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Personal Correlates of Leadership and Implications for HRM Practice

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to identify personal correlates of leadership. Leadership is operationally defined using nine indicators: vision, motivation, innovativeness, drive for leadership, effective communication, teamwork, authority, positive mental attitude and respect for others. Personality traits are identified using the NEO PI R test, as a measure of the five major domains: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. A positive correlation between leadership and emotional stability has been identified. This finding may have implications for the process of selection of leaders in different fields, as well as in the process of educating leaders according to their specific profiles.

Key words: leadership, personality, emotional stability, selection, education.

Introduction

“The study of leader traits has a long and controversial history. While research shows that the possession of certain traits alone does not guarantee leadership success, there is evidence that effective leaders are different from other people in certain key respects. There is less clear evidence for traits such as charisma, creativity and flexibility... The key leader traits help the leader acquire necessary skills: formulate an organizational vision and an effective plan for pursuing it, and take the necessary steps to implement the vision in reality” (Kirckpatrick, Locke, 1991, p. 48).

In this study, leadership has been approached from the personality point of view, with the aim of identifying underlying domains. This premise has justification in HRM practice, when there is a need for the selection of a person with specific characteristics, who is able to fit into a particular working environment or team. The implication of this approach leads us to another presumption: that

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there is a set of personality traits that differentiate successful leaders from unsuccessful ones. Although there were studies that stated that personality traits were not significant as a predictor of successful leadership (Stogdill, 1948), that thesis was later rejected because of the endless number of personal characteristics used as predictors.

Furthermore, later studies and meta-analyses (Lord, De Vader & Alliger, 1986) pointed out the following characteristics of leadership: intelligence, dominance, aggressiveness and determination.

Particularly, significant correlations between personality traits and leadership have been identified using the NEO PI R test (Tett et al., 1991). Further studies have confirmed a correlation between leadership and consciousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

One of the main conclusions is that personality traits are an important predictor of leadership, but this relationship depends on other factors such as the type of organization in which leadership is practiced (Tett, 1991).

“The study of leadership and personality is not only a search for understanding the thoughts and actions of leaders, but also a search for how to improve the performance and motivation of both individuals and groups. It is generally well accepted that leadership is a complex experience whereby both the person and the situations influence actions” (O’Neil, 2007, p. 1).

Methodological framework

Hypothesis

One general hypothesis has been defined (H1), and divided into 5 specific hypotheses. (H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d and H1e).

H1: There is positive correlation between leadership and personality traits, or domains, as identified in similar studies in this field and explained in more detailed in specific hypotheses (Barrick & Mount, 1991, Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991),

H1a: There is negative correlation between leadership and neuroticism (Barrick & Mount, 1991),

H1b: There is positive correlation between leadership and extraversion (Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991),

H1c: There is positive correlation between leadership and openness to experience (Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991),

H1d: There is positive correlation between leadership and agreeableness (Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991),

H1v: There is positive correlation between leadership and conscientiousness (Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991),

Additionally, the second hypothesis has been defined according to the first one – H2: the same trend of correlations would be present in both subsamples – of men and of women.

Instruments

A comprehensive analysis of various definitions of leadership has been conducted (Bass, 1990), which provided us with the material to identify a more complex definition of leadership based on different studies. Leadership is operationally defined by following nine indicators (Marićević, 2014):

1. Vision is the most distinctive characteristic, which differentiates leaders from managers (Kotter, 1990a). Vision is based on actual facts, as well as on intuition, hope and fear. The leader as initiator develops organizational vision together with other members of the team, making it a common effort, which leads to strong organizational commitment, although the leader can create vision by his own effort.
2. Motivating people to carry out any task is a precondition for the realization of an organizational vision. The leader and team members have a contract, which relates to rewards and sanctions in the event of success or failure. Leaders motivate people by using vision, commitment, persistence and patience. In the event of a loss of motivation, dissatisfaction, unproductivity and failure will follow. Additionally, leaders are more capable of self-motivation than other people. Finally, leaders try to motivate employees with rewards rather than sanctions (Kotter, 1996).
3. Innovation and creativity are characteristics of leadership (Burns, 2003) representing the introduction of new approaches in the way the organization functions and the way that tasks are accomplished. Innovation means the use of new approaches to work, improvement of working processes, creative decision-making processes and the involvement of new technologies (Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella, 2009).
4. Ambition for leadership (Frigon & Jackson, 1996) is a necessary characteristic. A self-confident, communicative, hard-working and honest

