



RESEARCH

ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

HOGAN PERSONALITY INVENTORY (HPI): SOCIABILITY

by Jamie Estes, October 2020

When we're asked to describe someone we have met only briefly, we will most likely describe that person's "sociability." Our first impressions are not typically about emotional stability or ambition. They are about the manner in which a person interacts with others. **Sociability** in the HPI measures the degree to which a person needs and enjoys being with people. One way to think about *Sociability* is to consider where people get their energy. A person with high *Sociability* scores gets energy from being around large groups of people; a person with low scores gets energy from being alone or with small groups of close friends. High scorers get energy from a broad range of new experiences; low scorers get energy from the familiar. High scorers get energy from the attention of others; low scorers get energy from avoiding the limelight. Both high and low scorers can act like their opposite on the *Sociability* scale but doing so expends rather than generates energy. A high-sociability person can spend time in her office alone getting work done when there is a social gathering on campus, but it takes some willpower. A low-sociability person can be charming at a cocktail party full of strangers, but he will likely leave the party drained.

In our leadership study of 247 heads of school, the only scale where the average score was below the global norm was *Sociability*. It may seem counter-intuitive that the leaders of "people" organizations like schools are, on average, less sociable. But it is important to understand what low sociability actually looks like. Low sociability is different from shyness, which is defined by social anxiety and is much more related to the adjustment scale. Instead, here are some defining qualities of "less sociable" people:

- They listen and think more than they speak.
- They are task-oriented.
- They are business-like.
- They do not interrupt or distract their subordinates.
- They prefer formal, structured meetings.

When seeking a leader for a complex organization like a school, a search committee would do well by starting with this list, which describes a keen observer capable of getting things done who is willing to delegate and uses clear processes for making complex decisions. As Susan Cain writes, "Quiet leadership is not an oxymoron." Quiet leadership, in the right setting, can be quite successful.

All successful heads understand the importance of being present; the best heads also know how to balance their needs against the needs of their constituents. They can "turn on the charm" when they need to. One head we spoke to said, "I am very sociable at work, but I don't know my neighbors. I talk to everyone at school events—I work those rooms. I don't talk to anybody at my husband's work events." Another told us, "I always arrive at school before anybody else so I can have some time alone." A person low on the sociability scale finds socializing draining but can still engage effectively in the social aspects of running a school.

SOCIABILITY IN PRACTICE

INTERVIEWS WITH HEADS OF SCHOOLS

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

HIGH SOCIABILITY

Were you surprised by your high sociability score?

I was not at all surprised by my sociability score. I can't even find vocabulary for how negatively COVID-19 social distancing has affected my energy. I feel like part of me is missing.

How do you think your level of sociability has impacted your career?

I have used it throughout my career, particularly as an interim head. I can make relationships very quickly. I have a practice of putting five pennies in my left pocket in the morning and moving one over each time I write a note or have a personal conversation with a student or parent. Because of my sociability, I can tell when coalitions are being made in a meeting. I don't use email much—email is not sociable. My sociability has been very useful in my fundraising. I can study cultures very well, which has allowed me to work in wildly different school and community cultures, which is probably related to my natural curiosity. I hate to feel like an outsider, so I work hard to learn a culture before I enter it. My father moved us around a lot when I was kid, so this has been a lifelong practice.

How do you balance talking with listening to engage in effective communication?

What I have noticed over the years is that because I do tend to talk more, I can overpower some groups. The fact is, I really like give and take, but I can tend to be the only one speaking. It probably took 15 years for me to figure this out. I created rules for my groups using Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. I really took those lessons to heart. I have learned to accept and enjoy disagreement.

When you are hiring for leadership positions, do you find yourself drawn to other highly sociable people like yourself? Why or why not?

I really try to balance the team. I need some introverts. I need some slow processors because I am a fast processor. I need a business manager who will take the time to go over things with me step-by-step. I also need some people who think like me. I need people with a sense of humor. In my current school, I have forty different cultures represented on my faculty, but I didn't hire any of them because I am an interim, so that's a challenge. I am a doer, and a person who is a blocker is the thing I just can't abide. I need people who will do things too. That is the one thing that is the opposite of me I can't stand.

As a highly sociable person, your network of associates is likely larger. What benefits and challenges are there to having a larger network?

Having a large social network is not the most efficient way to be, but it's the only way I can be. Even if I am in the process of making a big decision, if I see a kid outside my window whose birthday it is, I have to go out and



tell the child “Happy birthday.” It’s just the way I am. Even as a short-term interim, I learn pretty much every parent’s name. That may not be ideal for an interim, but it’s the only way I can lead. Attending every event is my need, not their need.

We noticed in our study that heads of schools with larger budgets tended to score lower on the sociability scale. You are high sociability and have run schools with very large budgets. Do you think that your sociability added an extra layer of challenge?

