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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY AND LEADERSHIP PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether personality, as represented by the five-factor model, influences preferences towards leadership styles. To explore this issue, 166 nursing employees completed a questionnaire that assessed their personality and preferred leadership style. Extraversion and conscientiousness coincided with favorable attitudes towards transformational leaders. Agreeableness and openness were inversely related to attitudes towards transactional leadership. Neuroticism was positively associated, but agreeableness was negatively associated, with attitudes towards laissez-faire leadership. Finally, extraversion and neuroticism moderated the impact of agreeableness and conscientiousness on attitudes towards laissez-faire leadership. These findings suggest the merits of transformational and transactional leadership might depend on the personality of followers.

Over the past two decades, two predominant and distinct characterizations of the consummate leader have emerged. First, the exemplary leader, as delineated by Bass (1985), inspires followers to transform, elevate, and coordinate, rather than merely pursue and fulfill, their goals and objectives. In particular, these leaders, designated as transformational, challenge the traditional but obsolete practices, procedures, and assumptions of the organization and then supersede these ineffective practices with an inspiring vision of the future (Bass & Avolio, 1990, 1994). To realize their vision, transformational leaders demonstrate the behaviors and qualities they champion and consider the unique desires, concerns, and qualities of each follower (see also Bass & Avolio, 1997; Conger, 1999; Martin & Epitropaki, 2001; Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, 1993). Transformational leadership, in short, entails the promulgation of goals that transcend egocentric interests and current expectations but instead emphasize collective values and future objectives (Porter & Bigley, 2001; Yukl, 1999, 2002).

A wealth of research has indeed corroborated the benefits of transformational leaders. These studies often contrast this style with transactional leadership, in which the principal role of leaders is to offer rewards and incentives to employees who fulfill specific goals as well as provide feedback and criticism in response to shortfalls (see Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1997). Relative to transactional leadership, transformational leadership has been demonstrated to enhance the performance of workgroups and organizations, as manifested by improvements in financial indices (e.g. Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996), quality audits (Sosik & Dionne, 1997), sales performance (e.g. McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002), and many other measures (see Flood et al., 2000; Sosik, Avolio, Kahai, & Jung, 1998). More specifically, transformational leadership also fosters creativity in followers and innovation in teams (e.g. Jung, 2001; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Sosik, 1997). Furthermore, transformational leadership enhances work attitudes and beliefs, including satisfaction with leaders (e.g. Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000), satisfaction with the job (e.g. Martin & Epitropaki, 2001), self-efficacy (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996), and commitment (e.g. Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995).

Although transformational leaders consider and accommodate the unique values, concerns, and qualities of each follower, they promulgate the same visionary, collective, and challenging goals to all employees. In stark contrast, proponents of other leadership frameworks, such as the contingency theory (Fiedler, 1967), path-goal theory (House, 1971; House & Mitchell, 1997), the situational-leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and leader-member exchange (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982), all underscore the need for leaders to adapt their behavior to the specific contexts in which they operate (for a review, see Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1998). For example, the contingency theory suggests that leaders should strive to facilitate the achievement of goals, rather than enhance employee relationships and satisfaction, in very favorable or unfavorable circumstances, as defined by the level of structure that is imposed, the authoritative power that is granted, and the relationships with followers (Fiedler, 1967; Peters, Hartke, & Pohlmann, 1985). The situational-leadership model, however, recommends that leaders impose progressively less direction as employees mature and assume responsibility (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; see also Vecchio & Boatwright, 2002).

The juxtaposition of these two perspectives, transformational leadership and the adaptation to specific contexts, implies that perhaps the effects of various leadership styles might vary across

circumstances. Consistent with this proposition, some research has revealed the efficacy of transformational leadership does depend on the characteristics of followers. Shin and Zhou (2003), for example, revealed the impact of transformational leadership on follower creativity was especially pronounced when these employees value harmony, tradition, and compliance. Likewise, transformational leadership is also more likely to promote the performance of workgroups when followers exhibit an elevated, rather than modest, need for autonomy (Wofford, Whittington, & Goodwin, 2001). Nevertheless, scholars have yet to formulate a comprehensive framework that predicts the characteristics of followers that amplify or inhibit the benefits of transformational leadership.

