Does Personality Make a Difference on Leadership Development?

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Does Personality Make a Difference on Leadership Development?

by

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A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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Abstract

Personality is one of the individual differences that should be addressed in leadership development research and practice, as it can provide one with valuable insights about identifying specific needs and personalized methods for development. The existing literature demonstrates the importance of personality traits in leadership emergence and outcomes. However, to date only few scientific investigations have explored the role of personal traits in leadership development. The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore the relationship between personality and leadership development. Fifty college students were interviewed to investigate significant developmental events they experienced and leadership lessons learned from these events. In addition, the students were asked to complete an online personality survey: The Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). It was hypothesized that the Five Factor Model (Big Five) personality traits predict certain kinds of developmental events recalled and leadership lessons gained from them. Results revealed no significant associations between any of the Big Five personality dimensions and developmental events and lessons. The findings suggest that personality does not play an important role in predicting leader development through learning from experience. Further empirical research is needed to highlight the role of personality in leader development.

Keywords: leadership development, learning from experience, personality, big five
Does Personality Make a Difference on Leadership Development?

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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By

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Montclair State University
Montclair, NJ
2013
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Does Personality Make a Difference on Students’ Development as Leaders?

In today’s competitive and global business environment, it is essential to invest in leadership development (McCauley, Van Velsor, & Ruderman, 2010). Leadership literature offers various perspectives and methods for developing leaders, noting that organizations should see developing leaders as a strategic investment for organizational effectiveness (McCauley, 2008). Recent research conducted by Bersin & Associates (2012) reported that in 2012 organizations increased their leadership development spending by 14% and they predicted that approximately $13.6 billion would have been spent on leadership development activities by 2012. Higher educational institutions have also recognized the need of student leadership development, and today various colleges include formal leadership courses in their curricula or offer leadership development programs on campus (Sessa, Matos, & Hopkins, 2009).

While millions of dollars are being spent on training leaders, most of the leadership development programs are designed to improve general leadership skills and are not tailored based on individual needs (Day, 2001). One question that needs to be addressed is whether a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership development is satisfactory. When individual differences are considered in developing leaders, it can provide one with valuable insights about identifying specific needs and personalized methods for development. Personality is one of the individual differences that should be investigated within leadership development research. While much research highlights the link between personality and leadership emergence (e.g. Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), leadership types and styles (e.g. Ross & Offerman, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2000; Bono & Judge, 2004; Lim
Purpose

The purpose of this concurrent, mixed method study is to investigate the relationship between personality and leadership development. The present study is an extension of research by Sessa, Morgan, Hammond, and Kalenderli (2012) that explored students' point of view in their leadership development. The research investigated leadership development by interviewing fifty college students on key developmental events in their lives and identified the leadership lessons learned from these events. In addition to the qualitative interviews, the students were asked to complete an online personality test, the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), for the present study.

In Sessa and colleagues' (2012) research, it is reported that the notion that different events are associated with different lessons was only partially supported. Individual differences could be one of the reasons behind this finding. Peoples' personality can make an impact on how they appraise an event and how they react to it (Avolio, 2005). Therefore, it is likely to see associations between different personality traits and certain kinds of events recalled as well as lessons derived from them.

This research aimed to address the question of whether personality can facilitate individuals' development as leaders. The relationship between personality traits and the key leadership events and lessons will provide information on individuals' tendencies, strategies, and motivations for learning from experience. If we come to understand that
some people can better learn than others from specific events because of predispositions, they can be guided to be involved in those kinds of events in their leadership development programs. In addition, training programs might provide activities that offer various learning opportunities for leaders with different personalities.

The following sections of the thesis will be devoted to the literature on relationship of personality with leadership and leadership development. I will then state predictions about the associations between the Five Factor Model of personality traits and learning from certain developmental experiences.

**Personality and Leadership Emergence and Outcomes**

Despite the controversies and inconsistent findings, addressing individual characteristics of leaders had long been influential in leadership studies (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). The “Great Man” theory was among the first attempts in studying leadership throughout the 20th century (Northouse, 2010). The emergence of successful world leaders had been attributed to innate, extraordinary characteristics and qualities. For instance, a study by Craig and Charters (1925) was one of the earliest reviews on leadership and personality that identified personal traits of successful industry leaders (as cited in Ferris et al., 2007).

Building on the “Great Man” theory's suggestions, trait theories assumed that personal traits might differentiate leaders from non-leaders and followers (Bass, 1990). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) argued that even though there is no clear formula of effective leadership, leaders are more likely to have certain traits (e.g. drive, desire to lead, self-confidence, honesty and integrity, cognitive ability, and industry knowledge). Various reviews on leadership and personality also identified common traits such as self-
confidence, adjustment, alertness, and high energy level that are linked to leadership outcomes (Stogdill, 1948; Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010).

Two broad criteria widely used in the literature to measure leadership outcomes are leadership effectiveness and leadership emergence (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). Although these outcomes are conceptually different from leadership development, understanding the factors contributing to leadership emergence and effectiveness may guide us in developing effective leaders. After all, “leadership development is a continuing process” in which individuals emerge as leaders and continuously learn and improve skills and competencies to function effectively (Bass, 1990, p. 911).

Emergent leadership can be defined as emergence of an individual in a group whose influence and leader-like behaviors are perceived and accepted by followers (Schneider & Goktepe, 1983). Several early and recent studies investigated personality characteristics that are related to and predicted leadership potential and emergence (e.g. Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959; Bass, 1990; Hogan et al., 1994; Silverthorne, 2001). Stogdill’s (1948) comprehensive review reported positive associations between traits such as dominance, extraversion, sociability, responsibility, self-confidence, emotional control, cooperativeness, and leader emergence in leaderless groups. Mann’s (1959) review found similar results that pointed to the same traits. Although Stogdill (1948) and later Mann (1959) concluded that these correlations were low and there is no evidence that traits can predict leader emergence, more recent studies continued to report higher correlations between leader emergence and certain personality dimensions such as self-confidence, emotional stability, and sociability (see Judge et al., 2002 for a comprehensive review).
The second category broadly studied as a dependent variable in the leadership literature is leadership effectiveness. Leader effectiveness is considered as outcomes and influence of a leader’s behaviors on followers and organizations (Judge et al., 2002). The relationship between personality and leader effectiveness has been empirically supported (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2010; Zaccaro, 2007; Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000; Judge et al., 2002; Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011). For instance, a recent meta-analysis of 187 studies examined a set of individual differences predicting leader effectiveness (Hoffman et al., 2011). The strongest correlations were found between personal traits such as charisma, creativity, achievement motivation, energy, dominance, self-confidence, and leader effectiveness.

A popular way to measure leadership effectiveness is using subjective criteria, namely: followers’ perception of the leaders’ performance. Hogan and colleagues (1994), in their review of leadership effectiveness pointed out the empirical evidence suggesting that followers’ perception are positively impacted by certain personality characteristics of leaders such as trustworthiness and credibility.

In attempts to investigate personality and leader effectiveness relationship, another set of research examined different leadership styles. Leadership styles and types are concerned with leaders’ behaviors (Northouse, 2010). Research findings confirmed the role of personality in different behaviors and styles of leaders. Followers’ perception of how effectively leaders behave also found empirical support. For instance, Judge and Bono (2000) reported that extraversion and agreeableness predicted transformational leadership, and transformational leadership in turn predicted leadership effectiveness. In addition, in a meta-analysis, Bono and Judge (2004) found strong correlations between
extraversion and followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. Similarly, de Hoogh, den Hartog, and Koopman (2005) reported a connection between agreeableness and conscientiousness and charismatic and transactional leadership styles when the work environment is stable.

