

## Effect of Personality Traits and Emotional Intelligence on Leadership Effectiveness

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### Abstract

Present study reports the impact of personality traits and emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness. The study was conducted on 140 IT professionals working in firms located in northern India. It was hypothesized that neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality traits and emotional intelligence would significantly predict leadership effectiveness among IT professionals. NEO Five Factor Inventory, Schutte's emotional Intelligence scale and GE Leadership Effectiveness Survey were used to assess personality traits and leadership effectiveness among IT professionals. The findings revealed that openness to experience emerged as best predictor of leadership effectiveness followed by conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, agreeableness, and extraversion. The findings suggest that personality traits and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of leadership effectiveness. However, different traits play differential role in predicting the leadership effectiveness.

**Keywords** Personality traits, Emotional intelligence, Leadership effectiveness

### Introduction

There are certain basic qualities or characteristics that most people associate with leadership. Some of these include self-reliant, independent, assertive, risk taker, dominant, ambitious, and self-sufficient. Most people would agree that people who possess these attributes are often labeled as "leaders". Effective leadership can be categorized in the following way. An effective leader is someone who motivates a person or a group to accomplish more than they would have otherwise accomplished without that leader's involvement. We can liken this to the sporting arena where a team is comprised of individual players; each with certain skills, but the team is honed into a finely tuned instrument by virtue of the coach orchestrating them into a cohesive unit. In this manner, and only with the proper motivation and care, will this group of individuals get into a team and accomplish more together than they ever could on their own merits.

The great Victorian era historian Thomas Carlyle commented that "the history of the world was the biography of great men" (Carlyle, 1907, p. 18). This "great man" hypothesis—that history is shaped by the forces of extraordinary leadership—gave rise to the trait theory of leadership. Like the great man theory, trait theory assumed that leadership depended on the personal qualities of the leader, but unlike the great man theory, it did not necessarily assume that leadership resided solely within the grasp of a few heroic men. Terman's (1904) study is perhaps the earliest on trait theory in applied psychology; other discussions of the trait approach appeared in applied psychology in the 1920s (e.g., Bowden, 1926; Kohs & Irlle, 1920). Cowley (1931) summarized well the view of trait theorists in commenting that "the approach to the study of leadership has usually been and perhaps must always be through the study of traits" (p. 144).

### Five-Factor model of personality

Consensus is emerging that a five-factor model of personality (often termed the Big Five) can be used to describe the most salient aspects of personality (Goldberg, 1990). The first researchers to

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replicate the five-factor structure were Norman (1963), Tupes & Christal (1961), who are generally credited with founding the five-factor model. The five-factor structure has been recaptured through analyses of trait adjectives in various languages, factor analytic studies of existing personality inventories, and decisions regarding the dimensionality of existing measures made by expert judges (McCrae & John, 1992). The cross-cultural generalizability of the five-factor structure has been established through research in many countries (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Evidence indicates that the Big Five are heritable and stable over time (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Digman, 1989).

The dimensions comprising the five-factor model are Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Neuroticism represents the tendency to exhibit poor emotional adjustment and experience negative affects, such as anxiety, insecurity, and hostility. Extraversion represents the tendency to be sociable, assertive, active, and to experience positive affects, such as energy and zeal. Openness to Experience is the disposition to be imaginative, nonconforming, unconventional, and autonomous. Agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring, and gentle. Conscientiousness is comprised of two related facets: achievement and dependability.

The Big Five traits have been found to be relevant to many aspects of life, such as subjective well-being (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) and even longevity (Friedman et al., 1995). One of the most popular applications of the five-factor model has been to the area of job performance, in which eight meta-analyses have been conducted. The overall conclusion from these studies is that the validity of personality as a predictor of job performance is quite low. However, at the time these studies were conducted, no well-accepted taxonomy existed for classifying personality traits. Consequently, it was not possible to determine whether there were consistent, meaningful relationships between particular personality constructs and performance criteria in different occupations. One could easily substitute “leadership” for “job performance” in the above quotation. Thus, just as the five-factor model has provided a valuable taxonomy for the study of job performance, so it might for the study of leadership.

