

UNLOCKING LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL: HOW PERSONALITY TRAITS SHAPE STYLES AND SELF-EFFICACY IN STUDENT LEADERS

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between personality traits, leadership styles, and leadership self-efficacy among college student leaders. Guided by the Big Five personality framework and leadership theory, the research investigated whether personality traits significantly predict leadership styles and self-efficacy within an educational context. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 111 college student leaders selected through purposive sampling. Standardized self-report instruments were used to measure Big Five personality traits, leadership styles (authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire), and leadership self-efficacy. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression at a .05 significance level. Results indicated that openness demonstrated a moderate positive relationship with democratic leadership and leadership self-efficacy, suggesting that leaders who are more open to experience tend to exhibit participative leadership behaviors and stronger confidence in their leadership abilities. It also demonstrated a low positive relationship with authoritarian leadership. Agreeableness showed weak to moderate negative relationships with authoritarian leadership and democratic leadership, indicating higher agreeableness was associated with lower endorsement of these leadership styles in this sample. Conscientiousness exhibited a weak positive relationship with laissez-faire leadership. Overall, the personality traits revealed approximately 15% to 17% of the variance in leadership outcomes, including moderate explanatory power, while extraversion and neuroticism were not significant predictors. These findings suggest that certain personality traits contribute meaningfully, but modestly to leadership styles and leadership self-efficacy among student leaders, highlighting the need for leadership programs that develop self-awareness and adaptive leadership among student leaders.

Keywords: *Personality traits, leadership styles, leadership self-efficacy*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership development among college student leaders has become an important area of educational research, as student leaders contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness, peer engagement, and initiatives **(Nasir et al., 2024)**. Understanding the psychological foundations of leadership is therefore essential. The study is grounded in the Five-Factor Model of Personality **(Costa & McCrae, 1992)**, which conceptualizes personality across five dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These traits shape how individuals perceive situations, regulate behavior, and interact with others. Recent empirical research continues to validate the relevance of the Big Five framework in leadership contexts, demonstrating that traits such as openness and conscientiousness are associated with adaptive and participative leadership behaviors among university students **(Avecillas et al., 2024; Grover & Amit, 2024)**.

In addition to personality traits, leadership effectiveness is influenced by self-efficacy. Drawing from Social Cognitive Theory **(Bandura, 1997)**, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute actions required to manage situations. Within student leadership settings, leadership self-efficacy functions as a psychological mechanism that determines whether personality dispositions are translated into effective leadership behaviors. Studies have shown that higher levels of leadership self-efficacy are associated with improved decision-making, resilience, and collaborative leadership practices **(Bergman et al., 2021; Pizzolitto et al., 2023)**. Thus, leadership among student leaders may be understood not merely as a product of inherent traits, but as an interaction between stable personality characteristics and confidence in one's leadership capacity.

The interplay between the Big Five personality traits and leadership styles is a crucial factor in organizational success, as specific traits naturally lend themselves to different management approaches. Individuals with high extraversion, which is characterized by energy and assertiveness, tend to adopt authoritarian leadership, which is effective for quick decision-making in high-pressure environments. Conversely, democratic leadership thrives when leaders possess high openness and agreeableness, fostering a collaborative, creative, and adaptable atmosphere **(Grover & Amit, 2024)**. The effectiveness and satisfaction of student teams are heavily influenced by these approaches; while authoritarian leadership may yield short-term wins, it often undermines morale and long-term commitment. In contrast, a laissez-faire approach typically results in fragmented communication and a lack of direction **(Garcia & Martinez, 2023)**. Leaders with high self-efficacy are more confident in consulting others, whereas those with low self-efficacy often default to authoritarian or laissez-faire styles that stifle engagement **(Garcia & Martinez, 2023)**. Therefore, leadership development is most impactful when it prioritizes boosting internal confidence, naturally fostering more inclusive and sustainable organizational practices **(Smith & Carter, 2022)**. Collectively, these findings support the view that personality traits not only shape leadership styles, but also influence the degree of confidence with which leaders enact those behaviors.

Objectives

The study aimed to determine whether personality traits can predict the leadership style and self-efficacy of college student leaders at Arellano University - Juan Sumulong Campus.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the personality traits of the respondents based on the Big Five Personality factors, namely:
 - 1.1 Openness
 - 1.2 Conscientiousness
 - 1.3 Extraversion
 - 1.4 Agreeableness, and
 - 1.5 Neuroticism
2. What are the leadership styles of the respondents in terms of:
 - 2.1 Authoritarian Leadership
 - 2.2 Democratic Leadership, and
 - 2.3 Laissez-Faire Leadership
3. What is the level of leadership self-efficacy of the respondents?
4. Which personality traits are significant predictors of the leadership styles and self-efficacy among college student leaders in Arellano University - Juan Sumulong Campus?

