

Abstract

Past research examines relationships between personality and leadership. One well studied factor of personality is conscientiousness. This personality trait would seem to be ideal in a leader. However, there may be a dark side to conscientiousness if a leader reaches a point in conscientiousness where it has a negative affect on their leadership skills. Studies have been conducted to examine the shape of the relationship between conscientiousness and aspects of leadership, though the results are inconclusive. For this proposed research study, the hypothesis is that a curvilinear shape is predicted between conscientiousness and leadership in higher education, meaning that leadership skills could diminish at a certain point if conscientiousness behaviors become detrimental. The author plans to examine the relationship between conscientiousness and leadership style in a higher education setting utilizing the hierarchy structure of department directors as leaders and their direct reports as followers. The data would be analyzed using regression analysis, including linear and squared tertiary split. If a linear relationship emerges, it would be interesting to control for personality of the followers to see if it moderates the leader's relationship between conscientiousness and leadership. Additional data will be collected for secondary analyses. These analyses may allow for more generalizable information as well as being conducive to furthering the available literature. The focus of the poster will concentrate on the shape of the relationship between conscientiousness and leadership.

Can a Leader be too Conscientious? A Linear vs. Curvilinear Comparison

There is a plethora of research that examines relationships between personality and leadership. One well studied factor is conscientiousness, which is defined as “the quality of wishing to do one’s work or duty well and thoroughly.” When an individual scores high in conscientiousness they tend to portray behaviors such as preferring a set schedule, being detail-oriented, adhering to preparedness, and finishing important tasks in a timely manner. These behaviors would seem to be ideal in a leader. However, there may be a dark side to conscientiousness if a leader is so high in conscientiousness that they become inflexible and unable to provide the support that their followers need. Though leaders need to know how to prioritize their own work, they also have a duty to manage their follower’s urgencies and unforeseen situations.

Studies have been conducted to examine the shape of the relationship between conscientiousness and aspects of leadership. Most results show there is a tendency for a linear model to be a good fit though the overall literature is inconclusive. There are many limitations to these studies including the samples used (i.e. students with potential to be leaders but not in an official leadership position within a company), lack of consistent definition of leadership, and controlling for confounding factors.

For this research study, the author plans to examine the relationship between conscientiousness and leadership style in a higher education setting. The hierarchical organization will allow for data to be collected anonymously using an electronic questionnaire targeting department directors and their direct reports. While this may not be useful as far as comparing directors in departments to each other within the university since their objectives and tasks differ (i.e. comparing the library to the registrar’s office), the analyses could allow for further knowledge of how conscientiousness affects leaders and their followers. The hypothesis predicts a curvilinear shape between conscientiousness and leadership in higher education. Meaning that there may be an optimal level of conscientiousness and that leadership skills could diminish past a certain point. The data would be analyzed using regression analysis, including linear and squared tertiary split. If a linear relationship emerges, it would be interesting to control for follower personality to see if it moderates the leader’s relationship between conscientiousness and leadership.

Data will be collected for secondary analyses as well, including demographics, leader/follower perceived organizational support, leader/follower job satisfaction, leader/follower self-reported individual and department productivity, leader/follower retention plans, and follower perceived supervisor support. If available, data on standardized productivity and retention rates will also be collected from the human resources department as a more objective measure. These analyses may allow for more generalizable results as well as being conducive to furthering the available literature. The focus of the poster will concentrate on the shape of the relationship between conscientiousness and leadership.

A potential model for use in investigating these relationships is found below:

