An Investigation of the Character Traits of Decision-Makers Open to Intuition as a Tool

C. Schreier, A. Schubert, J. Weber, J. Farrar

Abstract - The increasing complexity of business environments has resulted in decision-making also becoming more complicated. While classical decision-making theories purport strategic decision-making to be a result of rational contemplation, more recent research findings have put forward a more holistic view, which includes intuition as a tool for decision-making processes. Studies illustrate, that the implementation of intuition as a part of decision-making in companies can lead to improved company performance. Dealing with decisions and the way decisions are made is very individual and according to Musso and Francioni (2012) is mostly influenced by the decision maker’s personality. Traditionally, there has been a differentiation made between decision-makers that employ a rational method of decision-making and those that use intuition. Successful decision-makers appear to be able to commingle both of these decision-making methods and it is the character traits of precisely these decision-makers which will be scrutinized. The aim of this paper is to discuss the personality of the decision-maker who is open to intuition.

Keywords - leadership; leadership tool; decision-makers; character traits; intuition; holistic decision-making

I. INTRODUCTION

Classical decision-making theories and thus also traditional approaches to decision-making in economics tend to consider strategic decisions a result of rational thinking. Nevertheless, recent studies increasingly demand a more holistic view, which also includes using intuition as a relevant decision-making tool (Grichnik & Immerthal, 2005; Schreier, Dievernich & Gong, 2013). Intuitive processes play an important role in a company’s strategic decision-making and are associated with a better company performance, especially within rapidly changing, complex environmental conditions (Khatri & Ng, 2000, pp. 77-78; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005, p. 359; Gigerenzer, 2014, pp. 143-145). The character traits of the decision maker must be considered as Dievernich, Schreier & Gong (2013) show.

Most members of the research community emphasize the importance of intuition within entrepreneurial decision-making processes. The actual character traits and personalities, however, which are open to intuition when making decisions, have not yet been analyzed in any depth. Sadler-Smith and Shefy (2007) as well as Sadler-Smith and Burke (2009) recognize the necessity of educating managers to enhance their intuition and form their personality in order to prepare them optimally for complex decision-making in practice.

After recognizing that the means by which decisions are made depends on the individual characteristics of the decision-maker (Ürü et al., 2011, p. 538; Musso & Francioni, 2012, p. 281), the question is raised as to which character traits an entrepreneur must have to be able to include intuition in strategic decisions. In literature, studies refer to character traits (Vernon et al., 2007) as well as to intuition and emotional intelligence (Downey et al., 2009). The connection between character traits and intuition has not yet been explicitly scrutinized. The aim of this research paper is to enhance the state of knowledge in this area.

II. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, INTUITION AND PERSONALITY

A. The decision-making process

Scientists from various fields such as philosophy, economic sciences, psychology and neuroscience have been analyzing human decision-making processes for years. They attempt to clarify questions such as why humans decide differently in apparently the same situations and why rational based models cannot always predict the exact decisions of a person (Gutnik et al., 2006, p. 720).

Processes pertaining to decision-making depend on multiple factors. Apart from external factors, also competencies, character traits, socio-demographic characteristics, such as the typology of the decision-maker, are part thereof (Musso & Francioni, 2012, p. 281). Also sensorial influences, the conditioning of experiences, emotional reactions or the anticipation of future events play a role in decision-making (Gutnik et al., 2006, p. 724). Different authors assume that on the one hand entrepreneurs have to understand the past and on the other hand they have to be able to conjecture the future to successfully make strategic decisions in the present (Chen & Lee, 2003, p. 149).

B. Intuition and decision making

A question that has been frequently discussed related to decision-making is the inter-dependency of intuition, emotion and rational thinking. While Stanovich and West (2000) assume that one can make better decisions using logic and

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rational thinking rather than intuition and emotions, other authors such as Velásquez (1998) suggest that intuition and emotion play an important role when making rational decisions (as cited in Hess & Bacigalupo, 2011, p. 711).