### **Relationship of big five traits to leadership**

Below, we consider possible linkages between personality and leadership. We organize this discussion according to each of the Big Five traits. We then consider overall relationships between the Big Five traits and leadership, the issue of relationship with lower order personality constructs to leadership.

#### **Neuroticism**

Lord et al.’s (1986) meta-analysis revealed a corrected correlation of .24 between measures of adjustment and leadership perceptions on the basis of a relatively small number of studies cumulated in their analysis. This estimate, however, could not be distinguished from zero. Bass (1990), in his review, indicated that almost all studies on the relationship of self-confidence—indicating low Neuroticism—to leadership “were uniform in the positive direction of their findings” (p. 69). Hill and Ritchie (1977) suggested that self-esteem—another indicator of low Neuroticism (Eysenck, 1990)—is predictive of leadership: “It appears that there is convincing evidence for the inclusion of self-esteem as an important trait of both superior and subordinate in analyzing leadership effectiveness” (Hill & Ritchie, 1977, p. 499). Evidence also indicates that neurotic individuals are less likely to be perceived as leaders (R. Hogan et al., 1994). In light of this evidence and these arguments, we would expect that Neuroticism is negatively related to leader emergence and leadership effectiveness.

### **Extraversion**

In Bass's (1990) review, results linking Extraversion to leadership were inconsistent. In early studies (those completed between 1904 and 1947), Extraversion was positively related to leadership in five studies and negatively related in three, and there was no relation in four. Other reviews, however, suggest that extraverts should be more likely to emerge as leaders in groups. Extraversion is strongly related to social leadership (Costa & McCrae, 1988) and, according to Watson and Clark (1997), to leader emergence in groups. R. Hogan et al. (1994) noted that Extraversion is related to being perceived as leader like. Extraverts tend to be energetic, lively people. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) commented, "Leaders are more likely than non leaders to have a high level of energy and stamina and to be generally active, lively, and often restless" (p. 50). Adjectives used to describe individuals who emerged as leaders in leaderless group discussions included active, assertive, energetic, and not silent or withdrawn (Gough, 1988). These are the characteristics of extraverts. Indeed, Gough (1990) found that both of the major facets of Extraversion—dominance and sociability—were related to self and peer ratings of leadership. Considering this evidence, Extraversion should be positively related to both leader emergence and leadership effectiveness, although somewhat more strongly to leader emergence.

### **Openness**

Bass (1990) listed the traits that were the best correlates of leadership, originality—a clear hallmark of Openness—topped the list. Openness correlates with divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987) and is strongly related to both personality-based and behavioral measures of creativity (Feist, 1998; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Creativity appears to be an important skill of effective leaders. Creativity was one of the skills contained in Yukl's (1998) summary of the skills of leaders, which was based on Stogdill's (1974) earlier review. Research indicates that creativity is linked to effective leadership (Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1998), suggesting that open individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders and be effective leaders.

### **Agreeableness**

Conceptually, the link between Agreeableness and leadership is ambiguous. On the one hand, cooperativeness tends to be related to leadership (Bass, 1990), and Zaccaro et al. (1991) found that interpersonal sensitivity was related to leadership. That altruism, tact, and sensitivity are hallmarks of an agreeable personality would suggest that leaders should be more agreeable. On the other hand, agreeable individuals are likely to be modest (Goldberg, 1990), and leaders tend not to be excessively modest (Bass, 1990, p. 70). Furthermore, although it often is considered to be part of Extraversion (Watson & Clark, 1997), many scholars consider affiliation to be an indicator of Agreeableness (Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1991). Need for affiliation appears to be negatively related to leadership (Yukl, 1998). These factors suggest that Agreeableness would be negatively related to leadership. In light of these conflicting justifications, the possible relationship between Agreeableness and leadership is ambiguous.

