**Trait Approach of Leadership**

Summary by Deniz Ismailoff and Susan Deehan Murray

* Emphasis is on the traits that the individual leader embodies including personality traits, talents, strengths, and intelligences (Fleener, 2011).
* Focuses on the traits of leaders and does not take into consideration the situation in which the leader is in nor the role of followers.
* Early 20th century: "great man" theories identified innate qualities of leaders (Fleener, 2011).
* Mid-20th century: research reviews suggested situational factors be considered.
* Late 20th century: researchers explored aspects of leadership traits including personality, social intelligence, learned vs. inherited traits, strengths, talents, and emotional intelligence.

**Trait Research Comparison**

Studies of leadership traits and characteristics yielded a diverse list of traits identified as definitive leadership traits that successful leaders can strive to possess. Northouse considers intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability central to this list.

**Weaknesses**

* Only focuses on leaders and does not provide a definitive list of leadership traits.
* Not useful for training or leadership development.
* Highly subjective determinations of the leadership traits based on experiences.
* Inability to offer clear distinctions between leaders and non-leaders (Zaccaro, 2007).
* Failing to look at how leadership traits affect the team, productivity, or employee satisfaction.

**Strengths**

* Only focuses on leaders and pinpoints strengths and weaknesses.
* Leaders are gifted people that are different based on specific traits they possess.
* Longevity and creativity of research.
* The interaction between the leader and the situation is key to understanding leadership (Fleener, 2011).

**Leadership Trait Questionnaire (LTQ)**

Assesses personal leadership characteristics. Quantifies the perceptions of the individual leader and selected observers/peers. Access [bit.ly/njcutrait](https://padlet.com/smurray15/traits2) to view the Padlet containing a link to the printable LTQ survey.

**References**

Fleener, J.W. (2011). *Trait approach to leadership*. Sage Publications.

Northouse, P. (2019). Leadership: Theory and practice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zaccaro, S.J. (2007). Trait-based perspectives of leadership. *American Psychologist, 62*(1), 6-16. https://doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.6