

Case Study: Personalities and Military Leadership Styles

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Abstract

This purpose of this paper is to understand if there is any correlation between personality traits and preferred leadership style in the military. It examines the four personality traits given by Don Lowry, who created the True Colors™ personality test, which are represented by color. This paper will look into each of the four colors and examine their attributes. Furthermore, this paper will look to three leadership styles: Situational, Transactional, and Transformational Leadership. Lastly, the data will be examined to understand if personality has any influence over leadership style. The research presented in this paper was gathered from peer reviewed academic journals, a True Colors™ personality test, and a nine-question survey that is derived directly from each leadership category. The subjects represented in the quantitative analysis were from an undisclosed military installation and the persons were kept anonymous.

Keywords: personalities, True Colors™, situational, transactional, transformational, leadership

Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to understand if there is a link between personalities and leadership styles. This research will synthesize material from multiple different case studies and articles and will focus on personalities, situational, transactional, and transformational leadership. Is there a direct correlation between personalities and leadership styles?

Situational leadership is how leaders prepare subordinates for future tasks and help them develop their skills. According to Meier (2016), “a leader must always analyze the situational context of the task and the follower’s maturity for it” (p. 28). Ensuring the appropriate level of leadership will be important to the subordinate’s professional development. Not everyone has the same set of skill, and the leadership needs to be tailored for different situations.

Transactional leadership uses a rewards-based approach that is intended to motivate followers for meeting the goals set by the organization. It also holds members accountable for not meeting expectations to curb any negative behavior in the future. According to Van Dijk et al. (2021), “they enact monitoring and corrective behaviors, as well as provide punishment” (p. 639).

“Transformational leaders identify new opportunities and inspire followers, set an example for employees to follow, and promote cooperation among employees and the acceptance of collective goals” (Burmeister et al., 2020, p. 19). They encourage the members to be the best version of themselves while being an active member of the organization. While these two styles of leadership appear to be on different sides of the spectrum, both have their advantages and motivate their followers accordingly.

There are many factors that contribute to team effectiveness. Leadership plays a critical role in shaping team members’ attitudes, for effective team interactions, and for providing a

sense of direction for the team (Siangchokyoo & Klinger, 2022, p. 110). While leaders provide direction for the team, the team needs to have a positive mindset to achieve its goals. Leadership and team members alike play a very important part in the success of the team.

This research examines if there is any correlation of an individual's personality and their leadership style. It will discuss situational, transactional, and transformational leadership along with the advantages and disadvantages. This research was based off of a military setting and will examine the findings.

Literature Review

Introduction

The military is made up of many different organizational structures and teams. These teams are the core building block of the military (Boies & Howell, 2009, p. 217). According Sivarat et al. (2021) leadership is defined as:

Leadership is the behavior in which leaders express their authority or influence on their colleagues in different situations, by motivating co-workers to create internal incentives for them to be satisfied, cooperate with each other willingly, and put forth their efforts to perform their work by putting their energy into perspective, physical strength, knowledge, the ability to help solve problems in order to effectively accomplish the objectives. (p. 209)

Organizations must ensure they have the most qualified person leading their team if they wish to succeed. With the military having the ability to operate in multiple different domains, it's important to build their leadership skills so they can ensure mission success.

Military leaders go through different levels of professional development to learn the fundamentals of these leadership skills. According to Gleiman & Zacharakis (2016), “Over time, military leaders return to the ‘schoolhouse’ every 3 to 5 years during a 20-plus-year career, to engage in learning related to more academic topics including leadership” (p. 84). The Air Force has three main leadership schools: Airman Leadership School, Non-Commissioned Officer Academy, and Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy. This is where they learn different styles of leadership and how to apply those depending on the situation.

Not every situation requires the same level or style of leadership. The type of leadership style depends on the situation they are currently dealing with (Hamad, 2017, p. 5). This will also depend on the type of people they are leading since not everyone has the same personality or motivators. This makes choosing the correct style of leadership that much more important. Therefore, this research is to examine situational, transactional, and transformational leadership styles, as well member satisfaction and job performance of high-performing individuals.