While the literature is extensive in identifying personality characteristics that are related to leadership outcomes, Judge and colleagues (2002) in their qualitative meta-analytic study pointed out to the inconsistencies between these findings. As one of the most comprehensive research studies investigating the relationship between personality and leadership, the study emphasized that one of the reasons for inconsistencies across studies in earlier leadership-personality literature was the lack of a taxonomic categorization in the definition and labeling of personality traits. Judge et al., (2002) in their comprehensive study suggested the Five Factor Model (FFM) as a useful organizing framework.

Thus, the present study employed the five-factor model when assessing personality. The next section will give basic information about FFM and then further discuss findings from studies that used FFM as an organizing framework to study leadership.

**The Five Factor Model of Personality and Leadership**

The Five Factor Model (also known as Big Five) organizes most salient personality aspects in terms of five dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Judge & Bono, 2000). There is a consensus that these factors can be considered as fundamental dimensions of personality (Goldberg, 1990). In a nutshell, Extraversion refers to the tendency to be
energetic, sociable, talkative, and assertive; Openness to experience is characterized by being imaginative, unconventional and autonomous; Agreeableness represents the tendency to be compassionate, cooperative, and caring; Conscientiousness is indicated by traits such as dependable, responsible and achievement-oriented; Neuroticism is associated with negative affect and refers to the tendency to be highly sensitive, nervous, insecure, and hostile (John & Srivastava, 1999).

The meta-analysis by Judge and colleagues (2002) revealed significant associations between four of the five FFM dimensions (openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) and leadership effectiveness and emergence. The researchers also combined emergence and effectiveness into one criterion called overall leadership. The strongest correlation was found between Extraversion and leadership (.31). Conscientiousness had the second largest positive correlation (.28). The correlation between leadership and Openness to Experience was (.24). Finally, Neuroticism was reported to be negatively correlated with leadership (-.24).

Another study by McCormack and Mellor (2002) examined the role of big five traits in predicting leadership effectiveness by using a military sample. The performance of the participants was evaluated by their supervisors. The study found that conscientiousness and openness to experience dimensions are positively related to leadership effectiveness. Bartone, Snook, and Tremble (2002) reached a similar conclusion after performing a longitudinal study that investigated leadership performance of Military Academy cadets over a 4-year-time period. It was found that agreeableness and conscientiousness predict later leader performance following a leadership development intervention.
The existing literature demonstrates the role of personality traits in leadership outcomes. However, empirical research directly investigating the role of personality in leadership development is scarce (Harms, Spain, & Hannah, 2011). In addition, research findings on personality and leadership development are inconclusive for two main reasons (Wong, Bliese, & McGurk, 2003). First, as Judge and colleagues (2002) suggested in their review of personality and leadership relationship, studies are lacking a taxonomic structure of personality traits. Secondly, there are various perspectives and many different theories of leadership development. These create inconsistent and disorganized findings in leadership literature.

Therefore, the next sections in this thesis will be organized to (1) present findings from leadership development through learning from experience literature, and then (2) will further discuss relationships between Big Five dimensions and leadership development through learning from experience.

**Leadership Development and Learning to Lead**

Although perspectives and methods for developing leaders vary greatly, a widely accepted definition of leader development is “enhancing capacity of an individual to experience leadership roles and process” (McCauley et al., 2010; Day, 2001, p. 582). That being said, Day (2001) notes that leader development should be distinguished from leadership development. While leadership development is an organizational level process that involves other factors beyond a leader, leader development is mainly concerned with individuals. However, in the literature generally both terms are used interchangeably. Most importantly, the mutual aspect of both processes is that they include improving

The leadership development field offers a wide range of methods from formal training to coaching to enhance capacity of a leader or a leader candidate (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). On one hand, it might require formal interventions to improve certain knowledge, skills, and abilities. On the other hand, leadership development is also experienced as a natural process without any external and formal intervention (Day et al., 2004, p.6). While organizations can help individuals to acquire and enhance necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities, leadership can be also learned through lived experience.

Development through learning from experience is one of the popular approaches to leadership development. The critical role of experience in learning and development has been widely acknowledged and empirically supported by leadership research (e.g. McCall et al., 1998; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994; Popper, 2005). In experiential learning, experience is considered as the core of development and the source of learning (McCall, 2004). Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”(p. 38). Similarly, Dewey (1915) labeled it as “learning by doing” (as cited in Gentry, 1990). Although the terms and definitions vary, experience-based development approaches to leadership development can integrate three major sources for leader development: (1) on-the-job experience, (2) life experience, and (3) specific skill development (Thomas & Cheese, 2005).

On-the-job experience has long been considered an integral part of work-related learning as well as leadership development (Day, 2001). Development occurs through
learning from and achieving formal and informal tasks, roles, and responsibilities (McCauley & Brutus, 1998). However, not all job assignments are developmental (McCauley & Brutus, 1998). According to Van Velsor and McCauley (2004) effective developmental experiences share three features: assessment, challenge and support. They explained that these elements motivate people to learn and constitute the source of learning (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 5).

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) had been the pioneer organization investigating job experiences that lead to development. The CCL’s researchers McCall, Lombardo and Morrison’s (1998) book “The lessons of experience: how successful executives develop on the job” has been recognized as an important publication in leadership development literature (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2008). The researchers interviewed successful executives about significant events they experienced throughout their careers and lessons learned from these events. The identified events and lessons were grouped into broader categories. The major developmental events were challenging assignments, hardships, events about other people, and coursework/leadership development programs. The most frequently learned lessons included setting and implementing agendas; handling relationships; basic values; executive temperament; personal awareness.

A series of other studies also examined key career events and lessons derived from these events using a similar methodology (e.g. Lindsey, Homes, & McCall, 1987; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987; Van Velsor & Hughes, 1990; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Douglas, 2003). All of these studies shed light on the importance of learning from on-the-job experiences for leadership development. However,
developmental events are not limited to job experiences. Autobiographical studies also revealed the importance of early life events in shaping leadership identity and performance (e.g. Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Amit, Popper, Mamane-Levy, & Lisak, 2009; Shamir & Eilam, 2005a; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005b). For example, Shamir and Eilam (2005a) conducted a study examining the role of early life stories in leadership development. The analysis from the interviews with leaders indicated their development through learning from various life experiences, and role models in their lives. Similarly, Amit and colleagues (2009) compared early life experiences of leaders and non-leaders. The findings showed that the leaders had engaged in more leadership-like roles and lived more experiences influencing others in their youth than the non-leaders.

In the study by Sessa and colleagues (2011), the data of which is used in this research, they developed a similar interview protocol to the CCL’s for use with college student leaders in order to investigate the events that influence the student leaders’ development. The study found that the college student leaders experienced certain key events and learned lessons from these events that are influential in their development as leaders. Specifically, four main categories for the events recalled by the students were categorized as challenging assignments, hardships, events dealing with other people, and miscellaneous events. The researchers also labeled such leadership lessons learned from these events as lessons about identity, developing individual leadership competencies, developing and maintaining support systems, working with others, getting the job done, and other lessons.
While this research found some trends in how certain events influence leadership development, the individual differences in events recalled and lessons learned remained unexplored. Avolio (2005) argued that the same event experienced by people with various individual characteristics can be interpreted differently. Several studies indicated that individual characteristics influence the ability and willingness to learn as well as the process of learning from experience (Day, 2010; McCall, 2010; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Some researchers concluded that eventually it depends on the person to learn from experience (e.g. Day, 2010; McCall, 2010). McCall (2010) highlighted the individual characteristics of the person having the experience and encouraged further investigation of factors such as personality, readiness, motivation, perseverance, cognitive structure, and learning orientation. Therefore, the present study aimed to contribute to the literature by investigating whether different personality traits are related to certain kinds of leadership events and lessons learned.

