

Followership and the Relationship Between Kelley's Followership Styles and the Big Five Factor Model of Personality

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This research determined the relationship between an individual's personality traits and followership characteristics. Using Kelley's Followership Questionnaire, which measures active engagement and independent thinking, and the Mini-International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) personality test, which measures Big Five personality levels of extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, we collected data from 238 full-time working adults in the United States. The data indicates a positive relationship between the personality characteristics of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience with the followership attributes of active engagement and independent thinking. Neuroticism was negatively correlated to both active engagement and independent thinking.

Keywords: Kelley's Followership Questionnaire (KFQ), Big Five Personality Traits IPIP personality test

INTRODUCTION

Many prominent leadership theories confirm a correlation with the personalities of the leader (cf. Mushonga & Torrance, 2008; Politis & Politis, 2012; Mihalcea, 2014; Judge and Bono, 2000). Studies on followers and followership, however, have been minimal (Malakyan, 2014), despite McCallum (2013) concluding, "How well the followers follow is probably just as important to enterprise success as how well the leaders lead" (para. 5). Since followers make up the greatest majority of the workforce (Adair, 2008) and contribute an estimated 80% of the organization's success (Kelley, 1992), this lack of knowledge may impact not just the majority of the organization's workers but the success of the organization as well. This study attempted to gain a greater understanding of individuals in a follower role through a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis between one's personality as defined by the Five Factor Model and one's followership characteristics as defined by the Kelly Followership Questionnaire (Kelley, 1992).

According to Barrick, Parks, and Mount (2005), “Personality traits refer to characteristic, enduring patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that are stable over time and explain people’s behavior across different situations” (p. 745). In organizational life this may influence differences in follower styles, which Kelly (1988) classified in five categories ranging from *effective followers* to *sheep*. The purpose of this study was to determine if personality can predict the type of follower an individual will be. Since the Big Five personality styles of extraversion (E), neuroticism (N), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O) have been universally tested, we set out to determine if a high or low score in a particular area of one’s personality is related to the key followership characteristics of active engagement (AE) and independent thinking (IT) described in Kelley’s (1988) followership classifications.

Mushonga and Torrance (2008) conducted a quantitative study to see if there is a correlation between Kelley’s (1992) classification and an individual’s personality on college students in the southeast region of the United States. Although the researchers found some interesting correlations, the results were not conclusive; the authors concluded that the next step in the research process should be on working individuals, as opposed to students. This study provides an answer to that call.

KELLEY’S FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES

According to Kelley (1992), understanding why a person decides to be a follower is critical to understanding followership. This is important in both a work-type setting, where one is a subordinate of another person based on hierarchical structure, or in a non-work setting, where someone identifies as a follower of a particular individual, despite the fact that there is no required reporting structure (Mohamadzadeh, Mortazavi, Lagzian, & Rahimnia, 2015). Kelley stated that a person’s rationale for being a follower is based on (a) one’s personal goals/desired relationship, and (b) one’s desire to transform oneself or to express oneself.

As a result of these driving factors, Kelley (1992) identified seven paths to followership: the *apprentice*, the *disciple*, the *mentee*, the *comrade*, the *loyalist*, the *dreamer*, and *lifeway*. The first three are undertaken in an effort to help transform oneself. Apprentices look to be leaders in the future but know they need to gain more knowledge and experience before assuming a leadership role. Disciples want to learn from another individual but do so to emulate and bond with the leader, while the mentee looks to another to gain a level of personal maturation. The remaining four paths are based on a follower’s desire to express himself or herself. The comrade faces a situation where the effort being undertaken requires more than one individual, such as a sports team, or where individuals feel there is a greater chance of success if they bond together, such as a student study group. A loyalist’s decision to follow is based on personal loyalty to the leader, whereas a dreamer’s reason for following is based on an idea or cause, rather than the leader as an individual. Lastly, those who see following as the most rewarding way of life and as a way of serving are labeled lifeway: “These people follow out of personal preference. For them, following is compatible with their personality” (Kelly, 1992, p. 78).

