Chapter Activities

# Chapter 2: Trait Approach

# Activities

These activities may be used in either small-group or large-group settings, depending on class size and time available. Some may be suitable for homework or preparation for a “Flipped classroom” experience during the next class period.

### Leadership Trait Questionnaire (F, A, H)

Have students complete the Leadership Trait Questionnaire individually and share their results in small groups. Compile a master list of the most highly rated traits as each group reports its results in a large-group discussion. Students should be able to discuss their view of the accuracy of their own scores and to explain the scores’ meaning in terms of their leadership ability.

### Trait Development (A)

In small groups, ask students to choose one of the main traits associated with leadership. How can this trait be developed? Ask students for specific examples (not just saying “practice”). How can it be demonstrated to others? Identify one or two people who have this trait. How does it serve them in their leadership role?

### Trait Development 2 (A)

One suggested method for increasing (or exercising) intelligence is learning new concepts or skills. Over a series of class periods, ask students to teach their classmates something new, like--how to juggle, how to create a Prezi, how to use a new phone app, a difficult dance movement, an effective chess strategy, how to teach a cat to perform a trick, and so on. This can be both informative and a positive contribution to the class climate.

### Too Smart? (A)

In small groups, ask students to discuss the curvilinear relationship between leader intelligence and perceived leader effectiveness (Antonakis, House, and Simonton, 2017). This finding makes intuitive sense. But are there merits to having highly intelligent leaders in an organization? What can be done to bridge the gap between highly intelligent leaders and average intelligence followers? Should highly intelligent people never become leaders, and only work alone? Under what conditions could a person of average intelligence become an outstanding leader?

### Class Goals (A, C, H)

Students may already have individual goals for the class (to learn, get an “A”, or fulfill major credits). But if “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” what goals might the class like to achieve by the end of the term? Have a class discussion about what group goals would benefit the students most, and what each student’s responsibility is in contributing to the best class experience for everyone.

### Case Analysis (A)

Assign each case to one or more small groups for in-class analysis and discussion. Each small group should then report back to the entire class about the results of its group work.

### Jeopardy Quiz (F)

This exercise is a fun way of reviewing the reading material without lecturing on it. Students can respond individually or be grouped in teams that compete with one another for points. It helps to have at least one question per student, so everyone is called on. Or, the instructor can begin each class with a set number of answers and call on different students each time. Pairs of students can also be assigned to create the Jeopardy quiz for the next class.

*Directions*: The instructor gives an answer from the list below (in bold), and students must formulate the corresponding information as a question. Mixing up the order of the questions (so they don’t follow the outline of the chapter) adds to the intrigue.

* **These theories focused on identifying the qualities of prominent leaders in the early 20th century.** What are “great person” theories?
* **This researcher reconceptualized leadership as a relationship between people in a social situation rather than as a quality people possessed.** Who was Stodgill?
* **Strong verbal ability and reasoning are dimensions of this trait.** What is intelligence?
* **Believing that one can make a difference and being certain about one’s skills are dimensions of this trait.** What is self-confidence?
* **Dominance and drive are dimensions of this trait.** What is determination?
* **Being loyal and dependable are aspects of this trait.** What is integrity?
* **Friendly, tactful and diplomatic people demonstrate this trait.** What is sociability?
* **The tendency to be depressed, anxious, and hostile exemplifies this personality factor.** What is neuroticism?
* **The tendency to be thorough and controlled exemplifies this personality factor.** What is conscientiousness?
* **The tendency to be assertive and to have positive energy exemplifies this personality factor.** What is extraversion?
* **The tendency to be informed and curious exemplifies this personality factor.** What is openness?
* **The tendency to be trusting and nurturing exemplifies this personality factor.** What is agreeableness?
* **This study found that a person doesn’t become a leader solely on the basis of certain traits, but that the traits need to be relevant to the context in which the person is functioning.** What is Stodgill’s first study?
* **This study was published in 1974 and analyzed 163 different leadership studies.** What is Stodgill’s second study?
* **This is one of the traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders in Mann’s study.** What is intelligence? Masculinity? Adjustment? Dominance? Extraversion? Conservatism? (Up to 6 students can answer this question)
* **In the Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002) study, this personality factor was most strongly associated with leadership.** What is extraversion?
* **In the Judge, Bono, Ilies and Gerhardt (2002) study, this personality factor was only weakly associated with leadership.** What is agreeableness?
* **This refers to our ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking.** What is emotional intelligence?
* **This is one of the strengths of the trait approach.** What is intuitively appealing? What has a century of research to back it up? What is the exclusive focus on the leader?
* **This is one of the criticisms of the trait approach.** What is the endless list of traits associated with leadership? What is the failure to take situations into account? What are highly subjective determinations of the most important leadership traits? What is the failure to look at leadership outcomes? What is the limited usefulness for training and developing new leaders?

