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## Employees' Altruism and Organisational Adaptation in Nigeria

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### Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### ABSTRACT

This study empirically sought to establish the pattern of relationship between employees' altruism and organisational adaptation in Nigeria. As a cross sectional survey, the instrument for data collection was the questionnaire which top executives of the organisations responded to. Data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The 17.0 version of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to perform a Spearman Rank Order Coefficient Correlation and the result revealed that altruism is significantly and positively associated to organisational adaptation. The study concluded that the exhibition of altruism among employees of Nigeria domestic aviation companies resulted in sharing of knowledge and consequently made the organisations adaptive; and recommended among others that (1) Leaders and managers of Nigeria domestic airline companies and by extension, all other Nigeria organisations should apply motivation to induce employees to exhibit altruistic

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behaviors (2) Managers should enshrine as part of their selection practices; the potentials to exhibit altruistic behaviors as constituent sub- condition for hiring.

*Keywords: Altruism; employees; adaptation; behaviors; organisational.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Turbulence will never cease. The best evidence says that winning organisations will continue to deal with this fact. The single biggest challenge in the process is changing people's behavior. The key to this behavior shift, so clear in successful transformations, is less about analysis and thinking, and more about seeing and feeling [1].

The world today is dramatically facing increasing and novel social, economic and environmental changes. These changes are driven by several factors; including: (a) the interaction of multiple slow processes (stresses) and (b), occasional sudden events (shocks). One can list several current perturbations (stresses and shocks) and associated changes that traverse national boundaries: climate changes, global economic crises, outbreaks of swine flu, tsunamis, hurricanes, the spread of democratic processes, political uprisings and the revolution in the use of information technologies, just to list a few.

It is evident that each of these perturbations come with diverse consequences on nations and its economies; especially the business organisations, prompting some scholars to argue that this is the most amazing period of transformational change the world has ever seen [2,3,4]. With this wind of rapid changes and perturbations, business organisations must become adaptive and by extension resilient to avert entropy and other negative consequences.

Deevy (5) suggests that the ultimate test for any organisation today can be summarized in a single question: is it sufficiently adaptive or resilient to cope with an increasingly turbulent and unpredictable environment? The basic ingredient of adaptive organisations is "a committed work force that is free to give the maximum effort" [5]. This commitment may however be demonstrated via employees' behaviors that go far and above their call of duties.

Scanty evidence are at our disposal concerning studies that investigated factors that can cause organisational adaptation or ultimate resilience; except for Wildavsky [6] who linked social support and retaining financial reserves to have causal affiliation with organisational resilience and Meyer [7] who identified availability of slack resources which he described as shock absorber that buffered the impact of environmental jolts, and strong organisational ideology as organisation factors that can make organizations adaptive or resilient. Both studies were however undertaken outside the shores of Nigeria. Consequent upon this dearth of research on antecedents of organizational adaptation, we are enthused to contribute in filling the lacuna by investigating the relationship between altruism and organisational adaptation.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

### 2.1 The Concept of Altruism

Altruism [8,9,10] is the enduring tendency to think about the welfare and rights of other people, to feel concern and empathy for them, and to act in a way that benefits them [9,11].

Similarly, Eisenberg [12] defines altruistic behavior as, “voluntary behavior that is intended to benefit another and is not motivated by the expectation of external reward” (p. 1). Kaplan [13] states that people with altruistic value help others selflessly, just for the sake of helping, and may involve personal sacrifice.

Altruism is one of the most consistent individual resources that have been related to the engagement in helping behaviors [8,9,14]. Piliavin and Charng [10] conclude that such altruistic resources indeed exist and that the willingness to consider others in our overall calculations of our own interests is natural to people. Studies show employees giving altruistic reasons for becoming involved in helping behaviors, such as wanting to help others [15,9,16].

## 2.2 Organisational Adaptation

Dalziell and McManus [17] define adaptive capacity as, “...the ability of the system to respond to changes in its external environment, and to recover from damage to internal structures within the system that affect its ability to achieve its purpose”. Similarly, adaptive capacity was later defined as the measure of the culture of the organisation that allows it to make decisions in a timely and appropriate manner both in day to day business and also in crises periods [18]. Starr et al. [19] discuss the importance of adaptation and note that the aim is to “...create advantages over less adaptive competitors”.