Kelley (1988) categorized followers based on two distinct factors: level of independent/ critical thinking and active/passive orientation. Placing these variables along two intersecting axes, Kelley classified followers into four distinct categories, with a fifth middle-of-the-road category. Kelley (1992) termed these follower types as *alienated followers*, *sheep*, *conformists*, *pragmatists*, and *exemplary followers*. Alienated followers, those with high independent/critical thinking skills and a passive orientation, represent 15-25% percent of followers. Many were once exemplary followers, but “someone, sometime, something turned them off, resulting in withdrawal [and they now] see themselves as victims who unfairly got the short end of the stick” (p. 100). Conformists (20%-30% of the population) score high on active engagement but low on independent thinking. They believe the various levels of authority are in place for a reason; as a result, a person in power is due obedience and respect and should not be questioned.

The largest group, 25% to 35% of the population, are middle-of-the-road pragmatists. This population is known for their low risk tolerance, constantly covering their decisions with a paper trail that shows someone else made the decision, thus creating a survival mentality. Sheep comprise the smallest group -

only 5% to 10% of followers; they are passive and lack independent/critical thinking skills. These followers look to the leader to make all the decisions and do not complete tasks beyond what was assigned.

The last group, those with active personality styles and high independent/critical thinking skills, Kelley (1992) called *exemplary followers*. These individuals balance their high level of independent/critical thinking with their active personality. They create added value to their work, are passionately committed, understand how the work they do fits into the bigger picture of the organization, and have or acquire the skills needed to complete their job at the highest level. This combination of active personality and independent thinking along with supervisory support leads to greater job satisfaction (Jin, McDonald, & Park, 2016).

BIG FIVE FACTOR MODEL OF PERSONALITY

The basic purpose of personality psychology is “to account for the organization of action, thought, and experience in the life of each person” (Funder & Colvin, 1991, p. 773). Although psychologists have developed hundreds of measurement tools, McCrae and Costa (1991) noted the “emerging consensus on the value of the Five-Factor Model (FFM or ‘Big Five’) as a comprehensive taxonomy of personality traits” (p. 367). Given the fact that the FFM provides a “more complete view of personality traits than earlier theories” (Neck et al., 2017, p. 46), it is widely accepted in academia and used in academic research as the best representation of trait structure (McCrae & Costa, 1997). This model is important since the characteristics being studied can be grouped into meaningful categories, it is a common framework for doing research, and it covers virtually all the various personality spaces (Smith & Canger, 2004).

The five dimensions of the FFM are *extraversion*, *neuroticism*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, and *openness to experience*; each trait is scored from low to high (McCrae & Costa, 1991). *Extraversion* describes an individual who is warm, friendly, outgoing, and sociable with positive emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Individuals who score high in extraversion tend to be happier in their jobs and with life in general (Robbins & Judge, 2016) and are more sociable than those scoring low in this area (George & Jones, 2012). This high level of social skills and assertiveness individuals step up and assume a leadership role when needed (Mushonga & Torrance, 2008). Individuals with low extraversion can be seen as cold, distant, formal, and even unenthusiastic (McCrae & Costa, 1991).

Neuroticism describes an individual who is anxious, fearful, tense, nervous, defensive, and moody (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Although the term *neurotic* is portrayed negatively in the media and popular press, all individuals process some level of neuroticism (George & Jones, 2012). Individuals with a high level of neuroticism will have poorer job performance because they become preoccupied with the feelings associated with turning ordinary situations into threatening and hopelessly overwhelming situations (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017). The low end of the neuroticism scale can be conversely described as emotional stability. Politis and Politis (2012) determined that neuroticism was negatively related to leadership descriptors such as integrity, altruism, team building, and goal setting.

Agreeableness describes someone who is friendly, kind, forgiving, trusting, and peaceful (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Individuals who score high on agreeableness are better liked, perform better, and have lower levels of deviant behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2016). Those who score low on this trait tend to be antagonistic, unsympathetic, uncooperative, and rude (George & Jones, 2012). Mushonga and Torrance (2008) determined that agreeableness is associated with actively engaged followers as they are willing to take on additional tasks for the good of the organization.

Conscientiousness describes an individual as self-confident, thorough, resourceful, organized, and efficient (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Individuals with a high score in this category are reliable, while individuals with low levels of conscientiousness are easily distracted, disorganized, and unreliable (Robbins & Judge, 2016). In a meta-analysis, Barrick and Mount (1991) found conscientiousness to be a good predictor of job performance.

