



RESEARCH

# ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

HOGAN PERSONALITY INVENTORY (MVPI): SOCIAL INTERESTS

by Rod Chamberlain, March 2023

## Mind the Gap

*A phrase first introduced in 1968 on the London Underground in the United Kingdom.*

In the Introduction to Phase III of this Leadership Study, four clusters of core values were identified which make up the Hogan *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory* (MVPI). In this article, we will look at the second cluster, the Social Interests Cluster, with the core values of *Altruistic, Affiliation, and Tradition*. And while we will discuss each of these values as they may relate to school leadership, we will focus on *Altruistic* due to the significant gap between corporate leaders and school leaders AND between male and female school heads. We provide a deeper look at this trait in context from conversations with school heads who score near the top and near the bottom of the range on that scale.

As noted in the first article of this series, this cluster describes how an individual may want to relate to others, i.e.,:

- **ALTRUISTIC** - concerns the desire to help others and contribute to society. Higher scorers tend to be concerned about others' well-being while lower scorers tend to focus on developing personal responsibility and self-reliance.
- **AFFILIATION** - concerns values associated with socializing and preferences for environments that provide the opportunity to work with others or to work alone. Individuals scoring higher on this scale seek opportunities to network and enjoy teamwork. Low scorers prefer to spend time working on independent tasks with minimal interruptions and focus more on business/task-related activities.
- **TRADITION** - concerns valuing history, custom, and established moral codes. People with higher scores want to preserve past ways of living with clear roles; people with lower scores want to make change and move forward with greater autonomy and diversity.

The highest average score of any of the ten MVPI scales for the school heads in our study was *Altruistic* at 70 (out of 100). *Tradition* was the third highest score, with a 60. *Affiliation* was one of the lowest scores, with a 35. This paints a picture of a school leader who cares deeply about making the world a better place through helping those in their school and who values working in a setting where there are clear roles and responsibilities, and past practices are embraced (which may also offer an insight into why change is hard in many independent schools.) This school leader is quite comfortable working alone or with their group at school rather than spending time connecting with others to collaborate or explore other ways to do things.

Compare that picture of the school head with that of the corporate leader (who serve as trustees at many independent schools.) There is a significant difference in each of these scales between the school head and corporate leader! (see Figure 1 on next page)

## Comparing Social Interests Cluster Scores

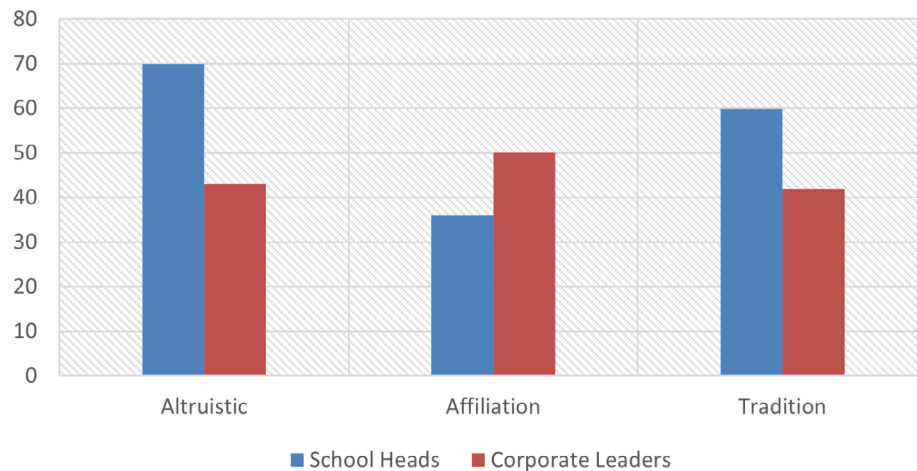


Figure 1: School Heads and Corporate Leaders average scores on the three MVPI scales making up the *Social Interests Cluster*

As one looks at these differences, it is easy to see potential tensions at board meetings as trustees push for more networking for fund raising versus staying on campus due to *Affiliation* scores. Trustees will encourage greater changes in programs versus maintaining tried and true practices with the variance in *Tradition* scores. However, the greatest source of conflict may be with the *Altruistic* scale, where Heads scored almost 40% higher than corporate leaders. One can now see how issues around tuition assistance (e.g., “we can really make a difference with our community” compared to “it’s important that every family pays their fair share”) and employee performance (e.g., “she just needs a little more support” compared to “she is not meeting expectations – we need someone who can”) can erupt in a board meeting.