- person perceived to be a good leader would remain mere hidden potential if they had no real ambition to take a leadership position.
5. Good communication is one of the key factors of leaders' success or failure (Rice, 1991). Effective leaders are differentiated from ineffective ones purely in the way they communicate (Klauss & Bass, 1982). Leaders have to be good communicators in order to present vision and tasks in an understandable way to team members.
 6. Authority is a delegated right and a responsibility that the leader receives from the team members (Marićević, 2001; Bojanović, 2004). The group has delegated responsibility to the leader as the best choice for accomplishing the common vision.
 7. Positive mental attitude is the ability to focus on positive aspects of leadership and vision accomplishment (Ricketts & Ricketts, 2011). This is an additional tool for motivating people.
 8. The good leader inclines toward teamwork because it is the only way to accomplish the common vision. The leader's main task is to manage the team and facilitate group processes (Robbins, 1997). The leader collects information from outside, sharing it with team members, manages resources, clarifies team roles, defines problems and directs the team towards problem-solving. (Blake & Mouton, 1964).
 9. Leaders understand the needs of others and have respect for others at all times, especially in situations when tough decisions have to be made (Bass, 1990), regarding the future of the organization, discipline, task assignment, promotion, sanctions or additional training and education.

A leadership 60-items questionnaire was created according to the nine indicators of vision, motivation, innovativeness, ambition for leadership, effective communication, teamwork, authority, positive mental attitude and respect for others (Marićević, 2014). A reliability analysis subsequently showed that the final 51-items questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.907395, with an average item inter-correlation of 0.171293 (Marićević, 2014). This 51-item questionnaire was used in further explorations.

As regards personality traits, these were assessed using the NEO PI R questionnaire, which defines five major domains (Džamonja Ignjatović & Đurić Jočić, 2004):

- (1) Neuroticism is a domain which differentiates emotional stability and adaptation from emotional instability. It represents a tendency to experience negative effects such as sorrow, fear, anger, anxiety and guilt.

It represents general vulnerability and detracts from adaptability. People with high scores in this domain have a tendency to react irrationally, have weak impulse control and are less capable of coping with stress. On the other hand, emotionally stable people are calm with strong coping mechanisms in stressful situations.

- (2) Extraversion is a reflection of interpersonal relations that includes the need for social stimulation and a capacity for joy. This domain differentiates socially active persons (talkative, unrestrained, active, cheerful, optimistic and full of energy) from socially reserved, cautious and introverted persons.
- (3) Openness to experience is defined as the proactive search for new experiences and tolerance to uncertainty. This domain differentiates curious, creative, prone to aesthetics and art and untraditional persons from conventional, unaesthetic persons. Open people are open-minded and willing to experiment and adopt new ideas and unconventional values. On the other side there are conventional and conservative persons.
- (4) Agreeableness is a dimension of interpersonal relations. It includes trust, altruism compassion and responsibility, against cynicism, selfishness, egocentrism, doubt and competitiveness.
- (5) Conscientiousness represents the ability to self-control in terms of the aspiration to reach goals and respect for ethical principles. Conscientious people have strong will-power, they are goal-oriented, scrupulous and punctual. People with a low score on this domain are hedonistic and in principle flexible but not amoral.

NEO PI R as a tool was selected as a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the personality traits of leaders as it has shown promising results. (Dipboye, Smith & Howell, 1997).

The sample

The sample consisted of 186 leaders, mainly from public utility companies (151 subjects – 81.2%) and a few privately-owned companies (35 subjects – 18.8%) from 35 cities and municipalities in Serbia (Serbia Post – Public Enterprise, Elektro distribucija Beograd – Public Utility Company, East Electro – Public Enterprise, Energogas – Public Enterprise, Exim Bank, Galenika – Pharmaceuticals, GSP Beograd – Public Transportation, Vodovod – Beograd – Public Utility

Enterprise, HIP Petrohemija, Iritel2, Logistic, Mobtel, Logistic Cargo, Serbian Chamber of Commerce, US Steel, Coca Cola and Downtown Coffees and Restaurants. The following 5 tables specify the sample characteristics:

Table 1: Gender

	f	%	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Male	104	55.9	55.9
Female	82	44.1	100.0
TOTAL	186	100.0	

