Personality and Leadership: The Effects of Perfectionism

Kyle Sandell

University of Florida
Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between perfectionism and four distinct leadership types: transformational, transactional, passive/avoidant, and authentic. Perfectionism was treated as a grouping variable as dictated by scores on two aspects (performance standards and perceived discrepancy meeting standards) of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised; participants were either classified as an adaptive, a maladaptive, or a non-perfectionist. Data were collected from 105 manager/subordinate pairs across a wide range of fields, and separate ANCOVAs were run for each type of leadership, with self-esteem and personality being controlled in each. Adaptive perfectionist scores on the transformational leadership measure were shown to be significantly higher than maladaptive and non-perfectionist scores. No significant differences were found between perfectionism group on the other three leadership scores, but medium to large effect sizes were found, suggesting that the results may carry a practical significance despite failing to result in statistical significance.
Personality and Leadership: The Effects of Perfectionism

The study of leadership in the workplace has become a top priority for many businesses, and for good reason. The rapidly changing nature of some businesses calls for a flexible and adaptive leadership style, while other more bureaucratic companies may utilize a rigid, ends-based form of leadership. In either case, those who find themselves in a position to influence others ultimately choose the form of leadership that they believe will be most effective.

Effective leadership has been shown to increase subordinates’ quality of work (Masi & Cooke, 2000) and task performance (Johnson & Dipboye, 2008) across a wide range of fields. In addition, certain types of leadership have a positive effect on more abstract yet equally important factors such as motivation (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001), organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors (Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995), group cohesion (Avolio, 1999), and job satisfaction (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2003). Due to the positive effects listed above, contemporary researchers have attempted to identify the types of leadership styles that invite positive change in these outcomes. At the same time, researchers have also distinguished the various personality traits and emotional states deemed either necessary for or incompatible with successful leadership techniques. However, one personality construct that has not been studied in relation to leadership is perfectionism, a multidimensional construct with both positive and negative aspects (Hamachek, 1978). Given the role perfectionism plays in numerous other areas of interpersonal functioning, the present study attempts to illustrate the relationship between perfectionism and leadership style.

To begin, I will review relevant literature on four major types of leadership: transformational, transactional, passive/avoidant, and authentic. I will investigate the linkages between each form of leadership and various personality traits, most notably the “Big Five”
factors of personality (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience). Next, I will be reviewing perfectionism from a multi-dimensional approach in which the trait is broken down into maladaptive (or negative, neurotic) perfectionism and adaptive (or positive, healthy) perfectionism. Both forms of perfectionism will be reviewed in-depth and studied in relation to other personality traits. Finally, I will attempt to predict which type of perfectionist is most likely to exhibit which leadership style.

Leadership

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) created the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership as a classification of political leaders, but these terms were later expanded into a business and organizational setting by Bass (1985), and have gained increasing levels of conceptual and empirical interest ever since. According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership is composed of four main components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence (also called charisma) includes establishing a vision or sense of mission while raising followers’ self-expectations (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996). Widely considered to be the most important of transformational leadership’s four dimensions, idealized influence has been linked to many positive effects in the workplace (Cicero & Pierro, 2007; Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008; Johnson & Dipboye, 2008). Inspirational motivation involves the ability to communicate clearly and effectively while inspiring workers to achieve important organizational goals. Intellectual stimulation involves encouraging workers to "think outside the box" and come up with creative solutions to problems. According to Judge and Bono (2000), transformational leaders attain
intellectual stimulation by challenging the status quo; Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) claim that transformational leaders seek opportunities in the face of risk. Finally, individualized consideration involves treating each subordinate as an individual with his or her own unique needs and attending to these needs appropriately.

Transformational leadership has been shown to elicit a number of positive responses in organizational settings. Lowe et al.’s (1996) meta-analysis found that transformational leadership is highly associated with work unit effectiveness and that idealized influence (or charisma) was the subscale most associated with team effectiveness. A study conducted with the U.S. Army by Masi and Cooke (2000) found a significant relationship between the commanding officer’s transformational leadership level and the follower’s level of motivation. In addition, Barling et al. (1996) reported an increase in organizational commitment for bank employees whose managers completed transformational leadership training. Dubinsky, Yammarino, and Jolson (1995) showed that sales managers exhibiting transformational leadership qualities had sales personnel that were less stressed and more committed and satisfied than when the sales managers used transactional techniques. Moreover, transformational leaders were shown to articulate company goals more accurately and successfully than non-transformational leaders, resulting in greater understanding of organizational goals (Berson & Avolio, 2004). Furthermore, Hoyt and Blascovich (2003) found that subordinates’ self-reported quality of work, group cohesiveness, and leader satisfaction all increased when directed by a transformational leader.

