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# Discovering the major personality traits in the tertiary education program directors via female lens and how these qualities are connected to the infrastructural and policy impact

Mouna Abou Assali

Rabdan Academy, Abu Dhabi 009712, United Arab Emirates; [massali@ra.ac.ae](mailto:massali@ra.ac.ae)

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**Abstract:** Leadership and personality traits of leaders always remained a hot debate among researchers and practitioners. However, there is still limited literature in the context of higher education. Thus, this research aimed to identify the most important personality traits in the workplace from the perspectives of higher education system leaders in four countries. The data were gathered by interviewing six participants from different nations, and those participants identified six personality traits that they considered positive at work. These traits include integrity, passion, adaptability, positivity, creativity, and compassion. Moreover, the findings revealed how program leaders can modify their recruitment and placement strategies to promote positive workplace practices and what methods can be used to reduce bad practices and their elimination, leading to higher business prospects. The results of this study can serve as guidelines for managers, program administrators, or intermediaries who want to improve their organizational performance. Moreover, the propositions developed by the findings can be investigated empirically.

**Keywords:** personality; personality traits; leadership; education; integrity; passion; adaptability; positivity; creativity; compassion

**JEL Classification:** L25; I20; I23

## 1. Introduction

Organizations today are working in an interconnected and highly competitive world, and to be successful, they should develop agility toward dynamic changes in the world with the help of technology adoption and effective human resources. Technological efficiency may be helpful for businesses in the short run only because the technology may erode over time; thus, the main emphasis of organizations should be on human resources as they are the main asset of any company (George and Zakkariya, 2018; Niati et al., 2021; Rivaldo and Nabella, 2023). The efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce can help organizations to grow. Moreover, employee efficiency is essential for any organization's operational efficiency (Rivaldo and Nabella, 2023). Prior studies highlighted that the efficiency of employees is associated with their personality (Gridwichai et al., 2021; Gupta and Gupta, 2020; Murtza et al., 2021; Nikbin et al., 2021; Piepiora, 2021; Wang and Chen, 2020). Therefore, organizations can manage human resources by focusing on the personality of every employee (Anwar and Abdullah, 2021; Rajest et al., 2023; Sabuhari et al., 2020).

Every company, either product or service-oriented, has long-term and short-term goals; to attain these goals, it must be capable of maintaining its existence in a dynamic business world. The reliance of organizations on existing technologies and infrastructure without proper management of reliable human resources is impossible.

Therefore, they should emphasize the performance of their employees (Niati et al., 2021) by focusing on their personality. Organizations are always keen on hiring competent people to help them achieve their goals efficiently. The management of every organization prefers to focus on the subjective qualities of employees to be hired. Moreover, organizations should emphasize personality traits as they are idiosyncratic capabilities of human resources that can help create efficiency and effectiveness in organizations (Murtza et al., 2021). Today, workplaces are becoming more globalized and diverse, and this situation is creating the need to understand human personalities, which is an important element that can determine organizational fate, particularly the success or failure of global organizations (Dababneh et al., 2022). Higher educational institutions are service-providing organizations, and like other organizations, they are also facing competition globally (Abad-Segura et al., 2020; Blankenberger and Williams, 2020; Camilleri, 2020; Garcia-Morales et al., 2021) and to cope with the current market needs every higher educational institute should focus on the personality of leaders. Moreover, the personality of educational leaders can help retain teachers and improve the overall quality of education (Tett et al., 2021).

Personality is defined by Oentoro et al. (2016) as “individuals’ emotions, thoughts, and behavioral patterns”. Further, Burger (2006) explained it as a collection of consistent behaviors observable in any situation at any time; for example, an extrovert today can also remain an extrovert tomorrow. In addition, Tett et al. (2021) defined personality broadly as “personality captures people’s characteristic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, allowing distinctions among individuals and, to varying degrees, prediction of how they will think, feel, and behave in the future”. Many researchers from different domains, including psychology, organizational behavior, sociology, and marketing, analyzed the concept of personality and personality traits (Aytaç, 2001) as it is a critical factor that can influence every kind of behavior and attitude in social life (Acaray and Yildirim, 2017).

