

# *A Review on the Development of Trait Theory of Leadership*

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**Abstract:** This paper reviews about the development of trait theory of leadership. By qualitatively review of the studies in 20th century, this paper emphasizes the contribution of integrating five-factor model (FFM) into the trait theory. By carefully analyzing the studies done about FFM and leadership, this paper points out that the lack of consistency in conceptualization and methodology among the trait theory studies are the major problems that lead to the inconsistency result among different studies. Facing the situation that few research is done communication-specifically, the paper also proposed three direction that communication can contribute to the theoretical development in future.

## **1. The Development of Trait Theory in Leadership**

The trait theory of leadership is based on the assumption that leaders possess certain personal characteristics which can differentiate them from non-leaders[1]. Those traits are born and innate and remain unchanged across situations. Scholars working hard to discover what are the traits that make some people "leader-like". They focused on factors like height, weight, appearance, intelligence and disposition, as well as status, social skill, mobility, popularity and other social traits [2]. They want to find out what of those determinates have the strong explanation or prediction power towards leadership.

Basically, as Lord et. al.[3] pointed out, two types of leaderships are studied, leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness. Leadership emergence, or called perception of leadership, identifies factors that make the person leaderlike [4]. The perception normally studied by peer rating or observer rating method, in a group without formal leaders. While leadership effectiveness refers to the leaders' performance. Hogan et. al.[4] suggested that the effectiveness of leadership should be evaluated by the outcome, in team, group or organizational level. However, Judge et. al. [5] pointed out that in assessment of leadership effectiveness, most studies still used ratings of leadership from supervisor, peer or subordinates. Such rating still reflected the perception of leadership effectiveness but not objective outcome. But the difference between leadership emergence and effectiveness can be conceptualized in two level of analysis [5]. Leadership emergence is studying the leadership within a group, and leadership effectiveness is between-group phenomenon. Although the two concepts are different, but in practice and from the results of trait findings, the two concepts are not too distinction, especially when all measured by perception [6].

The study of trait in the context of leadership communication is heavily influenced by psychology and is in the sociopsychological tradition in communication theories [7]. Although the trait theory had having their place in *Organizational Communication book* for very long time, the basic methodology or findings are still cited from psychologists' works. The conclusion over whether traits can alone predict the leadership and what traits constitute effective leadership is still in debate both over psychology and communication scholars.

### 1.1. The Origin of the Theory

Trait theories are the earliest approach that tries to understand leadership [1]. The origin of the trait theory may probably dated back to the theory of the "great man" in the writings of the early Greeks and Roman times[8] . The "great man" hypothesis is that "history is shaped by the force of extraordinary leadership[5]", and they owns special trait that different from ordinary persons. Trait theory also assume that leaders owns certain traits, but leaders not limited to those few heroic man anymore. The earliest study on trait theory of leadership is Terman's [9] study about pedagogy of leadership in applied psychology. During the early 20th century, the trait theory was widely believed by researchers and numerous studies were conducted in finding certain psychological and physical characteristics of leaders[2] . Almost the same time, during late 19th century and early 20th century, a psychological testing movement emergence. Therefore, studies attempting to build up relationship between leadership and traits were mostly in statistical way [10].

### 1.2. A Crisis and Critiques

There was a crisis of trait theory of leadership starting from late 1940s and early 1950s, with the publication of two influential reviews from Stogdill[11] and Mann [12]. The earliest skeptical towards trait theory attributes to Stogdill. In his review of 124 studies and surveys conducted between 1904 and 1947, Stogdill uncovered extreme inconsistency in the findings of both what traits leaders possessed and the strength of correlation between a give trait and leadership prowess. Therefore, he concluded, " A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers. [11] "

There were five reasons that trait theory was criticized of being an inadequate theory[13] . First, the traits that were suggested associated with leadership were inconsistent, especially the strength of the association. Second, trait studies did not identify between qualities between good and bad leadership. Third, most trait studies did not established that whether the traits were possessed before or after the leadership experience. Fourth, researches were based on debatable assumptions of what were the components of personality. Fifth, the traits needed for obtaining or maintaining leadership might be different. This rejection towards trait approach was largely and widely followed, like Jennings [14] concluded: " fifty years of study have failed to produce one personality trait or set of traits that can be used to discriminate between leaders and non-leaders." This abandon lasted for thirty to forty years until late 1980s.