In terms of characteristics, rationality is often described as being the contrary of intuition. The rational system is slow and methodic in comparison to intuition and can be communicated verbally. Additionally, rationality is a conscious, analytical and affectless process, which, considered from an evolutionary perspective, is probably more recent than intuition (Epstein, 1994; Nicholson, 2000; Sadler-Smith, 2007; Reber, 1993; as cited in Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007, p. 188). Based on earlier studies Musso and Francioni (2012, pp. 280-282) define rationality as an exact analysis of all existent information to find the best possible alternative decision. Therefore, rationality can only occur if enough information is present. When information is missing or when resources do not allow information procurement, intuition must augment the ratio (Dievernich, Schreier & Gong, 2013). The use of intuition in decision-making processes can, therefore, be deemed a last resort in certain situations.

C. Intuition and personality traits

Intuition plays a role in psychological as well as in philosophical and management fields, which has resulted in an inundation of definitions in subject-specific literature. Dane and Pratt (2007) collated numerous definitions of intuition and then also combined them. They summarize intuition as an unconscious and fast process, which results in effective decisions being made by including holistic associations (Dane & Pratt, 2007, p. 35).

For the paper at hand the study of Allinson and Hayes (2012) is also of interest. They define intuition indeed not per se, but they attribute adjectives to intuitive people such as active, ambiguous, precautious, cognitively simple, divergent, dependent on fields, holistic, impulsive, innovative, less detail-oriented, less tolerant regarding discrepancies, connecting, personal and scanning (Allinson & Hayes, 2012, p. 6). Allinson and Hayes identified these characteristics in an earlier work (1996) and developed the Cognitive Style Index (CSI), an instrument to measure intuition (as cited in Allinson & Hayes, 2012, p. 6). The CSI presents ideas for the study at hand, but ultimately it is not applicable, since the CSI measures intuition indirectly by concluding intuitive behavior from personal characteristics. The present study aims to measure intuition directly based on original properties of intuition. The connection between intuition and character traits is subsequently scrutinized.

D. Personality and openness to intuition

A coherent understanding of the term personality does not exist. Allport (1961) describes personality as the “dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought” (cited in Carducci, 2009, p. 260). Feist and Feist (2008) define personality as “a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person’s behavior. Traits contribute to individual differences in behavior, consistency of behavior over time, and stability of behavior across situations”. Hereby, they emphasize the temporary stability of the characteristics (Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 10). A newer definition originates from Asendorpf and Neyer (2012) who see personality as the non-pathological individuality of a person in physical appearance, behavior and experience compared to a reference population of people with the same age and the same culture. This approach is crucial in particular for empirical studies. Thus, the target group that is considered should be as homogenous as possible related to age (which means no mixture of adults and children or teenagers) and culture to prevent the situation where differences in personality are mixed with variations of age and culture (Asendorpf & Neyer, 2012, p. 19-20).

For the paper at hand it is relevant to scrutinize the relationship between the character traits of a decision-maker and their openness to intuition. Until now no short test has been identified in literature, which measures a person’s openness to intuition in terms of making strategic decisions. The authors have, therefore, created an original pool of questions in order to measure a decision-maker’s openness to intuition.

III. Evaluation of the Decision Maker’s Personality

Musso and Francioni (2012) refer to various studies, which attest to the influence that a decision-maker’s character traits have. They state, for example, factors such as the “educational level” and “knowledge of foreign languages” and show a positive connection between a higher educational level and rational processes when taking strategic decisions within the context of internationalization (Musso & Francioni 2012, pp. 281-286). In their 2011 study of approximately 300 Turkish entrepreneurs, Ürüş, Çalışkan, Atan and Aksu prove significant connections between decision-making behavior and rationality. Nevertheless, there is a lack in their tests with regard to the description of the relationship between the character traits of the decision-makers and their openness to intuition. It is the aim of this study to close exactly this gap in the following section.