The final trait, *openness to experience*, describes an individual as imaginative, adventurous, optimistic, idealistic, curious, and insightful (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Individuals high in openness to experience have increased learning capabilities, are more open to change (Robbins & Judge, 2016), and are willing to take on additional risks (George & Jones, 2012). Openness to experience has also been shown to enhance integrity, caring for others, empowering others, team building, and goal setting (Politis & Politis, 2012). Individuals with low scores in this area prefer activities that are familiar and routine, based on facts and values that are conforming (McCrae & Costa, 1991).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the following research questions, we hypothesized a correlation between each of the FFM traits and Kelly's (1992) two distinct factors of followership – level of independent/ critical thinking and active/passive orientation – as follows:

RQ₁: What is the relationship between the personality trait of extraversion and actively engaged followers?

H₁: Extraversion is correlated with active engagement.

RQ₂: What is the relationship between the personality trait of extraversion and independent and critical thinking followers?

H₂: Extraversion is correlated with independent thinking.

RQ₃: What is the relationship between the personality trait of neuroticism and actively engaged followers?

H₃: Neuroticism is correlated with active engagement.

RQ₄: What is the relationship between the personality trait of neuroticism and independent and critical thinking followers?

H₄: Neuroticism is correlated with independent thinking.

RQ₅: What is the relationship between the personality trait of agreeableness and actively engaged followers?

H₅: Agreeableness is correlated with active engagement.

RQ₆: What is the relationship between the personality trait of agreeableness and independent and critical thinking followers?

H₆: Agreeableness is correlated with independent thinking.

RQ₇: What is the relationship between the personality trait of conscientiousness and actively engaged followers?

H₇: Conscientiousness is correlated with active engagement.

RQ₈: What is the relationship between the personality trait of conscientiousness and independent and critical thinking followers?

H₈: Conscientiousness is correlated with independent thinking.

RQ₉: What is the relationship between the personality trait of openness to experience and actively engaged followers?

H₉: Openness to experience is correlated with active engagement.

RQ₁₀: *What is the relationship between the personality trait of openness to experience and independent and critical thinking followers?*

H₁₀: *Openness to experience is correlated with independent thinking.*

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since the purpose of the research was to determine the level of relationship between the two independent criteria of followership and the various categories of one's personality, a quantitative, nonexperimental survey using a cross-section of individuals was chosen. The degree to which two variables show interrelationship is determined through correlation analysis (Williams & Monge, 2001). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) can help "assesses the degree that quantitative variables are linearly related in a sample. Each individual or case must have scores on two quantitative variables" (Green & Salkind, 2014, p.232).

Since a validated instrument existed that could be used to determine an individual's quantitative independent thinking and active engagement score, and a validated instrument existed that could be used to determine a quantitative personality score for extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1991), designing a research study using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was a logical choice to determine the relationship between the variables. In addition, demographic variables were included in the analysis to help gain a more in-depth understanding of potential influencers within the followership-personality relationship being analyzed.

Participants

Participants for the study were obtained through an online survey organization—SurveyMonkey®. Using this varied population for participants ensured a cross-section of working adults from various levels within various organizations within various industries. This wide variety of individuals helped minimize the effect a particular leader or culture could have on a group of participants. Based on a recommendation by Mushonga and Torrance (2008), this population sample was a larger, diverse, nonstudent sample from multiple intuitions.

To determine the number of surveys to obtain, GPower3.0.10 sample size calculator was used. Based on a two-tailed test, a confidence level of 95%, a confidence interval of 5%, and an effect size of .50, the total number of completed surveys needed was determined to be 214. The effect size of .50 is used in behavioral sciences when the effect is considered to be large versus .30 for medium and .10 for small (Green & Salkind, 2014). Using the SurveyMonkey® system allowed for the purchase of the proper required number of completed surveys, rather than sending surveys in anticipation of a particular percentage of completed surveys being returned. The only two required parameters used in the gathering of completed surveys were that the individual live within the United States and that the individual be employed full time. Having only two requirements helped ensure a wider, more diverse audience.

Instrumentation

The survey consisted of three components: a series of questions designed to determine the demographic breakdown of the participants, Kelley's (1992) Followership Questionnaire (KFQ), and the Mini-IPIP FFM measure (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006). The demographic breakdown was then used to compare the sample population to the population as a whole. Questions to determine gender, age, race, level within an organization, and length of time employed allowed the results of this study to be compared with the original study of college students (Mushonga & Torrance, 2008).

