

Investigating the Influence of Personality Traits and Leadership Styles

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**Abstract**

Research indicates that leadership and personalities specified in the Big Five Inventory have a strong correlation (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Although personality and leadership are heavily researched, specific personality traits and how they relate to leadership styles is limited. The purpose of this study is to determine the possible relationship between personality traits and leadership styles. Results did not show significance between the variables; however, interesting significant correlations were revealed that provided a greater understanding among the relationship among specific personality traits and individual leadership traits. Additional information on the implications of the results will be discussed further in the article.

### **Introduction**

In the early 1900s, the belief of great leaders being born with the natural ability to lead, such as Abraham Lincoln, was prominent (Northouse, 2016). Because of this belief, a significant amount of research was conducted on leaders and the traits leaders possess. This particular approach of studying leadership was the first to introduce a methodical way of analyzing the field of leadership during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Northouse, 2016).

Leadership is considered to be divided into two major different types of styles. These two categories consist of transactional leadership and transformational leadership (Harm & Credé, 2010). Transactional leadership is leadership based around goals and organization as transformational leadership is oriented more on challenging the group and reaching the common goal (Harm & Credé, 2010).

Transactional and transformational leadership have their own set of characteristics that are unique to each. For instance, transactional leadership is concerned with the task that is given and how the finished outcome of the task is presented. The implementation of this style is brought forth through rewards and punishments as well as close supervision of how well the followers are doing on the assigned task (Harm & Credé, 2010). As for transformational leadership, the characteristics most associated with this style includes the concern of emotions, ethics, standards, and long-term goals, which shows the need of this type of leader to be more people oriented as opposed to task oriented (Northouse, 2016).

When describing transactional and transformational leadership in the perception of personality, the correlation between the two is present. For transformational leadership, the personality trait most correlated to the style is extraversion (Bono & Judge, 2004). As for

transactional leadership, there is a stronger correlation of a leader with the personality trait of agreeableness (Bono & Judge, 2004).

In the means of definitions, such as extraversion and agreeableness mentioned above, the five-factor model of personality, or The Big Five, relates how the trait approach perceives an individual when holding a leadership role (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). The major five factors of this model consist of neuroticism (hostile tendencies), extraversion (sociable tendencies), openness (curious tendencies), agreeableness (accepting tendencies), and conscientiousness (thorough tendencies) (Goldberg, 1990).

In the findings of Judge and colleagues (2002), it was discovered that there is a strong correlation between the Big Five traits and leadership. Because of this conclusion, an assumption on leadership styles and different traits associated with those styles became an observation which will be researched and investigated throughout this particular study.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *We hypothesize that there will be a correlation between the different leadership styles and the different personality traits.*

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Thirteen undergraduate students (10 females and 3 males; average age = 18-25,  $SD = 0$ ) from a mid-sized university in the Southwest were recruited. The sample consist of 54% Caucasians, 15% Black/African Americans, 23% Latinos/Latinas or Hispanics, 8% Asian/Asian Americans. Participants volunteered to participate in this research to fulfill a course requirement or receive extra credit for a psychology course.

*Materials*

*Descriptive Data.* A demographics form that consisted of answers basic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, classification, college of major and minor, GPA, employment, and involvement with extracurricular activities was administered to participants.

*Leadership.* Participants completed an 18-item Leadership Styles Questionnaire (Blake & Mouton, 1964) to assess one of the 4 leadership styles represented in the questionnaire: socialite, team, impoverished, and authoritarian leaders. Participants rated statements such as “when seeing a complex task through to completion, I ensure that every detail is accounted for” on a scaled from 0 (never) to 5 (always).

*Personality.* Participants completed a 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI: Oliver & Srivastava, 1999) to assess the five personality traits associated with the BFI: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. Participants rated statements such as “is talkative” or “makes plans and follows through with them” on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

*Procedure.*

Participants were greeted and asked to sign in as they entered the room. After waiting for all the participants to arrive, they were asked to put away cell phones and were given consent forms after doing so. Once read and signed, the participants were then given a packet that consisted of the Big Five Inventory and Leadership Styles Questionnaire and were asked to complete the forms in the that particular order. After these forms were completed, participants were given the demographics form to complete. Finally, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