On their part, Luers et al. [20] introduced the concept of adaptive capacity into their vulnerability assessment of agricultural systems in Mexico and argued that it is a significant factor in characterizing vulnerability and may be defined as *‘the extent to which a system can modify its circumstances to move to a less vulnerable condition’*. Adaptive capacity considers aspects of an organisation such as the leadership and decision making structures, the flow of information and knowledge and the degree of creativity and flexibility that the organisation promotes or tolerates. Therefore, the rapidity and swiftness with which organisations operate can be attributed as a function of its adaptability. It is important to note that the ability of any organisation to maintain adaptive status is a huge strength that can guarantee longevity and eventual attainment of other corporate goals; because only living firms pursue goals. Judging from this view, whatever makes organisations adaptive must be of great interest to scholars and practitioners alike. Hence our hypothesis that:

H<sub>01</sub> Altruism is significantly and positively associated with organisations’ adaptive capacity

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Data Collection

This involved the use of primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained with the use of questionnaire whereas the secondary involved the use of journals, periodicals and internet.

### 3.2 Research Design

Our study is a cross-sectional survey. According to Sekaran [21], a cross-sectional study is that which data are gathered just once, perhaps over a period of days or weeks or months.

Similarly, Saunders et al. [22] defined it as involving the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomena) at a single time and it often employs the survey strategy which we also used.

### 3.3 Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised top executives of five surviving domestic civil aviation airlines in Nigeria. Going by this status, we focused on both the head and branch offices of Arik, Aero, IRS, Dana and Overland airlines offices located in Lagos, Kaduna, Abuja and Port Harcourt; which represents the relevant zones delineated by the Federal Aviation Authority of Nigeria (FAAN). A total of 105 executives constituted the population because they occupy top positions and we adopted the entire population.

### 3.4 Research Instrument

Questionnaire was the instrument used in collecting data, and it was divided into two parts: part 'A' and 'B'. The instrument for altruism was adapted from Podsakoff and Mackenzie [23] and adaptability instrument was from McManus' et al. [24]; both were mildly modified.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

This involved the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The 17.0 version of SPSS was used to perform the Spearman Rank Order Coefficient Correlation.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 123 copies of questionnaire were distributed, out of which, 102 were retrieved, and 21 copies were not retrieved and 10 copies were not properly filled; hence 89 copies were analysis - compliant. Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents were within the age bracket of 40-54 years, followed by those between 25-39 years. Similarly, Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents were of the male gender; that is 60 males and 29 females. Table 4 shows that those with Bachelor's degrees constituted the majority whereas only an infinitesimal percentage of 2.2% held PhD degrees. Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents have spent a minimum of 5-10 years in their respective organizations; and Table 6 reveals that those who go by the job title of unit heads formed majority of the respondents, followed by the supervisors.

**Table 1. Response rate for field data collection**

Activities	Number of occurrences	Percentage of occurrences
Copies of questionnaire distributed	123	100%
Copies of questionnaire retrieved	102	82.9%
Copies of questionnaire not retrieved	21	17.07%
Minus uncompleted copies of questionnaire	10	8.13%
Total response rate	92	74.80%
Minus completed but not usable copies of questionnaire	3	2.44%
Completed and analyses- compliant copies of questionnaire	89	72.36%

