Ethical Leadership and Big 5 factors of Personality (Conceptual paper)

Fahad Shakeel, Peter Kruyen and Sandra Van Thiel

Introduction

Leaders play a vital role in fostering an ethical environment in organizations (Dickson et al. 2001). Due to their importance of harboring the ethical climate, ethical leadership is a priority of many organizations and is linked to positive effects within organizations (Brown et al. 2005; Kanungo, 2001). Research into ethical leadership has focused mainly on the outcomes such as that previous studies has shown that leaders who depict higher level of ethical leadership are able to increase citizenship behavior, reduce unethical behavior and influencing the attitude of employees about that unethical behavior. (Mayer et al., 2012; Resick et al., 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009). Research has also shown that it can reduce deviant behavior and change the perception about leaders effectiveness as well as increase follower satisfaction with leaders (Hassan et al., 2013; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh, 2011; Mayer et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2009; Resick et al., 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; Yukl et al., 2013).

But there is little research on the antecedents of this behavior, although theory does predict that individual differences play an important role in performing ethical leadership, for example, Personality characteristics, motivation, Machiavellianism which is “the use of guile, deceit and opportunism in interpersonal relationships” (Christie, 1970, p.1), moral judgment level, moral utilizations, locus of control and self monitoring (Brown and Trevino, 2006).

In particular, Research has revealed that personal characteristics of individuals affect the influence of leader (Anderson et al. 2008). Some studies have explored the personality characteristics of leadership styles (Judge and Bono, 2000; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; Kalshoven et al. 2011). Ethical leadership has been linked to certain personality traits by study conducted by Kalshoven et al. (2011) but this study has used an ethical leadership scale that has been criticized for its lack of context validity (Yukl et al. 2013). Moreover this study focuses on a single theory of ethical leadership which is the construct developed by Brown et al. (2005), whereas Van Wart in his article (See Van Wart, 2014) categorizes ethical leadership into different types based on the focus of leader.

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1 Radboud University, Institute for Management Research, Department of Public Administration.
Correspondence: f.shakeel@fm.ru.nl
In our previous study, we compare the ethical leadership construct developed by (Brown et al. 2005) to the more comprehensive list of contemporary ethical leadership theories developed by (Van Wart, 2014). In his article Van Wart describes different type of contemporary ethical leadership theories, which includes, besides five others, the Moral Management theory which essentially portrays the construct developed by Brown et al. (2005). We earlier proposed a continuum of ethical leadership (cf. Shakeel et al. 2017) based on the categorization of Van Wart (2014). This continuum displays the different categories of contemporary ethical leadership theories and places them as per the level of focus of external environment that is depicted by the leadership of these theories.

It is therefore important to realize that in the light of this categorization of ethical leadership, a broader view might be required (cf. Shakeel et al. 2017). Given that ethical leadership may indeed be represented by different styles, an inquiry into the antecedents of ethical leadership should take such a broader view. This call for research that investigates the personality traits of all types of contemporary ethical leadership theories in order to deliver results that can further help understand these specific types/categories of ethical leadership. Primarily, this study aims to investigate if the impact of different personality characteristics is different for each contemporary theory of ethical leadership. In doing so, this study investigates for the first time some of these theories that have not been previously linked to personality traits, and re-validates the existing studies using more comprehensive tools for two such theories including Moral Management, using construct of Brown et al. (2005) and Transformational Leadership. This study may also help reveal if the affect of personality traits on these contemporary ethical leadership theories, reveal a pattern on the continuum that we proposed earlier (cf. Shakeel et al 2017).

We propose a set of 5 hypotheses based on the big 5 factors of personality and all the relevant ethical leadership styles. The assumptions of these hypothesis in some cases is based on the earlier research linking transformational leadership to personality traits (Judge and Bono, 2000) and ethical leadership style using construct of Brown et al. (2005) to personality traits (Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; Kalshoven et al. 2011). Each of these styles is discussed in the subsequent sections leading to hypotheses.
Big 5 factors of Personality traits

Personality traits can be described as the “the public, observable elements of the personality” (Winter, 2003). Lately applied research on big 5 model far outnumbers other models of personality traits (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). The initial model of Big 5 was put forward by Ernest Tupes and Raymond Christal in 1961 (Tupes & Christal, 1961). In the 1990s the five factor model of personality trait gained attention among the students of trait psychology which was put forward by Digman and extended to high levels by Goldberg (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993). According to this model, the distinct five traits of personality are:

1. Openness to Experience

This dimension of personality includes intellectual curiosity and strong affinity towards variety. Those people who are generally open to experience have an active imagination and they tend to be independent in judgement. Such people are not afraid to question authority and are always ready to entertain new ideas. (Rothmann, Coetzer, 2003). Research has also shown that this dimension of personality is related to adapting to change. (Raudsepp, 1990).

