

# THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER'S DIMENSIONS AND NEWCOMERS' ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

by  
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## Abstract

*Newcomers' organization assimilation or socialization is a transition process whereby an outsider becomes an insider of an organization. This process involves a lot of change. Four dimensions of transformational leader were suggested to facilitate this change process. The Big Five Model of personality provides insights of the differences on the newcomer's part. The relationship between the four dimensions of transformational leaders and five newcomers' personality traits were delineated. Examination of previous literature revealed that transformational leaders gain trust and respect via the first two dimensions, namely charisma and inspiration. Individualized attention should be given high priority for those with neuroticism and extraversion traits. Intellectual stimulation should be given high priority for those with openness to new experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits.*

## INTRODUCTION

Newcomers go through a process called organizational socialization or assimilation process during their transition from being an outsider to becoming an insider of the organization. This is a process in which a newcomer acquires organizational social knowledge and skills necessary to perform his/her role in the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). It might take weeks, months, or even years to complete because functioning in an organization is a complex phenomenon and difficult to learn for some. Living in an organization encompasses several layers of roles and, to complicate matters, many of them are implicitly stated. People in an organization need various types of knowledge that include knowledge relating to the job together with the procedures to perform that job and the means to cooperate and gain cooperation from others.

Moreover, newcomers are different among themselves and from old-timers in their experiential predisposition, pace of learning, accessions to information, and types of information they tend to seek and process. Although a newcomer may possess certain experience in performing a job in a previous organization, performing, even exactly the same job, in a new organizational context might need different procedures, knowledge, equipment, team, conditions, etc. He/

she needs to learn these new procedures or to modify previous knowledge in order to operate effectively in the new organization. Apart from the job dimension, an organization is a social system hence newcomers' need to interact with others and that necessitates the need to learn the pattern of social interactions within the new organization. Knowing nothing, newcomers would be uncertain and reluctant to behave resulting in lower effectiveness than the roles they can actually perform. They need to know what roles they are expected to fulfill before they can fit in and operate satisfactorily. Newcomers are negatively influenced by improper treatments.

The transition of an outsider, who knows little about an organization, to an insider requires much learning and patience. If a newcomer fails to acquire either knowledge to perform the job or knowledge to deal with others, he/she is likely to be dissatisfied. Newcomers, with a lower degree of commitment to the organization than old-timers, have comparatively lower restraints to turnover. He/she might be unsuccessful in transcending the outsider-insider boundary and create turnover problems for the organization. Leaders should facilitate the socialization process by assisting newcomers in learning to adjust to the organization and social norms because a newcomer's discontinuance create negative impacts on the organization.

Several factors influence workers' intention to turnover and the real turnover. Mobley et al. (1979) revealed that age, tenure, overall satisfaction, job content, intentions to remain on the job, and organizational commitments were all negatively related to turnover. In addition, failure to train staff members increased the likelihood that they might seek employment elsewhere (Umiker, 1994). Hellman and Rickman (1997) reported that newcomers' socialization was positively and moderately related to overall job satisfaction, negatively related to role conflict and role ambiguity, and moderately related to perceived organizational effectiveness. Griffeth et al. (2000) confirmed the relationships and further suggested that comparison of alternatives elsewhere was another important factor gearing toward turnover. It is very likely that an unsuccessful assimilation process would create negative conditions and eventually lead to the newcomer's turnover. Leaders should handle the process carefully to decrease the turnover problem.

The most significant staff turnover costs are the administrative costs and, more importantly, loss of morale. This tarnishes the image of an organization and its effectiveness and performance (Phillips, 1987). If not handled well, the deteriorated image further creates negative consequences among existing employees and in forthcoming recruitment. Efficiency and effectiveness of the organization will be affected. To handle newcomers well, leaders should understand their behaviors along each stage in the socialization process.

