

Article

# Predictors of Leadership Styles in Romanian Organizations

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**Abstract:** This article conducts a systematic analysis of the personality factors involved in the leadership style expressed by employees, as well as the evaluation of the professional performance expressed by them. Employee performance was measured using the behavioral anchor method, and personality structure using the NEOPIR –R questionnaire. Employee leadership style was measured using the LTT questionnaire. The study used a quantitative, correlational research design and included 202 participants, from state-owned and private companies. The results of the study demonstrate a direct influence of personality factors on leadership style and implicitly on professional performance.

**Keywords:** Personality, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Transformational leadership, Openness, Extraversion

**Classification-JEL:** M30, M31

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership, as it is perceived and enacted by employees, represents a key element for both individual outcomes and organizational functioning. The way leadership is exercised influences how subordinates are motivated and how organizational resources are mobilized to achieve strategic objectives. An organization that succeeds in aligning leadership with its mission becomes better positioned to foster innovation, adapt to environmental changes and enhance overall performance.

Leadership extends far beyond articulating visions, missions or formal agreements. It also involves the capacity to formulate an appropriate vision based on a solid understanding of the organization and its context, to operationalize that vision effectively, and to guide followers toward desired outcomes. This process requires leaders to offer the necessary resources, provide continuous feedback and monitor progress in a constructive and supportive manner.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

From the outset, it is important to emphasize that transformational and transactional leadership are not mutually exclusive. A leader may employ both styles, choosing between them depending on situational demands or organizational challenges. These leadership approaches are closely aligned with the values that leaders and followers share within the organizational culture.

Transactional leadership is grounded in a structured exchange relationship in which compliance and performance are stimulated through rewards or sanctions. Leaders establish clear expectations, compensate employees for meeting objectives and impose penalties when standards are not met, reflecting a “cost–benefit” logic typical of social exchange processes.

In contrast, transformational leadership relies on a leader’s ability to articulate a compelling vision and to inspire followers through charisma, motivation and personal example. This style is particularly effective during organizational change—such as restructuring or mergers—when established routines must shift. Transformational leaders act as role models, cultivate empathy, stimulate creativity and autonomy, and promote a collaborative climate.

Such leaders encourage employees to challenge existing assumptions, reinterpret problems and explore innovative solutions, thereby fostering creativity and openness to risk. By acknowledging individual strengths and providing tailored support,

they empower employees to develop their potential and pursue new challenges, exemplifying the principle of individualized consideration.

Transactional leaders, on the other hand, rely on well-defined goals and structured systems of rewards and penalties. While this can ensure clarity and consistency, it may limit personalized attention to employees’ needs. The transactional relationship is built on the premise that individuals complete tasks in exchange for rewards—such as bonuses— or to avoid negative consequences.

This raises the question of whether employees’ subjective perception of transactional exchanges can create long-term commitment or whether it is likely to erode over time. Transactional leaders are often viewed as reactive, as they tend to prioritize immediate goals and respond to situations as they occur, managing performance primarily through external incentives.

Research supports the significant contribution of transformational leadership to effective organizational change (Buil, Martinez & Matute, 2019). Numerous studies highlight that transformational leadership is particularly effective in fostering both in-role and extra-role behaviors among employees (MacKenzie et al., 2001; Buil et al., 2019; Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1999). Transformational leaders encourage employees to rise above self-interest, offer constructive feedback, and set high performance expectations. As a consequence, they strengthen employee performance and promote organizational citizenship behavior—forms of discretionary effort that benefit the organization (Fuller et al., 1996; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996).

## THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND PERSONALITY FACTORS

In this study, we argue that organizational identification—interpreted through employees’ personality profiles—represents a key pathway through which transformational leadership shapes job performance.

Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 34) describe identification as the sense of unity or belonging to a collective. Dutton et al. (1994, p. 239) offer a complementary view, defining it as the extent to which individuals align their self-concept with the characteristics they attribute to their organization.

