Leadership Personality

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Introduction

Leadership is one of the most important elements in public organizations. There are many aspects that would be essential to make effective leaders. One of these aspects is their personality. In fact, this topic is important because personality plays a critical part among leaders. Because the high positions that leaders have in different organizations, their personality is an effective element as a key to influence followers and organizations in order to achieve the common goals. Thus, personality is a significant part in leadership field.

Therefore, this paper will focus on the leadership personality and its aspects in order to see how personality affects the leadership effectiveness in organizations and increases the positive relationship with others. There are specific questions that this paper will try to answer which are: What is the relationship between leadership and personality? What are the most critical personality traits in leaders? What are the outcomes of leaders’ personality toward followers and organizations? How do personality traits increase the leaders’ ethics? Do personality traits increase the leadership effectiveness?

In answering these questions, this paper will explore several aspects or contents that would provide the desired answers to the questions above. The contents are concept of personality, several personality traits in leaders, the effects of leadership personality, the strengths and weaknesses of leadership personality, challenges of leadership personality, leadership personality and ethics, and empirical study of personality and leadership effectiveness.
Concept of Personality

Personality has played an important element of leadership in organizations, particularly public organizations. Leaders with a strong personality influence their followers positively or negatively, so their personality can make a difference in the nature of the relationship between leaders and others. Therefore, personality has been defined by different theorists and experts. Each theorist or expert focuses on specific aspects of personality while others emphasize other aspects. As a result, the idea of personality contains various definitions and concepts that would explain the meaning of personality, its importance, and its role in the leadership field.

One definition uses traits as important elements in personality concept. Thus, personality is defined as dimensions of individuals’ characteristics, distinctions and differences that help to display thoughts, ideas, or actions of people. These differences in individuals are psychological features that can influence others (Johnson & Hill, 2009). Therefore, these features in individuals are specific traits that shape or create their personality and the degree to which they affect themselves, others, and the whole community by these different personality traits.

Personality also contains two important aspects that might help in understanding the nature of personality construct. The first element is human nature, and the second aspect is individual differences. These two components contribute to overall personality. Human nature is about how much individuals are the same or alike. On the other hand, individual difference is about how each person is different from the others (Hogan & Kaiser, 2008).
However, personality can be defined in different ways. According to "What is Personality?" (n.d.), personality can be created by different factors beside the traits. In other words, every individual’s personality can be influenced and created by different factors which are human genetics, cultures, individual life experience, and cognitive processes. Therefore, those previous elements are important considerations that effectively account for personality differences among others.

Personality and culture are interactive influence. In fact, culture is an essential factor that may determine the specific personality of individuals. There are some cultures or social aspects that make individual differences in personality. For example, these elements such as family or parents, friends, politics, religion, ethnic identification, country or region, race, and education may influence one’s personality in the future (What is Personality?, n.d.). Therefore, these factors of cultural and social life, especially at the beginning of life, would have an effective impact on personality gradually either appropriate or inappropriate.

Personality traits are difficult to change. In other words, if individuals would like to change their personality, it may take a long time in order to change some personalities (Martin et al., 2012). Therefore, personality traits cannot easily be modified if they are negative or inappropriate in some situations.

Finally, based on those personality concepts and definitions, it is clear that leaders with specific appropriate personalities would determine whether or not they can lead subordinates and organizations in a perfect manner. Leaders may need some positive personality traits in order to be successful.
Leadership Personality Traits

There are many personality traits in leaders. Each study has shown a list of essential leaders' personality traits that are important to have during their leadership in organizations. However, there is no agreement about which personality traits are best for the leader to possess. Therefore, this section will determine and explore the most important traits that might affect leaders and followers in organizations.

One of the most important personality trait models for leaders is the big five model. This big five model of personality contains five traits that impact the work situations and the relationships with others. The leaders should have these five traits factors in order to effectively direct and support in leading their organization or groups of people. These five elements or aspects of personality are conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

For the conscientiousness factor, this dimension is very important in leaders' personality. Individuals would focus more on every signal detail during their work. Also, this element of personality means that they are hard-working, organized, controlled, trustworthy, and committed to following the procedures and rules (Northouse, 2013; Naydenova et al., 2012). Importantly, individuals having this construct mean that they work their best in order to achieve their organizational goals effectively and on time (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). Therefore, Johnson and Hill (2009) believe that this trait of personality is the most critical and effective trait in leaders. As a predictor, leaders with high conscientiousness would influence their performance to be more effective and
positive during their leading. Thus, conscientiousness is the most appropriate factor of achieving leadership success (Johnson & Hill, 2009).