Preferences for Transformational Leadership

The impact of transformational leadership should, at least partly, depend on the expectations and preferences of followers. Indeed, in a recent study, when the behavior of leaders matched the implicit expectations of their followers, the job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and well-being of employees improved (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). This finding suggests that transformational leadership is more likely to promote desirable work attitudes in employees who assume, either explicitly or tacitly, this style is appropriate and exemplary. Accordingly, leaders should direct their transformational behavior to followers who prefer this style.

This approach, however, is not feasible unless leaders can establish the preferences of their followers. Fortunately, recent research intimates the personality of followers could influence their leadership preferences. Ehrhart and Klein (2001), for instance, identified a collection of personality traits and values that correspond to a preference towards leaders who emphasize and promote a clear, inspiring, and challenging vision of the future, the cornerstone of transformational leadership. In particular, employees who like to participate in workplace decisions, but do not especially value job security, were especially likely to demonstrate a preference for these charismatic leaders (see also Dvir & Shamir, 2003).

This research, however, has not examined the gamut of personality traits that could influence preferred leadership styles; thus, preferred leadership cannot yet be predicted from personality alone. An examination of the relationship between the five principal personality Traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and preferences towards leadership could potentially resolve this shortfall. Many personality researchers contend these five factors, in essence, encompass almost every significant personality scale (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa, Jr. & McCrae, 1992; Hough & Schneider, 1996). The five-factor model, although frequently challenged and debated (e.g., Becker, 1999; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000; Lee, Ogundofura, & Ashton, 2005; McAdams, 1992; Murtha, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996), remains the most pervasive and accepted characterization of personality traits (e.g. Goldberg, 1993; Judge & Ilies, 2002). Furthermore, most other formulations extend, rather than reject, this model altogether (e.g., Ashton, Lee, & Son, 2000; Ashton, Lee, & Son, 2000; Ashton, Lee, Perugini, Szarota, de Vries, Di Blas, L., et al., 2004; Piedmont, 1999).

Five Factor Model and Preferences

The first personality trait, extraversion, refers to the extent to which individuals are sociable, loquacious, energetic, adventurous, and assertive (e.g., Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1987). This trait seems to manifest two related needs or drives. First, extraversion was initially assumed to reflect limited levels of cortical arousal (e.g., Eysenk, 1970; see Geen, 1997), although this trait might instead correspond to a reduction in brainstem auditory evoked responses (Bullock & Gilliland, 1993). Extraverted individuals, therefore, seek exciting, stimulating events to boost these levels of arousal, usually in the form of social, gregarious experiences or risky, uncertain behaviors. For example, extraversion has been demonstrated to promote the incidence of risky activities (e.g. Cooper, Agocha, & Sheldon, 2000). Second, this trait is argued to evolve from a temperament called positive emotionality, which corresponds to elevated levels of dopamine (e.g. Depue & Collins, 1999), and augments sensitivity to rewards (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000; see also Elliot & Thrash, 2002). To illustrate, in one study, male extraverts were more likely than other individuals to assume a leadership role during team activities, but only when their performance was monitored by an attractive female (e.g. Campbell, Simpson, Stewart, & Manning, 2003).

Because of these fundamental drives, extraverts should be more likely than introverts to prefer transformational leaders. In particular, transformational leaders, because of their emphasis on collective interests (Bass, 1985), will tend to foster more interactions between team members and thus fulfill the need for extraverts to engage in social interactions (Ashton, Lee, & Paunonen, 1999). Consistent with this proposition, studies reveal that transformational leadership does promote more cohesion and interaction amongst team members (e.g. Carless, Mann, & Wearing, 1996). Furthermore, the lofty, challenging goals that transformational leader promote boost the potential for employees to receive sizeable rewards, which disproportionately motivate extraverted individuals (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000). In contrast, transactional and laissez-faire leadership will not necessarily influence the prevalence of social interactions or the prospect of sizeable rewards; attitudes towards these leadership styles, therefore, might not vary with extraversion.

