

# The leadership and success phenomena in the student community: a sociological analysis

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the theoretical and empirical positions of the leadership and success phenomena in the student community. This issue represents a critical need for the leaders all around the world whose activities correspond to moral imperatives. The paper is based on the own unique survey that yields some interesting results. In particular, such qualities as honesty and reliability are the primary characteristics of leaders expressed by the students who took part in the survey. Besides, the vast majority of respondents do not consider aggressiveness as a character trait necessary for an effective leader. In the studied population of respondents, a significant group of situational leaders is singled out. These leaders occupy corresponding positions depending on the circumstances. It is established that the overwhelming majority of students are sure the leaders are not born, they are made as a result of inclusion in the transformational activity aimed at self-constructing. In general, a large segment of the students from Togliatti State University tend to self-educate themselves and are interested in the needs of other people. They appear to be benevolent, self-organized, self-confident, optimistic, self-critical, evade the perception of negative energy and conflicts and take care of their physical and mental health. These characteristics indicate the presence of a potential and real leaders' layer in the student community of the university.

## 1 Introduction

Leaders play an important role in all aspects of our modern everyday life, and good leadership is an art that is highly valued. Effective leaders not only control, evaluate and analyze, but also encourage, improve and inspire (see e.g. Adair 2009; Moskalenko and Yevsieieva 2015; Kuzmin 2015; Host'ovecký and Poláčik 2016; Strielkowski et al. 2018; or Strielkowski and Chigisheva 2018).

At the same time, we may find many examples of the leadership in history that caused and still causes disasters. This is the result of the unethical leaders' activity, that's why there is an exigence for true leadership in the world (Jacobsen et al. 2007; or Jacobsen 2009). Many ethical violations performed by top managers in the business environment are a by-product of success, not competitive pressure. Even individuals with highly developed moral standards can be tempted to use success for personal gain (Ludwig and Longenecker 1993).

Based on overview of the research literature, one can establish the links between early childhood experiences and gaining leadership skills in adulthood (Gottfried et al. 2011; or Naushad 2018). Particular attention is paid to such factors as genetics, parenting style, type and conditions for education and early leadership experience (Murphy and Johnson 2011; Hengartner and Ajdacic-Gross 2013; or Strielkowski 2018). Undoubtedly, there is no short list of various childhood events that can affect the development of leadership qualities. National culture is another element that should be taken into account in the analysis (Greenfield et al.

2003). Moreover, since nowadays children have the opportunity to interact simultaneously with different cultures, it is especially important to examine the factor of the sociocultural environment in order to understand the influence of differences in cultural life on the formation of leadership skills (Akstinaite 2016; or Lazányi et al. 2017).

At the age of six, children, especially girls, have stereotypes about kids being united into the category of "gifted" and evade the games intended for them. In accordance with accepted stereotypes the society associates high rate of intelligence with men more than with women. These stereotypes hamper the women's desire of building a career in such areas as physics and philosophy (Bogdanović et al. 2018). Such stereotypes are approved by the society and affect the interests of children under the age of six. Gender concepts of giftedness are acquired early and immediately affect the interests of children (Bian et al. 2017; or Turner et al. 2018).

The gender approach to the analysis of leadership in various spheres has shown that women recently occupy leading positions not only in teaching and social work, but also in those areas where there is more proportional gender representation: business, technology, medicine and science (Carter and Janes 2018). The problems of successful leadership in the educational community are also considered in the works of Bryman (2007), Jacobson et al. (2007), or Williams et al. (2017).

## 2 Perception of the leadership phenomenon in the student environment

The empirical part of this paper is based on the sociological survey conducted in May 2018 in Tolyatti State University that encompassed 300 students and showed the following trends: the students consider the essence of leadership at three points: 1) the art of inspiring ordinary people for extraordinary results; 2) forming a vision of the future and by this mean inspiring their followers; 3) the ability to organize subordinates for speeding, aggressiveness, irregularity, professionalism, focusing on innovations at work. These characteristics reflect the inner sense of the leadership and are estimated by students equally (by 33% of students, respectively).

Then the students were asked to give the definition to the word «leader». The question involved the possibility of choosing several answers. Slightly more than half of the students under the survey (51%) considered the leader to have totalitarian and tyrannical traits. To prove this point respondents chose the answer – «is able to inspire followers to overwhelming tasks and activities they don't want». Slightly less than half of the respondents agree with the fact that it is the leader who is able to reveal the best traits in others (48.7%). About a third of respondents are sure that if a person showed himself to be a leader in a certain situation, there might be another one in different situation (35%). Less than a third of students believe that the leader is the one who leads his supporters the way they want (32.3%). 24.3% of respondents say that the leader bears the features that are welcomed and expected in this group. Some of the students indicated the physiological characteristics of a leader: the leader is tall, well-built and wield physical power (12.3%). It is known that the leader among boys becomes someone who is older, taller and more powerful than the age-mates in a teenage delinquent environment. In the university environment this fact is not confirmed.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Potential Leaders

Characteristics	Exactly yes		I strive to do this but cannot always do it		No, I do not inherent in it	
	%		%		%	
I read, ask questions, go through additional training courses;	33,67	101	49,67	149	16,67	50
I often ask myself, what another person needs, and don't care only about my needs;	37,67	113	50,67	152	11,67	35
I exude positive energy, benevolence, shrink from uptaking negative energy and conflicts;	41	123	49	147	10	30
I defend another person, I feel his personal value, kindness and potential;	40,33	121	48	144	11,67	35
I try to optimally distribute the time of my life between work (study), family and society;	38,33	115	47,33	142	14,67	44
I'm confident, optimistic, perceive life as an adventure;	39	117	47,67	143	13,33	40
I am a self-critical, tolerant person, I pay a tribute of others and their equal rights to self-actualization;	47	141	35	105	18	54
I keep fit, develop myself intellectually, grow spiritually, reflect on things that can inspire.	35,33	106	53	159	11,67	35

Source: Own results

The majority of students (85.3%) are sure: leadership traits may be advanced, but you need certain psycho-physiological inclinations (attention, good memory, productive thinking bias, etc.). At the same time, another part of the respondents believes that the leader should be born, the education of the leader is a hopeless business (14.7%).

