

The Influence of Agreeableness on LMX and Task Performance: The moderating effect of relationship conflict.

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Abstract

Will LMX have a significant positive impact on task performance? If the performance of employees is intercepted by a careful consideration of their personality traits such as agreeableness, will their task performance be any different? Also, will relationship conflict lessen or increase the effect of the agreeableness on their performance? These were three main questions that served as the benchmark of this research.

Using a random sampling technique with a sample of 360 employees within the context of Accra and the public sector of Ghana, the data was gathered. With the use of SmartPLS 3 and IBM SPSS 23.0, data was analysed. It was found out that though, LMX was significantly related to task performance, the relationship was negative. The rationale behind this was because the relationship between leaders and their employees could be taken for granted if it becomes too cordial.

This research revealed that agreeableness is a good predictor of task performance and this trait have less relationship conflict. The main practical implication of this research is that there is the need to cherish but not take for granted the nature of agreeable employee, mainly because they will serve as a beneficial resource to the organisation.

Keywords: *Leader-member Exchange, Agreeableness, Relationship Conflict and Task Performance*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Though there are diverse relationships in any given organisation, so far as there will always exist employer and employees, the exchange between employees and their leader(s) will often be mull over. For an organisation to be successful, its leaders need to employ and develop a meaningful rapport among employees so as to ensure a high performing workforce (Weng & Muthueloo, 2019). (Graen et al., 1995), proposed the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory to throw more light on this kind of relationship.

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory postulates leaders to have a varying relationship among their employees (Kim, Liu and Diefendorff, 2014; Liden et al., 1997). Previous studies have identified that the mannerism in which employers relate with their employee are not the same; instead, there's a differentiated relationship termed as either in-groups or out-groups (Graen et al., 1995; Scandura & Graen, 1984). The category of employees that falls within the in-group are those who exhibit high mutual trust, confidence and reciprocity as well as a higher LMX quality (Terpstra-tong et al., 2020). While the out-group represents the employees who do not often have any form of close exchange with their employer (Terpstra-tong et al., 2020) (Jane, 2020).

It is revealed by researchers that the quality of relationship between leaders and subordinates will predict outcomes such as organisational commitment, turnover rate (Dulebohn et al., 2012) performance (Berdicchia, 2015) among other variables. Over the years, the key focus of this LMX has been on its casual effect (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kim et al., 2014). Nonetheless, less attention has been given to its antecedents. More so, though it's tough to separate employees from their personality traits (Ameyaw et al., 2020). Yet their personality traits influence them in diverse ways such as in their thoughts pattern, their approach towards work, and their attitudes (Mkoji & Sikalieh, 2012) and so a critical analysis needs to be given to such traits (Barrick et al., 2005).

Hence, knowing that personality traits are likely to play a significant role in the relationship between LMX and employees approach towards work (Bono et al., 2002; Harris et al., 2007), it becomes imperative to ascertain further the possible role of such variable on the employee's task performance.

Besides, most studies conducted on LMX and performance were done in western countries, with less attention given to African countries. This study brings into bear, a different cultural perspective by considering Ghana. The researchers sought to find answers to these questions: In the context of Ghana, will LMX have a significant positive impact on task performance? If the performance of employees is intercepted by a careful consideration of their personality traits such as agreeableness, will their task performance be any different? Also, will relationship conflict lessen or increase the effect of the agreeableness on their performance?

Ghana was chosen because it is one of the leading countries of Africa and also the first black African country to obtain independence from colonial rule. Consequently, it serves as a model for many other African countries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

LMX and Task Performance

LMX theory proposes that work and social interaction are the typical exchange that transpires between supervisors and subordinates (Harris et al., 2007). Thus, from these exchanges, it builds a bond and causes supervisors and subordinates to develop a varying level of relationships. Traditionally, role theory and social exchange theory have been used in explaining how the various types of LMX relationship evolve (Terpstra-tong et al., 2020).

Following the role theory of (Graen et al., 1995), supervisors always have some expectations regarding the execution of subordinate's role. Hence, as the supervisor communicates these expectations, subordinates learn to adjust and behave in the flow of expectation (Choi, 2013). The level to which a subordinate can succumb to the supervisor's expectation will eventually influence their level of LMX relationship.

