

The Cult of Agreeableness

Personality's Influence on the Advocacy Efforts of Political Appointees

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I was appointed to a government commission in Texas. I don't get paid; I volunteer because it's my civic duty and an honor to serve.

I'm a lot like other volunteers. We just want to help people.

Introduction

Why Study Appointees and Advocacy

This project studies the correlations between agreeableness and advocacy efforts of political appointees. Commissions for which they serve rely on advocacy to secure support for organizational services. Appointees in this study volunteer to serve, a prosocial value (i.e., need to help others) that increases the likelihood that they are highly agreeable.

Why Agreeableness Matters

Upside	Highly agreeable people in general	Downside
Helpful and unselfish		May give up needs/wants
Forgiving nature		May not correct mistakes
Cooperates with others		May miss opportunities

Upside	Highly agreeable members of a team	Downside
Conforms to norms of team		Hesitant to offer new ideas
Empathetic team member		Hesitant to criticize
Supports the team		May support bad ideas

Upside	Highly agreeable appointees who lead a government commission	Downside
Established relationship with elected official which enabled appointment		May put allegiance to official's directives above organizational mission
Acknowledges and provides for the needs of others		Pleasing too many people may compromise mission
Easy to advocate to people who support organizational mission		Difficult to advocate to people who don't support organizational mission

Why Agreeableness and Advocacy May Be Related

At times, advocacy requires confrontational activity, and highly agreeable appointees may avoid this type of work. This project explored how socialized agreeableness can affect the advocacy efforts of political appointees.

Looks like I'm a team player.

Don't want anyone to be uncomfortable.

I'm passionate about our mission but advocating for money may make people uncomfortable.

Literature cited

Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual; Essays in Face-to-face Behavior*. Chicago: Aldine Pub., 1967. | Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959. | John, Oliver P. "Research: The Big Five Model of Personality Traits." www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~johnlab/bigfive.htm. | Markman, Art. *Habits of Leadership*. New York: Penguin Group, 2013. | Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. | Triandis, Harry C. "The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts." 1989.

Research Methods & Results

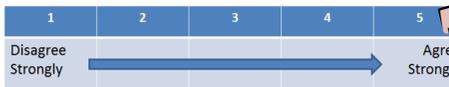
Survey Part 1—Personality Inventory

36 appointees who serve in Texas completed the **Big Five Inventory*** ranking statements such as:

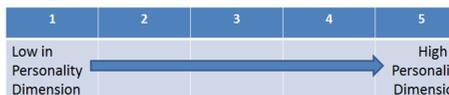
- I am someone who is talkative
- I am someone who is reserved

I talk a lot, so I'll choose a 5.

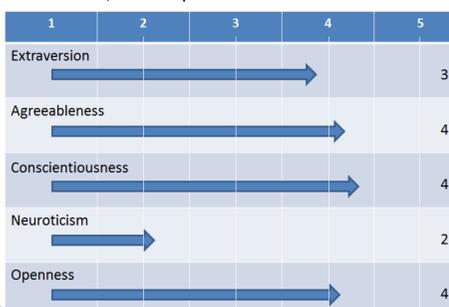
Each appointee ranked 44 statements using:



Rankings determine where individuals fall within each personality dimension (i.e. trait).



Individual results for all 36 appointees were combined; means per dimension are below.



Personality Inventory Results

Appointees were:

Low in Trait	Personality Dimensions	High in Trait
Reserved, Shy	Extraversion	Talkative, Assertive
Critical, Unfriendly	Agreeableness	Sympathetic, Helpful
Careless, Disorderly	Conscientiousness	Organized, Thorough
Calm, Stable	Neuroticism	Anxious, Moody
Commonplace, Simple	Openness	Imaginative, Insightful

Appointees in this study are, generally speaking, talkative, sympathetic, organized, stable, and insightful. Interesting . . .

Survey Part 2—Advocacy Efforts

Appointees were given a list of advocacy activities that included actions like:

- Shared information with the public via newsletters, journals, books, etc.
- Had face-to-face discussions with federal legislators in support of your organizational mission

Appointees indicated involvement by checking the box next to the action.

Tables at right show the most and least popular activities among appointees. Note that the most popular activities result in more visible and immediate results at the local level than the least popular.

Advocacy Activity Results

Numbers below indicate the number of appointees who pursue advocacy activity listed.

High and low scoring advocacy activities indicated by survey data from all 36 appointees	Total by activity
Invited friends and colleagues to events connected to your organization	34
Invited members of the general public to events connected to your organization	30
Shared information with the public via newsletters, journals, books, etc.	29
Worked with nonprofits who advocate for specific projects associated with your organizational mission	28
Wrote letters/email to federal legislators in support of your organizational mission	6
Made telephone calls to federal legislators in support of your organizational mission	4
Provided public comment/testimony at state legislative meetings/hearings in support of your organizational mission	3
Provided public comment/testimony at federal legislative meetings/hearings in support of your organizational mission	0

Talk to legislators? We only do that once a year, right?

Conclusions

Agreeableness as it relates to political appointees

- Research showed that political appointees within this study are highly agreeable, which is a common trait among volunteers that contributes to prosocial values (i.e., the need to help others.)

Agreeableness as it relates to advocacy efforts

- Research data showed that openness and extraversion, not agreeableness, are the more significant contributors to active advocacy behavior within this appointee pool.

Correlations used data from all 36 participants	Advocacy	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Advocacy	1					
Extraversion	0.585	1				
Agreeableness	0.259	0.074	1			
Conscientiousness	0.218	0.182	0.251	1		
Neuroticism	-0.322	-0.348	-0.555	-0.424	1	
Openness	0.557	0.384	-0.046	0.368	-0.079	1

I'm outgoing and willing to try new things, which significantly contributes to advocacy.

Recommendations for political appointees

- As with most things, agreeableness should be in balance. Appointees must be able to support ideas that contribute to a mission and question those that do not.
- Conflict is a part of life, and for appointees, it's part of the job. Appointees must practice providing methodical, constructive responses rather than reactionary ones.
- If the job was easy, it wouldn't be worth it. Appointees who work hard are likely to find the job more interesting and fulfilling. Making a difference means taking chances.

Advocating is hard but the more I do it, the more confident I'll become.

Acknowledgments

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Further information

Amy Hammons, amy.hammons@utexas.edu
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