Efficient teachers are crucial for providing quality education and developing students’ abilities and positive traits. Teaching quality depends on teachers’ psychological resources (Colomeischi et al., 2014), which are highlighted by personality. Therefore, teachers’ personality traits impact the teaching profession more than students’ traits (Gungor et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018). Moreover, they play a significant role in helping students develop good personality traits (Belogolovsky and Somech, 2010; Buela and Joseph, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Khalilzadeh and Khodi, 2021). Thus, many researchers and practitioners highlight personality traits as important factors for positive work-related outcomes. Furthermore, it’s essential to know the personality traits and identify the issues relevant to them because leaders possessing negative personalities can adversely affect employees’ mental and physical health (Gridwichai et al., 2020).

Personality consists of universal adaptive traits crucial for personal success, with different levels of abstraction advancing understanding of human behavior (Oentoro et al., 2016). Personality traits are stable patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and cognitions (Mammadov, 2022). The researchers have focused on different personality traits, and most of them focused on the Big Five: Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Bhatti et al., 2014; Bazkiaei et al., 2020; Gridwichai et al., 2020; Mammadov, 2022; Udin and Yuniawan, 2020).

Conscientious individuals are reliable, organized, and responsible, which is beneficial in many work situations. Emotional intelligence helps individuals recognize and manage emotions and is valid for teamwork and conflict resolution. Consensus is essential in team-based environments because it encourages cooperation and healthy relationships. Experience openness is associated with creativity, flexibility, and willingness to try new things, which can be valuable in problem-solving and innovation (Hirschfeld et al., 2014; Mammadov, 2022). However, it's important to note that different roles can require different personalities, and success is often a combination of several attributes rather than one.

An individual's identity is influenced by their sociocultural attitudes, values, and life experiences (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). A person's personality is influenced by social and cultural views, values, and life experiences (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). Moreover, personality traits can predict the best leadership style suitable for the personality (Simic et al., 2022). Moreover, they can determine the success of leadership. Effective and efficient leaders possess good personality traits. In contrast, an ineffective leader has negative personality traits. Moreover, the effectiveness of leaders is based on how their leadership style fits the circumstance. Their behavior influences the leadership style among educational leaders in a specific situation. Effective educational leaders learn from their past mistakes and try to correct them. Furthermore, it offers teachers and staff members the chance to offer feedback and ideas for improvement (Ahmad Saifuddin, 2020). Traits impact how people approach challenges and form positive or negative characteristics. These traits are influenced by genetics, culture, and society but can be improved through attitude and training. Prior studies focused on highlighting teachers' personality traits (Ibad, 2018; Istivono et al., 2021; Kell, 2019; Vallone et al., 2022) but ignored the personality traits of leaders of higher educational institutions. Therefore, this study aimed to identify positive personality types and behaviors sought by program directors (i.e., leaders) in creating a productive workplace and how they deal with unfavorable traits. Understanding this can improve working relationships and productivity.

## **2. Literature review**

Organizations can develop strong teams and a positive working environment by closely working with people possessing diverse personalities (Byrd, 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2019). Every individual in an organization possesses unique capabilities, including a strong work ethic, creative thinking, efficiency, or something else entirely. Therefore, organizations should not underestimate their contributions and strengths. Success is determined by personality traits in many categories, which are often enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Traditionally, studies examining the relationship between personality and performance deal with personality as things that do not change much as people age (Andrapuri et al., 2023; Kuśnierz et al., 2020; Piepiora, 2021; Supratman et al., 2021). However, recent research has shown that the stability of personality traits over time is not as robust as previously thought (Lam et al., 2012). De Waal (2012) studied the preferences of managers with different personalities and gained some interesting insights into how managers can work more effectively with their employees. According to him, there are three basic managerial

personalities: leadership-oriented, task-oriented, and people-oriented. The first two types of managers are almost identical; Both value results above all else and tend to have a more directional management style. People-oriented managers place more emphasis on building positive relationships with their team members. They take a more hands-on approach, delegating tasks to their team members. Personality is easy to spot because it is static and changes slowly. When we meet someone for the first time, we think of them as funny, outgoing, energetic, optimistic, and confident—as opposed to overly serious, slow, pessimistic, and shy. Moreover, it may take more than one session to determine that these traits are present, by the time we conclude that they are, we usually gather enough data to support our conclusions. This system of testing traits provides such a useful inventory of personality; it provides us with a method that allows us to “test” the qualities we know exist and/or are expected in a person, ultimately giving us an accurate idea of that personality. But while some people can freely measure their own personality and the personalities of those around them, others rely on instruments such as questionnaires to determine personality traits (Lickerman, 2012).