*Fieldwork, 2014*

**Table 2. Age of respondents**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	25 - 39 years	25	28.1	28.1	28.1
	40 - 54 years	61	68.5	68.5	96.6
	55 and above	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3. Respondents' gender**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	Male	60	67.4	67.4	67.4
	Female	29	32.6	32.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4. Respondents' highest academic degree attained**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	Doctoral degree	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Masters degree	26	29.2	29.2	31.5
	Bachelors degree	50	56.2	56.2	87.6
	Others	11	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5. Respondents' length of service in this organization**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	less than 5 years	8	9.0	9.0	9.0
	5 - 10 years	52	58.4	58.4	67.4
	11 and above	29	32.6	32.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6. Respondents' job title**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	Director/CEO	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
	Manager	12	13.5	13.5	16.9
	Supervisor	29	32.6	32.6	49.4
	Unit Head	45	50.6	50.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, the result presented in Table 7 implies that employees in the domestic aviation sector display altruistic behaviors among themselves ( $x_1 = 4.1$ ,  $x_2 = 3.91$ ,  $x_3 = 3.80$ ). Going by this, most respondents agreed that employees in their organisations are in the habit of helping their fellows who are either new in the job, are pressed with time or are not present at work in tackling work – related problems without having any ulterior motives.

**Table 7. Statistics on altruism**

	(Altruism 1)	(Altruism 2)	(Altruism 3)
N Valid	89	89	89
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	4.1124	3.9101	3.7978
Std. Deviation	.88470	1.20265	1.14990
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00

We can therefore infer that employees in the domestic aviation sector are good at exhibiting altruistic tendencies, which though are targeted at individual members of the organisation but is ultimately beneficial to the entire organisation. This position is further validated by the result in Table 8 which provides the overall mean score ( $\bar{x}$ ) of altruism as 3.94, which is relatively high when compared to base mean of 2.50 which we adopted as criterion.

**Table 8. Descriptive statistics of altruism**

Statistics	Altruism
N Valid	89
Missing	0
Mean	3.9401
Std. deviation	.94356
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00

Table 8 indicates that a high level of adaptive capacity prevails in the organisations surveyed ( $x_1 = 4.12$ ,  $x_2 = 4.01$ ,  $x_3 = 4.10$ ,  $x_4 = 4.09$ ). Going by this result, it is inferable that Nigerian domestic airline operators have the potentials to cope with disturbances and changes while retaining critical functions, structures, and feedback mechanisms. This feature is very important for the survival of any organisation in this fast changing and turbulent business atmosphere that permeates the globe today. Table 9 is the SPSS output of descriptive statistics on the aggregate views of respondents on the adaptability item of our research questionnaire. And Table 10 also shows that altruism significantly and positively correlates adaptive capacity ( $r = .625$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.01$ ); this means that altruistic behavior can make organisation adaptive to its operating environment.

**Table 9. Descriptive statistics on adaptability**

Statistics	Adaptability
N Valid	89
Missing	0
Mean	4.0815
Std. deviation	.86584
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00

**Table 10. Correlation matrix for altruism and adaptability**

		<b>Altruism</b>	<b>Adapt capacity</b>
Spearman's rho	Atruism	1.000	.625**
		.	.000
	Adapt capacity	.625**	1.000
		.000	.
		89	89

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed), \* Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (1-tailed), Source: Research Data, 2014

**5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

We found that employees of Nigerian domestic aviation companies exhibit altruistic behavior at work. This means that such employees are always willing to help colleagues with work related problems. Years back, Simon [25] had explained altruism as behavior that – (a) seeks to increase the welfare of others, (b) which is voluntary, (c) intentional and involving helping others, and (d) expects no reward in return. Literature is awash with behavioral types that fall within the purview of altruism. Examples include, orienting a new co-worker (14), helping other co-workers to learn about the work [26] and helping co-workers with heavy workloads [27] among others.

The high rate of altruistic behaviors in the Nigerian domestic aviation companies could be as a result of the fact that Nigeria being an African country is of collectivistic orientation. According to Schartz [28], altruistic behavior is more predominant among collectivist settings. Similarly, Ahiauzu [29] explained that in real life-world of the Africans, there exists a web of kinship and other interpersonal relationships, so much that there is hardly any differentiation in individual members' roles within a community. This is the mindset of a typical Nigerian that makes him/her readily disposed to lending helping hands to others at the work place.

Justifying this outcome further, we also adduce the result to the high religiosity of Nigerians. Most Nigerians are perhaps altruistic because the holy bible or the Muslims teachings say so. Meisinger [30] investigated the editorial history of the synoptic gospel and found that the gospel of Luke emphasized the extension of Jesus' love command beyond all bounds. The command of Jesus to love our enemies in Luke 6: 27-36 can be regarded as the highest form of unconditional love. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an exemplary illustration of altruistic love [30].