METHODS

Research Design and Participants

This study utilized a quantitative correlational and predictive research design to investigate the relationships between personality traits, leadership styles, and leadership self-efficacy. The target population consisted of officially recognized college student leaders at Arellano University–Juan Sumulong Campus during the 2025–2026 academic year. Using a purposive sampling technique, a total of 111 student leaders were selected to participate in the study. This design allowed the researchers to determine how specific personality dimensions could statistically forecast leadership behaviors and confidence levels within an educational context.

Research Instrumentation

Data were collected using three standardized instruments to ensure theoretical alignment and measurement accuracy. Personality traits were assessed using the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), which measures Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (**John et al., 1991**). Leadership styles were identified through the Leadership Style Questionnaire (LSQ), categorizing participants into Authoritarian, Democratic, or Laissez-Faire styles (**Northouse, 1999**). Finally, the Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE) that's divided into six (6) dimensions: starting & leading process, choose & delegate, relationships, self-confidence, motivation, and consensus (**Bobbio and Manganeli, 2009**).

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process adhered to strict ethical and administrative guidelines. After obtaining approval from the research adviser and the Dean of the college, invitations were distributed to student leaders through official email and social media platforms. Participants were provided with an informed consent form that detailed the voluntary nature of the study and ensured the confidentiality of their responses. Surveys were administered through a combination of printed forms and Google Forms to maximize accessibility, with data collection occurring over a designated period to ensure a high response rate.

Statistical Treatment

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to profile the participants' traits and leadership styles. To address the primary research questions, Pearson-R and Multiple Linear Regression were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. This allowed the researchers to determine the predictive power of personality traits, such as openness and conscientiousness on leadership self-efficacy and style preference, as suggested by the theoretical frameworks of **Bandura (1997)** and **Costa and McCrae (1992)**.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table 1

Composite Table of the Respondents' Personality Traits

Personality Traits	Overall Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Openness	35.94	High
Conscientiousness	30.87	High
Extraversion	26.14	High
Agreeableness	33.96	High
Neuroticism	24.82	Low

Openness: 10.00-30.99 Low; 31.00-50.99 High

Conscientiousness and Agreeableness: 9.00-27.99 Low; 28.00-45.99 High

Extraversion and Neuroticism: 8.00-24.99 Low; 25.00-40.99 High

Analyzing the presented Table 1, personality traits are composed of 5 main factors. Among respondents, the highest mean pertains to openness ($M = 35.94$), interpreted as high, followed by agreeableness ($M = 33.96$), interpreted as high, conscientiousness ($M = 30.87$), interpreted as high, and extraversion ($M = 26.14$), interpreted as high. The lowest score pertains to neuroticism ($M = 24.82$), interpreted as low.

The results shown are consistent with the theoretical explanations of the Big Five Personality Traits, in which agreeableness reflects traits such as kindness, trust, and cooperation, which are essential for maintaining harmonious relationships and teamwork; qualities often observed among student leaders. High openness is linked to creativity, curiosity, and adaptability, allowing leaders to embrace new ideas and respond effectively to challenges. Conscientiousness represents organization, responsibility, and discipline, supporting strong leadership and goal-

oriented behaviors. Meanwhile, moderate extraversion suggests that respondents are sociable and energetic but may vary in their assertiveness and enthusiasm. The lowest score in neuroticism aligns with emotional stability and resilience, both of which are vital for effective leadership **Lim (2025)**. Thus, the discussion of the Big Five Model supports the findings in this table, emphasizing that the respondents' personalities are generally positive, balanced, and conducive to leadership development.

Table 2

Composite Table of the Respondents' Leadership Style

Leadership Style	Total Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Authoritarian	21.44	High
Democratic	25.25	High
Laissez-Faire	20.50	High

6.00-18.99 Low; 19-30.99 High

Table 2 presents the composite summary of the respondents' overall leadership styles. The results revealed that the authoritarian leadership obtained the highest mean ($M = 21.44$), verbally interpreted as high, suggesting that the respondents often display directive and structured leadership behaviors, emphasizing control, discipline, and organization in managing their members. Such tendencies indicate a preference for providing clear instructions and maintaining order within their groups, reflecting a strong sense of responsibility and accountability as leaders.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Leadership ($M = 25.25$) and laissez-faire leadership ($M = 20.50$), were both interpreted as high. This finding implies that while respondents recognize the importance of collaboration, open communication, and granting autonomy, these approaches are not as dominant in their leadership practices. Instead, they tend to exercise participative or hands-off leadership only when the situation allows or when members demonstrate competence and initiative.

Overall, the results indicated that the respondents primarily adopt an authoritarian leadership approach but remain flexible enough to integrate democratic and laissez-faire characteristics when appropriate. This combination reflects an adaptive leadership style that balances structure and independence. It suggests that the respondents can shift between directive and participative strategies, asserting authority when necessary while also valuing team input and individual initiative. Such adaptability allows them to effectively address diverse group dynamics and maintain both productivity and cooperation.

Authoritarian leadership style is effective in promoting order and accountability through structured decision-making, especially in settings that require discipline and clarity (**Pizzolito et al., 2023**). Democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles foster trust, creativity, and confidence by encouraging participation and independence (**Jaafar et al., 2021**). In line with these findings, the present study suggests that the respondents' ability to blend directive and participative styles enables them to maintain control while nurturing engagement and collaboration within their teams.