The personality of any person can be measured with different types of instruments, and among them Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is the most important psychological assessment tool that can help people identify and define personality traits. It uses four binary pairs to determine which of the two opposite personality traits is preferred over the others. The dichotomies include introversion (I) or extroversion (E), perception (S) or intuition (N), attention (T) or perception (F), judgment (J) or perception (P) Myers-Briggs type indicator of understanding self-discovery (King and Mason, 2020). It was a valuable tool, providing insight into how a person makes decisions, interacts with others, sees the world, and approaches tasks. However, it should be used cautiously, as human attitudes can change over time, and one trait should not be adopted in isolation (Mattare, 2015; Rashid and Duys, 2015; Yang et al., 2016).

Emotional intelligence is the most important factor leading to organizational performance (Kessi et al., 2022; Supramaniam and Singaravello, 2021), whereas empathy, flexibility, and communication skills are also essential elements that can help organizational success. Prior studies have revealed that high EQ is associated with success in the workplace (Dirican and Erdil, 2020; Emmons, 2002; Goleman, 2021; Mayer and Salovey, 2004; Krén and Séllei, 2021; Uraz and Arhan, 2020). Personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness enhance work engagement and performance in education (Binti Rusbadrol et al., 2015; Chandrasekar, 2019; Zaidi et al., 2013). Leaders should consider personality traits to increase job satisfaction and effectiveness (Dababneh et al., 2021), and they can be used to predict teacher performance and hire effective teachers (Rockoff et al., 2011).

In addition to the above significant factors that play crucial roles in shaping one's personality, coaching is a widely used approach in various professions to enhance performance and productivity. It involves reflecting on existing capabilities and developing strategies for personal growth. Coaching has been shown to improve employees' job satisfaction, job performance, and psychological functioning. Negative employees can benefit from coaching, gaining insight into limiting traits, and learning positive habits. Coaching can also help individuals transition into new roles

or careers. Studies have suggested that coaching can provide greater autonomy and a new perspective, leading to better performance outcomes (Jarosz, 2021; Sidhu and Nizam, 2020; Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2020). Conversations with negative people at work can also increase self-efficacy and confidence. Knowledge of personality-behavior associations can provide valuable information for coaching (Glisson and Durik, 2018; Kress and Stern, 2019; Kossek et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Joyce and Showers, 2002; McCormick and Burch, 2008; Obrenovic et al., 2020).

Based on the discussion given above, following framework is developed (See **Figure 1**).

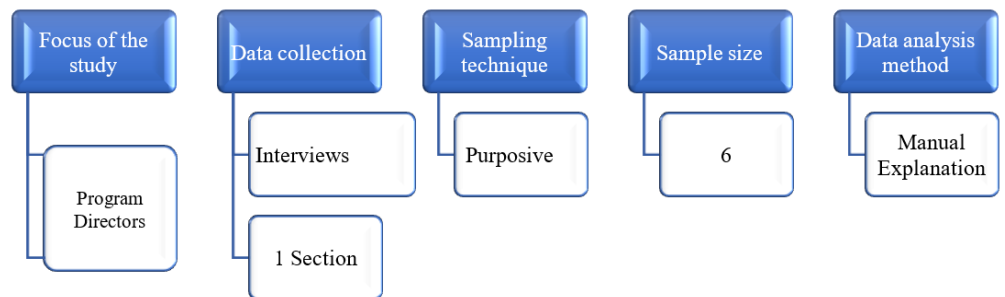


**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework to qualitative view.

### 3. Methodology

This study focuses on the perspectives of female program directors to shed light on the nuanced leadership qualities pivotal within the realms of higher education. The choice to concentrate on female leaders is both deliberate and strategic, stemming from an acknowledgment of the unique challenges and contributions women bring to leadership roles. Literature highlights the distinctive leadership styles of female leaders, often characterized by transformative, participatory, and emotionally intelligent leadership practices that significantly impact organizational culture and effectiveness (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Koenig et al., 2011). Specifically, in the academic sector, where female leadership representation is burgeoning yet remains underexplored, understanding the personality traits valued by female directors can provide invaluable insights into fostering inclusive and thriving educational environments. The research methodology depends on the research's nature and the type of data considered for research. It can be qualitative or quantitative, but most studies on personality traits and psychological assumptions have emphasized a qualitative approach. The decision to probe into employees' traits through the lens of leadership is underpinned by a growing body of literature that underscores the symbiotic relationship between leadership effectiveness and the personality composition of team members. The emphasis on employees' traits seeks to explore how leaders navigate the complexities of personality diversity to cultivate a harmonious and high-performing team. This approach is aligned with contemporary leadership theories that advocate for a nuanced understanding of followers' traits, as such knowledge is pivotal in the enactment of transformational leadership practices (Bass and Riggio, 2006). By examining the personality traits that leaders value in their employees, this study contributes to a deeper comprehension of how leadership in the educational sector can be effectively exercised to harness the full potential of human