Of course, each head brings his or her own personality to these board conversations. Some heads have very high *Altruistic* scores and some have low scores. In the next pages, we will see how two heads respond to the same questions based upon their scores. And in the final section of this article, our special topic will look at the average differences between genders.

There is always the opportunity to find a good resolution between opposing options proposed by the head and trustees – but it takes listening and a collaborative mindset to achieve balance. And to do that, both the head and the trustees need to “mind the gap.”

# ALTRUISTIC 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 ALTRUISTIC SCALE

**You have clearly been a successful administrator to reach the level you have and to have had the success you have had. How do you think your *Altruistic* qualities may have helped you?**

I think of a head of school as a servant leader and maybe that's why I ended up in the kind of school that I did. You see yourself as the person who is in charge of meeting the needs of your community and what that means in a school like the [one I served at with its mission] for struggling learners. You see the real need to help these kids who likely will not be successful unless you help them in a way that meets those needs.

I'm an optimist. I always think that there is a way to solve problems. So, even in the most difficult situation, I've always believed we could do it once I identified who needs to help me to do this, and with that we can do it.

**What leadership style and culture do you try to create?**

Trying to create a caring culture. I wasn't starting from scratch because I walked into a school with that history and that culture. So my role was supporting that culture, helping it grow and develop. As a community, we were always really true to our mission. You want a person who understands the mission and cares about it passionately and will support it.

**Have there been times when the personality qualities in this area may have created conflict or tension?**

Well, it might be in a personnel issue where you have to let someone go and you can't really discuss all of that. You then have to remember why you're doing what you're doing and proceed. I had an experience in another school where I let a teacher go for the right reasons, but a teacher who also had the support of colleagues. I was then presented with a petition from 30 teachers asking me to reconsider.

This kind of difficult thing can happen with a student issue, too. If you punish a student in a certain way you can't discuss the details. You just have to live with people drawing their own conclusions - which are usually not correct.



## LOW ON THE ALTRUISTIC SCALE

**You have clearly been a successful administrator to reach the level you have and to have had the success you have had. How do you think your *Altruistic* qualities may have helped you?**

As I have sat in this seat for the last 18 months, I've learned that sometimes the process has actually become a little bit more important than the product. I've had to learn to respect where people are. And when I'm dealing with a challenge with the board or the faculty, and 17 years of experience tells me this is not the way, I want to say, "Buddy, ask anybody, ask anyone. This is not the way you should do it." But you know, sometimes I've learned that you have to know where people are and respect that.

So, for example, when we set goals with our faculty, I set goals with them in the beginning and now I'm in the check-in phase. These goal markers are important for me, and so my administrative style is, "Hi, I know we talked about this in August, how are we doing on that?" And some people respond, "Oh my God, haven't talked about it since August. I'll get right on that."

**What leadership style and culture do you try to create?**

I think if I could wave a magic wand, I would make people less dependent upon me. I think a healthy school, whether it's a school that has 1400 kids, 800, 500 kids and 300 kids, you have to distribute the leadership and you have to trust people to do their jobs. And that is so much the antithesis of the culture that I walked into where there was a lot of micromanaging and "You're going to do it my way."

I think of one specific example. We we're getting an exchange program off the ground, and I turned it over to the department chair. I said here are my parameters, here are the lines. You color in between the lines, whatever color you want, but here are the parameters. Check in with me in two weeks, let me know if you need anything. I think this is hard, especially in a small school where there's so many things to be done right. I think we as heads of school sometimes struggle with, how should I put this, "control issues."