When organizational identification is strong, employees internalize elements they perceive as central, distinctive and enduring about the organization, including the leader’s style.

Transformational leadership has been shown to enhance followers' identification with the group as well as relational identification, defined as "the extent to which an individual defines himself or herself in terms of the leader-subordinate relationship" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 32).

Work engagement is traditionally conceptualized as comprising three dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor reflects employees' experience of "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working" (p. 74). Dedication refers to feelings of meaning, enthusiasm and pride at work, while absorption captures a state of deep immersion in work activities, where time seems to pass quickly and detaching becomes difficult (Schaufeli et al., 2002, pp. 74–75). Prior research also indicates that work engagement mediates the effect of transformational leadership on job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Buil et al., 2019). Transformational leaders stimulate and motivate their teams by promoting intellectual growth, modeling strong values, and demonstrating individualized consideration for employees' needs (Bass, 1990).

The mediating dynamics discussed above are further shaped by employees' personality traits. The Big Five model—Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism—provides a widely validated structure for understanding personality across cultures and contexts. Openness captures curiosity and receptivity to novel ideas and experiences. Conscientiousness relates to planning, discipline and goal-oriented behavior. Extraversion reflects sociability and the degree to which individuals seek stimulation through social interactions. Agreeableness reflects tendencies toward cooperation and empathy. Neuroticism, often framed as emotional instability, pertains to how individuals manage stress and negative affect.

Personality traits can therefore influence both how leadership is perceived and how it affects job performance, particularly when interacting with mechanisms such as identification or engagement. Judge and Bono (2000) found strong links between personality and transformational leadership behaviors. Their study associated the Big Five traits with transformational tendencies: Extraversion, Agreeableness and Openness to Experience were initially found to positively predict transformational leadership, although Openness lost significance once other traits were controlled. Neuroticism and Conscientiousness did not show consistent relationships with transformational leadership. Further analyses indicated that specific facets of the Big Five traits were less predictive than their broader dimensions.

Transactional leadership is also shaped by personality characteristics, especially Extraversion and Conscientiousness. Extraversion is associated with more effective leadership in general, while Conscientiousness supports the structure, reliability and task orientation that define transactional leadership. Neuroticism appears less directly connected.

Ultimately, achieving professional performance requires Leaders - transformational or transactional - to monitor both internal and external conditions, articulate strategic and operational goals, and offer constructive performance feedback (Antonakis & House, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample and data collection

To test the proposed hypotheses, we undertook an empirical study with employees from Romanian industry and local administration. The population was composed of 204 employees; in the industrial sector, the population is made up of production managers, quality managers, general managers and engineers in administrative positions. For local administration, there were positions of local councilors, mayors, and other local council employees in administrative positions.

The research sample was made up of employees in equal proportion from two sectors: the administrative sector and the industrial sector.

### Measures

Employee performance was measured using the behavioral anchor method, (an adapted version of the Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales -BARS method, made by Horia Pitariu in 2006) and personality structure using the NEOPI - R questionnaire. Employee leadership style was measured using the LTT questionnaire.

The NEO PI- R is the most widely used personality questionnaire in modern psychology, assessing the classic constructs of the Big Five model. The NEOPI-R can be considered the standard for what is called the canonical Big Five model worldwide. The instrument was developed by Paul Costa and Robert R. McCrae in 1992 and standardized on Romanian population in 2009. The Romanian normative sample of NEOPI- R is representative and has a volume of 2200 people, of which 1100 are women and 1100 are men. The minimum age in this sample is 14 years old, and the maximum age is 62 years old ( $m=30.30$ ,  $SD=11.61$ ).

The research instruments were applied after working hours or during break hours. After the purpose of the study was explained, the respondents were asked to

answer the questions bearing in mind the company / organization where they worked; they were assured of anonymity.

