



ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

HOGAN PERSONALITY INVENTORY

by Rod Chamberlain, April 2023

Making good decisions is a crucial skill at every level.¹

Peter F. Drucker

In the earlier articles of **PHASE III** of this Leadership Study, we looked at the first three clusters of core values which make up the Hogan *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory* (MVPI), i.e., *Status Interests, Social Interests, and Financial*. In this article, we will look at the final cluster, *Decision-Making*, with the core value scales of *Aesthetics* and *Science*. While we all recognize the truth of the quote above by Peter Drucker, it is hard to find agreement about what approach one should take in making a decision. Using the two scales identified by Hogan in decision-making, *Aesthetics* and *Science*, we will discover some patterns among heads of school, how that compares to corporate leaders, and a demographic area that did NOT predict a pattern. We will also provide a deeper look at two different approaches in decision-making from conversations with two school heads who have different orientations to these two scales.

In this article we will look at the fourth cluster which describes how an individual may approach a decision, i.e.:

AESTHETICS – concerns valuing art, literature, music, and a lifestyle guided by imagination, culture, attractive surroundings, and opportunities for self-expression. Individuals scoring high on this scale typically focus on the quality of work products and enjoy work environments that provide opportunities to create innovative solutions. Low scores tend to focus on functionality and substance over form.

SCIENCE – concerns valuing knowledge, research, technology, and data. High scoring individuals are curious, enjoy problem-solving, analytical thinking, and objective decision-making. Those scoring in the low range are less interested in science and technology; they prefer an intuitive approach to problem-solving.

The second highest average score of the ten MVPI scales for the school heads in our study was *Aesthetics* at 65 (out of 100). *Science* was significantly lower, with an average score of 47. These results suggest school leaders will lean towards making decisions that favor quality and the “look and feel” while still considering the underlying data related to an issue. Perhaps this might best be seen in the architecture on many independent school campuses – beautiful buildings that cost more (with larger capital campaigns) rather than just purely functional facilities.

So – how does this school head decision-making approach compare to that of the corporate leader who might be serving as a trustees at the schools? The difference can be seen in the gap between these two scales, as illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page.

1 - Peter Drucker, Alan Kantrow, Rick Wartzman, Julia Kirby (2016). “Get the Right Things Done: The Drucker Collection (6 Items)”, p.33, Harvard Business Review Press

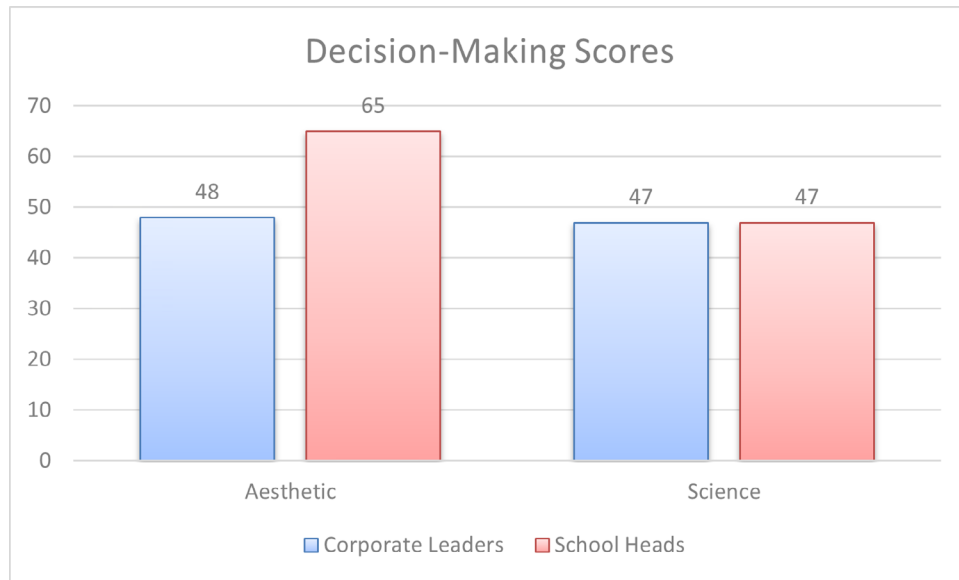


Figure 1: School Heads and Corporate Leaders average scores on the two MVPI scales which make up the Decision-Making Cluster

As one looks at this chart, a couple of observations can be made. First, corporate leaders tend to be fairly balanced between the *Aesthetic* (48) and *Science* (47) scales, indicating individuals who value both quality and quantity issues in making decisions. Second, while heads of school have the same score as corporate leaders in *Science* (47), they have a much higher score in *Aesthetic* (65). This difference in approach might be seen in board discussions around facilities, finance, and goals – where numbers might be more highly valued by trustees than by the head of school. Of course, this data-informed approach to decision-making is easier than trying to weigh the importance of relationships and past practices – and this difference can lead to misunderstandings within a school community.