A. Big Five – Five Factors Model of the personality

The model of the ‘Big Five’ offers a procedure that is generally accepted to assess personality traits (Roth, 2009, p. 17). Also known and applied is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Nevertheless, in contrast to MBTI, the Big Five model is scientifically supported by a significant number of accurate studies which prove that the model assesses all of the basic parts of personality (Robbins & Judge, 2008, p. 35).


- **Openness to new experience (O):** People who have a high value regarding this factor are generally curious, interested in many things and tolerant. Often they also feel connected to art, literature and classical music.
- **Conscientiousness (C):** Conscientious people are at the same time dutiful, orderly and are generally used to a systematic and exact procedure. In the working
environment conscientiousness is one of the most important factors to predict professional performance.

- **Extraversion (E):** The contrary thereof is introversion. Extraverted people are rather oriented to the outside, as they are sociable, talkative and adventurous. Introverted people are rather oriented to the inside; as they are thoughtful and withdrawn into themselves.

- **Agreeableness (A):** Agreeable people are friendly and care for others. Mostly, they are good team players and popular. Their winning mentality often increases their chances to enforce themselves in specific business situations (e.g. interviews).

- **Neuroticism (N):** This is often also described as emotional lability. Neurotic people are rather tense, afraid and nervous. Their resistance to stress is low, they frequently express doubt and they are more vulnerable to depressive illness and to burnouts.

The Big Five model has proven to be practical and reliable in science, which allows for a solid ordering of the most important character traits (Lang & Lüdtke, 2005, p. 29). As an instrument to assess the Big Five model for the paper at hand, the short questionnaire BFI-25 (Big Five Inventory) of Gerlitz and Schupp (2005) was employed.

### B. Basic motives of personality

Personality traits as well as basic motives of personality interact when making decisions. Musso and Francioni (2012, p. 281-286) discuss the need of both achievement and risk attitude, which are important when taking internationally strategic decisions. Furthermore, Satow (2012) describes three basic motives, which characterize decision-makers. The questions of the paper at hand are according to the Big Five, additionally complemented by questions of Satow’s (2012, p. 7-8) three basic motives: the achievement motive, power motive and security motive.

- **Achievement motive (AM):** If the achievement motive is high, these people have a strong need for recognition and achievement. They try to be the best and are only content if they have achieved their goals. In favor of more recognition of their performance they forgo any other amenities.

- **Power motive (PM):** People with a strong need for power and influence want to take over responsibility and shape the world according to their meaning. They are content if they can influence important things and can control them.

- **Security motive (SM):** If this motive is significantly high, these are people who strive for secured conditions and (inner) peace. They are risk-averse and dislike unpleasant surprises.

In the following, the authors describe their study. A survey was utilized to evaluate the Big Five and the basic motives of the personalities of decision makers. The additional questionnaire was created in order to assist in assessing their openness to intuition. The main objective of the study is to analyze and describe the relationship between the decision maker’s openness to using intuition and the Big Five.

### IV. Methodology

The method of a quantitative, standardized online-questionnaire was chosen for this study in order to conduct research particularly about attitudes, opinions and their corresponding connections. A standardization of the questionnaire enabled the comparability of the results (Diekmann, 2012, p. 434; Atteslander, 2000, p. 157).

The survey contained 57 questions. Six questions addressed the traits of intuition (questions regarding the openness to intuition). The questionnaire was constructed solely for use in this survey and was tested in two pretests, once with 36 and once with 20 people for internal consistency. Thereby, the questions were once formulated softly (n = 36) and once formulated strongly (n = 20). The stronger formulation showed the higher internal consistency with a Cronbach’s-Alpha-value of 0.72, which scientifically counts as sufficient (Brosius, 2013, p. 826). The questions regarding the personality traits were conducted using the short questionnaire BFI-25 of Gerlitz and Schupp (2005); it consisted of 25 questions and was based on the well-known Big Five model of personality. Furthermore, 18 additional questions regarding the three dimensions: achievement motive, power motive and security motive according to Satow (2012) completed the spectrum and aided in the assessment of personality in a much broader way. The questions (Big Five and Satow’s basic motives) comply with the necessary internal consistency. The questionnaire finishes with sociodemographic questions so as to be able to describe the sample.

