



RESEARCH

ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

HOGAN PERSONALITY INVENTORY (HPI): ADJUSTMENT

by Jamie Estes, September 2020

Each week, we will examine more closely one of the Hogan scales to help you better understand its leadership implications. We will start by giving a brief definition of the scale and describe the implications of high and low scores. Next, to provide a deeper look at these traits in context, we provide notes from conversations with school heads who score near the top and near the bottom of the range on that scale. Finally, we explore a special demographic observation from the study and ask some key questions for further consideration.

Adjustment measures the degree to which a person appears confident, self-accepting, and stable under pressure. Of all the scales, *adjustment* likely has the most significant impact on one's professional and personal life. People with high adjustment scores tend to be even-tempered, stay calm under pressure, and do not react negatively to stress. Because they are so calm, they may not realize when those around them are feeling stressed, and they may tend to discount, or even ignore, negative feedback. Low-scoring people tend to be introspective, vigilant, and constantly striving to improve. They tend to be responsive to coaching and feedback, but they can be overly self-critical and inclined to take criticism personally.

One way to understand the *adjustment* scale and its impact on people as professionals and leaders is offered by Daniel Nettle in his book *Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are*. He compares the *adjustment* scale to a smoke detector. Smoke detectors are designed to alert us to fire. Most of the time, they work just fine, but they can malfunction in one of two ways. They could go off when there is no fire (false positive) or they could fail to go off when there is a fire (false negative). People at the low end of adjustment may perceive threats even when there are no threats around them. People at the high level of adjustment may not perceive the threats that are very real and present.

As with an overly sensitive fire alarm, it is hard to be around people in our lives who routinely worry about problems that are unlikely to occur or to be as dire as they predict. We want our leaders to be emotionally stable and calm under pressure. A lot of false positives from a person can wear us down. However, while a false positive is annoying, a false negative is catastrophic, whether we are talking about a house on fire or an impending crisis in our school. High adjustment people need to recognize their tendency to discount danger or ignore trouble. In addition to recognizing their tendencies, high adjustment leaders need to have people on staff who are lower on the adjustment scale and listen to their low adjustment colleagues when they sound the alarm, even if these concerns sound overblown or unlikely.

ADJUSTMENT IN PRACTICE

INTERVIEWS WITH HEADS OF SCHOOLS

Below are lightly edited conversations with two heads of schools, one who scored high on the adjustment scale and one who scored low. We hope these conversations will help you understand the scales even better.

HIGH ON THE ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Was your Adjustment score a surprise?

People always tell me that I am calm and level-headed, so I am not all that surprised that I scored high on that scale.

Describe your approach to dealing with job stress.

When I was a teacher, I remember my head of school telling me that it's lonely at the top because the number of people you can bring in to talk about issues shrinks. I relied on my mentors early on when I became head of school. I internalize stress. My doctor told me my blood pressure is up and I now grind my teeth at night, which I never did before I became head of school. Yet, people continue to tell me that I seem calm. My husband is probably more aware of the stress I am under than those around me.

How do you seek out feedback and how do you typically respond to it?

I invite feedback from the staff and the board. When I first started, the board did not give me any feedback. Things were going well, and they didn't feel the need to communicate with me, I suppose. Eventually, I made them meet with me. The dynamics were interesting because I am older than most everyone on my board. Nevertheless, I feel like I respond to their feedback pretty well.

How do the moods of your coworkers affect you?

I try to help others work through their issues. I do not get worked into their stress. I do not get frustrated with the stress of others. However, I do not have much patience for people who do not get their work done. We all have too much to do, so that's not an excuse in my mind.

LOW ON THE ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Was your low Adjustment score a surprise?

I am incredibly self-critical, so I was not all that surprised by my low adjustment score. I could feel myself looking through the answers and scoring myself down. When I got my report, I kind of laughed at how I threw myself under the bus.

Describe your approach to dealing with job stress.

I think I am actually pretty good at dealing with stressful situations. As a head of school, I deal with stressful situations all the time and I feel like I handle them well. That said, I really don't have any point of reference to



judge myself against, so I don't know if I am better or worse at dealing with stress than other heads of school. In fact, I feel like that's a bit of a missing piece in the industry. I would love it if I had a better peer group to talk about the stress of the job. I do know some other heads where the stress is eating them up. I believe that the shorter terms and tenures of heads is directly related to the stress of the job. I depend on taking care of myself and spending time with my family. My board chair actually told me to take time during the day just to go home and reset and come back to school when I know I have a long night ahead.

A veteran head of school told me that this job is not lonely, it is "only." You must build your peer-to-peer networks because you can't really include anybody else in those conversations on campus.

How do you seek out feedback and how do you typically respond to it?

I am not really structured in the way I gather feedback. That does not suit my style. Instead, I look at the people in my community that I value and ask them directly about how I'm doing and what I could be doing better. I create avenues for anonymous feedback from faculty with a "suggestion box." I demand the faculty tell me what I'm doing wrong, either publicly or confidentially.

I have 19 bosses on my board. They have a more formal feedback process. They gave me feedback that I was weaker on external affairs, which was a surprise to me because that's my background. When we unpacked that criticism, we figured out that the board simply didn't know a lot of what was going on. I was doing a lot more externally than they knew. I learned from that experience the importance of feedback being a dialogue rather than just one-way communication.