Personalities

Personality plays a critical role in the development and success of a team. When working in a team setting, it’s important to understand your own personality as the personality preference of the other members of the team. According to Bird et al. (2016), “Personality preferences can be assigned using various types of assessments designed to identify different ways in which an individual cognitively processes a problem or topic” (p. 1).

Personality tests are one method to identify how to communicate with someone. According to Ali (2018), “information about an individual’s personality can provide valuable information pertaining to what is the best method of communicating with them and what types of

jobs and tasks they are suitable for” (p. 38). Don Lowry created the True Colors™ Personality model in 1978. According to Weber (2019), “Lowry developed a four-part classification that departmentalizes personality traits. Each category is associated with a color assigned intentionally to describe the group” (p. 128). These four colors are: Orange, Gold, Blue, and Green.

Neff (2015) states, “Those with Orange color personality strengths tend to be witty, spontaneous, generous, optimistic, eager and bold. They need fun, variety, stimulation and excitement” (para. 1). Oranges tend to take risks and lack attention span. They like to bounce from one project to another making things difficult to keep on track. However, they are good at breaking down barriers and think out-of-the-box (Neff, 2015, para 3-4). Table 1 shows a breakdown of the separate personality’s values, needs, attributes, and preferred learning.

“Individuals with predominately ‘gold’ personality like structure and being in control of groups or projects put in their charge”. Additionally, “They thrive with routine and adherence to policies and procedures, and they are usually highly organized and value planning ahead” (Torretta & Bovitz, 2021, p. 2). Research also suggests that golds believe that their way of doing things is the only way and they often times do not collaborate well with others.

People with the Blue personality are compassionate. According to Freeman (2009), “They relate well in groups of people but are sensitive to people’s feelings. Blues like to nurture other’s potential and expect people to develop their own potential” (p. 3). Furthermore, “They enjoy unity and harmony for all; possessing a strong spirituality”. Freeman (2009) also goes on to state, “Others may perceive blues as overly emotional, weird, naïve and easy to manipulate” (p. 3).

According to Bellman (2013), “Greens enjoy spending time alone, problem solving, and analyzing” (p. 22). Bellman (2013) also goes on to state, “Greens look at the big picture, which makes it hard for them to move quickly without having a full understanding of what is happening” (p. 22). They are logical and turn to research and data to help them make tough decisions.

Table 1

True Colors™	Core Values, Needs, Attributes	Preferred Learning and Assessments
Orange	freedom, creativity, spontaneity	active, hands-on activities, independent projects, multiple-choice testing
Gold	duty, responsibility, planning, predictable routines, structure	rules, standards, accurate directions, lecture formats, frequent quizzes
Blue	relationships, harmony, caretaking, loyal	interactions, collaborations, non-competitive assessments, essays
Green	independence, intellectual-competence, logical, theoretical, abstract thinking	time for exploration, investigations, essay or oral examinations

Fiorenza & Hanna (2019). Greater Differentiation of Instruction and Mastery of Learning for Student Teachers by utilizing the True Colors™ Model.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership was first developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969. Kenton (2020) summarized situational leadership theory given by Hersey and Blanchard as, “no single leadership style is better than another. Instead of focusing on workplace factors, the model suggests leaders adjust their styles to those they lead and their abilities” (para 1). Furthermore, “the situational leader adopts the appropriate leadership style to match the follower’s developmental level” (Lynch, 2015, p. 2).

According to Woods (2019), “there is no one ideal way to influence and lead people, and a good leader will be one who is able to adapt his or her leadership to achieve congruency with the required organizational goals and objectives” (p. 3). McCleskey (2014) describes situational leadership as, “effective leadership requires a rational understanding of the situation and an appropriate response” (p. 117). This information tells us that the situational leadership theory requires leaders to remain flexible so they can adapt to different situations as they arise. The definition given by Woods will be used since military teams are structured to meet organizational goals and objectives.