Table 2: Education

	f	%	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
High school	11	5.9	5.9
Two-year post-secondary school qualifications	29	15.6	21.5
BA	140	75.3	96.8
MA	4	2.2	98.9
PhD	2	1.1	100.0
TOTAL	186	100.0	

Table 3: Age

	f	%	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
• 25 years	0	0	0
26 – 30 years	8	4.3	4.3
31 – 35 years	35	18.8	23.2
36 – 40 years	26	14.0	37.3
41 – 45 years	44	23.7	61.1
46 – 50 years	23	12.4	73.5
51 – 55 years	32	17.2	90.8

55 • years	17	9.1	100.0
TOTAL	185	99.5	
Missing data	1	0.5	
TOTAL	186	100.0	

Table 4: Number of employees under supervision

	F	%	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
1 – 10	47	25.3	26.6
11 – 50	74	39.8	68.4
51 – 100	29	15.6	84.7
101 – 500	22	11.8	97.2
500>	5	2.7	100.0
TOTAL	177	95.2	
Missing data	9	4,8	
TOTAL	186	100.0	

Table 5: Leadership experience

	f	%	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<5 years	77	41.4	41.6
6 – 10 years	52	28.0	69.7
11 – 15 years	27	14.5	84.3
16 – 20 years	15	8.1	92.4
20 years>	14	7.5	100.0
TOTAL	185	99.5	
Missing data	1	0.5	
TOTAL	186	100.0	

There was a satisfying representation of gender in the sample – male (55.9%) and female (44.1%). The majority of participants had BA education and higher, (75.3%). The majority of leaders in this sample were between 31 and 50 years of old. The majority of leaders supervised groups of up to 50 employees (39.8%), 25.3% supervised groups of up to 10 persons, 15.6% of leaders supervised groups of 51–101 employees and 11.8% supervised groups of 101–500 employees.

Applied statistical techniques

This was non-experimental research, with Likert scales applied for assessment of leadership and the NEO PI R test for assessment of personality traits. The genuine leadership questionnaire was based on nine leadership indicators. The statistical tools used were the Cronbach's alpha reliability test and regression analyses.

Results and Interpretation

The main results are shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Correlation between personality and leadership

	Leadership
Neuroticism	-0.34*
Extraversion	0.09
Openness to experience	0.04
Agreeableness	0.02
Consciousness	0.10

A positive correlation between emotional stability and leadership was found, that is a negative correlation between neuroticism and leadership (-0.34*), meaning that only the specific hypothesis H1a is confirmed. All the other specific hypotheses were not confirmed (H1b, H1c, H1d and H1e), as well as general H1.

Having in mind our operational definition of nine-indicators leadership, there is a common-sense explanation for the correlation between leadership and

emotional stability, or to put it another way, leaders should be well-adapted people. It could reasonably be presumed that they have to be well adapted to the situational circumstances in order to fulfill the organizational tasks and vision. Furthermore, neuroticism as a domain differentiates emotional adaptability and stability from emotional instability and maladaptation. Persons with a high score on “neuroticism” domain react irrationally, have low impulse control and weak stress-coping mechanisms. On the other side there are emotionally stable persons, who are calm, with powerful coping mechanisms and with the following characteristics: patience, optimism, self-confidence and balance (Džamonja Ignjatović, Đuri Jočić, 2004). Possibly, the main factor that underlies this correlation is that our definition of leadership incorporates indicators such as effective communication, a positive mental attitude, authority, teamwork and understanding and respect. There is a connection between these leadership characteristics and the reaction of an emotionally stable person.

Finally, this result is in accordance with other findings “...a negative correlation was expected between the NEO PI R dimension of neuroticism (i.e., the proneness to experience negative emotions and being emotionally unstable) and the Job – Match – Talent main scales called Stress Index (i.e., the aptitude to cope with stress and emotional stability at work despite outer influences)...” (Garcia, Nima, Rappe, Rapp Ricciardi & Archer, 2014, p. 2).