Lord et. al. [3] published "A meta-analysis of the relation between personality traits and leadership perceptions: an application if validity generalization procedures", in which he pointed out three aspects of misinterpretation with in Mann and Stogdill's work. First, the two reports did not clarify between leadership emergency and leadership effectiveness. Second, actually, there were "many consistently significant relationship between personality and leadership emergence in both reviews. [3] " Third, the actually number of studies which Mann based on for conclusion was far fewer than what in other scholar's perceptions. He criticized that Mann and Stogdill's works were overgeneralization and too pessimistically. In the result of re-examination of Manning's work, Lord

et. al.[3] concluded that the relationship between leadership and personality trait is much higher and more consistency than the two influential literature indicated. This research gave scholars confident towards trait theory again and stimulated the recovery study of trait theory of leadership. Although sometimes embedded in situational contingencies, studies linked traits to leadership began to recover and provided empirical evidences that traits were essential in the prediction of leadership [15] .

### 1.3. Results of Early Researches

Over the half century, scholars tried hard to summarize what were the common traits that can be found in leaderships among all the situations. Some research results were pessimistic like Stogdill's [11] and Mann's [12] , which concluded that traits alone were not reliable in predict leadership; while some were more optimism like Lord et. al. [3] found indeed some traits were significant in relating to leadership. However, the debate was never end, because they all found traits were sometimes consistent and sometimes inconsistent in their research and even the conclusion among the meta-analysis or summaries were inconsistent with each other.

Table 1: The traits found to be significantly related to leadership in early works

Year	Author	Traits
1948	Stogdill [11]	Intelligence, Insights, Sociability, Initiative, Persistence, Self-confidence, Alertness
1959	Mann [12]	Intelligence, Extroversion, Masculinity, Conservatism, Dominance, Adjustment
1961	Tupes and Christal[16]	Surgency, Agreeableness, Dependendability, Emotional Stability, Culture
1974	Applbaum et. al. [17]	Intelligence, Adjustment , Deviancy
1986	Lord et. al.[3]	Intelligence, Masculinity, Dominance
1987	Lewis [13]	Intelligence, Well-rounded, Maturity, Internal motivation
1990	Bass [18]	Intelligence, Scholarship, Dependability, participation, Socioeconomic status, Sociability, Initiative, Persistence, Knowledge, Self-confidence, Alertness, Cooperativeness, Popularity, Adaptability, Verbal facility
1991	Kirkpatrick and Locke [19]	Drive, Integrity, Self-confidence, Cognitive ability, Knowledge
1997	Northouse [20]	Intelligence, Self-confidence, Determination, Integrity, Sociability
1998	Yukl [21]	Energy level/ stress tolerance, Self-confidence, Internal locus of control, Emotional maturity, Personality integrity, Socialized power motivation, Achievement orientation, Low need for affiliation
1999	Daft [22]	Self-confidence, Honesty/ Integrity, Drive

Above is a list of eleven review or summary of studies and their conclusions about what traits related to the leadership. These are part of the most influential studies from 20th century that have strongly affected later works of trait theory of leadership, as well as heavily cited in the Organizational Communication books. Although the findings are all different from each other in terms of variables that concluded in the trait systems, there are still many aspects that noteworthy.

First of all, intelligence was included in seven of the studies, which is also the highest mentioned trait that considered to be important towards leadership. Although all the seven studies agreed that leaders are generally more intelligent than others, what consisted intelligence and how to measure it still different among the studies. For example, Northouse [20] suggested that verbal ability, perceptual

ability and reasoning were important component of intelligence. He also mentioned that the difference between leaders' IQ and his followers should not be too big, that the acceptance of his idea maybe affect by the difference. However, in Mann's [12] study, the intelligence should be measured in questionnaire and objective tests. Besides, Kirkparick and Locke identified one trait called "cognitive ability", which he defined as "strong analytical ability, good judgment and the capacity to think strategically[19] ", which in fact, similar to the denotation of intelligence.