Hypothesis 1. Extraversion should be positively associated with preference towards transformational leadership.

The second personality trait, conscientiousness, refers to the extent to which individuals are organized, thorough, responsible, disciplined, motivated, and ambitious (Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1987). This trait might evolve, at least partly, from the temperament called effortful control, which corresponds to activation of the mid-prefrontal cortex including the cingulate gyrus (see Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000), and reflects the inhibition of a dominant response. As a consequence, conscientiousness seems to reflect the suppression of immediate desires to ensure these individuals can fulfill future objectives, particularly impersonal rather than social goals. Another perspective conceptualizes conscientiousness as intimately related to integrity and compliance (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993), which perhaps evolved in optimize the success of social collectives (e.g. Hogan, 1983).

Conceivably, conscientious individuals are more likely than other individuals to prefer transformational leaders. Like conscientious individuals, transformational leaders emphasize broad, future aspirations rather than egocentric, immediate desires. A variety of models, such as the attraction-similarity paradigm (Byrne, 1971; see also Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986), self-categorization theory (e.g. Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and implicit egotism (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002), predict that employees are more inclined to like a manager who demonstrates similar behaviors, attitudes, and values to themselves.

Attitudes of conscientiousness towards transactional leadership, however, cannot be predicted *a priori*. On the one hand, when leaders engage in transactional behaviors, the goals and targets they expect their followers to fulfill are concrete and unambiguous (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990, 1997). Conscientious individuals, who feel motivated to realize the goals that are endorsed by their social environment, might become engaged and thus satisfied when their leader demonstrates transactional rather than laissez-faire behavior. On the other hand, unconscientious individuals, who do not set goals spontaneously (Ramanaiah, Sharpe, & Byravan, 1999), might be more likely to benefit from the goals that transactional leaders impose. Taken together, these arguments imply that attitudes towards transactional leadership might not depend on conscientiousness. Thus:

Hypothesis 2. Conscientiousness should be positively associated with preference towards transformational leadership.

Openness to experience reflects the degree to which individuals are curious, reflective, creative, imaginative, original, independent, unconventional, and accepting of diversity (e.g. Goldberg, 1992). Openness is often ascribed to a need or drive to experience variety and novelty, a motivation that might be rewarded through the activation of noradrenergic neurons (e.g., Zuckerman, 1984). In addition, some scholars attribute openness to a capacity or willingness to maintain a diverse variety of conflicting thoughts, feelings, and impulses. In contrast, closed individuals compartmentalize conflicting cognitions and even reject contradictory information (see Rokeach, 1960).

This portrayal of open individuals implies these employees will be especially receptive to transformational leadership. Transformational leaders challenge traditional practices (Bass, 1985), as well as institute inspiring developments, and thus provide open employees an opportunity to experience the variety they seek. Open individuals are more likely to feel satisfied when they can express this need (cf. Tett & Burnett, 2003). Furthermore, their capacity to entertain conflicting cognitions enables open individuals to tolerate the temporary ambiguity that might coincide with visionary objectives.

In contrast, open individuals should resist transactional leaders, which entails two principal behaviors: the provision of both incentives to reward suitable behavior and criticism to redress shortfalls (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1997). This emphasis on the realization of current goals, instead of the introduction of novel objectives, might inhibit the variety that open individuals seek. Laissez-faire leaders, however, do not stifle this variety but also do not eradicate the impediments that often constrain creative pursuits and inventive initiatives (Bass, 1985), such as

biases against innovative suggestions (Ford & Gioia, 2000). Attitudes of employees towards laissez-faire leadership, therefore, might not be related to openness. Accordingly:

Hypothesis 3. Openness to experience should be positively associated with preference towards transformational leadership but negatively associated with preference towards transactional leadership.