### **Stages of organizational socialization process**

Jablin (1982) suggested that newcomers socialize or assimilate into an organization through four stages: anticipatory socialization, organizational encounter, organizational metamorphosis, and communication-related outcomes. The initial stage in the socialization between organization and newcomers is anticipatory socialization. Newcomers develop impressions about an organization during the recruitment and selection process. These impressions form expectations towards the job and the organization. Wanous (1980) revealed that the typical outcome of this process is the emergence of

inflated expectations by the recruits as to what their potential job and organization will be like. Although job interviewers might include some threatening messages about conditions in performing the job, they tend to supply a lot of favorable information about the organization. Hence, newcomers form expectations regarding the organization based on such filtered information. These expectations might be in both positive and negative directions. Newcomers might become frustrated when meeting reality in later stages. Moreover, they might form a self-efficacy that they possess the ability to complete the jobs successfully (Bandura, 1997). When actually performing the job or mingling with colleagues, they might find it easier or more difficult than expected.

Newcomers and organizations own different sets of expectations. Newcomers might come up with unrealistically high expectations (Wanous, 1976) that results in a form of negatively "met expectation" (Wanous et al., 1992). Possessing little or inaccurate information about the organization, newcomers develop an expectation about life in the organization. Organizations also have limited information about the newcomers hence their expectation might also be unrealistic. Formal, informal, and psychological contracts are utilized to express these expectations. However, behavior in line with group norms cannot be explicated clearly but must be learned by action. Organizations and newcomers might create misperceptions of each other in the initial stage of entry. This results in a generally lower level of satisfaction of newcomers. This is an unfavorable situation because the success of any company is directly linked to the satisfaction of the employees who embody that company (Feeman, 2003).

Once recruited into the organization, newcomers begin encountering the reality of the organization and making sense of the environment. They start to define, label and socially map the new work environment. The first few months of employment are critical for the development of a positive psychological contract with organizational newcomers (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). Jablin (1982) revealed that those who later quit their jobs tend to have more inflated initial expectations than those who stay on. Those who find the discrepancies in the entry stage undesirable or unacceptable will be dissatisfied and some will quit without attempting to assimilate along the socialization process.

The third stage of the process is the organizational metamorphosis stage in which newcomers build the interpretive schemes that they will use to understand the work environment. In this stage, newcomers seek a lot of information from a) the management through internally written sources, b) direct supervisors, and c) coworkers. Ashford and Black (1996) reported that newcomers often actively seek information they need for their socialization process. Nevertheless, newcomers' proactive search of information, was not a potent predictor of successful newcomer socialization. Only an organization's behaviors in accommodating them predicted performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Bauer & Green, 1998). Action on the organization side is influential in the process of retaining newcomers.

Information obtained from supervisors and colleagues has been found to be highly valued by newcomers and have a significant impact in early socialization (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Newcomers view their supervisor's favorable or unfavorable orientation toward them as indicators of the organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Supervisors play a significant role in forming satisfaction in jobs. Supervisors' emotional support can persuade newcomers to engage in positive thinking and facilitate the assimilation process (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) suggested that good induction and mentoring programs were highly influential in retaining newcomers. Colleagues assist in illustrating the social norms in the organization and offering the social supports for relational dimension of the job. Supervisors can generate positive impact on advising about their work, building unity within the team, and attempting to reduce employees' anxiety or worry about their works or jobs (Heathfield, 2006). It is important that an organization assesses employee's perceptions, attitudes, and behavior (Chakravorty, 2005) in order to tailor effective patterns of support.

The last stage in the assimilation process suggested by Jablin (1982) is the realization of results that incurred from the first three stages. A successful socialization process creates, among other positive benefits, satisfaction in job, motivation, and organizational climate. Newcomers who can assimilate into the organization successfully will have sufficient knowledge to perform the job as expected from the organization and they also let the organization, through

supervisors, learn the expectations on their part. Hence, mutual understanding can be created between newcomers and the organization amidst the process. At this stage, the newcomers are not considered "new" anymore they become full members of the organization who understand sufficient codes of conduct to operate with their colleagues effectively and thus they learn how to survive in the organization. They have successfully transcended the boundary of being a newcomer into becoming an employee.

### Individual differences

Hoppock (1993) suggested that individuals select occupations to meet their needs. They apply to an organization in the hope that membership in the organization will fulfill their personal needs. Satisfaction results from a job that meets these needs or from a job that promises to meet these needs in the future. Individuals have different needs and choices of occupation. These differences can be assessed through the analysis of their traits. Newcomers with different types of traits are likely to have different expectations of the organization. Transformational leadership, with its four dimensions, should be considered to reflect these differences. Leaders need to assist newcomers through the socialization process successfully and to become productive employees of the organization. In this process, supervisors must seek an understanding of individual differences in the newcomers' socialization process.

