

## **A Qualitative Content Analysis of Leader Critiques**

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### **Introduction/need for research**

Leadership education advocates for personal reflection to determine where an individual can best utilize their personal traits, characteristics, and skills to emerge as leaders. Desten and Gray (2001) identify a constructivist approach as a method for students taking responsibility for their own leadership learning through opportunities where students link theory and experience. Therefore, a constructivist approach allows students to investigate leaders, examine leadership theories/models, and develop hypotheses about leadership attributes based on leadership theory and an individual's personal experience (Desten & Gray, 2001). This research examines perceptions of leadership and leadership attributes based on a leadership critique assignment completed by students at the University of Arkansas. This research aligns with the American Association of Agricultural Education's (AAAE) National Research Agenda Research Priority Area (RPA) 6: Vibrant, Resilient Communities which advocates for further developing human capital through education and leadership development (Roberts et al., 2016).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers used the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program as the theoretical framework. GLOBE is a large-scale study originally designed by Hofstede (1980) and further expanded by House et al. (2004) to describe and define leadership characteristics in a cultural context across 62 nations (McCrae et al., 2008). Researchers developed nine cultural dimensions which included 1) uncertainty avoidance, 2) power distance, 3) institutional collectivism, 4) in-group collectivism, 5) gender egalitarianism, 6) assertiveness, 7) future orientation, 8) performance orientation, and 9) humane orientation. The 62 countries surveyed defined regional clusters and characteristics (House et al., 2004). The United States, along with Canada, Australia, Ireland, England, South Africa (white population sample), and New Zealand, fall into the Anglo country cluster according to GLOBE (House et al., 2004). The United States scored high in performance orientation and low in in-group collectivism, meaning the U.S. and other Anglo cluster countries are characteristically competitive, results driven and less group oriented (House et al., 2004). To further describe the leadership profiles of different countries, GLOBE researchers defined charismatic/valued based, team oriented, participative, humane oriented, autonomous, and self-protective leadership styles as the six global leadership behaviors. Anglo countries are defined as wanting motivated leaders who visionaries, considerate of others, team oriented, autonomous and not autocratic or self-protective. This analysis sought to determine if Anglo students conducting leader critiques referenced leader behaviors aligned with GLOBE research findings.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative content analysis of student generated leader critiques was conducted. The critiques were written by students enrolled in an upper level/combined graduate leadership theory course. Students received instruction about the definition of leadership, GLOBE studies, and various theories and models prior to the assignment. The critique requirements of focus in this analysis stated students should provide background information about their selected leader and state the rationale for selection. Thirty-three leader critiques completed during the 2019 and 2020 course offerings were analyzed. The goal of the analysis was to which leaders were most often critiqued and the criteria for selection of leaders as cited by the students. A team of three researchers coded the critiques. Each critique was initially coded utilizing the authors' exact

words. Codes were organized based on exact matches or similarity and themes were identified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes were reviewed by the researchers and discrepancies resolved.

### Results/findings

RQ1: Which categories of famous leaders were selected for critique? The categories of famous leaders with some examples, as described by the students, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Categories of famous leaders*

Theme	Examples of Leaders
Political	Barrack Obama, Donald Trump, G.W. Bush, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., Winston Churchill, Candace Owens, Patrice Lumumba, Margaret Thatcher
Social Change	Martin Luther King Jr. (4 times), Helen Keller, Mother Teresa, Maya Angelo, Annie Mabel McDaniel “Mother” Abrams
Military	Audie Murphy, Robert E. Lee, Joan of Arc

RQ2: Which attributes of leadership did students identify as rationale for the selection of leaders? Attributes of leaders as emerged from the critiques are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Attributes of famous leaders*

Theme	Description
Position leader	Leaders who held appointed or elected positions.
Influence	Ability to bring others along toward the common goal.
Traits	Born a leader or exhibiting traits such as charisma and determination.
Skills	Learning competencies needed such as communication and goal setting
Emergent leader	Rising to challenges

### Conclusions

The performance orientation of leaders and assertiveness were the cultural dimensions most closely aligned with the emergent themes of leader categories and leader attributes. While male leaders were identified more often than female leaders in the categories of political and military leaders, the attributes identified for both males and females were consistent. This supports the cultural dimension of gender egalitarianism. Moreover, the themes of emergent leaders align with the United States descriptors of performance oriented characteristics (House et al., 2004).

### Implications/recommendations/impact

The emergent themes indicate students were able to form hypotheses about the attributes of the leaders and further application of content through critiques is needed to help students further develop as leaders. It is recommended a larger sample be included with students who wrote critiques prior to the pandemic to determine if any changes in attributes are notable. Finally, research should be conducted to identify specific traits and skills students identified and determine how those align with leadership literature.

### References

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