The 4-point Likert scale was used for the questions pertaining to personality and intuition. The categories for the answers were labeled “not applicable”, “rather not applicable“, “rather applicable“ and “applicable“. All of the questions were marked as compulsory to minimize the amount of invalid questionnaires due to missing information.

The number of valid participants of the survey was 159 in total. Filter questions helped to evaluate the people that were actually active as strategic decision makers in a corporate context, where intuition can occur. The sample (n) comprises of 80 people, whereof 11 were women and 69 men. The largest number of participants, namely 44 people, was in the age group of 31-40 years, followed by the 41-50 year old participants (29 people). Only four participants were between 20-30 years old and three participants were over 50 years old. Seventy-three people had a university degree. This corresponds to a participation of 91 %. Thirty people came from small businesses, 26 from medium-sized companies and 24 from large businesses. When indicating the number of superiors, the largest number of participants (43 participants) mentioned one principal, 23 participants stated zero superiors. The remaining participants recorded having two or more principals.

### V. Results and Findings

The analysis of the data was conducted using the program SPSS® version 21 of IBM©. The coding of the Likert scale
started with 1 ("not applicable") to 4 ("applicable"). When questions were negatively phrased, the points were rearranged from 4 to 1. For every new group of questions the total score per participant was calculated. Subsequently, the total scores were analyzed according to significant correlations.

Moreover, in the present study, compared to the total and apart from the already mentioned correlations, the relatively strong and highly significant correlations between Openness to new experiences (O) and achievement motive (AM) (r = 0.315; p = 0.002) as well as between Extraversion (E) and the power motive (PM) (r = 0.343; p = 0.001) stand out. These are slightly weaker with Satow (O zu AM: r = 0.2; E zu PM: r = 0.21). Hence, the results do not correspond to all the points of studies previously conducted by other authors.

Within the Big Five, Openness to new experiences (O) has a slight positive correlation with Extraversion (E). Agreeableness (A) has a strong negative correlation with Extraversion (E) and with Neuroticism (N).

VI. DISCUSSION

The results of the survey show that there is a statistical relationship between Openness to intuition (I) and the characteristics of certain personality traits or motives of people responsible for making decisions pertaining to strategy. The study clarifies that managers who are open to intuition mostly differentiate themselves through Achievement (AM), Openness to new experience (O) and Conscientiousness (C). Compared to the other correlations with intuition, the correlation between intuition and both of the later motives are the strongest and are also highly significant. Regarding the motives Neuroticism (N), power (PM), security (SM) and Extraversion (E) statistically significant relations have also been identified. Solely Agreeableness (A) does not have a considerable statistical relation.

Specifically the following observations can be interpreted and argued:

Openness to new experiences (O): The results show that leaders open to intuition are also rather open to new experiences. This observation can be interpreted as people who are curious and prefer to make new experiences are more open to intuition because, as described in Satow, they desire to always try, learn and discover new things (2012, p. 16). As a result, they are automatically confronted with uncertain situations. Intuition occurs mostly within the context of uncertain situations (Shirley & Langan, 1996, p. 564 cited in Dane & Pratt, 2007, p. 35), where the entrepreneur needs to be prepared to experience something new and unknown.

Conscientiousness (C): According to the results of the survey, the authors argue that conscientiousness and the systematic procedure linked thereto is rather an obstacle regarding the usage of intuition within the decision making process. The correlation shows that those strategically responsible people who are less open to intuition have a stronger characteristic of conscientiousness. As described in Sinclair and Ashkanasy (2005, p. 357) intuition has a holistic character. Hence, the decision maker open to intuition has to be rather vague in certain situations in order to be aware of the big picture. Those who, in contrast, become lost in details and orderly procedure, have difficulties maintaining the holistic perspective. Hence, it can be ascertained that intuition is likely also blocked. This also coincides with the description of Allinson and Hayes (2012, p. 6), where intuitive people are described as holistic and less concerned with details.