Self-confidence was another highly mentioned trait. A consistent attribute of this trait is that self-confidence means certainty about one's own idea, decision and capabilities. However, some studies included several minor-concept into this category. Yukl [21] described that self-confident leaders were more optimism and persistence in accomplish their tasks. While for Stogdill [11] and Bass [18] , self-confidence and persistence were two different traits for leadership. In the discussion part of Kirkpatrick and Locke [19], self-confidence also meant emotional stability, which was under the trait of emotional maturity trait in Yukl's [21] study and separated in Tupes and Christal's [16] study. These concepts were overlap and defined differently across different studies.

Although adjustment in Applbaum et. al. [17] and adaptability in Bass [18] named differently, were defined nearly the same. Adjustment means "an individual's ability to adjust or adapt to a situation[17] " and adaptability means "the ability of adjust to situation[18] ". Extroversion in Mann [12] and Surgency in Tupes and Christal [16] also means a same trait. The difference of terminology among different studies even intensify the inconsistency among findings.

There were also some traits that only appeared in only one research and also did not similar to other traits that mentioned in other studies. For example, culture in Tupes and Christal's works[16] , and socioeconomic status in Bass' [18], were really non-trait factors that may not be suitable to put them together with other traits. Some scholar even thought motivation, knowledge and intelligence were not personality traits that these traits should be eliminated when reviewing the studies[5] .

Just like what I mentioned before, as the fourth critique came from Lewis [13] , one of the weakness of the past studies about trait theory of leadership was that they had not established a structure or framework of what compose the personality. It is impossible for scholars to find consistent result under an inconsistent labeling dilemma [23]. House and Aditya [24] commented that the problem and difficulty of early trait research was that they were lack of empirically substantiated personality theory as guidance for their research.

## **2. Apply Five-Factor Model (FFM) in Trait Theory of Leadership**

Facing the strong demand of having a common structure or taxonomy of classifying traits of leadership, in the early 21th century, Judge et. al. [5] proposed the five-factor model (FFM), also called Big Five, into the trait theory of leadership as an organizing framework to establish the relationship between personality and leadership. This taxonomy for studying trait theory is now the most widely adapted one.

The founder of the five-factor model often credited to Norman [25] and Tupes and Christal [16] , although their versions were a little bit different from the robust one, which developed during 1990s [26] . Tupes and Christal [16] classified the five personal traits as surgency, agreeableness, dependability, emotional stability and culture and Norman's [25] version was extroversion or surgency, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and culture.

The first to mention that FFM can be used in classifying leadership traits was Hogan et. al. in 1994[4] . However, until 2000, Judge and Bono[27] first adapt this model in their research to study transformational leadership. Then, Judge et. al. [5] proposed the FFM as a taxonomy to do meta-analyses of 78 previous research. This research has got essential influence that many researches followed it by using the same frameworks in study leadership traits in different settings.

## 2.1. Five-Factor Model

FFM is used to describe most if not all of the traits that one may possess based on the five dimensions [28]. Some traits may combine by more than one factors; each factor also includes multiple traits [7]. This model is said to have universal application across cultures, despite of different cultures places varying importance on different factors [28]. However, which factor contains which subset of traits or dimensions is not so universally agreed yet [27]. Overall the five major factors are same in the research studying leadership trait based on FFM in 21th century. They are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

### 2.1.1. Neuroticism

Neuroticism means the tendency to feel negative emotions [7]. According to the nine studies reviewed in this paper, neuroticism person may easily experience anxious, fear, guilt, depressed, anger, insecurity, emotional, lack of self-confident, low self-esteem and low on traits like calm, even tempered and relaxed. Since the neuroticism is opposite to many essential traits that a leader is considered to possess, like self-confident and emotional stability, this factor is normally hypothesis to be negatively related to effective leadership.

### 2.1.2. Extraversion

Extraversion is sometimes called Surgency, but they all means people like to be with group and express positive emotions. Traits that used to reflect this factor are assertive, active, sociable, talkative, energetic, optimistic, dominance and so on. Since the close relationship between extraversion and social ability, and qualities like sociability, dominance, high energy level are recommended by previous researches as traits positively related to leadership (Eg. Stogdill, 1948, Mann, 1959, and Yukl 1998), extraversion are examined as positive factors in recent researches.