Agreeableness refers to the extent to which individuals are compassionate, altruistic, cooperative, compliant, modest, forgiving, and trusting (e.g. Goldberg, 1992). Agreeable individuals are seldom argumentative and evade environments that are characterized by conflict (e.g. Suls, Martin, & David, 1998). To explain this tendency, Infante and Rancer (1982) contend that individuals who are not argumentative usually experience less excitement when they engage in arguments, as well a stronger aversion to these confrontations - than do individuals who are argumentative. To avert these arguments, agreeable individuals often suppress anger, resentment, and irritability (e.g. Meier & Robinson, 2004) - an inclination that might be related to the timing of commissural transfer (see Kinsbourne & Bemporad, 1984) as well as increased volume in the right, but not left, orbito-frontal lobe (Rankin, et al., 2004)

Agreeable individuals are likely to experience an aversion to transactional leadership. In particular, transactional leadership, in which leaders provides rewards or criticism to motivate behavior, underscores the divergent, and indeed conflicting, goals of leaders and followers. Agreeable individuals, who attempt to circumvent conflict, are thus less inclined to prefer transactional leadership than are other employees.

In contrast, attitudes towards transformational leadership might not depend on agreeableness; this style entails behaviors that could either inhibit or augment conflict. The inclination of transformational leaders to promote collective goals (Bass, 1985, Bass & Avolio, 1997) could temper the likelihood of conflict. Conversely, transformational leaders tend to challenge extant practices (Bass, 1985, Bass & Avolio, 1997) - an inclination that could provoke conflict. Hence:

Hypothesis 4. Agreeableness should be inversely associated with preference towards transactional leadership.

Neuroticism describes individuals who are irritable, anxious, vulnerable, erratic, unstable, and discontent (e.g. Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1987). This emotionality is often ascribed to an elevated sensitivity to stimuli that are potentially adverse (e.g., Eysenck, 1982; but see Dornic & Bo, 1990). In particular, neuroticism reflects heightened activation of the *behavior inhibitory system* (Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Gray, 1972, 1981; Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000). This system, purportedly underpinned by the medial septal area, and modulated by the orbital frontal cortex, provokes negative affect and passive avoidance in response to stimuli that represent fear or disappointment.

Individuals with neuroticism are likely to perceive leaders as a potential threat and thus a source of fear. To minimize this threat, these individuals, who typically engage in passive avoidance, would prefer leaders who do not monitor their followers. As a consequence, they would prefer leaders who adopt a laissez-faire approach (Bass, 1985) - leaders who tend to shirk their

responsibilities and shun involvement. Bass and Avolio (1997) conceptualize laissez-faire leaders as individuals who do not engage with their followers; they do not impart a vision, offer advice, reinforce exemplary behavior, or even redress ineffective practices.

The motivation and satisfaction of employees who exhibit neuroticism, because of their relative insensitivity to reward (e.g. Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Eysenck, 1982), is unlikely to depend on the extent to which leaders demonstrate transformational leadership. Furthermore, these employees might enjoy the structure and certainty that transactional managers impose but feel threatened by the potential of conflict that corresponds to this leadership style. Preferences towards transformational and transactional leadership, therefore, are not likely to vary with neuroticism. In short,

Hypothesis 5. Neuroticism should be positively associated with preference towards laissez-faire leadership.

Interactions between Personality Traits

The previous section considered the effect of each personality trait on leadership preferences. The impact of each personality factor, however, might depend on one of the other traits. Previous research, however, has seldom explored the interactions between the five personality traits. One exception to this observation is exemplified in a study that was conducted by Witt, Brown, Barrick, and Mount (2002). This study revealed that conscientious individuals, as anticipated, were more likely than were other employees to receive favorable performance evaluations. Nevertheless, in employees who exhibited limited levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness was inversely associated with perceived job performance. The effect of conscientiousness on performance, therefore, depends on the level of agreeableness (for other examples, see Burke & Witt, 2002).

Extraversion and neuroticism, in particular, are likely to influence the association between the other personality traits and leadership preferences. Specifically, most individuals recognize the benefits and drawbacks of each leadership style. Extraverts, because of their sensitivity to rewards and gains but relative oblivion to costs and losses, will tend to focus their attention on the benefits (e.g. Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lucas et al., 2000). In contrast, individuals with elevated levels of neuroticism are more sensitive to potential threats and thus more inclined to focus their attention on the drawbacks (e.g. Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Gray, 1972, 1981).