Agreeableness is also an important construct of personality in leaders. According to Hurtz and Donovan (2000), individuals with this personality trait interact, react, care, cooperate, and behave with others, and they fit with groups of people when agreeing with them. People with high agreeableness would be friendly and likeable with others (Raymark et al., 1997). Leaders with a high level of agreeableness are very excited to get along and work with others. In other words, high agreeableness in leaders will help them to make effective leadership decisions, and it could be a factor to predicting the transformational leadership approach (Johnson & Hill, 2009). Therefore, agreeableness is important, especially in the transformational leaders because of the importance of interaction among others in organizations.

For the extraversion trait, individuals with this trait are socially active. They are competitive, lusty, outgoing, and very energetic in their lives (Northouse, 2013; Naydenova et al., 2012). In leadership aspect, among different studies, high extraversion in leaders also makes effective leaders. Different studies such as those by Judge and Colbert (2002), Taggar et al. (1999), and Perkins and Corr (2000) show that high extraversion is an important predictive for the effective leadership and leaders’ performance (Johnson & Hill, 2009). In addition, leaders being extrovert would be engaged in important behaviors. For example, they talk very much, control or monitor several meetings, and likely behave or manage in a positive social mode (Johnson & Hill, 2009).
Neuroticism is the trait that individuals express when they are not calm. They are very anxious, insecure, depressed and negative in general (Johnson & Hill, 2009). There are several studies showing that leaders with having this trait (i.e. depression, anxious, and insecurity) may not tend to be effective in their leadership (Johnson & Hill, 2009). Therefore, some theorists and experts recommend the trait of emotional stability into the big five model rather than neuroticism be followed that shows leaders to be effective but in emotional aspect. Hurtz and Donovan (2000), and Naydenova et al., (2012) confirm that emotional stability is important to have in order for individuals to be calm and relaxed, and they are able to adjust or control themselves in stressful situations and environments.

Finally, the last trait of personality model is openness to experience. Individuals with this trait tend to be curious to learn and know new ideas, flexible in thinking, insightful, and show more creativity and willingness to accept changes (Northouse, 2013; Naydenova et al., 2012). However, there are not enough studies confirming that there is a clear relationship between openness to experience and leadership (Johnson & Hill, 2009). In other words, even though this factor is important, especially it may relates to the intelligence construct, the correlation between intelligence and its role in the openness to experience is not determined by most theoretical studies provided (Johnson & Hill, 2009). Therefore, this factor might be helpful in order to be good leaders, but that does not mean they might not be good leaders if they do not possess this trait of personality.
In short, the big five model of personality show the most important traits that leaders must possess in order to be effective in their leadership. However, it is difficult for these five traits of personality to be met in one leader.

Because this model of personality has some degree or level differences in different traits among leaders, there should be a need that each personality trait must be in suitable level based on leaders’ work and situations. According to Howard, P and Howard, J (2001), there are different levels of all these five factors or traits of personality that generic leaders must have. Also, there is a difference between leaders and managers generally about the different levels of the big five personality traits in their work or based on their situations and characteristics.

In leaders, there should be high levels of extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. In contrast, leaders should have low levels of neuroticism and agreeableness. These different levels among the five traits of personality should be appropriate for most leaders in different organizations and environments (Howard, P & Howard, J, 2001). On the other hand, there is a little difference in managers’ five traits that they need during their work. Managers need high levels of extraversion and conscientiousness. In contrast, they should have low levels of neuroticism, openness to experience, and agreeableness (Howard, P & Howard, J, 2001).

In order to see which of these big five personality traits is the best predictor for the leadership effectiveness, and which is the weak predictor, Northouse (2013) emphasizes, based on Judge et al.’s studies, that factor of extraversion is the best predictor of effective leadership, and the weakest predictor of the big five personality is
agreeableness. However, Hurtz & Donovan (2000) argue that the best predictor or factor of the big five personality for generic individuals in organization and work performance is conscientiousness.

There is Carl Jung’s theory that individuals’ personalities would be evaluated based on the essential four elements of personality types. Each type of personality can benefit any individual who possesses this type (Furnham, 2005). According to Furnham (2005), the important four types of personality are (1) extraversion-introversion (EI), (2) sensing-intuiting (SI), (3) thinking-feeling (TF), and (4) and judgment-perception (JP).

Furnham (2005) describes that the first type indicates that extraversion is expressed in individuals whose mental process or information preferences are obtained and organized outside the world. In contrast, introversion refers to processing the information and other aspects internally.

