Chapter #3

SELF-CONCEPT AND ANXIETY OF SLOVAK STUDENTS (FUTURE LEADERS)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the self-concept and anxiety of Slovak university students as future leaders. A positive self-concept and emotional stability are considered important characteristics of an effective leader. Our research sample consisted of 199 (mean age=20.04; SD=1.58) university students (field of study: management and education). The available and intentional sampling was used. Data were obtained by means of the State-trait anxiety inventory and the Piers-Harris self-concept scale for children and adolescents. The reliability (inner consistency) of the measured variables was acceptable (Cronbach alpha from .56 to .90). Correlation tests and a comparative research study were conducted. Our findings prove negative moderate statistically significant correlation between all self-concept dimensions and state and trait anxiety (from -.26 to -.67; $p<.01$). A strong significant relationship between the total self-concept and state and trait anxiety (-.56; -.68; $p<0.01$) was shown. No differences among students in terms of field of study were found. The limitation of this study is the sample size and the use of self-reported data. This study presents a contribution to the research of relevant personal factors of tomorrow´s leaders in education and economics in Slovakia.

Keywords: leadership, trait anxiety, state anxiety, self-concept.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Bass and Bass (2009), leadership is a "widely discussed and popular topic" but when it comes to defining this much conferred concept, the literature has not shed light on a concerted definition or its constitution. Yukl (2009, p.13) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives." Simplifying the definition, leadership is the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of goals. In a similar way Chemers explains leadership (In Pashiardis, 2014, p. 14): „leadership is a social influence process during which an individual manages to secure the assistance of others in order to accomplish a common goal. A leader is the person, who influences through his/her behaviour the behaviour of the people in his/her group. In this way, he/she activates the organization members towards the accomplishment of a common vision." According to Collins (2001, p.74) "leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted." Ahn, Adamson and Dornbusch (2004, p. 114) point out that "leadership" is a prospective. It defines what the future should look like, aligns the organization with a common vision, and provides inspiration to achieve transformational goals." Cashman (2000, p. 20) defines leadership as „authentic self-expression that creates value, it is not seen as hierarchical - it exists everywhere in organizations."

Although every definition emphasizes something different we can state that leadership is a demanding, unrelenting job with enormous pressures and grave responsibilities. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) believes it takes a special kind of person to master the challenges of opportunity.

One of the earliest approaches to understanding leadership was the trait approach emphasizing the personality of leaders. According to Hogan, Curphy and Hogan (1994) and Anderson (2006) personality has an impact on a leader's effectiveness. Contemporary research suggests the importance of five personality traits to determine leader´s effectiveness and the leadership style (Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Hassan, Asad & Hoshino, 2016).

The study of leader traits has a long history. There is constantly reported self-confidence among leader´s core traits associated with emotional stability. Every major review of the leadership literature lists self-confidence as an essential characteristic for effective leadership (Bass, 1990; Locke, 1991; House & Aditya, 1997; Yukl, 2009; Northouse, 2016).

There are many reasons why a leader needs self-confidence (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Northouse, 2016; Axelrod, 2017; Holsinger, 2018). A great deal of information must be gathered and processed. A constant series of problems must be resolved and decisions made. A person riddled with self-doubt would never be able to take the necessary actions nor command the respect of others. Self-confidence plays an important role in decision-making and in gaining others' trust. Self-confident leaders have a positive attitude about themselves and they are able to press ahead with the belief that, if they make a wrong decision, any setback can be overcome. Self-confidence helps effective leaders remain even-tempered.

Emotional stability is especially important when resolving interpersonal conflicts and when representing the organization. Leaders who derail are less able to handle pressure and more prone to moodiness, angry outbursts, and inconsistent behaviour, which undermines their interpersonal relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors. On the contrary, successful leaders are calm, confident, and predictable even during crisis. Emotional stability operates as a relevant variable even in a profile approach to effective leadership (Parr, Lanza & Bernthal, 2016). Emotional stability is also in a positive relationship to up-to-date network leadership performance (Grift, 2016). Insufficient emotional stability may be due to increased anxiety of the individual. Anxiety is an aversive motivational state that occurs in situations where the level of perceived threat to the individual is high (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). Anxiety in general refers to an individual´s disposition to worry about many different events, behaviors or personal abilities of everyday life, together with a difficulty in controlling these worries. It is clear that this disposition does not fit into the desired profile of an effective leader.