Beliefs, values, and customs form an individual's ways of thinking and hence his/her expectations regarding an organization and a job. Costa & McCrae (1992) clarified the five-factor model called the Big Five Model of personality from literature in psychology. This classification scheme enables a systematic exploration of the relationship between personality and other phenomena. Goldberg (1993) suggested that the Big Five Model of personality has become a dominant paradigm in personality psychology and the most widely accepted contemporary model of personality structure providing a taxonomy for the studies of individual differences. According to the Big Five Model, personality is classified into five distinct traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.



Neuroticism trait is described as the tendency towards negative affect and emotions such as fear, anger, distrust, sadness, anxiety, and guilt (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Neuroticism is a trait that is possessed by all normal, psychologically sound individuals to a certain degree, not only those with psychological disorders. Tellegen (1985) suggested that the neuroticism trait is related to perceptions of uncertainty and ability to adapt.

Extraversion trait refers to the personality trait of an individual who holds positive emotional states about him/herself and the world around. Extraverts are more likely to enjoy socializing with others resulting in the tendency to be satisfied in the organizational social rings (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Newcomers who possess this trait actively seek information and advice from others. They do not feel intimidated by strangers in social interactions. They feel comfortable approaching others, such as colleagues and supervisors, in the social settings to acquire information they need in order to adjust into the organization.

Openness to experience trait includes thoughtfulness, imagination, intellectual activity, need for variety, cultural sophistication and preference for cognitive complexity (McCrae, 1996). Individuals with openness to experience trait tend to be open-minded and are more willing to accept changes and take risks. Hence, it is likely that they are ready to experience new jobs, new organizations, and new people. They have the tendency to find out necessary information through formal sources such as company's periodicals, documents, and manuals.

Agreeableness trait refers to tendency to be sympathetic, helpful, and cooperative (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Agreeable individuals are easy to get along with. They often accommodate and yield to others. Newcomers with this trait are willing to adjust themselves to comply with and to seek understanding of the situation along the socialization process. They tend to rely on supervisors' guidance in the socialization process.

Conscientiousness is the degree to which an individual possesses low impulsiveness, a strong disposition toward achievement, and a responsible attitude toward work (Digman, 1990). Newcomers with this trait are less dependent on people and situations. They are confident in their principles. It is very likely that, during the socialization process, they seek to learn the principles governing the organization.

If these principles match them, they will stay on else they will move to find other organizations. They are likely to consult with higher authorities such as supervisors, company manual and other documents to find information to adjust themselves, if necessary.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Effective leadership is an important ingredient in guiding newcomers along the socialization process. Supervisors need to apply appropriate leadership strategies to help newcomers transcend the insider-outsider barrier with their personality trait as an influential factor. Supervisors or leaders should respond to different needs and expectations for each type of individual. Seltzer and Bass (1990) explained that transformational leadership theory combines the behavioral styles and situational approaches of leadership and further adds charismatic and other behaviors. Hence, it is an appropriate leadership style for newcomers' socialization process. Transformational leaders are leaders who can extend followers' visions and go beyond individual benefits for mutual or organizational benefits.

Bass (1990) argued that transformational leaders possess charismatic qualities, inspire followers, stimulate follower's learning, and give personal attention to each follower. They act more as a coach or advisor rather than a manager. Contemporary leadership literature suggests that transformational leadership is the master of change (Nadler & Tushman, 1990). Transformational leadership concept is used widely in the organizational change context. Organization change is related to the adjustment of the organization in response to its external environment or inside-out process. The socialization process is the adjustment of an outsider to fit in so they can respond to the external environment within the organization framework. It is an outside-in process in order to perform the inside-out process. Both situations involve changes that must be addressed carefully. Hence, we propose transformational leadership, or the master of changes, as the effective leadership strategy in the newcomers' socialization process. The four dimensions of transformational leaders (Bass, 1990) are described as follows:

### **Charisma**

Transformational leaders possess the characteristics of charismatic leaders. Charisma

is a special compelling quality that followers are impressed with and they want to be led by a leader who possesses this quality. This depends largely on the perceptions of followers. Ployhart, Lim, and Chan (2001) found that a leader's agreeableness and extraversion traits had combined effects in enhancing leaders' interpersonal relationships and charisma. Charismatic leaders exhibit an interrelated set of images, i.e., trustworthy, credible, morally worthy, innovative, esteemed, and powerful (Durbin, 2004). They instill respect and trust from followers. They also make followers feel proud of themselves and of identification with the organization. To enhance the cohesiveness of the group, leaders provide common vision and a sense of mission. Vision is beneficial in many folds. In the charisma context, it helps to create positive impression and emotional attachment to the leaders. With adequate level of respect and trust, followers hold a positive attitude that leaders will do them no harm and can be inspired more effectively.

#### *Inspiration*

A leaders' vision can inspire others. It attracts attentions and uplifts followers' spirit. High and realistic expectations create inspiration among followers. Communication through simple symbolic expressions enhances followers' utilization of their imaginations. This allows followers to appreciate the opportunity in interpreting meanings of what is expected from them rather than just following orders. It creates a positive psychological motivational impact on the followers. Note also that it is important to make sure that followers' interpretations should be in line with the organization's interpretations. Delineating visions and missions through charismatic influence becomes an important tool in this regard. Charismatic leaders also inspire followers, though in a different manner. Transformational leaders differ in that they go beyond charisma and inspiration, they stimulate followers to acquire intellectual quality and focus on paying individualized attention to followers.

#### *Intellectual stimulation*

Transformational leaders tend to promote intelligence, rationality, and problem solving ability through training courses. They also show such ability themselves as role models, coach followers, and assign tasks so that followers have the opportunity to exercise these abilities. This dimension sounds similar to any other types of leader who want to

promote followers' ability in performing tasks. However, transformational leaders aim at promoting followers' ability as a primary objective while the organization's benefits are secondary or a by-product. They are willing to promote the followers' employability, both internally and externally.

#### *Individualized attention*

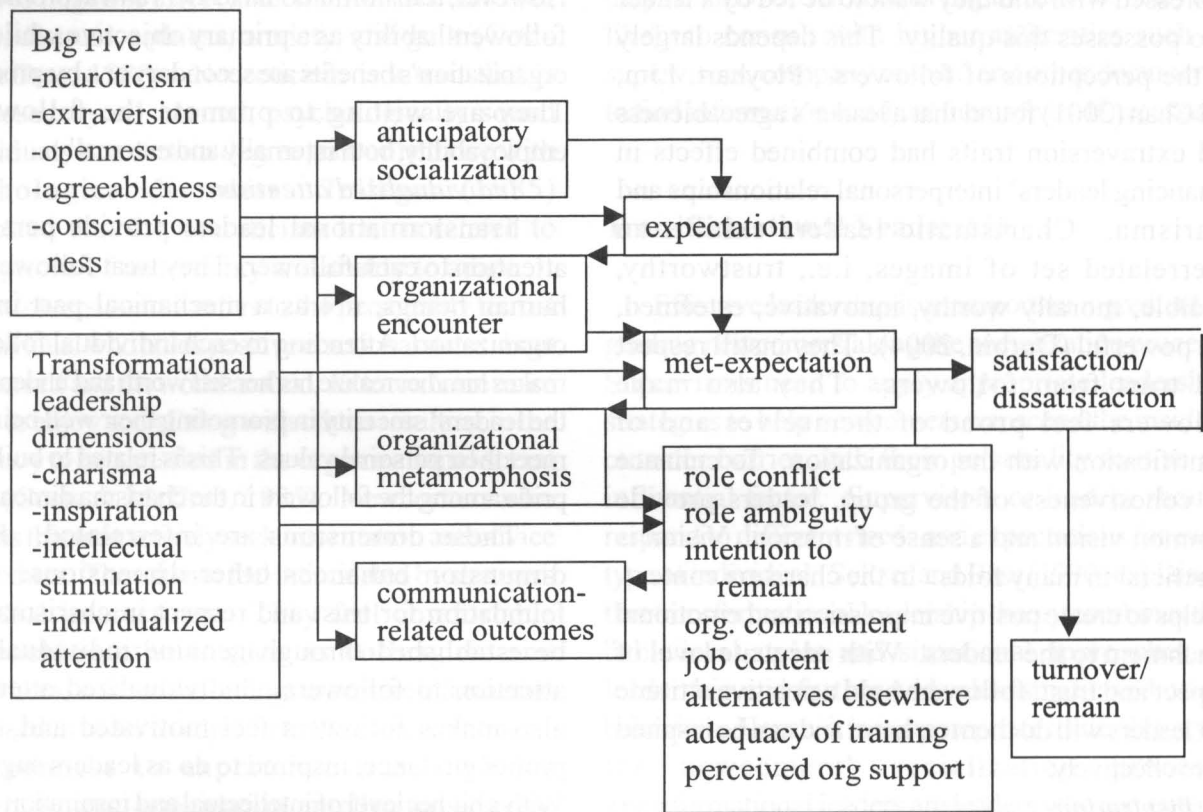
Transformational leaders provide personal attention to each follower. They treat followers as human beings, not as a mechanical part in the organization. Attending to each individual follower makes him/her realize his/her self worth and understand the leaders' sincerity in promoting their well being to meet their personal values. This is related to building pride among the followers in the charisma dimension.

