

## Leadership Traits, Leadership Practices, and Big Five Personality Dimensions: A Quantitative Descriptive Study of Educational Department Heads in Universities in Lahore

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Leadership is increasingly recognized as a key component in organizational success. It is the art of motivating a group of people or an organization toward achieving collective goals. This quantitative, questionnaire-based study examines the role of personality type in determining the leadership levels of Heads of Departments in universities in Lahore. The study draws on the Big Five Personality Test, which assesses five major dimensions: openness, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Data were collected from 100 Heads of Departments across five public and five private universities in Lahore using a 50-item questionnaire designed to evaluate personality traits. The findings reveal that educational leaders exhibit a range of dominant personality traits, with openness ( $n = 47$ ) and agreeableness ( $n = 30$ ) being most common, highlighting creativity, curiosity, empathy, and cooperation as prevalent characteristics. Extraversion ( $n = 24$ ) and conscientiousness ( $n = 8$ ) were also observed, supporting effective communication, team engagement, and dependability, while neuroticism ( $n = 5$ ) was relatively rare. Overall, these results suggest that certain traits, particularly openness and agreeableness, may play a prominent role in shaping leadership practices within educational settings.

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is a skill that brings individuals together within an organization to achieve collective goals. In educational settings, effective leadership ensures that both leaders and subordinates work in alignment with the vision of the leader and the mission of the institution. Leadership is not solely a function of authority or position; it encompasses the example a leader sets through personal conduct, decision-making, and ethical responsibility (Gallie, 1955; Grint, 2004; Kellerman, 2004; Shiundu, 2024).

It has been observed that there are some personality traits which work better for leaders in comparison to others. Those personality traits are stability in mental condition, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness and surgency (Hogan et al., 1994; Hasanah et al., 2022). Still all personality types cannot be positive predictors in all situations so it means that some personality types can work and some might not work in particular situations because leadership methods are relative. They also need to align with the subordinate's needs and expectations of the leader (Hogan et al., 1994; Shi & Zhou, 2023). Keller (1999) states that leader is usually visualized as an ideal by the team who they want to follow and try to become like him/her. In the integrated theory of Hollenbeck (2000), which is "person-organization fit", he draws a connection between a person's traits and the structure of an organization (Sullivan & Swider, 2025). He projects that an organization's culture is made by its people and it constructs the external environment of the organization. He further elaborates that in order to create functional characteristics of the organization, higher management of the organization creates a particular internal system which attracts the suitable people to join and pave the way towards its external environment. This works as a means to enhance the vision and mission of the organization and bring like-minded people together to achieve collective goals.

Some scholars have emphasized that leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon and can be a "unique social myth" dependent on the followers' perception (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Farivar et al., 2026). Effective leadership is therefore both a personal and relational process, extending beyond formal power to influence, motivation, and the development of others. Despite debates about its moral or religious dimensions, leadership fundamentally revolves around the leader's capacity to inspire, guide, and enhance organizational performance.

This study specifically examines leaders' self-perceptions of their leadership levels in conjunction with their personality traits, drawing upon Lewis Goldberg's (1990) Big Five theory of personality. Goldberg's (1990) model identifies five core personality dimensions—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—through which individuals can be categorized. In this test, there are 50 statements, with 10 statements assessing each personality trait. The questions are shuffled and presented in different ways to minimize confusion and ensure accurate identification of each personality type. Personality types are determined after scoring, with scores ranging between 0 and 40 for each trait. By examining how departmental heads at universities in Lahore perceive their own leadership levels, this research aims to assess their self-awareness and explore the alignment between perceived leadership level and observable leadership behaviors.

Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study are:

### **1.1 Research Questions**

RQ2: What are the personality traits of university department heads in Lahore, Pakistan as measured by Goldberg's Big Five?

RQ3: How do the personality traits of department heads relate to their leadership practices in the Pakistani university context?