Early work by Bass (1990) suggests that transformational leaders possess certain characteristics and personality traits that lead them to be more effective than their non-transformational counterparts. Indeed, charismatic (or transformational) leaders have been
described as being self-confident (Bass & Riggio, 2006; House, 1977), nurturing (Clover, 1988), energetic and enthusiastic (Smith, 1982), creative and innovative (Howell & Higgins, 1990), and visionary (Bass, 1985), among many other adjectives. House and Howell’s (1992) review of the literature contrasts traits that lead to transformational leadership: strong propensity to take risks, high need for social influence, and tendencies to be socially sensitive and considerate; with those that hinder it: desire to be dominant, high levels of boldness and masculinity, and tendencies to be highly critical and aggressive toward others. Transformational leaders were also found to be very proactive (Crant & Bateman, 2000), a personality trait that may explain their ability to inspire others and promote an environment of positive change (Bass, 1990). Using the Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI), Hautala (2006) indicated that the extraverted, perceiving, and intuitive preferences are most associated with transformational leadership. Those scoring high in the perceiving preference tend to be adaptable and open-minded, and those scoring high in the intuitive preference tend to be creative and idealistic (Gardner & Martinko, 1996), traits that seem to align with the concept of transformational leadership.

Despite the inherent difficulty in capturing the broad spectrum of personality, the five-factor model of personality is considered to be accurate in its encompassment (Goldberg, 1990). Myriad studies have investigated the relationship between the five-factor model of personality (the Big 5) and transformational leadership (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004; Crant & Bateman, 2000; Judge & Bono, 2000; Lim & Ployhart, 2004; Ployhart, Lim, & Chan, 2001), but a clear consensus has yet to be reached. Judge and Bono (2000) found that Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experience were positively correlated with transformational leadership, whereas Lim and Ployhart (2004) found Neuroticism and Agreeableness to be negatively correlated with transformational leadership. Extraversion was found to have a strong
relationship with transformational leadership in both typical and maximum performance situations (Ployhart, Lim, & Chan, 2001). Conscientiousness was found to have no significant relationship to transformational leadership in most studies. Due to the variability in Big Five research, some have proposed that the type of organizational setting may moderate the relationship between personality and leadership (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005), but further research is needed.

Transactional and Passive/Avoidant Leadership

Transactional leadership can be thought of as the precursor to transformational leadership. Whereas transformational leadership leads to an inspirational change within the subordinate, transactional leadership focuses almost entirely on measurable outcomes such as productivity and efficiency. Transactional leadership is composed of three main components: contingent reward, passive management by exception, and active management by exception. Contingent reward involves setting up a path-goal transaction in which the subordinate will be rewarded for adequate performance (Bass, 1997). Management by exception involves identifying aberrations or mistakes in day-to-day activity and enforcing rules to eliminate such mistakes. The difference between passive and active management by exception lies in how long it takes the leader to address the issue. In passive management by exception, leaders do not become involved until problems become serious (Bass, 1997). Passive management by exception has also been conceptualized as a component of passive/avoidant leadership, a style considered to be one step below transactional leadership in which the leader takes an ambivalent or “laissez-faire” attitude toward his or her duties. In active management by exception, a leader’s response or involvement is earlier, anticipatory, and preventive, which causes it to be aligned with transactional rather than passive/avoidant leadership. Transactional leadership by
itself is generally viewed as ineffective, or, at the very least, less effective than transformational leadership, but it is necessary for transformational leaders to utilize some transactional techniques (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987).

While not as effective as transformational leaders, transactional leaders may be necessary in companies that employ a more mechanistic structure. As Bass (1985) points out, transactional leaders work within the constraints of organization whereas transformational leaders work to change the organization. In addition, transactional leaders tend to be found in the lower-levels of management, where emphasis is placed on production rather than motivation (Avolio & Bass, 1988). The reward/punishment paradigm utilized by transactional leaders has been shown to increase subordinate sales performance while decreasing role ambiguity (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001), but only when the rewards and punishments were administered fairly. Contingent reward, one of the three components of transactional leadership, was found to be positively associated with subordinate perceptions of work unit effectiveness (Lowe et al., 1996). However, contingent reward was not correlated with actual work unit effectiveness, thus making it difficult to distinguish transactional leadership’s effectiveness based on subordinate ratings alone.

Due to the majority focus on transformational leadership, there is little research investigating personality and transactional leaders. A study conducted by Rubin, Munz, and Bommer (2005) found Agreeableness to be significantly related to contingent reward behavior, whereas Extraversion was not. In addition, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were positively related to transactional leadership, particularly in stable organizational settings (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). Agreeableness may be a necessary trait due to the transactional leaders’ tendency to set up agreed-upon reward/punishment systems with their
subordinates. Emotion recognition, defined as “the ability to accurately decode others’ expressions of emotions communicated through nonverbal channels,” (Rubin, et al.) was not predictive of the contingent reward behavior inherent in transactional leadership. Emotion recognition was, however, significantly related to transformational leadership, furthering the idea that transactional leaders are not as interpersonally involved with their followers.

Authentic Leadership

Although only recently introduced, the theory of authentic leadership has sparked considerable interest among leadership scholars. The concept of authentic leadership emphasizes the positive psychological capabilities that lead to increased self-awareness, and thus an increased ability to lead others. According to Luthans and Avolio (2003, p. 243), authentic leadership can be defined as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capabilities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of both leaders and associates, fostering positive self development.” Authentic leaders focus on building strengths rather than correcting weaknesses (Novicevic, Davis, Dorn, Buckley, & Brown, 2005), which promotes a more encouraging workplace environment. In addition, Gardner and Schermerhorn (2004) postulate that authentic leaders build confidence (self-efficacy), create hope, raise optimism, and strengthen resilience. Authentic leadership is largely viewed in a positive light, though as Endrissat, Müller, and Kaudela-Baum (2007) point out, authenticity is not necessarily a trait but rather a label that others may prescribe to a leader; therefore, authenticity can be feigned.