The advantages of using the situational leadership style is the ability to increase members readiness. According to Vecchio et al. (2006), “the model involves creating developmental challenges for subordinates that can help to move a subordinate to higher levels of readiness/maturity” (p. 409). Developing a member to a higher level of readiness increases their performance and capability. Gaille (2018) stated, “this allows team members to find common ground with each other, which reduces the risks of internal conflict developing” (para 8).

Some of the disadvantages of situational leadership is that it focuses on the short-term instead of the long-term needs. According to Kaushik (2020), “If you focus too much on what is directly ahead of you, then you risk neglecting the long-term vision of both your team and your organization as a whole” (para 11). Another disadvantage of this theory is the incorrect application of leadership. Lekka et al. (2012) found that, “the hectic and fast-paced nature of managerial work means that it may be difficult for managers to apply different behaviors depending on the situation to ensure optimal performance” (p. 12).

Transactional Leadership

“Transactional leadership focuses more on increasing employees’ motivation and compliance through the exchange of desired rewards or unwanted punishments (Lee & Ding, 2020, p. 670). The military uses this technique in many different settings where they use a system of rewards to get the desired output from their members. This style of leadership is focused on results where specific objectives must be accomplished, and deadlines need to be met.

According to Kumar (2018), “Transactional leadership theory looks at exchange of wants between followers and leaders. This style is based on the exchange of rewards contingent on performance. Transactional leaders display constructive and corrective behaviors such as contingent reward and corrective dimension” (p. 17). Dr. Chandan & Devi (2014) explains transactional leadership as, “an exchange of rewards between the leaders and the subordinates for services rendered. Transactional leaders try to motivate their followers through extrinsic rewards” (p. 5). Further, Hamad’s (2017) definition is, “transactional leadership which is also known as a traditional military leadership’s style, uses the existing organizational structures to build energy of the followers in return for rewards or punishments. It is designed to promote (motivate) the follower’s compliance through reward and punishment” (p. 4). Given the structure of the military, the definition of transactional leadership provided by Hamad will be used.

The advantage of using transactional leadership is that it motivates members to achieve a set goal by rewarding them when those goals are met (Sivarat et al., 2021, p. 214). It provides structure and direction to larger organizations so there is no doubt what needs to be done. It also has clearly defined rules where the rewards and penalties are understood by the members of the

organization. Transactional leaders pay close attention and correct issues when they occur (Sunil, 2018, p. 17). This allows the leader to correct and prevent further damage from happening. Furthermore, according to Jong & Faerman (2021), “When transactional leaders provide specific goals, employees are more likely to experience self-efficacy (competence) and meaning, two dimensions of empowerment” (p. 567). This provides the members with a great sense of worth in the organization and leads to higher performance.

The downside of transactional leadership is that it takes away from the creativity of the members. Since the goals and objectives are already set, there is little room for members to be creative in their organization. “Innovation in leadership is being observed as the implementation of a new or significantly improved solution in order to strengthen the competitive advantage” (de Souza et al., 2017, p. 2073). Since transactional leadership has clear cut goals and expectations, members cannot stray from the direction that is given to them. This puts a strain on members’ creativity, reducing professional development.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders inspire members to be the best version of themselves. It motivates them to commit to the organizational goals instead of their own self-interest. Transformational leadership has been defined as, “Transformational leaders seek to increase the admiration, respect, and trust of the followers” (Cheng et al., 2012 p. 383). However, according to Sehgal et al. (2021), “transformational leaders provide personal consideration for employees’ personal growth and spend time coaching, teaching, and developing employees’ strengths so that they reach their full potential” (p. 20). While these two perspectives do have some similarities, the research will be conducted using the definition given by Sehgal et al.

Effective leadership in the military is vital to the success of the mission and the growth of its members. Transformational leadership has been found to be more apparent with higher ranking military officials than their younger, lower ranking counterparts (Gonzalez, 2016, p. 5). According to Gonzalez (2016), “Since transformational leadership has been shown to be effective in the military setting, it appears important to those within the military that these values be instilled in leaders as early as possible, in order to produce the most capable leaders” (p. 6). It is highly important to develop members at an early stage because they will eventually take over the higher-ranking positions and must be prepared to do so.

