

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROFICIENCY AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ADMINISTRATORS: THE PREDICTIVE ROLES OF THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY FACTORS

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### Abstract

The Nigerian school system has been ravaged by recurring conflicts. Efforts to solve or curb such conflict often prove abortive. This study investigated the roles of the Big-5 Personality Traits in conflict management proficiency among administrators of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. It was a survey, utilizing ex-post facto design. Multi-stage sampling method was used. A total of 299 administrators participated in the study. Results showed that personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) jointly predicted conflict management proficiency [ $R = .411$ ,  $R^2 = .088$ ,  $F(1,295) = 3.751$ ,  $p < .05$ ], accounting for 88% of the variance observed. Openness to experience [ $\beta = .223$ ;  $t = 3.54$ ,  $p < .05$ ], conscientiousness [ $\beta = .341$ ,  $t = 4.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and neuroticism [ $\beta = -.453$ ,  $t = -6.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ] independently predicted conflict management proficiency among the administrators studied. However, extroversion [ $\beta = .067$ ,  $t = 1.23$ ,  $p > .05$ ] and agreeableness [ $\beta = .012$ ,  $t = 1.10$ ,  $p > .05$ ] were not independent predictors of conflict management. It is recommended that recruitment and deployment of administrators in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should take into consideration the personality traits of such employees vis-à-vis the conflict proneness of the area or department/units. Experts in personality assessment and educational management should be involved in the selection, employment, and deployment processes.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Conflict Management Proficiency, Personality Factors, Tertiary Institutions Administrators

## **Introduction**

Conflicts are inevitable parts of every human group/organisation; the nature of conflict however depends on the very nature and peculiarity of the organisation. Conflicts in tertiary institutions, like other schools, often take the form of staff-students conflicts, staff-staff conflicts, student-student conflicts, staff-management conflicts, and student-management conflicts. In Nigeria, they have remained recurring events despite efforts and strategies put in place by governments, managements, and unions to end them. This inevitability of conflicts in schools, like other human groups, places on every school manager or administrator the responsibility of conflict management. It has been observed that, conflict in tertiary institutions is inescapable; it exists at every level of the academic world (Holton, 1998). Conflicts in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been attributed to their peculiar structure which allows two or more units or groups to share functional boundaries in achieving its set objectives. The organisational structure is such that staff and staff, students and students, and staff and students share functional boundaries in exchange of knowledge. These give rise to complex interactions which often results in conflict situations (Alabi, 2003). Other known sources of conflicts in tertiary institutions include limited resources, differences in perceptions, autonomy drives, roles, and political and national issues (Alabi, 2003).

For Badler (2008), sources of conflict include poor communication channels, friction between two or more people/departments, friction between employee and manager, lack of recognition and employee development, lack of support from management, lack of information, lack of resources, and salary negotiation deadlocks. Such conflicts have been further grouped as value conflict, power conflict, economic conflict, interpersonal conflict, organisational conflict, and environmental conflict (Folger, 2004). Empirical evidences are that tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State are conflict-prone. It is on record that College of Education, Afaha Nsit was shut down between 2013 and 2014 due to conflicts between staff and management, about the same time, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua was closed for some months due to conflicts between students and staff/management,

in June 2013, there was a conflict between students and management of the University of Uyo during which a student was killed, the Vice Chancellor's office, Deputy Vice Chancellors' offices, Record's office among other buildings were burnt down (Afisunlu, 2013). Some conflicts in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are national while others are local (within a particular branch). All these necessitate proficiency in conflict management by the administrators of the institutions because each unresolved conflict results in the disruption of the academic activities which are the primary aims of setting up any school. Experts therefore opine that conflicts should be dealt with constructively and that conflict management is a life-time skill every administrator needs if the goal of the organisation must be achieved (Pendharkar, 1995). This becomes more important in tertiary institutions where almost all students and workers are adults with varying natural dispositions, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and political persuasions which they might have held unto for a long time. Managing conflicts at school has been an age-long challenge for educators; attention has been drawn to high level of violence in schools (Pendharkar, 1995). It has therefore been posited that the skills for conflict management could and should be acquired by administrators in view of its importance (Goldstein, 1988) to facilitate the peaceful ending of conflict (Forsyth, 2009).

