Exploring the Relationship Between Psychological Maturity and Leadership Personality Traits – A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose : The study here used discourse analysis (DA), a qualitative approach addressed by psychological researchers, to understand and interpret the meaning associated with psychological maturity and leadership personality traits and to explore the relationship between them.

Methodology : DA has the capability of innovatively addressing global psychology issues like maturity and personality. The data were collected from research journals on psychology and human resource management published by eminent psychological researchers to ensure the content validity of the study.

Key Findings : Three levels of psychological maturity (PM) during adulthood and pertaining to leaders were found to be : socialization, self-authorization, and self-transformation. The transformation from employee to leadership role induced responsibility and emotional stability in an individual. Personality traits like extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and agreeableness vary from males to females in a leadership role.

Practical Implications : In today's volatile world of uncertainties, complexities, and ambiguities (VUCA), multifarious occupational perceptions evolved into leadership maturity. A leader must exhibit calmness and tackle negative feelings causing stress effectively to build emotional stability. Over time, such changes in leadership traits impacted the levels of psychological maturity.

Originality : The mediators identified in the study were conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, which stimulated the strength of association between psychological maturity and leadership personality traits.

Keywords : psychological maturity, personality traits, leadership, discourse analysis, socialization

JEL Classification Codes : I23, L26, M12

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In today's volatile world of uncertainties, complexities, and ambiguities (VUCA), multifarious occupational perceptions have evolved into leadership maturity. These crucial aspects ascertain the success or failure of organizations. Psychological maturation talked about in the theories as stated by Aristotle, Buddha, and renowned developmental psychologists like Kegan recognized it as a process of increasing psychological complexity through several experiences and coping with life (Fossas, 2019; Kegan, 1982). A major change in

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development of personality for adults was transformation into roles and responsibilities, identifying newer concepts and areas of activity. During role transitions, the experiences of individuals increased with demanding job roles, leading to the growth of a calibrated approach to a problem with diligence, calmness, and mental stability (Li et al., 2021). Personality traits defined by Donnellan et al. (2015) and Johnson (1997) is a stable and balanced approach with analytical acumen combined with constructive imagination in organizational research. The transformation from employee to leadership role expects individuals to broaden their mental horizon with an increase in aspects of diligence and resilience, i.e., conscientiousness and extraversion, the two personality traits introduced by Goldberg (1990).

The expectations and responsibilities to be borne by leaders need to be addressed under difficult and uncertain circumstances. The characteristics of emotional stability include calmness and managing negative emotions caused by stressful situations. Over time, such behavioral changes stabilize, resulting in changes in personality traits. Conscientiousness reflects an indication of being dignified, solid, reassuring and, at the same time, persuasive, adaptable, versatile, and accomplished. The practice of spiritualism among professionals studied by Bantha et al. (2021) in an exploratory qualitative research setup justified the growth of an individual from within and thereafter exercising the power of supreme authority as a leadership role demanded intensity, conviction, and energy. Excellence in the execution and implementation of objectives is required to ensure organizational excellence as a team (Bass & Bass, 2008; Hogan et al., 1994; Yukl, 2013). These challenges comprise forms of work ranging from mundane routine tasks to unprecedented and unpredictable circumstances to be handled (Fleishman et al., 1991; Mintzberg, 1971; Yukl, 2012). In addition to the above, leaders need to be committed towards fulfilling meaningful bonds with all stakeholders at work, primarily subordinates, top management, and external agencies (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Reitzig & Maciejovsky, 2015).

A study by Meskelis and Whittington (2020) explored the need for individual traits impacting employee engagement through positive leadership. The association between emotional intelligence and personality traits of a leader (Sumadi et al., 2024) showed biasedness, where neuroticism and agreeableness were influenced more out of the five human characteristics of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness. This resulted in the research problem and further study, using an appropriate method to explore the association between psychological maturity and leadership characteristics.

Out of the previous studies, the gap identified by Lee (2022) stated that there is a need to explore leadership interaction leading to job satisfaction and improving the perception of association among employees. There is a need to explore the leadership approach considering gender diversity (Andrade, 2023). Mishra et al. (2022) studied the effect of leadership, subordinates, and firms and expressed the need for developing propositions that can form the base for future research work. Fossas (2019) found out that cross-sectional studies are unable to prove the relationship between happiness and psychological maturity contrary to longitudinal and qualitative studies. There are not many current studies available on psychological maturity to justify the relationship with leadership personality traits.