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their members through coaching and mentoring. This type of leadership lets the members know that the leader cares for their personal and professional growth. According to Jong & Faerman (2021):

When transformational leaders articulate an appealing vision and focus on achieving attractive goals, employees are more likely to perceive favorable working conditions, based on the support and guidance they receive from the leader to help them achieve their goals, which in turn will make it more likely that employees will exert more effort. (p. 567)

Employees may see the impact their work has had in the organization and give them a sense of empowerment and belongingness.

There are many advantages of using transformational leadership. Farahnak et al. (2020) found that, “transformational leadership was associated with improved relationship quality with subordinates during the implementation of organizational change, which was then related to improved subordinate task performance and citizenship behavior” (p. 100). According to Choi et

al. (2012), “leaders not only offer coaching and advice but also give employees attention and treat them as individuals (p. 3)”. Furthermore, Schaubroeck (2007) states, “they also support their followers in working toward the goals, such as by acting as a role model, stimulating them to engage in analysis, showing concern for them as individuals, and encouraging teamwork” (p. 1020).

Transformational leadership is said to have some disadvantages as well. Hamad (2017) stated, “it is more charismatic than transformational...it is absolutely difficult to train other to be transformational leaders” (p. 3). Hay (2006) states, “transformational leadership has potential for the abuse of power...transformational leaders can exert a very powerful influence over followers, who offer them trust and respect. Some leaders may have narcissistic tendencies, thriving on power and manipulation” (p. 13). Since military leaders are higher ranking than their subordinates, this abuse of power can negatively affect the organizational culture and positive climate.

Summary

To summarize, the True Colors™ personality test identifies and describes four colors that correlate to an individual’s personality. Those four colors are Orange, Gold, Blue, and Green. Oranges are spontaneous, require flexibility to operate, and are creative. Golds adhere to rules, uphold standards, and require structure. Blues are sensitive to feelings and value relationships. Greens are analytical, investigative, and logical.

Information was also gathered about leadership styles. It can be concluded that no one style of leadership is a better than the other. According to Wong et al. (2003), “both transformational and transactional contingent reward leadership rating of platoon leaders and

sergeants positively predicted unit performance” (683). Each of these leadership techniques has its advantages and disadvantages and being able to manage each style and knowing when to apply them can lead to high-performing military teams.

The key for leaders is to know what situation requires what style of leadership. Leaders should remain flexible so they can adapt to the changing environment of the military structure and its organizations. Leaders of the military are expected to adapt to every situation and transition between leadership styles depending on the situation (Wong et al., 2003, p. 683). This lowers the chances of decreased motivation and will allow for the organizational teams to continue to operate in an efficient manner.

Framework for Analysis

The framework for this paper is to identify personality types and how they correlate to leadership styles. It challenges the idea that they are both interrelated, and this information can be used to enhance communication. The research supports the need for understanding how personality traits can influence communication styles. The literature review uses previously conducted research on these topics.

The target audience for this research are those that are in, or have the potential to be in, a leadership position. The concept of this paper came from the thought that not every person is the same. Not everyone sends and receives information the same way. Therefore, understanding how someone’s personality effects their communication style, can help the leader determine the appropriate leadership style to use.

The research conducted for this paper utilizes the Granite State library database. The search terms used were military leadership, personality, situational leadership, transactional

leadership, transformational leadership, and True Colors™ Personality Test. Data for the personality test was limited so the search criteria was expanded to the years 2005 and later. The information has been limited to the demographic of the United States to keep consistency with the research.

Methods

For this research, I investigated the different personalities that Don Lowry had described in 1978 when he created the True Colors™ personality assessment. To gather the data on the subjects I utilized a free online test that measures those personalities with a series of questions. At the end of the survey the site gives the subject a numerical value which represents their strongest personality down to their least weakest.