Incidentally, administrators of the tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State are often exposed to trainings on conflict management both on short-term and long-term bases. Many higher institutions of learning in Nigeria are running many undergraduate and post graduate programmes on conflict management and educational management. Many, if not all, administrators of schools in Nigeria may have had the opportunities to attend some of those programmes. Others obtain such trainings in foreign institutions. Investigating panels are often set up following conflicts and unrests in schools; some administrators, staff, and students have been punished to deter others and avoid further occurrence; scientific studies have been conducted to determine the possible causes and how to curb it. But, the Nigerian school system still experiences conflicts – between students and management, staff and management, students and staff, and students and

students. Indeed, news bulletins and daily reports from the print and electronic media are filled with stories of school conflicts, some of which ferment and escalate to live-claiming and property-destroying levels and disrupting academic activities. Even in non-physically violent conflict situations, it is certain that no meaningful learning can take place where there is an unresolved conflict between a staff and a student he/she is teaching – yet learning (impartation and acquisition of knowledge and skills) is the main goal of any tertiary institution. Labour unions in tertiary institutions across Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular frequently threaten to and often embark on industrial actions due to some conflicts with either managements or governments. These have continued despite efforts by managements and governments; such efforts include dialogue, creation of enabling environment, and provision of social amenities in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Okonkwo, 2012).

This persistence of conflicts in tertiary institutions which appear to have differed all solutions necessitate this study which fundamentally aims at investigating how administrators of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria differ in their conflict management proficiency based on specified personality variables. The human personality is known to influence every facet of human behaviour. For instance, in studying personality, Altemeyer (2007) found that those who are of the authoritarian personality, characteristically, do not want to give orders, rather they want to take orders, seek conformity, security, and stability. They become anxious and insecure when events or circumstances upset their previously existing world view. Ahmed, Nawaz, Shaukat, and Usman (2010) found that individuals with high openness to experience were more inclined towards compromising style of conflict handling.

In another study, Antonioni (1998) found that openness to experience had a positive relationship with integrating style but negative relationship with avoiding style of conflict handling. Studies had also found that there were significant correlations between openness trait and integrating, compromising, obliging, and dominating styles of conflict resolution (Ejaz,

Iqbal & Ara, 2012). Hashim, Rashid, Othman, Hamzah and Sunai (2012) in a related study found that in the presence of other influencing factors, openness to experience would moderate the choice of conflict management style by the managers and also influence the employees' job performances. Ma (2010) found that conscientiousness was not related to any specific behavioural preferences in conflict situations. This finding was consistent with the findings of earlier research such as Barry & Friedman's (1998) and Ma & Jaeger's (2003) studies. In contrast, Anwar, Shahzad and Ijaz-ul-Rehman (2012) found in their study that those who were high on conscientiousness were more proficient in the management of interpersonal conflict. Conscientiousness was also seen to have a significant moderating role in the management of conflict among the sample studied. Equally, Hashim, et. al. (2012) reported that high conscientiousness moderated the choice of conflict management styles adopted by managers and by extension, influenced the job performances of the employees who may be in the conflicts.

Studies have implicated extroversion in conflict management; for instance it was found that individuals who were high in extroversion preferred compromising to avoiding style of conflict management (Ahmed, et al., 2010; Ejaz, et al., 2012). It has also been found that high score on extroversion led to choosing collaborating style whereas those who were introverts preferred to avoid the conflict, believing it will naturally take care of itself, indicating that extroversion had positive correlation with the integrating and compromising styles, which were conducive to functional conflict incidents (Kilman & Thomas, 1975; Liu & Zhai, 2011). In Ma's (2010) finding, highly extroverted administrators or managers were more likely to be confrontational while handling conflicts than those who highly introverted. Studies linking agreeableness to managing conflict management indicated that agreeableness significantly and positively predicted the use of avoiding, obliging, and integrating styles of conflict handling but had a significant negative correlation with dominating style of conflict management. These imply that individuals with high agreeableness preferred to use collaborating or avoidance style but were unwilling to use