Exploring these research questions is essential because leaders' self-perceptions directly influence their behavior, decision-making, and effectiveness. A leader's understanding of their own level of influence shapes how they relate to others, pursue results, and invest in team development. Examining these perceptions also helps identify gaps between perceived and actual leadership effectiveness, providing valuable insight for professional growth and organizational improvement, particularly when viewed through Lewis Goldberg's (1990) Big Five theory of personality.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Organizations and Leadership**

According to Hollenbeck (2000), well-established organizations hire individuals whose personalities align with organizational goals and fit well within the organizational environment. Suitable candidates should align with both the internal and external environments of the organization. Organizational leaders often handpick candidates who are effective in producing results, possess sufficient experience, and demonstrate compatibility with the institutional culture. Sorcher (2002) states that hiring for leadership positions should be undertaken after careful consideration of a wide range of soft criteria, including personality, cultural background, and individual integrity. Additionally, a proactive personality can positively influence an individual's overall success, impacting job satisfaction, promotion, and career growth (Seibert, 1999).

This study employs the framework proposed by Lewis Goldberg (1990), who introduced the five-factor model of personality, commonly referred to as the "Big Five." A significant relationship has been identified between two of these factors - conscientiousness and extraversion - and job performance. These traits may serve as practical tools for assessing employee performance (Barrick, 1993; Hertz et al., 2000). Barrick and Mount (1991) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and three criteria of job performance: personnel data, job proficiency, and training proficiency. Their findings indicated a direct correlation between these performance indicators and the Big Five dimensions. However, although personality traits are linked to job performance, researchers should also consider contextual performance when interpreting such relationships (Bryman et al., 2000).

## **2.1 Big Five Personality Test**

Lewis Goldberg (1990) presented his theory based on five factors of personality called “The big five”. There are five factors of personality in which different people can be categorized, which are elaborated below.

### **2.1.1 Extroversion**

This is a personality trait which draws its energy from interaction with people. These people are extremely social and cannot find comfort in solitude. They try to seek opportunities from their social interactions and they are much appreciated in their social gatherings. They are not very imaginative and cannot contemplate things. Their major source of happiness is action. They are aware of their needs as social human beings and they are assertive about fulfilling those needs. They generally have an outgoing nature which makes them friendly and affectionate. Their highest energy level can be observed in social situations and they cannot keep quiet for long.

### **2.1.2 Agreeableness**

Personalities who are agreeable, have the tendency to be appreciated, well-liked and considerate. Agreeableness is mainly associated with one’s orientation towards other people. This phenomenon rests on how people prefer to interact with each other generally. Since they are very sensitive towards the needs and feelings of other people, they have very less enemies. People generally love agreeable personalities. They win other people’s trust by their considerate conversations and affectionate manner. They are patient towards strangers and amiable in their encounters.

### **2.1.3 Conscientiousness**

Conscientious personalities are those who feel for the problems of other people and tend to empathize with them. The art of putting oneself in the shoes of others is really crucial. Conscientious people are gifted with a sense of perseverance, kindness, organization, planning and high achievement. They make their decisions wisely and can easily recognize their mistakes. When they are solving problems, their solutions are practical and do-able for their audience.

### **2.1.4 Openness to Experience**

Openness to experience is a very vital life skill which produces better leaders. Leaders should be able to think outside the box and they should be able to entertain innovation and new ideas. This trait can be associated to some universal values like equal right of promotion for all employees irrespective of their age, gender or color. People who are open to experience are more likely to be creative. They like the originality of ideas and new projects. They go through a journey of exploring their inner selves too. Openness to experience is a stable trait and it is highly unlikely that it might change over the period of years.

### **2.1.5 Neuroticism**

Neuroticism has been associated with being emotional and low performance. Leaders who are neurotic might have less motivation regarding self-efficacy and goal-orientation. They

are unable to adjust to changes which life throws at them and they are the last ones to adapt to a new situation. They tend to have outbursts and might feel helpless to control their emotions.