The sample size was determined using G\*Power 3.1, a recognized tool for calculating statistical power in quantitative research. In accordance with the specifics of the correlational design and the objective of study, a multiple regression analysis was chosen.

## RESULTS

The questionnaire responses were collected in a digital format and downloaded into an Excel database, then processed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 26. Thus, the correlation method was used to establish the significant relationships between the variables; also, it was used inferential statistical methods, MANOVA, ANCOVA and multiple regression, to identify significant predictors of professional performance.

H1. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are significant predictors for professional performance.

H2. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are significant predictors for transformational leadership style.

H3. Extraversion and Conscientiousness are significant predictors for transactional leadership style.

H4. Openness and Extraversion are significant predictors for transformational leadership style.

The findings indicate a strong positive association between Openness and Extraversion ( $r = .621^{**}$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that individuals scoring high on Openness are also more inclined to display thoughts, behaviors and emotional responses typically associated with extraverted tendencies.

This notable relationship prompted a deeper examination of how the facets of Extraversion relate to Openness in order to determine which components of Extraversion are most strongly connected to this personality dimension.

Although there is a significant correlation between the two factors, the data did not show that the two factors can be significant predictors for professional performance, instead the data demonstrate a significant cumulative effect (see table no.1) of the two factors on leadership style ( $F = 4.180$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.215$ ). So, this result supports hypothesis no. 4. ( $\beta = 0.219$ ; sig. 0.000).

Extraversion and Conscientiousness correlate positively with transactional leadership, but the Pearson coefficient values are quite small for both variables, which does not allow us to apply the linear

regression method (see table no. 2). Therefore, the data do not support hypothesis no 3.

Agreeableness ( $\beta = 0.019$ ; sig. 0.024), Conscientiousness ( $\beta = 0.231$ ; sig. 0.001) and Neuroticism ( $\beta = -1.198$ ; sig. 0.044). significantly correlate with professional performance and are at the same time predictors for it (see table no. 3). Therefore, the results support the hypothesis no.1.

The data also show strong, positive correlations between Agreeableness ( $r = 0.81$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Conscientiousness ( $r = 0.77$ ;  $p < .05$ ), and both leadership styles: transactional and transformational; therefore, the hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed.

Leaders from administrative organizations perceive themselves as transformational leaders, agents of change, eager to attract as many followers as possible, concerned with their own image and desire for change. To this perception, the good evaluation of supporters in terms of professional performance is added. According to the collected data, among local councilors, the perception of leadership style is positive, in most cases, mayors being associated with characteristics from behavioral anchors such as: "courageous", "eager for change", "good managers", "close to the team"; the idea of "profit", "earning", "attracting funds/money/resources for the commune" are aspects of leadership style that are rarely mentioned in the opinion of supporters - public councilors, although mayors are still perceived as performing leaders.

For leaders from industry, the perception of supporters is mainly linked to terms such as: "objectives", "production", "production plan", "production norms", the affective relationship with formal leaders being more distant, even neutral from an affective point of view. Although the company's turnover and profit is much higher than the earnings and investments made in administrative organizations, these leaders are paradoxically perceived as being less performing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present research attempts to contribute to the understanding of how personality traits can influence the perception of leadership in the organizational environment. The results indicated the existence of significant links between personality dimensions, self-perception of leadership style and professional performance.

In public administration organizations, transformational leadership is predominant, unlike the group of employees from industry companies where transactional leadership is predominant. Mayors, deputy mayors and local councilors

evaluate themselves more as transformational leaders, they perceive themselves as agents of change, with strong emotional connections between themselves and their supporters. Some of them are willing to take personal risks and use impression management to strengthen their own image (image promotion meetings, slogans, argumentative speeches, promoting the managerial program among citizens, etc.). On the other hand, industrial employees tend to develop a more transactional leadership style, characterized by maintaining stability and achieving organizational objectives. This information is consistent with the company's specifics of conducting teambuilding sessions on management and organization of production process as well as sessions on the implementation and management of production quality procedures. Both leadership styles are significantly correlated with the 5 primary personality factors.