dominating style in their management of conflicts (Goel & Khan, 2012). For Liu and Zhai (2011), low agreeableness strongly related with integrating style of conflict management; whereas high agreeableness agreed with obliging style and integrating style (Ejaz, et al., 2012), and moderated the preferred conflict management style by managers and administrators and influence employees' job performances (Hashim, et. al., 2012). Another study shows that those who were highly agreeable are more likely to adopt avoiding style and less likely to adopt dominating style (Antonioni, 1998). In Goel and Khan's (2012) study, it was found that neuroticism significantly and positively predicted avoiding and obliging style of conflict management but negatively related to the integrating and compromising conflict management styles. These findings showed that those who scored high on neuroticism also scored high on avoiding and obliging styles and by implication, preferred those styles to integrating and compromising styles on which scales they scored low. In an exploratory study, it was found that individuals who were high on the anxiety (a facet of neuroticism) preferred the avoiding strategy when handling conflict to avoid high level of anxiety. This implies that neuroticism related positively with avoiding strategy and negatively to the collaborating and competing strategies (Ejaz, et al., 2012; Wang, 2010). Those with high neuroticism were more likely to adopt avoiding style and less likely to adopt dominating style of conflict management (Antonioni, 1998). Generally, it had been found that managers' (administrator's) personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) were correlated to the conflict management (Chen, Tsai, & Chen, 2009).

From the works cited, it could be deduced that understanding personality traits is crucial for top management in developing effective conflict solving strategies in order to enhance employees' job performance and achieve the overall objective of the organisation. However, it could be observed that a vast majority of studies in this area are alien to Nigeria, some with contrasting results, and most of them were not directly conducted to show relationships between personality factors and conflict management proficiency (among tertiary institution administrators). Consequently, there

is dearth of indigenous literature. These necessitate this study. The conduct of this study was guided by the Big-Five Factor Theory of Personality by Digman (1990). The Big-Five Factor Theory of Personality was proposed by Digman (1990) and extended by Goldman (1993). This theory holds that the human personality underlies the individual differences and explains why different people respond to the same situations differently. The Big-Five Personality is considered a modern theory of personality; the Big-Five Factors of Personality are five broad domains which define human personality and account for individual differences. In other words, it explains why people respond differently to the same situation using five domains or factors. Beneath each factor, a cluster of correlated specific traits are found. The Big Five traits are openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN) (Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003).

**Openness to experience** - People who like to learn new things and enjoy new experiences usually score high in openness. Openness includes traits like being insightful and imaginative and having a wide variety of interests. Openness is a general appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, imagination, curiosity, and variety of experience. The trait distinguishes imaginative people from down-to-earth, conventional people. People who are open to experience are intellectually curious, appreciative of art, and sensitive to beauty. They tend to be, compared to closed people, more creative and more aware of their feelings. They are more likely to hold unconventional beliefs. People with low scores on openness tend to have more conventional, traditional interests.

**Conscientiousness** - People that have a high degree of conscientiousness are reliable and prompt. Traits include being organised, methodic, and thorough. Conscientiousness is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement against measures or outside expectations. The trait shows a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behaviour. It influences the way in which we control, regulate, and direct our impulses (Matthew, et. al., 2003).

**Extroversion** - Extroverts get their energy from interacting with others, while introverts get their energy from within themselves. Extroversion includes the traits of energetic, talkative, and assertive. Extroversion is characterised by positive emotions, urgency, and the tendency to seek out stimulation and the company of others. Extroversion includes such related qualities as gregariousness, assertiveness, excitement seeking, warmth, activity and positive emotions (Matthews, et al., 2003). The trait is marked by pronounced engagement with the external world. Extroverts enjoy being with people, and are often perceived as full of energy. They tend to be enthusiastic, action-oriented individuals. In groups they like to talk, assert themselves, and draw attention to themselves (Matthew, et. al., 2003). Introverts lack the social exuberance and activity levels of extroverts. They tend to seem quiet, low-key, deliberate, and less involved in the social world. Their lack of social involvement should not be interpreted as shyness or depression. Introverts simply need less stimulation than extroverts and more time alone. They may be very active and energetic, simply not socially (Matthew, et. al., 2003).

**Agreeableness** - These individuals are friendly, cooperative, and compassionate. People with low agreeableness may be more distant. Traits include being kind, affectionate, and sympathetic. Putting it differently, Matthew, et. al., (2003) assert that agreeableness is a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. The trait reflects individual differences in general concern for social harmony. Agreeable individuals value getting along with others. They are generally considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise their interests with others. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. They believe people are basically honest, decent, and trustworthy. On the contrary, disagreeable individuals place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally unconcerned with others' well-being, and are less likely to extend themselves for other people. Sometimes their skepticism about others' motives causes them to be suspicious, unfriendly, and uncooperative (Matthew, et. al., 2003).