### 3. Methodology of the Study

This research study uses a mixed method of research. Quantitative research includes two survey questionnaires. First survey questionnaire is Big Five personality questionnaire. This questionnaire deals with fifty queries and they result in the identification of five personality traits which are extraversion, openness, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness. Each personality trait carries ten statements ultimately identifying the particular personality type of the said leader.

#### 3.1 Sample of the Study and Data Collection

The study was conducted on 100 Heads of Departments from five Public and five Private Universities. Since the study was identifying leadership levels, so the population was supposed to be on key leadership position. Ten heads of departments were sampled from each university. It was preferred that the sample represents both male and female population. Also, both experienced and inexperienced heads of departments were given representation.

The purpose of the study was to examining how departmental heads at universities in Lahore perceive their own leadership levels. Similarly, it aimed to assess their self-awareness and explore the alignment between perceived leadership level and observable leadership behaviors. Therefore, in line with the theoretical framework provided by Lewis Goldberg's *Big Five* theory, five questionnaires were conducted with the sampled population of the study.

### 4. Data analysis

This test determines that people all around the world fall in five broad personality types. Those types are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. These are the five major categories which people tend to have in their life as far as personality type is concerned. The test has 50 statements and based on the answers of each person, the test determines whether a person belongs to a particular personality type.

**Table No 1: Extraversion**

Sr No.	Extraversion	N	M	SD
1.	Q1. Am the life of the party.	100	4.13	0.76
2.	Q6. Don't talk a lot.	100	2.72	0.64
3.	Q11. Feel comfortable around people.	100	4.02	0.74
4.	Q16. Keep in the background.	100	1.69	0.68
5.	Q21. Start conversations.	100	3.49	1.23
6.	Q26. Have little to say.	100	1.59	0.70
7.	Q31. Talk to a lot of different people at parties.	100	3.49	0.69
8.	Q36. Don't like to draw attention to myself.	100	2.58	0.83
9.	Q41. Don't mind being the center of attention.	100	3.39	0.65
10.	Q46. Am quiet around strangers.	100	1.49	0.86
	Total		28.47	

Mean score of statement 1 is 4.13 of the Big five questionnaire reveals that leaders slightly agree that they are the life of party. Mean score of statement 2 is 2.72, which reveals that leaders remained neutral on talking too much or too little. Mean score of statement 3 is 4.02 which says that leaders slightly agree that they feel comfortable around people. Mean score of statement 4 is 1.69 which states that leaders slightly disagree that they keep in the background. Mean score of statement 5 is 3.49 which says that they were neutral about starting conversations. Mean score of statement 6 is 1.59 which shows that leaders slightly disagree that they have little to say to their team. Mean score of statement 7 is 3.49 which reveals that leaders were neutral when they said that they talk to different people at parties. Mean score of statement 8 is 2.58 which shows that leaders remained neutral on this statement. Mean score of statement 9 is 3.39 which reveals that leaders were neutral, saying that they do not mind being the center of attention around their team. Mean score of statement 10 is 1.49 which reveals that leaders disagree with this statement and the statement says that they remain quiet around strangers.

**Table No 1: Agreeableness**

Sr No.	Agreeableness	N	M	SD
1.	Q2. Feel little concern for others.	100	3.75	0.86
2.	Q7. Am interested in people.	100	4.19	0.85
3.	Q12. Insult people.	100	1.53	0.56
4.	Q17. Sympathize with others' feelings.	100	4.12	0.56
5.	Q22. Am not interested in other people's problems.	100	1.6	0.65
6.	Q27. Have a soft heart.	100	4.13	0.63
7.	Q32. Am not really interested in others.	100	1.97	0.66
8.	Q37. Take time out for others.	100	2.51	0.99
9.	Q42. Feel others' emotions.	100	4.14	0.64
10.	Q47. Make people feel at ease.	100	4.13	0.65
	Total		28.41	