Extraversion and neuroticism should, therefore, affect the association between personality traits and leadership preferences, but only in specific instances. In particular, in some instances, the same leadership behavior could disproportionately benefit or disadvantage individuals with a specific personality trait, depending on the context. To illustrate, agreeable individuals will realize that laissez-faire leaders, because of their disconnection from their followers, are less inclined to intercede and thus unlikely to incite conflict (Bass, 1985). These leaders, however, do not develop a secure attachment with their followers and hence, as the theory of social categorization would predict (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Haslam, Oakes, & Turner, 1996; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), might be less likely to support or understand these individuals if conflicts do arise. When extraversion is elevated, agreeable individuals will

emphasize the potential benefits of laissez-faire leadership. In contrast, when neuroticism is augmented, agreeable individuals become more sensitive to the potential drawbacks of this detached style of leadership. Accordingly:

Hypothesis 6a. When extraversion is limited, agreeableness should be negatively related to preference towards laissez-faire leadership. This relationship, however, should diminish as extraversion rises.

Hypothesis 6b. When neuroticism is elevated, agreeableness should be negatively related to preference towards laissez-faire leadership. This relationship, however, should diminish as neuroticism declines.

Extraversion and neuroticism could also influence the association between conscientiousness and attitudes towards laissez-faire leadership. Individuals who are not at all conscientious might feel that laissez-faire leaders will not challenge their indolence. Nevertheless, these unconscientious individuals might also recognize they are more likely than are their conscientious counterparts to benefit from the inspiration and drive that a dedicated leader could impart. Unconscientious employees, in other words, might feel they have not developed the capacity to set and fulfill their own goals effectively (although see, Byrne, Stoner, Thompson, & Hochwater. 2005, for findings that challenge this assumption). Again, when extraversion is elevated, unconscientious individuals will focus their attention on the potential benefits of laissez-faire leadership. When neuroticism is elevated, however, unconscientious individuals will recognize the likely drawbacks of laissez-faire leadership. Hence:

Hypothesis 7a. When extraversion is limited, conscientiousness should be negatively related to preference towards laissez-faire leadership. This relationship, however, should diminish as extraversion rises.

Hypothesis 7b. When neuroticism is elevated, conscientiousness should be negatively related to preference towards laissez-faire leadership. This relationship, however, should diminish as neuroticism declines.

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 166 nurses, only seven of whom were male, were recruited from two public and two private hospitals in Australia. The response rate approximated 70 percent. All participants had worked at least 20 hours a week for three months with their current supervisor. The sample age ranged from 21 to 70 years, with a mean of 40.

Materials

Participants completed a self-administered survey that included the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) as well as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Form

5X-Short (MLQ; Avolio & Bass, 2002), which was adapted to identify the preferred, not the actual, behavior of their leaders.

Personality. The 60-item NEO-FFI was used to characterize the participants along the Big Five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI is a self-report questionnaire measuring the five personality domains of neuroticism (e.g., “I am not a worrier”), extraversion (e.g., “I really enjoy talking to people”), openness to experience (e.g., “I often try new and foreign foods”), agreeableness (e.g., “I generally try to be thoughtful and considerate”) and conscientiousness (e.g., “I work hard to accomplish my goals”). Each trait corresponds to 12 items, measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. After reverse-scoring some items, the mean response was computed for each trait. Cronbach’s alpha for the scales range from $\alpha = .68$ to $.81$ (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Leadership Preferences. The MLQ Form 5X-Short (Avolio & Bass, 2002) was adapted to assess the leadership preferences of the participants. In particular, participants were instructed to rate the extent to which a series of 45 behaviors matches their perception of their preferred or ideal leader from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (5).