### Trait Bingo (F)

This exercise is another fun way of reviewing concepts from the reading without lecturing on them. (Doing this only once or twice a semester keeps the activity fresh.) Hand students a list of terms from the chapter and ask them to enter 24 of them in any order in the blank squares of the game board. Offer fun prizes to winners such as extra credit points, a candy bar, or a coupon for a free coffee at the Student Center.

*Directions for students*:

1. Enter a word from the list below in each space on the game board except the “Free” space.
2. Listen to the definitions or descriptions the instructor reads out loud. If a word on your game board is defined or described, cross out that space.
3. When you cross out five boxes in a row vertically, horizontally or diagonally, call out “TRAIT!”
4. The first person to complete a row correctly is the winner. (Instructor will check answers.) Winners will receive a valuable prize ☺.

Stodgill (1948)

Mann (1959)

Lord et al. (1986)

Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991)

Intelligence

Self-confidence

Determination

Integrity

Sociability

Neuroticism

Extraversion

Openness

Agreeableness

Conscientiousness

Meta-analysis

Five-factor personality model

Emotional intelligence

MSCEIT

Goleman (1995)

Masculinity

Dominance

Tolerance

Leadership instrument

Century of research

“Great man” theories

Endless list of traits

Game board for *Trait Bingo*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **T** | **R** | **A** | **I** | **T** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **FREE** |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

### Group Observation: Trait Leadership (A, I, H, C)

Ask students to attend an open meeting of a group they are interested in, but do not belong to, such as a sports team, community service organization, or religious organization. Have them observe the communication behaviors of the most engaged or active group members. What leadership traits do these group members demonstrate? What specific behaviors correspond to the leadership traits the students observe? (Students will be operationalizing the traits here.) Do other group members recognize these traits in their peers (e.g., “Let’s ask Jeff to do it. He’s good on follow-through”). How do these observed traits affect the flow and productivity of the meeting? Have students write a 2–3 page analysis.

### Trait Comparison: (A, H)

Ask students to bring in examples (such as magazine pictures) of well-known leaders who demonstrate one or more of the five main leadership traits (intelligence, sociability, determination, integrity, self-confidence). Ask them to bring in examples of female leaders as well as leaders from other cultures. In class, discuss whether a well-known male leader demonstrates determination in the same way as a well-known female leader. Does a well-known North American leader demonstrate self-confidence the same way as a well-known African or South American leader? What are the factors that influence how a particular trait is expressed and perceived by others?

### Elevator Pitch (A, I)

As the instructor, you may wish to use different small group combinations throughout the term, or ask students to work in the same groups over a period of weeks so that they form a kind of “learning team.” As homework, assign students to work small groups, each researching a different leadership trait and preparing a 3-min speech that one of them will give to the class on “the best leadership trait to have.” Research should include a definition and description of the trait, how it is acquired, when it is used by leaders, real-life examples of the trait’s use, what interactions would be like if people didn’t have this trait, how this trait is connected to other traits, and so on. The speech should use logical arguments, credible information, and persuasive appeals. Humor is also encouraged. After the speech is delivered, the class will have the chance to question the remaining members of the team about the trait (to balance the workload and hold everyone accountable for their learning). After all the speeches are delivered, the class can discuss what new insight they gained into the various traits and their relevance for leadership. Or, if this is constructed as a friendly competition, the class can vote on the “best” speech based on quality of research, effectiveness of examples, clarity, or other criteria you choose.

## Writing Assignments

### Contemporary Leadership (F, A, I)

Have students write a 2–3-page reaction paper about a contemporary leader (someone they know personally or a public figure) and the leadership traits they think this person demonstrates. Students should use specific examples to support their argument that the leader exhibits these traits. They should also explain how the trait approach provides a useful way to understand this person’s leadership.