On the other hand, the social exchange theory addresses the exchange between supervisors and subordinates from the perspective of reciprocity. According to (Barrick et al., 2005), when a person (in this case the subordinate) receives something (favour) from the supervisor, there is an expectation of giving something (favour) in return. Actions such as providing the subordinates with the needed organisational support (Riggle et al., 2009) are positive initiations that trigger the feelings of gratitude, trust and the need to perform (Graen et al., 1995). This means that the level of reciprocity between the supervisors and subordinates will be dependent on the kind of social interactions that exist between them.

When the exchange of relationship is of high quality, the subordinate will do better by even going beyond the prescribed role and demands of the job (Russell Cropanzano, Shanna Daniels, Erica Anthony, 2017). The leader will reciprocate this extra-role behaviour by giving the subordinate much attention, support, preferable information and possibly, preferential treatment (Scandura & Graen, 1984). In the absence of a high-quality exchange of relationship, the expected interaction becomes solely transactional or economic (Thompson & Buch, 2018).

In this case, the relationship between the supervisors and subordinates are mainly on getting the task done with less interest in the workplace (Choi, 2013). Thus, subordinates work based on the employment contract, and they put in little efforts – have a lower commitment and work performance (Thompson & Buch, 2018). Subordinates with high-quality relationships are considered to be in the in-groups while subordinates with low-quality relationships are deemed to be in the out-groups.

Task Performance

Traditionally, the employee's performance has been linked to task performance (Weng & Muthuveloo, 2019). Task performance is a multi-dimensional construct which shows how well employees discharge their tasks, the initiative they take, and the ingenuity they show in solving problems (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). In most cases, it measures how efficiently and effectively an individual contributes to the economic growth of the organisation (Le et al., 2011).

Employees in the in-groups of the leader are compelled to remain close to the leader, and so, they feel obliged to reciprocate every favourable treatment shown them by their leader. In this way, they work harder on

their task as a 'payback'. When there is high LMX, it boosts the positive feelings and liking of the employee for their leader. This, therefore, motivates them to meet the different expectations of their leader. In so doing, increasing their performance at the workplace.

H1 The relationship between leaders and their employee (LMX) will have a positive effect on the task performance of their employees

LMX and Personality Traits

The LMX theory reveals that there's always a constant exchange of interaction between the supervisor and the subordinate. Meanwhile, employees have their own beliefs, perceptions and innate composition that may influence their dealings in different ways (Ayub et al., 2017). For example, an introvert employee will be quiet, reserved and distant from his/her leader not because he/she dislikes the workplace or leader but ensue of a dominant personality trait.

The underpinning rationale behind personality traits is that individuals hardly change and they almost always behave consistently to their innate composition (Robertson & Callinan, 1998). When an individual exhibit a likeable trait at the workplace, it becomes easier to develop a high LMX. Hence it takes less time to be part of the leader's in-group. Conversely, a subordinate whose personality traits undermines or falls short of the leader's expectation will find it arduous to impress the leader, therefore fall within the out-group on the leader.

The need to further investigate the link between LMX and personality is essential for these two main empirical reasons. Firstly, (Henson et al., 2017) have cited the vital influence of personal characteristics of supervisors and subordinates on LMX; yet less attention is devoted to other continents such as Africa. Secondly, LMX serves as the pivot of exchange between the supervisor and the subordinate (Martin et al., 2018), we need to ascertain whether certain types of individuals easily influence the development of such relationship at the workplace.

Agreeableness and Task Performance

Agreeableness

Personality trait is explained by (Prewett et al., 2018) as the pattern of behaviours which are demonstrated continuously by an individual. Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism often referred to as OCEAN, are the big-five framework of personality traits generally accepted and variable in other cultures (McCrae et al., 2005; Mkoji & Sikalieh, 2012).

Many researchers (Lysaker et al., 1998; Oppong et al., 2015) have focussed their attention on how various personality traits distinctively affect the performance of employees. In this research, we considered agreeableness because as revealed by researchers, they seek to have amicable negotiation (Lee & Park, 2020), they are honest and trustworthy (Hales et al., 2016). These features key traits are needful for a healthy working environment that enforce task performance. Hence, we sought to explore further.