This scale was used to measure attitudes towards transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership refers to the extent to which their preferred leader challenges traditional practices (e.g., “Seeks different perspectives when solving problems”), considers the unique qualities of each follower (e.g., “Treats me as an individual rather than just as a member of a group”), articulates an inspiring vision of the future (e.g., “Talks optimistically about the future”), and demonstrates exemplary behaviors and attributes (e.g., “Goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group”). Transactional leadership entails the degree to which their preferred leader offers suitable rewards and recognition to reinforce desirable behavior (e.g., “Provides me with assistance in exchange for my efforts”), monitors followers closely to uncover errors or shortfalls (e.g., “Keeps track of all mistakes”), and interferes only when problems arise (e.g., “Fails to interfere until problems become serious”). Finally, laissez-faire leadership relates to the extent to which their preferred leader is detached rather than involved (e.g., “Is absent when needed”). The mean response was computed for each of the three principal leadership style. When the MLQ is used to assess actual leadership behavior, Cronbach’s alpha for the subscales range from $.74$ to $.94$ (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Procedure

Unit managers or assistant unit managers of four hospitals received survey packs. These managers were instructed to distribute these survey packs to the first four of their followers alphabetically. This procedure was used to preclude sampling biases in the distribution of surveys. The survey pack included the NEO-FFI, MLQ, as well as some other scales that were utilized for other purposes and an explanatory statement. The explanatory statement highlighted that participation was voluntary and that individual information provided would be disclosed only to test administrators for construct validation or to the respondent upon request. This statement emphasized that information would be used only for research purposes and not for any form of occupational assessment. Questionnaires were returned using self-addressed envelopes to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

RESULTS

Effect of Personality on Leadership Preferences

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, including the Cronbach's alpha associated with the personality scales and leadership preferences. Cronbach's alpha approximated or exceeded .7 in each instance, which represents reasonable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1. Descriptive and Psychometric Properties of all Study Variables

	Possible range	Mean	Stdev	Cronbach's alpha	N
Extraversion	1-60	18.35	7.12	.80	162
Conscientiousness	1-60	30.61	5.52	.71	160
Openness	1-60	28.61	5.87	.70	162
Agreeableness	1-60	34.77	5.86	.75	161
Neuroticism	1-60	37.37	6.26	.85	162
Transformational preference	0-4	3.27	.54	.93	162
Transaction preference	0-4	2.07	.53	.69	162
Laissez-faire preference	0-4	.60	.88	.69	162

To examine the effect of each personality trait on leadership preferences, a series of three multiple regression analyses were first undertaken. The three analyses were conducted to examine whether the five personality traits are related to attitudes towards transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership respectively. Sex and age were also included as control variables. Before these analyses were undertaken, outliers were sought and statistical assumptions were assessed. No univariate outliers, multivariate outliers, or influential cases were uncovered. Furthermore, no consequential departures from normality, homoscedasticity, or linearity were observed. Table 2 presents the standardized *B* and *t* values that emerged from these regression analyses

Table 2. Regression Analysis Examining whether Personality Traits Predict Preferences towards Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership

	Transformational		Transactional		Laissez-faire	
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>
Constant		3.83***		6.23***		3.52***
Age	-0.09	-1.08	0.12	1.51	0.08	1.05
Sex	-0.06	-0.74	-0.08	-1.16	0.02	0.30
Extraversion	0.18	2.00*	0.02	0.20	-0.02	-0.21
Conscientiousness	0.22	2.58*	0.12	1.54	-0.04	-0.50
Openness	-0.03	-0.40	-0.19	-2.37*	-0.11	-1.43
Agreeableness	0.05	0.51	-0.38	-4.62**	-0.42	-5.30***
Neuroticism	0.12	1.28	0.15	1.82	0.17	2.15*
R ²	.10*		.24***		.30***	
Adjusted R ²	.06*		.20***		.27***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

These regression analyses revealed that extraversion and conscientiousness were positively related to preferences towards transformational leadership. Agreeableness and openness were inversely related to preferences towards transactional leadership. Finally, neuroticism was positively associated and agreeableness was negatively associated with preferences towards laissez-faire leadership.