resources. The qualitative research method is associated with feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. This approach is associated with quality and helps determine non-tangible elements such as social standards and religion. Moreover, the qualitative technique is the most appropriate to comprehend the complex reality of different situations or assumptions (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this research used qualitative methods and focused on the interpretivism approach. Nickerson (2022) explained the interpretivism approach as “focuses on individuals’ beliefs, motivations, and reasoning over quantitative data to gain an understanding of social interactions.” The five-step process of the methodology (i.e., research design) is given below (See **Figure 2**).



**Figure 2.** Research design of the research.

Selecting the most relevant and appropriate methodology is critical to comprehend the results and their relevancy fully. Therefore, researchers should carefully evaluate all the available methods and select the most suitable and appropriate ones. Moreover, the selection criteria must ensure the method is compatible with the research questions and objectives (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, based on these recommendations, we employed the qualitative exploratory case study method, and used focus groups and semi-structured interviews to collect data, which were further analyzed using traditional textual analysis. In qualitative research, between 6 and 10 participants are necessary, whereas 5 to 50 participants are enough for data collection through interviews (Dworkin, 2012). Therefore, this research interviewed six respondents (i.e., 2 from UK, 1 USA, 1 Canada, and 2 from UAE), all serving as program directors in their institutions.

To address the research questions, six respondents were interviewed in-depth to gather data. The interviews normally provide a large volume of data; thus, it is important to develop themes or conduct thematic analysis, which includes identification, examination, and summarizing of data (Braun and Clark, 2006). Therefore, the interview data was manually transcribed, and themes were developed. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were referred to as PD1, PD2, PD3, PD4, PD5, and PD6. They participated voluntarily. Participants’ perceptions of the key core personality traits at work were explored by asking them the following questions.

- What are the top five personality traits that you value in your employees?
- How do you deal with an employee’s negative qualities?

For research question 1, 30–35 min online, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of individual perspectives and experiences (Kvale, 1996). By allowing participants to speak freely and openly about their thoughts and experiences, in-depth semi-structured interviews can provide valuable

insights into complex and subjective issues that may not be captured through other research methods (Creswell, 2013). In addition, a one-hour online focus group via Zoom was used to examine research question 2. Focus group interviews involve bringing a small, diverse group of people together to discuss and share their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors around a specific topic or issue. This research method is useful for gathering rich, in-depth insights from individuals with diverse perspectives and experiences (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

The study has selected groups of six female participants within the age range of 40 and 55 to gather valuable insights. These individuals had 10–15 years of outstanding experience as program facilitators in their respective institutions. Moreover, participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time if they experienced problems or difficulties. Furthermore, it was explained to them that their participation would be voluntary and no monetary reward would be given.

#### **4. Data analysis**

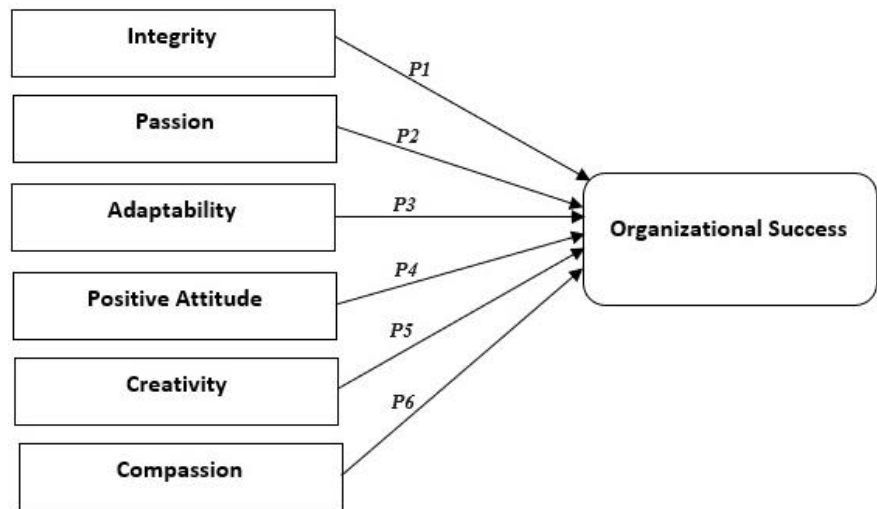
The data analysis process for the qualitative research consisted of six semi-structured interviews (interview questions can be seen in Appendix) and one focus group interview, where thematic coding was used. The first step was to transcribe the content of the interview recordings and the focus group sessions verbatim. Further, the codes were assigned to pieces of data, and similar codes were combined into basic themes. Moreover, the themes and input from the research teams were critically reviewed to ensure reliability and validity. After defining themes, they were described and named to capture the content. A final coding chart was developed to guide the systematic application of coding to the remaining transcripts. Cross-validation and consensus were achieved through discussion and peer interviews to ensure reliability and consistency in the coding. Furthermore, after completing coding, interpretation of data was done, relationships among themes were examined, patterns were identified, and findings were reported.

