

# Personality theories in successful leaders



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## **Abstract**

One question that all good employee thinks is what makes a good leader and how do I become one. It is important to understand what makes a leader and are there certain personality characteristics that make leaders successful.

Using the big five personality dimensions which are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience it will be explored what characteristic's fit with successful leaders today.

This study aims to quantify what of the big five personality dimensions are most present in successful and effective leaders today. It will take 4 teams from 100 organizations from fortune 500 companies to non-profit organization.

## **Hypothesis**

This study intends to demonstrate with evidence that effective leaders have similar personalities traits based on the big five personalities dimensions.

## **Leadership**

Was Steve Jobs a good leader or George Washington a good leader? What makes a good leader? Before that is answered, it must be understood what defines leadership and what qualifies as a good leader. Many scientific papers and books try to define leadership some define it as " leadership involves persuading other people to set aside for a period of time their individual concern and to pursue a common goal that is important for the responsibilities and welfare of a group (Hogan, G, & Hogan, 1994)" while others believe it stands it for "...inspiring followers to identify with a vision that reaches beyond immediate self-interest (Benoliel & Somech, 2014)."

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Between the two definitions it is clear a leader must inspire a group of people to go above and beyond and do what is beyond what they will want to do.

Not everyone can be a leader there are certain traits we expect out of them. In our everyday life we work for, learn from, and follow leaders. These leaders can be CEO's, managers, teachers, or even the President of the United States. They should be intelligent, likeable, have strong technical skills to relate to their roles. There are many people in the world with these traits but not every one of them makes a good leader. Based on these assumptions there must some additional traits that separate good leaders from average leaders. A leaders personality must have an effect on how the lead and inspire people to go above and beyond. Looking at a leader from the aspect of the big five personality dimensions might shed some light on what makes a strong leader.

### **Big Five Personality Dimensions**

For centuries people have classified personalities, even Aristotle have established several categories of classification. The current established theory has been created by Tupes and Christal (1961). This taxonomic structure has five personality dimensions which are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

The first factor of the personality dimensions is extraversion. Leaders who possesses high level of extraversion are described of " sociable, optimistic, expressive, active, and assertive (Benoliel & Somech, 2014)." Salespersons often are high-extraversion employees because they enjoy person

interaction and thrive in an environment that involves. These employees seek a positive environment to work in because it gives them a sense of security,

The second factor of the personality dimensions is agreeableness.

Agreeableness can be described as cooperative, trusting and flexible.

Employees with a high level of agreeableness tend to be successful in roles that work in groups and require joint efforts between teams. Project managers are a great example of a role someone with agreeableness might hold. Similar to extraversion, agreeableness enjoys the interactions between people but focuses more in the intimacy of relationships between people.

The third factor of the personality dimensions is conscientiousness. “ High-conscientiousness individuals tend to be responsible, dependable, hardworking, persistent, and achievement oriented; low-conscientiousness individuals tend to be irresponsible, undependable, and lacking self-discipline (Benoliel & Somech, 2014).” High- conscientiousness employees believe they are capable of doing the job and set high achieving goals for themselves. These will employees tent to dive in when the workload gets intensive and will work with others to relief the stress.

The fourth factor of the personality dimensions is neuroticism. Neuroticism is a personality dimensions that unlike the other having a high level of is not necessary a good thing. People who have a high level of neuroticism are often described as a worry-ward and insecure. Those with low levels are neuroticism are calm individuals who can handle high amounts of pressure. This is important in a high stakes environment some occupations where one

would expect to see people with low levels of neuroticism would be in the medical field such as doctors and nurses or traders on the New York Stock Exchanges floor.

The final factor of the personality dimensions is openness to experience. These individuals are creative and the out of the box thinkers. They adjust to change fairly easily and are willing to adjust their behaviors to meet the environment they are in.

## **Method**

This study aims analysis what big five personality dimensions are most common with effective leaders. An effective leader will add value to any organization and therefore it is important to understand what makes up an effective leader. Additionally it is vital to understand the employees think of this leader.

