 2017). They do their possible best to reduce relationship conflict and to intellectually handle conflicts that occur on a task level. Lastly, Neuroticism (or emotional instability) is seen by an individual's inability to manage emotions, stress, mood swings and anxiety (Peeters et al., 2006). Those high in Neuroticism easily gets irritated by the least thing. They experience a lot of stress, worry and often perceive conflict most of the times. Individuals with such traits don't only have more of relationship and task conflict, but they also go too much to the extreme in times of disputes (Bono et al., 2002). According to the following information gathered, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

- H1a Extraversion will be positively related to relationship conflict and task conflict;
- H1b Agreeableness will be negatively related to relationship, and task conflict;
- H1c Conscientiousness is positively related to task conflict more than relationship conflict;
- H1d Openness to experience will be positively related to task conflict more than relationship conflict
- H1e Neuroticism will be positively related to relationship conflict more than task conflict.

**Figure 1: Research Model**

### Personality Traits and Employee Performance

The effect of the traits or behaviour of each employee on one another can be complicated, and it may either lead to the success or downfall of the organization. Concerning the traits of individuals to their performance at the workplace, unlike being introverts, unfriendly, and always being reserved at the workplace, extraverts are very energetic and optimistic (McCrae et al., 2005). Extraverts usually possess the features of having positive feelings, experience and enthusiastic at work. So there is a positive relationship between this kind of traits and their performance at the workplace (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). This denotes that the attitude of extraverts can form a positive climate on the employee's performance which eventually spur other employees on to work cohesively together.

Agreeableness is less competitive and always seek to assist others in a given task. Some of the standard features exhibited by those who are high in Agreeableness are friendliness, tolerance, helpful, and meek (Prewett et al., 2018). The co-operative nature of agreeable individual makes them good team players (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003) and hence they can contribute significantly towards their job performance.

More so, those with conscientious traits have the most robust and steady correlations with performance across all jobs and settings (Barrick et al., 2005). Thus those high in these traits are always able to ensure that the focus and the plans of the organization as a whole are well-tailored. One of the key advantages of this trait is that they help in following the due steps in the completion of a given task. People scoring high on Openness tend to be creative in behaviour, and they prefer innovative ways of doing things at the workplace (Bradley et al., 2013). They often question the traditional ways of doing things, because novelty is their hallmark, and they seek to find more innovative ways of embarking on an activity.

Lastly, due to the mood swing of Neuroticism, they find it difficult in working with other members, particularly with the extraverts and those who are open to experience. Neurotic members, due to their nature of behaviour does not only have adverse effects on their jobs, but they can even disrupt the cooperation or cohesion among other workers (Peeters et al., 2006).

Based on the above literature, the researchers posit that:

H2 Extroverts, Agreeableness, conscientious, Openness to experience will have a positive impact on employee performance, but Neuroticism will have a negative effect on employee performance.

### Personality traits on performance through conflict

As long as employees continue to work, they will undoubtedly interact with one another, and they will also have some argument on that which needs to be done. And so, almost always, there is an evitable factor; Conflict. According to (Ayub et al., 2017), one of the most common mediating variables that can affect employee's performance is conflict.

Task conflict may increase employee's performance because those who experience task conflict, achieve a better understanding of task-related issues, and therefore they improve their decisions (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2009). On the other hand, task conflict may decrease the performance of an employee (Guerra et al., 2005), mainly, when they are intense, and other employees are unaware of the significance of such conflicts to others. Moreover, scholars such as (Korsgaard et al., 2008) observe that task conflict can play a significant role in the performance of an employee's performance under certain contingencies. One potential contingency of the task conflict and employee job performance relationship is the employee's personality composition (Bradley et al., 2013). This suggests that the effect of an employee's personality on their performance will be dependent on their ability to handle task conflict.

Relationship conflict is thought to have its adverse effects (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003) on an individual's performance. Personal issues can always be over-stretched if not handled with care; it may even dwindle an individual's interest in cooperating with others or on the job as a whole. The leading cause of relationship conflicts is stemmed out from personality differences and

dislikes among employees feelings about one another (Guerra et al., 2005). More so, almost every criticism an individual may receive will affect his or her personality even when it is a task conflict (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). And so, this study underscores that relationship conflict mediates between employee's personality and their performance.

Hence, combining the effect of task conflict and relationship conflict, this research proposes;

H3 Task conflict and relationship conflict may predict the relationship between an employee's personality and performance.