#### **5. Findings**

This study identifies six key personality traits that program directors at higher education institutions value: integrity, passion, adaptability, positivity, creativity, and compassion. The participants discussed how these traits are essential for effective leadership and management and strategies for promoting them and handling negative traits. A conceptual model (**Figure 3**) was developed based on these findings.

The model given above highlights six propositions that were developed from the findings. These propositions contend that organizational success is based on integrity (P1), passion (P2), adaptability (P3), positive attitude (P4), creativity (P5), and compassion (P6) of program leaders.

The first question was, “what are the top five personality traits that you value in your employees?” Responding to this, participants confirmed that integrity is highly valued in employees, leading to a positive work environment, team morale, and improved productivity. This trait is crucial for building trust and reliability within the team, resulting in better outcomes for the program and organization. Integrity means acting honestly, even when no one is watching, as defined by PD1.



**Figure 3.** The conceptual model drawn from the findings.

Integrity is associated with better job performance (Connor and Sims, 2014; Yang et al., 2019). Leroy (2012) found that employees who scored higher on a measure of integrity reported better job performance, and supervisors rated them as more effective. Similarly, the five program directors value integrity in their employees because it is a key component of trust and reliability. When employees demonstrate integrity in their work, they are showing that they can be trusted to do the right thing, even when no one is watching. This is important because program directors often rely on their employees to make important decisions and handle sensitive information. Without integrity, employees may be more prone to making mistakes or taking shortcuts, which can have negative consequences for the program and the organization as a whole.

All six participants identified passion as a crucial positive personality trait that organizations require in the 21st century, citing benefits such as high motivation, engagement, and commitment to work, increased productivity and creativity, and higher job satisfaction. Miao and Wang (2015) found that passionate employees had lower levels of turnover intention, and higher levels of job satisfaction mediated this relationship. Three participants also highlighted adaptability as a desirable trait, as adaptable employees can learn and adjust quickly to new situations and handle change positively and productively. The other two participants valued resilience, as resilient employees can handle stress and change, leading to increased job satisfaction and performance.

Many researchers have highlighted adaptability as an essential predictor of success in the modern workforce (e.g., Jandrić and Randelović (2018); Mc Loughlin and Priyadarshini (2021); Park and Park (2021); Sony and Mekoth (2022)). Similarly, Brislin et al. (2010) indicated that adaptability is positively related to job performance and career success. In addition, Zacher and Frese (2008) found that adaptability is particularly important in times of change and uncertainty, as it allows employees to handle new challenges and adapt to new situations.

Findings also indicated that five program managers believed that, in terms of benefits to the organization, employees with positive attitudes enjoyed their jobs, were more engaged in the organization, and were more likely to they will be changed. They can be innovative and creative, leading to increased competitiveness and success for



the organization (Cameron and Quinn, 2006; Jaskyte et al., 2020; Nasifoglu Elidemir et al., 2020; Zieba and Prokopenko, 2014). There is an extensive literature on the benefits that organizations derive from hiring conscientious employees. For example, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) found that life was associated with many positive outcomes, including positive affect, positive emotional sounds such as joy, happiness, enjoyment, high performance, good physical health, and improved quality. Positive employees engage in social behaviors such as volunteering to help others, which can have a positive impact on the workplace (Lopez and Snyder, 2009).