### Historic Leadership #1 (F, A, I, H, C, L)

Some early 20th century leadership theories were called “great person” theories because they focused on the qualities exhibited by prominent social, political, and military leaders of the time. Ask students to research what important national and international events occurred between 1890 and 1920. How might those events have influenced the kinds of research questions the theorists posed? What kind of leadership was needed in the United States during those decades? How were those leadership challenges similar to or different from today’s? Who was *allowed* to lead in the early 20th century? Have students write a 3–4-page paper addressing these questions.

### Historic Leadership #2 (F, A, I, H)

Ask students to read a few chapters of a biography of a U.S. leader from the late 19th or early 20th century (such as Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton or George Washington Carver). What traits is this person known for? How well did the traits serve him or her in leadership? How much of this person’s success or failure do you think can be attributed to his/her traits? Have students write a 2–3-page paper addressing these questions and citing their source.

### Leadership Trait Questionnaire (A, H)

Have students write a 2–3-page reaction paper that explains their score on the Leadership Trait Questionnaire, describes their perception of the accuracy of this measure, discusses the implications of the score for their effectiveness as a leader, and provides specific examples to support their ideas.

### Introversion (A, H)

Have students write a reflection paper on how introverted people can become effective leaders without changing their personalities. What other traits should they possess to offset their reserved natures? Papers should provide real-life examples.

## One-Minute Paper Topics

If you could suddenly acquire any trait in the world, what would it be? Why would you choose this trait? (H)

List three traits that your friends or family members identify in you. Do you agree with their perceptions? (A, H)

What part of today’s class was unclear or confusing for you? (L)

## Internet Activities

### Internet #1: Class Blog (A, I, H)

In your class blog or chat room, write about some of the discussion questions suggested elsewhere in this resource to explore topics in this chapter. Some additional questions are provided here:

* Is social intelligence a trait or a skill? What does social intelligence look like in a teenager? A senior citizen?
* Which traits are easier to develop? Harder?
* Is it better for a person to work on correcting his/her undesirable traits or building desirable traits?
* Are leadership traits demonstrated differently by men and women?
* Give an example where possessing a trait (such as intelligence) didn’t yield a desired outcome (such as the best answer to a problem). Why would this happen?

For the class blog, ask students to post pictures of people modeling certain leadership traits.

### Internet #2: “Maybe” (A, I, H)

Look up the Michael Jordan commercial, “Maybe,” on YouTube. What is the main message of the commercial? What do the supporting images tell viewers about Jordan’s extraordinary career? Recall specific examples. What traits of Jordan’s are suggested by this commercial? In what ways might the traits of an excellent leader be *demotivating* to a follower?

### Internet #3: Be All That You Can Be (A, I, H, L)

Go online and check out several different websites using the search term, “leadership traits.” Typically these sites will have multiple lists of traits and skills. Distinguish between items that are truly traits (stable personal attributes) and those that are more like skills (learned competencies). Select one leadership trait that appears across several sites. What advice is given on these sites for how this trait can be developed and strengthened? Create a learning plan for someone who desires to develop this trait over a period of several months, citing their internet sources. One suggested site: [www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org).

### Internet #4: Emotional Intelligence (A, I, H)

Look up a podcast from “This American Life” (NPR) from August 11, 2012, on amusement parks. The segment profiles Cole Lindbergh, a full-time employee of a Kansas City amusement park, who runs the games department. He delights in his job and excels at motivating employees. Play the podcast in class and discuss:

* What traits does Lindbergh have?
* What is he doing well?
* How is he managing his and others’ emotions?
* What can you learn from him?

### Internet #5: Tweeting Like a Leader (A, L)

If you have asked students in Week 1 to follow a thought leader on Twitter throughout the term, have them report on how the leader manages his or her image on Twitter. What personality traits are communicated (intentionally or inadvertently) through their manner of texting and posted images?

### Internet #6: Skyping a Leader (A, I, H)

If your classroom has Skyping capability, invite a community leader or a professor from another institution to speak to your class about leadership. Ask them to share their research questions with the class, their research methods, and what they hope to learn. Or inquire about their practical insights regarding the leadership challenges they face in work. What leadership traits do they think are essential for the kind of work they do? How did they acquire those traits? Your guest leaders may have questions for the students as well.