**Personality and Leadership Development**

The empirical research exploring personality and leader development relationship is very limited (Harms et al., 2011). One of the rare empirical studies is Harms and colleagues’ (2011) research on leader development and the dark side of personality. The existing research in the literature has already highlighted negative personality characteristics that are related to leadership derailment (Hogan, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2010). Harms et al., (2011) further investigated how subclinical personality traits such as excitability, diligence, and skepticism influence leadership development in a military sample. The results showed associations between subclinical personality traits and
developmental trajectories. Overall, the study indicated that negative personality traits are not necessarily detrimental, and that some can facilitate leadership development.

In addition, a recent group of researchers has begun to recognize the importance of personality in leadership coaching (e.g. Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, & Kerrin, 2008). Specifically, strength-based and personality-focused approaches to leadership coaching aim to enrich leadership experience by utilizing personality assessment as a key tool in behavior and developmental changes (McCormick & Burch, 2008; Linley et al., 2009). McCormick and Burch (2008) proposed that personality assessment provided a need analysis for identifying developmental targets in executive coaching practices. They argued that the personality traits of the leaders offer an individualized framework that facilitates behavioral change. Similarly, a strength-based approach to leadership coaching, having taken its roots from positive psychology, suggested valuing existing qualities of leaders.” (Linley et al., 2009). Certain personality traits such as extraversion, self-esteem, and self-confidence can be among the strengths of a leader that should be further focused for developmental purposes. The personality traits can also predict transfer and application of coaching services to real settings. A study found positive relationships between conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability and general self-efficacy and transfer of learning from executive coaching practices (Stewart et al., 2008).

While the empirical research for a personality-leadership development link is limited, there are prior findings that suggest linkages between personality and different aspects of leadership development such as training proficiency, developmental readiness, and skill acquisition/behavioral change over time.
Success in training programs and response to developmental interventions can facilitate leadership development. A meta-analysis of 256 researchers investigated training motivation and performance and subsequently reported significant associations between conscientiousness and transfer of training (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). Similarly, Barrick and Mount (1991) reported that extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience predict training performance of managers. In a similar vein, a longitudinal study that used Canadian military officers as a sample, found evidence for the predictor value of certain personality traits in leadership development training (Bradley, Nicol, Charbonneau, & Meyer, 2002). These traits in particular—dominance, energy level, and internal control—predicted leader effectiveness of the officers, when they completed the leadership development training. The leadership effectiveness was assessed based on four-year-performance in their career.

Recent developmental readiness literature also supported the links between individual differences and leadership development interventions (Avolio, 2005). A group of researchers proposed that certain personality characteristics can promote ability and motivation to develop (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008). According to Hannah and Avolio (2010), self-awareness and meta-cognitive ability can predict developmental readiness. Still, the role of personality in leadership development through learning from experience is unknown. Existing research only investigates the relationships between personality and the different aspects of leadership development in general. No research to date has empirically examined how five factor personality traits are related to leadership development through learning from developmental experiences. The present study proposes that personality traits make a difference in learning leadership
lessons from experience. A summary of findings on FFM traits presented below along with a rationale for suggesting how each of the FFM dimensions might be related to key leadership events and lessons learned.

**FFM Traits and Rationale for the Hypotheses**

**Openness to experience.** The Openness to experience dimension includes traits such as creativity, flexibility, and experience-seeking behaviors (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Judge and colleague’s (2002) meta-analysis found positive correlations between openness and leadership. Barrick and Mount (1991) reported positive correlations between openness to experience and managerial training proficiency and performance. Openness to experience was also reported to be related to motivation to learn and to engage in developmental activities (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006).

Other studies found positive relationships between openness and learning in general (e.g. Gough, 1987; Salgado, 1997). Specifically, in a study exploring the relationship of Big Five personality dimensions to learning approaches, openness predicted a deep learning approach, which is characterized by a real understanding of what is learned (Zhang, 2003).

Individuals, who are open to experience, actively seek any kind of opportunities to participate. They might also be more ready and motivated to learn from these opportunities. Barrick and Mount (1991) suggested that it is likely that openness to experience measures ability to learn as well as motivation to learn. The “intellectual curiosity” facet of openness dimension might be one of the explanations for the positive relationship between openness to experience and learning (Naquin & Holton, 2002).
**Neuroticism.** High neuroticism (or reverse scaled “emotional stability”) scores indicate a tendency to experience negative emotions such as stress, insecurity, and nervousness around other people (Costa & McCrae, 1991). Judge and colleagues (2002) in their meta-analysis found negative correlations between neuroticism (.22) and leadership effectiveness, and (.24) leadership emergence. Ng, Ang, and Chan (2008) argued that one of the reasons for this relationship could be related to leadership self-efficacy. In other words, as neurotic individuals are more likely to be anxious (Popper, Amit, Gal, Mishkal-Sinai, & Lisak, 2004), and have negative beliefs about their leadership capabilities, they usually do not get involved in leadership or do not function effectively in leadership roles (Judge et al., 2002). Other findings supported this relationship between self-efficacy and leadership (Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Murphy, 2002).

Neuroticism can also intervene with certain self-leadership strategies that can assist in leadership efficiency and performance improvement. Self-leadership is a self-influence process in which individuals control and direct their own behaviors and motivate themselves to perform a certain set of tasks (Manz, 1986). The three main categories of such strategies are behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies. For instance, emotional stability was found to be significantly related to natural rewards strategies, which refers to engaging in intrinsically motivating tasks (Houghton, Neck, & Singh, 2004). Similarly, Williams (1997) argued that as neurotics are pessimistic and perceive life events negatively, they are also less likely to develop skills such as self-regulation and self-management. Lack of self-regulation and management can in turn influence leadership development process.
Considering neurotic traits negatively bias individuals’ interpretation of events, they can also inhibit learning or opportunities to learn from experiences. For instance, high levels of self-efficacy positively influence learning processes by leading individuals to understand their capabilities and development needs (Morrison & Brantner, 1992). Similarly, a comprehensive meta-analysis reported strong negative correlations between anxiety (a facet of neuroticism) and motivation to learn (−0.57) (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000).

Earlier studies found that the neuroticism trait “predisposes individuals to experience more negative events” (Magnus & Diener, 1991, p.13). Additionally, research findings reported the influence of neurotic traits on memory. Negative affectivity can bias individuals towards the recalling of negative memories (Martin, Ward, & Clark, 1983; Young & Martin, 1981). For instance, Ruiz-Caballero and Bermudez (1995) found significant negative correlations between neuroticism and the recollection of personal events in a student sample. The students that scored high on neuroticism recalled more negative personal memories, when mood state was controlled.

**Extraversion.** Costa and McCrae (1992) differentiated interpersonal and temperament facets of extraversion. Interpersonal traits include warmth, gregariousness, and assertiveness, while temperament traits include activity, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions.

As extraverts are sociable, energetic, talkative, and assertive, it is not surprising to observe that they usually engage in leadership positions. Judge et al. (2002) reported extraversion as the most consistent correlate of leadership. It is also likely that extraversion can predict leader development to some degree. For instance, extraversion
was found as a predictor of managerial training performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Naquin and Holton (2002) argued that optimistic and self-confident characteristics of extraverts might lead them to engage in training programs and believe in their ability to complete such training programs successfully.

Similarly, learning orientation might be another reason for explaining training performance of extraverts. Learning orientation is described as aiming to increase a competency rather than performance (Zweig & Webster, 2004). Learning orientation can be a helpful factor in leader development, as it encourages leader-candidates to engage in developmental activities and facilitates the learning process (Hirst, et al., 2001). The positive relationship between extraversion and learning orientation was confirmed by empirical studies (Elliot and Thrash, 2002; Zweig & Webster, 2004).

Extraversion was also found to be related to the “activist” learning style (Furnham, Jackson, & Miller, 1999). Activist style is one of the four main learning styles identified by Honey and Mumford (1982) (Honey & Mumford, 2000), as activists tend to learn by doing, and learn better from activities.