These dimensions are interrelated. Each dimension enhances other dimensions. The foundation for trust and respect in charisma can be established through genuine individualized attention to followers. Individualized attention also makes followers feel motivated and, with proper guidance, inspired to do as leaders suggest. With a higher level of intellectual and inspiration from leaders, followers appreciate leaders and become more respectful. This enhances individualized relationship and increases the charisma of the leader. The violation of any of the dimensions deteriorates other dimensions. When trust is broken, any attempts from leaders seem suspicious. It drives followers away from the leader. The socialization process model with the influence of transformational leadership is illustrated in figure 1.

### **Discussion**

In the socialization process, newcomers are more heterogeneous than current employees who have already learned and assimilated. Leaders' social sensitivity and persuasive traits contribute to perceived charisma, that in turn, influences followers' commitment to the organization (Hwang, Khatri, & Srinivas, 2005). The higher the commitment, the higher the possibility to progress in the socialization process. Hence charisma plays an important role in retaining a newcomer. However, charisma alone is insufficient, effective leaders should consider other aspects of relationships in the organization as well. Transformational leadership broadens the concept of charismatic leadership by incorporating, apart from

**Figure 1: The Socialization Process Model as applied in Transformational Leadership**



charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention dimensions. These properties can help in acculturating newcomers' differences into the organization. Leaders should attend to each newcomer to help him/her in not only assimilating into the organization but also in becoming an effective member of the organization.

People with different traits tend to react to leadership differently. In addition, personality traits are considered an antecedent of satisfaction (Nikolaou, 2003). Hence, it is important for leaders to understand each newcomer. The Big Five Model of personality trait is an important tool for transformational leaders to create such understanding because it can provide insights into the individual's perceptions and behaviors.

Neurotics feel insecure and are reluctant to trust others. They exhibit avoidance behavior (Roesch, Wee, & Vaughn, 2006). Newcomers with this type of trait need a lot of emotional support. They do not want to engage in social relationships with colleagues so they try to hide behind their tasks. They prefer to deal with others only on the task dimension. Unfortunately, the socialization process is characterized by a lot of uncertainty and adaptation with colleagues. Newcomers with a high level of

neuroticism are likely to face hard times adjusting to the organization. Supervisors have the primary responsibility to create trust to overcome their negative emotions toward the organization and colleagues. Bartolome (1989) suggested supervisors should concentrate on communication, support, respect, fairness, predictability, and competence to create trust between neurotic newcomers and the organization. A trusting climate in the organization can accommodate these newcomers. Promoting the relational dimension of the job is helpful. Neurotics have little ability to generate or initiate relationship with others. Leaders should help initiate it by assigning an old-timer buddy for him/her so the newcomer has at least one colleague and one supervisor who support him/her. When supervisor and colleagues show a certain level of trust within the group and willingness to support neurotic newcomers, they will eventually open up to this new relationship. It might take some time before neurotic newcomers begin to trust the buddy but this will link them to other members and become a productive member of the organization.