There is a general consensus on the four factors that cover the components of authentic leadership: balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and self-
awareness. Balanced processing involves the objective examination of relevant data before coming to a decision. Internalized moral perspective refers to the leader’s self-regulation through his or her moral standards. Relational transparency involves presenting one’s opinions or feelings in a purely authentic manner. Finally, self-awareness refers to “the demonstrated understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and the way one makes sense of the world” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Authentic leaders display high levels of all four components, which have been captured in the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

An important focus in the nascent stages of the authentic leadership theory has been to distinguish it from other leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership. According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), the definitions of transformational leadership provided by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) necessitate that a leader must be authentic in order to be considered transformational. However, a leader may very well be authentic but not transformational; authentic leadership merely indicates a deep sense of self and not necessarily the motivational and charismatic qualities that come with transformational leadership. Despite these key differences, authentic leadership has been linked to transformational leadership on the basis that their propagators share many personality traits and both can lead to similarly positive results in an organizational setting. Authentic leaders have been hypothesized to increase their subordinates’ levels of hope, trust, optimism, and other positive emotions (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). Subordinate’s personal and social identification (self-identity vs. group belongingness) have also been posited to benefit from the inclusion of authentic leadership, which is very similar to the transformational leader’s ability to align his or her subordinate’s personal goals with those of the organization (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003).
In one of the few empirical studies incorporating the concept of authentic leadership, Jensen and Luthans (2006) found that employees' perception of authentic leadership served as the strongest single predictor of employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work happiness in an entrepreneurial setting. While authentic leadership has been shown to elicit many of the same responses as transformational leadership, it is important to consider them as mutually exclusive constructs.

**Perfectionism**

Leadership has been studied in relation to a wide range of personality traits; however, no studies have considered the role perfectionism plays. Whether perfectionism is positive, negative, or both has been a topic of much debate. Despite the disagreement, Leonard and Harvey (2008, p. 585) state that perfectionism has been defined in all cases as “behavior linked to the process of setting very high standards or demanding goals of achievement for oneself or for others and evaluating performance based on those standards.” Most scholars argue that high standards ultimately define a perfectionist, but research has shown that some perfectionists are more apt to display negative emotional states and behaviors while others remain unharmed in their zealous pursuit of perfection. Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, and Ashby (2001) developed the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) in order to capture the multidimensionality of perfectionism. Through the APS-R, Slaney et al. (2001) and others (e.g., Rice & Ashby, 2007) have operationalized perfectionism as elevation on the High Standards subscale, an indicator of high performance expectations. The negative aspect of perfectionism has been operationalized with the Discrepancy subscale on the APS-R. Discrepancy measures the perception of consistent failure to meet one’s high standards--the belief of a major gap between standards and one’s adequacy in meeting those expectations. Rice and Ashby (2007) developed classification rules
based on combinations of High Standards and Discrepancy scores on the APS-R in which people could be classified as maladaptive perfectionists (high standards and high discrepancy), adaptive perfectionists (high standards and low discrepancy), and non-perfectionists (moderate or low standards).

Maladaptive perfectionism lends itself to a chronic state of self-criticism and disappointment with performance (Rice & Ashby, 2007). Maladaptive perfectionists’ constant self-doubt leads to emotional issues such as depression (Rice & Ashby), impoverished self-esteem, and strong feelings of inferiority (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). According to Dunkley, Zuroff, and Blanksetin (2003), maladaptive perfectionists view perfection as their only means of acceptance into a group, thus leading to considerable discomfort in social settings. These negative effects cause maladaptive perfectionists to suffer a great deal more stress than other groups, such as adaptive or non-perfectionists (Bousman, 2007). Maladaptive perfectionism has also been linked to Neuroticism (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007), an unhealthy personality trait that may lead to problematic performance.

Adaptive perfectionism, on the other hand, is considered to be a healthy personality characteristic that leads the individual to set high personal standards and strive for performance excellence without becoming self-punitive or distressed with their performance or themselves (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007). In fact, adaptive perfectionists tend to have high self-esteem that is seemingly immune to chronic discrepancy (Ashby & Rice, 2002; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998). Unlike their maladaptive counterparts, adaptive perfectionists overcome their feelings of inferiority in constructive ways that prove to benefit themselves and others (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). Due to their low vulnerability to negative affectivity (Rhéaume et al., 2000), adaptive perfectionists tend to be more focused on the task at hand as opposed to excessively ruminating.
about their performance (Enns, Cox, Sareen, & Freeman, 2001). With respect to the Five Factor
Model, adaptive perfectionists, compared with other groups, have higher average levels of
Conscientiousness and Extraversion and a lower level of Neuroticism (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney,
2007), furthering their image as hard-working, outgoing, and emotionally secure individuals.