The second type indicates that sensing means individuals get information from their senses, but intuiting refers to discovering other things or possibilities in clear methods that may be different than sensing data (Furnham, 2005).

Third, thinking and feeling are methods of evaluating the information and making judgments. Thinking means that individuals use logic and analyze ways to make decisions by using the method of cause and effect analysis. In contrast, feeling “involves identifying the emotional value that is attached to objects or events” (Furnham, 2005, p.3).

The last type is that perceiving is the way the individuals get information with no assessment method, but judging is the way individuals look at the information and other
things concerned in an organized way (Furnham, 2005). Northouse (2013) indicates that leaders with judging type are concerned with planning and structures before they act.

**Leadership Personality Effects**

The leaders’ personality absolutely has a strong influence on the organizations and employees. The effects of personality within leaders can be toward subordinates, followers, or teams’ relationships. In addition, these influences of leaders’ personality may affect the entire organization as well. Therefore, the effects of leaders’ personality may make changes within the organization or departments they lead.

Some personality traits within leaders affect the nature of the relationship toward their subordinates. According to Sears and Hackett (2011), agreeableness in leaders affects the interpersonal relationship with others. When leaders are highly agreeable with others, they are likely to change the followers’ behaviors by achieving subordinates’ emotional needs.

Also, Sears and Hackett’s studies (2011) confirm that there are other personality traits that may influence the followers’ behavior in a different way than the agreeableness trait. Leaders possessing conscientiousness influence subordinates’ behavior by initiating work structure or task behavior such as work performance and achievement, delegation, direction and task feedback. As a result, it can influence the followers or subordinates’ behavior of how to achieve the tasks requirements. In short, both personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness in leaders and followers will influence the Leader-Member Exchange approach (Sears & Hackett, 2011).
The leaders’ personality can also influence emotional intelligence. In other words, there is a relationship between the general personality and emotional intelligence of a person. Some big five model of personality traits such as emotional stability and agreeableness can influence the emotional intelligence within individuals. The more the personality traits increase (e.g. agreeableness, emotional stability), the more likely emotional intelligence will increase (van Zyl & de Bruin, 2012). Therefore, it is clear that having strong personality traits may affect the degree of emotional intelligence within leaders which is very important because emotional intelligence is one of the most essential elements that would increase the leadership effectiveness (van Zyl & de Bruin, 2012). Thus, some personality traits would determine the degree of emotional intelligence in leaders.

Finally, personality itself influences transformational and transactional leadership behaviors. Some personality traits affect or relate to some dimensions of transformational and transactional leaders. Therefore, leaders being transformational or transactional would be influenced by their personality traits they possess. Bono and Judge (2004) emphasize, based on their studies, that there is a relationship between personality and the transformational and transactional behaviors in leaders. By using the big five model of personality traits, Bono and Judge (2004) point out that personality traits influence some aspects of transformational leaders which are positive influence, encouragement, and individualism. Moreover, personality traits affect aspects of transactional leaders which are “management by exception-active and passive, and contingent reward” (Bono & Judge, 2004, p.1). In addition, the extraversion trait in
leaders would be the most effective influence that has a relationship with the transformational leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004).

**Leadership Personality Pros and Cons**

It is obvious that leadership personality traits or types have several good aspects that can support and increase the importance of leaders’ personalities. However, there would be some negative aspects that might result from this leadership personality. Therefore, leadership personality may contain some pros and cons.

For leadership personality’s benefits, Northouse (2013) provides several strengths about the trait theory, including personality aspect. Some of these benefits are very important which is personality traits can be used as a test or guidance in order to see who is a leader and who is not. In other words, because leaders should possess important traits in their personality, a list of desired traits that leaders must have can be used in order to increase their effectiveness. As well, this list of traits can be used by leaders in order to look at which personality traits are needed (Northouse, 2013).

Also, personality traits confirm that people express different ones. Consequently, the differences in individuals mean that leaders must possess some unique personality traits that would be distinctive from others because they would influence their leadership roles such as self-esteem and self-confidence, and these two traits would affect leaders more than anyone else (Tozer, 1997).

In short, leadership personality approach positives or benefits can be described as (1) looking to what traits are important for leaders to lead the organizations and (2) showing that leaders are different than others by having some essential traits.
In contrast, even though leadership personality has some strengths and benefits that support this concept, there are other aspects that may decrease the powerful points of leadership personality.