In this study, we have attempted to capture the views of different psychological researchers over time to reach a conceptual framework. We have used discourse analysis, a qualitative approach addressed by psychological researchers, to understand and interpret the meaning of psychological maturity and leadership personality traits and their relationship in the context of organizational behavior. Discourse analysis can innovatively address global psychological issues like maturity and personality (Stead & Young, 2007). The research question considered for the discourse analysis is whether the five personality traits mediate the relationship between leadership personality traits and psychological maturity.

Literature Review

Psychological Maturity

The organizational structure with meaning and wisdom is generally termed psychological maturity (Bauger et al., 2021; Staudinger et al., 2005). The term enfolds and characterizes multifarious advances in theoretical frameworks like the humanistic approaches to personality development of Maslow (1968, 1970) and Rogers (1961), the psychosocial development theory of Erikson (1997), ego development (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976), moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969), and meaning-making system (Kegan, 1982, 1994). According to Fossas (2019), the hypothetical and the structural affinity between various theories of development advocated a customary maturational process that was latent in a wide range of complex mental measures, e.g., cognitive ability, thought-provoking and personality-related, which spanned the lifetime of a human being.

These diverse hypotheses converged into the building up of an ascending competency to be able to think with analytical depth and analytical breadth about the benefits and knowledge acquisition of both oneself and others which may be termed as psychological maturity. According to Manukyan et al. (2015), several researchers maintained that the vital benchmark and measure of psychological maturity was an overall elevation of an individual's quality of life (Sen & Banerjee, 2022) in the ability to act independently under external and internal business environment, programmed to focus totally on execution of best skills in the most destructive circumstances (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, 1999; Leontiev, 2011; Sergienko, 2007). Keeping in mind the viewpoint of the above researchers, the psychological maturity of personality (Dermanova & Manukyan, 2010) is represented by responsibility, reflectiveness, a subjective development marked by intelligence, discernment, dignity and reassurance – in a character which is morally edifying, intellectually elevating, and emotionally satisfying to all concerned. An accomplished, adroit, and adept person in society is a motivational and inspiring leader, treasuring the quality of optimism, simplicity, tolerance, patience, compassion, and creative skills of improvisation in all circumstances of positive public relations. In a study by Singh et al. (2019), testing psychological parameters like emotional intelligence, participation, facilitation, negotiation, and communication skills result in the acceptance of change.

Leadership Personality Traits

Personality is often referred to as an individual's total sensitivities and intellectual and behavioral patterns. According to Dababneh et al. (2022), there is a universal psychological need for effective, distinguished, and consummate leadership across the globe to fit into specific archetypal leadership styles. Oentoro et al. (2016) defined personality as inherent qualities in people that delineate their behavioral patterns. These involve temperaments, implementation of schemes, and societal synchronicity that are consistent with maturity in leadership. The Big Five Model advocated the belief that personal characteristics represent the potential to conceive, discern, and expedite decisive action erected to build upon five broad pillars, mainly extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (McCrae & John, 1992). According to Judge et al. (2017), personality represents the holistic manner in which a leader reacts and interacts. In one of the studies by Deshpande et al. (2024), green initiatives by leaders influenced environmental consciousness in the workplace.

Methodology

In this study, we have used discourse analysis (Ranade et al., 2023) to understand how leadership personality traits

influence psychological maturity, and it includes different analytical views (Cotter, 2018; Fetzer, 2018; Gee, 2014; Jones, 2018, 2019; Traynor, 2006). Jones characterized the following three options to study discourse viz. formal, functional, and social (Jones, 2018, 2019). Here, discourse analysis is looked upon as a social approach where language is considered a social practice (Jones, 2019). The data were collected from research journals on psychology and human resource management and the data sources were books and journals to ensure the content validity of the study.