## Results

The frequencies, descriptive statistics, and bivariate correlations were conducted from the data collected on the Leadership Styles questionnaire, the Big Five Inventory, and various demographic questions such as GPA, gender, future leadership position, extracurricular, classification, major, minor, school experience, employment, and ethnicity. There was a negative correlation between neuroticism and question 10 on the Leadership Styles Questionnaire,  $r = -.56$ ,  $p < .046$ . Individuals who reported lower scores in neuroticism, ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), are more likely to take personal relationships into consideration when correcting mistakes, ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ). Researchers also found a positive correlation between conscientiousness and question 11 on the Leadership Styles Questionnaire,  $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < .02$ . Participants who scored high in conscientiousness, ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ), were more likely to be considered those who manage their time more effectively ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). A positive correlation was found between classification and question 7 on the Leadership Styles Questionnaire  $r = 0.608$ ,  $p < .03$ . Individuals who indicated being a higher classification such as a junior or senior, ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), were more likely to find a greater importance of details in complicated tasks ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). A positive correlation was also found with classification and question 8 on the Leadership Styles Questionnaire,  $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < .03$ . Individuals who indicated being a junior or senior ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) were more likely to find complex tasks easier to complete ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). A negative correlation was found between extracurricular activities and question 12 on the Leadership Styles Questionnaire,  $r = -0.621$ ,  $p < .03$ . Individuals who participate in extracurricular activities ( $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) were more likely to report enjoying the explanation of complex tasks to their peers ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ). A positive correlation was found between classification and those who were considered to be task oriented leader,  $r = 0.66$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Individuals who were more task-oriented ( $M=6.67$ ,  $SD=0.70$ ) were more likely to indicate that he or she had completed more school ( $M=2.00$ ,  $SD= 1.16$ ). Researchers also found a positive correlation between GPA and individuals who were considered task-oriented leaders,  $r=0.64$ ,  $p<0.02$ . More task-oriented individuals reported having a higher GPA ( $M=3.08$ ,  $SD=1.26$ ) than those who were not task oriented leaders ( $M=6.67$ ,  $SD=0.70$ ). Researchers were not able to find significant data supporting their hypothesis of different personality traits correlating with different leadership styles.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a correlation between leadership styles and certain personality traits. Researchers were unable to find significant data to support their hypothesis; however, bivariate correlations were conducted between individual variables to find possible extended relationships. The bivariate correlations revealed three correlations between personality traits and individual leadership traits as opposed to personality traits and leadership styles.

The present research indicated that participants who were to take personal relationships into consideration when correcting mistakes were less likely to be neurotic. It can be speculated that individuals who are considered high in neuroticism were more likely to report less sociability as they perceived ordinary situations as difficult; Therefore, maintaining a relationship that could potentially be harmed by certain changes would be easier to avoid than to fix, later ruining the relationship. Previous studies also found that individuals who report lower in narcissism commit to intimate relationships (Klimstra, Luyckx, Branje, Teppers, Goossens, & Meeus, 2013). Researchers were also able to find a correlation between less neurotic individuals as individuals who had a greater chance in enjoying the analyzation of problems. Researchers

speculate that individuals high in neuroticism report avoiding difficult tasks as it may cause the individual to experience anxiety. Previous research indicates that there is no correlations between neuroticism and problem analyzing; However, situations that cause anxiety may affect neuroticism scores (Goh & Frarley, 1977). The final correlation researchers found was between conscientiousness and time efficiency: participants higher in conscientiousness reported having better time management. It could be speculated that the results are due to individuals who are considered to be more conscientious are those who are well organized meaning time management is crucial to everyday life activities. Previous research supports this finding which indicates a positive correlation between time use and conscientiousness (Kelly & Johnson, 2005).

After these individual variable correlations were conducted, demographics were then analyzed with the individual leadership traits tested with personality. Researchers were able to find correlations between classification and task-oriented leadership, classification and GPA, and extracurricular activities and task explanation. When speaking on the basis of classification, participants who reported being juniors and seniors correlated as more task oriented leaders as opposed to people oriented leaders. The same was concluded with participants who reported having a higher GPA. Researchers speculate that these individuals have grown throughout the years to pay attention the task given in order to progress. Previous research has also indicated that task oriented leaders work best with those who want to succeed. (Bass, 1985). The final correlation researchers found concluded in participants who reported being a part of extracurricular activities were more likely to enjoy explaining complex tasks to his/her peers. These findings insinuate that student involvement aids in the development of social skills. According to Student Involvement Theory, the more an individual participates in activities, the greater the chance of personal and educational growth (Astin, 1984).

*Limitations*

Limitations were present in this study. The main limitation was sample size. If there were more participants, researchers conducting the study would have had better chances of finding a correlation between the two variables being tested. In addition, the time researchers were given was limited also restricting the number of participants. Another factor was the name of the study. The title "Lead On" could have drawn individuals who are interested in leadership as opposed to others. Other limitations include males being underrepresented, the selection of age range, and the variety of questionnaires that could have been used; however, according to the population of students on campus, the males were proportionate to that of females. Also, one the options for the age selection item was 18-25, which can easily be prevented for future research by separating the ages rationally. Lastly, some more detailed questionnaires can be used in future research as long as researcher are given longer session times with their participants.

*Concluding Remarks*

After researching the hypothesis being experimented, we were unable to find any studies done on personality traits and certain leadership styles. The results on the current research determined that there is no significant correlation between personality traits and leader styles; however, there were significant correlations between certain personality traits and individual leadership traits that were found.

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