Additionally, as consistent with common sense knowledge, Michael and Yukl (1993) confirmed that extraverts are more likely to engage in networking behaviors. Networking skills might facilitate learning from experiences of dealing with other people. In addition, networking skills might allow extroverts to obtain relevant feedback from others that can be helpful in their leadership development (Yost & Plunkett, 2010).

**Conscientiousness.** Conscientiousness is related to characteristics such as being responsible, dependable, hardworking, and reliable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Various theorists argued “conscientiousness” is one of the desirable leader characteristics
(Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Hogan et al., 1994; Bass, 1990). In Judge et al.'s (2002) review, conscientiousness and leadership were found to be positively correlated (.28).

Barrick and Mount’s (1991) meta-analysis on big five dimensions and job performance found that conscientiousness was consistently reported as a valid predictor of job performance criteria across occupational groups. In addition, they found that conscientiousness consistently predicted training proficiency. Similarly, Colquitt et al. (2000) reported positive relationships between motivation to learn and conscientiousness. Several other research studies also reported high correlations between achievement motivation, academic success and conscientiousness (e.g. Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Blickle, 1996; De Raad & Schouwenburg, 1996).

Considering the hard working, detail- and achievement-oriented nature of conscientious people, it is likely to observe them employing task-oriented leadership styles (Bono & Judge, 2004). As conscientious people are achievement-oriented and have high self-control, they are likely to strive for developing necessary competencies and pursuing goals (Quirk & Fandt, 2000).

Agreeableness. Agreeableness is characterized by the tendency to be gentle, cooperative, and compassionate and trusting (Barrick & Mount, 1993). Judge and colleagues (2002) argued that the passive and compliant nature of agreeable people suggest a negative correlation with leadership. However, their meta-analysis revealed only a weak correlation between agreeableness and leadership outcomes. On the other hand, agreeableness is related to supportive and considerate aspects of leadership (Quirk & Fandt, 2000). For instance, agreeableness was found to be strongly related to transformational leadership style, which can be described as inspiring and motivating
followers to change in alignment with a clear vision (Judge & Bono, 2000; Bono & Judge, 2004). Therefore, the gentle, trusting, and cooperative nature of agreeable students might help them to form better relationships with people, and they would be more likely to seek interactions.

Hypotheses

**Number of Events.** The students were interviewed about events from their college years that they found significant to their development as leaders. They were asked to mention at least three key events; however, some students recalled more events. As stated above, people who are open to experience actively seek engagement in various experiences. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1: Openness to experience scores are positively related to number of events recalled.

**Number of Lessons.** In Sessa and colleagues' (2012) research, the students described in total 734 lessons they had learned from their experiences. In addition, the students learned 4.10 lessons from each event (range was from 1 lesson to 12 lessons). Considering aforementioned empirical findings related to openness to experience and neuroticism, the hypotheses below were developed.

H2: Openness to experience scores are positively related to overall number of lessons learned.

H3: Neuroticism scores are negatively related to overall number of lessons learned.

**Types of Events**
Challenging assignments. This category refers to the events that focus on a specific type of challenging assignment (e.g. first leadership role in college, organization switches, start from scratch). Based on the aforementioned evidence on openness to experience, it is expected that:

H4: Openness to experience scores are positively related to recalling events about challenging assignments.

Hardships. The three characteristics of these events are: (a) individuals accepted the event and took responsibility for it; (b) when the situation got worse, they felt alone and lack of control over it; and (c) the situation had them confront themselves. Example events include business mistakes, problems with others, gender and race issues. Based on the features of neuroticism, it is expected that neurotic individuals are more likely to experience and recall hardships.

H5: Neuroticism scores are positively related to number of hardship events recalled.

Events dealing with other people. The central theme in this type of events is other people (e.g. role modeling/mentoring, feedback/recognition). Based on the characteristics related to extraversion and agreeableness, as well as the empirical findings regarding these traits, the following hypotheses were constructed.

H6: Extraversion scores are positively related to recalling events about dealing with other people.

H7: Agreeableness scores are positively related to recalling events about dealing with other people.
Leadership development programs/coursework. This category refers to formal programs and coursework that helped students in developing leadership competencies. In the light of previous evidence on conscientiousness, it is expected that:

H8: Conscientiousness scores are positively related to recalling events about formal leadership development programs or curricular courses.

Types of Lessons Learned

Lessons about identity. These lessons dealt with learning about one’s identity and developing new identities (e.g. self-identity, leadership identity, professionalism). As openness to experience is expected to be related to all kinds of lessons, the following hypothesis is developed.

H9: Openness to experience scores are positively related to lessons about identity.

Lessons about developing individual competencies. These lessons are related to particular leadership competencies such as delegation, decision-making, adaptability and flexibility, and so forth. Both conscientiousness and openness to experience are expected to be related to this category of lesson.

H10: Conscientiousness scores are positively related to lessons learned about developing individual competencies.

H11: Openness to experience scores are positively related to lessons learned about developing competencies.

Developing and maintaining support systems. This category includes both lessons about being a support system and developing and using support systems. Based on the aforementioned characteristics related to extraversion and openness to experience the following hypotheses were developed.
H12: Extraversion scores are positively related to lessons learned about support systems.

H13: Openness to experience scores are positively related to lessons learned about support systems.

Lessons about working with others. The main concern of this category is to learn to work with others through lessons of communication, teamwork, confrontation, and so forth. Based on the above explanations, the following hypotheses were developed.

H14: Extraversion scores are positively related to lessons learned about working with others.

H15: Openness to experience scores are positively related to lessons learned about working with others.

Lessons about getting the job done. These lessons focused on learning how to do a job. Examples are lessons of developing task skills and lessons about organization, school, job, and work environment. Considering the features of conscientiousness it is expected that:

H16: Conscientiousness scores are positively related to lessons learned about getting the job done.

The present study is an extension of research by Sessa et al. (2012) and used its data to test above hypotheses about personality and leadership development.

Method

Participants

The researchers approached Student Affairs administrators responsible for student leadership development at four colleges and universities located in the mid-Atlantic
region. These institutions were chosen because of their diverse characteristics; size (2 large, 2 small), Carnegie classification (2 teaching, 2 research), and public/private (2 public, 2 private). Once the administrators agreed to allow their school to be in the study, they were asked to nominate junior and senior student leaders who were recognized as “top student leaders” on their campus to participate in the study, let them know about the research, and ask them if they would be willing to participate. They each approached 30 to 35 traditionally aged juniors or seniors at each college/university for a total of 130 student leaders (See table 1 for demographic characteristics of the students).

Seventy-two of those students (55%) indicated interest in participating in the research. Two students were sophomores and excluded from the research, as they did not meet eligibility criteria. Fifty students were available to be interviewed on the dates researchers visited each campus for a response rate of 38%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Demographics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
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<td>Juniors</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<td>White</td>
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Procedure

The researchers scheduled interviews with each participant through email. Within this email, the participants were also asked to fill out a survey, which they needed to fill out before the interviews. This survey included demographic information and the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008).

Once the interviews were scheduled, the participants were sent out the following instructions to have them prepare for the interviews:

“To help you get ready for the interview we want to give you time to think about the following questions:

When you think back on your collegiate leadership experiences, certain events or stories probably come to mind—things that lead you to change or affirm the way you lead. Please write down some notes for yourself and identify at least three ‘key events’ from your years in college, which helped shape you into the leader you are today. What happened and what did you learn from those experiences (the good and the bad)?”

Within this email, they were also reminded to fill out the online survey if they had not done so already. Finally, just prior to the interviews, personal emails were again sent to the students to confirm the interview day and place, as well as to remind them to fill out the survey and to think about the main interview questions.