I then created a questionnaire where I drew the questions from each of the three leadership styles described in this paper. I took three main points for each style and created questions using a scale to determine how much each subject valued that style of leadership. I then quantified the data points so that I could make a connection between each of their strongest personality style and leadership preference.

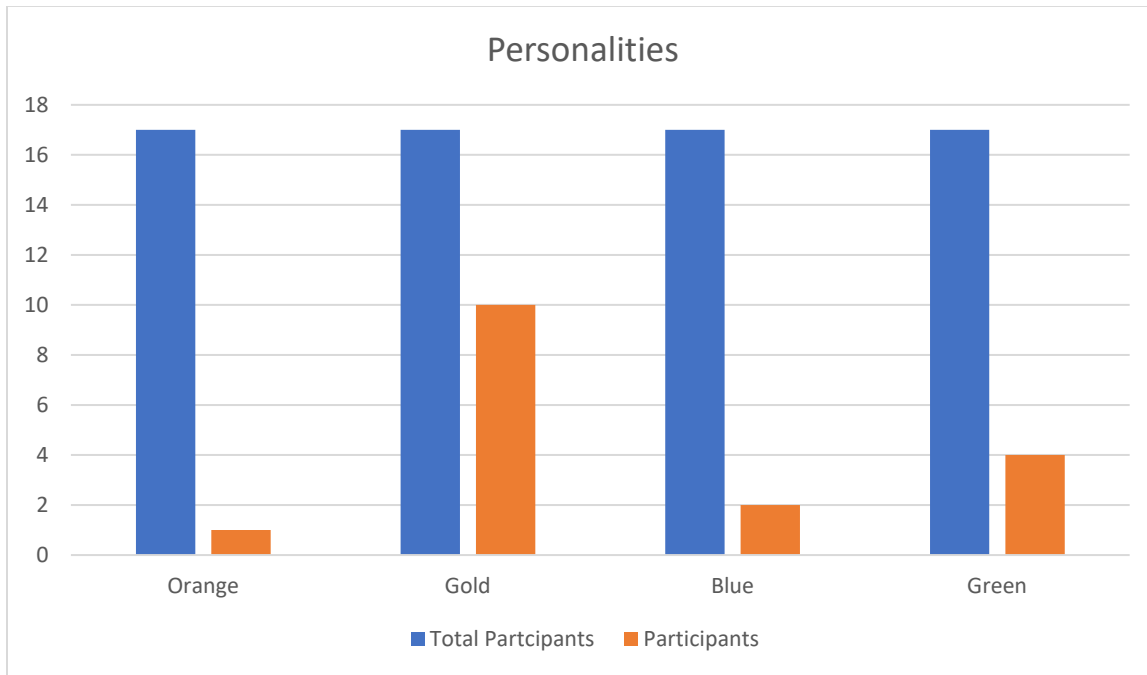
The IRB application was submitted and approved through the Granite State College review board. The questionnaire and survey were approved to use on subjects at an undisclosed military installation with the approval of the commanding officer in charge. All subjects have remained anonymous. The documents provided to the subjects were physically handed out and left no personally identifiable information. The completed documents were submitted into a secure container with restricted access and only taken out to survey the results.

Results

The results of the survey provided information and insight into what personality types were present in leadership roles around the military installation I was observing. Seventeen surveys were conducted in different work centers to get a broader perspective. Each participant worked in a role in which they lead and develop members of the organization.

The results revealed that most of the participants exhibited a gold personality. Specifically, out of the 17, 10 were strongest in this category. The next highest personality trait was the green with 4 entries. Followed by blue with 2 participants, and then orange with only 1. See table 2 for graphic.