Part of this tension can be sensed in the culture of a school when phrases like, “We’ve become too much like a business,” or “We’re too corporate now” are made after the rationale for some decisions are shared. As the key liaison between the board and the school community, the Head knows that any explanation of a decision needs to address many perspectives.

In reality, each head brings his or her own personality to these decision-making issues. Some heads have very high *Aesthetic* scores with low scores in *Science* while others had very low *Aesthetic* scores with high *Science* scores. In the next pages, we will see how two heads respond to the same questions based upon their scores. In the final section of this article, our special topic will look at the role the head of school had prior to becoming a head as a potential predictor of which decision-making scale is valued more.

Making good decisions is essential for the health and sustainability of any organization—including independent schools. Knowing one’s approach allows the leader to avoid making precipitous decisions that will have a negative impact and supports a more balanced solution. And recognizing this as a core value permits the school leader to be more intentional in building a strong, vibrant school culture.

DECISION MAKING IN PRACTICE

INTERVIEWS WITH HEADS OF SCHOOLS

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

HIGH AESTHETIC/LOW SCIENCE SCORES

Your scores lean toward the *Aesthetic* scale (i.e., quality) over the *Science* scale (i.e., quantity) that is, your *Aesthetic* score is 95 points more than your *Science* score) and this difference was much greater than the average difference among the heads who took the assessment (i.e., their *Aesthetic* scores were 18 points higher than their *Science* scores). Individuals who have your results tend to value quality, image, and product “look and feel” much more than the analytics of an issue. As a Head of School, where do you see these behaviors occurring?

I don't discount data. I just sat through a meeting where we had tons of data collection and we're doing an analysis of it. I generally look at data as the basic foundation. I've always been in relatively small schools so I think about the culture of the institution, traditions, and the actual personnel. I feel like I have the capacity to have a much deeper knowledge base of these individuals and our families. And my board is small (16 persons) and so it's easy for me to work with them. I'm a little bit weary of data-driven decision making in a small school. I think it is a little different in a big school. I don't categorically reject data, but I just don't necessarily lead through it.

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 decision-making approach may have helped you?

I've been a head of two schools. The first school was a 7 through 12 school. When I left, it was a pre-K through 12 school, and we had an increase of about 450 students. We had a hundred student increase in the upper school alone. I think that I spent an enormous amount of time getting to know people and really being a relational leader. I'm ordained and so I leaned into a lot of the soft skills that I learned as part of pastoral counseling, including things to engage people. I didn't spend a lot of time being distant to the institution. I kind of embedded myself on a personal level with it.

It has been a similar kind of situation here. I'm an alum of the school, so I have an engagement there emotionally. When I arrived, the school was immediately thrown into a number of legal issues which went back to the 1960s which were really challenging and difficult. I think that by being relational, being highly engaged in the moment, allowed a kind of success through that piece. We had a lot of media coverage and a lot of angry alumni, but I think in the end, just being a highly relational, highly open leader kind of changed that piece.

What leadership style and culture do you try to create?

I'm trying to create a student-centered institution. We have not been historically student-centered. We've been pretty faculty-centric, and that has happened over the course of a couple of decades. And so we're trying to nurture a leadership culture, particularly among my administrators. All but one administrator has changed in the last four years since I've been here and we're getting an innovative, collaborative, and highly relational team.

I've done some things like hiring an organizational psychologist to come in and run workshops with my team around things like establishing trust in a working setting, having interpersonal relationships, having disagreements, and still being able to walk out of the room laughing and holding hands. Not literally, but really feeling good about each other. I'm trying to find ways where people can really enjoy one another and their jobs, which I think is really critically important. And not being as focused on the substantive pieces. For example, when I have a day-long retreat, four of the hours are going to be on substance, and four of the hours are going to be on engagement with one another and establishing rapport.

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

Yeah, I think that people have a hard time working with me who are highly objective in terms of wanting everything to make total sense. I'll give you an example. I have worked with CFOs who will say, "Well, this is exactly how we should do this because as you look at all this information then this decision should be made." And I'll say, "You're right, 100%, this is exactly how it should be made, except that it is not going to work in our culture. We have a hundred employees. We've got 300 kids. We're a small school and we're highly relational." I know the name of every student and I know every faculty member. They want a really humane face to our institution. And this decision, be it around healthcare or whatever, is going to be perceived as hostile. And while it is the right idea, it's not going to work right now. So we're going to figure out a way to get there maybe in five years, but we're not going to be able to do it tomorrow. And that will frustrate some people on a pretty regular basis.