On the contrary, a positive self-concept, which we consider to be the basis of self-confidence, is an important prerequisite for successful social functioning. We can also find empirical studies that link negative self-concept with anxiety and depressive symptoms (Orbach, Mikulincer, Stein & Cohen, 1998; Erkolahti, Ilonen, Saarijärvi & Terho, 2003; Räty, Larsson, Söderfelt & Wilde Larsson, 2005). A recent study (Mammarella, Donolato, Caviola & Giofrè, 2018) confirmed positive self-concept (both general and academic) as a significant protective factor in childhood and adolescent anxiety (both general and test).

Since we also consider teachers as leaders at least in relation to students, we have decided to pay attention to them. In particular, they (Williams-Boyd, 2002):

- are thoughtful risk-takers who are not afraid to fail
- are problem solvers
- are generators of ideas—insightful, thoughtful, and sensitive
- are innovators who creatively motivate all students
- value growth and relationships, and lead by example
- foster collegiality with fellow teachers, and support and encourage them
- are voracious learners, constantly seeking new ideas that can improve instruction and learning
- consistently place students at the centre of their work and attention
- maintain an abiding belief in the potential and integrity of each student...

We believe that all these abilities, skills and behaviors go hand in hand with sufficient self-confidence and emotional stability.

Contemporary leadership models that have a direct impact on educational practice also require some personality assumptions, for example instructional and transformational leadership. Instructional leadership has been defined in a number of different ways, some of which refer to activities directly and others indirectly related to the processes of teaching and learning (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014; Marks & Printy, 2003). According to Portin, DeArmond, Gundlach and Schneider (2003, p. 18), instructional leadership is the process of "assuring quality of instruction, modeling teaching practice, supervising curriculum, and assuring quality of teaching resources". It involves a number of functions such as coaching, critical reflection, teacher collaboration, teachers as action researchers and generally collaborative and critical thinking on the quality of teaching (Glanz & Neville, 1997). According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahistrom (2004), instructional leadership was seen as having an indirect impact on student outcomes through improving organizational learning culture and staff performance. Likewise, Marks and Printy (2003) found that school effectiveness could be improved by adopting instructional leadership.

Transformational leadership entails not only a change in the purposes and resources of those involved in the leader-follow relationship, but an elevation of both - a change for the better. With respect to motives or purposes: transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both (Burns in Williams-Boyd, 2002). Leithwood (in Williams-Boyd, 2002, p. 675) concludes on the basis of his research, „that transformational school leaders pursue three fundamental goals: first, the stimulation and development of a collaborative climate within the school; second, contribution to the continuous professional development of the teachers; and, third, expansion of the problem-solving capacity of the school. Transformational school leadership clearly occurs within the framework of maximizing the potential of those involved in a particular organization."

Based on the above, we consider it important to pay attention to the selected personality traits of young people as potential leaders. Through their upbringing and education, we are able to influence society and future generations in Slovakia to a certain extent.

2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of our research study was to examine the self-concept and anxiety of Slovak university students as future leaders. They represent tomorrow´s leaders in education and economics in Slovakia. Our objective was:

1. to verify the relationship between a student´s positive self-concept (perceived as the assumption of his future self-confidence) and his state and trait anxiety (the lack of emotional stability). Considering the listed empirical research, we state this hypothesis:

H1: There is statistically significant negative correlation between student´s trait anxiety (as an individual disposition) and their total self-concept.

2. to compare groups of students according to their field of study and answer the question: Are there any differences in self-concept and anxiety between students of management and students of education?

3. METHODS

The research was carried out in Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica. Our research sample consisted of 199 university students (mean age= 20.04; SD=1.58). The available and intentional sampling was used (late adolescence and field of university study: management or education). The research was realized anonymously by the means of a questionnaire set:

1. The Piers-Harris Children´s and Adolescents´ Self-Concept Scale 2 (Czech version: Obereignerů et al., 2015; translation to Slovak: Ďuricová & Ladnová, 2018) is 60-item self-report scale with the possibility of a dichotomous yes/no response. Except for the total score (TOT; range from 0 to 60) the questionnaire includes 6 subscales evaluating specific domains of self-concept: behavioural adjustment (BEH; α = .65), intellectual and school status (INT; α = 0.56), physical appearance (PHY; α = .70), freedom from anxiety (FRE; α = .72), popularity (POP; α = .63), happiness and satisfaction (HAP; α = .76).