Effect of Extraversion on the Relationship between Personality and Leadership Preferences

A moderated regression analysis was conducted to examine whether extraversion moderated the association between preferences towards laissez-faire leadership and the personality traits conscientiousness and agreeableness. For this regression analyses, the predictors included extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and the interactions between extraversion and conscientiousness as well as extraversion and agreeableness. To represent these interactions, the corresponding scales were first centered and then multiplied together. A significant interaction implies moderation (Aiken & West, 1991). Table 3 presents the standardized *B* and *t* values that emerged from this analysis.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Examining the Moderating Effect of Extraversion on the Relationship between Preferences towards Laissez-Faire Leadership and the Personality Traits Agreeableness and Conscientiousness

	Laissez-faire leadership	
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant		6.96***
Age	0.00	-0.04
Sex	-0.01	-0.19
Extraversion	-0.14	-2.06*
Agreeableness	-0.45	-6.29***
Conscientiousness	-0.07	-0.99
Extraversion x Agreeableness	0.23	3.42**
Extraversion x Conscientiousness	0.17	2.57*
R ²	.37***	
Adjusted R ²	.34***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 reveals that extraversion moderates the association between agreeableness and preference, as well as the association between conscientiousness and preference, towards laissez-faire leaders. Specifically, the negative *B* value associated with agreeableness, coupled with the smaller positive *B* value associated with the interaction between extraversion and agreeableness, suggests that agreeableness was inversely related to laissez-faire leadership, although this association diminished as extraversion increased. Furthermore, the positive *B* value associated with the interaction between extraversion and conscientiousness indicates that conscientiousness was positively related to preferences towards laissez-faire leaders when extraversion was sufficiently elevated; in contrast, conscientiousness was inversely related to preferences towards laissez-faire leaders when extraversion was sufficiently elevated

Effect of Neuroticism on the Relationship between Personality and Leadership Preferences

Finally, another moderated regression analysis was undertaken to explore whether neuroticism moderated the association between preferences towards laissez-faire leadership and the personality traits conscientiousness and agreeableness. In this instance, the predictors included neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and the interactions between neuroticism and conscientiousness as well as neuroticism and agreeableness. Table 4 reports the standardized *B* and *t* values that emerged from this analysis.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Examining the Moderating Effect of Neuroticism on the Relationship between Preferences towards Laissez-Faire Leadership and the Personality Traits Agreeableness and Conscientiousness

	Laissez-faire leadership	
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant		1.90
Age	0.09	1.35
Sex	-0.02	-0.30
Neuroticism	0.19	2.73**
Agreeableness	-0.24	-3.11**
Conscientiousness	-0.03	-0.39
Neuroticism x Agreeableness	-0.41	-5.64***
Neuroticism x Conscientiousness	-0.06	-0.97
R ²	.37***	
Adjusted R ²	.34***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 indicates that neuroticism moderated the association between agreeableness and preference towards laissez-faire leaders. In contrast, neuroticism does not moderate the association between conscientiousness and preference towards laissez-faire leaders. In particular, the negative *B* values associated with agreeableness and the interactions between agreeableness and neuroticism suggests that agreeableness was inversely related to laissez-faire leadership, although this association diminished as neuroticism subsided.

DISCUSSION

This study examines whether preferences towards transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership depended on personality, as represented by the five-factor model. This research thus considers transformational leadership from the perspective of a contingency framework, which maintains that leaders should adapt their behavior to the unique characteristics and preferences of their followers. All of the five personality traits influenced leadership preferences.

In particular, as hypothesized, extraversion was positively related to attitudes towards transformational leadership. This observation aligns with the proposition that extraverts, because of their need for stimulation and sensitivity to reward (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Stewart, & Manning, 2003; Cooper, Agocha, & Sheldon, 2000, are likely to appreciate the risky initiatives and lofty aspirations that transformational leaders promote. Conscientious individuals also evaluated transformational leaders favourably. This finding is consistent with the argument that conscientious individuals might feel an affinity towards a leader whose behaviors, values, and practices mirror their own.

Consistent with the hypotheses, openness was negatively related to attitudes towards transactional leaders, perhaps because these feel these leaders might stifle their need for variety and novelty. Agreeableness was also inversely related to attitudes towards transactional leaders.