Influence of Leadership Personality Traits on Psychological Maturity

In one of the studies about personality and leadership by Andrade (2023), personality features are the yardsticks of how leaders identify themselves in terms of the cognitive and metabolic entity and how others observe an understanding. In a research work by Prabhu and Koodamara (2022), there is a conceptualization of shared leadership, spirit at work, and team trust. However, opinions about leadership traits may change with male and female leadership and stereotyped individuals. The personality traits like extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and agreeableness vary from male to female in leadership roles. Conscientiousness and openness to experience are more salient in predicting leadership self-efficacy for women; whereas, extraversion is a better characteristic for men with power and assertiveness (Huszczo & Endres, 2017). Conscientiousness levels are higher for women than men, while openness and extraversion qualities are found reasonably among men and women leaders. Openness to experience justifies the effectiveness of female leaders in a male-dominated organizational culture. The development of this trait contributes to higher work responsibilities, leading to the improvement of women's leadership self-beliefs. In another way, openness to experience can create resilient leaders, especially in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to inspiring work culture, retention of the workforce, and crisis management (Pai et al., 2023).

Kegan's Theory is related to a psychological cognitive approach taking into account each level of psychological maturity in a specific manner by balancing the subject and object, where the subject relates to individual commitment as well as an inability to take up a perspective, while the object relates to those issues which have to be put into action on a broader canvas (Berger, 2005). Kegan identified five distinct qualitative levels of psychological maturity. Impulsive and instrumental minds, being impetuous, are chiefly confined to childhood and adolescence; whereas the adult mind copes with socialization, self-authorization, and self-transformation. Every stage of maturity manifests and demonstrates an escalation of ability and sagacity to realize that every challenge begins with a potential solution along with a consultative and conventional level of involvement at the cognitive as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (Kegan, 1994). At the maturity level of mind relating to social interactions, one can focus the intellect on one's needs and concerns and adjust and comply with these to others. Here, self-interest is combined with principles, morals, and expectations as experienced around us (Helsing & Howell, 2014). At this level of maturity, kinsmen, especially parents, friends, and social groups at large, harbor certain expectations since one has not established an independent way of thinking to resolve a conflict. At the self-authorization stage of maturity, an astute and confident individual adapts a more harmonious and balanced individual stance, which broadens and branches out to accumulated societal influences. A competence acquired by self-acquired authority can be interpreted as an inherent ability to distinguish one's self and convictions individually through social relations (Magolda, 2008). At this stage, one has inwardly cultivated a system focused on self-confidence, which is streamlined towards and culminating into an independent decision-making entity, uniquely creative and endowed with the spontaneity of thoughts, ideas, and opinions (Kegan & Lahey, 2010). According to Kegan and Lahey (2009), the majority of adults balance between the socialization and self-authoring maturity level, while the self-transforming mind is rarely observed. The above discourses clearly signify a connection between psychological maturity and leadership personality traits in terms

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework Showcasing the Relationship Between Psychological Maturity and Leadership Personality Traits*
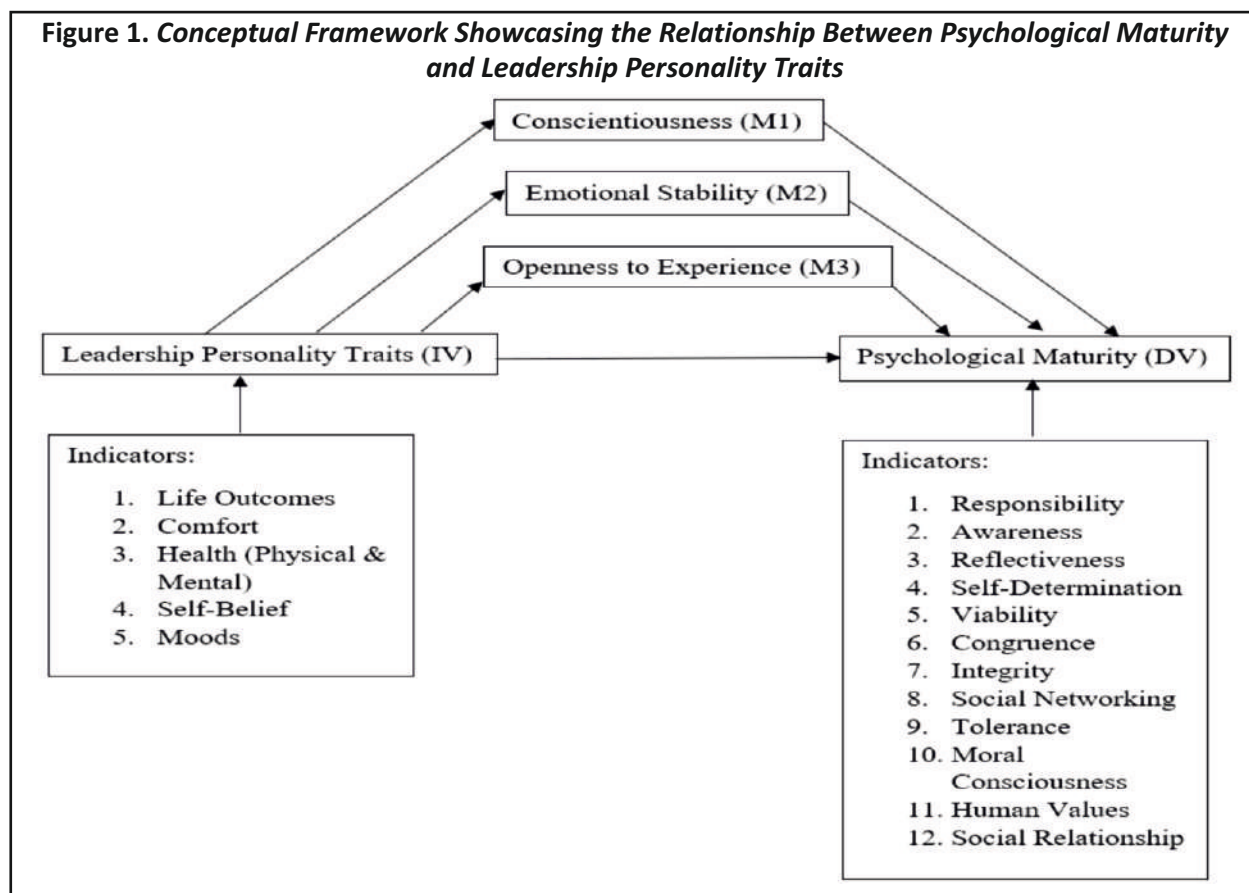
of social behavior and the personality traits primarily, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience prevalent in organizational culture.

