

Personality Traits of Leaders

Chris Boleman

Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist

The Texas A&M University System

What are the traits of leaders? This is a question that has been studied for years. The first important leadership theories focused on leadership traits of individuals and were called Great-Man Theories. These theories focused on studying leaders such as Moses, Gandhi, Washington and Churchill. The conclusion of the Great-Man Theories was that “There is no such thing as leadership by the masses. The individuals in every society possess different degrees of intelligence, energy, and moral face” (Covey 2004, p. 352).

Everyone is different, with different traits and different personalities. Truly, no two people are exactly alike. We can define traits as distinguishing personal characteristics. Personality is a combination of traits that classifies an individual’s behavior.

There are many personality profiles that help us determine our own personalities. One of the most widely recognized is the Big Five Model of Personality. This personality profile categorizes traits into dimensions of surgency, agreeableness, adjustment, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Lussier and Achua, 2001) (Fig. 1).

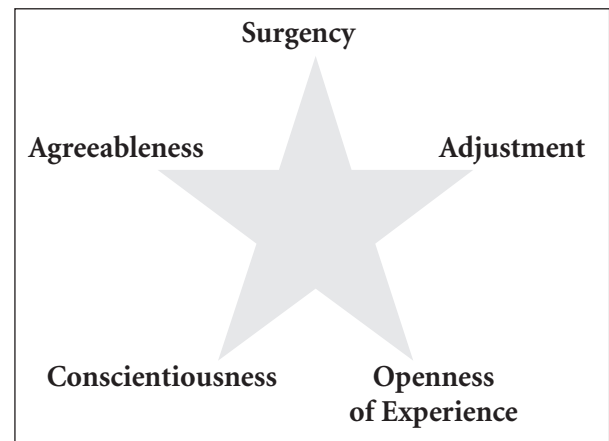


Figure 1. Big Five Model of Personality.

Surgency – includes leadership and extroversion traits. People strong in surgency like to lead and want to be in charge.

Agreeableness – includes traits related to getting along with people. People strong in this area are characterized as warm, easygoing, compassionate, friendly and sociable.

Adjustment – includes traits related to emotional stability. People strong in adjustment are characterized as being good under pressure, having self control, and being calm, secure and positive.

Conscientiousness – includes traits related to achievement. People who are conscientious are hard working, go beyond the call of duty, and have a strong desire to succeed.

Openness to experience – includes traits related to being willing to change and try new things. These individuals are risk takers, free thinkers, and creative.

According to House and Aditya (1997), there appear to be traits that separate effective leaders from others.

Dominance – ability to take charge

High energy – drive and enthusiasm and a tolerance for stress

Self-confidence – self-assured in judgments, decision making, and ideas

Locus of control – control over their own destiny

Stability – emotionally in control of themselves, secure and positive

Integrity – honest, ethical and trustworthy

Intelligence – ability to think clearly

Flexibility – ability to adjust to different situations

Sensitivity to others – understand the difference between handling individuals and groups

Very few people are strong in all nine traits. Even great leaders may not be strong in all of them. However, great leaders know their strengths and weaknesses and it is important for each of us to do the same. Then we can work on the traits we need to develop. You cannot lead others until you know yourself.

References

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