### 2.1.3. Openness to Experience

Openness to Experience or simple call Openness, means a tendency to be reflective, imaginative and creative. This replace the culture dimension which means "cultured, esthetically fastidious, imaginative, socially polished, and independent-minded" in Norman [25] and Tupes and Christal [16]. In fact, the openness factor still included the variables in culture dimension, as well as other traits like divergent thinking, intellect, creative, need for change and curious. This trait is the least studied trait in FFM, although intelligence is seems as one of the most essential traits for leadership. This factor is assumed to be positive in most of the studies.

### 2.1.4. Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness related to how people can control themselves. Conscientiousness people means they are self-discipline, well organized, careful, dependability, responsible, helpful, hard-working, persistence and so on. It is agreed that conscientiousness is quiet positively related to overall job performance [29]. As the relation between persistence, dependability and leadership is identified by previous researches, this factor also regarded as positive before examining.

### 2.1.5. Agreeableness

Agreeableness means the tendency one can think for others. Traits like sympathy, empathy, generous, sensitive, helpfulness, tolerant, trust, kind, as well as cooperativeness, modest and affiliation sometimes be the indicator of agreeableness. Most of the researchers think that sensitive and

cooperativeness are positively related to leadership but need for affiliation is negative to leadership. Therefore, Judge et. al.[5] think the link between agreeableness and leadership might be ambiguous.

## 2.2. Trait Research of Leadership Based on FFM

There were totally nine original works which statically tested the relationship between traits and leadership based on the FFM are analyzed in this paper. Two of them were meta-analysis of previous research results. Judge et. al. [5] was a meta-analysis based on 73 previous studies about both leadership emergence and effectiveness. Bono and Judge [30] was a meta-analysis of 26 studies about transformational leadership behavior. The other seven were empirical research based on different situations. Judge and Bono's [27] study was tested among participants in a community leadership program about the transformation leadership behavior. McCormack and Mellor's [31] study was analysis the leadership effectiveness among Australian Military. Lim and Ployhart's [32] study was conducted in Singapore Armed Forces to exam the leadership effectiveness based on team performance. Hoogh et. al. [33] was in a consultancy firm by evaluation of leadership performance from subordinates and self-report, using stable and dynamic working environment as another independent variable. Hirschfeld et. al. [34] was set in a officer development program and built link between five factors and observed leadership potential by other proximal factors. Gao and Ma [35] was questionnaire about effective leadership collected from college student organizations. Lee's [36] study was to build up relationship between transformational leadership behavior and traits by questionnaire collected from MBA students.

Although these researches were based on a same taxonomy and similar definition towards each factors, the findings were still not very consistent. Most of the research found that extraversion was positively related to leadership, but this link was not significant in Hoogh et. al.[33] and even showed negative relationship in McCormack and Mellor's [31] study. Neuroticism was sometimes not significant and sometimes negative in associated with leadership, but still worked positively in one situation of Hoogh's et. al. [33] research. Openness to experience and conscientiousness was normally positive, although sometimes the link was not strong enough. Agreeableness was a most ambiguous factor, that it showed positive, negative, and not significant all in more than one research.

Table 2: Results of the seven research.

Year	Author	E	N	O	A	C
2000	Judge & Bono [27]	+	NS	+	+	NS
2002	Judge et. al. [5]	+	-	+	NS	+
2002	McCormack & Mellor [31]	-	NS	+	NS	+
2004	Bono & Judge [30]	+	NS	NS	NS	NS
2004	Lim & Ployhart [32]	+	-	NS	-	NA
2005	Hoogh et. al. [33]	NS	+/-	+	+	+
2008	Hirschfeld et. al. [34]	+	-	+	+	+
2009	Gao & Ma [35]	+	-	+	+/-	NS
2012	Lee [36]	NS	NA	+	NS	NA

(+: Positively related -: Negatively related NS: Not significant NA: Not tested )

Several factors could be identified as explanation for the differences between the results. The inconsistency among the research may result from four major difference of methodology among the research: (1) the measure scale used to measure five factors of traits; (2) the dimensions that emphasized in the measure of leadership; (3) data collecting method of leadership; and (4) setting of leadership situation.