Online survey. The survey included demographic questions and the personality inventory. Demographic information survey asked age, gender, ethnicity, race, year in school, major/minor, GPA, leadership positions held (both on and off campus), leadership development activities participated in or led.
Independent Variable: The Big Five Inventory (BFI). The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a self-report inventory designed to measure the Big Five dimensions (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). It includes 44 items with accessible vocabulary. There are scales for each of the Big Five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion and Openness). Research examining the psychometric properties of the BFI, has shown that it has satisfactory validity and reliability values (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003). The test-retest reliability coefficients for each of the five subscales range between .76 and .83 (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). The internal consistency coefficients for each of the scales are: extraversion (a = .87), agreeableness (a = .81), conscientiousness (a = .81), neuroticism (a = .86), and openness to experience (a = .80). Examples of items are “I am someone who: is full of energy (Extraversion), is helpful and unselfish with others (Agreeableness), is curious about many different things (Openness), is depressed, blue (Neuroticism), is a reliable worker (Conscientiousness)”.

In-depth interviews. Two members of the original research team conducted the interviews in approximately 30-45 minute periods. One of the team members recorded the interviews via an audio digital recorder, while the other was the primary interviewer. First, the participants were given information about the purpose of the study. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed the consent form. The interview questions included:

“When you think back over your time as an undergraduate student, certain events or episodes probably stand out in your mind—things that led to lasting change in you as a
leader. Let’s start with the first key event that made a difference in you as a leader. What happened?”

The interviewers used follow-up questions when necessary (such as “please tell me more about that?” or “Can you describe that in more detail?” or “What was important about this event?”). When the participants fully described the events, they were asked the following question:

“What did you learn from this event (for better or for worse)?”

The same questions were repeated for two more events and lessons learned from them. In some interviews, when there was extra time, students shared additional 4th and 5th events.

Coding of the interview. After the interviews were completed, the research team transcribed the audio files. The research team coded the Key Events described by the students into macro and micro categories. These categories were adopted from those developed by Douglas (2003) and Lindsay et al. (1991) (see Appendix 1 for the categories and their definitions). The team members also identified lessons learned from these events and coded them into categories (see Appendix 2).

Dependent Variables

Key Events. Approximately 180 Events were revealed from the interviews. Two members of the research team coded the events into macro and micro categories. The first coding procedure included following steps:

a) Two of the team members discussed how to define and identify Event categories; a Challenging Assignment, a Hardship, an Event Dealing with Other People, and a Miscellaneous Event.
b) They conducted a trial coding with 18 randomly chosen events to test their understanding of categories.

c) Each member separately coded the Events into one of the four-macro categories: Challenging Assignments, Hardships, Events Dealing with Other People, and Miscellaneous.

d) They compared their scores and calculated Kappa scores to determine reliability, (Kappas > .70)

e) A discussion session was arranged and discrepancies were resolved with consensus coding (see Appendix 1 for the categories and their definitions).

Secondly, the same two members of the research team coded events into micro categories following these steps:

a) They discussed how to identify and describe each of the 28 micro categories (see Appendix 1 for list and definitions).

b) 20 randomly chosen events were used as a trial to test their understanding.

c) The two members separately coded the Events into one of the 28 micro categories.

d) The scores were compared (Kappas > .80).

d) They discussed and resolved discrepancies with consensus coding.

**Lessons Learned.** Two members of the team identified 734 lessons from the 180 events. The research members agreed on how to determine separate lessons for each event and identified all lessons from each participant’s transcribed interviews. First, the two members of the research team used the original Center for Creative Leadership
lessons codes. However, they realized that these categories did not represent lessons discussed by the student leaders accurately.

Therefore, the research members developed a new coding system following these steps:

a) Two team members separately categorized lessons.

b) They compared the results and discussed coding schemes.

c) Eventually, they developed a new coding scheme (see Appendix 2).

d) The same two members of the team then separately coded the lessons using the new coding scheme.

e) They compared their results and calculated the reliability score (Kappas > .90).

f) Finally, the discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus coding.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables are reported in Table 2. The correlations between Big Five factors of personality were generally low except the correlations between conscientiousness and agreeableness (r = .38, p < 0.01), and between conscientiousness and openness to experience (r = -.46, p < 0.01). There were also significant correlations between two of the Five Factor dimensions and other variables in the study. Agreeableness positively correlated with challenging events (r = .29, p < 0.05) and leadership development programs (r = .32, p < 0.05); negatively correlated with events about people (r = -.33, p < 0.05). In addition, extraversion negatively correlated with lessons about getting the job done (r = -.30, p < 0.05).
Table 2

*Means, standard variations and correlations for all variables*

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<th>M (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Extraversion</td>
<td>3.97 (.65)</td>
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<td>2. Agreeableness</td>
<td>4.13 (.62)</td>
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<td>3. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>4.30 (.38)</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>4. Neuroticism</td>
<td>2.66 (.53)</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<td>5. Openness</td>
<td>3.93 (.47)</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Number of Events</td>
<td>3.54 (.75)</td>
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<td>.20</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Number of Lessons</td>
<td>14.6 (5.9)</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.47**</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Challenging Events</td>
<td>1.7 (.93)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.27</td>
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<td>9. Hardships</td>
<td>.17 (.38)</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. People Events</td>
<td>1 (.95)</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. LDP/ Coursework</td>
<td>.37 (.59)</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Identity</td>
<td>3.22 (2.12)</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Competencies</td>
<td>4.12 (2.59)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Support Systems</td>
<td>1.30 (1.61)</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Working w/ others</td>
<td>3.7 (2.53)</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.16</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Getting the job done</td>
<td>1.88 (1.72)</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.01</td>
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*p<.05, **p<.01*
Multiple Regressions

A series of multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if personality measures predicted number and types of events and lessons. The predictors were the five personality dimensions, while the criterion variables were the number of events, number of lessons, types of events (challenging assignments, hardships, events dealing with other people, leadership development/coursework) and types of lessons (identity, developing individual competencies, support systems, working with others, getting the job done). None of the predictions in this study were supported.

**Number of Events.** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict the overall number of events from personality variables (openness to experience, neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness). However, the regression equation was not significant (adjusted R² = .014, n.s.). The overall model did not support Hypothesis 1, which predicted that openness to experience scores would be positively related to number of events recalled.

**Number of Lessons.** A multiple regression analysis was performed to predict the overall number of lessons from personality variables (openness, neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness). However, the overall regression model was not significant (adjusted R² = -.09, n.s.). Thus, the overall model did not support Hypothesis 2, which predicted that neuroticism scores would be negatively related to number of overall lessons learned; and Hypothesis 3, which predicted that openness to experience score would be positively related to number of overall lessons learned.

**Challenging Events.** The multiple regression model for predicting challenging events from personality variables was not significant (adjusted R² = .02, n.s.). Hypothesis
4, which predicted that openness to experience scores would be positively related to recalling events about challenging assignments, was not supported.

**Hardship Events.** The multiple regression model for predicting hardships from personality variables was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = .02$, n.s.). Therefore, Hypothesis 4, which predicted that neuroticism scores would be positively related to recalling hardships, was not supported.

**Events dealing with other people.** The multiple regression model for predicting events dealing with other people from personality variables was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = .08$, n.s.). Hypothesis 6, which predicted that extraversion scores would be positively related to recalling events dealing with other people, was not supported. Hypothesis 7, which predicted that agreeableness scores would be positively related to recalling events dealing with other people, was not supported.

**Leadership development programs/coursework.** The multiple regression model for predicting events about leadership development programs from personality variables was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = .09$, n.s.). The overall model did not support the Hypothesis 8, which predicted that conscientiousness scores would be positively related to recalling events about formal leadership development programs or curricular courses.