2. Neuroticism/Emotional stability

Neuroticism which is also sometimes referred to as “Emotional stability” is that particular dimension of human personality which shows a greater tendency to experience negative affects such as sadness, anger, guilt, embarrassment, fear and disgust. A high score on this factor depicts that a person is coping poorly with stress, have irrational ideas and is less able to control impulses whereas a less score on this factor will show a person who is calm and is able to cope with stressful situations. (Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp, McCloy 1990). Emotional stability includes Self reliance, callousness and candor (Goldberg, 1990).

3. Conscientiousness

This dimension of personality refers to the process of organizing, planning, carrying out tasks. (Barrick & Mount, 1993). A conscientious person is strong willed by nature and determined. Conscientiousness is linked to orderliness (organized) and achievement (persistent). A high level of this factor may lead to conditions like compulsive neatness. A low score on this factor does not mean that a particular person lacks moral principles but it can be because the principles are not applied properly (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Some of the personality characteristics associated with this dimension are self discipline, consistency, reliability and sophistication (Goldberg, 1990).
4. Agreeableness

A person who is agreeable by nature is sympathetic towards others and in return expects others to be helpful towards him. Such a person is cooperative by nature. Whereas those persons that are disagreeable by nature tend to be competitive. (Rothmann, Coetzer, 2003). This dimension of personality is linked to the capability of teamwork. (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, Barrick 1999). According to Goldberg (1990) agreeableness includes Trust, Amiability, Generosity, Agreeableness, Tolerance, Courtesy, Altruism, Warmth and Honesty.

5. Extraversion

This dimension of personality includes traits such as talkativeness and assertiveness. Extraverts are optimistic and energetic and hence this is seen as a positive affect whereas on the other hand introverts are reserved and independent by nature. (Clark & Watson, 1991)

**Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership has been defined differently by scholars. A categorization of contemporary theories of Ethical leadership by Van Wart(2014) reveal six major contemporary theories. Based on this categorization, a continuum of ethical leadership was developed in our earlier study(cf. Shakeel et al.2017). This continuum shows the six categories with respect to focus of the leader on the external environment. The following sections discuss each of these ethical leadership theories in detail with respect to personality traits and conclude in hypotheses.

![Figure 1. A continuum of ethical leadership](image-url)
Virtuous Leadership

Virtuous leadership has been classified as a classic virtue approach in his classification of contemporary ethical theories by Van wart (2014). Although this type of leadership is associated with a certain list of virtues that are signature values of such leaders but this approach focus on the qualities of leader alone and therefore hence lie on the left most extreme of the continuum of ethical leadership with no focus on the external environment (Shakeel et al.2017). The type of virtues that are associated with such leadership are honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, prudence and conscientiousness (Van Wart, 2014). As conscientiousness is considered as one of its hallmark value, we predict a positive relationship with this factor in our findings. To measure virtuous leadership, this study uses a scale developed by Thun and Kelloway (2011). In their study they use three categories of virtues: wisdom, humanity and temperance. These categories further entails 13 different types of character strengths of virtuous leaders. The character strengths of wisdom include (creativity, curiosity, open minded, love of learning and bravery), Humanity includes (love kindness and gratitude) whereas temperance includes (persistence, leadership, prudence self-regulation and appreciation of beauty and excellence). The character strengths of creativity, curiosity and open-minded are linked to personality dimension of (Openness to new experience). Hence we predict a positive outcome for this relationship as well. We propose:

H1: Conscientiousness and openness to new experience are most positively related to Virtuous leadership