Even the taxonomy of FFM was agreed in measure the traits in the studies, the scale used in the studies were not all the same. Three of the empirical researches [27][31][33] used the 240-item NEO Personal Inventory-Revised invented by Costa and McCrae [37] as measurement for personality traits. Gao and Ma[35] used a revised version [38] of above scale which contains only 60 items. Hirschfeld et. al. [34]. used another scale called NEO Five-Factor Inventory also developed by Costa and McCrae [37] along with a five-point scale in their research. Lim and Ployhart (2004) and Lee [36] used measure scale of International Personality Item Pool developed by Goldberg [39] to evaluate the personality of leaders. It is clear that although FFM has been widely accepted by scholars and even the five-categories have come to a same conclusion, how to measure for the personality based on the FFM is still not standardized. Several versions of scales are all be approved can be used to measure the FFM of personality. However, as they used different items and different questions in the scale, the result of personality for a same person may still be different. As for the two meta-analysis studies, the author needed to find a classification method to categorize traits from various studies in to the FFM. Judge et. al. [5] applied coding procedure developed by Barrick and Mount [29]. While Bono and Judge's [30] classification principle was consistent with Hough and Ones' [40]. The two authors did not show their detailed traits within each five categories, but there should be some differences as they applied different ways of classification. How is the consistency of the different scales or classification system in measuring the five traits? How would this affect the result of one's trait result? It leaves a problem when comparing the differences among those studies.

There are no standard or commonly adapted conceptualization of what leadership and what aspect of leadership is to be studied. Therefore different studies defined leadership in their own ways. Lord et. al. [3] distinguished leadership studies into leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness. Therefore, this paper will also review the seven empirical studies in these two categories. Actually, only one study [34] was aimed at evaluating the observed leadership potential, which can be regarded as studying the leadership emergence. The potential was theoretically structured with five traits by the intermediated factors of individual perception of team cohesion, team-oriented proactively and teamwork knowledge [34]. Other six studies were all in some way constructing the effective leadership. Judge and Bono [27] examined it by measuring transformational and transactional leadership behaviors, subordinate satisfaction with the leader and with overall job, subordinate organizational commitment and work motivation, as well as direct leadership effectiveness. McCormack and Mellor [31] directly used the Army Evaluation and Development Report-Officers which consists nine items as assessment of leadership effectiveness. Lim and Ployhart [32] believed that team performance in completing the tasks can reflect the leadership effectiveness. Hoogh et. al. [33] admitted that they only evaluated the perceived leadership effectiveness. Gao and Ma [35] proposed that leadership effectiveness is constructed by perceived leadership effectiveness, leadership satisfaction and task accomplishment and 18 items to further evaluate the three components. Lee [36] evaluated the leadership effectiveness by transformational leadership behavior. In conclusion, the understanding towards leadership is fairly different in different scholars' mind. It is kind of like the situation of last century when different studies constructing personal traits in different ways. It is still impossible to come to a conclusion of relationship between trait and leadership when the concept of leadership is not consistent.

Normally, the method applied in collecting data was by questionnaire and it was consistent in all the studies. However, the answer to who was suitable to complete the questionnaire and evaluate the performance or leaders was different among the studies. There were five categories of information source. The first was by self-report or texts done by the target [34][36]. Similar to self-report, the second source was peer evaluation [33]. Supervisor was the most common source that adapted among the studies [27][31][32][33]. The subordinates were sometimes perceived also suitable for evaluate their leaders' performance [27][35]. The fifth categories was some external assessor or observers,

who maybe more objective in evaluating the leaders [30] [32] [34] . Many studies chose more than one source in assessing the leadership performance. The sources chosen, to certain extent, should be restricted by the leadership defined by the research.