Mean score of statement 1 is 3.75 which says that leaders slightly agree with the statement saying they feel little concern for others. Mean score of statement 2 is 4.19 and it reveals that they slightly agree with the statement that they are interested in people. Mean score of statement 3 is 1.53 which says that they slightly disagree to the statement saying that they do not insult people. Mean score of statement 4 is 4.12 and it reveals that they slightly disagree with the statement. Mean score of statement 5 is 1.6 and it says that they slightly disagree with the fact they are not interested in other people's problems. Mean score of statement 6 is 4.13 and it shows that leaders slightly agree with the fact that they have a soft heart. Mean score of statement 7 is 1.97 which says that leaders slightly disagree that they cannot say they are disinterested in people. Mean score of statement 8 is 2.51 which means that leaders stayed neutral on the point that they take time out for others. Mean score of statement 9 is 4.14 which says that leaders slightly agree that they feel the emotions felt by others. Mean score of statement 10 is 4.13 and that means they slightly agreed that they make people feel at ease.

**Table No 2: Conscientiousness**

Sr No.	Conscientiousness	N	M	SD
1.	Q3. Am always prepared.	100	2.44	0.82
2.	Q8. Leave my belongings around.	100	2.68	0.80
3.	Q13. Pay attention to details.	100	4.07	0.66
4.	Q18. Make a mess of things.	100	1.77	0.69
5.	Q23. Get chores done right away.	100	4.11	0.67
6.	Q28. Often forget to put things back in their proper place.	100	3.49	0.88
7.	Q33. Like order.	100	3.4	0.78
8.	Q38. Shirk my duties.	100	1.64	0.58
9.	Q43. Follow a schedule.	100	4.05	0.77
10.	Q48. Am exacting in my work.	100	4.25	0.81
Total			26.74	

Mean score of statement 1 is 2.44 which means that leaders slightly disagree with the fact that they are always prepared. Mean score of statement 2 is 2.68 which says that leaders remained neutral on the issue of leaving belongings around. Mean score of statement 3 is 4.07 which means that leaders slightly agreed that they pay attention to details. Mean score of statement 4 is 1.77 which means that they slightly disagree by saying that they do not make a mess of things. Mean score of statement 5 is 4.11 and it means that leaders slightly agree that they get their chores done right away. Mean score of statement 6 is 3.49 which says that leaders remained neutral about the question related to putting things back to their place. Mean score of statement 7 is 3.4 which says that leaders stayed neutral on the question of liking order in their life. Mean score of statement 8 is 1.64 which says that they strongly disagreed saying that they do not shirk their duties. Mean score of statement 9 is 4.05 and it means that leaders slightly agreed that they follow a schedule in their professional tasks. Mean score of statement 10 is 4.25 which says that leaders slightly agreed that they like to do exact work and follow exactness.

**Table No 3: Neuroticism**

Sr No.	Neuroticism	N	M	SD
1.	Q4. Get stressed out easily.	100	3.64	0.85
2.	Q9. Am relaxed most of the time.	100	3.51	0.75
3.	Q14. Worry about things.	100	3.76	1.01
4.	Q19. Seldom feel blue.	100	2.85	0.86
5.	Q24. Am easily disturbed.	100	1.52	0.77
6.	Q29. Get upset easily.	100	1.72	0.70
7.	Q34. Change my mood a lot.	100	2.75	0.76
8.	Q39. Have frequent mood swings.	100	1.58	0.71
9.	Q44. Get irritated easily.	100	1.83	0.70
10.	Q49. Often feel blue.	100	1.63	0.73
Total			25.96	

Mean score of statement 1 is 3.64 which says that leaders slightly agreed with the statement that they get stressed out quite easily. Mean score of statement 2 is 3.51 which says that leaders remain neutral in saying they are relaxed most of the times. Mean score of statement