I got feedback in my first year that I was overly aggressive and loud in my meetings with parents. I asked for examples and I found that this was a valid observation. My board chair noted recently that I seem more mellow. I recognize that perception is reality. Even if I did not feel like I was being too harsh, what I thought was much less important than what other people thought.

How do the moods of your coworkers affect you?

I try to cut out negativity wherever I find it. Negativity is contagious and I separate myself from it whenever I can. I can't stand gossip or griping. I thrive on positivity and people who are proud of their work and want to lift others.

Indecision seems to plague the independent school world. I feel like I don't have time to invest mental energy in sitting back and observing and watching. I don't have patience for it.



SPECIAL TOPIC

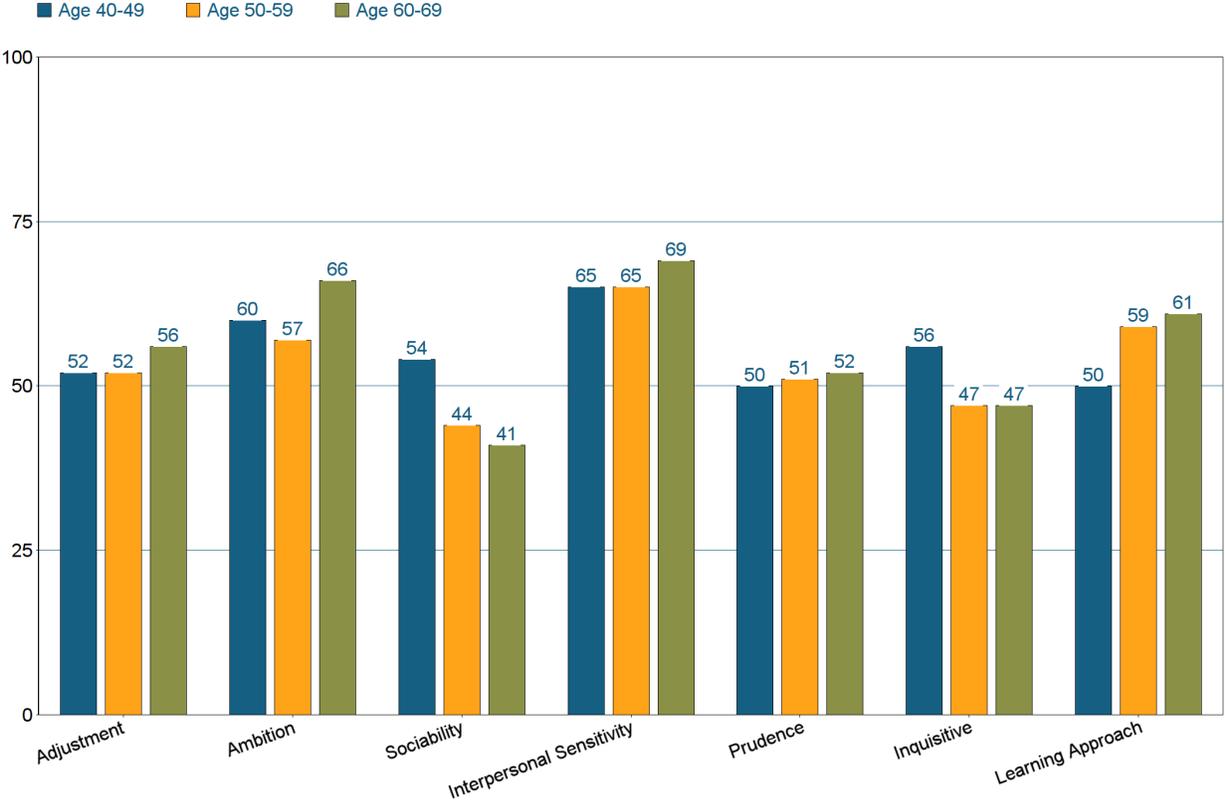
PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

One of the most fascinating components of the leadership study was the opportunity to look at personality data as it relates to different demographic groups within our larger cohort of heads. Though we speculate on what some of these differences suggest, we know that we cannot draw hard conclusions. We cannot easily separate correlation and causation, and we recognize that where the comparison groups become unequal in size, the data could be more unreliable. However, we consider these pieces worth sharing, and we hope to continue our research, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to better understand some of these key issues.

This week, we explore the personality differences between heads of school of different ages. Participants have been arranged demographically in the following manner, where N equals the number of participants.

Age 40-49 (N=81) Age 50-59 (N=105) Age 60-69 (N=47)

HPI Comparisons: Current Age



CONCLUSIONS

In terms of *Adjustment*, *Interpersonal Sensitivity*, and *Prudence*, we see almost no difference between heads of different generations. They are all about equally emotionally stable, agreeable, and conscientious. We see a slight difference in *Ambition*, with heads in the oldest group averaging 65 and heads in the younger groups both below 60. The largest outlier of any group is the younger heads and *Sociability* scoring over 10 points higher than their elder peers.

The most interesting difference between the groups regards their *Inquisitive* and *Learning Approach* scores. Younger heads of school score higher on *Inquisitive*, suggesting that as a group they are more imaginative, curious, and open-minded. They score significantly lower, however, on *Learning Approach*, suggesting they are more interested in hands-on learning and application of skills than traditional learning approaches and learning for learning's sake. In other words, the personality of younger heads may make them more open to project-based, experiential, skills-based education than their older colleagues are. It will be quite interesting to see in the coming years how this new generation of heads changes the way schools teach and students learn.