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Table 1 – Inter-correlation between the Big Five (O, C, E, A, N), Basic Motivation (AM, PM, SM) and Openness to intuition (I). Number of participants n = 80; ns = not significant; ** = p ≤ 0.01; * = p ≤ 0.1.
Neuroticism (N): People open to intuition have a higher value concerning neuroticism compared to people who are less open to intuition. This can be interpreted as people open to intuition being sensitive due to their unconscious cognitive ability. Therefore, according to Satow (2012, p. 6) they are rather tense and unable to cope as well with stress as those who resist the use of intuition. Moreover, they are also more likely to burnout.

The characteristic neuroticism additionally correlates negatively with the characteristic agreeableness. Satow (2012, p. 6), in his description of the characteristic agreeableness, suggests that neurotic people concentrate primarily on themselves and their own emotions rather than caring about others. Also Gerlitz and Schupp (2005, p. 22) as well as Satow (2012, p. 24) observe a slightly negative correlation here.

Extraversion (E): There is little correlation between extraversion and openness to intuition. Hence, according to Satow (2012, p. 5) it can be ascertained that people open to intuition are rather sociable and talkative. These results also correspond to the characteristics of Allinson and Hayes. They describe intuitive people as impulsive and personal. Allinson and Hayes define personal as the contrary of impersonal and it can be seen as being friendly, warmly or empathetic in this relationship (2012, p. 6).

Additionally, the characteristic extraversion has a strong positive correlation with the characteristic openness to new experience. This is not surprising, since both characteristics complement each other well. According to Satow (2012 pp. 5-6), open-minded people are curious and interested in many things, which presumably supports their extraverted sociability and communicativeness. Here, also Gerlitz and Schupp (2005, p. 24) as well as Satow (2012, S. 24) observe a positive correlation.

Agreeableness (A): This characteristic shows no significant correlation to intuition. There are no significant differences between people who admit to using intuition in decision-making and those who do not. Moreover, there is a negative correlation between agreeableness and neuroticism (as already described above). Agreeableness also correlates strongly with negative extraversion. Nevertheless, this observation does not correspond to the observations of Gerlitz and Schupp (2005, p. 24) and Satow (2012, p. 24). The results of the different studies do not accord within all points.

Achievement motivation (AM): The correlations show that people, who are open to intuition, are also rather goal-oriented and possess a higher achievement motivation. This aspect can also correlate with the holistic character of intuition. Leaders who do not get lost in details always keep their overall goal in mind. Furthermore, intuitive assessments happen rapidly according to Sadler-Smith (2008, p. 494) and Gigerenzer (as cited in Pickl, 2009, p. 71). This also leads to a much faster achievement of goals and higher performance curve. It is shown that entrepreneurs, who are open to intuition, are more performance-oriented than those who admit to possessing less intuition. Therefore, decision-makers open to intuition are presumably more ambitious than others and rather strive for achievement and recognition. This result also correlates with the one of Ürü et al. (2011, p. 538) in which female entrepreneurs with a high need for achievement tend to make less rational strategic decisions.

Power motivation (PM): People who are open to intuition appear to have a stronger need for power according to the results of the study at hand, as people who admit little or almost no intuition. People motivated by power like to take over responsibility according to Satow (2102, S. 7), want to help shape and control. The correlation between openness to intuition and power motivation could mean that managers more open to intuition are more responsible and active. They aim to actively create a situation and then control it, rather than relying on the rational facts to form the outcome of a situation. This corresponds to the description of Allinson and Hayes (2012, S. 6), who also see people open to intuition as having more active.