The six program directors agreed that a creative employee is highly valuable to an organization. PD2 asserts that “creativity is a very important skill to have in the workplace, as it allows for employees to think outside the box, which can lead to new and innovative ways of completing tasks.” Another participant confirms that “in our organization, we value creative employees and see them as a great asset... they are independent and self-motivated and can come up with original solutions on their own.” PD5. The other three participants also agree that creativity is important to an organization’s success. PD3 and PD4 explain that creativity is a necessary attribute for employees because it allows them to be proactive and think of new ways of doing things. PD1 also reiterated the same view and believes that “creativity is important in the workplace; however, I also believe that it must be combined with other qualities such as hard work and determination.” The findings of this research are supported by Zhou and Shalley (2003) who found that creative employees can bring a range of benefits to organizations, including increased innovation, competitiveness, and financial performance. Employee creativity is seen as an essential component of modern organizations by most organizations’ scholars and practitioners because it is a significant source of organizational innovation. Many researchers emphasized the significance of determining and comprehending the aspects that contribute to the creative output of employees (Ouakouak and Ouedragogo, 2017). Moreover, many prior studies have revealed that work creativity can enhance the innovative behavior of employees (Asbari et al., 2021; Karatepe et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020) and leads to better performance of a company (Imran et al., 2018; Yamin, 2020). It’s worth noting that being a compassionate employee does not necessarily mean being a pushover or sacrificing your own needs, as all participants agreed. For them, as program leaders, “it’s important to find a balance between showing compassion towards others and setting boundaries for yourself,” as PD2 said. It’s also important to recognize that everyone has their own unique strengths and areas for improvement and that “compassionate employees may not necessarily excel in all areas of their work... but it’s important to be supportive and understanding of others and recognize that everyone has their own limitations and challenges,” as PD4 emphasized.

## **6. Discussion**

Several research studies have examined the benefits of compassionate employees in the workplace. Hsu and Chiu (2014) found that compassionate love at work (i.e., showing care and concern for the wellbeing of colleagues) was positively related to wellbeing and that social support moderated this relationship. The authors concluded that supportive social networks can help enhance the positive effects of compassionate

love at work on wellbeing and productivity (Aboul-Ela et al., 2017; McClelland and Vogus, 2014; Sulphey, 2021).

The second question was, how do you deal with the negative qualities of your employees? To inquire this, participants were asked to describe ways or means of dealing with non-offenders in the workplace. Results indicated that program directors generally have several negative traits to address, such as lack of communication, low morale, low performance, jealousy, lack of motivation, and cooperation. This might be the case among some colleagues, but exploring this negative behavior is well beyond the scope of this research. Seven of the most effective methods or strategies identified by participants were highlighted: training, outdoor activities, professional development, dialogue and discussion, isolation, government warnings, and psychotherapy. The following **Table 1** summarizes the strategies five program managers used in their work to deal with negative people.

**Table 1.** Strategies used by program directors.

<b>Strategies program directors use to deal with negative employees at work</b>	
<b>Preferred strategies</b>	<b>Undesirable strategies</b>
1) Coaching	5) Isolation
2) Professional development	6) Official warnings
3) Outdoor activities	7) Psychotherapy
4) Conversations and discussions	

All six participants agreed that training is the most successful way to address employees’ negative attitudes in the workplace. Coaching is seen as more collaborative than other forms of intervention, such as counseling or discipline, and aims to improve employee behavior and performance. Program directors utilized continuous professional development as a strategy to deal with negative employee attitudes such as disrespecting authority, lack of team spirit, or not abiding by the rules. This strategy aimed to ensure that employees understood their roles in the workplace and stayed up-to-date with new practices, strategies, and technologies. The participants emphasized that jealousy among team members required urgent action and that providing continuous professional development courses was the best solution to equip employees with the necessary skills to manage their emotions. However, none of the participants claimed that CPD was always successful in improving team spirit and the workplace atmosphere.

All participants in this study agreed that outdoor activities and travel experiences were effective ways to reduce employees’ negative attitudes. However, some group members saw them as a waste of time. Discussions were viewed as useful for improving communication, developing trust, identifying underlying issues, and creating a positive atmosphere. Private discussion can help foster a sense of respect and understanding among all parties and provide the program director with opportunities to provide employee support and guidance. Moreover, all six participants asserted that dialogue and discussion can be an effective way to work with people without prejudice. Providing a safe and non-judgmental environment, listening to the person, acknowledging their feelings, and identifying the root cause of their

negative thinking can help promote a positive work environment and encourage a more productive relationship.

