

# Trait theory of leadership



Before I briefly explain my topic it is necessarily to define the term " leadership". Many authors until now have defined or tried to define leadership, but the most common and useful definition is given by Gary Yukl (2010), who defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.

Theories of leadership are developed to enrich professional knowledge of the leadership phenomenon and enable future leaders to acquire skills and traits in order to succeed in a dynamic environment. Before World War II, leadership theories and researchers focused on identifying the personal traits of leaders that distinguish them from followers. A leadership trait can be defined as personal characteristic that enables and guarantees sustained leadership effectiveness across different situations, and such kind of trait distinguishes leader from followers.

For example, Steve Jobs, the chairman and CEO of Apple Inc. , was known for his charisma. He was able to passionately demonstrate his visions and made people want to follow his lead. Some other examples of traits that make an effective leader are intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, level of energy and activity, and task-relevant knowledge. This paper focuses on trait theory of leadership and tries to explain the most essential aspects of trait leadership theory. The trait approach to leadership is rightly considered as one of the oldest leadership theories created by humans.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, historian Thomas Carlyle said that the world's history was made by great men's biographies (Judge et al. , 2002). Human beliefs about leaders and leadership gave rise to the development of trait leadership theories (Judge et al. , 2002). The first trait theories were developed to explain the connection of personal traits to leaders' achievements. They were built on the assumption that leaders possessed physiological or inherited superior abilities that enabled them to manage and direct their followers.

According to Yukl (2010), the theory of trait leadership is developed from the earliest attempts to identify personality traits, physical characteristics, and even genetic factors of people claimed to be natural leaders. " The trait perspective suggests that certain individuals have special innate or inborn characteristics or qualities that make them leaders, and that it is these qualities that differentiate them from non-leaders" (Northouse, 2013). Many leadership professionals identified traits that make up a good leader by examining a great leaders through time. But are those traits enough to be effective and successful leaders?

The traits approach gives rise to questions: whether leaders are born or made; and whether leadership is an art or science? Many researches proved that it still requires the application of special skills and techniques. Over time, and influenced by other leadership theories, trait theory was almost discarded. Bass noted (as cited in Brown, 2008, p. 57) that " the pure trait theory lost favor with researchers as they realized that there were numerous other dynamics that contributed to leadership". However, professional

experts and researchers are still interested in personality traits and their relation to leadership effectiveness.

Below section is about others' statements regarding trait theory of leadership. Literature review Judge, Piccolo and Kosalka (2009) attempt to place the leader trait perspective in the context of supporting intellectual traditions, including evolutionary psychology and behavioral genetics. They examined both the positive and negative effects of specific “bright side” personality traits: the Big Five traits, core self-evaluations, intelligence, and charisma. On same way they considered the positive and negative effects of “dark side” leader traits: Narcissism, hubris, dominance, and Machiavellianism.

In so doing, they recognized the interplay of traits and context, describing both the positive and negative consequences of socially desirable (and undesirable) traits. They proposed a Leader Trait Emergence Effectiveness heuristic model integrating the genetic and evolutionary sources of trait development, as well as leadership motive and emergence processes in the associations between traits and both subjective and objective measures of leader effectiveness. Authors found that tests of the bright and dark sides of leader traits generally stand the promise of showing that the link between leader traits and leadership emergence and effectiveness is quite significant.

While initial empirical evidence stated that personality traits influence leader emergence and effectiveness, Colbert et al. (2012) believed that their research may underestimate the relationship between personality and leadership. They propose that personality assessed using both self and

observer ratings explains more variance in leadership than self ratings of personality alone. Colbert and his team conducted exploratory analysis using both self and observer ratings of personality of 155 participants in leaderless group discussions.

Results showed that the relationship between personality and leadership was mediated by contributions to group success. Exploratory analysis also showed that when personality was assessed by observer ratings alone, personality explained more variance in leadership than when personality was assessed using both self and observer ratings. Their findings suggest that using a multitrait- multimethod approach to assess personality increases the variance explained in leadership. Judge, Bono, Ilies and Gerhardt (2002) in their article provided a qualitative review of the trait perspective in leadership research, followed by a meta-analysis.