Our result of existing positive and significant association between altruism and organisational adaptability may not have direct support from literature because studies linking both variables seem inexistent yet. However, scholars have converged in agreement that altruism affects organisational outcomes. Earliest reports on such relationship were made by Podsakoff et al. [31], who investigated 30 limited menu restaurants and observed that altruism or helping behavior is positively associated with measures of organisational effectiveness, such as- profit per employee, customer trust in the organisation, perceived reliability of service, perceived expertise of employees and employees' willingness to cooperate.

Regarding the issue of employees' willingness to cooperate with the organisation, Elster [32] described a mechanism referred to as reciprocal altruism or "tit – for –tat" in repeated interactions, such as " I scratch your back, you scratch my back", therefore, a continuation of the repeated exchange of help among employees is capable of breeding positive rewards as we can see in Podsakoff et al. [33], where they argued that over time altruism behavior can help spread " best practices" throughout the work unit or group. By this thinking, altruism is controvertibly a sacrificial behavior because there are expectations of return action in line with the social exchange theory. In another setting, Khalid et al. [34] reported a positive relationship between lecturers altruism and students academic achievement. Others who found positive associations between altruism and organisational effectiveness include Ehrhart et al. [35], Podsakoff et al. [31], Al – Zu 'bi [36] and Karambayyan [37].

Altruism has been described as a catalyst for creating organisations with high level of awareness, which may be associated with environment where creativity, learning and humanism are key players [37]. Altruism positively relate to group effectiveness [38,39,40]. It was also described as a lubricator of social machineries of work groups [30], as a maintainer of the social ties that bind individual members to groups, conserves organisational resources and enhance the effectiveness of coworkers [38,4,36].

Erhart et al. [35] also studied 2403 Soldiers in 31 Military Units and found a significant and positive relationship between helping behaviors (altruism) and the outcomes of combat readiness, physical fitness, award rate and range scores. Naumann and Benneth [41] studied 220 employees in 34 branches of a banking organisation and found that group level altruism correlates positively with employee effectiveness, but negatively with financial performance of the banks. The negative correlation was however suggested as having been caused by time spent in helping that may have reduced the overall effectiveness of experienced branch members, thus resulting in a drop in unit level productivity.

Similarly, Yen and Niehoff [42] studied 24 Taiwan Banks and found that there was a negative correlation between altruism and labor cost per employee. Walz and Niehoff [43] also studied 30 limited menu restaurants and reported that there was a negative relationship between altruism and food cost; that is to say that the cost of food in those restaurants had no positive association with employees altruistic behavior. Yahaya et al. [44] also found the relationship between altruism and continuous learning as negative, and positive with empowerment, team learning, dialogue and inquiry, system connections as well as pilot leadership; all applied as dimensions of learning organisation.

Based on the findings reported above, it is obvious that altruism is a predictor of learning in the organisation. Learning is a central element in organisations' adaptive capacity; a learning organisation is one that constantly seeks and acquires new knowledge and ways of solving problems. According to Senge [45], organisational learning fosters a sense of commonality of purpose and strategic thinking and develops organisational systems approach that can be considered as relevant for making organisations adaptive. We therefore conclude that:

The exhibition of altruistic tendencies by employees of Nigeria domestic aviation companies which help in encouraging knowledge sharing results in the ability of the organisation to adapt to environmental jolts and turbulences.



## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

1. Leaders and managers of Nigeria domestic airline companies and by extension, all other Nigeria organisations should strive to motivate their employees enough so that they can be willing to exhibit altruistic behaviors.
2. Managers need to adopt as part of their selection practices, that to-be-hires must show potentials for the exhibition of altruistic behavior before they are employed.
3. Managers should also pay sufficient attention to their employees' work behavior in order to determine with some level of certainty those employees who are high in altruistic behaviors so that such behaviors could be constantly reinforced as a way to retain it in the system.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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