

MANAGERS' PERSONALITIES AND THEIR LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS¹

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This study investigated relationships between managers' personalities and their leadership perceptions. Data describe 94 managers in one company and another 61 managers working in diverse organizations. Personality variables measure rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and locus of control. Leadership variables measure initiating structure, consideration, and least preferred coworker. Only two of the 24 differences between means exhibited statistical significance, which provides very little support for the hypothesis that managers' personalities are significantly related with their leadership perceptions.

Sometimes, people's personalities function as cognitive filters that influence their perceptions of others (Shrauger & Altrocchi, 1964; Targiuri, 1969). Two recent studies of leadership concluded by suggesting that perceivers' personalities may be important determinants of leadership perceptions (Durand & Nord, 1976; Lord, Phillips, & Rush, 1980). These studies and literature reviews (Fleishman, 1973; Kerr, Schriesheim, Murphy, & Stogdill, 1974) call for more research on relationships between personality and leadership variables.

This article extends past analyses in several respects. First, the study seeks to resolve past, contradictory evidence about the nature of relationships between the personality variable called locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and perceptions of leader behaviors. Secondly, the study seeks to extend analyses to other personality variables conceptually associated with locus of control. Thirdly, the study seeks to extend past analyses by examining three leadership measures rather than one. Fourthly, the study seeks to reduce specious results even further by analyzing two different samples of actual managers. In general, this research constitutes a more robust test of the hypothesis that people's perceptions of leadership are related to their own personalities.

Prior studies are reviewed in descending order of their support for significant relationships. Internal-external locus of control correlated moderately with the leadership dimensions of initiation ($r = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and consideration ($r = -0.24$, $p < 0.05$) for a sample of MBA students (Evans, 1974). Subordinates who believed in external control tended to see their supervisors as initiating less structure and as being less considerate. The other major study reported opposite findings. Subordinates' locus of control yielded an increment of ten percentage points in a model explaining variance in leaders' initiating structure, and an increment of seven percentage points for leaders' consideration (Durand & Nord, 1976). However, subordinates who believed in external control tended to see their supervisors as initiating more structure and as being more considerate, not less as in the Evans study.

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In a study of head nurses, personality as assessed by locus of control correlated moderately ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) with consideration but was nonsignificant ($r = 0.09$) for initiating structure (Sheridan & Vredenburg, 1979). A study of undergraduates in an experimental setting involving groups without formal leaders found moderate positive correlations between locus of control and three leadership variables (r 's = 0.14, 0.17, 0.22), with only the last correlation being significant at the 5% level (Lord et al., 1980). Also, locus of control failed to enter in a subsequent analysis using hierarchical regression.

Internal-external locus of control correlated negatively with consideration ($r = -0.32$, $p < 0.05$) for psychiatric aids, but these variables were not significantly related for nursing assistants ($r = -0.05$) or registered nurses ($r = 0.11$). None of the three groups exhibited significant correlations between locus of control and the other leadership dimension of initiating structure (Pryer & Distefano, 1971). Chemical workers' personalities as measured by locus of control exhibited no direct relationship (chi-square = 0.11) with co-workers' perceptions of the bosses' leadership styles (Runyon, 1973). Finally, nursing staff exhibited some significant correlations between their needs for achievement, affiliation, independence, and power and their perceptions of leader behavior, although the highest coefficient was only -0.18 (Niebuhr, Bedian, & Armenakis, 1980).

In a partially related stream of inquiry, undergraduates described imaginary supervisors by completing standard leadership questionnaires (Weiss & Adler, 1981). Raters' cognitive complexity did not appear to influence their perceptions of leadership. These findings oppose earlier suggestions (Eden & Leviatan, 1975); Rush, Thomas, & Lord, (1977) that leadership scores might reveal more about perceivers' personalities than about leaders' behaviors.

Fewer researchers have conducted studies of relationships between perceivers' personalities and their own leadership styles. Furthermore, these few studies are more heterogeneous and tangential than the studies discussed previously. In a study of evening students, Evans and Dermer (1974) found that scores on the least performed coworker measure did not correlate with either intolerance for ambiguity ($r = -0.04$) or tolerance for certainty ($r = 0.02$), but did correlate moderately with a measure of dogmatism ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Baths and Green (1979) reported that scores on the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire were associated with leadership-style balance. Supervisors with unbalanced styles – large differences between scores in the two leadership dimensions of initiating structure and consideration – were more tender-minded, imaginative, experimenting, and self-sufficient. Inclusion of personality as assessed by FIRO-B increased explained variance by only one to four percentage points in a study of how leadership scores change after training (di Marco, Kuehl, & Wims, 1975). Dogmatism predicted autocratic-democratic leadership style for females but failed to enter as a predictor for males (Rosenfeld & Fowler, 1976). In the same study, Machiavellianism failed to enter as a predictor of leadership style for either sex; most predictors were various dimensions from the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values, the California Psychological Inventory, and Edwards Personality Preference Schedule. Many personality variables failed to achieve entry in these multiple-regression models predicting leadership style. In summary, past evidence for personality leadership relationships seems sparse, weak, and contradictory.