**Neuroticism** - This dimension of personality is characterised by emotional instability and negative emotions. Traits include being moody and tense. Neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, or depression. It is sometimes called emotional instability. Those who score high in neuroticism are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. Their negative emotional reactions tend to persist for unusually long periods of time, which means they are often in a bad mood. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish the ability of a person scoring high on neuroticism to think clearly, make decisions, and cope effectively with stress. At the other end of the scale, individuals who score low in neuroticism are less easily upset and are less emotionally reactive. They tend to be calm, emotionally stable, and free from persistent negative feelings. Freedom from negative feelings does not mean that low scorers experience a lot of positive feelings (Matthew, et. al., 2003). Neuroticism is the opposite of emotional stability.

In relation to this study, administrators who are high on openness are likely to manage conflict situations differently from those who are of high conscientiousness, who, in turn will manage the same situation differently from those who are highly extroverted. Differences are also to be found between administrators who are highly agreeable and those who are highly neurotic. Those who are high on these two traits (agreeableness and neuroticism) are likely to be different in conflict management from those who are high on the other three traits (openness, conscientiousness, and extroversion). It was therefore hypothesized that personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) will independently and jointly predict conflict management proficiency among tertiary institution administrators in Akwa Ibom State.

## **Method**

**Design of the Study:** The study was a survey using ex-post facto design. This was because the variables of interest have already existed; there was no manipulation of variables.

**Study Area/Setting:** The area of the study was Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom State was created in 1987 from the former Cross River State. It is located in the coastal South-Southern part of Nigeria, lying between latitudes 4°32'N and 5°33'N North, and longitudes 7°25'E and 8°25'E East. The State is bordered on the east by Cross River State, on the west by River State and Abia State, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean and the southernmost tip of Cross River State (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Economic Development, 2013). Akwa Ibom is one of Nigeria's 36 states with a population of 3,920,208 people being 2.80% of Nigeria's total population (National Population Commission, 2006) and more than 10 million people in diaspora. It has 31 local government areas with Ibibio, Anang, Oron, and Obolo as the major ethnic groups. The State's Capital is Uyo with about 500,000 inhabitants (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Economic Development, 2013). It has five recognised public tertiary institutions – University of Uyo - Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University-Mkpat Enin, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic-Ikot Osurua, Akwa Ibom State College of Education-Afaha Nsit, and Maritime Academy - Oron (Naijapal Network, 2014).

**Study Population:** The population of this study consisted of all 506 (322 males and 184) senior administrators in the five public tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State (Personnel Directorates of the Institutions, 2015). That is, those involved in the day-to-day running of the tertiary institutions. They included: the Vice Chancellors, the Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments, Rectors, Deputy Rectors, Provosts, Deputy Provosts, Registrars, Directors of Units/Directorates, Deputy Directors of Units/Directorates. They were selected from University of Uyo-Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University-Mkpat Enin, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic-Ikot Osurua, Akwa Ibom State College of Education-Afaha Nsit, and Maritime

Academy-Oron. The actual participants in the study were 303 administrators; they were 193 males and 110 females.

**Sample and Sampling Techniques:** The sample size for this study was 303 respondents (approximately 60 percent of the study population). It was made up of 193 males and 110 females. The actual participants in the study were 299 administrators selected from the five recognized tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. They were 191 males and 108 females. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Cluster sampling was used as each of the five institutions constituted a cluster. Simple random sampling was used to select the department/units and the actual participants for the study. A list of staff holding administrative positions was collected from the personnel department of each institution and the selection participants table of random numbers.

**Instruments:** Two instruments were used to gather data for this study.

**1. Big-five Personality Inventory:** Big-five Personality Inventory (BFI) developed by John and Srivastva (1999) was used to measure personality. It is a 44-item instrument measured on a four-point rating scale format. It measures five dimensions of human personality, namely, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN). Responses range from strongly disagree to strongly agree and have both positively and negatively worded items. The BFI's reliability and convergent validity coefficient for the full scale and each sub-scale's reliability coefficient as reported by the authors were as follows: Openness to experience = .79, Conscientiousness = .84, Extroversion = .87. Agreeableness = .74, and Neuroticism = .88, The scoring formula indicates that the higher the score above the global mean score on each sub-scale, the higher the individual is on that particular personality trait and vice versa.

**2. Conflict Management Proficiency Questionnaire:** Conflict Management Proficiency Questionnaire (CMPQ) was used to measure the administrators' proficiency and efficiency in the management of different types of school conflicts. It is a 37-item instrument developed in the course

of the study. It is a four-point rating scale. Their responses were measured as follows: Strongly disagree (SD)=1; Disagree (D)=2; Agree (A)=3; Strongly agree (SA)=4. Section A of the instrument consisted of necessary demographic information or bio-data of the participants.