### Research Method

In measuring the personality traits of employees, the Mini-IPIP personality scale with 20-items by (Donnellan et al., 2006) was used to measure the various five-factor personality traits. To boost the redundancy of this study, a five-point Likert-type scale as advised by (Hair et al., 2017) was used. On conflict, (Jehn, 1997) scales for measuring individuals' relationship and task conflict scale with among others in a group was used. In measuring employee's job performance, (IWPQ) Individual Work Performance Questionnaire as designed by (Koopmans et al., 2014) was used.

Using random sampling, the survey questionnaires were disseminated among employees of five major companies in the public sector of the capital city of Ghana - Accra. In all, 400 employees were contacted, but 360 of them gave their full consent and response. R statistics was used to analyze the data.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1 Demographic Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency ( N=360)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	191	0.53
	Female	169	0.47
Age	Under 20 years	4	0.01
	21-30 years	216	0.60
	31-40 years	107	0.30
	41-50 years	20	0.06
	51-60 years	13	0.04
Marital Status	Single	243	0.67
	Married	117	0.33
Educational Level	Diploma	36	0.10
	Degree	237	0.66
	Masters	64	0.18
	PhD	23	0.06
Years of Service	Less than a year	75	0.21
	1-2 years	109	0.30
	3-5 years	75	0.21
	6-9 years	54	0.15
	10-20 years	40	0.11
	Above 20 years	7	0.02

*Notes: (N) = Population size*

Table 1 above shows a brief descriptive statistic of the demographic attributes of the respondents with regards to age, gender, marital status, educational level and years of service. Out of the 360 number of respondents, 191 (53%) were males, while 169 (47%) were females. With regards to age, 216 (60%) were between the ages of 21-30 years, 107 (30%) of the respondents were between 31-40 years, while 20 (6%) were between the ages of 41-50 years. Also, 13 (4%) and 4 (1%) accounted for respondents between the ages of 51-60 years and under 20 years respectively. Again, with regards to marital status, 243 (67%) of them were single while 117 (33%) of them were married. Also, majority of the respondents representing 237 (66%) had a degree, 64 (18%) of them had a master's degree while 36 (10%) and 23 (6%) of them had a diploma and PhD respectively. According to the respondents' years of service, majority of them representing 109 (30%) were between 1-2 years of service, 75 (21%) were less than a year and 3-5 years of service respectively. In essence, only 7 (2%) of the respondents had a year of service above 20 years.

**Table 2 Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations for the variables under study**

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Extraversion	0.14	0.36								
Conscientiousness	0.01	0.40	-0.04							
Openness	0.24	0.34	0.20*	-0.17*						
Agreeableness	0.22	0.35	-0.11*	-0.14*	0.23**					
Neuroticism	0.15	0.36	-0.07	-0.06	0.17**	0.22**				
TC	0.22	0.37	0.07	-0.14*	0.10	-0.20**	-0.03			
RC	0.19	0.40	-0.01	-0.24**	0.09	-0.19**	-0.08	0.54**		
EP	0.20	0.34	0.02*	-0.11*	0.31**	0.17**	0.07	0.05	0.01	

*Notes: \*p-value<0.05, and \*\*p-value<0.0. TC=Task Conflict, RC= Relationship Conflict and EP=Employee Performance.*

Table 2 displays the results for the descriptive statistics of means, standard deviations and the correlation coefficients for our study. From the result, all the variables are moderately related to each other. We observe that Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism are negatively associated with all two types of conflicts (Task and relationship Conflict). Also, Openness is positively related to all two types of conflicts. However, only Conscientiousness is negatively associated with employee performance; all the remaining personality traits (Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Neuroticism) are positively related to employee performance.

**Table 3 Regression analysis for the effect of five personality traits on task, and relationship conflicts**

Personality Traits	DV = Task Conflict			DV= Relationship Conflict		
	Estimate	t-value	p-value	Estimate	t-value	p-value
Extraversion	0.0721	1.351	0.178	-1.87e-02	-0.357	0.721
Conscientiousness	-0.105	-2.002	0.046*	-2.20e-01	-4.269	0.000***
Openness	0.0334	0.605	0.545	4.08e-02	0.753	0.452
Agreeableness	-0.200	3.659	0.000***	-1.75e-01	3.274	0.001**
Neuroticism	-0.0759	-1.424	0.155	-1.43e-01	-2.737	0.007**
F		4.829***			7.981***	
R <sup>2</sup>		0.064			0.101	

