

# Integrating the Big Five Personality Traits with Leadership Styles: Utilising Talent Pooling for Leader Selection in Malaysian Polytechnics and Community Colleges

Muhamad Naim Abdul Halim<sup>1</sup>, Faudzi bin Muhammad<sup>1</sup>, Siti Aminah binti Yusuf<sup>2</sup>, Aini Azeqa Ma'rof<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Polytechnic Education and Community College, Ministry of Higher Education, 62100 Putrajaya, MALAYSIA, <sup>2</sup>Nilai Polytechnic, 71760 Bandar Enstek, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA, <sup>3</sup>Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA, <sup>4</sup>Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA  
Email: azeqa@upm.edu.my

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## Abstract

The talent pool of today's educational institutions specifically polytechnics and community colleges face an evolving landscape of leadership demands. This paper explores the pivotal role of personality tests based on the Big Five Personality model in enhancing leadership selection processes. The study underscores a distinctive arrangement of personality traits predisposing individuals to either strategic (EOANC) or operational (OEANC) leadership styles. Strategic leaders, characterized by Extraversion and Openness, are primed for roles that require visionary thinking and stakeholder engagement. In contrast, operational leaders, with a predilection for Openness balanced with other traits, are aptly suited for roles demanding meticulous planning and execution. By leveraging these insights, institutions can foster a leadership cadre that aligns seamlessly with their unique challenges and objectives. Furthermore, the paper recommends customizing personality tests for educational leadership, ensuring a harmonious balance between personality insights and practical expertise, periodically reviewing the tests' efficacy and investing in post-selection training. Ethical and transparent implementation of these tests further augments their efficacy and foster trust within the academic community. In conclusion, incorporating tailored personality tests in leadership selection can empower polytechnics and community colleges to navigate the complexities of modern education which further driving sustained institutional excellence.

**Keywords:** Big Five Personality, Leadership Styles, Talent Pool, Polytechnic and Community College, Leader Selection

## **Introduction**

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influences the direction, growth, and performance of organisations worldwide (Northouse, 2018). According to Ismail et al (2011), in the context of educational institutions particularly Malaysian community and polytechnic colleges, effective leadership is essential for advancing both academic and administrative excellence. As these institutions stand at the crossroads of shaping the next generation of professionals, it is crucial that they choose the right leaders. Consequently, the personality attributes of prospective leaders become an essential factor to consider.

The Big Five Personality traits — Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism — have garnered significant interest in the fields of psychology and organisational behaviour (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Numerous studies (Judge et al., 2002) have investigated the relationship between these traits and numerous leadership styles. Understanding how the Big Five align with strategic and operational leadership styles, particularly in the cultural and institutional context of Malaysia, remains a void in the literature (Omar et al., 2020).

Strategic leaders frequently see the big picture that establish long-term objectives and aligning resources with these objectives (Ireland & Webb, 2007). Their vision functions as the organization's compass will further guide it towards its future goals. In contrast, operational leaders concentrate on daily duties which ensure that the organization's immediate requirements are met efficiently and effectively (Day, 2000). Given the unique characteristics of these leadership styles, it is essential to identify the personality traits that may predispose a person to one style over another.

This article thus aims to map the Big Five Personality traits to strategic and operational leadership styles that will shed light on the potential alignment or mismatch between personality types and leadership tendencies. This comprehension will provide valuable guidance for the recruitment and selection processes of community and polytechnic college staff in Malaysia particularly among the headquarters staff to ensure that the institutions are managed by individuals best suited to their leadership requirements.

## **Talent Pooling Initiative: The New Wave of Leadership Selection**

Organisations have begun to shift from traditional recruitment processes to proactive talent pooling initiatives in this era of dynamic business environments and an ever-changing workforce. A talent pool is essentially a database of internal and external potential candidates that can be accessed whenever a vacancy arises, particularly for leadership positions. By consistently cultivating relationships with these high-potential individuals, businesses ensure a future supply of leadership talent. According to a 2019 report by LinkedIn (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019), 87% of talent professionals and recruiting managers believe that a proactive recruitment strategy (such as talent pooling) is more cost-effective and efficient than the reactive approach of filling positions as they become vacant.