Agreeableness refers to individuals concerned with building a good interpersonal relationship; they hardly challenge and also wishes to do things just as instructed. An employee with such character is usually soft-hearted, trusting, forgiving and seek to be straightforward at the place of work (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Those high in agreeableness are usually 'moved by others', complies to norms and are cooperative. They are typically likeable; they can accommodate and tolerate the behaviour of others (Weng & Muthueloo, 2019). Those low on this trait are cynical, prefer to compete and complain as well as express an unfriendly behaviour at the workplace (Bono et al., 2002). In their research (Bakker et al., 2006), they revealed agreeableness is somewhat linked with a high level of social support. Per the cooperative nature of workers such traits, there's an indication that agreeableness can influence an employee's performance.

H2 LMX and Agreeableness will have a significant impact on the Task Performance

H3 Agreeableness will positively influence task performance.

H4 Agreeableness plays a mediating role in increasing task performance via the effects of LMX

Effect of Relationship conflict on Agreeableness and Task Performance

As different employees interact and work towards a common goal at the workplace, there will experience conflict (Ameyaw et al., 2020). Previous research has indicated that conflict can vary on a number of dimensions. As reviewed by literature, there are three main types of conflicts, task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997). Task conflict refers to conflicts which arise over work-related issues (such as varying ideas, different perspectives and ways on the right way of approaching a task), process conflict occurs in the of discharging a required duty, while relationship conflict refers to frictions

that occur among individuals that are mostly associated with emotions and personality differences (Bono et al., 2002; Jehn, 1997)

Following the social exchange theory, (Buss, 1991) suggests agreeableness has the ability in reciprocating a stronger social alliance. For instance, an agreeable individual has these common traits; modesty, respectful, kindness and sensitive to the needs of others. Such people rarely go against authority and are tactful in performing their assigned duties at the workplace. An employee high in agreeableness is caring and primarily altruistic (Henson et al., 2017).

According to (Barrick et al., 2005), an individual’s personality traits influences the extent to which they exert efforts in their work. An individual who can align his/her personality traits well to the needs of the job will know how best to relate with the leader and will also exhibit an improvement in their task performance.

Agreeableness is mostly concerned about building interpersonal relationships. The calm nature of agreeableness abets them to constructively handle any negative issue that has the potential of affecting their relationship with others. Hence, in favour of a cordial relationship, high agreeableness will be negatively related to relationship conflict (Ayub et al., 2017; Bono et al., 2002).

Based on these: we propose that

H5 Relationship conflict significantly moderates the relationship between agreeableness and task performance

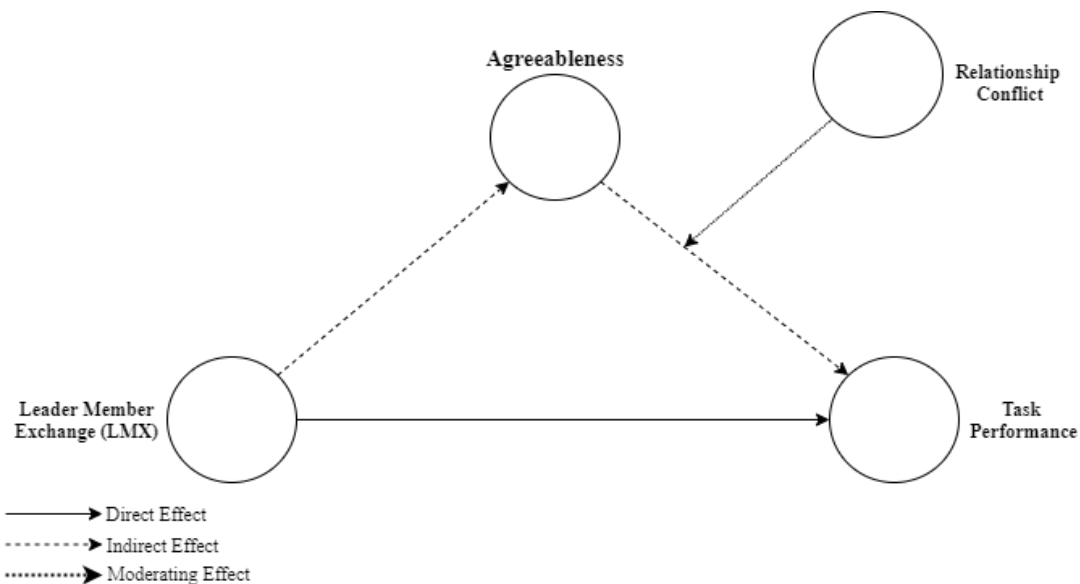


Figure 1: Research Model

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Instrument

This study aimed to investigate the influence of personality traits on LMX and task performance. To assess the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates, the LMX -7 questionnaire developed by (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 2010) was used. It measures the effectiveness of the relationship and disposition of the parties involved to comprehend and mutually support each other in resolving work-related issues.