**Lessons about identity.** The multiple regression model for predicting lessons about identity from personality variables was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = -.01$, n.s.). Hypothesis 9, which predicted that openness to experience scores would be positively related to lessons about identity, was not supported.

**Lessons about developing individual competencies.** The multiple regression model for predicting lessons about developing individual competencies from personality
variables was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = -.03$, n.s.). The overall model did not support
Hypothesis 10, which predicted that conscientiousness scores would be positively related
to lessons learned about developing individual competencies; and Hypothesis 11, which
predicted that openness to experience scores are positively related to lessons about
developing competencies.

**Lessons about developing and maintaining support systems.** The multiple
regression model for predicting lessons about support systems from personality variables
was not significant (adjusted $R^2 = -.05$, n.s.). Hypothesis 12, which predicted that
extraversion scores would be positively related to lessons learned about support systems,
was not supported. Hypothesis 13, which predicted that openness to experience scores
would be positively related to lessons about support systems, was not supported.

**Lessons about working with others.** The multiple regression model for
predicting lessons about working with others from personality variables was not
significant (adjusted $R^2 = -.03$, n.s.). Hypothesis 14, which predicted that extraversion
scores would be positively related to lessons learned about working with others, was not
supported. Hypothesis 15, which predicted that openness to experience scores would be
positively related to lessons about working with others was not supported.

**Lessons about getting the job done.** The multiple regression model for
predicting lessons about getting the job done from personality variables was not
significant (adjusted $R^2 = .01$, n.s.). The regression model did not support Hypothesis 16,
which predicted that conscientiousness scores would be positively related to lessons
learned about getting the job done.
Discussion

The present study attempted to explore the role of personality in leadership development. The linkages between each of the Five Factor Model of personality dimensions and key leadership events and lessons that are significant to student leaders were investigated. The study has failed to find a significant relationship between any of the personality variables and leadership development through learning from experience.

The hypotheses about the relationship of personality to number of events and number of lessons were not supported either. One of the possible explanations for the lack of significant relationships between personality dimensions and number of events could be that the participants were limited to telling three events that they think of as significant to their development during the interviews. Only when there was extra time left, were the students asked to share more events. Therefore, the research protocol may have prevented personality from predicting the number of events mentioned as key leadership events. Similarly, the number of lessons mentioned during the interviews may have been influenced by other factors than personality such as students’ narrative abilities and time constraints.

The study also has failed to find significant relationships between personality measures and types of events and lessons. This may have been a result of small sample size. The number of participants in this study may be too small to support meaningful statistical analyses. Another interpretation of these non-significant findings might be that there are other individual differences that influence individuals’ learning from certain events. For instance, researchers suggest studying the role of personal variables such as motivation to learn, learning orientation, and cognitive ability in leadership development.
(Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco, & Lau, 1999; Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Similarly, there might be other personality characteristics that cannot be captured by the Five Factor Model. For instance, Bartone and colleagues (2009) argued hardiness and social judgment are related to leader performance development, but these traits are not covered within the Big Five dimensions.

As the present research focuses on the leaders' self-description of their own experiences, it is likely that individual differences other than personality traits may have been influential on participants' reflection on certain events. Reflection refers to the process of observing one's own experiences, beliefs and behaviors (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Densten and Gray (2001) discussed the importance of critical reflection in student leadership development. They suggested that reflection encourage students to question their behaviors and experiences and provide them with new insights. By evaluating their experiences, students may improve their leadership knowledge, skills and abilities. However, as Luthans and Avolio (2003) suggested, trigger events might not influence individuals' leader development if they are not developmentally ready. It was argued that developmental readiness of leaders is related to individual differences such as learning orientation, and motivation and ability to develop (Hannah & Avolio, 2007). While the students in this study were able to reflect on their experiences, differences in number and types of lessons might be a function of developmental readiness rather than personality.

In summary, there might be other personality characteristics that cannot be measured via Five Factor Model, or other individual differences besides personality that explains the participants' tendency to recall certain events as significant to their leadership development and different lessons learned from these events. However, further
research should be conducted before concluding that the Five Factor Model of personality does not influence leadership development through learning from experience.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

While this thesis could not find support for its predictions, it still has some theoretical and practical implications. First, the present study contributed to the leadership development literature by reviewing and organizing previous empirical findings about personality and leadership development. As mentioned before, there are only a limited number of studies on personality and leadership development. Of these studies, some did not use Big Five Model as a personality measure; others limited the concept of leadership development only to leader effectiveness and performance. Sessa and colleagues (2012) extended previous research from CCL that examined executives’ leadership events and lessons to student leadership development. The present study is also important because it is the first one that further explored the key leadership events and lessons by personality types. As suggested by Judge et al. (2002), the Big Five model was used as an organizing framework for this research.

Second, the non-significant findings may be support for those that argue personality do not predict leadership practices. For instance, Hartman’s research (1999) concluded that personality (except Warmth trait) could not predict leadership behaviors. He found that among sixteen personality traits, only warmth was positively related to leadership effectiveness. The results might also support situation perspectives to leadership. Barrick and Mount (2005) in their review of personality and job performance, pointed out to the impact of personality at work. However, they warned researchers about considering situational demands that can interact with personality. These findings are also
encouraging for many who do not possess leadership-like traits. McCall et al. (1998) discussed this by stating that certain inborn characteristic might be helpful in emerging as leaders, but what happens to them throughout leadership experience makes a real difference.

Third, approaching to leadership development from students’ own point of view and using self-report personality measures allowed us to understand how the student leaders see their identities and their development as leaders. Komives and colleagues (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006) developed a leadership identity model by investigating the life experience of college students. The interviews with the students revealed four developmental influences in students’ leadership identity development: adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning. The present study confirmed that students derive lessons related to self and leadership identity from various college experiences. In addition, this study found that students learn other lessons of leadership beyond identity such as lessons about working with others, developing leadership competencies, and using and being support systems.

Overall, the present study encourages other researchers to design studies to support or refute these findings. Understanding the factors influencing learning from experience allows one to predict who will develop what leadership competencies, as a result of certain experiences. This knowledge can be used to direct leaders and leader candidates towards specific events in which they are most likely to learn. Organizations can design and develop leadership development programs that offer individualized learning opportunities.

**Limitations and Future Studies**
The present research is not without limitations. The major problem in this study was the lack of previous empirical evidence on relationships between leadership development and the Five Factor model personality dimensions. First, it is important to note that the present study benefited from the literature linking personality traits to leadership emergence and effectiveness to develop the hypotheses. However, leadership development is conceptually different from these outcomes. The existing studies were not focused specifically on leadership development and therefore only indirectly support the rationale for the predictions. As to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there are no previous studies of Big Five personality dimensions and leadership development through learning from experience. When developing this study’s hypotheses, the possible influence of personality traits on learning from developmental events was discussed. However, the finding that personality predicts leadership development has not been previously documented. Therefore, the hypotheses were developed based on the studies that examined leadership emergence and outcomes.

There are also problems with the generalizability of the findings. The study had only a small sample size and a majority of the sample consisted of females. Therefore, the findings might not be generalized to broader populations. Future studies should increase the sample size and include professional and adult participants in the sample to make better inferences to other leader populations.

Another limitation is that this study relied on self-report measures when assessing both personality and leadership development. There is a possibility that the results are prone to measurement bias. It was documented that self-ratings and personal perspectives about behaviors are usually prone to biases (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). In order to
control this, it would be beneficial to assess leadership development with more objective criteria in future studies. For instance, longitudinal designs can be implemented to observe the developmental changes over time. Similarly, self and others’ ratings can be combined to evaluate both leader development and personality. Multi-rater feedback is one of the methods that can be used to obtain more precise evaluations on leader development (Conger & Toegel, 2003).