Have there been times when the personality qualities in this area may have created conflict or tension?

I think sometimes I'm so certain of what I think is right and it doesn't mean that I don't have doubts about the calls that you make. But I think one of the things that I struggle with as a head of school is that I get tired of trying to convince people of what I feel like I know to be right, whether it's a discipline decision or the way we should run the capital campaign, etc. I think that causes the conflict because people will use words like smug and arrogant. And I think, "Well, we can do it that way, but it'll be a disaster."

# SPECIAL TOPIC

## PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDERS

As we have done in the other Leadership Study articles, we looked at the *Altruistic* data to see if there were any characteristics that stood out among the 189 individuals who took the MVPI. First, and this is not surprising to anyone who has been at head of school gatherings or read any articles related to head of school demographics, there were a lot more male heads of schools than female heads of school in our study. One hundred twenty-nine male heads of school completed the MVPI for this study compared to only 60 female heads of school (making up just 32% of the cohort.)

Then we looked at the difference in the average scores on *Altruistic* between these two groups. You may remember that the average score for all heads of school was 70%. However, for female heads of school, this average was 77 and for male heads of school it was 67—a full ten points difference. This raises the question of why is there such a difference?

In the two interviews we conducted for this article, we posed this final question:

**We have looked at overall patterns in the data, and noticed, on average, that female heads of schools tend to score higher (76.97) in *Altruistic* than males (66.63). Do you have any thoughts on why this may be the case?**

### **The head of school with the high *Altruistic* score said:**

I don't know if it's just basic motherly instincts. I'd be interested to know if in that group of females, the ones that scored so high were all mothers. I say that because I felt a real difference in myself in my teaching. Once I had my own children, I really could feel for those students more than I had previously.

You have feelings that you might not otherwise have. So, I don't know if it's the mothering thing, or perhaps it's just that the women who are attracted to education, to teaching, to leadership are those who do have more altruistic tendencies.

### **The head of school with the low *Altruistic* score said:**

I'm hesitant to speak for my female colleagues, but I would say that to look at another interesting data point which is that the one area of schools where there are more female heads of school than male heads of school tend to be the smaller schools in K through six and K through eight. I wonder if the way that you've had to build relationships between lower school faculty is very different than dealing with an upper school faculty and an independent school where you have PhDs and public school teachers who've been teaching for 25 years.

We're a product of our career, right? Our identity is layered upon layered, right? And I wonder if those scores are indicative of bending over and talking to third graders and using a third-grade voice all day. I just think it's a different flavor of ice cream and I don't know if there's anything intrinsically different about us as people other than our lived experience.

While these are interesting hypotheses to consider, and the reader may have additional ones, there is a clear average difference in *Altruistic* scores between male and female heads of school. Understanding what may contribute to this difference would be worthy of future study.

# CONCLUSIONS

There is a significant gap between school heads and corporate leaders among all three scales that make up the *Social Interests Cluster* (i.e., *Altruistic*, *Affiliation*, and *Tradition*). This is especially significant with the *Altruistic* scale, where heads scored almost 40% higher than corporate leaders. And when one considers the different ends of this scale (i.e., higher scorers tend to be concerned about others' well-being while lower scorers tend to focus on developing personal responsibility and self-reliance), it is easy to see how these different viewpoints can lead to conflicts.

And although more research is needed to better understand the differences between male and female heads, the average score gap between female heads and corporate boards climbs to 44%. How these tensions are resolved between the recommendations of a school head and a board's policy decisions can either become the source of a more complete and nuanced solution or create a rift that splits the school community.

Knowing these tendencies is one of the powerful reasons to explore one's own personality and with this awareness, adjust personal practices for the benefit of the school. To the degree that this occurs with the *Altruistic* scale may be a strong indicator of a school's health and vitality in serving its community.