The second component of the survey was comprised of questions from the KFQ, which Kelley (1992) developed to help followers identify their followership type, followership strengths, and any areas needing improvement. The KFQ consists of 20 questions, 10 for each of the two qualities of critical thinking and level of engagement. The resultant two summation scores suggested the participant's type of preferred follower behavior and provided a basis for our correlation study. This questionnaire was chosen

for a number of reasons, the first one because Kelley is considered to be “the most prominent scholar in bringing the theory of followership into leadership literature” (Jin et al., 2016, p. 221). Second, the KFQ has been utilized in over a dozen studies to study follower types, relationships between follower types and behavioral/psychological traits, as well as relationships between follower types and organizational outcomes (Ligon, 2016). Although some researchers have questioned the validity of the KFQ (cf. Blanchard, Welbourne, Gilmore, and Bullock, 2009; Ligon, 2016), the fact that no other instrument has been developed and tested, and the fact that the KFQ was utilized in a correlation test with the Big Five factor model of personality with college students (Mushonga & Torrance, 2008), led us to the conclusion that the KFQ was the best option to use for the current research given that the need to move the study of followership forward is too critical to wait.

The Mini-IPIP is based on the original 50-item International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) FFM measure (Goldberg, 1999). The scale consists of four items in the same five distinct personality categories as the original instrument. The instrument is a series of short statements (e.g., “Am the life of the party” or “Get upset easily”), which are answered using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*), indicating how well the statement describes the participant. After conducting a series of validity studies, Donnellan et al. (2006) concluded, “The Mini-IPIP scales showed a comparable pattern of convergent, discriminant, and criterion-related validity (studies 2-5) with other Big Five measures [and] the Mini-IPIP is a psychometrically acceptable and practically useful short measure of the Big Five factors of personality” (p. 192).

SCOPE

Analysis

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was chosen to measure the strength of a linear association between the variables since it can “determine the strength and direction of the relationship between two factors on an interval or ratio scale of measurement” (Privitera, 2012, p. 477). The statistical analysis was completed using IBM’s SPSS Statistics 24.

Data Collection and Results

Survey services were purchased through the online organization SurveyMonkey®. Since individuals taking the survey could be counted as a completed survey even if they disagreed with the informed consent statement or skipped over a major portion of the survey, we conducted a small sample test that was run prior to the main survey gathering where eight of 59 respondents skipped a majority of the questions. Because 86.4% of the respondents answered the majority of the short sample test questions, to ensure 214 complete surveys, a total of 250 responses were purchased. The responses obtained were from the SurveyMonkey® database for individuals who lived in the United States, were over the age of 18, and held full-time employment. No other requirements or restrictions were made.

Initial Data Preparation

Data were collected from SurveyMonkey® between February 18, 2018 and February 23, 2018. Once SurveyMonkey® determined the total number of purchased surveys had been received, the survey was closed. The data were imported from the SurveyMonkey® system into SPSS Version 24 and reviewed for completeness and valid responses. In total, 281 individuals opened the survey. Of those who opened the survey, 273 (97.15%) of the participants agreed to the informed consent question. Individuals agreeing were permitted to proceed with the survey; those disagreeing with the informed consent were directed to the end of the survey and were not able to see or complete any questions. However, of those who agreed to the informed consent as presented, 29 individuals did not answer any of the questions within the survey and one participant answered only one question. Given the fact that these surveys were of no value, they were eliminated from the analysis. This left 243 surveys of the 273 who agreed to the informed consent question (89.0%).

Second, an analysis of the questions pertaining to Kelley's (1992) followership model was completed. In total, 28 questions were not answered by the 243 survey participants remaining in the survey dataset. As a result of this analysis, it was determined that eight individuals skipped one question, four individuals skipped two questions, and four individuals skipped three questions. By analyzing which questions were missed based on the questions themselves, it was determined that five questions were not skipped, eight questions were skipped once, three questions were skipped twice, and two questions were skipped three times and two questions were skipped four times.

Kelley's Followership Questionnaire (KFQ) contains 20 questions with 10 questions designed to give an individual a score in IT and 10 questions designed to determine an AE score. These scores are determined by adding the responses to the specified 10 questions and giving the individual a cumulative score. Since the score is cumulative, as opposed to an average, leaving an answer blank could move an individual from one level of AE to another or from one level of IT to another. As a result, the four survey participants who missed three or more questions were removed from the analysis. The remaining missing data points were populated with the overall average of the question for the remaining participants.