The last major difference presented in the situation or setting of the case. Although the trait theory assume that the trait associated with leadership should not be changed across situations [1] , however, different requirement of leadership still may affect the traits that leaders need. Three of the studies were done in the military. Officers in McCormack and Mellor [31] were evaluated based on their daily leadership performance. Lim and Ployhart [32] and Hirschfeld et. al. [34] were done in an Air Force training program. Participants in Hirschfeld et. al. [34] study even needed to complete military tasks at the end of training. Gao and Ma's [35] and Lee's [36] studies were done among students, but the former one is college student and the latter one is MBA students. They are different in working experience which may change the participants' view towards leadership. Judge and Bono [27] studies the community leadership program, who came from a wide range of background. Hoogh et. al. [33] brought the stable and dynamic work environment as a moderator into the study of a consultancy firm. He found out that high on neuroticism was positively related to charismatic leadership in dynamic environment but negative in stable work situations. This may show that situational factors should work together with the trait factors together in predict and explain leadership.

### **3. A Lack of Communication-Trait Specified Research**

Although trait theory of leadership is also considered important by communication scholars, few researches could be found to specifically examine the relationship between communication trait and leadership. Only two researches can be found based on key words combination of "communication", "trait/personality" and "leader/leadership".

One study examined the impact of argumentativeness, communication apprehension, and verbal aggressiveness on leadership emergence was conducted by Limon and La France in 2005 [41]. The research found that argumentativeness and communication apprehension were associated with leadership emergence, but not evidence supported the relationship between verbal aggressiveness and leadership. The research was done among 130 university students from communication courses and the context was small group discussion. The findings at least indicated that communication traits may play an important role in leadership emergency of small groups.

Another study that can be found was not so directly examined the relationship between communication trait and leadership, but the research was discussing the traits of ICT usage among male and female entrepreneurs [42]. However, as those participants were leaders in their company, study about what traits were they proposed, and the traits of their ICT usage also may help build up the link when studied together with other literatures.

Communication traits are of high relevance to communicative outcome [43]. Communication traits are also important variables for small group outcome [44][45][46]. The trait of communicator is an important area of studies of organization. Leadership is an important factor that influence the group outcome and the realization of leadership cannot avoid the process of communication. Therefore, examining the relationship between communication traits and leadership is necessary for the study of trait theory and leadership in the context of organizational communication.

### **4. Future Research Suggestions**

Based on the review and analysis of past research on trait theory of leadership, three recommendations are proposed for researchers on future studies of the trait theory based on FFM. Three directions are also suggested for communication scholars to participate in the establishment of relationship between communication traits and leadership.



First, a consistent conceptualization and measurement of both traits and leadership needs to be established. Since the trait theory of leadership is studying the relationship between the two concepts, if the two concepts were not consistent, surely the relationship cannot be consistent. Scholars have already noticed the problem of different taxonomy used in early leadership-trait researches. Therefore, recently, many researches adapt a consistent taxonomy of FFM in their theory studies. However, as this paper analyzed above, the five factors are now tested by various different measure scales. The attempt to standardize the operational concept of traits is still on the way. Besides, this is only one end of the problem. The different conceptualization of leadership and measurement of it still caused even more inconsistency in the results. Leadership studies had been divided into two aspects of emergence and effectiveness by Lord et al. [3]. Then, how to measure the effectiveness? Who is responsible for evaluating the team performance? What should be seen as having potential of leadership? These questions may need to be debated over all scholars interested in leadership.

Second, it is noticeable that nearly all researches study about trait theory of leadership research are done by questionnaire and statistical methods. Quantitative methods are good at establishing reasonable causal relationships among tested variables [47]. However, they cannot explain why there are huge inconsistencies among different researches. Qualitative review is now needed to study and understand what caused the inconsistency. There are already many statistical results. Even more statistical numbers cannot explain why their numbers are different and cause even more inconsistency. Trait theory scholars need to re-examine their results based on comparison with other studies and find out what should be the major factors that cause their inconsistency. Qualitative review will also help scholars to find what is lacking in the past researches and avoid duplication of mistakes which provide no further useful information.