LOW AESTHETIC/HIGH SCIENCE SCORES

Your scores lean away from the *Aesthetic* scale (i.e., quality) and towards the *Science* scale (i.e., quantity) that is, your *Science* score is 90 points higher than your *Aesthetic* score - which is quite different than the average difference among the heads who took the assessment (i.e., their *Aesthetic* scores were 18 points higher than their *Science* scores). Individuals who have your results tend to value analytics and data-driven decisions over quality, image, and product “look and feel.” As a Head of School, where do you see these behaviors occurring?

I'll give you a recent example. We've been working through the yearly dance with the finance committee over the budget and I know that I'm going to struggle a little bit with the trustees who need me to write the letter about whatever the increase is going to be. So - how do we tell that story? Because the numbers by themselves are not sexy and so we're going to have to highlight the value proposition and include the things we're enhancing. But the reality, if I was talking about this to an auditor, is inflation. For example, the food cost is going up. It's costing us more money to varnish the floor. That's not going to be the aesthetic story that needs to be told, but that's where the data are.

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 decision-making approach may have helped you?

I think it helped to see a bigger picture and say, “Here are the things that people think matter - and here's what really matters.” This happens when I'm trying to make something successful and I'm able to ask those questions. For example, let's look at AP scores. Why is this teacher successful in getting fives in the chemistry AP and this teacher hasn't been? How do we dig into that question versus just accepting people's opinion of a loved teacher? He's great - but the scores aren't so good. What's going on here?

What leadership style and culture do you try to create?

I try to lift people up. I tend to be a little more collaborative. There are certainly places where I have to dictate things, but I try to get people to come to those decisions on their own rather than me trying to force the issue. I want them to take ownership. I'm also aware of my shortcoming with aesthetics, so I want them to be happy with the way their decision looks because that doesn't matter to me.

For example, I just sent the foundation team up to meet with the architects. We are moving the development office to one of our other buildings. It's an office building that we own up the street. They're not super happy about it, but I've said, look, this is your space. I just met with them and I said, “I don't care what you do with this, but it has to fit eight people. You need to look at some of these options because you all have already said you want to add two more people to the staff over the next couple years. Where are you going to put them?” And they're struggling with this because right now they all have individual offices and the way they're showing it only deals with the current staffing level. So I said, “Y'all figure it out. All I care about is that you're not coming to me in two years and saying, “We don't know where to put Harry.” I repeated to them, “I don't want to be saying, ‘I told you so.’”

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

Absolutely, because some people need the aesthetic. They need more of the “feel good” piece to sell the story and they maybe don't care about what the data say. For example, having a conversation with a parent about why their child is not recommended for AP physics. You could say, “Here's what the data says. Here's the student's scores. Here's the other information from the teacher.” It can come across as shallow or uncaring. This is a situation where there has to be some balance. This could include statements such as “We're trying to do what's best for your child. We think they're going to struggle with this. We think they're not going to be in a good situation and their self-worth is going to be damaged.”

SPECIAL TOPIC

PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES—IT’S NOT THE SCHOOL SIZE!

Like the other Leadership Study articles, we looked at both Decision-Making scales, *Aesthetics* and *Science*, to see if there were any particular demographic item that stood out among the 189 individuals who took the MVPI. Much like the head in interview one above, we suspected we would see a difference based upon the size of school, e.g., heads of smaller schools would lean more towards qualitative decisions. The data did not support this hypothesis. Using budget size as a proxy for school size we examined the average scores for heads for both scales. As one can see in Figure 2 below, there is no trend for the Aesthetic scores across the seven (7) school groups. The scores range from a high of 70.76 for schools with a \$10 – 14.99 million budget to a low of 56.11 for schools with a budget of \$25 – 29.99 million. The average scores of school heads for the other five school sizes are all in the 60s.

Initially, it looked like we might have a pattern for the Science scores. However, once again, there is no consistent pattern. Heads’ average scores in three of the school budget sizes are in the 30s and three are in the 50s. Of course, these scores are somewhat scattered across the seven budget groups so we looked at other data for patterns.