Perfectionism and Leadership

Although no studies have attempted to link perfectionism with specific leadership styles,
a detailed review of the constructs suggests possible associations. For example, maladaptive
perfectionists have been shown to be heavily motivated by self-interest, suggesting that they may
put their own goals and interests above others' (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). However,
transformational leaders work out of the interest of others and the company as a whole (Bass,
1985). In addition, maladaptive perfectionism is a negative personality trait associated with
neuroticism (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007), whereas transformational leadership is negatively
correlated with neuroticism (Lim and Ployhart, 2004). Both transformational and authentic
leaders are considered to be confident and emotionally secure people, with high self-esteem
(Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Riggio, 2006), whereas maladaptive perfectionists are plagued
found that maladaptive perfectionists develop a general mistrust of others through their tendency
to view their environment as dangerous, unfair, or unpredictable, but trust is essential to the
individual consideration component of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Furthermore,
maladaptive perfectionists’ fear of peer rejection (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blanksetin, 2003)
contrasts greatly with authentic and transformational leaders’ ability to communicate clearly and
effectively with others (Avolio & Gardner 2005; Bass, 1990). Due to the emotional instability
and interpersonal problems that result from maladaptive perfectionism, it seems likely that they
would employ a more distant and less personal leadership style such as transactional, or, even more likely, passive/avoidant leadership.

In contrast, adaptive perfectionists appear more prone to display transformational and authentic leadership qualities, and a primary purpose of the study is to highlight this relationship. Adaptive perfectionists have high levels of Conscientiousness, a personality trait which Judge and Bono (2000) believe is positively correlated with job performance. Adaptive perfectionists have also been shown to be extraverted and emotionally secure (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007), traits which also correlate with transformational leadership (Judge & Bono). Stoltz and Ashby (2007) found that adaptive perfectionists work cooperatively with others and avoid aggressively taking charge, which coincides with King’s (2007) finding that transformational leaders work effectively in teams and tend not to be narcissists. Both authentic and transformational leaders look to serve as a positive role model for their subordinates (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), so providing a positive image for their followers is crucial in terms of their success as a manager. Therefore, my hypotheses will follow from these implied connections between the various leadership styles and perfectionism type, after controlling for the impact of self-esteem and personality.

Hypothesis 1: adaptive perfectionists will score higher than maladaptive and non-perfectionists on measures of transformational and authentic leadership. Specifically, I expect adaptive perfectionists to score highest, followed by non-perfectionists, and maladaptive perfectionists scoring lowest with a significant difference between their scores and those of adaptive perfectionists.

Hypothesis 2: maladaptive perfectionists will score higher than adaptive and non-perfectionists on measures of the less effective transactional and passive/avoidant leadership
styles. I again expect non-perfectionist scores to fall in between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionist scores, with a significant difference again occurring between the two extremes.

Method

Participants

One hundred five pairs of supervisors and subordinates participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The participants worked in wide range of business settings, including retail, service, real estate, financial, governmental, manufacturing, and utilities companies.

Work supervisors. The supervisors in the sample ranged in age from 20 to 61 ($M = 37.39; SD = 12.25$) and the sample was composed of 59% females ($n = 62$) and 41% males ($n = 43$). Supervisor tenure ranged from two months to 29 years ($M = 7.09$ years; $SD = 6.87$ years), and hours worked per week ranged from nine to 100 ($M = 41.57; SD = 13.61$). The highest level of education achieved for the sample is as follows: 32% completing some college ($n = 34$), 30% completing a four-year college degree at a university ($n = 31$), 17% completing professional/graduate school ($n = 18$), 9% completing some professional/graduate school ($n = 10$), 9% completing high school or obtaining their GED ($n = 10$), and 2% attending a post-high school trade or technical school ($n = 2$). The racial/ethnic background was 74% White/European American ($n = 78$), 11% Black/African American ($n = 12$), 5% Asian/Asian American ($n = 5$), 5% Hispanic/Latino ($n = 5$), and 4% Multicultural/Mixed Race ($n = 4$).

Subordinates. The supervisors’ subordinates in the sample ranged in age from 18 to 52 ($M = 22.19; SD = 6.3$) and the sample was composed of 62% females ($n = 65$) and 36% males ($n = 38$), with two participants declining to report their gender. Subordinate tenure ranged from one month to 22 years ($M = 2.22$ years; $SD = 3.38$ years), and hours worked per week ranged from three to 45 ($M = 18.82; SD = 11.46$). The racial/ethnic background was 68% White/European American ($n = 78$), 11% Black/African American ($n = 12$), 5% Asian/Asian American ($n = 5$), 5% Hispanic/Latino ($n = 5$), and 4% Multicultural/Mixed Race ($n = 4$).
American \((n = 71)\), 11\% Hispanic/Latino \((n = 11)\), 9\% Asian/Asian American \((n = 10)\), 8\% Black/African American \((n = 8)\), 3\% Multicultural/Mixed Race \((n = 3)\), and 1\% reported as a non-U.S. citizen or permanent resident \((n = 1)\).