The most negative aspect of leadership personality is that there is no specific number of personality traits needed in leaders. According to Wiggins (1996) and Northouse (2013), there is no significant list of traits that all leaders must have in order to lead the organization. In addition, even though the big five personality model could be a comprehensive list of traits, there is no definitive consensus from the scientists to determine which exact personality traits leaders must have (Wiggins, 1996). Therefore, it is hard to choose which traits each leader must possess in their personality during their work in organizations. The nature or environment of one organization and its mission may need different traits than others.

Also, Northouse (2013) points out those traits in leaders might not be influenced by the situations within the organizations. In other words, some personality traits in leaders may be suitable in some situations. However, these traits might not be appropriate in other situations. As a result, some personality traits might not work with all situations. Also, it is very hard for leaders to be trained to change their personality based on specific situations that demand particular traits (Zaccaro, 2007; Northouse, 2013).

In summary, no consensus of traits list, traits do not depend on different situations, and the lack of training for particular traits in order to fit with the work demands are negative aspects that might decrease the quality of personality traits.
Challenges of Leadership Personality

There are several issues or challenges that can be considered in leaders’ personality traits and the personality traits theory in general. Therefore, Zaccaro (2007) points out various points and aspects that can be challenges in leadership personality traits and attributes.

The first challenge is that leadership needs a wide range of traits listed because most researches have provided a small number of personality traits in leaders. Therefore, because of the complexity in leaders’ behaviors that can be influenced by their traits, the leaders personality should contain different and essential traits that can affect these behaviors to be organized and realized (Zaccaro, 2007).

Another issue or challenge is that some situations demand some combination in leaders’ personality traits. In other words, it is obvious that leaders may possess some traits and not others based on some factors (Zaccaro, 2007). Therefore, there is a challenge of how leaders can have a joint combination or integration of traits in their personality in order to create a suitable behavior needed.

The most significant challenge that Zaccaro (2007) confirms is that leaders’ personality traits must deal with the situations in one way or another. Because one of the negative aspects of personality traits is that they do not pay attention to the situations in the organizations, it is important to find ways in which these personality traits can be influenced by situations because it is a reality that situations are important and affect leaders over time. In other words, it is important to make new studies of how the contingency theory affects the traits and attributes in leaders’ personality.
Moreover, the organizational culture and globalization may also affect or challenge the perspective of leadership personality, especially when there is a diverse group of people in work settings. “In a diverse workforce, people from different cultural or social groups must constantly interact with each other. In such settings, people’s own cultural identities and their assumptions about and perceptions of others from different social groups” (Ayman & Korabik, 2010, p.160). Therefore, this would create an issue with leaders’ personality (e.g. Agreeableness) that considers how to interact with people in different cultures.

**Leadership Personality and Ethics**

One of the most significant aspects regarding leadership personality is how it relates to the ethical dimension. There are some personality traits in leaders that might be related to the ethical aspect of those leaders. Therefore, because ethics is an important part in leadership, it should be noted how leaders’ personality traits influence their ethics.

Some researchers provide some information about personality traits in leaders affecting the ethical element. For example, some research emphasizes that neuroticism, one of the big five model of personality, has a negative relationship with the ethics or ethical leadership. On the other hand, some studies point out that the same element, neuroticism, has no relationship with ethical leaders (Xiaoyong et al., 2011).

There is an empirical study, conducted by Xiaoyong, Fen, and Jiannong (2011), from China that tries to see the relationship or connection between the “ethical leadership” or the ethics level in leaders and their personality traits dimensions. This
study used two scales: the ethical leadership scale and NEO big five factor model scale (Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness). The data was obtained from different employees and supervisors in different health care centers in China.

The Xiaoyong et al.’s results, based on regression analysis, show that neuroticism is really negative in relationship with ethical leadership. However, other leaders’ personality traits (Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness) are positively related to the ethics aspect in leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Personality</th>
<th>Scale Related to Ethical Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>(= -.29, p &lt; .05)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>(= .27, p &lt; .05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>(= .40, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>(= .40, p &lt; .01)</td>
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*Table: “Xiaoyong et al., 2011’s study”*

To make it clear, when leaders have a high level of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion, their ethical aspect is high. However, when their three previous traits are in low level, their ethical leadership is low. On the other hand, when a leader’s personality has a high level of neuroticism, their ethical leadership would be low. In contrast, a low level of neuroticism in leader’s personality would mean their ethical leadership tends to be high.
Empirical Study of Personality and Leadership Effectiveness

After showing the most important elements regarding leadership personality and its related contents, it is important to find the relationship between personality traits and leadership effectiveness. Therefore, there is a very good empirical study from Johnson and Hill (2009). This study aims to find out if there is a difference of personality characteristics between effective and ineffective leaders in the U.S. military field.

