



ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

CONCLUSION

by Jamie Estes, November 2020

As we wrap up this phase of the ST Leadership Study, here are the titles of the articles in the most recent Harvard Business Review's Leadership section:

How the Best Leaders Answer "What Are We Here for?"
Reinventing the Leader Selection Process
Anyone Can Learn to Be a Better Leader
Will the Pandemic Reshape Notions of Female Leadership?

Research, discussions, conferences, and general reflections on leadership and personality surround us. After our nine-part exploration of the topic, we ask ourselves: *what have we learned and how can we act on it?*

We recognize a basic limitation in our endeavor: that aggregated, averaged personality data from 247 heads of schools do not necessarily help us draw conclusions about the actions of a specific person in specific circumstances. As we have noted throughout the last nine weeks, personality research is all about probabilities and understanding the interaction between situation and person; no personality assessment is a guarantee of behavior. Still, we are wise to think about people in terms of the qualities they show to the world. This understanding should encourage a cautious approach. A systematic process, geared towards a clear understanding of candidates, and enlightened by a comparison of individuals to averages, will increase our chance of success in identifying the right person for the right position.

Frequently, the identity a candidate presents to the world diverges from the personality qualities that govern their behavior and dictate their accomplishments. Confusing a person's apparent personality with his or her real habits can have severe repercussions. This chart displays the association between confidence and competence:



Summarized, this chart suggests that when one's confidence outweighs one's competence, we see arrogance. Arrogance can easily be mistaken for competence—in fact, unless the arrogance is extreme, interviewers are naturally drawn to arrogance. However, arrogant heads promote their own career goals at the expense of the organization; they ignore negative feedback; and they can be insensitive to the needs and expectations of others. How, then, can a search committee seek competence and confidence without being misled by arrogance?

Without structure, a selection process can easily focus on confidence rather than genuine competence. We can mitigate this danger by refining the search process. We teach search committees to conduct more useful interviews by using behavior-based, structured interviewing techniques with rubrics. By asking references consistent questions designed to reveal historical patterns of behavior, we can get a sense of a candidate's real competence without asking references to evaluate candidates as “good” or “bad.” We also believe that using the science of validated personality assessments like Hogan Assessments adds an important, clarifying layer that tests our qualitative assumptions. It is often said that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. In fact, personality is the best predictor of future behavior, and personality is much more easily measured.

Leadership competency models vary from search to search, but for the sake of this argument, here are four sample questions a search committee might want to answer about a potential new leader:

- Are they rewarding to work with?
- Do they work hard?
- Are they a leader, or, more accurately, will others follow them?
- Can they set a vision?

With this structure in mind, we can create a clear plan for gathering the data required to make the best decision possible. We can ask specific questions that will yield relevant evidence about the candidate's performance and skills, and we can identify key competencies to look for on the Hogan Assessment itself.

	SAMPLE BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTION	SAMPLE REFERENCE QUESTION	HPI SCALES
REWARDING?	Give us an example of a group decision you were involved with recently. What part did you play in helping the group develop the final decision?	Talk about the candidate's openness to feedback.	Interpersonal Sensitivity Sociability
HARD-WORKING?	Give us some examples of doing more than required in your job.	The candidate mentioned your recent reaccreditation. What role did she take on and what were her most significant contributions?	Ambition Prudence
LEADER?	Tell us about a time you found it necessary to tactfully, but forcefully, say things that others did not want to hear.	How does the candidate handle interpersonal conflict?	Ambition Interpersonal Sensitivity
VISION?	Tell us about a time when you exhibited forward thinking and questioned the status quo in order to make improvements at your school.	What are some of the candidate's most significant accomplishments?	Adjustment Inquisitive Learning Approach



A major obstacle to making the right selection is time, so the process must make the most of the time a search committee does have. You can focus your approach by making it your goal to understand the candidate's competencies and personality.

Our conclusion from the ST Leadership Study is that yes, people are complex—but we can take a systematic approach to understand what motivates them, what they do to achieve their goals, and what patterns of behavior get in their way. Armed with this approach, we can better identify the leaders who will help our schools succeed.

WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

“The only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself.”
William Faulkner

The first phase of our leadership study focused on day-to-day personality. In the next phase of our study, we will turn our attention to the dark side of personality as measured by the Hogan Development Survey (HDS). We will analyze the qualities and behaviors that derail leaders and prevent them from achieving their goals.

When under pressure, most people display certain counterproductive tendencies. Hogan refers to these tendencies as “risk factors.” Under normal conditions, these characteristics may be strengths. However, when people are tired, pressured, bored, or distracted, these risk factors may impede their effectiveness and erode the quality of their relationships with customers, colleagues, and direct reports. The conscientious, high-prudence person allows her perfectionism to get in the way of her productivity. The highly sociable person tells story after irrelevant story, alienating his audience. The highly ambitious leader starts taking unnecessary chances, thereby exposing the school to unnecessary risk.

Risk factors become more prominent as people transition into leadership roles. As a person moves into a management position, shifting social expectations and mounting pressure can lead them to overuse former strengths, damaging their professional reputation and hindering their ability to form and maintain a team. The fact that people tend not to speak “truth to power” means leaders receive less and less feedback about derailing behaviors, leading to reduced self-awareness and potentially damaging behavior. The HDS gives us a tool for predicting these behaviors and gives people insight into what is standing between them and their objectives.

In the coming months we will provide more information about Phase II of the ST Leadership Study. We will once again ask for volunteers to participate so we can build a dataset that provides key insights into how leaders lead and what can get in their way. Our anticipated 2021 calendar for Phase II is:

- Assessments conducted in the spring
- Interviews and data analysis in the summer
- Serial publication of the results in the fall

In the meantime, we look forward to continued conversations about leadership, personality, and success in independent schools.