When I was the long-term head of large schools, I missed much of my own children’s childhoods. Being a highly sociable head means I work 14 hours a day. In my second year as a head of school, I ran a \$48M campaign. It was the first money I had ever raised, and I was in way over my head, but I just did it. I do not have any relationships with friends outside of school. I tried retiring six years ago and immediately knew it would not work. I applied for my first interim position and have worked every year since. I would rather run a school of 1000 kids than sit at home or at a club. I love what I do, I am good at it, and I really do not want to do anything else.

LOW SOCIABILITY

Were you surprised by your low sociability score?

It is interesting that you called today because I spent the day interviewing potential Head of School candidates for a school I am consulting with. We interviewed 8 candidates and about half of them described themselves as introverted even though that was not readily apparent from the interview up to that point.

I would describe myself as introverted as well, though many people would probably be surprised by that. If I have time to read, I can find the energy to do the more social parts of the job. I have always taught a class even when head of school, and I have enjoyed preparing for classes as much as engaging with them. I worked really hard in my career to protect that time. I cannot emphasize enough to other heads of school the importance of staying connected through teaching if possible.

Though engaging with people probably does not come first nature to me, I know it is important.

How do you think your level of sociability has impacted your career?

If you ask people who have worked for me, they will say that I always saw the incredible importance of acknowledging people for their work. Therefore, much of my social engagement is driven by my belief in the importance of getting out and seeing people doing their work and praising them for what they are doing well.

I have deep antipathy to email. I always prefer to pick up the phone or, even better, to meet in person. This is especially true when there is some level of emotion involved. More often than not, my response to an email is to schedule a time to meet face-to-face.

How do you balance talking with listening to engage in effective communication?

My evaluations have consistently said that I am a pretty good listener. I am probably a better listener than a talker. That likely has been a big part of my success in my career. I believe that as you take on responsibility and as you move into larger and larger organizations, the listening piece becomes more and more important.



Do you tend to work better on group or individual projects? Why?

I have always felt better working individually or in small groups. When the tough, controversial issues come up, I would rather have ten small group meetings than two big group meetings, even if it takes more time. I found that more time in small group discussions was more efficient at resolving big issues.

How do you establish and maintain a network of relationships?

I have had to work on this. After 40 years in the business, you realize just how small the independent school world is. It is one of the great things about the profession.

However, I am not the type of person who effortlessly remembers everybody's name. If I am going into a new setting where I am likely to run into people that I have not seen in a while, I will sit down and take some time to think about who might be there and remind myself of their names and stories.

We noticed in our study that heads of schools with larger budgets tended to score lower on the sociability scale. What thoughts might you have about that observation?

In the big budget schools, you have built-in obstacles to community and communication. There is so much more bureaucracy than in smaller schools. When I was the head of a smaller school earlier in my career, I knew everybody's name. Relationships were organic. Relationships are so much harder in a big institution. You must be so much more focused on breaking down the obstacles to community, which is more of an intellectual exercise than a social one.

In the larger schools, you have more folks to delegate to. The great thing about great schools is the quality of the people you can have around you. I was particularly dependent on my assistant. I gave her full access to my email. Because she was constantly monitoring my email feed, I was freed up to get off campus and have those important face-to-face conversations. If something came up that she could answer, she would do so. If not, then she brought me in, and I handled it. It meant that I was not chained to the office and I was not tied down by the minutiae.

If I think about my fellow heads of larger schools who are on the introverted side, I would say they have two things in common—they are excellent thinkers and they are excellent writers. Effective leadership of large schools requires you to be a thinker and writer.