In addition, the study did not control any variables that might contaminate with the results such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and race. Future research should control these factors or analyze them as mediator and moderator variables.

To conclude, further research should be conducted on the relationship between the FFM dimensions and leadership development through experience.
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Appendix 1

Key Events: Definitions and Examples for Coding

1. Challenging Assignments – The focus of this category are events, which focus on a specific type of assignment.

   1. Start From Scratch
      
      i. This event refers to building something from nothing or almost nothing.
      
      ii. Example: Starting a new club/organization

   2. Fix-it/Turnaround/Growing to the next level
      
      i. Turning around or stabilizing a failing program.
      
      ii. Example: Taking a club with 10 members and growing it to 100

   3. Project/Task force/Program
      
      i. Projects or tasks, which are temporary in nature and have a specific deadline, beginnings and ends. Often involving unfamiliar content/activities and possibly involving building new relationships.
      
      ii. Example: Putting on a leadership conference. Creating a budget.

   4. Change in Scope and/or Scale
      
      i. Broadened scope or scale of responsibility, which added new elements. Job expands or you move up a position.
      
      ii. Example: Getting elected to a higher leadership position

   5. Organization Switch
      
      i. Taking a position in another organization, which requires the individual to do things in a different way.
ii. Example: Moving from an executive board position in one organization to one in another organization who’s culture is different.

6. Breaking a Rut
   i. Leaving a successful position to find something new and more challenging.
   ii. Example: Quitting one position in which the participant was successful to do something completely different.

7. **Pre-leadership Experience (Modified from Early Work Experience and Moved)**
   i. Experiences, which took place early in a participant’s leadership career, often in non-leadership role, which exposed them to new environments. Sometimes characterized by ambivalence.
   ii. Example: Being a member of an organization and taking on responsibility for something.

8. **First Leadership Role in college (Modified from First Supervision and Moved)**
   i. First time overseeing someone else.
   ii. Example: First time leading a group.

9. **Business Success (Moved)**
   i. Events, which seemed doomed to fail and which turned out extremely well.
   ii. Example: An event where you expected 5 people to attend was attended by 50.

10. **Other Challenging Assignment (New)**
2. Hardships – These events have three characteristics: (a.) Individual’s accepted appropriate personal responsibility for the mess they were in; (b.) during the worst of it, they experienced a strong sense of aloneness or lack of control over events; and (c.) the situation forced them to confront themselves.

1. Business Mistake
   i. Shortcomings, mistakes which derailed success.
   ii. Example: Didn’t advertise a program and nobody came.

2. Lousy Job/Missed Promotion
   i. Position and person’s perceived skills did not match. Event seen as a setback.
   ii. Example: Didn’t get elected to a position he/she really wanted.

3. Problems with others
   i. Situation where something bad happens with people -- that was not related to personality conflicts. People quitting midway, etc.
   ii. Example: A President having to tell a treasurer he/she isn’t doing his/her job correctly.

4. Race Mattered
   i. Experienced or observed a racial injustice due to prejudice or discrimination.
   ii. Example: Noticed the organization didn’t invite as many Asian students to join as they did Hispanic students.

5. Gender Mattered
i. Experienced or observed an injustice due to prejudice or discrimination based on gender.

ii. Example: Noticed the only student government positions held by women where the ones in which they did not run against a male.

6. Personal Trauma

i. Unexpected tragedies stemming from either personal or work life which had a powerful emotional impact and put the individual in crisis.

ii. Example: Death in the family, cancer, etc.

7. Other Hardship (New)

3. Events Dealing with other people – Events in which another person or persons were the central feature of the event.

1. Role Models

i. Superiors (either students in a higher leadership position, supervisors or faculty/staff) with whom the participant interacted or observed and profoundly influenced the participants leadership (either from positive, negative, or a mix of positive and negative actions/skills/traits).

ii. Example: Saw how a President ran the organization and emulated his/her style.

2. Values Played Out

i. Short lived events where the participant was either involved or observed an interaction which took place and left strong imprints of behaviors to emulate or avoid.
ii. Example: Saw John yelling at Sally and didn’t want to be like John.

3. Mentors
   i. These events revolve around superior who took special interest in the participant and helped the through a transition.
   ii. Example: Older student showing a new student the ropes.

4. Peers
   i. Interactions with peers either negative or positive which effected the participants leadership.
   ii. Example: Working with a friend on a project. Working with diverse groups.

5. Feedback (Moved)
   i. Events in which the participant was given feedback (+ or -) or recognition related to performance, pivotal conversations, nominations, getting elected, etc.
   ii. Example: As president, having the members of your executive board tell you how bad of a job you are doing or getting nominated for an honor's society.

6. Role Modeling/Mentoring (New)
   i. Events in which the participant was a role model or served as a mentor for another person (in either an informal or formal capacity)
   ii. Example: An RA who looked out for a specific new student to get them involved on campus.

7. Other Events Dealing with People (New)
4. Other Events – Events which do not fit into the previous 3 categories

1. Coursework
   i. Work from formal academic courses or formal trainings, attended by participants, which gave information or provided experiences not part of participant’s everyday routine.
   ii. Example: Going to a leadership retreat and interacting with leaders from other schools/organizations.

2. Purely Personal
   i. Range of experiences outside of college that contributed to the participant’s leadership development.
   ii. Example: Climbing a mountain or running a marathon.

3. Pre-College (New)
   i. Any event that happens prior to starting college
   ii. Example: An event the summer before school or an event in high school

4. Other Other Events (New)
Appendix 2

Coding scheme for Lessons Learned

1. Lessons about Identity

1.1 Self Identity

The main focus of these lessons was learning about who they are on a personal level. This may or may not be followed by some sort of personal change. They included personal characteristics (self confidence), personal boundaries, how they behaved in certain situations, and what they liked and disliked about their current roles.

Example: “...at the same time I am a bit of a control freak, so I end up picking up slack for others.” “I am starting to realize my priority is internships.” “what ethics I should have.” “I learned a lot about myself, in that in that situation I could do it, so it made me less afraid to take on that role in the future.” “I learned how to think on my own and fast on my toes.” “I can handle situations outside my comfort zone.” “I learned to trust myself.”

1.2 Leadership Identity

These lessons were about developing a leadership identity and learning what it means for them to be a leader. It includes their ideas of leadership good verses bad leadership, important leadership qualities, and that one does not need to have a title to be a leader. It includes lessons where they learned that they want to be, can be, need to be, or are a leader. These lessons included what/who makes a good leader, learning how to lead/serve as a leader, leading by example, that they are good at or like leadership, and that they can be a leader.
Examples: “You don’t have to be in a leadership position to lead, it’s really about who you are as a person.” “Lead by example.” “Not everyone takes their leadership roles seriously.” “Leaders need to be grounded in everything.” “I know I want to manage people, but not in this type of field.” “I learned I could take over leadership.”

1.3 Professionalism

These lessons were about the proper way to act in a leadership role when dealing with others. They dealt with how to present oneself well, represent the organization (even when they don’t agree with the organizations policies), interact with others in a professional way, handle situations appropriately, as well as, lessons in which they learned that they no longer just represent themselves, but that they also represent their organizations wherever they go.

Example: “...learning how to just act like someone that they’re going to quote in the newspaper, because they will, and they did.” “I realize that I am no longer just [me], but I represent the [organization name].”

1.4 Managing and balancing differing roles

These lessons were about balancing and separating differing roles including personal and professional, work and student, learning how to manage/lead friends.

2. Developing Individual Leadership Competencies

2.1 Delegation

These lessons were about delegation. They included lessons about the importance of delegating, the need to delegate, and how to delegate.
Examples: “it taught me a lot about delegating.” “I learned that you can delegate and ask for help from people who are offering it.” “learning how to delegate responsibilities.” “Delegation is key.” “I need to make sure to allocate to other people.”