**Measures**

*Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).* The MLQ Rater Form 5X contains 45 items measuring the nine components of Bass’s Full Leadership Model (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The nine components are included under three broad subscales: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, and Passive/Avoidant. Transformational Leadership is measured by five components: Idealized Influence-Attributed, Idealized Influence-Behavior, Inspirational Motivation, Individualized Consideration, and Intellectual Stimulation. Each of the five components has four items that assess the frequency in which the leader participates in a particular behavior, and Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999) report the psychometric properties of each factor to be conceptually distinct. Transactional Leadership is measured by two components: Contingent Reward and Active Management-by-Exception. Passive/Avoidant Leadership is measured by two components: Passive Management-by-Exception and Laissez-faire. Each item is evaluated on a 5-point scale \((0 = \text{not at all}, 1 = \text{once in a while}, 2 = \text{sometimes}, 3 = \text{fairly often}, 4 = \text{frequently, if not always})\). Items include “Talks optimistically about the future” and “Avoids making decisions.” Avolio, Bass, and Jung display evidence of the MLQ dimensions’ high reliability, intercorrelations, and convergent and discriminant validity. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha was .90 for the rater scale and .88 for the self-report leader scale.

*Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ).* The ALQ Version 1.0 Rater Form contains 16 items measuring the four components of authentic leadership (Balanced Processing,
Internalized Moral Perspective, Relational Transparency, and Self-Awareness). The Balanced Processing component (3 items) measures the degree to which the leader obtains sufficient opinions prior to making important decisions. An example item includes “analyzes relevant data before coming to a decision.” The Internalized Moral/Ethical Perspective subscale (4 items) measures the degree to which the leader sets a standard for moral and ethical conduct. An example item includes “demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions.” The Transparency subscale (5 items) measures the degree to which the leader reinforces a level of openness with others that allows them to express their opinions. An example item includes “says exactly what he or she means.” The Self Awareness subscale (4 items) measures the degree to which the leader is aware of his or her strengths and limitations, as well as how others see him or her and how the leader impacts others. An example item includes “accurately describes how others view his or her capabilities.” Each item is evaluated on a 5-point scale (0 = not at all, 1 = once in a while, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = frequently, if not always). Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) found that the four components of the ALQ are not independent of one another, suggesting that it might not be best to conceptualize the measures as assessing entirely separate and distinct constructs. Walumbwa et al. did find the ALQ to have acceptable levels of construct, content, and convergent validity. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for the rater scale and .87 for the self-report leader scale.

*Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R).* The APS-R contains 23 self-report items responded to on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* through 7 = *strongly agree*). The APS-R measures three subscales. The High Standards subscale (7 items) measures the participant’s personal standards and performance expectations. Example items include “I have high expectations for myself” and “I expect the best from myself.” The Order subscale (4 items)
measures the participant’s preference for order and organization. Examples items include “I like to always be organized and disciplined” and “I think things should be put away in their place.” The Discrepancy subscale (12 items) measures the negative aspect of perfectionism, or the perception of failure to meet one’s personal standards. Example items include “Doing my best never seems to be enough” and “I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance.” Slaney et al. (2001) found the APS-R to have acceptable levels of internal consistency, reliability, and construct validity. Also, Ashby and Rice (2002) demonstrated the convergent validity of the APS-R through significant positive correlations with other measures of perfectionism, including Hewitt and Flett’s Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (HFMPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) and Frost’s Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). Cronbach’s alpha was .83 in the present study.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) contains ten self-report items responded to on a 4-point scale (0 = Strongly Agree, 1= Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 3 = Strongly Disagree). Example items include “I take a positive attitude toward myself” and “I feel that I have a number of good qualities.” Cronbach’s alpha was .87 in the present study.

Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10). The BFI-10 contains ten self-report items responded to on a 5-point scale (1 = Disagree Strongly through 5 = Agree Strongly). Items are worded as a continuation of the phrase “I see myself as someone who…” and encompass the Big Five aspects of personality. Example items include “…has few artistic interests” and “…tends to be lazy.” In Rammstedt and John’s (2007) study involving both German and English participants, test-retest reliability for the BFI-10 was .75 and convergent validity correlations with the NEO-PI-R averaged .67 across the Big Five domains.
Procedure

Participants were recruited in two ways. In the first method, University of Florida students signed up for the study through the SONA systems research pool and received credit toward their general psychology course for their successful participation. The study was open only to employed students who worked more than five hours a week and had an immediate work supervisor who was also willing to fill out questionnaires. Participants were directed to a secure website where they read an informed consent and provided contact information (email address, phone number, first and last name) for themselves and their work supervisor. The informed consent expanded on the compensation for participating in the study and also explained the procedure for the study. Participants were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions or concerns regarding their role in the study. Participants were also informed that I would contact their managers to ensure that they did not forge their supervisors’ responses to the second set of questionnaires. Approximately one week after signing up and filling out the contact information survey, I emailed each participant and his or her supervisor with a link to the main surveys, as well as a three-digit code that was unique to each supervisor-student pairing and that gained them access to the surveys. The student participants completed three questionnaires in total: one demographic survey and two surveys which rate their supervisors’ leadership type. The supervisors read through an informed consent and completed six measures in total: a demographic survey, two leadership style self-report measures, a self-report perfectionism measure, and self-report personality and self-esteem measures. The students’ supervisors did not receive any compensation for their participation in the study. Student participants and supervisors were matched based on the three-digit codes and all identifying information was discarded so as to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, all participants completed the measures
on a secure website that is protected by a username and password which only I can access. After completing the measures, the participants were thanked and credit was awarded to the student participants if both they and their supervisors completed the surveys.