Third, an analysis of the questions pertaining to the Big Five personality traits was completed. In total, only four individuals did not answer all 20 questions pertaining to the personality assessment. Two individuals answered all personality questions except one. However, one individual did not answer six questions, and one individual did not answer 10 questions. The Big Five personality scores are based on an average score for the question responses. The same process was followed with the individuals not answering three or more questions being eliminated. Since the individual who did not answer six questions had been eliminated because they also did not answer multiple questions in the followership section, only one additional participant was removed. The other two data points were populated with the overall average of the question from all the remaining participants. As a result of the five surveys being eliminated, a total of 238 surveys were analyzed compared to the total of 214 surveys proposed. Participants not answering one or more of the demographic questions were not eliminated.

As stated, the KFQ consists of 20 questions, with one half of the questions used to determine the individual's IT score and the other half used to determine the AE score. To compute the IT score, SPSS was used to sum participants' answers to Questions 1, 5, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. To compute the AE score, SPSS was used to sum participants' answers to Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 15.

An individual's Big Five personality scores were computed by taking the average of four scores in five separate areas. Participants answered the 20 questions using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*). Prior to averaging the scores, a number of the scores required reverse scoring. Using the *Transform – Recode into different variables function* within the SPSS system, Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 were reverse scored. Once the reverse scoring was completed, and using the reverse score where required, an average score of Questions 1, 6, 11, and 16 was used to calculate the extraversion (E) score. The average score of Questions 2, 7, 12, and 17 was used to calculate the agreeableness (A) score. The average score of Questions 3, 8, 13, and 18 was used to calculate the conscientiousness (C) score. The average score of Questions 4, 9, 14, and 19 was used to calculate the neuroticism (N) score. The average score of Questions 5, 10, 15, and 20 was used to calculate the openness to experience (O) score. Following the analysis and data manipulation in SPSS, the data were uploaded into Microsoft Excel and all calculations were redone to confirm all reverse scoring and mathematical calculations were done properly.

Population Demographics

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of the survey participants. Participants were nearly 55.9% female ($n = 133$) and 43.7% male ($n = 104$) with one participant preferring not to answer. The ages of the participants were widely disbursed with the largest single category (25.2%) falling in the 40-49 age category. Participants were evenly disbursed throughout the United States. All ethnic categories participated in the survey; however, the largest represented category was White/Caucasian with 84% of the respondents indicating that ethnic background. Participants were asked to check all that applied. A total of 235 individuals answered the question dealing with the length of years respondents have worked

full time (averaging over 35 hours per week). Respondents answering the question averaged slightly above 28 years. Two survey respondents indicated 91 and 97 years of full-time employment. If those responses were removed, the average drops to slightly below 28 years. Lastly, nearly half (47.1%) considered themselves non-management.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

| Variable | <i>n</i> | % |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------|
| Age | | |
| 18-20 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 21-29 | 29 | 12.2 |
| 30-39 | 52 | 21.8 |
| 40-49 | 60 | 25.2 |
| 50-59 | 54 | 22.7 |
| 60 and older | 42 | 17.6 |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 133 | 55.6 |
| Male | 104 | 43.7 |
| Race | | |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 4 | 1.7 |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 9 | 3.8 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 9 | 3.8 |
| White/Caucasian | 200 | 84.0 |
| Prefer not to answer | 5 | 2.1 |
| Other | 6 | 2.5 |
| Geographic Location | | |
| Northeast | 61 | 25.6 |
| Southeast | 52 | 21.8 |
| Midwest | 60 | 25.2 |
| Northwest | 19 | 8.0 |
| Southwest | 44 | 18.5 |
| Organizational position | | |
| Non-management | 112 | 47.1 |
| Entry-level management | 26 | 10.9 |
| Middle management | 68 | 28.6 |
| Executive management | 32 | 13.4 |

Hypothesis Testing

Through the use of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, the strength of a linear association between Kelley's two key components, IT and AE level, with the Big Five personality categories of E, N, A, C, and O was conducted. Hypothesis 1 stated that the Big Five personality trait of E is correlated with the followership trait of AE. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .282 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

TABLE 2
CORRELATION OF E AND AE

| | | AE | E |
|--------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Extraversion | Pearson correlation | .28** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .000 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 23 | 238 |
| *p<.01 | | 8 | |

Hypothesis 2 stated that the Big Five personality trait of E is correlated with the followership trait of IT. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .288 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 3). Therefore Hypothesis 2 is supported.