In measuring the personality traits of employees, the Mini-IPIP personality scale by (Donnellan et al., 2006) with 20-items was used to measure the personality trait (agreeableness) of employees. Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IW PQ) as developed by (Koopmans et al., 2014) was used to measure the task performance of the employees. To ascertain the task and relationship conflict of employees, the measuring scale developed by (Jehn, 1997) was used. As admonished by (Hair et al., 2017), a five-point Likert-scale was used. All the questions used were reliable and widely used by others.

Population and Sample Size

The population studied entailed employees within the public sector of West-Africa – Ghana. In gathering the sample, random sampling technique was used in disseminating the questionnaires across employees in the capital city of Ghana, that’s Accra. 360 out of the 400 employees gave their feedback on the issued questionnaire.

Analytical Method

Data was analysed using SmartPLS 3 and IBM SPSS 23.0 (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015). This is because Partial Least Squared (PLS) is a structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique.(PLS) was used in data analysis. PLS is aStructural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique that is able to estimate both the causal and predictive significance of endogenous constructs as well as deal with measurement errors in the structural model(Hair et al., 2017). The IBM SPSS 23.0 was used for the descriptive analysis while the SmartPLS 3 was used in analysing the data.

IV. 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

The above Table 1 depicts the summary of brief descriptive statistics of the respondent’s demographic attributes. Likely statistical errors of normality, missing values, outliers and missing demographic variables were tested, but none of such errors was detected. Out of 360 respondents, 47% representing 169 were females, while 53% (191 people) were males. In terms of age, the majority of the respondents (60%) were within the ages of 21 – 30. The next highest of 30% were between the ages of 31 – 40. In descending order, 6%, 4% and 1% depicted ages 41 – 50, 51 – 60 and under 20. Also, 243 of the respondents were single, whereas 117 were married. With regards to their educational level, 66% were degree holders, 18% were masters, 10% had a diploma, and only a few of 6% had a doctoral degree. Lastly, in terms of age, 109 respondents had served for 1- 2 years, 75 respondents served for less than a year 3-5 years, 40 of the respondents had worked for 10 – 20 years, and only 7 people had worked for more than 20 years.

Measurement Analysis of the Adopted Model

Hair, Hollingsworth, (Hair et al., 2017) specified that establishing discriminant validity means individual construct should capture a unique phenomenon not embodied by any additional construct in the model. In this study, however, for the measure of the discriminant validity, we employed the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (FLC) shown in Table 1 as suggested by JörgHenseler, 2018; J. J. I. M. Henseler, 2016. Conversely, we observed the internal consistency reliability in addition to the convergent validity of the variables as proposed by (Henseler, 2018) of which the composite reliability (CR) is shown as more appropriate since it takes into account the indicators’ differential weights while the Cronbach’s alpha weights the indicators equally. Therefore, the measurement model results suggest agreement with the requirements for convergent and discriminant validities (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2 Variability and Reliability of Constructs

Latent Variables	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Discriminant Validity
Agreeableness Agre1 Agre2	>0.70 0.893 0.784	0.60 _0.90 0.827	>0.50 0.706	Yes
Task Performance TP1 TP2 TP3	0.814 0.911 0.830	0.889	0.727	Yes
Relationship Conflict RC1 RC2	0.966 0.773	0.866	0.766	Yes
LMX LMX1 LMX2 LMX3	0.925 0.836 0.754	0.876	0.708	Yes

Assessment of the Structural Model

Table 3 Path coefficients and Specific Indirect effects of the structural model; direct, indirect and total effects of constructs

Path Coefficients of constructs					
Effects of the constructs	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Values
Agreeableness -> TP	0.176	0.201	0.057	3.108	0.002**
LMX -> Agreeableness	0.143	0.150	0.058	2.476	0.014*
LMX -> TP	-0.177	-0.177	0.064	2.742	0.006**
Moderating effect (RC)-> TP	0.161	0.156	0.074	2.036	0.042*
RC -> TP	-0.027	-0.012	0.061	0.450	0.653
Specific Indirect effects of constructs					
Effects of the Constructs	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Values
LMX -> Agreeableness -> TP	0.025	0.030	0.013	1.881	0.061