SPECIAL TOPIC

SIZE OF SCHOOL BUDGET

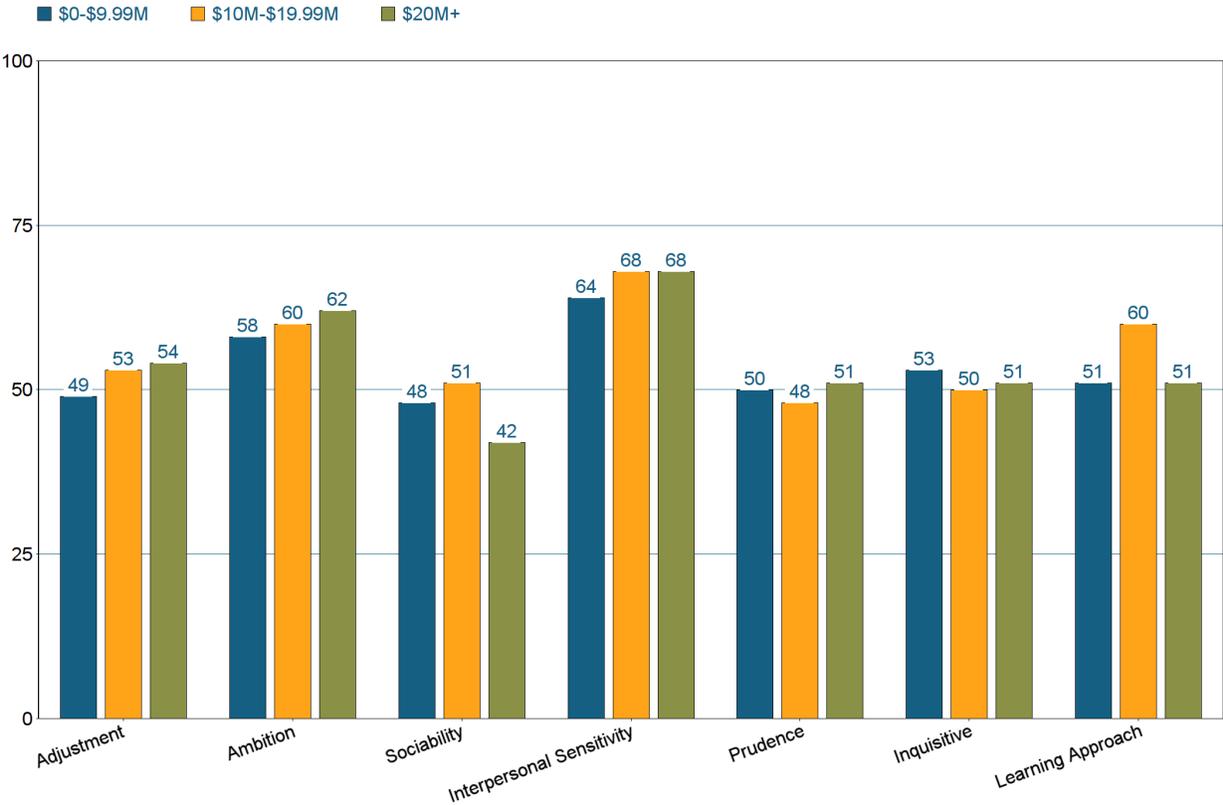
One of the most fascinating components of the leadership study was the opportunity to look at personality data as it relates to different demographic groups within our larger cohort of heads. Though we speculate on what some of these differences suggest, we know that we cannot draw hard conclusions. We cannot easily separate correlation and causation, and we recognize data can be less reliable where comparison groups become unequal in size. However, we feel these pieces are 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 based on the size of the largest school budget they have managed.

Participants broke down demographically in the following manner, where N equals the number of participants.

\$0-\$9.99M (N=112) \$10M-\$19.99M (N=84) \$20M and up (N=51)

HPI Comparisons: Size of Largest Budget Managed



CONCLUSIONS

On most scales, there is little difference between the personalities of heads relative to size of school. They are equally prudent and inquisitive. Heads of larger schools score slightly higher for adjustment and slightly higher for ambition, but not to a statistically significant degree. Heads in the middle group score quite a bit higher for learning approach than their peers running smaller and larger school budgets, but we struggle to draw any conclusions from that observation. The piece we found most interesting and worth exploring further was the fact that heads of the schools with the largest budgets scored below their peers on average in sociability.

In the previous two weeks, we have discussed the connection between sociability and leadership emergence. Gregariousness gets people noticed and it may help them get their first leadership position, perhaps even their first head of school position. However, the competition to run a school with a budget over \$20M is stiff, and the quality of a candidate's track record and ideas becomes much more important in the vetting process than their ability to quickly engage in an interview. In other words, if all someone had was a sociable personality, he or she is unlikely to rise to leadership in the largest independent schools. However, one can certainly be highly sociable and have great ideas, so our expectation would be that in the larger schools the sociability scores might regress closer to the mean. Instead, what we observe is that the heads of the largest schools are not just average on sociability but well below average.

It is a cliché among heads that it is lonely at the top, but it is a cliché that reflects some level of truth. Running a school with large budgets is likely even lonelier given the layers between the head and the frontline teachers and students. People who score low on sociability, however, are less likely to feel lonely because they do not derive energy from being around people in the same way that high sociability people do. They are better built to handle the loneliness of leadership in large schools.

Another theory about why heads of large schools tend to be lower on sociability may be related to the time involved in connecting with people one at a time. Every head of school we spoke to mentioned that their time is scarce. Highly sociable people will spend time each day feeding their need for social interaction at the cost of time in their office thinking about vision and strategy. In a small school, those social interactions can have great power. Over the course of a week or a month, the head of school could have meaningful interactions with a large percentage of the school community, thus offsetting the sacrifice of time spent alone thinking about the future. In a large school, however, the calculus changes. No matter how sociable the head of school, she would never have enough time to personally connect with the same percentage of the school community as the small school head. Instead, her connection to her school depends on her ability to do the things that our low-sociability head mentioned in our interview: thinking, writing, and removing the barriers to community. The low sociability head, by nature, will find that work easier.