The second group of participants was students enrolled in a number of large psychology courses and a management course. Students and their supervisors completed the study in the same manner as the other group of participants, and the students received extra credit in their respective courses upon completion.

Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for each measure or subscale that was used in the analyses. In terms of the APS-R, The High Standards subscale had a relatively high mean score ($M = 42.7; SD = 5.95$), while the mean score for the Discrepancy subscale ($M = 36.13; SD = 13.05$) was below the maladaptive perfectionism cutoff, suggesting that the average participant was classified as an adaptive perfectionist. Internal consistency and mean scores for the APS-R are comparable to those obtained by previous studies in measuring perfectionists (Rice & Ashby, 2007; Rice et al., 2007).

Transformational leadership was measured using the five transformational subscales of the MLQ: Idealized Influence-Attributed, Idealized Influence-Behavior, Inspirational Motivation, Individualized Consideration, and Intellectual Stimulation. Transactional leadership was measured using the Contingent Reward and Active Management-by-Exception subscales, and Passive/Avoidant leadership was measured using the Laissez-faire subscale. Authentic leadership was measured using the four subscales of the ALQ: Balanced Processing, Internalized Moral Perspective, Relational Transparency, and Self-Awareness. Table 2 displays the intercorrelations between all the measures used in the study, including both self- and
subordinate-rated leadership.

Perfectionism groups were classified into three distinct groups based on the cutoff scores established by Rice and Ashby (2007) for the APS-R. Adaptive perfectionists were categorized as such if their scores were greater than 42 on the High Standards subscale and lower than 42 on the Discrepancy subscale; maladaptive perfectionists were defined as having scored greater than 42 on both subscales, and non-perfectionists simply scored below 42 on the High Standards subscale. The present study yielded 50 adaptive perfectionists, 23 maladaptive perfectionists, and 31 non-perfectionists.

Several analyses of covariance were run using each of the various subordinate ratings of the four leadership styles as the dependent variable, perfectionism group (adaptive, maladaptive, non-perfectionist) as the fixed factor, and self-esteem and the Big-Five personality dimensions as the covariates. Results showed a significant difference between perfectionism groups on transformational leadership $F(8,95) = 5.49, p = .006$. A Games-Howell post-hoc test was conducted, indicating that subordinates’ ratings of their supervisors on the transformational leadership measure were significantly lower among supervisors who were maladaptive perfectionists ($M = 62.65; SD = 15.88$) than in supervisors classified as adaptive perfectionists ($M = 74.36; SD = 10.8; p < .05; d = .86$), and also lower than non-perfectionists ($M = 71.06; SD = 10.6; p = .08; d = .62$). The other leadership styles showed no significant differences between the perfectionism groups, although scores on the passive/avoidant and authentic leadership measures both followed the general trends that were predicted in the hypotheses.

Despite not achieving statistical significance, subordinate ratings on the measures of passive/avoidant and authentic leadership showed practical significance due to the medium-to-large effect sizes discovered between the perfectionism groups and also followed the trends
predicted in the hypotheses. Subordinates’ ratings of their supervisors on the passive/avoidant leadership measure were higher among supervisors who were maladaptive perfectionists ($M = 7.57; SD = 2.86$) than in supervisors classified as adaptive ($M = 5.92; SD = 2.29$); $d = .64$ suggests a medium effect size between the two groups (Cohen, 1992). Additionally, adaptive perfectionists ($M = 61.58; SD = 8.36$) were rated as much higher on the authentic leadership measure than maladaptive perfectionists ($M = 55.96; SD = 10.83$), and again the difference was consistent with a medium effect size ($d = .58$). Non-perfectionists were hypothesized to fall in the middle on both leadership measures, and in both cases they did ($M = 59.42, SD = 9.02$ on authentic; $M = 6.58, SD = 2.67$ on passive/avoidant).

Subordinate ratings for each of the leadership types were used rather than the supervisors’ self-ratings due to the inherent bias of self-report. In fact, supervisors rated themselves as higher in terms of transformational and authentic leadership, and lower in passive/avoidant leadership, than their subordinates did. A series of paired-samples $t$ tests highlights these differences. Scores on the transformational leadership measure, as reported by the supervisors, ($M = 77.1; SD = 12.14$) and the subordinates ($M = 70.89; SD = 12.75$) differed significantly $t(104) = 4.57, p < .001, d = .50$. Scores on the authentic leadership measure as reported by the supervisors ($M = 63.57; SD = 7.95$) and the subordinates ($M = 59.69; SD = 9.32$) also differed significantly $t(103) = 3.74, p < .001, d = .45$. Interestingly, the differences between supervisor and subordinate ratings on the passive/avoidant ($M = 6.2, SD = 2.37; M = 6.47, SD = 2.58; d = .11$) and transactional leadership ($M = 26.87, SD = 4.8; M = 26.4, SD = 5.01; d = .10$) scales were not significantly different, suggesting that leaders are more likely to enhance their positive qualities rather than hide their managerial shortcomings.
Discussion

The purpose of the present study was twofold: to determine whether adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists differed significantly among the four leadership styles of transformational, authentic, transactional, and passive/avoidant; and to discover if non-perfectionists’ levels of the same four leadership styles fall in between the scores obtained for adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists. Results partially support the first hypothesis, as transformational leadership levels were significantly higher among adaptive perfectionists than they were for maladaptive perfectionists, and the non-perfectionists’ scores fell between the other two perfectionism group’s scores on both transformational and authentic leadership. However, there was no significant difference found between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism on the basis of authentic leadership, despite a medium effect size being found. The second hypothesis was also partially supported, as the non-perfectionists’ transactional and passive/avoidant scores again fell in between the other two groups’ scores, but there were no significant differences found between the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists’ scores on both leadership measures. However, a medium effect size between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists was observed on scores of passive/avoidant leadership.