**Validation of the Instruments:** The BFI was presented to experts (1 educational psychologist and 2 educational administrators) for content validation. The CMPQ was also presented to 2 educational administrators for content validity.

**Reliability of the Instruments:** To establish the norm, ensure internal consistency, and make them population-specific and culture-sensitive, the two instruments were administered to 35 administrators from 3 faculties each from the University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic who were not part of the main study. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of .79 were for BFI and .88 for CMPQ.

**Procedure:** The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was the pilot study during which the instruments were developed and/or revalidated. The second phase was the main study during which the hypothesis was tested. For both phases, three research assistants were trained to assist in the conduct of the study, particularly in retrieving the instruments from the participants after completion. The participants (administrators) were contacted in their offices, the purpose of the study was explained to them, and the valid and reliable versions of the instruments were administered to volunteers. They used an average of 72 hours (three days) to complete the instruments. The completed instruments were retrieved from them and their responses subjected to statistical analysis using Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. A total of 303 copies of the questionnaire were issued but 299 were completely filled, retrieved, and used for the analysis, representing 98% retrieval rate.

**Statistical Analysis:** Mean and deviation were used as descriptive statistics while multiple regression analysis was used to test for the hypothesis.

## Results

**Table 1 showing mean and standard deviation scores of participants on conflict management proficiency based on personality traits**

Variables	Score Level	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
<b>Openness</b>	Low	191	13.83	5.00
	High	108	20.68	9.35
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	Low	199	11.34	8.70
	High	100	15.18	6.75
<b>Extro-Intro</b>	Intro	209	12.14	8.15
	Extro	90	13.46	8.38
<b>Agreeableness</b>	Low	202	10.95	8.70
	High	97	11.56	5.22
<b>Neuroticism</b>	Low	201	24.31	7.20
	High	98	17.38	8.91

Results in Table 1 show that participants with high openness to experience (N=108) reported a higher mean conflict management proficiency score ( $\bar{X}$  =13.83; SD=9.35) than those with low openness to experience (N=191) who reported a lower mean score ( $\bar{X}$  =13; SD=5.00). Those with high conscientiousness (N=100) reported higher mean conflict management proficiency score ( $\bar{X}$  =15.18; SD=6.75) than those with low conscientiousness (N=199) who reported lower mean score ( $\bar{X}$  =11.34; SD=8.70). The extroverted (N=90) reported a slightly higher mean conflict management proficiency score ( $\bar{X}$  =13.46; SD=8.38) than the introverted ( $\bar{X}$  =12.14; SD=8.15). Equally, those with high agreeableness (N=97) reported a slightly higher mean conflict management proficiency score ( $\bar{X}$  =11.56; SD=5.22) than those with low agreeableness (N=202) who reported a slightly lower mean score ( $\bar{X}$  = 10.95; SD=8.70). The lowly neurotic (N=201) reported a higher mean conflict management proficiency score ( $\bar{X}$  24.31; SD=7.20) than the highly neurotic (N=98;  $\bar{X}$  =17.38; SD=8.91).

The hypothesis which stated that personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) will independently and jointly predict conflict management proficiency among tertiary institution administrators in Akwa Ibom State was tested using a multiple regression analysis and summary of result is presented in Table 2

**Table 2: Multiple regression result showing independent and joint prediction of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism on conflict management proficiency**

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Openness to experience	.223	3.54	<.05				
Conscientiousness	.341	-4.11	<.05				
Extroversion	.067	1.23	>.05	.411	.088	3.751	<.05
Agreeableness	.012	-1.10	>.05				
Neuroticism	-.453	-6.11	<.01				

The results in Table 2 show that personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) jointly predicted conflict management proficiency [R= .411, R<sup>2</sup>=.088, F(1,295) =3.751, p<.05]. This entails that openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism jointly predicted conflict management proficiency among tertiary institution sampled, accounting for 88% of the variance observed in conflict management proficiency. The results further show that openness to experience [ $\beta$ =.223; t=3.54, p<.05], conscientiousness [ $\beta$ =.341, t=4.11, p<.05], and neuroticism [ $\beta$ =-.453, t=-6.11, p<.01] independently predicted conflict management proficiency among the administrators studied. These results indicate that, administrators who were high in openness to experience, those who were high in conscientiousness, and those who were low in neuroticism reported better management proficiency than those whose low in openness to experience, those who were low in conscientiousness, and those who were high in neuroticism. However,

extroversion [ $\beta=.067$ ,  $t=1.23$ ,  $p>.05$ ] and agreeableness [ $\beta=.012$ ,  $t=1.10$ ,  $p>.05$ ] were not independent predictors of conflict management proficiency among the administrators sampled.