The proposed conceptual framework can depict the discourse analysis from multiple perspectives, as stated by psychological researchers.

Figure 1 shows the proposed model linking psychological maturity as a dependent variable (DV) and leadership personality traits as independent variable (IV) with their respective indicators for measurement. The mediators M1, M2, and M3 are conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience stimulating the strength of the relationship between the two constructs: psychological maturity and leadership personality traits using Hayes's (2013) parallel mediation Model 4. During framing of the above conceptual framework based on previous studies, three of the Big Five personality traits – conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience have impacted the leadership personality traits, mostly leading to affecting the psychological maturity of an individual. It has also been observed from the discourses of psychological researchers that gender plays an important factor in the variation of personality traits and there lies a direct relationship between leadership personality traits and level of psychological maturity.

Research Implications and Conclusion

Perspectives about psychological maturity and leadership personality traits address socialization and self-authorization to a great extent. Further studies can be done to empirically determine the nuances of leadership maturity. Leaders need to fulfill the expectations and responsibilities that deal with uncertainties and frequent

changes. Therefore, a leader must exhibit calmness and handle negative emotions in responses to stress effectively to build emotional stability. Over time, such changes in leadership traits impact the levels of psychological maturity. In this exploratory qualitative study, it has been observed that gender inclusion influences leadership style, as found in previous research by Singh et al. (2021). A transformational leadership behavior is characterized by conscientiousness, openness to experience, and extraversion; in other words, emotional stability (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012), mediating the relationship here between leadership personality traits and psychological maturity.

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

The study is qualitative in nature and highlights the narratives of several psychological researchers about psychological maturity and leadership personality traits. Future studies need to determine the empirical framework justifying the conceptual model proposed here. There is a need to develop a scale measuring the impact of leadership personality traits on psychological maturity. The study is limited to the psychological maturity of leaders. Further research can be done to determine the leadership skills, qualities, and powers required in a dynamic work culture. In addition, a positive leadership style can be further analyzed to understand organizational effectiveness (Khatri et al., 2022). Dababneh et al. (2022) stated that future researchers can investigate the link between leadership personality traits and job satisfaction with reference to loss making business sectors.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Subhasis Sen and Dr. Sweta Banerjee are the leading authors in the field of research and development. They conceptualized the research paper title through years of work experience, conducted the study in consultation with subordinates as well as leadership team while developing a conceptual framework by exploring past and present research works of eminent scholars in human resource management and psychology. We express our deep gratitude towards Sri Balaji University, Pune (India), for facilitating and encouraging the research process using prominent research databases like Scopus, EBSCO, and ProQuest.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this paper.

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