Results indicate that high standards may be an important aspect of transformational leadership. The APS-R measures high standards with statements like “I have a strong need to strive for excellence” and “I try to do my best at everything I do.” This intense, internal drive to succeed may provide adaptive perfectionists with the ability to become transformational leaders and guide their subordinates toward greater accomplishment. The high standards that adaptive perfectionists hold for themselves may also be applied to their subordinates through the use of Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation, two components of transformational
leadership that require a considerable amount of faith and trust to utilize.

However, it is equally viable that the chronic discrepancy between one’s standards and his or her perception of performance plays a larger role in determining one’s level of transformational leadership. In the present study, a significant, negative correlation existed between the Discrepancy subscale of the APS-R and transformational leadership, which explains the large gap in mean transformational scores between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists. While maladaptive perfectionists have similarly high standards, they are differentiated from adaptive perfectionists in their constant perceived sense of failure to meet their lofty expectations (Slaney et al., 2001). Additionally, maladaptive perfectionists are known to worry excessively over mistakes (Rice & Ashby, 2007) and put their own goals and ideas ahead of others’ (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). The maladaptive perfectionists’ concern over mistakes and their consistent belief in their own ideas at the expense of others goes against the Intellectual Stimulation component of transformational leadership, which measures the ability to challenge followers to approach problems in innovative ways. Maladaptive perfectionists may not advocate unique ideas in the workplace and thus may not be suited to be transformational leaders.

Surprisingly, scores on the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) did not differ significantly among any of the three perfectionism groups, despite its reported close connection with transformational leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). A few explanations may account for this finding. The first rationale behind this result may be due in part to the level of supervisor that primarily participated in the study. A large percentage of student participants worked in non-professional job settings outside of an office setting, such as restaurants and retail stores. The supervisors in these organizations may not have the incentives to practice an engaging leadership style such as authentic leadership,
thus decreasing the variance of scores in the sample. Along the same lines, student participants worked, on average, less than twenty hours per week ($M = 18.82$). As Avolio et al. (2004) assert, “Authentic leaders…build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers by encouraging diverse viewpoints and building networks of collaborative relationships with followers, and thereby lead in a manner that followers recognize as authentic” (p. 806). This sense of legitimate authenticity may take quite some time to accumulate, and because the study used ratings from student subordinates who for the most part did not work a typical forty-hour work week, the results may be lower than what was originally expected across all three of the perfectionism groups. Finally, authenticity can be feigned by a work supervisor (Endrissat, Muller, and Kaudela-Baum, 2007), resulting in a warped score on the subordinate’s rater form of the ALQ. Since authenticity is a perception rather than a quantifiable construct, a leader could purposely act in an authentic manner around his or her subordinates in order to garner a higher esteem.

Another unexpected finding occurred in regard to the transactional leadership levels of each perfectionism group: contrary to expectations, adaptive perfectionists utilized a transactional style more than both maladaptive and non-perfectionists. This rigid, results-oriented managerial style appeared to fit well with the more nitpicky and sometimes impersonal nature of maladaptive perfectionism, but results showed that maladaptive perfectionists were the least likely group to display transactional techniques such as active management-by-exception and contingent reward. The results may again be due to the managerial level of the work supervisors who participated in the study. Transactional leadership is necessary in every job to some extent, but the lower-level positions filled by the subordinate participants presumably require a more ends-based approach to management (Bruch & Walter, 2007). Because of the emphasis that many organizations place upon quantifiable results, it may actually be in the best
interest of the supervisor to incorporate transactional techniques in order to meet their standards. For example, Shamir and Howell’s (1999) study showed that the effectiveness of low-level managers’ transformational leadership techniques may actually be less pronounced than upper managers. Therefore, the adaptive perfectionists’ higher scores on the measure of transactional leadership may still support their drive toward success, as the standards for success are ultimately decided by upper management or the organization as a whole, and transformational techniques may simply not work at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. It is important to note that transactional leadership is not necessarily negative; it is simply viewed as a less effective precursor to transformational leadership. In addition, stable, established working environments such as those organizations in which the majority of the participants in this study worked may also lend themselves to transactional approaches amongst management (Bass, 1990). Bass also recognizes that great leaders utilize both transactional and transformational techniques in order to get the most out of their followers, which may elucidate the unexpected results a bit more.