### **Discussion/Conclusion**

The results of this study showed that openness to experience significantly predicted conflict management proficiency among the administrators sampled with high openness to experience reporting better conflict management proficiency than those with low openness to experience. This result supported some earlier findings such as Ejaz, et. al's. (2012) findings which indicated that there were significant correlations between openness trait and some conflict resolution styles. It also corroborated the finding that in the presence of other influencing factors, openness to experience would moderate the choice of conflict management style by the managers and also influence the employees' job performances (Hashim, et al., 2012). This could be due to the fact that with high openness to experience, such administrators are willing to accept new ideas and methods of conflict resolution and may be able to win the interest of the parties to any conflict. Already, it has been found that individuals with high openness to experience were more inclined towards compromising style of conflict handling (Ahmed, et al., 2010) and integrating style but less likely to adopt avoiding style of conflict handling (Antonioni, 1998).

It was also found that administrators with high conscientiousness reported better conflict management proficiency than with low conscientiousness. This could be attributed to the fact that individuals with high conscientiousness are naturally organised, methodic, and thorough. Conscientiousness is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement against measures or outside expectations, show preference for planned rather than spontaneous behaviour, and not impulsive (Matthew, et. al., 2003). This result also supported earlier findings that those who were high on conscientiousness were more proficient in the management of interpersonal conflict (Anwar, et al., 2012). It was also in consonance with result which held that reported that high

conscientiousness moderated the choice of conflict management styles adopted by managers and by extension, influenced the job performances of the employees who may be in the conflicts (Hashim, et al., 2012). It however contradicted the finding that conscientiousness was not related to any specific behavioural preferences in conflict situations (Barry & Friedman, 1998; Ma & Jaeger, 2003; Ma, 2010). The results also shows that administrators who were low in neuroticism reported better conflict management proficiency that those who were high in neuroticism.

A plausible explanation for this could be that high neuroticism is characterised by emotional instability and negative emotions. Those who are high in neuroticism are generally moody and tense; tend to experience negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, or depression; they are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult (Matthew, et. al., 2003). With these characteristics, it is difficult for them to do well in conflict management situations which naturally call for high coordination. This finding seems to support the position of Goel and Khan (2012) which held that neuroticism significantly and positively predicted avoiding and obliging style of conflict management. As administrators, such persons are likely to avoid conflict resolution situations involving their subordinates yet conflicts are inevitable.

The results that extroversion was not an independent predictor of conflict management proficiency among the administrators sampled indicated that whether extroverted or introverted, the administrators would still manage conflict equally. This result was in line with the findings of Anwar, et. al., (2012) that extroversion was not a significant predictor of interpersonal conflict handling. It contradicted the findings of such studies by Ahmed, et. al.'s (2010) which found some positive relationships between extroversion and preferred conflict management styles. The differences in results may be due to the population studied. Equally, it was found that agreeableness did not independently predict conflict management proficiency. This result refuted the findings that individuals with high agreeableness preferred to



use collaborating or avoidance style but were unwilling to use dominating style in their management of conflicts (Goel & Khan, 2012). It further contradicted the position that low agreeableness strongly related with integrating style of conflict management (Liu & Zhai, 2011), whereas high agreeableness agreed with obliging and integrating styles (Ejaz, et al., 2012). The differences observed may be attributed to environment and population.

In conclusion, the predictive roles of the Big-5 Personality Traits in conflict management proficiency were studied among administrators of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. A total of 299 administrators participated in the study. The results showed that administrators who were high in openness to experience, those who were high in conscientiousness, and those who were low in neuroticism reported better management proficiency than those whose low in openness to experience, those who were low in conscientiousness, and those who were high in neuroticism. It was further found that extroversion and agreeableness were not independent predictors of conflict management proficiency among the administrators sampled. It is recommended that recruitment and deployment of administrators in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should take into consideration the personality traits of such employees vis-à-vis the conflict proneness of the area or department/units. Experts in personality assessment and educational management should necessarily be involved in the selection, employment, and deployment process.

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