The path coefficients of the direct effects of the Leader-memberexchange (LMX) on Agreeableness and Task performance (TP), in addition to the indirect and total effects of Relationship Conflict (RC) as a moderating variable on the association between Agreeableness and Task Performance (TP) (as shown in Table 3). From the result, we observed that all the variables proved to be statistically significant with direct effects on Agreeableness and Task performance (TP). Agreeableness ($\beta = 0.201$; t -value = 3.108; $p = 0.002$) having a significant positive direct effect on Task performance, Leader-member exchange ($\beta = 0.150$; t -value = 2.476; $p = 0.014$) also having a significant positive direct effect on Agreeableness as well as Leader-member exchange ($\beta = -0.177$; t -value = 2.742; $p = 0.006$) having a significant negative direct effect on Task performance. However, Relationship conflict ($\beta = -0.012$; t -value = 0.450; $p = 0.653$) suggest not to have a direct effect on Task performance in the context of this study. Also, Relationship conflict ($\beta = 0.161$; t -value = 2.036; $p = 0.042$) as a moderating variable between the connection among Agreeableness and Task performance (TP) revealed to be statistically significant indicating that Relationship conflict tends to alter the strength as well as the direction of the relationship between Agreeableness and Task performance.

Conversely, Table 3 on the path coefficient analysis revealed that the indirect effect of the Leader-member exchange (LMX) indicator on Agreeableness and Task performance (TP) was statistically significant. In reference to the research objective and the hypothesis of this study, the results of the indirect effects further suggest that the partial mediating role of agreeableness ($\beta = 0.030$; t -value = 1.881; $p = 0.061$) is statistically significant and vital (at an alpha level of 10%), since it carries a positive indirect effects of Leader-member exchange (LMX) and Task performance (TP).

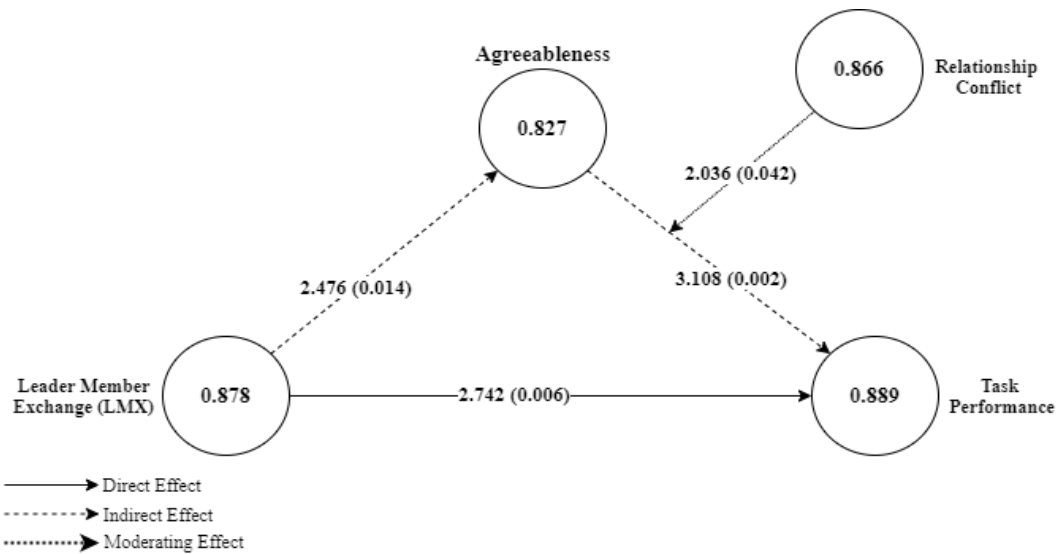


Figure2: It tested the relationship between LMX and task performance with the mediating role of agreeableness. It further tested the moderating effect of relationship conflict on agreeableness and task performance.

V. DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATION

The pivot of this research was to find answers to the following questions: In the context of Ghana, will LMX have a significant positive impact on task performance? If the performance of employees is intercepted by a careful consideration of their personality traits such as agreeableness, will their task performance be any different? Also, will relationship conflict lessen or increase the effect of the agreeableness on their performance?