Although the differences between passive/avoidant leadership scores for adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists were not significant, a medium effect size was observed, suggesting some practical significance. It was hypothesized that the maladaptive perfectionists’ low self-esteem (Ashby & Kottman, 1996) and their fear of unpredictable environments (Stoltz & Ashby, 2007) would naturally lead them to incorporate a hands-off leadership approach with as little interaction as possible. Indeed, the Discrepancy subscale of the APS-R was found to significantly, negatively correlate with self-esteem and significantly, positively correlate with passive/avoidant leadership. These results do support the overall hypothesis that maladaptive perfectionists incorporate passive/avoidant leadership more than their adaptive counterparts, and
the practical significance of the findings are evident.

A secondary aspect of both hypotheses was the belief that the non-perfectionists would fall in between the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists on all measures of leadership. This facet of the hypotheses was entirely supported, as the scores on each leadership measure followed a continuum in regard to perfectionist group, with non-perfectionists always scoring in the middle. This finding has significant implications for the conceptualization of the overall results of the study, mainly because it implies that the level of discrepancy is most crucial when predicting the levels of certain leadership styles. Despite holding similarly high standards, it is the perceived sense of failure to meet expectations, or discrepancy, that differentiates maladaptive perfectionists from adaptive perfectionists (Slaney et al., 2001). Had high standards been the key factor explaining the differences in leadership scores, we would observe adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists obtaining similar scores, with non-perfectionists falling somewhere below. As the results show, however, non-perfectionists placed in between the other two groups on all leadership measures. Since the major difference between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists is the Discrepancy score, it is reasonable to presume that the level of Discrepancy goes a long way in determining a perfectionist’s leadership style.

Finally, it is important to note that the subordinate ratings of their supervisors’ transformational and authentic leadership levels differed significantly from the supervisors’ self-ratings on the same scales. Past studies have resulted in a difference of opinion in terms of whether self-raters characteristically inflate their ratings (e.g., Mabe & West, 1982; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), or provide ratings that vary in relation to others’ ratings (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Van Velsor, Taylor, and Leslie, 1993). The results of the present study support the former, but only along the lines of the more positive leadership styles. Previous research has also
indicated that supervisors who score high on measures of effectiveness, self-awareness, and interpersonal orientation were more likely to provide self-ratings that are in agreement with others’ ratings (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Roberts, 1991; Roush & Atwater, 1992). Self-awareness and interpersonal orientation are certainly characteristics of transformational and authentic leadership, so the discrepancy between leader and subordinate ratings may be due to those supervisors who practiced transactional or passive/avoidant leadership, but classified themselves as more transformational or authentic than they actually were. In any case, the use of subordinate ratings of leadership style was a definite strength of the study due to the inherent bias in self-report.

A few limitations exist in the present study that future research may address. The study used mostly lower-level supervisors, which may have skewed the results toward a more transactional and less transformational leadership style. Bruch and Walter’s (2007) study involving organizational hierarchy and transformational leadership found higher levels of Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation amongst upper-level managers as compared to those leaders categorized as lower-level. Future research should take managerial level into account by sampling from each level in order to reveal any hierarchal differences. Furthermore, only one subordinate rating was used in determining the supervisors’ level of each type of leadership in question. Atwater and Yammarino (1997) advise against the sole use of others’ ratings as the ‘true’ score, and the use of a single rating is certainly a limitation of the present study. Future studies may benefit from using a combination of multiple subordinates as well as a self-assessment in order to gain a more accurate measure of leadership style. Finally, demographic variables such as gender and race/ethnicity were not taken into account during analyses; gender has been shown to have a moderating effect on certain leadership styles such as
transformational leadership (Reuvers, Engen, Vinkenburg, & Wilson-Evered, 2008).

Despite the limitations, there are several strengths to this study. The study avoided self-report bias by measuring leadership style according to the subordinates’ perceptions of their supervisors. Leadership self-assessments were also collected in order to better understand the relationship between self- and other-ratings. An additional strength is the generalizability of the results across many vocational fields. Participants worked in retail, service, real estate, financial, governmental, manufacturing, and utilities companies, among many others. Therefore, the results of the present study have a far greater applicability than similar leadership studies that are conducted under the roof of a single business or in a specific field.

This study fills an important void in the literature by being the first to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and leadership style, despite a plethora of research concerning the relationships between personality and perfectionism as well as personality and leadership. Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) have called for more research on leadership, especially since leaders have shown they can make the change to more effective styles such as transformational leadership (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996). Along these lines, Bass (1990) agrees that improving leadership in an organization is important, even if it requires changing the presiding style. Furthermore, Judge and Bono (2000) argued that understanding personality traits would lead to an increased accuracy in predicting leadership type, a skill which could be used in the hiring or promoting process. With perfectionism being seemingly commonplace in work environments, it is my hope that companies will be able to identify its impact on leadership ability. The idea that a somewhat slight difference along a specific characteristic such as discrepancy could go very far in determining a supervisor’s leadership style should call upper management and those involved in employee selection to abrupt attention. By highlighting the
many detailed relationships between perfectionism and leadership, the present study could be used to further define what characteristics should be considered desirable in the workplace.
References


characteristics and dimensions of transformational leadership. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 9*(3), 315-335.


Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for All Scales Used in Analyses*

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<th>Measure</th>
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Table 2

**Intercorrelations Between All Scales**

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**p < .01 (one-tailed test)**

* p < .05
Figure 1. Mean Transformational Subordinate-rated Score for Each Perfectionist Group