Separating non-negative employees is an effective but undesirable way to reduce team stress and create a better work environment. It can reduce negative energy, employee harassment and eliminate workplace crime or delinquency. Some participants emphasized that isolation should only be used when necessary and that the long-term consequences could be negative for team morale and performance. Isolating a negative employee can also help reduce the level of conflict within the team, as all participants agreed. Moreover, the elimination of negative employees can help in reducing the level of conflict within the team and create a more cohesive work environment. Furthermore, this process will reduce the stress and tension felt by other team members and maintain a positive atmosphere. Finally, isolating a negative employee can help reduce the level of crime and delinquency within the team. PD3 stated that a malicious employee “will often spread rumors and gossip to make himself look good.” Such behavior “can create a toxic environment and has the potential to divide team members and distract them from their work,” PD5 added.

Overall, the six participants believed that isolating negative employees is an effective way to reduce the amount of crime and crime that can circulate in the workplace, because it adversely affects the employees in the factory. However, it was also highlighted that there are shortcomings in this approach. The main problem stated by PD4 was that “by isolating an offending employee, the team may lose the opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills”. This process is seen as a short-term solution rather than a long-term strategy for improving team growth. Three participants (i.e., PD1, PD3, and PD5) emphasized that isolation should not be used to the extent necessary, as it may lead to negative long-term effects group the ethical and professional.

The program directors in this study stated that they use official warnings with negative employees for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it is important to document any negative behavior in the workplace. This is especially true “if the behavior is serious enough to warrant disciplinary action.” PD5 said. Official warnings provide a record of the incident and can be used to prove that the employee was warned about their behavior. They also serve as a reminder to the employee that their behavior is not tolerable and that they need to make changes. It is important for employees “to understand that their behavior has consequences and that they need to take accountability for their actions.” PD6 added. Warnings can help to reinforce this message and ensure that the employee is aware of the potential consequences of their behavior. Furthermore, five participants explained that official warnings help protect the employer from potential legal action. If an employee is terminated or disciplined for their behavior, they may try to take legal action against the employer. By having an official warning on record, “the employer can demonstrate that they took appropriate action to address the employee’s behavior and that they were warned about the potential consequences of their actions.” PD2 commented. All program directors appear to only issue formal warnings to unfavorable employees under very specific conditions and with a deadline for taking action. They were incorporated into any company’s employee handbook or policy manual to guarantee that any disciplinary action was reasonable and consistent. The participants also voiced their displeasure

with the possibility that a warning could be used to pressure an employee to quit their job rather than giving them a chance to improve their work or deal with any underlying problems that might be affecting it. Additionally, none of the participants could recall ever receiving formal instruction on the use of warnings or guidance on how to deliver them.

None of the participants thought that official warnings were being used in any significant way and that they instead “served as an unnecessary and potentially damaging process,” even though they were mentioned as an expected component of the disciplinary process, PD2 commented. Official warnings can result in job loss and negatively affect a person’s reputation, morale, and ability to do their work. These warnings are harmful to everyone involved—either the employer or the employee—and are of no assistance. Employers must therefore ensure that the warning system is consistent and fair and that the warning process is used as constructively as possible.

Four of the program directors stated that they may use psychotherapy as a last resort with negative employees when all other attempts to address the issue have been unsuccessful. For them, this could include attempts to provide additional training, coaching, or mentoring, or to provide additional resources or support. If these attempts have not been successful in improving the employee’s performance or attitude, then the program director may consider psychotherapy as a last resort. Psychotherapy can be an effective way “to help employees address underlying issues that may be contributing to their negative behavior... where normal or official ways work... it can also help employees identify and address any underlying mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, that may be contributing to their negative behavior.” PD1 commented.

The participants’ responses assert that this last-resort strategy can also help employees develop better coping skills and learn how to better manage their emotions. However, when considering psychotherapy as a last solution for dealing with negative employees, “it is important for any program director to ensure that the employee is comfortable with the idea and that they are willing to participate.” PD5 commented. It is also important to ensure that the employee is receiving the appropriate level of care and that the therapist is qualified to provide the necessary services.

The results show that program directors must ensure that they are providing the necessary support to the employee that they need throughout the process. This might entail offering extra assistance or resources instead of being available to respond to inquiries and offer advice. This strategy will help the employee feel empowered to complete the assignment rather than resentful or angry about being micromanaged.