Third, other factors may need to be integrated into the trait theory. Stogdill [11] had pointed out that trait alone is not able to predict leadership, but it should work together with other factors like characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers. His view maybe was too pessimistic, since some traits indeed appeared in most of the studies. However, considering how other factors may affect the leadership emergence and effectiveness and integrating them all into the trait approach may be a way to explain the inconsistent findings and reply to the critiques. For example, the type of different team task may require different types of leadership. Completing a military task may need the leader to be energetic, optimistic, dominant in leading the team. Therefore, extraversion is positively related to leadership performance in Lim and Ployhart's [32] study. On the other hand, too assertive, active, sociable may not be suitable for officers in Amy. Even they are leaders of their team, they need to learn more about obey and silence. So, extraversion means negatively in leadership performance in McCormack and Mellor's [31] study. This does not mean trait approach should give up to situational approach. Admit that many traits changed among situations does not mean there are no traits that remain across. At least, traits should have an essential role in prediction and explanation of leadership. Setting boundaries for the trait theories by situation or other factors may help increase the reliability of the trait theory of leadership.

#### **4.1. Directions for Communication Specific Traits**

There are three directions that communication scholars can try to develop communication specific trait theory of leadership. (1) Integrate communication traits into FFM and take advantage of this existing model and findings; (2) select the communication traits that tested separately before and classify them into systematic frameworks; and (3) make use of existing communication trait or style taxonomy and examine their relations with leadership.

The first direction is to integrate communication and psychology methodology and framework together, but replace the scale items with communication traits. There were already some

communication research make use of the FFM. For example, Moberg [48] built up relations between five factors and different conflict strategy. He identified six tendency of strategies that may be used in conflict by individuals who possess each of the five kinds of traits listed in the FFM. For example, neuroticism may be reflected by anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability in conflicts [48]. Leadership also need to deal with conflicts. Therefore, adapting this framework into future studies may help to exam what traits can help leaders better deal with conflicts. Besides, Waldherr and Muck [49] also proposed that "communication styles are characteristic adaptations of personality". He integrated the FFM into his whole framework of communication style. Another example comes from Gardner et. al. [45]. He used FFM to examine personal-organization fit under different culture. This research showed that FFM can be successfully adapt into organization communication context. Thus, integrating FFM into leadership and communication setting may be an easy and promising way of study communication traits and leadership.

Qualitative review of past research findings help us to notice that there were lots of traits which has been tested closely related to communication behavior. For example, sociability [11] [20] should be a trait that mainly expressed by communication behaviors. Bass [18] even directly suggested that verbal facility, which is without a doubt a communication trait, was positively related to leadership. Besides, many traits that were been classified into five factor models were also closely related to communication, such as anger, emotional, active, sociable, talkative, socially polished, independent-minded, well organized, sensitive, cooperativeness and so on. Therefore, identifying all those communication traits and organized them in a communication-orientated framework may be the second direction that communication scholars can contribute the trait theory development.

Communication scholars have build up some communication style inventories which link communication style with personality. de Vries et. al. [50] introduced a Communication Style Inventory consists of 36 communication facets classified under six domain-level scales, which are expressiveness, preciseness, verbal aggressiveness, questioningness, emotionality, and impression manipulativeness. In fact, those domain-levels as well as the facets under each of them, could be regard as communication traits that individual may possess. For example, talkativeness and humor under expressiveness, were tested as personal traits by psychologists [18]. Therefore, this inventory can be used as a taxonomy to study communication traits and leadership. Teven et. al. [51] also introduce six self-perceived communication traits which can also be used to test the self-perceived communication traits of the leaders. There should be lots of communication frameworks of communication traits that can be adapted into the content of leadership communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Trait theory of leadership has been developed for over a century, but scholars still have not come to a consistent conclusion. By reviewing of the previous research, this paper finds that inconsistency of the measurement and conceptualization is a big obstacle in comparison among the studies. Although the taxonomy of traits is established, the consists of leadership is still diversified. Based on the situation, three suggestion are given that future research may need to develop a consistent concept of leadership, focus more on qualitative analysis among the differences and consider setting boundaries for traits based on other factors. As there is a lack of the communication traits in the previous research, communication scholars may choose either of the three directions that the paper proposed to make their own contribution in the trait theory of leadership.

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