There are two reasons for the lack of correlation between leadership and other personality traits. Firstly, our method for assessing leadership differed from the methods used in other studies – here a self-assessment scale was used, while other researchers have used an assessment of leaders given by subordinate employees – meaning that employees evaluated their leaders. Secondly, our assessment of effective leadership was not done according to other criteria that are commonly applied in capitalistic societies where the final measure of good leadership is the development and expansion of business that is reflected in increased profits. Robbins (1997) quotes criteria for defining effective leadership, emphasizing their productivity or achievements resulting in increased profits. In our case, the leaders were working mostly in public utility companies and other public enterprises (81.2%) and any assessment of their productivity would be questionable, especially in the case of companies in a monopoly position, such as Serbia Post or Elektrodistribucija – Beograd. Also in our sample there were companies that are showing significant losses rather than profit. And finally, some of the companies were in the process of transition, transformation or even privatization. These leaders have to conform to the specific circumstances in our political system, since they do not participate in the decision-making process in the sense that leaders from productive companies do, especially in societies with a long capitalistic tradition. A positive correlation

with other personality traits in state-owned companies might be unwelcome. Leaders have to be well adapted to the situation or political environment in the sense that they are appointees of the governing party, rather than employees taken on under market conditions. That is the reason why only emotional stability is correlated with leadership, whereby leaders have to be aware of the current social and political factors influencing their position in state-owned companies rather than considering real benefits for the company. They have to be well-adapted, patient and tolerant to the authority that appointed them to their leadership position. Although it seems like a political explanation it is actually a situational explanation, given according to the specific circumstances. For leaders in such circumstances it is questionable whether they can express extraversion, openness, cooperation and conscientiousness as defined in NEO PI R. They have to be active and energetic, but still reserved and closed when we assess extroversion. They need to be independent in thinking and have a strong initiative for change, yet sometimes they have to be conservative or conventional. These paradoxes are even more obvious when it comes to the dimension of agreeableness. The leaders in this sample have to be trustful and emphatic but suspicious toward the intentions of their colleagues and possibly their superiors. When it comes to conscientiousness, leaders need to be attached to their own principles, while their behavior can vary according to the proclaimed goals of the enterprise. It seems that they have to balance between the two poles of these domains, in order to remain in a leadership position under circumstances in which the functioning of the company depends on many factors, such as the political climate in our society at the moment.

The same conclusion can be applied when it comes to the gender differences regarding emotional stability in both the samples of men and of women. Both men and women express the same behavior under the same circumstances, with one difference, which can be seen in the following table.

Table 7: Correlation between leadership and personality traits (men)

	Leadership (Men)	Leadership (Women)
Neuroticism	-0.22*	-0.44*
Extraversion	0.11	0.03
Openness to experience	0.49	-0.17
Agreeableness	0.14	-0.19
Conscientiousness	0.13	-0.23*

The only distinctive correlation between men and women is found in the domain of conscientiousness: there is a negative correlation (-0.23*) with leadership. A low score on the conscientiousness domain suggests a hedonistic orientation and flexible principles in regard to goal implementation, but less obligation towards moral principles, which does not include amorality (Knežević, Džamonja Ignjatović & Đurić Jočić, 2004). Additionally, men can be regarded as aggressive, strong, rational and competitive, independent and self-confident, while women are warm, emotional, kind, dear, empathetic, conscious of the feelings of others and altruistic (Xie & Whyte, 1997).

Women regard leadership as a shift in their own interests and the interests of their subordinates towards concern for the company, which is reflected through applied motivational and interpersonal skills (Rosner, J.B., 1990, as cited in Weinrich & Koontz, 1993). This means that they are not just focused on goals but rather on people, by expressing more caring mechanisms. It can also mean that women prioritise people over strict principles.

The final conclusion is that hypothesis H1 and H2 are not generally confirmed, while the specific H1a goal is confirmed on both subsamples of men and women.

Conclusion

Leadership was in correlation with emotional stability (-0.34*), meaning leadership was in negative relation to neuroticism. As has been emphasized, a leadership position requires poise, calmness and good stress-coping mechanisms. Managers and human resources experts describe characteristics such as stress tolerance, persistence and self-control (Garcia, Nima, Rappe, Rapp Ricciardi & Archer, 2014) as significant predictors of leadership in the recruitment process.

The lack of other correlations is explained by the different leadership assessment techniques and specific social and political circumstances relating to the fact that our leaders were working mostly in state-owned enterprises. This means that leadership position depends more on political or social conditions than on the leader's productiveness and effectiveness. They have to be well adapted, not demonstrating other positive personality traits which might jeopardize their position. They can be innovative, open to new mechanisms and new ideas, creative and independent in decision-making process only up to a certain level. The justification for this explanation is found in theories emphasizing that some personal characteristics will be revealed according to situational factors (Berry, 1998), or the political factors explained in this study. Additionally, leadership is not a pas-

sive position, or some personality pattern, it is the result of interpersonal in-group relations (Bass, 1990).