Extraversion trait is related to problem-focused coping strategy (Roesch, Wee, & Vaughn, 2006). Interpersonal problems in the socialization process are minimized because extraverted newcomers do not



show much negative emotion while they struggle through the process. They generally like to socialize and can initiate interactions with colleagues and supervisor to obtain cooperation and assistance. They know when to accommodate and when to push. Followers who are high in extraversion have a favorable preference for transformational leaders (Fefle & Schyns, 2006). They are likely to feel satisfied getting attention from leaders. Transformational leaders should provide individualized attention to them. That can stimulate them to work through the assimilation process. Ignorance will psychologically harm them. Their social ring provides them with information not only from within the organization but also from other organizations. They realize when they are treated unfairly or unjustly. With their social network, they possess the capacity to move to other organizations. Moreover, with their tendency to socialize, they might ignore the task dimension of the job so leaders should focus on stimulating them to learn about the job as well.

Newcomers with the openness to new experience trait tend to focus on issue at hand when faced with a problem. People with this trait are willing to try new experience both task-wise and people-wise. They have higher tolerance thresholds than other types of people. When faced with problems during the socialization process, they will tolerate and are open to learn new things. They are more willing to modify and adjust their predisposition than other types of newcomers. When openness to new experience is coupled with the extraversion trait, there is an interaction effect that increases scores on work involvement (Bozionelos, 2004). Those who like to learn new things and like to socialize will find minimal problem in the socialization process because they have the tendency to address both the task-related and relationship-related dimensions of the jobs. As a result, leaders can focus on intellectual stimulation to develop their potentials. The problem is that if they find a job in the organization does not meet their expectation or they can perform it unsatisfactorily they are ready to move on to other organizations because of their adventurous nature. Leaders should see to it that the task assigned to them have certain degree of challenges and opportunity to learn new things.

Newcomers with agreeableness trait are likely to yield and accommodate others. They will not protest to any kinds of treatment imposed upon them. They might become suppressed and incur stress.

Agreeableness is negatively related to work involvement (Bozionelos, 2004). The more agreeable a person is, the less he/she will get involved with the job. It is very likely that such employees will turn to the relational dimension of the job rather than the task itself and agree to whatever other people say. On the task dimension, they are likely to perform just as instructed. This might result in low level of learning and the inability to perform the task by themselves and eventually they have to quit. Transformational leader should provide them individualized attention, observe them well, and utilize techniques to induce them to increase their involvement in the tasks and reduce their involvement in the social activity. The more interactions they have, the more yielding they have to be. This is a negative indicator for satisfaction in job.

Newcomers with conscientiousness trait also focus on problem rather than emotion (Roesch, Wee, & Vaughn, 2006). These types of people are ethical in their conduct. They expect others, especially leaders, to behave ethically as well. They perceive a leader as having charisma only when that leader shows strong hold on conscientiousness and behave in an ethical manner. It may be more difficult to exercise charismatic power over them because they are not influenced easily by external power. They are strong in their principles and need to understand the issues at hand before behaving. Transformational leaders who are principle-oriented can focus on intellectual stimulation for this group of newcomers.

## Conclusion

Newcomers along the organizational socialization process possess different types of personality traits. Leaders should observe these differences and treat them accordingly. Failure to prioritize the right leadership dimension results in, among others, job dissatisfaction and eventually leads to turnover. Newcomers who possess neuroticism and conscientiousness traits tend to focus their attention on the tasks assigned. Those who possess extraversion and agreeableness traits tend to focus on relational dimension of their jobs. Those with openness to experience trait are open to both dimensions of the jobs. Initiation on the leaders' part is essential in the newcomers' socialization process. Transformational leaders should apply appropriate

behaviors to match the followers' traits to help them go through the process. Charisma and inspiration should be used as the starting point to build trust and commitment among newcomers. The priority of individualized attention and intellectual stimulation dimensions differs among newcomers with different traits. Newcomers with neuroticism and extraversion traits need individualized attention before intellectual stimulation. For those with openness to new experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness traits, intellectual stimulation should be prioritized over individual attention.

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