*Notes:\*\*\*p-value<0.001, \*\*p-value<0.01 and \*p-value<0.05*

From Table 3, we, first of all, run a linear regression for the effects of personality traits on conflict (Task and relationship conflicts). The R<sup>2</sup> value (0.064 and 0.101) indicates the proportion of variance in conflict types (Task and relationship conflicts) that can be explained by the independent variables (personality traits). The result shows that Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are the only traits that significantly affected all the two types of conflict. Nevertheless, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness have a statistically negative relationship with the two types of conflict. This confirms H1a and refute H1c that Agreeableness is negatively related to the conflict types, and Conscientiousness is positively associated with the types of conflicts, respectively. On the other hand, Neuroticism is statistically significantly and negatively related to both task and relationship conflict. This refutes H1e that Neuroticism is positively associated with the conflict types.

**Table 4 Regression analysis for the effect of five personality traits on Employee Performance**

Personality Traits	Estimate	t-value	p-value
Extraversion	0.0831	1.601	0.110
Conscientiousness	-0.0459	-0.899	0.369
Openness	0.259	4.816	0.000***
Agreeableness	0.108	2.025	0.044*
Neuroticism	0.00990	0.191	0.849
F		9.089***	
R <sup>2</sup>		0.1134	

*Notes:\*\*\*p-value<0.001, \*\*p-value<0.01 and \*p-value<0.05*

Also, we check for the effect of personality traits on employee performance. Table 4 presents the result of the regression effects of personality traits on employee performance. The R<sup>2</sup> value (0.1134) indicates the proportion of variance in employee performance that can be explained by the independent variables (personality traits). We observe that Openness and Agreeableness have a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance.

**Table 5 Regression analysis for the mediating effect of conflict in the personality to employee performance relationship**

	Dependent Variable = Employee Performance			
	t-value	F-value	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Step 1				
TC	0.930	0.4631	0.0026	-0.003
RC	-0.01809			
Step 2				
Extraversion	1.601			
Conscientiousness	-0.899	9.089***	0.1134	0.1012
Openness	4.816***			
Agreeableness	2.025*			
Neuroticism	0.191			

*Notes:\*\*\*p-value<0.001, \*\*p-value<0.01 and \*p-value<0.05. TC=Task Conflict and RC= Relationship Conflict*

Conversely, we examine the mediating effects of personality traits on employee performance relationship through conflict. From Table 5, the results indicate that conflict does not directly affect employee performance. However, Openness and Agreeableness sustained to have a significant impact on employee performance. This is an indication that conflict, by itself, does not mediate the relationship between personality and employee performance.

**Table 6 Causal Mediation Analysis**

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	-0.0019	-0.0235	0.02	0.84
ADE	0.2918	0.1689	0.42	0.000***
Total Effect	0.2899	0.1674	0.41	0.000***
Prop. Mediated	-0.0065	-0.0777	0.07	0.84

**Notes:\*\*\*p-value<0.001. ACME stands for Average Causal Mediation Effects; ADE stands for Average Direct Effect and Total Effect is the sum of a mediation (indirect) effect and a direct effect.**

Table 6 shows the test for causal mediation effects of conflict in the personality to employee performance relationship. The ACME (-0.0019) indicates the indirect effect of the independent variable (personality traits) on the dependent variable (employee performance) that goes through the mediator (conflicts). Again, the ADE (0.2918) also indicates the direct effects of the independent variable (personality traits) on the dependent variable (employee performance), when controlling for the mediator (conflicts). The total effect (0.2899) shows the indirect and the direct effects of the independent variable (personality traits) on the dependent variable (employee performance) when controlling for the mediator (conflicts). In addition, the proportion mediated (-0.0065) value indicates the portion of the effect of the independent variable (personality traits) on the dependent variable (employee performance) that goes through the mediator (conflicts). This is an indication that the indirect effect of personality traits on employee performance that goes through conflict is not statistically significant.

## Discussion

From the analysis, it showed that all the five-factor personality traits had effects on employee performance. Agreeableness and Open to experience were much significantly related to performance. This confirms the research of (Peeters et al., 2006; Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003) that when there is a high level of Agreeableness, high level of performance is assured. Also, workers being hard-working, detailed planners, and well organized are very productive and instrumental to the progress and performance of an organization (Forrester et al., 2017; Vianen & Dreu, 2001). Indeed, Conscientiousness is one of the most unswerving predictors of performance.