METHOD

SAMPLES

The study examines two samples of American managers. The first sample focuses on 94 managers of a large corporation that manufactures and sells a variety of heavy industrial and consumer products. This firm operates plants and offices located in several states. The sample includes, managers from all product divisions as well as staff departments, performing jobs ranging from supervisors up to general managers and vice-presidents. Managers' mean age is 44.7 years in the one-company sample.

The second sample focuses on 61 managers from a diverse set of organizations, primarily business firms but also some public and not-for-profit organizations such as

governmental agencies and hospitals. Jobs performed range from project managers up to vice-presidents and presidents. Managers' mean age is 36.7 years in the diverse sample.

PERSONALITY MEASURES

Three personality attributes were measured: rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and locus of control. Rigidity is measured by a 39-item instrument (Rehfishch, 1958) composed of true-false items drawn from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the California Personality Inventory. Rehfishch designed this rigidity scale to assess six personality characteristics: (1) constriction and inhibition, (2) conservatism, (3) intolerance of disorder and ambiguity, (4) obsessional and perseverative tendencies, (5) social introversion, and (6) anxiety and guilt.

Intolerance of ambiguity is measured by an 8-item instrument composed of 5-point scales (Martin & Westie, 1959). Intolerant persons tend to perceive continuum-type stimuli as dichotomized, and to process shades of grey as being either black or white. Intolerant persons also tend to seek unambiguous solutions when confronted with complex problems.

Locus of control is measured by a 29-item instrument composed of forced choices between statements (Rotter, 1966). This extensively used scale assesses the degree of contingency one believes exists between one's own behaviors and reinforcements: low scorers or internals expect their own behavior to control significantly the reinforcements that occur, whereas high scorers or externals expect their behavior will exercise little or no control over reinforcements. Externals attribute outcomes to fate, luck, or chance, to decisions by other powerful people, or view them as unpredictable results.

Each of the three personality variables apparently assesses an independent dimension. None of the product-moment correlations reported in Table 1 achieves statistical significance at the 5% level.

TABLE 1: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PERSONALITY VARIABLES
(Diverse sample in upper-right triangle and one-company sample in lower-left triangle)

	<i>Rigidity</i>	<i>Intolerance of Ambiguity</i>	<i>Locus of Control</i>
Rigidity		0.24	0.10
Intolerance of Ambiguity	-0.04		-0.09
Locus of Control	0.12	0.06	

SUBGROUPS

Analyses compared those managers above the mean score on each personality variable with those below the means. Thus, managers who scored 14 or lower are classified as flexible and those who scored 15 or more as rigid. The one-company sample contains 58 flexible and 36 rigid managers; corresponding frequencies for the diverse sample are 38 and 23. Managers who scored 19 or lower are classified as tolerant and those who scored 20 or higher as intolerant of ambiguity. The one-company sample contains 51 tolerant and 43 intolerant managers; corresponding frequencies for the diverse sample are 37 and 24. The diverse sample contains 36 managers who scored 7 or lower, classified as having internal locus of control; 24 managers scored 8 or higher, labeled externals. The one-company sample contains 58 managers who scored 5 or lower, classified as internals; 33 managers scored 6 or higher, labeled externals.

LEADERSHIP

The Ohio State leadership model (Stogdill, 1974) measures two categories of leader behaviors: (1) initiating structure refers to leader behaviors that clarify the leader's and subordinate's roles concerning goal attainment: (2) consideration refers to

leader behaviors that elicit subordinates' feelings of trust, respect, and friendliness. Managers' perceptions of their bosses' behaviors were measured by the supervisory behavior description questionnaire, an instrument containing 48 items eliciting responses on 5-point scales (Fleishman, 1957a). Managers' perceptions of their own leader behaviors were measured by a companion instrument called the leadership opinion questionnaire (Fleishman, 1957b). The first-mentioned questionnaire concerns managers' perceptions of how their bosses actually behave (labeled "Boss" in the tables), whereas the latter questionnaire concerns a normative issue of how managers think they themselves should behave in a leadership role (labeled "Self" in the tables).

The conceptually independent leadership dimensions of initiating structure and consideration are also empirically independent in this study, whereas they have not been empirically independent in many other studies. Product-moment correlations between initiating structure and consideration were -0.018 in the diverse sample, -0.08 for self, and 0.01 for boss in the one-company sample, with none of them achieving statistical significance at the 5% level.