The authors used the five-factor model (Big Five traits) as an organizing framework and meta-analyzed 222 correlations from 73 samples. Overall, the correlations with leadership were Neuroticism: . 24, Extraversion: . 31, Openness to Experience: . 24, Agreeableness: . 08, and Conscientiousness: . 28. Results indicated that the relations of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness with leadership generalized in that more than 90% of the individual correlations were greater than 0.

Extraversion was the most consistent correlate of leadership across study settings and leadership criteria (leader emergence and leadership effectiveness). They found out that these Big five traits were positively related to leadership. Bai and Roberts (2011) tried to build up a

comprehensive framework for integrating existing leadership theories from the perspective of Taoism, the well-known oriental philosophy. Their paper argues that a Taoism-oriented model of leadership offers a complementary lens, through which leadership insights can be deepened, and may serve as an effective tool for adaptive leaders in a world.

They analysed the principles of Taoism, and the concepts of leadership studies in order to establish a Taoism-oriented model of leadership to integrate the current major schools of leadership studies. The authors found out that the model of traits of successful leaders based on Taoism has satisfactorily solved the conflicts between different perspectives of leadership studies and provided a dynamic framework to guide leaders to keep up with the organizational changes.

They concluded through a combination of Taoism and modern leadership theories, a brand-new leadership model or theory is likely to be developed to account for real organizational outcomes. Johnson, Vernon, Harris and Jang (2004) examined the extent to which factors of personality are predictive of leadership dimensions and the extent to which unique genetic contributions to the relationship between personality and leadership style may be identified. In their research an adult twin pairs (183 MZ and 64 same-sex DZ) completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Personality Research Form (PRF).

Univariate analyses indicated that both leadership factors (transformational and transactional leadership) and all five of the “ Big Five” factors (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, disagreeableness, and

neuroticism) were best fit by genetic models. These results underscore the importance of conscientiousness and extraversion in predicting leadership style. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) researched whether traits are essential for the successful leadership and tried to find out whether leaders are born or made or some combination of both.

By analyzing and summarizing the findings from a wide array of studies of other professional authors who dealt with trait leadership, they found out that there are certain core traits which significantly contribute to business leaders' success. According to them key leader traits include: drive (a broad term which includes achievement, motivation, ambition, energy, tenacity, and initiative): leadership motivation (the desire to lead but not to seek power as an end in itself): honesty and integrity: self-confidence (which is associated with emotional stability): cognitive ability: and knowledge of the business.

The researchers concluded that, regardless of whether leaders are born or made or some combination of both, it is unequivocally clear that leaders are not like other people because of possession of those certain traits. Arvey et al. , (2006) investigated the influence of genetic factor and personality on leadership role occupancy among a sample of male twins. Their method was comparison of identical twins (n = 238) who share 100% of their genetic background with fraternal twins (n = 188) who are expected to share only 50% of their genetic background.

Their research resulted that 30% of the variance in leadership role occupancy could be accounted for by genetic factor, while non-shared (or

non-common) environmental factor accounted for the remaining variance in leadership role occupancy. Findings clearly indicated that genetic factors influence the personality, cognitive, and leadership factors derived in this study and confirmed earlier research showing that personality and cognitive factors have strong genetic influences. According to this, they concluded that personality and cognitive factors can predicted leadership.

Joseph A. Schafer (2010) examined effective leaders and leadership in policing according to traits, assessment, development, and expansion. Schafer conducted a survey to over 1, 000 police supervisors. Respondents ranked the traits and habits of effective and ineffective leaders, methods to evaluate leadership efficacy, and barriers to expansion of more effective leaders and leadership. Ratings suggest respondents saw effective and ineffective leaders as expressing nearly opposite sets of traits and habits.

Efficacy was most strongly linked with integrity, work ethic, communication, and care for personnel; ineffective leaders were characterized as failing to express these traits. These findings suggest key policy implications for police organizations and the policing profession. In considering the results it might be concluded that developing more effective leaders could be achieved by working to convert the dominant elements such as poor ethics, poor communication, and lack of compassion for employees, from strengths into weaknesses.