A working environment with the Personality of Agreeableness helps to reduce all forms of Conflict (Task and Relationship). This result was in line with previous research (Ayub et al., 2017; Bono et al., 2002; Nurhazirah et al., 2013) which found that workers with the trait of Agreeableness often ignore any kind of matters that trigger either relationship or task conflict. Thus, they do their possible best to keep their bond with each other as well as their work.

On the other hand, contrary to previous research (Ayub et al., 2017; Bradley et al., 2013; Nurhazirah et al., 2013), this research realized a negative relationship between Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and the types of conflict. This inconsistent finding can be attributed to culture. Studies portray that the culture of a country will have a significant effect on the mannerism in which they handle issues within their organization (Gelfand et al., 2007; Saxena, 2014). In Ghana, research by (Brenyah & Darko, 2017; M. Haybatollahi & Gyekye, 2015) shows that workers are more of collectivism rather individualism. Hence, most Ghanaian workers will choose the ultimate goal of their organization over their personality traits or any form of conflict. Research by (Oppong et al., 2015) in the case of Barry Callebaut Ghana Limited indicated that employees who were Neuroticism didn't have a significant negative influence on their performance. This helps to explain the reason for the negative relationship.

Other reasons could be that since most of the respondents (216) were young (21-30 years) and given the culture or value of the country (respect for the elderly) as indicated by (S. A. Gyekye & M. Haybatollahi, 2015), even the neurotic had to suppress their emotions or calm down whenever the

elderly intercepted on issues that result in conflict. Moreover, since Conscientiousness are detailed planners (Costa, 2017; McCrae et al., 2005), it may be they make room for contingencies, hence, in case of any arising conflict, they are able to adjust easily.

Lastly, even though personality trait was significantly related to conflict and employee performance, conflict couldn't play a statistically significant mediating role between the independent and the dependent variable. This can be attributed to the fact, conflict in itself can't fully mediate the relationship between these variables but as other researchers (Bradley et al., 2013; Martínez-Moreno et al., 2009) have shown it can either reduce or increase the effect of personality or other variables on performance.

## Research Practical Implication

From the research, it's obvious; personality assessment must be factored into the recruitment and selection criterion of human Resource Management so as to examine how potential employees will well fit into a precise job vacancy. This is because personality traits are expressed in skills – this indirectly determines the strategies an employee adopts towards being better at the workplace (Bornmai, 2015). Therefore, knowing and understanding employees' personality can serve as a vital tool for achieving a remarkable organizational performance. Also, understanding the employees' personality will benefit the employees' by creating more awareness about themselves and guiding them on how best to relate with others within the organization.

Lastly, this research adds up to other researchers (Gelfand et al., 2007; Guerra et al., 2005; Haybatollahi & Gyekye, 2015; Ayub et al., 2017) that attention should be given to the culture of a country since it can easily influence the life of employee even beyond their trait. It revealed that there are likely variables such as culture that can suppress an individual's traits.

## Limitation and Recommendation

Just like any other study, this study had its limitations. The data sampled was limited to a single region; hence, it may pose a threat to its generalized validity. Also, the sample size was relatively small, and it may affect its representation of

the whole. Lastly, generalizing the results to other settings may not be applicable, mainly due to the different culture. Since culture can have an extensive influence on the personality of employees (Gelfand et al., 2007; Saxena, 2014; Haybatollahi & Gyekye, 2015), other researchers can find out more about the role of either a specific country's culture or organizational culture on personality traits and performance. More so, using age, educational level, or duration of service as control variables, other researchers can find out the effect of such variables on traits and performance.

Traits such as Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were found to have a negative relationship between the two main types of conflict (relationship and task), other researchers can probe further into that. Future researchers can use different or multiple measures of personality traits. Lastly, researchers can find out the primary role of conflict in an organization – that's whether it mediates or moderates the relationship between personality traits and performance.

### Conclusion

The pivot of this research was to explore the Big Five personality traits in the workplace and how they influence the perception of conflict and performance. The public sector of Ghana was studied to this effect. The results of this research showed that the mediation relationship of conflict between personality traits and performance wasn't statistically significant.

The results of this confirmed that the personality of an employee played an essential role in their performance. Also, an employee's personality traits influenced their perceived conflict. Nonetheless, this study showed that Neuroticism and Conscientiousness were negatively related to both task and relationship conflict.

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