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership has been defined in various ways by scholars studying leadership. The major proponents of this type of leadership define it “as a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Luthans and Avolio, 2003, p.243). In their study of authentic leadership, Walumbwa et al. (2008) proposes a new definition of authentic leadership by taking forward the initial concept of different authors and bringing them together. This study also puts forward a new tool to measure authentic leadership which will be used by our study as well. Their study define authentic leadership as “a pattern of leader
behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa et al. 2008, p.94). In their study Walumbwa et al. (2008) identified four main domains of authentic leadership which are self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective and balanced processing. One of these domain, relational transparency, can be implied as a characteristic of an honest leader. Honesty is linked with the big 5 trait of Agreeableness. This personality trait reflect tendencies to be gentle, trusting, honest and altruistic (Goldberg, 1990; Mc Crae and Costa, 1987). Thus we predict a positive relation between these variables. One of the other domain identified by Walumbwa et al. (2008) was balanced processing, which can be a characteristic linked to the big 5 trait of emotional stability, and opposite to neuroticism which signifies being anxious, unstable, stressed and impulsive. We predict that Authentic leadership will also be positively related to emotional stability. Furthermore, the optimism associated with Authentic leadership can be related to the personality trait of extraversion. Extraversion signifies the flow of positive emotions (Paunonen and Ashton, 2001). We propose

H2: Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, and Extraversion are most positively related to Authentic leadership

Moral Management

Moral Management has been classified by Van Wart (2014) as a classical Deontological approach with its main proponents being Brown and Trevino. Brown and colleagues proposed a construct of ethical leadership that is widely used by studies into ethical leadership till date. They define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal action and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al. 2005, p.120). Brown and colleagues also developed a measure of ethical leadership called the ethical leadership scale (ELS). Both the definition/construct and the ELS are widely used by academics studying ethical leadership. Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) in their study explored the relationship between ethical leadership using the construct of Brown et al. (2005) and measuring ethical leadership through ELS, found a relationship for agreeableness and conscientiousness. However the ELS scale deployed by
them has been a source of criticism on the grounds of construct validity. In a similar study Kalshoven et al. (2011) explored the relationship of ethical leadership quoting the construct/definition of Brown et al.(2005) but using two different scales the ELS and multi-dimensional scale using added items of fairness, power sharing and role clarification. Kalshoven et al (2011) conducted two studies as part of their research. In one study, using the ELS scale alone, Conscientiousness and agreeableness were found to be positively related to ethical leadership, however, after controlling for the other traits, agreeableness did not show significant result. In a separate setting using the ELS as well as self-developed multi-dimensional scale and controlling for other traits, managerial level studied, Gender of participants, number of direct reports and leader member exchange (LMX). Conscientiousness was found to have positive relation with ethical leadership overall (ELS) and role clarification, whereas, agreeableness was also found to have positive relation with ethical leadership (ELS), power sharing and fairness. We seek to revalidate the findings of these studies using a different scale Ethical Leadership questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Yukl et al. (2013). We propose:

H3 Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are most positively related to Ethical Leadership using Brown et al (2005) construct

Professionally Grounded leadership

Professionally grounded leaders are said to pose emphasis on principles rather than rules and are associated with the competence of distinguishing between two competing values. Such leaders are considered to be triggered by aspirations (Van Wart, 2014). As a proponent of this leadership style, Sergiovanni, depicts leaders as people who are out to serve the society with their competence (Sergiovanni, 2007). These are Leaders who seek to improve themselves professionally (Implying competence), who lead followers by motivation (Van Wart, 2014) and leaders of virtue who serve the people and society generally (Sergiovanni, 2007), such a leader has to be fair to his duty, with virtues implying he has to have the moral virtues expected of a leader and the ability to seek out problems related to his work in particular and the society in general. Such characteristics mark qualities such as honesty, competence and the ability to reach out to society. As honesty is related to agreeableness (Goldberg, 1990), competence is related with conscientiousness, and ability to reach out to other people is
related to extraversion (Clark and Watson, 1991). Hence we therefore predict a relationship with personality traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion. We propose:

**H4 Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and extraversion are most positively related to Professionally grounded leadership**