Presumably, agreeable individuals, who strive to shun confrontation (e.g., Suls, Martin, & David, 1998), might feel threatened by the prospect of conflict that transactional leaders confer. That is, transactional leaders often strive to uncover and redress shortfalls, an emphasis called management by exception (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 2002; Bass, 1985), and this inclination is likely to entail criticism and thus possible conflict. Finally, individuals who exhibit neuroticism were more likely than were other participants to favour laissez-faire leadership. Individuals with elevated levels of neuroticism might regard leaders as a potential threat; this sense of threat might diminish if the leaders seem detached rather than involved.

These observations, although hypothesized, could nevertheless be ascribed to an alternative explanation. In particular, consistent with the attraction-selection-attrition model (see Bretz, Jr., Ash, & Dreher, 1989), the personality of followers might dictate the environments in which they tend to operate. Extraverted individuals, for example, might typically work with transformational leaders. Over time, employees might begin to prefer the leadership style in which they are familiar. This explanation does not contradict the assertion that personality influences leadership preferences; instead, this explanation merely suggests the relationship between personality and leadership preference could be ascribed to variations in past experience.

Not all the hypothesized effects of personality traits were corroborated. Specifically, openness to experience did not coincide with a preference towards transformational leaders. This finding does not support the contention that transformational leaders offer the opportunities for novelty that open individuals seek. Transformational leaders, however, also promote collective goals, which could potentially compromise the sense of independence that open, and in particular creative, individuals tend to enjoy (e.g. Gough, 1979). In short, open individuals might feel that transformational leaders could foster novelty and change but might also stifle independence.

As hypothesized, extraversion and neuroticism moderated the impact of agreeableness and conscientiousness on attitudes towards laissez-faire leaders. Specifically, when extraversion was elevated, agreeable as well as unconscientious employees become cognizant of the benefits they could accrue from laissez-faire leaders. As a consequence, agreeableness was positively related and conscientiousness was inversely related to evaluations of laissez-faire leaders. These relationships diminished as extraversion subsided.

Conversely, when neuroticism was elevated, agreeable employees become more inclined to recognize the difficulties they could experience if their leaders adopt a laissez-faire style. Therefore, as neuroticism increased, the positive relationship between agreeableness and preferences towards laissez-faire leaders began to diminish. Neuroticism, however, did not influence the association between agreeableness and preferences towards laissez-faire leaders.

One limitation of these findings, however, is that an emphasis on gains rather than losses was not directly measured. The effects of extraversion and neuroticism, therefore, could potentially be ascribed to other characteristics of these traits. Future research, therefore, could examine whether an emphasis on gains or losses, perhaps as gauged through measures of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997, 1998), mediate the effects of extraversion and neuroticism. Future research could also determine whether sex moderates the relationship between personality and leadership

preferences. This study could not establish the effect of sex because relatively few males work in the nursing sector.

Regardless, the findings of this study do indicate that not all employees prefer transformational leadership to the same extent. Introverted or unconscientious individuals were less likely than were their extraverted and conscientious colleagues to evaluate transformational leaders favorably. Transformational leadership, therefore, might not align with the preferences of all employees and, thus, might not universally enhance job satisfaction. This observation does not suggest that leaders should necessarily accommodate the preferences of their followers. Leaders, for example, should not become more inclined to adopt a laissez-faire approach because their followers exhibit elevated levels of neuroticism. Nevertheless, leaders need to be aware of the affective reaction of different followers. They might, for example, recognize they might be more likely to be conceptualized as a threat to followers who demonstrate neuroticism and thus introduce measures to alleviate these adverse attitudes.

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APPENDIX

Table A. Variable Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Extraversion	1.00							
Conscientiousness	0.22	1.00						
Openness	0.28	-0.03	1.00					
Agreeableness	0.19	0.34	0.25	1.00				
Neuroticism	-0.31	-0.37	0.01	-0.36	1.00			
Transformational preference	0.20	0.23	0.01	0.09	0.00	1.00		
Transaction preference	-0.14	-0.04	-0.26	-0.41	0.21	0.22	1.00	
Laissez-faire preference	-0.19	-0.25	-0.21	-0.50	0.33	-0.30	0.40	1.00

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