TABLE 3
CORRELATION OF E AND IT

| | | IT | E |
|--------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Extraversion | Pearson correlation | .30** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .000 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 238 | 238 |
| *p<.01 | | | |

Hypothesis 3 stated that the Big Five personality trait of N is correlated with the followership trait of AE. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is -.120 and is not statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 4). Therefore Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

TABLE 4
CORRELATION OF N AND AE

| | | AE | N |
|-------------|---------------------|------|-----|
| Neuroticism | Pearson correlation | -.12 | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .065 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 238 | 238 |

Hypothesis 4 stated that the Big Five personality trait of N is correlated with the followership trait of IT. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is -.133 and is statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 5). Therefore Hypothesis 4 is supported.

TABLE 5
CORRELATION OF N AND IT

| | | IT | N |
|-------------|---------------------|------|-----|
| Neuroticism | Pearson correlation | -.13 | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .041 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 238 | 238 |
| *p<.05 | | | |

Hypothesis 5 stated that the Big Five personality trait of A is correlated with the followership trait of AE. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .374 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 6). Therefore Hypothesis 5 is supported.

TABLE 6
CORRELATION OF A AND AE

| | | AE | A |
|---------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Agreeableness | Pearson correlation | .37** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .000 | |
| <i>n</i> | | 238 | 238 |

*p<.01

Hypothesis 6 stated that the Big Five personality trait of A is correlated with the followership trait of IT. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .210 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 7). Therefore Hypothesis 6 is supported.

TABLE 7
CORRELATION OF A AND IT

| | | IT | A |
|---------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Agreeableness | Pearson correlation | .21** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .001 | |
| <i>n</i> | | 238 | 238 |

*p<.01

Hypothesis 7 stated that the Big Five personality trait of C is correlated with the followership trait of AE. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .219 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 8). Therefore Hypothesis 7 is supported.

TABLE 8
CORRELATION OF C AND AE

| | | AE | C |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Conscientiousness | Pearson correlation | .22** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .001 | |
| <i>n</i> | | 238 | 238 |

*p<.01

Hypothesis 8 stated that the Big Five personality trait of C is correlated with the followership trait of IT. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .136 and is statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 9). Therefore Hypothesis 8 is supported.

TABLE 9
CORRELATION OF C AND IT

| | | IT | C |
|-------------------|---------------------|------|-----|
| Conscientiousness | Pearson correlation | .14* | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .036 | |
| <i>n</i> | | 238 | 238 |

*p<.05

Hypothesis 9 stated that the Big Five personality trait of O is correlated with the followership trait of AE. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .253 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 10). Therefore Hypothesis 9 is supported.

TABLE 10
CORRELATION OF O AND AE

| | | AE | O |
|------------------------|---------------------|------|-----|
| Openness to Experience | Pearson correlation | .25* | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .000 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 238 | 238 |

* $p < .01$

Hypothesis 10 stated that the Big Five personality trait of I is correlated with the followership trait of IT. Based on the data collected, the correlation between the two variables is .244 and is statistically significant at the .01 level (see Table 11). Therefore Hypothesis 10 is supported.

TABLE 11
CORRELATION OF O AND IT

| | | IT | O |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------|-----|
| Openness to Experience | Pearson correlation | .24** | |
| | Sig. (two-tailed) | .001 | |
| | <i>n</i> | 238 | 238 |

* $p < .01$

To see correlations using all variables, a Pearson product-moment correlation with the two Kelley followership attributes of AE and IT and the Big Five personality traits of E, A, C, N, and O was completed (see Table 12).

TABLE 12
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND CORRELATIONS AMONG ALL VARIABLES

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | AE | IT | E | A | C | N | O |
|----------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|---|
| AE | 44.25 | 11.02 | – | | | | | | |
| IT | 40.43 | 10.08 | .71** | – | | | | | |
| E | 2.82 | 0.97 | .28** | .29** | – | | | | |
| A | 3.83 | 0.87 | .37** | .21** | .32** | – | | | |
| C | 3.94 | 0.80 | .22** | .14* | -.03 | .08 | – | | |
| N | 2.72 | 0.91 | -.12 | -.13* | -.07* | .08 | -.20** | – | |
| O | 3.73 | 0.82 | .25** | .24** | .13* | .28** | .05 | -.11 | – |

Summary

Of the 10 hypotheses presented, nine were supported seven at the 99% confidence level, and two at the 95% confidence level. The personalities of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience were positively related to Kelley's (1992) followership characteristics of active engagement and independent thinking. In contrast, the personality characteristic of neurosis was negatively related to Kelley's followership characteristics of AE and IT, though at a less significant level than the other relationships.