## **7. Implications**

This research emphasized the importance of considering personality traits in organizational performance. Moreover, it examined and identified key personality traits and their importance in the workplace. The study focused on leaders (i.e., program leaders) of higher educational institutions and provided significant theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theoretical implications, this qualitative research has provided a detailed understanding of the factors that the program directors considered necessary to maintain a productive and collaborative work environment in

their educational institutions. Secondly, it has focused on the personality traits that program managers value in their employees. By identifying the characteristics of program managers, this research has also highlighted the characteristics that contribute to individual and collective success at work. Thirdly, the study has provided a complete understanding of the importance and impact of the characteristics that can help program administrators and managers to make informed decisions about recruitment, team structure, and professional development. Fourthly, it has explained how program directors deal with negative personality behaviors among their employees. Moreover, it has highlighted the ways and means by which the program directors can effectively manage and reduce harmful workplace practices. Fifthly, the theoretical implications include a unique context of discussing every personality trait as a strategy, focusing on specific traits like integrity, passion, adaptability, a positive attitude, creativity, and compassion, and differing from prior studies that focused solely on the big five traits. Sixthly, the research significantly differs from previous studies that either focused on the personality traits of teachers (Berkovich and Eyal, 2021; Deng et al., 2020; Khalilzadeh and Khodi, 2021) or quantitatively examined the personality traits of educational leaders (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015; Deinert et al., 2015; Na-Nan and Ngudgratoke, 2017). Lastly, it has proposed that organizational success is based on personality traits, including integrity, passion, adaptability, positive attitude, creativity, and compassion. These propositions can empirically be analyzed by further studies focusing on the personality traits of program leaders.

In terms of practical implications, the research has contributed to the existing research by providing valuable insights into the role of personality traits in the workplace, particularly from the perspective of program directors in higher education. The findings can be helpful in improving organizational practices, increasing employee productivity and satisfaction, and ultimately contributing to a healthier and better work environment. Moreover, the implications suggest that program directors or managers can use these findings as a guideline to enhance their organization's overall performance by creating a positive work environment that fosters increased job satisfaction, better relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and increased productivity, job performance, and customer satisfaction. Positive personality traits can also contribute to an organization's reputation as a desirable place to work, helping to attract and retain top talent. Therefore, organizations should focus on their employees' personality traits to enhance their performance and success.

## **8. Limitations**

The study has broadly explained the personality traits of program leaders that can influence the personality of employees of higher educational institutions. However, it still has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, the study did not solely focus on the big five personality traits, which could be explored in greater depth in future studies. Secondly, the limited sample size of female program directors may not adequately represent the wider population; thus, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed. Moreover, it would help to understand better the impact of positive personality traits on organizational success and whether gender bias exists in the evaluations of such traits. Thirdly, future studies should explore the

relationship between employees' integrity, passion, adaptability, positive attitude, creativity, and compassion and their impact on organizational performance through empirical research. Finally, the propositions developed by the findings can be empirically examined.

Even though in this paper, female leaders of tertiary education programs provide information on the strengths and flaws of leadership characteristics, it is vital to indicate the drawbacks of this study. One of the crucial factors remains the minimal sample size consisting of only six people. This limited number of respondents hindered the studies from generalizing to the broader population that belongs to higher education systems. The choice of a small but actively involved group was dictated by the fact that qualitative research is in-depth and looks under the surface into the richer experiences and views of women in academia. Nevertheless, tangible knowledge in those fields that solicits and condenses the unique leadership paths of leaders from various regions, institution types, and disciplines may sound like music to the ears but, at the same time, may have yet to handle the leadership diversity dilemma completely.

This deficiency can be addressed in future research by working with a more significant and diverse number of directors of programs, both male and female, to establish differences in the priority traits among the program leaders of different identities. Expanding the sample size and scope will preserve the finding's robustness and generalizability and enable the leadership dynamics in higher education that are resisting the challenges embodied in the rapidly changing landscape to be known more comprehensively. Thus, these studies, which would adopt a strategic mix of qualitative breadth and quantitative depth, would analyze the intricate intertwining of gender, leadership, and the culture of organizations in the academic environment.

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## **Appendix**

### **Semi-structured interview questions**

Reflecting on your leadership experience, what five personality traits do you most value in your team members?

Can you share instances where these traits significantly impacted team dynamics and performance?

How do you approach and manage negative qualities or behaviors in your team?

In your view, how do these valued traits align with the goals and challenges specific to higher education leadership?

How do you cultivate or encourage the development of these traits within your team?