3 is 3.76 which says that leaders slightly agreed saying that they worry about things. Mean score of statement 4 is 2.85 which says that they are neutral on the concept of feeling blue. Mean score of statement 5 is 1.52 which says that they strongly disagreed saying that they do not get easily disturbed. Mean score of statement 6 is 1.72 which says that leaders slightly disagree that they do not get upset very easily. Mean score of statement 7 is 2.75 which says that they are mainly neutral and feel that they do not change their mood a lot. Mean score of statement 8 is 1.58 which shows that they slightly disagree with the fact that they have frequent mood swings. Mean score of statement 9 is 1.83 which says that they slightly disagree with the statement and express that they do not get irritated easily. Mean score of statement 10 is 1.63 which says that they slightly disagree that they do not feel blue.

**Table No 4: Openness**

Sr No.	Openness	N	M	SD
1.	Q5. Have a rich vocabulary.	100	4.38	0.58
2.	Q10. Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.	100	1.55	0.76
3.	Q15. Have a vivid imagination.	100	3.95	0.94
4.	Q20. Am not interested in abstract ideas.	100	1.78	0.79
5.	Q25. Have excellent ideas.	100	4.2	0.71
6.	Q30. Do not have a good imagination.	100	1.55	0.61
7.	Q35. Am quick to understand things.	100	4.19	0.56
8.	Q40. Use difficult words.	100	2.21	0.90
9.	Q45. Spend time reflecting on things.	100	2.85	0.91
10.	Q50. Am full of ideas.	100	4.33	0.77
	Total		29.23	

Mean score of statement 1 is 4.38 which means that they slightly agree by saying that they do have a rich vocabulary bank. Mean score of statement 2 is 1.55 which says that they slightly disagree to having difficulty understanding abstract ideas. Mean score of statement 3 is 3.95 which says that leaders slightly agree to having a vivid imagination. Mean score of statement 4 is 1.78 which means that leaders slightly disagree to having no interest in abstract ideas. Mean score of statement 5 is 4.2 which says that leaders slightly agree to having excellent ideas. Mean score of statement 6 is 1.55 which says that leaders slightly disagree to not having an active imagination. Mean score of statement 7 is 4.19 which says that leaders slightly agree to having quick understanding of things. Mean score of statement 8 is 2.21 which says that leaders slightly disagree that they use difficult words in their conversations. Mean score of statement 9 is 2.85 which says that they remained neutral on the question of spending time on reflection. Mean score of statement 10 is 4.33 which says that leaders slightly agree that they have a lot of ideas.

#### 4.1 Discussion

Big five personality test was conducted on 100 HOD's from five public and five private universities. This test classifies leader's personality into five categories. The five personality traits are Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism and Conscientiousness. According to this test, 47 HOD's out of 100 were identified as having openness to experience as their most dominant characteristic. This means that these leaders are mainly open to new

experiences and they are more inclined towards challenging intellectual pursuits. People who are having a high level of openness, tend to savor new experiences. They have good imagination and they do not curb their curiosity. Their curious side keeps them open minded and experimental. They like novelty in both professional and personal life. Individuals have a desire to explore, accept and ponder over stuff which has not been explored before (McCrae & Costa, 1987). There are some other characteristics of people who have high degree of openness as well. They judge people less often and they respect difference of opinion more. They manage easily in various different situations and in case of a conflict, they handle the situation amicably as against those who are having a low degree of openness to experience. But there is a down side to this as well. The leaders who have openness to experience as their high score, they tend to day-dream a lot because they think of it all the time. This ultimately leading openness to become a somehow negative trait in leaders. Second most dominating characteristic seen amongst leaders is Agreeableness. This shows that such leaders adjust their behavior to suit others and they are eventually liked by most people. They like to please people and it is difficult for them to create an air of distaste within an organization and then live with it. People who fall in this category are usually very polite because they are good with interpersonal skills and their people management skills are very good. They like people and generally maintain cordial relationship with them.