DISCUSSION

Because many leadership theories emphasize a leader's personality (Judge & Bono, 2000; Mihalcea, 2014; Mushonga & Torrance, 2008; Politis & Politis, 2012), the fact that strong leadership and followership characteristics are similar (McCallum, 2013), and the fact that it has been shown that personality is a valuable predictor of leadership (Judge, Bono, Ilies, et al., 2002), understanding if a relationship exists between one's personality and one's followership style would prove valuable to gaining a greater understanding of the follower and followership in general. This research could prove valuable to the entire organization since studies conducted over the past 15 years have shown a meaningful relationship between personality traits and performance (Barrick et al., 2005).

Mushonga and Torrance (2008) began this work by studying the relationship between personality and followership characteristics in 95 undergraduate students in a southeastern university but concluded that future research should be conducted with a larger, nonstudent, more diverse sample base. The current research accomplished that by utilizing SurveyMonkey®. Through the use of this online data-gathering system, we garnered participants from 47 of the 50 states in roles from non-management to executive management, those just beginning their careers to those with decades of experience. In contrast to the first study where all participants were students, all participants in this research were adults with full-time employment.

Similar to the original student study, extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness showed a positive relationship to the two key factors of Kelley's (1992) followership model—active engagement and independent thinking. In the current study, all but one of the six relationships were significant at the $p < .01$ level, in contrast to the study of students where only half were significant at that level. In this study, neuroticism showed a negative relationship to the two key factors of Kelley's followership model—active engagement and independent thinking—however, neither was significant at the $p < .01$ level. This was the same result received when students were studied.

Last, in the current study, agreeableness was positively related to the two key factors of Kelley's (1992) followership model—active engagement and independent thinking—and the results were significant at the $p < .01$ level. However, when the students were studied, a nonsignificant, negative relationship was seen between agreeableness and both of the two key factors of Kelley's followership model. Interestingly, in this study, for all the relationships that were significant at the $p < .01$ level, the relationship between agreeableness and active engagement showed the largest correlation at .374; however, the relationship between conscientiousness and independent thinking showed the smallest correlation at .136.

Implications

This research is original in studying the relationship between the Big Five personality traits of extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience and Kelley's (1988) followership characteristics of active engagement and independent thinking in working adults. The findings have given new insights into the study of individuals in the follower role as well as followership in general. Although this research plays a small role in the big picture within the topics of followership and leadership, the fact that an in-depth study concentrating on followers versus leaders in a small way closes the gap between leadership and followership research since in the past the studies on followers have been minimal (Malakyan, 2014). This study also responds to the issue Burns (2008) raised, "One of the most serious failures in the study of leadership has been the bifurcation between the literature on leadership and the literature of followership" (p. xii). Utilizing tools (e.g., personality tests) that have been used in the past to study leaders and utilizing them to gain a better understanding of followers helps overcome this bifurcation that has been concerning for decades and answers the call to bring the two areas of literature together.

The results of this research, particularly the relationship between various key attributes of an individual's personality and how it correlates with key attributes of followership, has begun to answer the question Antelo et al. (2010) raised: "It is not surprising why individuals choose to become leaders. It is

more intriguing why people voluntarily submit to leaders and become followers” (p. 10). If one’s personality traits, which are defined as “characteristic, enduring patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that are stable over time and explain people’s behavior across different situations” (Barrick et al., 2005, p.745), are linked to a person’s follower type, this may start to answer Antelo et al.’s question.

In addition to the benefits the research has provided to the field of academic research, the research fills a number of roles within the practitioner literature. First and foremost, it continues to provide quality research and information that raises the awareness of the topic of followership. Since books on leadership outnumber books on followership a several thousand to one (Bennis, 2008), any additional information that helps individuals in an organizational setting understand coworkers or subordinates more clearly is helpful for the individuals as well as the organization as a whole. Since many organizations utilize personality tests when assessing potential hires, candidates being considered for promotions, or working with individuals to be more successful, adding an additional dimension where personality testing can provide insight will be beneficial for all involved parties.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of the research is the fact that the study broke new ground by identifying, exploring, and measuring the relationship between the key attributes of a follower and the individual’s personality among working adults. The research is believed to be the first of its kind to correlate these two important attributes in a nonstudent population.