### **Conscientiousness**

Bass (1990) commented, "Task competence results in attempts to lead that are more likely to result in success for the leader, effectiveness for the group, and reinforcement of the tendencies" (p. 109). We know that Conscientiousness is related to overall job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and this suggests that Conscientiousness will be related to leader effectiveness. Furthermore, initiative and persistence are related to leadership. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) noted, "Leaders must be tirelessly persistent in their activities and follow through with their programs" (p. 51). Because conscientious individuals have more tenacity and persistence (Goldberg, 1990), it is expected that conscientious individuals will be more effective leaders.

### **Linking emotional intelligence to leadership effectiveness**

Prior research has explored the concept of emotional intelligence, which is the ability both to know one's own emotions and to read others' emotions as well (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Zadel, 2008). Work by Goleman (1995; 1998) has assessed the link between emotional intelligence and leadership ability. Goleman researched and analyzed 188 companies (primarily large and global organizations), to determine the personal capabilities among leaders which appeared to drive outstanding performance within these organizations, and to what degree they did so. Personal capabilities were clustered in three categories: technical skills, such as accounting and engineering; cognitive skills like analytical reasoning; and competencies demonstrating emotional intelligence (EI), such as the ability to work with others and effectiveness in leading change

According to Goleman's research, emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as technical skills and cognitive abilities for leadership jobs at all levels of an organization. Intellect remained a driver of outstanding performance, and cognitive skills such as big picture thinking and long-term vision were also important, but mainly as "threshold capabilities": entry level requirements for executive positions. Goleman (1998) listed five components of emotional intelligence that an effective leader exhibits: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives, as well as their effect on others. Characteristics of a self-aware individual include self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-depreciating sense of humor. Self-regulation is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and the propensity to suspend judgment--to think before acting. Characteristics include trustworthiness, integrity, and comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change. Motivation, the third component, is defined as a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status, with a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Characteristics of a motivated emotionally intelligent leader are strong desire to achieve, optimism--even in the face of failure--and organizational commitment. Empathy, the fourth component, is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, with skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions. Characteristics include service to clients and customers, cross-cultural sensitivity, and expertise in building and retaining talent. Social skill, the final component of EI, is proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, with an ability to find common ground and build rapport. Characteristics include effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading teams.

Research on emotions in the workplace suggests that emotions may drive many productivity gains, innovations, and accomplishments of individuals, teams and organisations (Cooper, 1997). Individuals with high Emotional Intelligence are said to be more effective at leading and managing others and fostering positive attitudes amongst employees. Furthermore, individuals high on EI are also said to be good organisational citizens and better overall performers (Sosik and Megerian, 1999; George, 2000; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001). Recent Emotional Intelligence research (see Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2002; Sosik & Megerian, 1999) suggests that Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in leadership effectiveness. George (2000), states that EI enhances a leader's ability to recognise and solve issues facing them and their organisation. Specifically, he proposes that leaders high on Emotional Intelligence are able to accurately recognize emotions and are more able to determine whether emotions are linked to work opportunities or obstacles. Therefore, they can effectively utilize their emotions in their decision-making process (George, 2000). Furthermore, Caruso et al. (2002) argue that leaders who are able to use emotions to guide decision-making are able to motivate their employees, and encourage open-minded idea generation, decision-making and planning, because they can consider multiple points

of view. Additionally, a leader high in Emotional Intelligence, who is able to accurately appraise how their employees feel, can use this information to influence their employees' emotions to ensure that they are receptive and supportive of the organisation's goals (Caruso et al., 2002; George, 2000).