Table 3*Respondents' Leadership Self-efficacy*

Leadership Self-Efficacy Statements	f	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Starting and leading processes in groups	1,445	4.34	High
Choosing effective followers and delegating responsibilities	2,213	4.99	High
Building and managing interpersonal relationships within the group	1,747	5.25	High
Showing self-awareness and self-confidence	2,787	5.02	High
Motivating people	1,655	4.97	High
Gaining the consensus of group members	1,632	4.90	High
Overall	11,479	4.91	High

1.00-3.00 Low; 3.01-5.00 High

Table 3 presents the respondents' assessment of their leadership self-efficacy across several dimensions, including leading group processes, delegating responsibilities, managing interpersonal relationships, and motivating team members. The findings reveal that respondents generally exhibit a robust level of self-belief, as evidenced by the grand mean ($M = 4.91$), which is interpreted as High. This suggests that the majority of participants are confident in their ability to execute leadership tasks effectively. Notably, the highest mean ($M = 5.25$) indicates that respondents feel most capable in managing interpersonal relationships and communicating within groups. Conversely, the indicator for gaining consensus/motivating others ($M = 4.34$) received the lowest mean; however, this score still reflects a high degree of consistent confidence across all dimensions.

This is consistent with research stating that leadership self-efficacy is defined by an individual's confidence in the knowledge and skills required to lead others (Bergman et al., 2021). These results also align with the foundational concept that a person's belief in their capacity to organize and execute actions directly dictates their performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, the respondents' strong self-efficacy likely stems from their perceived competence in managing relationships and decision-making, which serve as core competencies that strengthen leadership capabilities in organizational settings.

Table 4

Composite Table of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Personality Traits as Strong Predictors of Leadership Styles and Self-Efficacy

IV	DV	β	t	p	Interpretation	Decision
Agreeableness	Authoritarian	-0.191	-2.057	.042	Significant	Reject Ho
Openness	Leadership	0.326	2.821	.006	Significant	Reject Ho
Agreeableness	Democratic	-0.248	-2.914	.004	Significant	Reject Ho
Openness	Leadership	0.605	5.710	.001	Significant	Reject Ho
Conscientiousness	Laissez-Faire	0.175	2.115	.037	Significant	Reject Ho
	Leadership					
Openness	Self-Efficacy	1.507	4.899	.001	Significant	Reject Ho

Table 4 reveals that openness to experience is the most dominant predictor of leadership behavior and self-belief. Specifically, openness showed a strong positive correlation with democratic leadership ($\beta = 0.605$, $p = .001$) and a very strong positive correlation with leadership self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.507$, $p = .001$), while also moderately predicting authoritarian leadership ($\beta = .326$, $p = .006$). In contrast, agreeableness was a significant but negative predictor for both democratic ($\beta = -0.248$, $p = .004$) and authoritarian styles ($\beta = -0.191$, $p = .042$), suggesting that higher agreeableness slightly reduces the inclination toward these structured roles. Conscientiousness emerged as a weak significant predictor of laissez-faire leadership ($\beta = 0.175$, $p = .037$), whereas extraversion and neuroticism showed no significant predictive power.

These statistical findings reinforce the broader academic consensus that effective leadership is rooted in psychological adaptability. The strong link between openness and self-efficacy resonates with research that posits that curious and open-minded individuals possess the inherent confidence and flexibility required to achieve complex goals (**Abod et al., 2020**). Notably, the fact that extraversion and neuroticism did not significantly influence outcomes suggests that traits related to intellectual curiosity and structured cooperation are more critical for shaping how leaders influence others. Ultimately, these results underscore the importance of aligning inherent personality dimensions with situational demands to foster adaptive and effective leadership (**Grover & Amit, 2024**).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that specific personality traits are significant predictors of leadership behaviors and confidence among college student leaders. The findings highlight that openness was the most associated trait, serving as a strong positive predictor for both democratic leadership and leadership self-efficacy. Furthermore, conscientiousness was found to positively predict laissez-faire leadership, while agreeableness acts as a deterrent to authoritarian tendencies. These results suggest that a leader's innate personality significantly shapes their leadership style and their belief in their own capability to lead. Consequently, educational institutions should consider integrating personality assessments into leadership development programs to enhance self-awareness and foster more adaptive and confident educational leaders.

The findings of this study lead to several recommendations for the academic community and future scholarship. Educational institutions should consider integrating standardized personality assessments into their leadership development programs to assist student leaders in identifying their natural strengths and specific areas for professional growth. Furthermore, leadership training curricula should be intentionally designed to foster high levels of openness and self-awareness, which encourages student leaders to adopt more adaptive and democratic leadership approaches that enhance overall organizational effectiveness. Finally, for future research, it is recommended that scholars explore additional variables beyond personality traits; since the current study's model accounted for approximately 15% to 17% of the variance in leadership outcomes, it is evident that external factors or environmental influences also play a significant role in shaping the efficacy and style of educational leaders.

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