2. State-trait anxiety inventory (Slovak version: Müllner, Ruisel, & Farkaš, 1980), that measures state anxiety (α= .90) and trait anxiety (α= .89). Trait anxiety (A-Trait) refers to relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness, that is, to differences between people in their tendency to respond to situations perceived as threatening with elevations in A-State intensity. State anxiety is conceptualized as a transitory emotional state or condition of the human organism that is characterized by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension and apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity. States may vary in intensity and fluctuate over time (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970, p. 3).

The STAI-Trait scale consists of 20 statements that ask peaple to describe how they generally feel. The STAI-State scale also consists of 20 statements, but the instructions require subjects to indicate how they feel at a particular moment in time. STAI-Trait scale has seven reversed items and thirteen that are scored directly. STAI-State scale has ten reversed items and ten that are scored directly. The range of possible scores varies from a minimum score of 20 to maximum score of 80 of both the State and Trait subscales. Subjects respond to cach STAI item by rating themselves on a four point scale (for state scale are: 1-not at all, 2-somewhat, 3-moderately so, 4-very much so; for trait scale are: 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-often, 4-almost always (Spielberger et al., 1970, p. 6).

Obtained data were processed by the statistical program SPSS using the procedures of descriptive and inductive statistics.

4. RESULTS

Since our variables did not fulfil the conditions for a normal distribution, a non-parametric procedure was used to analyse the data. Although trait anxiety was at the center of our interest, state anxiety was also statistically analyzed. We also present its results for illustration. Based on the results (Table 1), we can state that there *are strong negative statistically significant relations* among the total self-concept and state and trait anxiety.

More detailed analysis brought negative moderate statistically significant correlations among all self-concept dimensions and state and trait anxiety. Especially strong is the negative correlation between trait anxiety and freedom from anxiety and happiness and satisfaction.

Table 1.
Correlation analysis (Spearman) of students´ anxiety and self-concept (N = 199).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
M (mean)	11.75	10.42	7.74	6.94	7.87	8.29	41.31	39.45	46.11
SD (stand.dev.)	2.06	2.45	2.36	2.49	2.17	2.04	8.03	10.24	9.62
1. BEH		.36**	.12	.19**	.15*	.22**	.50**	**-.32****	**-.26****
CIρ (95%)		.23-.49	-.02-.25	.07-.32	.02-.03	.08-.36	.40-.60	-.45-.18	-.39-.13
2. INT			.41**	.19**	.16*	.31**	.59**	**-.34****	**-.32****
CIρ (95%)			.29-.52	.05-.32	.03-.29	.18-.44	.49-.67	-.46-.20	-.44-.18
3. PHY				.44**	.47**	.72**	.71**	**-.32****	**-.48****
CIρ (95%)				.32-.55	.35-.57	.64-.79	.63-.78	-.45-.19	-.58-.36
4. FRE					.48**	.51**	.72**	**-.49****	**-.67****
CIρ (95%)					.35-.59	.39-.62	.64-.79	-.59-.79	-.75-58
5. POP						.38**	.63**	**-.33****	**-.39****
CIρ (95%)						.25-.51	.52-.71	-.46-.20	-.50-.25
6. HAP							.73**	**-.45****	**-.57****
CIρ (95%)							.64-.80	-.57-.32	-.67-.45
7. TOT								**-.56****	**-.68****
CIρ (95%)								-.65-.45	-.75-.60
8. State anxiety									.70**
CIρ (95%)									.62-.76
9. Trait anxiety									

BEH = behavioural adjustment; INT = intellectual and school status; PHY = physical appearance; FRE = freedom from anxiety; POP = popularity; HAP = happiness and satisfaction; TOT = total self-concept ** $p < .01$

In line with our second research objective we present descriptive characteristics of measured variables in groups by the respondents´ field of study (Table 2).

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics of the variables studied by field of study
(S_M = students of management, N = 112; S_E = students of education, N = 87).