Johnson and Hill’s study hypotheses are (1) effective leaders would have a low level of neuroticism in contrast to ineffective leaders, (2) effective leaders would have a high level of conscientiousness in contrast to ineffective leaders, and (3) effective leaders would have a high degree in extroversion in contrast to ineffective leaders. Also, the other two factors (agreeableness and openness to experience) would be scored as well in order to see which is higher between effective and ineffective leaders. In short, each personality trait is considerably different among effective and ineffective leaders in the military field.

For participants, Johnson and Hill’s (2009) study obtained 57 different military officers in the Army National Guard as a sample in order to conduct this study. The mean age of these officers is 33.08. The participants were different regarding their ethnicity.

This study used The “NEO-PI-R” as a measurement for this empirical aspect containing 240 items in order to measure the big five factors of personality. This measure, the “NEO-PI-R”, has a very good validity and is appropriate in research for individual differences or big five factors of personality.
In order to have the results and compare the differences between effective and ineffective leaders regarding the big five factors of personality, this study used a t-test for the results and ratings.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Effective leader</strong></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>28.42</td>
<td>69.07</td>
<td>48.78</td>
<td>65.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>12.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ineffective leader</strong></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>66.43</td>
<td>40.17</td>
<td>37.91</td>
<td>29.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>10.81</td>
<td>11.79</td>
<td>12.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1:** "effective and ineffective leaders’ personality (Johnson & Hill, 2009)"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>(t (56) = -22.19, p &lt; .0001)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>(t (56) = 13.87, p &lt; .0001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>(t (56) = 4.90, p &lt; .0001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>(t (56) = 14.05, p &lt; .0001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>(t (56) = 15.44, p &lt; .0001)</td>
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**Table 2:** "Sample t-test for a difference in FFM for effective/ineffective leader (Johnson & Hill, 2009)"

The results from Johnson and Hill’s study (2009) show that, based on the t-test, there is a clear distinction between effective and ineffective leaders regarding all big five personality characteristics (i.e. extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience).

In neuroticism, the effective leader had a low level of this trait compared to ineffective leader in the military field. The effective leader had a high level of extraversion compared to the ineffective leader. Openness to experience is significantly higher in the effective leader than the ineffective leader. There is, as well, a high level of
agreeableness in the effective leader compared to the ineffective leader. Finally, for the conscientiousness, the effective leader is higher in this trait than the ineffective leader (Johnson & Hill, 2009).

Therefore, it is obvious that these results support the hypotheses above that effective leaders would have a low level of neuroticism (e.g. anxiety, depression) more often than ineffective leaders, effective leaders would have higher conscientiousness, and effective leaders have a higher level of extraversion compared to ineffective leaders. Because the study hypotheses did not point out which is higher between effective and ineffective leaders regarding openness to experience and agreeableness, the results showed that having higher levels on these two traits of personality mean being an effective leader.

**Discussion and Analysis**

Based on the literature review in this paper and the previous empirical study of personality and leadership effectiveness above, the big five factors of personality model should be possessed in leaders to different degrees based on their work structure or environment. In general, most the information from the literature review for this paper of leadership personality supports the results of the previous empirical study in the military field that leaders would be effective when they have high conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and extraversion while have low neuroticism. Also, the results support the literature review of this paper that leaders are different by having essential traits in different degrees. For example, those with characteristics in neuroticism (e.g. depressed, nervous) tend to not be effective leaders.
Conclusion

Personality is not a new term regarding leadership. When individuals want to lead others, having effective and strong personalities that differentiate among other individuals would increase or foster their leading. Also, people having particular personality traits would make other people choose which one is suitable to be a leader or lead them. In other words, personality plays a big step psychologically.

Leadership personality means that even though leaders and subordinates may share the same main characteristics and other values, leaders should have specific characteristics that feature the others being a leader. There is obviously no consensus regarding which leaders must have these needed traits in order to foster their leadership toward others and the entire organization. However, the big five factors of personality model can be the most essential and general leadership personality reference that support and increase their effectiveness.

Even though there are some negative thoughts about the personality traits in leaders, most studies confirm that personality and leadership could be part and parcel, especially in some situations where personality is important to taking a place in leadership. Having a good degree of some of personality traits, using them in a perfect manner, and influencing the work structure and individuals’ relationships would create good and positive consequences that not only improve the relationships of others, but also improve leaders themselves.
References:


Howard, P. J., & Howard, J. M. (2001). *The Owner’s Manual for Personality at work: how the big five personality traits affect performance, communication, teamwork, leadership, and sales*. Marietta, GA: CentACS.