In the first place, as indicated in the analysis, LMX plays a significant role in the task performance of employees. Though researchers (Liden et al., 1993) indicated that there was no significant relationship between the two variables, this research was in line with (Chung-Jen Wang, 2016; Martin et al., 2018) which shows that the role of LMX on performance isn't only evident in western countries but also Africa (Regts et al., 2019). Nonetheless, unlike other researchers, the relationship between LMX and task performance was negative. Reasons are that when the rapport between the leader and employee become too cordial, the employee takes the exchange for granted; hence, it affects their performance. Also, in the public sector of Ghana, in most times, employees may care less about their commitment and performance because of the notion that the organisation belongs to the government and necessarily theirs. This gives the clear indication that much attention needs to be given to the relationship between employers and their employees. Employers shouldn't just be concerned about achieving organisational goals but they should consider building a good rapport with their employees which will, in turn, influence the overall performance of the organisation.

Also, our research indicated that the personality trait of employees is essential in developing a better LMX. In addition, employees' personality trait influence their performance. Agreeableness is a trait that most leaders will admire. This is because they are law-abiding, calm, trustworthy, and they hardly challenge the leader. They are the employees that do (work) without complaints, try to swallow their pride, worry and feeling all in the interest of building a better interpersonal relationship and helping to maintain serenity at the workplace. This research is in line with other researchers (Peeters et al., 2006), who found out that agreeableness is a healthy trait that most leaders expect. Also, they are good predictors of performance (AbdelRahman A.A, 2010). Though in most cases, employers take such personality traits for granted.

From the analysis, it showed that the employees with agreeableness as their personality would do anything within their means to avoid relationship conflict. This is because they believe high relationship conflict will lead to low performance. Such people find it arduous to work in an environment where there are a lot of relational frictions. Agreeable employees prefer to maintain peace by ignoring issues that may hinder their rapport with others. The quest for agreeable employees to have fewer personal problems with others in the workplace significantly enhances their performance (Gyaama Darkwah, 2014). In Ghana, mostly aside from the workplace, employees and their leaders meet on different occasions such as weddings, funerals, religious gathering, among others. And so, this research throws more light on why leaders will possibly admire employees with agreeable traits as well as explains why employees with such traits engage in less relational conflict.

As hypothesised, this study has elaborately contributed to the need to build a quality relationship between employers and their employees and how it positively affects the performance level of the employees.

Consequently, this study is valuable to all employers and human resource personnel in Ghana and beyond by providing an in-depth understanding on one of the kinds of personality traits that serves as a booster to achieving an increased performance. This research calls for further inquiry in finding the rationale behind LMX having a significant negative relationship with task performance. The public sector of Ghana should concentrate on measures to improve the relationship between employers and employees by giving attention to the interest and needed organisational support of their employees. It poses this fundamental question to Human Resource Personnel's: Where does the imbalance between leaders and employees begin and what measure can be considered in boosting the performance of employees in the public sector? Also, this research reveals that there is the need to cherish but not take for granted the nature of agreeable employee. Mainly because they will serve as a very useful resource for the organisation.

VI. CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Utilising an emergent path modelling approach, as well as a data analysis method which is multivariate and of a second-generation (PLS-SEM), multivariate data analysis method (PLS-SEM), this study was not in correspondence to previous studies which indicated that LMX was positively related to task performance. On the other hand, it revealed the favourable influence of agreeableness on the relationship between LMX and performance. It also showed how agreeable employees for the sake of their performance, sacrifice any relational conflict that will be detrimental to their performance.

Like any other research, this wasn't devoid of limitation. In the first place, there are many personality traits, but the researchers used only agreeableness. Future studies can consider the influence of other personality traits on the task performance of employees. In addition, according to (Barrick et al., 2003), in a situation where autonomy is high, personality dimensions are most likely to affect job performance. And so, other researchers can research on the dominant power-distance in Ghana and its effects on performance.

Also, while the current study addresses the moderating effect of relationship conflict on agreeableness and task performance, future researchers could focus on the impact of control variables such as age, gender, years of service on other outcome variables.

Finally, further research can be done to know much about on factors that cause LMX to have a negative relationship with performance and at what are the limits to the relationship between the employers and employees.

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