This proactive recruitment strategy contrasts with traditional reactive recruiting processes which typically begin only when a position becomes vacant (Kekäle, 2018). Reactive hiring can be fraught with time constraints that results in hasty decisions and potential misalignment between the capabilities of leaders and the requirements of the organisation. In contrast, talent aggregation affords organisations the luxury of time. They can engage with potential

leaders, cultivate relationships, and even provide training or mentoring programmes to prepare candidates for future leadership roles (Day & Schoemaker, 2019).

In addition to addressing the urgency of recruiting, talent pooling is intrinsically linked to effective talent management strategies. Organisations can ensure that the members of their talent pools are continuously developed, trained, and engaged which aligned to their skills and aspirations with the company's long-term vision. Gallardo-Gallardo and Collings (2021) in their studies found that organisations with well-structured talent management programmes, which included talent pooling, had a 29% greater chance of retaining top talent and a significant increase in employee performance. As the business environment continues to evolve, the ability to rapidly access and mobilise a leadership talent pool may be the determining factor for future organisational success.

### **The Role of Personality Testing in Identifying Leadership Potential**

Over the years, personality assessment has gained widespread acceptance in a variety of organisational settings. One of its most important applications is in leadership development. Organisations and institutions have acknowledged the significance of aligning leadership styles with organisational culture and objectives. According to Judge et al (2002), personality traits can accurately predict the emergence and effectiveness of leadership which justifies the use of personality tests in leadership assessments.

The Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, which includes characteristics such as Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, functions as a foundational framework for numerous personality assessments. According to Barrick, Mount, and Judge's (2001) research, extraversion and conscientiousness are consistently associated with leadership potential. Understanding these correlations enables organisations to identify individuals who possess the innate characteristics of effective leadership. Although personality assessments provide insightful information, they are not without limitations. Positively, they can provide objective and consistent measurements that can be contrasted across a large candidate pool (Salgado, 2003). In addition, personality assessments can be less subject to bias than subjective evaluations such as interviews. However, a reliance on these tests to the exclusion of other crucial factors such as experience, abilities, and situational fit can be detrimental. In evaluating leadership potential, Furnham (2017) cautions against viewing personality assessments as the sole determinant, instead emphasising a holistic approach.

In a dynamic organisational environment, identifying leadership potential efficiently is crucial. Based on rigorous academic research, personality assessments provide a valuable resource for this endeavour. However, the best results are obtained when they are used in conjunction with other assessment methods to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the leadership potential of an individual. As the discipline of organisational psychology develops, it is anticipated that personality assessments will become even more nuanced, thereby increasing their usefulness in identifying leaders.

### **The Role of Characteristics: Strategic versus Operational Leadership**

The distinction between strategic and operational leadership styles stands out prominently within the intricate fabric of organisational structures. Each contributes to a balanced dynamic that is essential for the growth of institutions. Anderson and Anderson (2010) cast light on strategic leaders by comparing them to navigators who chart the course of the organisation. They shape the future by cultivating an organisational culture consistent with long-term visions and objectives. This vision-forward approach that marked by innovation and

adaptability, renders them indispensable in a constantly changing corporate environment (Davies & Davies, 2004). According to Hughes et al (2013), on the opposite extreme of this spectrum, operational leaders serve as the organization's anchors. They operate in the present, optimising day-to-day operations, assuring efficiency, and meeting short-term benchmarks on a consistent basis. The structured nature of operational leadership requires a keen attention to detail, pragmatism, and a risk-averse operating style.

The underlying influence of inherent personality traits is a crucial aspect of this dichotomy in leadership. According to McCrae and Costa (2017), the widely acknowledged Big Five personality framework divides personality into five distinct dimensions. Recent research, such as that conducted by Antonakis and Day (2018), indicates a correlation between these characteristics and leadership potential. For instance, leaders who score highly on 'Openness to Experience' may be better suited for innovative strategic roles, whereas those who exemplify 'Conscientiousness' may thrive in the methodical domain of operational leadership. Understanding the relationship between leadership styles and innate personality traits is crucial for the success of an organisation. By utilising this knowledge, institutions can facilitate optimal leadership placements, nurturing productive and harmonious environments, thereby ensuring sustainable growth and advancement (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

### **The Personality Test Order for Determining Leadership Style: Strategic or Operational**

The appraisal of personality as a predictor of leadership style is increasingly recognised as a tool for guiding organisational selection and development processes (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). The Big Five Personality model has long been used as a metric to assess and predict various workplace outcomes, including leadership effectiveness. According to DeRue et al (2011) in recognition of the diversity of leadership styles, scholars have increasingly sought to comprehend how the arrangement of these characteristics influences the propensity towards strategic or operational leadership.