Security motivation (SM): Even though intuition is often applied in uncertain situations, people open to intuition show a relatively high security motive. Such people according to Satow (2012, p. 8) are rather more risk-averse. This could mean that people open to intuition only make decisions when they effectively blindly trust their intuition and can rely on their gut feeling, which gives them an unconscious feeling of security. However, this result does not support the thesis of Ürü et al. (2011, p. 538), which says that risk appetite has a negative effect on the rational strategic decision-making process. This would mean that people prepared to take risks decide rather intuitively. Nevertheless, the study of Ürü et al. was only conducted with female entrepreneurs, which could in turn make the comparison of both studies difficult. However, the results of the paper at hand do correlate with the indications of Allinson and Hayes (2012, p. 6). The authors describe intuitive people as rather cautious. Whereas they describe analytical, rational people as being more willing to take risks.

The study of the sociodemographic data showed no significant correlations with the openness to intuition. A statement made by Musso and Francioni (2012, pp. 281-296), that a higher-education level is associated with a rational process when making strategic decisions, cannot be confirmed here. Also the observations made by Busenitz and Barney (1997, p. 9) that decision-makers in large companies proceed in a rational manner could not be proven.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the authors the main objective of the study was achieved. The relationships between openness to intuition and clearly identified personality traits of decision-makers who are open to intuition have been characterized. It is now possible to describe the character traits that an entrepreneur possesses involving intuition when making strategic decisions.

Measuring intuition was challenging as the questionnaire had to be specially created for this study. The fact that all measurement criteria have been derived exclusively from definitions of intuition suggests that the present study indeed measures intuition. On the other hand, the validity of the instrument of measurement can be proven by the sufficient internal consistency as well as the accordance to the CSI of Allinson and Hayes (2012, p. 6).
The results of the present paper have to be considered critically as this study was conducted in its present form for the first time. A replicate and more refined analysis is advisable as an area of further research. Nevertheless, the authors see a practical usage of the results of this study. A clear relationship of specific character traits and the decision maker’s openness to intuition has been established. These results will be useful to human resource managers when recruiting executive personnel. Assuming, like some authors (Khatri & Ng, 2000, pp. 77-78; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005, p. 359; Gigerenzer, 2014, pp. 143-145), that intuitive processes coincide, especially in rapidly changing environmental conditions, with a better company performance, leaders open to intuition are increasingly sought after on the labor market as the complexity of the environment increases, as Malik (2011, pp. 32-34) describes. Companies could draw conclusions with the established personality analysis regarding the openness to intuition of their potential employees. Alternatively they could evaluate the openness to intuition directly with the measurement criteria developed in this study. Further research could also include an analysis of how business leaders, specifically those open to intuition, act in differing cultural settings. Exploring the impact of intercultural aspects on intuitively made decisions in business and raising awareness of the topic could be of substantial practical value in business.

From their perspective the authors are convinced of the importance of intuition within decision-making processes and refer to Albert Einstein who claimed that "the only real valuable thing is intuition." […] The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."

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AUTHORS’ PROFILE

Claus Schreier, Prof. Dr. rer. pol., is a lecturer for International and Intercultural Management and head of the «MBA Lucerne» at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Business. As a management consultant on behalf of «Die Kulturarchitekten.ch» he supports the internationalization of companies.

Alexandra Schubert, B.Sc., M.Sc. (ETHZ), MBA Lucerne, is a representative in the management team of Fair Trade Handels AG in Stans. Her responsibilities include directing operations and strategic management.

Judith Weber, lic. rer. soc., MBA Lucerne, is active in the third generation of the family-run business Weber-Vonesch AG, wine and beverages, in Zug. As an assistant to the managing director she supports him and the board of directors in strategic decisions and is responsible for marketing and personnel management.

Jillaine Farrar, Prof., M.Ed., is a lecturer for Intercultural Communication and English for Business. She is academic director of the «CAS International Leadership» at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Business.