Leadership Traits



Trait Theory Approaches

- **"Great Man" Theories (early 1900s)**
  - Focused on identifying innate qualities and characteristics possessed by great social, political, & military leaders
- **"Personality Theories"** (1940's – present)
  - Sought to identify the characteristics of everyday leaders

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Major Leadership Traits

Traits to possess or cultivate if one seeks to be perceived by others as a leader:

- **Intelligence** – Verbal, perceptual, and reasoning capabilities. Ex. Steve Jobs
- **Self-Confidence** – Certainty about one's competencies and skills. Ex. Steve Jobs
- **Determination** – Desire to get the job done (i.e., initiative, persistence, drive). Ex. Lance Armstrong

Major Leadership Traits

Traits to possess or cultivate if one seeks to be perceived by others as a leader:

- **Integrity** – The quality of honesty and trustworthiness. Ex. Character Counts! program

- **Sociability** – Leader's inclination to seek out pleasant social relationships. Ex. Michael Hughes, university president

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5-Factor Personality Model & Leadership

Table 2.3 Big Five Personality Factors

Neuroticism	The tendency to be depressed, anxious, insecure, vulnerable, and hostile
Extraversion	The tendency to be sociable and assertive and to have positive energy
Openness	The tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious
Agreeableness	The tendency to be accepting, conforming, trusting, and nurturing
Conscientiousness	The tendency to be thorough, organized, controlled, dependable, and decisive

SOURCE: Goldberg, L. R. (1990). An alternative "description of personality": The big-five factor structure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *59*, 1216–1229.

5-Factor Personality Model & Leadership

Big Five & Leadership Study Using Meta-Analysis
(Judge et al, 2002)

Results – a strong relationship between personality traits and leadership

- ***Extraversion*** – factor most strongly associated with leadership
  - Most important trait of effective leaders
- ***Conscientiousness*** – 2nd most related factor
- ***Openness*** – next most related
- ***Low Neuroticism***
- ***Agreeableness*** – only weakly related to leadership

Emotional Intelligence & Leadership

Emotional Intelligence

Ability to perceive and:

- apply emotions to life's tasks
- reason/understand emotions
- express emotions
- use emotions to facilitate thinking
- manage emotions within oneself and relationships

EQ Leadership Traits

- **MSCEIT**: EQ as a set of mental abilities
  - to perceive, facilitate, understand, and manage emotion
- **Goleman** (1995, 1998): EQ as a set of personal and social competencies
  - self-awareness, confidence, self-regulation, conscientiousness, and motivation
- **Shankman & Allen** (2002): EQ as awareness of three aspects of leadership
  - context, self, and others

Focus of Trait Approach

Leader

- Focuses ***exclusively*** on leader
  - What traits leaders exhibit
  - Who has these traits

Personality Assessments

Organizations use personality assessments to find "right" people

- ***Assumption*** - will increase organizational effectiveness
- Specify characteristics/traits for specific positions
  - Personality assessment measures for "fit"
  - Instruments: LTQ, Myers Briggs

Strengths

- Intuitively ***appealing***
  - Perception that leaders are different in that they possess special traits
  - People "need" to view leaders as gifted
- ***Credibility*** due to a century of research support
- Highlights ***leadership component*** in the leadership process
  - Deeper level understanding of how leader/personality related to leadership process
- Provides ***benchmarks*** for what to look for in a leader

Criticisms

- Fails to ***delimit*** a definitive list of leadership traits
  - Endless lists have emerged
- Doesn't take into account ***situational effects***
  - Leaders in one situation may not be leaders in another situation
- List of most important leadership traits is ***highly subjective***
  - Much subjective experience & observations serve as basis for identified leadership traits
- Research fails to look at traits in relationship to leadership ***outcomes***
- Not useful for ***training & development***

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Application

- Provides direction as to which traits are good to have if one aspires to a leadership position
- Through various tests and questionnaires, individuals can determine whether they have the select leadership traits and can pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses
  - Can be used by managers to assess where they stand within their organization and what is needed to strengthen their position

Leadership Traits

- **Intelligence**
- **Self-Confidence**
- **Determination**
- **Integrity**
- **Sociability**