Table 2

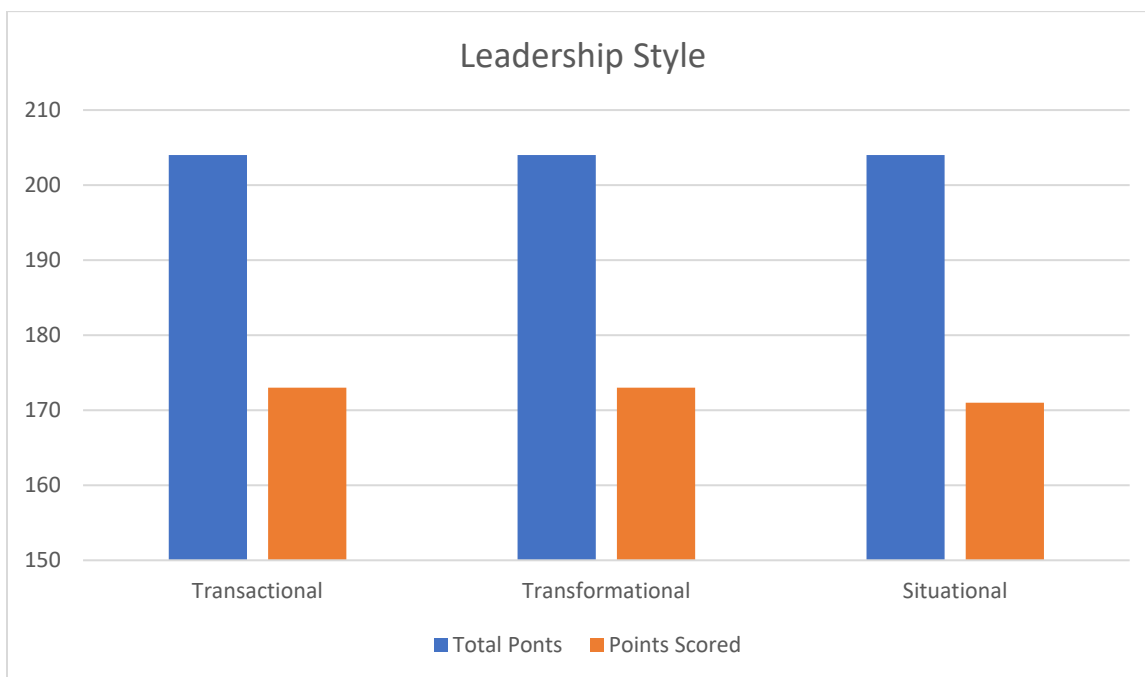


The next data point was the questionnaire. This was a series of 9 questions that asked about how each participant believed they led their subordinates. The data was computed by adding together the numbers that each participant circled in relation to leadership style. For

example, the ratings of each question were a 1 – 4 scale, 1 being the least and 4 being the most. The total amount of points per leadership category was 204.

Of the 17 participants, transactional and transformational leadership had the same numerical outcome of 173 points. Although not every participant in the same personality grouping chose one specifically over the other. Furthermore, the value for situational leadership style was 171 points. See table 3 for graphic.

Table 3



The participants in this study suggest that they follow the more traditional structure of a military organization. That structure is represented by the gold personality which was the most dominate of the four types. It also suggests that not one style of leadership is more apparent than others. This information and having multiple different leadership style attributes can contribute to more effective communication.

The results of this survey and questionnaire did not reveal a compelling case to correlate a connection between a single personality style and a single point of leadership preference.

Although the personality styles were heavily favored as gold, there was no one favored leadership style. In fact, the data shows that no matter the personality style, the leadership preference depends upon the situation and the people they are leading. This shows that military leaders in these positions have a well-rounded skill set that allows them to lead in the manner that is the most effective, regardless of their personality style.

Discussion and Analysis

All subjects that participated in the survey and questionnaire are in a position of leadership within their respective work center. There were seventeen participants, all of which were volunteers. There were no gender requirements or age restrictions for the purpose of this study. The True Colors™ personality test was conducted through an online application, the same link was provided to each member. The subjects then provided their respective results on the nine-question questionnaire. The questionnaire was then filled out to the best of their ability and handed into a secure container that was locked with restricted entry/access. Those results were recorded onto a spreadsheet and the data is compiled into this document.

The online survey took approximately ten minutes to complete and contained a mixture of questions. These questions ask the subject to answer with how they most feel they act in certain situations. The survey gives four different options per question and gives the subject their results at the end. Each personality trait is given a color that represents the personality that matches with their answers.