A second strength of the research, also dealing with the survey population, is a result of the numbers of participants used. Through the use of SurveyMonkey®, 238 useable surveys were obtained. This number exceeded the required 214 needed to be statically relevant. The survey participants were from across the entire United States, diverse in age, work experience, and level within the organization. Through the analysis, seven of the 10 hypotheses were significant at the 99% confidence level, two of the 10 at the 95% confidence level, and one at the 90% confidence level. The strength of these numbers makes the results generalizable across the population.

A third strength of the research is that the personality instrument used consisted of only 20 questions, therefore reducing or eliminating a fatigue effect. The personality instrument used in the previous research with students comprised 60 questions (Mushonga & Torrance, 2008). Although not listed as a limitation in the research, it is possible that fatigue played a role in the process.

Although the research contained numerous strengths, it has a number of limitations as well. In regard to the survey, the validity of Kelley’s Followership Questionnaire (KFQ) has been questioned (Blanchard, et al., 2009; Ligon, 2016). In these studies, researchers determined that a third factor was present. Although questions have been raised as to the validity of the instrument, to date no better instrument has been developed and tested.

As it relates to the responses given, a number of suspect answers raise some question as to individual answers in general. In response to the question, “I have been working full time (an average of more than 35 hours per week) for ___ years,” one respondent answered 91, and a second respondent answered 97. It is questionable that these answers were accurate and may reflect respondents who were not serious about the responses. The same thought could be raised where a respondent listed “honky” as his or her ethnic background. Although it is not known if this is an indication of the seriousness of participation or an error, since no direct remuneration was given to the participants, it is unlikely any respondent participated strictly for personal gain. In addition, 84% of the survey participants listed “White/Caucasian” in responding to the question, “What is your ethnicity?” This high percentage does not represent the overall population of the United States.

Future Research

One suggestion for future research is a longitudinal study to see if an individual’s independent thinking and/or active engagement levels change over time and, as a result, the possible change that may have on the relationship between the followership characteristics and personality factors.

A second consideration for future researchers could include the use of another personality test, particularly the Myers–Briggs personality test. This would be valuable since many organizations use this testing instrument as it relates to organizational personality testing, as opposed to research found in the academic circles (Chaleff, 2016). Since a relationship was found in many of the hypotheses presented, future research could be done to determine if results would be similar between various groups of the sample population. For example, does gender, years of working experience, or level within an organization impact the relationship that was seen in the overall sample population?

Last, as researchers look to narrow the bifurcation of literature between leadership and followership, and since leadership studies have been completed in many countries and cultures around the world, enhancing the literature through research outside the United States would be a logical next step.

CONCLUSION

The current research was undertaken to answer the research question: What is the relationship between the personality traits of extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and the followership characteristics of active engagement and independent thinking (Kelley, 1988)? Based on the review of the literature, 10 hypotheses were developed that stated that each of the five personality traits was correlated with each of the two followership characteristics. To test the hypotheses, a survey was developed consisting of an informed consent question, six demographic questions, the 20 questions of the Kelley Followership Questionnaire (1992) and 20 questions to test the Big Five personality dimensions, known as the Mini-International Personality Item Pool scale. To obtain a wide variety of respondents, 250 responses from adults in the United States currently working full time were purchased through SurveyMonkey®. The data were gathered between February 18, 2018, and February 23, 2018. I ran a Pearson's product-moment correlation to investigate the relationship between the factors. Analysis of the results showed a positive correlation in eight of the 10 relationships studied with one of the relationships being significant at the 95% confidence level, while the other seven were significant at the 99% confidence level.

Answering these questions is important to the understanding of followers, followership, and the relationship between followership characteristics and personality traits. The research has enhanced the academic literature on the topic as well as given insight to those involved in the leadership of organizations. The research topic can be further enhanced with additional research comparing results between various demographic categories, the use of other personality testing instruments, as well as longitudinal studies to determine what impact time has on the relationship. Gaining a greater understanding of those that play the role of followers will not only enhance our knowledge of them but our knowledge of leaders and organizations as a whole.

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