#### ***Strategic Leadership Style and EOANC***

EOANC (Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Conscientiousness) is the arrangement of the Big Five personality traits for strategic leadership whereby a style that emphasises long-term vision, innovation, and resource alignment with overarching objectives. Extraversion is a trait associated with assertiveness, vitality, and the ability to influence large groups (Judge et al., 2002). Their outgoing and assertive nature allows them to articulate visions convincingly, mobilise teams, and navigate the complexities of external stakeholder relationships (Bono & Judge, 2004). The significance of openness suggests that these leaders value innovation, novel approaches, and adaptability (Zhang & Arvey, 2009), which is consistent with their fondness for innovation, adaptability to change, and openness to new ideas. While agreeableness and neuroticism suggest the importance of cooperative interactions and emotional resilience, respectively, these traits also indicate the significance of emotional resilience. In contrast, the diminished emphasis on conscientiousness indicates a flexibility that enables strategic leaders to adapt to shifting environments, even if it means deviating from carefully crafted plans (DeRue et al., 2011). This also suggests that strategic leaders may prioritise adaptability over strict plan adherence.

#### ***Operational Leadership Style and OEANC***

In contrast, operational leadership focuses on the effective execution of daily tasks, resource management, and immediate organisational requirements (Jones & Hill, 2022). The prominence of Openness in the OEANC configuration for operational executives highlights

their adaptability in day-to-day operations and problem-solving. While openness and extraversion continue to be crucial, as they indicate a person's ability to communicate effectively and ensure that daily tasks are aligned with the organization's larger objectives, they are not sufficient. In addition, Agreeableness and Neuroticism are essential that highlight the significance of teamwork and emotional stability in day-to-day management. The position of conscientiousness suggests that although operational leaders value orderliness, they may not be excessively rigid that allows for operational flexibility. In contrast, operational leaders place a heavy emphasis on conscientiousness, an attribute associated with dependability, organisation, and a meticulous approach to tasks (Dudley et al., 2006). This indicates that operational leaders may flourish at ensuring that routine tasks are completed to high standards and processes are adhered to consistently.

Using the Big Five to determine leadership style requires a robust personality evaluation mechanism. To ensure their efficacy, such assessments should be rigorous, objective, and validated against diverse population samples (Salgado, 2003). It is also important to note that while personality traits provide valuable insights, they are only one of a constellation of factors, including experience, education, and situational contexts that determine leadership effectiveness. Therefore, the arrangement of the Big Five characteristics offers organisations seeking to align leadership selection with strategic or operational requirements a promising path forward. By recognising and capitalising on these personality configurations, organisations can make more informed decisions regarding leadership development and selection.

### **Implications of Personality Tests in Leadership Selection**

As leaders play a fundamental role in driving performance, culture, and strategic direction, the recruitment and selection of leaders is a crucial decision for organisations (Aguinis, 2019). In this context, personality tests based on the Big Five Personality model have emerged as valuable tools for identifying and matching leadership candidates with roles best fitted to their inherent characteristics (Barrick & Mount, 2018). Organisations seeking to optimise their leadership selection procedures must understand the implications of these tests.

Personality tests offer a scientifically supported method for predicting a candidate's behaviour, attitudes, and organisational compatibility (Salgado et al., 2020). Given the configuration of traits that may predispose individuals to strategic (EOANC) or operational (OEANC) leadership, these tests provide granular insights that go beyond qualifications and prior experiences. A person with a strong tendency towards Extraversion and Openness, for instance, may be better suited for roles requiring strategic vision and stakeholder engagement, whereas someone with balanced scores on the other traits may excel in operational roles (DeRue et al., 2011).

These evaluations are also essential for ensuring organisational compatibility and cohesion. Leaders selected on the basis of a congruence between their personality traits and the organization's values, culture, and leadership requirements are more likely to experience greater job satisfaction, demonstrate greater commitment, and produce enhanced performance outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This alignment can reduce turnover costs, foster team cohesion, and promote the long-term success of an organisation.

