

Moving into a Leadership Role Can Shape Personality Development



We know that personality characteristics can be used to predict whether someone will emerge and be effective in a leadership role. Moreover, there is rich evidence that personality is extraordinarily stable—scores on personality assessments change little over long periods of time. But a recent ground-breaking study has also demonstrated that **becoming a leader can, to some extent, actually shape a person's personality.**

The researchers analyzed two different national databases of employees who were assessed on the trait of “conscientiousness” three times; one study was conducted over a 20-year period, and the other over an 8-year period. In each study, the authors created two parallel samples, equated at the start of the period for age, gender, income, education **and personality.** The first sample comprised individuals promoted into people leader roles soon after the first assessment of the conscientiousness trait, while the other sample consisted of people who remained individual contributors over the duration of the study period.

The authors hypothesized that assuming a leadership role **would require strengthening the need to act with dependability, diligence, organization and an achievement focus.** And indeed, when assessed at the end of a 20-year (in study 1) or 8-year (in study 2) period, those

who assumed leadership roles **grew in their conscientiousness trait.** This effect on personality was accelerated by the degree to which taking on a leadership role significantly increased the demands on the individual—that is, the more demanding the leadership role, the greater the impact of the experience on conscientiousness.



It should be noted that given the general stability of personality, even over such long intervals, the effects—while statistically significant—were not considered very strong in absolute terms. Still, this study did demonstrate not only that taking on a leadership role requires solid conscientiousness, but also that **prolonged experience as a leader itself builds conscientiousness.**

by **Seymour Adler, Ph.D.**

Managing Director
Leadership Assessment & Development
Global Practice Leader
seymour.adler@kincentric.com



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