**Social responsibility leadership**

Social Responsibility leadership comprises of constituent three leadership styles including servant leadership, spiritual leadership and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). As these leadership styles are closely related to each other, they are discussed together. Greenleaf (1977) who is the main proponent of servant leadership portrays such leaders as individuals serving the society instead of the other way round. Such service signifies empowerment on part of the leader. Spiritual leadership in terms of organizational leadership is similar in essence to servant leadership but takes a broader view and include workplace spirituality whereas CSR has been explained by various models all of which are complementary. These models depict levels of responsibilities for organizations and individuals that start with primary individualistic or main corporate responsibilities and with progressive levels go further beyond towards responsibilities concerning the environments (A.B.Carroll, 1979; Van Wart 2014). Some of the key characteristics that can be associated with socially responsible leadership are humility, altruism, Empowerment, emotional labor, emotional healing and focus on end results (which can be implied as focus towards performance). (Van wart, 2014). We predict a relationship with personality traits of Agreeableness, Extraversion and emotional stability. We propose

**H5 Agreeableness, extraversion and emotional stability are most positively related to Socially Responsible Leadership**

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders have been described by Burns(1978) as type of leaders who obtains support from their followers by identifying with a vision that reaches beyond their self-interest. A study exploring the link between transformational leadership and Big five factor of personality has already been conducted by Judge and Bono, (2000). Their study revealed that
Extraversion and Agreeableness were positively related to transformational leadership. Their study also revealed a positive relation with openness to new experience but these effects disappeared once the other variables were controlled. We aim to revalidate the findings of Judge and Bono (2000). Transformational leadership might have some universal characteristics as well as cultural specific aspects. The MLQ which was developed in its earliest form by Bass(1985) using the grounded theory approach, was used by Judge and Bono(2000) to measure transformational leadership. However in another study by Singh and Krishnan (2007) who used the same grounded theory method in a different cultural background of India, developed a similar scale for transformational leadership. The revalidation and regression analysis in their study revealed that their developed questionnaire ITL (Indian Transformational Leadership explained outcomes over and above MLQ-TL. We seek to revalidate the findings of Judge and Bono(2000) using the ITL. We propose:

**H6 is positively related to Extraversion and agreeableness are most positively related to Transformational leadership**

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**Figure 2. A continuum of ethical leadership and personality traits hypotheses**

- Less focus of external environment
- High focus of external environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtuous L</th>
<th>Authentic L</th>
<th>Moral Management</th>
<th>Professionally</th>
<th>Socially</th>
<th>CSR/TL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness to new E.</td>
<td>Emotional S</td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Emotional S</td>
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<td>Emotional S</td>
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</table>
Table 1. A table of ethical leadership hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Leadership styles</th>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtuous Leadership</td>
<td>H1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Leadership</td>
<td>H2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Management</td>
<td>H3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionally Grounded leadership</td>
<td>H4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social responsibility leadership</td>
<td>H5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>H6</td>
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**Methodology:**

The data for this study will be collected through questionnaires. Personality traits of leaders will be measured through a questionnaire based on the Big 5 model which is the basic model of personality dimensions (Goldberg, 1990) and is cross culture generalizable (Mc Crae and Costa, 1997). Virtuous leadership will be measured through a questionnaire developed by Thun and Kelloway (2011). Moral Management focusing on the construct of (Brown et al. 2005) will be measured by Ethical leadership questionnaire developed by Yukl et al. (2013), whereas Transformational leadership will be measured by the MLQ whose previous version have received positive conclusions regarding its psychometric properties (Kirnan & Snyder, 1995). This scale was also used by Judge and Bono (2000) in their study and our research seeks to validate those finding in a different population.
Participants and procedure

Managers across different levels in public sector organizations will be invited to participate in this study elaborating the importance of this study, the voluntary nature of the participation, the assurance that data will be dealt in confidence and that results will be shared with them afterwards. This study will collect data through online survey tool Qualtrics.

Comparison of existing instruments

The existing research inquiring the antecedent factors of personality traits to any leadership theory/styles brings us to the work of few numbered studies which predominantly focused on only two ethical leadership theories, transformational leadership and moral management with the ethical leadership construct of Brown et al (2005). The scales used in these studies including the ELS and MLQ have either been source of critique or can be replaced by comprehensive alternatives available already used by other studies. The study of Kalshoven et al. (2011) has valuable findings for us, but these findings need to be revalidated with latest measures available like the ELQ developed by Yukl et al.(2013). This leaves us with four other major contemporary ethical leadership theories, as identified by Van Wart (2014) that are yet to be explored with regard to personality traits. Our study seeks to explore the relationships with regard to personality traits for these theories. We aim to investigate if personality traits have different affect on these different contemporary ethical leadership categories, this will also help us determine if a pattern of personality traits can be established along the continuum.
References


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