The leaders who have this characteristic/trait, are usually empathetic and feel for their team. They can put themselves in the place of their subordinates and feel their problems. They are altruistic because they show un-biased concern for the well-being of their people. They are modest and cooperative as well. People who have high level of agreeableness, are usually positive and they have cordial relationships with others. The most dominating trait of these people is that they can always find a middle ground in every situation. They have the patience to be good listeners even when they feel that others are presenting opinions which might be wrong. There is a drawback to people high in agreeableness because sometimes they cannot express their opinion clearly and they might have to go with the opinions they do not agree with. Some situations might expect the leader to make objective decisions and agreeable leaders sometimes cannot do that. Extraversion was identified to be the dominating trait of 24 HOD's from the total population of 100. A major part of a leader's life is to interact and handle problems of the team. That is why it is essential for the leader to be outgoing and social. Extraversion deals with people who are "life of the party". These people are hyper active and like to participate in all social activities. They enjoy the company of people and mainly stay with people. They have a drawback as well where they only want to be the center of attraction at every party and cannot tolerate being side-lined. Their sub-traits are gregariousness, friendliness, assertiveness, cheerfulness and excitement seeking. People who have a high level of Extraversion, like to discuss their problems with their colleagues and friends. This gives them a cushion which they need for their emotional stability. They can voice their opinion in any circumstances and they do not care whether their opinion makes others uncomfortable or not.

Conscientiousness is the fourth dominating trait with 8 leaders identified as having conscientiousness as their top characteristic. Conscientious leaders are goal-oriented, self-

disciplined, thoughtful and controlled. Persistence is the key for conscientious leaders because they believe upon goal-oriented approach. They pay a lot of attention to details and specifics. Conscientious leaders are very organized and they stick to their schedules and plans. They like to meet deadlines and submit their projects in advance. Conscientious leaders are very well-disciplined and goal-oriented. They do the right thing and cannot allow others to go the wrong way. These leaders follow their schedules and also push others to follow theirs too. 5 leaders were identified to be in the fifth category which is “Neuroticism”. This trait is characterized by a persistent but disproportionate sense of worrying and anxiety. This type of leaders want to achieve perfection in every walk of life and when things get out of their control, they feel really frustrated and flustered. They cannot manage the common day to day phenomenon of unpredictability of events. Their tilt usually goes towards the negative side of events more than the positive side of events. This ultimately leads them to be insecure and jealous of people who are at an advantaged position. They may experience disruptive emotions more frequently than others because their reactions are usually hostile and negative. They procrastinate more than any other personality trait because they tend to self-lame. Although people assume that neuroticism is somehow negative but they tend to be much more successful than others. They think too much about others and that is why they maintain stable harmonious relationship with their colleagues and friends.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined the personality profiles of educational leaders using the Big Five Personality Test, which measures five major dimensions: openness, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. The findings indicate a varied distribution of dominant traits among the participants. A substantial proportion of leaders ( $n = 47$ ) demonstrated openness as their primary trait, suggesting that creativity, intellectual curiosity, and receptiveness to new ideas are prominent characteristics within this leadership group. Extraversion emerged as the dominant trait for 24 leaders, reflecting tendencies toward sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm, qualities that may facilitate effective communication and team engagement. Agreeableness was identified as the leading trait for 30 participants, indicating the presence of empathy, cooperation, and strong interpersonal orientation. In contrast, neuroticism was the dominant trait for only five leaders, reflecting comparatively lower representation of emotional instability within the sample. Conscientiousness emerged as the primary trait for eight leaders, underscoring attributes such as responsibility, organization, and dependability. Overall, these findings suggest that while leadership is associated with diverse personality configurations, traits such as openness and agreeableness appear more frequently within this sample and may have meaningful implications for leadership practices in the educational context.

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