Similar results were obtained on both subsamples, with one exception that might have been the result of some other characteristics of the women that might have influenced the result. In specific situations women leaders express better communication skills, a tendency toward cooperation, caring for people and warm feelings, which might not be expected from leaders (Čizmić, 1995).

Results show that when all leadership characteristics are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness (Paustia – Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014).

There is evidence that gender similarities are the consequence of a specific job, that people in the same profession have the same personality traits (Robins, 1997). On the other hand there are studies showing that women are more willing to express a democratic style of leadership, boosting participation in decision making, aiming at increasing self esteem in their subordinates (Robins, 1997). Furthermore, women can be described as more friendly, gentle, expressive and sympathetic and gender differences are negligible when it comes to managerial positions (Dipboye, Smith & Howell, 1997).

Finally, although hypothesis H2 has not been confirmed, the differences between men and women leaders were almost invisible in our sample.

These results raise relevant dilemmas concerning leadership, and its relationship to personality:

Firstly, since the nature of leadership can be flexible depending on circumstances; and it could also be that personality traits can differ depending on what kind of effective leadership is implemented (Dipboye, Smith & Howell, 1997).

Secondly, there are no magic scores for leadership on the NEO PI R test, furthermore the leader does not have to be effective even if the score classifies him as an ideal case (Howard & Howard, 2001). This conclusion can also justify our results.

Thirdly, it is questionable what would serve as a better predictor of leadership than the personality traits of intelligence, dominance, aggressiveness or confidence (Lord, De Vader & Alliger, 1986). Some research has shown that leadership is basically correlated with communication skills, interpersonal relationships, coping with stress, anxiety tolerance, energy and creativity (Bartol & Martin, 1994). Others are pointing to confidence, persistence and ego strength (Bass, 1990), or initiative, adaptability, bravery and ethics (Frigon & Jackson, 1996).

Fourthly, the latest studies in the US show significant positive correlation between leadership and the NEO PI R domains (Agreeableness, Openness, Extroversion and Conscientiousness and negative correlation with Neuroticism (Garcia, Nima,

Rappe, Rapp Ricciardi & Archer, 2014), leading us to the question of whether situational factors have more impact on leadership than traits themselves.

Finally, what if the main factor for determining leaders is ambition, drive or power of will, while personality traits determine a style of leadership that is dependent on other social factors?

These findings may have also implications for HRM practice regarding the selection of leaders and training of leaders.

Our point of view is that the personality characteristics identified by NEO PI R could be a good predictor for leadership success. Additionally, there are different studies that suggest that other personality traits could be assessed for the prediction of leadership success, like virtues such as courage, temperance, and transcendence (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005), some of them similar to the NEO PI R domains.

There could be a distinct profile of leaders that perform differently in the working environment. Identification of exact profiles of leaders can be used for the design of training and education. Based on profile characteristics three groups of leaders can be defined: "First, there is a distinct profile of individuals who consistently perform above average in leadership effectiveness. Second, there is a group who increase in effectiveness over time. Training and self-awareness may accelerate or strengthen this increase in effectiveness. And third, there is a group of individuals who demonstrate a flat trajectory over time. A unique leader development program may be needed for these individuals to move from average to above average in leadership effectiveness." (O'Neil, 2007, p. 80).

It means that efforts to improve the recruitment of leaders, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective (Leithwood at all, 2006).

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Korelacije između osobina ličnosti i liderstva i njihove implikacije za praksu upravljanja ljudskim resursima

Apstrakt: Cilj ovog rada je da se liderstvo dovede u vezu sa domenima ličnosti. Liderstvo smo operacionalno definisali preko devet indikatora: vizije, motivacije, inovativnosti, želje da se bude lider, efikasne komunikacije, timskog rada, autoriteta, pozitivnog mentalnog stava i poštovanja i razumevanja. Domeni ličnosti: neuroticizam, ekstraverzija, otvorenost, saradljivost i savesnost procenjavani su putem NEO PI R testa. Utvrđeno je postojanje pozitivne korelacije između liderstva i emocionalne stabilnosti. Dobijeni nalaz može imati implikacije prilikom izbora lidera u procesu selekcije i u procesu obuke lidera u različitim oblastima, u zavisnosti od njihovih specifičnih profila ličnosti.

Ključne reči: liderstvo, ličnost, emocionalna stabilnost, selekcija, obuka i trening.

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