In addition, the objective nature of personality tests can help eliminate potential biases during the hiring process. Standardised tests ensure that candidates are evaluated based on consistent, pertinent criteria (Rivera, 2019). This not only increases the impartiality of the selection process, but also the likelihood of selecting the most qualified leader for the

position. Overall, the use of personality tests in the selection of executives has far-reaching implications for organisations. It provides a nuanced, evidence-based strategy for identifying the leaders most suited to strategic or operational roles, ensuring alignment with organisational requirements and nurturing an environment conducive to growth and success.

### **Incorporating Personality Tests in Leadership Selection for Polytechnics and Community Colleges: Suggestions and Recommendations**

Educational institutions, in particular polytechnics and community colleges, have distinctive leadership requirements. Bolman and Gallos (2011) state that the selection of leaders for these institutions necessitates a nuanced approach due to the diversity of the student body, the combination of academic and vocational courses, and the need for community engagement. Incorporating personality tests into the selection procedure can provide a thorough understanding of candidates that ensure alignment with the institution's values, requirements, and goals.

It is possible that generic personality tests do not adequately convey the complexities of administrative or educational leadership. Institutions should consider collaborating with industrial-organizational psychologists to develop or select tests that emphasise traits essential for educational leadership, such as agreeableness for fostering a collaborative environment and openness for curriculum innovation (Hogan & Holland, 2003). By customising the examinations, institutions are better able to identify candidates whose personalities correspond with the distinctive challenges and opportunities presented by polytechnics and community colleges.

Although personality assessments provide invaluable insight into a candidate's dispositions, they should be used in conjunction with other selection criteria, such as academic credentials, teaching experience, and administrative achievements (Bass & Bass, 2008). A candidate may have high scores on strategic attributes such as extraversion and openness, but lack practical experience with vocational education. Such exhaustive assessments ensure that the selected leaders possess both the inherent characteristics and the practical knowledge necessary to excel in their roles.

Periodically, the predictive validity of personality tests in terms of effective leadership outcomes should be evaluated (Pulakos, 2005). Institutions should maintain a feedback loop to collect information on the efficacy of leaders chosen through this process. This iterative approach can be used to fine-tune the selection process over time, ensuring that it remains responsive to the changing requirements of the educational setting.

Even with the insights obtained from personality tests, leadership development is an ongoing process (Day, 2011). Once leaders have been chosen, institutions should invest in training programmes that address any potential deficiencies identified during the selection process. If a candidate demonstrates strong strategic traits but scores lower on agreeableness, they may benefit from seminars on teamwork and conflict resolution.

Lastly, the incorporation of personality tests into the hiring procedure must be conducted in a transparent and ethical manner. Candidates should be apprised of the purpose of the examination, and there should be clear guidelines to protect the confidentiality of their data (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). By upholding ethical standards, institutions can enhance the confidence of prospective leaders and the academic community as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Within the dynamic realm of educational leadership, particularly in the context of polytechnics and community colleges, the strategic incorporation of personality assessments

has emerged as a potent mechanism for optimising the process of leadership identification and selection. Grounded in the framework of the Big Five Personality model, these assessments offer significant value by providing valuable insights about a candidate's inclination towards strategic or operational positions. Furthermore, it establishes a scientific foundation for aligning inherent traits with the requirements of the organisation. The distinction between strategic leaders, who are prepared for creative ideas, and operational leaders, who excel at rigorous execution, highlights the intricate leadership demands in the current educational landscape.

In order to fully leverage the capabilities of this pool of talent, organisations must embrace a comprehensive and diverse strategy. In order to enhance the efficacy of leadership selection, institutions can use several strategies. These include tailoring tests to align with the specific requirements of educational leadership, integrating practical expertise into the assessment process, conducting regular reviews to ensure the continued relevance of the selection criteria, and placing emphasis on post-selection training. Moreover, a dedication to ethical and open execution cultivates confidence which will guarantee that the procedure is both efficient and held in high regard. In conclusion, the careful incorporation of personality assessments into the process of selecting leaders holds the potential to ensure that educational institutions are led by individuals who possess the most suitable combination of inherent qualities and practical knowledge to effectively address the complexities and prospects of contemporary education.

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