Next, there was asked a question about the capability of developing leadership traits. The results of the survey showed the presence of gender stereotypes about developing leadership traits in our student's community: 67.4% of respondents indicated that this process does not depend on gender. At the same time, 22.3% of students think that men are more able to develop their leadership traits and 10.3% are sure that women are capable of this.

From the respondents' point of view among the most popular leader traits are: initiative, courage, enchantment and charisma, perseverance and persistence, efficiency, independence, ambition, honesty, self-confidence and poise.

What skills do the surveyed students expect from the leader? First of all, these are the skills to organize, take risks and responsibilities, convince and understand people. In addition, the leader must have a clear diction, articulation, sonorous voice and be reliable.

To determine the percentage of the leaders' group in the community we have studied, the respondents were asked to identify themselves as a leader. Slightly less than half of the respondents noted the situational nature of their own leadership – "sometimes I am, but only from time to time" (46%). 19.7% of respondents do not have such a need: «I can follow someone more outstanding and it's not a shame for me». 19% of students said that they know how to lead people and always like to lead. 15.3% of students are not leaders because they do not have the appropriate abilities and capabilities. Consequently, almost one fifth of students can be attributed to a group of permanent leaders, half to a group of potential leaders.

In order to qualitatively record the facts of students' proneness to a group of leaders, we asked to characterize themselves according to the following criteria.

The results elicited that a small percentage of respondents (from 10 to 18%) did not have the given types of activities and traits. Therefore, as real, potential and situational leaders we have 80% of the students surveyed at the university.

### **3 Students about the criteria of successful personality**

In the course of our research, we asked the students about facts testifying a person's life success. The most popular evidence was the presence of a happy family (58.7%). For 43% of the students interviewed, it is important to be able to do more things every day than the average person. Promotion on the career ladder is a significant fact of the successful personality life for 40.67% of respondents. According to their point of view the availability of high-quality education (39%), own business (38%), demanded profession (35.3%), car, real estate, and the country house (31.3%) are the facts proving the person to be successful.

What are the main factors the development of a successful personality depends on? The students under the survey related the success of a person with the attitude toward him in childhood in the family and primary collectives – 40.3%. Slightly more than one fifth of respondents (22%) are confident that the presence of family and friendly relations provides decent employment and with this regard, it can be considered as a pledge of the personal future success. The genotype, inherent qualities and own desire to succeed in many respects are merging together for 19% of the surveyed students assessing the factors of a person's success affect. The degree of parents' well-being according to 18.7% of the respondents affects the person's success as these are parents who can give the child an adequate education by developing him and arranging for prestigious educational institutions.

Taking into account the fact about strong patriarchal values in Russia, we analyzed the relevant attitudes of students regarding the possibility of becoming a successful person in terms of gender. A little less than half of the students (46.3%) believe that a person's ability to become a successful person does not depend on gender. Men have more opportunities to become successful than women having affection to family and children – 21.3% of students responded. Men are being strategic and thanks to this characteristic they achieve their goals more efficiently and quickly not spreading themselves too thin – 17.7% of the respondents say. Women are characterized by assiduity (perseverance) and that's why they achieve great results and become more successful than men - 14.7% of respondents believe. As the Table shows a little more than half of the respondents have pronounced stereotyped ideas about sex having more chances to succeed.

Next, we decided to find out the influence of the age on a person's success. Age and experience do not affect the success and status of a person (45% of respondents believe), above all is to have talent, perseverance, purpose and strong will. Nowadays, young people have great opportunities for professional and career advancement than the older generation – say 32.3% of students. At the moment, it is the representatives of mature generation, who have a rich life and professional experience, take leading positions in the society and are more successful than the young people (considered by 22.7% of respondents). As we see, despite the fact about

significant part of students who do not see the influence of age on the person's success, a third of interviewed believe that young people have more chances to succeed nowadays.

At the end of the survey, the students were asked to name the most successful celebrities. Ten most frequently used names in terms of popularity in descending order are Vladimir Putin, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Olga Buzova, Ilon Mask, Nick Vuychich, Pavel Durov, Henry Ford, Steven Spielberg, or Angelina Jolie.

## 4 Conclusions

Overall, one can see that leadership and success phenomena are quite important in the student community. Since Togliatti State University is the concentration of the creative and intellectual ideas in our automobile city and Samara Region, it appears that researching potential leader's traits in the student community is especially important. It is extremely necessary for innovative future development of the city and the region.

Theoretical comprehension, analysis of the sociological research results and life observation showed there should not be too many leaders but the minimum percentage ought to be 20%. The students' youth interviewed demonstrated an awareness of the leadership and human success issues. The hypothesis on the existence of the relationship between the style of upbringing, relations in the family and primary collectives to the child, the future opportunities for the development of leadership traits is confirmed. The hypothesis about the gender stereotypes absence in the student community and its influence on the abilities to develop leadership traits and opportunities to succeed in life was refuted.

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