2.2 Decision Making

These lessons focused on decision-making skills and the importance of making decisions. They include lessons on the impact of decisions, when, where, and how to make decisions and sticking with your decision.

Examples: “I learned that decisions you make in a small group, in a private group, have very public repercussions.” “Not making decisions in the heat of the moment.” “some of the appropriate ways for decision making process.” “I learned you just have to make a decision.”

2.3 Adaptability and Flexibility

These were lessons on managing stress, being flexible, making adjustments, using different tactics and strategies, and adapting one’s leadership style. They included lessons about dealing with stressful situations and relaxing, learning to have different approaches, being prepared for last minute changes, etc...

Examples: “I learned you can’t always expect things to be good.” “keep calm under pressure.” “You have to be flexible with people.” “I learned how to kind of work on the fly.” “It helped me adapt.” “Just have fun in most situations, you can’t take life too seriously.” “it definitely changed my leadership style.” “it’s been interesting to understand how to cope with that and get around that…”

2.4 Resilience, Persistence, and Working Hard
The focus of these lessons were working hard, being persistent, and being resilient. They included lessons about being determined to do something, dedication to the job, patience, patiently working on things, persistence, not giving up, learning from mistakes, and staying strong when things are not going well.

Examples: “if you are persistent you will always get results.” “If I put my mind to it I can do anything.” “how to be persistent and patient.” “I learned to be a leader you have to just keep going.” “working hard, I can do a lot.”

2.5 Taking Initiative/Standing up for oneself

These lessons were about asserting oneself. They included lessons on assertiveness, stepping up, taking initiative and speaking up/out.

Examples: “I definitely learned when not to hold back…” “Sometimes you have to step up and take charge…” “I learned when you don’t like something you say it.” “I learned how important it is to take the initiative…”

2.6 Accountability and Responsibility

These lessons centered on accountability and learning to take responsibility for themselves, others, and the roles in which they acted as leaders. They also dealt with holding others accountable, being upfront with responsibilities, setting expectations with others, how one can’t always depend on others for things and that it is up to oneself to get things done.

Examples: “…it taught me that I need to be someone they can rely on and be a dependable person…” “Not only did I have to be responsible for myself, but I had to be responsible for my teammates and their actions.”

2.7 The Bigger Picture or Perspective and where they fit in
These lessons were about seeing the bigger picture, seeing another perspective, seeing where they fit into the bigger picture, or seeing themselves from another perspective. This may include some sort of paradigm shift. It includes events about globalization, how everything has an impact, and thinking about the bigger picture.

Examples: “Having a bird’s eye view on life.” “The little things make such a big difference.” “I learned everything you do has an impact on someone else.”

2.8 Learning to Teach and Learn

These lessons focus on learning to teach and learn. They include lessons about classroom management, how to teach, how and from whom you learn.

Examples: “I learned that you learn something everyday.” “It taught me how to teach.” “It is important to learn from...the past.” “Different personalities, different teaching styles.” “Old dogs can be taught new tricks.” “I learned how difficult it can be to educate individuals.

2.9 Other Individual Leadership Competencies

These were other individual leadership lessons that were only mentioned once or twice like Patience and Pay attention.

3. Developing and Maintaining Support Systems

3.1 Developing and Using Support Systems

The lessons in the category focus on the importance and use of networking, resources, and asking for help (except for delegation). They include lessons about consulting other people, asking for support, networking with peers and administrators, benefit of talking with people at other universities or in other groups.
Examples: “Asking for help from them to learn how to make it go as smoothly as possible.” “I learned you have to use your resources.” “I learned to network a lot.”

3.2 Being a Support System

These lessons are about being a part of someone else’s network, being seen as a resource, and helping others. It includes mentoring, coaching, and role modeling.

Examples: “You need to see what support they need…” “It really pays off big time when you invest your time in people.” “how to develop leadership in others.” “How to be…that kind of role model for someone.” “I try to instill trust in them.” “keeping people’s interest.”

4. Working with Others

4.1 Communication

These lessons were about the importance of communication as well as how to communicate. These lessons included how to communicate more effectively, that everyone needs to be communication in an organization, speaking skills, presenting to groups, how to talk to people, how to listen to people, and the value of communicating and listening.

Examples: “I learned to talk in this position.” “I learned communication skills are extremely important.” “Changing my way of thinking to tell other people.” “Listening more…” “I learned to communicate rules effectively where you make the understand what the rules are.”

4.2 Teamwork
These lessons focused on working together as a team. They included lessons about valuing group work and dynamics, learning to be a team-member/team player, working as a team, keeping the integrity of the group.

Examples: “working with many leaders towards just one common goal definitely helps.” “I had to figure out how to work as a team.” “it’s everyone else who is working with you and are just as important as the person whose name is on the flyer.” “Trying to keep the integrity of our group intact.”

4.3 Confrontation/Conflict Management/Negotiation

These lessons were about how to and the importance of confrontation, conflict management, and approaches to both. These lessons included creating and enforcing boundaries, how to confront situations, how to manage conflicts between third parities, how to manage conflicts with others, how to act during arguments, and approaches to confrontation and conflict management.

Examples: “Even if everyone turns against you, you can still be the bigger person and hear them out.” “The way you approach people is way more valuable than what you are questioning them about.” “You need to always [be] cool, calm, and collected when there is an argument.” “confront with a smile.”

4.4 Diversity

These lessons centered on learning about and appreciating other’s differences and opinions. They included lessons about “being open,” “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes,” being more culturally aware, working with differences and the advantages of diversity. It included things like personalities, skills, communication styles, leadership
styles, student populations, perspectives, and valuing those differences. They also included valuing different opinions and using them to move the group forward.

Example: “learning to work with different kinds of minds.” “we both have different strengths. We’re similar, yet we’re different.” “Other people can do things differently, but just as well.” “People aren’t going to agree with you and how you decide to do things.” “It’s good to have a mix of different leadership personalities on the executive board…” “So, working with other people that definitely had different mindsets than myself, a different skillset, different qualities, that was challenging.”

4.5 Inspiring and motivating others as a leader

Getting buy in. Learning to encourage. Learning how to inspire and motivate other people to do something. Learning NOT to force, demand, or control people.

4.6 Other Lessons about Working with Others

These lessons centered on infrequently mentioned lessons learned about working with other people that did not fall into any of the other categories. These lessons included interacting and dealing with people, relationships with people in authority, working with peers, managing people, compatibility with different groups, collaboration, politics, and cynical lessons (e.g., being female matters).

5. Getting the Job Done

5.1 Developing task skills

These lessons revolved around the importance of and learning how to organization, planning, budgeting, and time management. Organization lessons included organizing self, projects, programs, etc. Lessons on time management included balancing
work and personal responsibilities, creating schedules (for self, others, projects, programs, etc.). Includes how to run meetings. Goals and goal setting.

Examples: “I learned how to coordinate a large scale event.” “Timing is important too.” “Learning to keep a schedule…” “I learned how to manage money well.” “Helped me learn to keep focused on one thing at a time rather than get overwhelmed.” “Don’t try to run two large events at once.” “I learned that being organized is important.”

5.2 Organization, School, Job, and Work Environment

These lessons focused on learning about the environment in which the leaders operated and how to do the job. These lessons included learning about the structure of the organization, the resources available to them in the organization, and the organization in general. It also included lessons about how to run an organization, regulations, policies, operations. It includes learning about the position, where the position is “placed” in the organization or hierarchy, and realizing there is more to the position than they thought.

Examples: “I didn’t realize the hierarchy in it.” “I learned a lot about the university”. “We have so many clubs and organizations on campus …”

6. Other

These were lessons that didn’t fit anywhere else and did not have enough of a common thread to create a category. They included lessons about transferable skills, very general lessons, among others.