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**Table no.1**

Predictors of leadership style

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Leadership style

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	46.649 <sup>a</sup>	31	2.184	4.685	.580	.516
Intercept	184.257	1	184.257	684.709	.000	.705
Openness	.031	1	.031	4.061	.001	.189
Extraversion	17.333	18	.963	4.187	.010	.335
Openness * Extraversion	9.406	12	.784	4.180	.046	.215
Error	34.342	78	.440			
Total	515.000	110				
Corrected Total	70.991	109				

a. R Squared = .516 (Adjusted R Squared = .324)

**Table no.2**

Predictors of Transactional Leadership

**Correlations**

		Transactional Leadership	Conscientiousness	Extraversion
Transactional Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.614	.372
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041	.092
	N	204	204	204
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.614	1	-.209*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041		.029
	N	204	204	204
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.372	-.209*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.092	.029	
	N	204	204	204

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table no. 3**

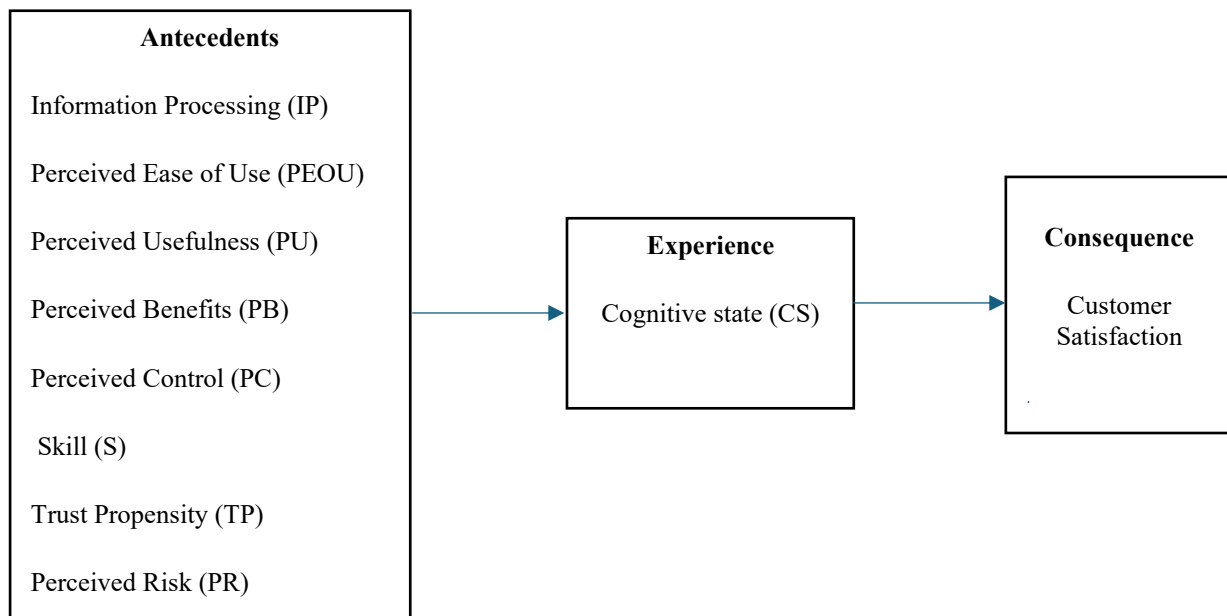
Predictors of professional performance

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.640	.822		1.994	.049
	Agreeableness	.008	.028	.019	.096	.024
	Conscientiousness	.042	.030	.231	1.394	.00
	Neuroticism	-.023	.019	-.121	-1.198	.044

a. Dependent Variable: Professional performance

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**Figure 1**  
Research model  
*Adopted from Rose et al. (2011).*