In Bradford's analysis (1984) successful leaders not only has ability to motivate, control, and coordinate subordinates but also brings them into the decision process. The leader's effectiveness is associated with drive, motivation, honesty/integrity, self confidence, intelligence, and emotional intelligence, all of which can be developed through experience, training, and analysis. Such training helps managers understand themselves and others, understand the emotional traits of others and the implication of these traits for work performance, build EQ in themselves and others, and effectively relate to a wide variety of people. In "Executive EQ," Cooper and Sawaf (1997) also demonstrate the difference emotional intelligence can make in the success of a career or organization. A primary source of motivation, information, feedback, personal power, innovation, and influence, EI helps in decision making, strategic and technical breakthroughs, open honest communication, trusting relationships and teamwork, customer loyalty, and creativity and innovation. By helping the manager to acknowledge and understand the feelings of themselves and others, to appropriately respond to the emotions, and to effectively apply them, EI contributes greatly to success in work and everyday life. The high level of self-awareness associated with EQ enables leaders to display self-confidence and earn respect and trust from followers. Through self regulation they can objectively consider the needs of others despite their own immediate feelings. Leaders, who are able to maintain balance, keep themselves motivated, optimistic, and hopeful are positive role-models to help motivate and inspire others. The ability to empathize with others and to manage interpersonal relationships also contributes to motivate and inspire their subordinates. EQ enables leaders to recognize and respect followers with feelings, opinions, and ideas, to treat them as persons with unique needs, and abilities. Empathic leaders use their social skills to help followers to grow and develop, to enhance their self images and senses of self-worth, and help their followers to meet their needs and achieve their goals.

Exactly how, and to what extent personality traits and EI accounts for effective leadership is currently unknown. Despite much interest in relating personality traits and EI to leadership effectiveness there is little research published that has explicitly examined the relationship. Knowledge regarding exactly how personality traits and EI relates to leadership may lead to significant advances in leadership training and development programs, and the ability to select potentially effective leaders. The aim of the present study was to explicitly examine the relationship between personality traits, EI and leadership effectiveness.

### **Objective**

To determine the best predictors of leadership effectiveness from different personality traits and emotional intelligence.

### **Hypothesis**

Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and emotional intelligence will be predictors of leadership effectiveness.

### **Instruments**

- NEO five factor inventory (Costa and (McCrae 1992), a 60 item version of the NEO PI-R was used in the present study. It is scored for five dimensions (Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness).

- Schutte's Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT, 1998), a 33 item self-report measure of emotional intelligence was used in the present study.
- GE Leadership Effectiveness Survey Tool, a 30 item scale for measuring leadership effectiveness was used in the present study

### Sample

The total sample of the study included 140 professionals from IT firms of northern India. The sample was selected on the basis of purposive sampling technique.

### Result and Discussion

**Table 1: Summary of regression analysis between personality traits, emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness**

Model	R	R Square	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Openness	0.463	0.214	0.926	0.392	5.965	0.000
Conscientiousness	0.612	0.374	0.637	0.286	4.002	0.000
Emotional Intelligence	0.642	0.413	0.433	0.193	2.666	0.009
Agreeableness	0.666	0.444	0.429	0.158	2.463	0.015
Extraversion	0.680	0.463	0.394	0.149	2.181	0.031

Dependent variable: Leadership effectiveness

Table 1 depicts that when independent variables entered in the regression model with leadership effectiveness as a criterion, openness itself contributed 21.4% of the variance. A significant increase of 16.00% was obtained in R square when it was entered along with conscientiousness in the regression model accounting for 37.40% of the variance. A significant increase of 3.9 % was found in the R square when these variables were entered along with emotional intelligence in regression model accounting for 41.30% of the variance. A significant increase of 3.1 % was found in the R square when these variables were entered along with agreeableness in regression model accounting for 44.4 % of the variance. A significant increase of 1.9 % was found in the R square when these variables were entered along with extraversion in regression model accounting for 46.3 % of the variance.