Field of study	BEH	INT	PHY	FRE	POP	HAP	TOT	State anxiety	Trait anxiety
S_M									
Mean	11.71	10.34	7.86	6.83	7.74	8.37	41.22	39.73	46.36
Median	12.00	11.00	8.50	7.00	8.00	9.00	42.00	37.50	45.50
Mode	13	12	10	5	9	10	41	29	49
Std. Deviation	2.12	2.5	2.39	2.37	2.17	2.07	8.16	10.17	9.59
Skewness	-1.72	-.67	-1.15	-.01	-1.00	-1.43	-1.08	.67	,37
Kurtosis	4.08	-.17	1.18	-.62	.58	2.13	1.91	.05	-.07
Minimum	3	3	0	1	1	0	10	24	26
Maximum	14	15	11	12	11	10	54	70	75
S_E									
Mean	11.80	10.52	7.60	7.08	8.05	8.20	41.41	39.08	45.79
Median	12.00	11.00	8.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	41.00	38.00	46.00
Mode	13	11	8	6	10	10	44	27	53
Std. Deviation	1.98	2.30	2.34	2.64	2.19	2.02	7.90	10.36	9.72
Skewness	-1.09	-.27	-.68	.16	-.84	-1.31	-.45	.68	.03
Kurtosis	1.13	-.13	-.36	-.57	.45	1.28	-.16	-.03	-.57
Minimum	5	5	2	2	1	2	20	22	26
Maximum	14	15	11	13	12	10	55	66	69

BEH = behavioural adjustment; INT = intellectual and school status; PHY = physical appearance; FRE = freedom from anxiety; POP = popularity; HAP = happiness and satisfaction; TOT = total self-concept

In order to compare groups of students according to their field of study we used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test (Table 3). Results summarized in Table 3 show there are no statistically significant differences in the tested variables between students of management and students of education.

Table 3.
Self-concept and anxiety differences among students according to their field of study.

N=199 Variables	S_M n=112 median	S_E n=87 median	Z	p	d_Cohen
BEH	12	12	-.28	.78	.0
INT	11	11	-.01	.99	.0
PHY	8.5	8	-1.02	.31	-.21
FRE	7	7	-.61	.54	.0
POP	8	8	-1.01	.31	.0
HAP	9	9	-.97	.33	.0
TOT	42	41	-.09	.93	-.12
State anxiety	37.5	38	-.51	.61	.05
Trait anxiety	45.5	46	-.15	.88	.05

S_M = students of management; S_E = students of education; BEH = behavioural adjustment; INT = intellectual and school status; PHY = physical appearance; FRE = freedom from anxiety; POP = popularity; HAP = happiness and satisfaction; TOT = total self-concept

5. CONCLUSION

Comparing study groups (potential managers and teachers) has shown that there are no statistically significant differences in self-concept and anxiety among students. Thus, the students of the study fields studied do not differ in these personality variables at the beginning of their studies. This fact creates a good precondition for the potential development of leadership skills for both future managers and future teachers.

Our results confirm a strong negative correlation between a student´s self-concept and his/her level of anxiety. The stronger the sense of positive self-concept, the lower the sense of anxiety. This finding corresponds with previous empirical research (Orbach et al., 1998; Judge, Erez & Bono, 1998; Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge et al., 2002; Erkolahti et al., 2003; Räty et al., 2005, Mammarella et al., 2018). Trait anxiety has direct association to a leader's health status (Lindorff, 1995). The most common drugs used by managers are for treating depression, insomnia and anxiety (St-Hilaire & Gilbert, 2018). Mortensen (2014) also deals with some disastrous outcomes of leader´s chronic anxiety. In terms of prevention, it is then desirable to develop a student´s positive self-concept during the study. Trait anxiety is something that is hard to influence, but to some extent we can compensate insufficient emotional stability (i.e. increased state anxiety) by fostering self-confidence and positive self-concept.

In a longitudinal study, Benson (2018) confirmed that a leader´s self-confidence can be developed in youth in a leadership training program and that a leader´s effectiveness and leader´s self-confidence will persist over time to become permanent. Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) found that education enhances an individual's level of self-efficacy by providing knowledge and skills. Here we can see an opportunity in developing new study programs for future teachers and economists as future leaders. It would be appropriate to create more space for training in basic leadership skills especially in teacher education (during a Master´s degree through a course of Managerial Psychology): decision-making, team-building, conflict solving, time management, delegation…. By developing these and other leadership skills, we can consolidate the students' positive self-concept and remove their doubts about their competence. Although we are aware of the limits of our research study (especially the composition of the research sample), we believe that our work can contribute to the study of the personality of the leader.

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