The third measure of leadership was the 16-item scale called least preferred co-worker, which uses 8-point semantic differential scaling (Fiedler, 1972).

Table 2 reveals that both samples are very similar with respect to the distributions of managers' scores on two personality measures and two leadership measures. However, they differ for two other measures: managers in the diverse sample tend to score more external on locus of control and they tend to think that they should behave with less consideration compared with managers in the one-company sample.

TABLE 2: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR PERSONALITY AND LEADERSHIP VARIABLES

	<i>One-company Sample</i>		<i>Diverse Sample</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Personality:</i>				
Rigidity	13.67	4.11	13.61	4.65
Intolerance of Ambiguity	18.86	4.46	18.71	5.06
Locus of Control	4.71	2.92	6.97	3.27
<i>Leadership:</i>				
Self: Structure	47.15	7.34	46.82	6.50
Self: Consideration	56.25	5.64	53.18	5.57
Boss: Structure	41.68	8.87	-	-
Boss: Consideration	77.52	14.54	-	-
Least Preferred Coworker	61.35	17.14	59.44	13.16

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership styles for managers in the low and high personality subgroups are summarized in Table 3. Differences between means are tested by computing *t*-values. Only 2 of the 24 comparisons exhibit differences between means that are statistically significant beyond the 5% level. One or two purportedly significant results could be expected to emerge by chance alone, so a cautious interpretation would be that results in Table 3 corroborate the null hypothesis that leadership styles do not covary with personality differences.

An estimate of omega, squared for the two statistically significant differences ($t = 2.14$ and 2.70) indicates that these personality scores account for only 4 and 9%, respectively, of the variances in leadership scores. Thus, even the infrequent signs of support for the hypothesis seem to offer little or no practical significance, because the associations are so weak.

Finally, the two statistically significant results concern the association between (a) two different personality variables, and (b) managers' normative beliefs about how considerably they should act. Managers classified as flexible and tolerant sometimes

TABLE 3: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEANS FOR THREE PERSONALITY VARIABLES

Leadership	Rigidity		Intolerance of Ambiguity		Locus of Control	
	Flexible	Rigid	Tolerant	Intolerant	Internal	External
ONE-COMPANY SAMPLE						
Self: Structure (M)	47.72	46.22	46.10	48.40	47.59	46.00
(SD)	(7.26)	(7.47)	(6.95)	(7.66)	(7.10)	(7.82)
Self: Consideration	55.72	57.08	57.39*	54.88	56.28	55.91
	(5.44)	(5.92)	(5.15)	(5.95)	(5.43)	(6.22)
Boss: Structure	40.90	42.94	42.18	41.09	42.57	39.85
	(9.07)	(8.50)	(8.50)	(9.35)	(8.58)	(9.53)
Boss: Consideration	79.72	73.97	77.29	77.79	78.88	74.61
	(13.28)	(15.93)	(14.87)	(14.32)	(14.72)	(14.36)
Least Preferred Coworker	62.76	59.08	60.02	62.93	58.48	64.97
	(18.51)	(14.64)	(16.64)	(17.79)	(18.66)	(13.04)
DIVERSE SAMPLE						
Self: Structure	46.97	46.57	45.89	48.25	46.83	46.17
	(7.10)	(5.50)	(6.45)	(6.44)	(6.70)	(5.59)
Self: Consideration	54.66**	50.74	53.84	52.17	53.06	53.58
	(5.07)	(5.59)	(4.96)	(6.36)	(5.51)	(5.76)
Least Preferred Coworker	61.63	55.83	60.97	57.08	60.39	57.54
	(12.30)	(13.98)	(12.87)	(13.52)	(13.50)	(12.78)

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

tend to think that they should behave with more consideration than do managers classified as rigid and intolerant of ambiguity. However, the other four associations involving managers' own consideration scores fail to exhibit statistically significant relationships, and two of these four differences between means are not even in the same direction as the others.

Recalling the earlier literature review which showed that the popular personality variable called locus of control had exhibited contradictory relationships with leadership, this study heightens one's skepticism further. None of the eight relationships between locus of control and perceptions of leadership emerged as statistically significant. This study constitutes a more robust test than prior studies insofar as it uses three measures of leadership and two different samples of actual managers.

Perhaps formulations of leadership as attribution processes (Calder, 1977; Pfeffer, 1977) will evoke new propositions about how personalities affect leadership perceptions. However, it seems reasonable to conclude, from this study and others (Kerr & Slocum, 1981; Nystrom, 1978), that additional variables such as personality should not be entered into already complex leadership models unless they increase one's ability to explain leadership phenomena.

In summary, this study found very little support for the hypothesis that managers' personalities are significantly related with their leadership perceptions.

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