These results suggest that Extraversion is the most important trait of leaders and effective leadership. Of the Big Five traits, Openness to Experience is the most controversial and least understood. One of the problems is that, with a few exceptions, such as creativity and sociopolitical attitudes (cf. McCrae, 1996), Openness has not been related to many applied criteria. Openness to Experience does appear to be related to leadership: In business settings, it—along with Extraversion—was the strongest dispositional correlate of leadership. When Bass (1990), listed the traits that were the best correlates of leadership, originality—a clear hallmark of Openness—topped the list. Research indicates that creativity is linked to effective leadership (Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1998), suggesting that open individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders and be effective leaders. Nature of job in IT industries requires originality, creativity, imagination and insightfulness. People with these characteristics are more likely to be effective leader.

Result suggests that Conscientiousness is a strong predictor of leadership effectiveness. We know that Conscientiousness is related to overall job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and this suggests that Conscientiousness will be related to leader effectiveness. Furthermore, initiative and persistence are related to leadership. As Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) noted, "leaders must be tirelessly persistent in their activities and follow through with their programs". IT sector employee's Competent, organized and achievement striving attitude contributes for effective leadership.

By helping the manager to acknowledge and understand the feelings of themselves and others, to appropriately respond to the emotions, and to effectively apply them, EI contributes greatly to success in work and everyday life. The high level of self-awareness associated with EQ enables leaders to display self-confidence and earn respect and trust from followers. Through self regulation they can objectively consider the needs of others despite their own immediate feelings. Leaders, who are able to maintain balance, keep themselves motivated, optimistic, and hopeful are positive role-models to help motivate and inspire others. The ability to empathize with others and to manage interpersonal relationships also contributes to motivate and inspire their subordinates. EQ enables leaders to recognize and respect followers with feelings, opinions, and ideas, to treat them as persons with unique needs, and abilities. Empathic leaders use their social skills to help followers to grow and develop, to enhance their self images and senses of self-worth, and help their followers to meet their needs and achieve their goals. Conceptually, the link between Agreeableness and leadership is ambiguous. On the one hand, cooperativeness tends to be related to leadership (Bass, 1990), and Zaccaro et al. (1991) found that interpersonal sensitivity was related to leadership. That altruism, tact, and sensitivity are hallmarks of an agreeable personality would suggest that leaders should be more agreeable. On the other hand, agreeable individuals are likely to be modest (Goldberg, 1990), and leaders tend not to be excessively modest (Bass, 1990, p. 70). Agreeableness may be weakly correlated with leadership because it is both a hindrance (agreeable individuals tend to be passive and compliant) and a help (agreeable individuals are likeable and empathetic) to leaders.

These results suggest that Extraversion is an important trait of leaders and effective leadership. As expected, results also confirmed that Extraversion was more strongly related leader effectiveness. In past studies Extraversion was strongly related to social leadership (Costa & McCrae, 1988) and, according to Watson and Clark (1997), to leader emergence in groups. R. Hogan et al. (1994) noted that Extraversion is related to being perceived as leader like. Extraverts tend to be energetic, lively people. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) commented, "Leaders are more likely than non leaders to have a high level of energy and stamina and to be generally active, lively, and often restless" (p. 50). Adjectives used to describe individuals who emerged as leaders in leaderless group discussions included active, assertive, energetic, and not silent or withdrawn (Gough, 1988).

## Conclusion

The results of this study show that, overall, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, agreeableness, Openness and emotional intelligence are useful in relation to leadership. The findings revealed that openness to experience emerged as best predictor of leadership effectiveness followed by conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, agreeableness, and extraversion. Overall, the findings suggest that personality traits and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of leadership effectiveness. The findings of the current study provide preliminary evidence for the relationship between personality traits, EI and leadership effectiveness. Understanding precisely how personality traits and EI relates to leadership effectiveness may have several implications for human resources practitioners and leadership

search firms, particularly in the area of selection and leadership development. Specifically, aspects of personality and EI identified as underlying attributes of effective leaders may provide additional selection criteria for identifying potentially effective leaders. Collectively, the results provide support for the relevance of the five-factor model and emotional intelligence in leadership research. Neuroticism has failed to predict leadership effectiveness in this study.

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