Why is it important to understand an effective leader from one that is not so effective? If we go back throughout history and look at the effect a good leader on the outcome of a situation there is plenty of evidence that shows an effective leader will have a positive impact. To give some examples the explosive growth Steve Jobs had on Apple to in 1997 or George Washington entering the revolutionary war and become the first President. These leaders took a situation that was losing situations and thorough their leadership turns the situation around and makes it extremely successful through hard work and dedication.

The first step of this study is to analysis what an effective leader is. To do this the study would work with 100 organizations from fortune 500

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companies to non-profit organizations such as universities, charities, and military. From each of the organizations select they study will review 4 teams, within these teams there will be effective leaders and teams and those who are not as effective. By understanding those who have successful leadership compared to those who are not the goal would be see what personality dimensions are prominent. To do these the leaders will take a big five personality test that will quantify how their personality matrix is built. In addition the employees of those leaders will take the test for their leader. This will aim to quantify what dimension of the big five personalities to followers look to the most. This will also help give an unbiased look because leaders might try to skew the results.

Once the tests have been completed the study will focus on the effectiveness of those leaders. The study will analysis each team within their organizations to understand their effectiveness. The effectiveness of the team will look at the team's productivity. The more productive the team the expectation would be the more the effective the leader. Besides the level of productivity the study will also look at the morale of the team.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Once the data has been collected the results will be analysis to see if there is any positive or negative correlation between the big five personalities dimensions. Among these correlations it would be expect to see that effective leaders will have specific traits in their personalities that make them effective leaders. In the contrary the study will also show the dimensions are negatively affect leadership. Based on expectations I would

expect to see the big five dimensions show up in leadership in the following ways.

The first personality to analysis would be the extraversion. It would be expected that a leader should have a medium to high level of extraversion. Extraversion involves the socialness of the individual. A leader should be social with the team and keep the optimistic view that will drive the team going forward.

The next attribute that is vital to a leader is agreeableness. The expected outcome would be all leaders would have a high level of agreeableness. They will work well with the team and keep everyone on track. There will also make the teams function more effective because leaders do not always have the correct answers and a good interaction between leader and the employees can create a good dialogue that will lead to the best solution.

Conscientiousness is one trait that all company want out of their employees have and therefore would be a high expectation of any effective leader. Employee with high levels of conscientiousness are often described as dependable and organized. " Individuals who are conscientious also tend to preserve, work hard, and enjoy achieving and accomplishing things (BOOK)." Since all conscientious enjoy achieving their goals it is important that leads hold these values. Additionally all leaders should be able to keep their followers organized and focused on the goals ahead. Since cons

Neuroticism is the one trait that would be advantageous to have in the lower spectrum. People in the high spectrum are often emotionally unstable. Leaders need to have their emotions in check all the times.

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The final personality dimension is openness to experiences which like most of the other dimensions the expectation would be a leader would be on the higher side. Leaders should be open to change and also be a leader of change within an organization. A leader who cannot handle moving parts of everyday business will not be effective.

### **Benefits of research**

There will be a lot of benefits from the research into what makes an effective leader. If an employee was interesting into taking a leadership role they can take a personality test and see if what areas they are strong in and where they are weak. This can then help them work on improving their skills. For example say an employee is lacking in extraversion assuming it is a primary measure of leadership skills. The employee can be put into situation to help then become more expressive or go to particular training classes to make then more expressive. This will help the organization put in leaders that will lead to change making the teams and organization more effective.

Understanding the traits of an effective leader will help human resources as well. Understanding the personalities of employees coming in will help them understand the person potential. Another example is there is an opening for a senior vice president of operation. This department has been suffering for years under the lack of leadership. It will be helpful to know what traits to look for in the new leader.

### **Supporting References**

The following studies have support this hypothesis and will help provide guidance.

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## **Study 1 –Five-Factor mode of personality and transformational leader**

In this study the authors explore the personality factors of transformational leaders.

### **References**

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