The questionnaire that was distributed contained nine questions that revolved around each of the three leadership styles discussed in this research: Situational, Transactional, and Transformational. The questions were derived from each theory and four answers were available per each question. The answer scale was: Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always. The

subjects circled the corresponding answer with how they believe they lead their subordinates.

All the answers were recorded onto the questionnaire with no identifiable information about the subject as to keep the survey and questionnaire anonymous.

The information gained from this study have provided beneficial information. However, there are some shortfalls that have been identified. One of those was the lack of participation in the survey. While the subjects provided honest feedback and answers, more members would have given more data to make a stronger conclusion regarding this study.

Another shortfall was the limited radius of the study. If the survey and questionnaire could have been widened out to the entire installation, this could have provided even more information. Since each organization has its own culture and values, a broader perspective into these units might have valuable information.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the analysis of data and the literature review. Participants shared their honest opinions of how they act and lead their teams. The survey and questionnaire reinforced the importance of understanding ones own personality and leadership style. These types of assessments allow leaders to understand how they communicate with others. According to Vidic et al. (2016), “leaders need to possess well-developed interpersonal skills that allow them to motivate and inspire others, foster positive attitudes, and empower emotional commitment from their followers in order to achieve organizational goals” (p. 23).

One recommendation would be to provide this leadership training earlier in a military professionals career. In my experience, we tend to learn these skills before we attend the education. However, if the younger military members had the luxury of learning communication

styles and the difference in personality types, they would be better prepared to lead when they become a supervisor.

The significance of this study highlights the importance of knowing, not just your own, but others personality and leadership styles. Leaders must continue to grow and advance their skills as well as develop their subordinates so they can be effective in any domain. According to Newcomer et al. (2014), “necessary to produce more effective officers and, ultimately, to create a more competent and productive military force” (p. 72).

There are some questions that should be considered for further research. One question should be to include the demographics of the organization. This will allow research to explore the differences in demographics, such as gender and age, and looking into the steps that are taken to deal with the different variables. Understanding the differences in communication between genders and making a connection to personality styles can help further deeper research into this question.

Another question is the study factors of different personality tests and leadership styles. With the many different personality tests and leadership theories, there is more information to analyze. Evaluating these things would give a much larger perspective into these concepts and could be used to understand if there is in fact a connection between both, leadership preference and personality style.

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Appendix A

Volunteer Letter

Subject: Personality Test and Leadership Survey

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student pursuing an M.S. in Leadership from Granite State College. I am kindly requesting your participation in a research study that I am conducting titled: Case Study: The Correlation Between Leadership Styles and Personalities. The intention is to gather self-reported data regarding how personalities relate to different leadership styles and individual performance. Results from this survey will be analyzed quantitatively and will complement other sources of data found in published scholarly research studies.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the survey at any time. The survey is completely anonymous, and I would sincerely appreciate honest and thoughtful responses to the questions.

The survey and questionnaire are brief and will take 10-15 minutes to complete, with all answers in a Likert scale format. To begin the survey, please click the link below or copy and paste the link into your browser.

Should you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me at j.hauser@granite.edu.

Link to Survey:

<https://my-personality-test.com/true-colours>

Questionnaire:

Scale: 1 = Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4: Almost always

1. I ensure members receive recognition/rewards when they complete goals. 1 2 3 4
2. I manage subordinates by setting standards that are mutually agreed upon. 1 2 3 4
3. I hold members accountable and correct poor performance. 1 2 3 4
4. I consistently provide feedback and coach my team members, so they know how they are performing. 1 2 3 4
5. I help others with their personal and professional development. 1 2 3 4
6. I encourage innovation and creativity at the workplace. 1 2 3 4
7. I can adapt to many different situations. 1 2 3 4
8. I am satisfied if things are going smoothly. 1 2 3 4
9. I let members work in the manner they want. 1 2 3 4

True Colors Scoring: Orange= Gold= Green= Blue=

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Joseph Hauser

Leadership Student

Granite State College