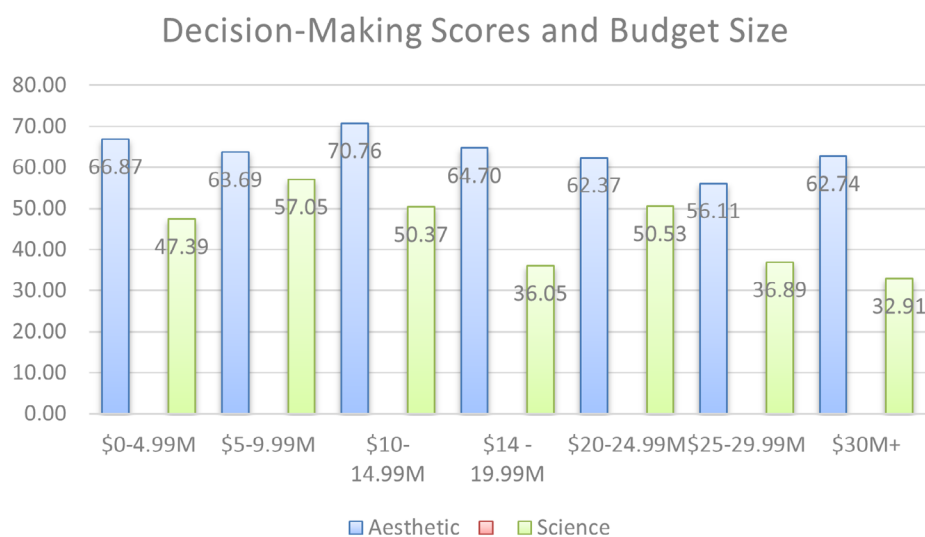


Figure 2: Decision-Making average scores on the two MVPI scales and Budget Size

When we looked at the prior experiences of heads of schools, we noted that we supplied the following four options for selection (with the number selecting that option in brackets):

- Academic/Faculty Leadership (division head, academic dean, etc.) [113]
- Advancement/Admissions/Development [22]
- Business Operations [8]
- Other - Write In [46]

The “Other” category had a wide number of responses – many of which were hard to place in the previous three categories. For example, eighteen (18) of these answers indicated *Assistant Head* or *Associate Head* – but not the area over which the person had responsibility. Therefore, in Figure 3 we focused on the first three categories, recognizing the small sample size for the non-Academic roles.

Decision-Making Scores and Prior Position

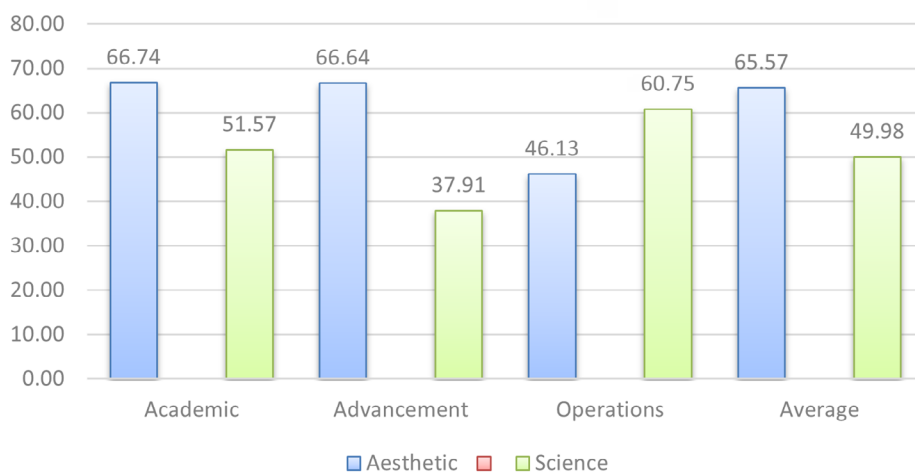


Figure 3: Decision-Making average scores on the two MVPI scales and Prior Position

Four groups are compared in this figure: *Academic*, *Advancement*, *Operations*, and the overall *Average* of all those taking the MVPI assessment. Given the large size of the *Academic* group, it is not surprising to see the close alignment with the scores of this group with the overall average. And it was not surprising to see the high *Science* score by the *Operations* group, given their orientation to the bottom line at a school. In fact, this group might be worth a deeper review in the future with their leaning toward the quantitative over the qualitative.

However, the difference between the *Aesthetic* score and *Science* score by the *Advancement* group provided a new insight (i.e., a 43% higher score in *Aesthetics* over *Science*!) Upon reflection, one could see how those in the areas of advancement, development, and admissions could approach decisions based upon past experiences and relationships (both qualitative components) rather than looking at just the data. This tendency could be seen in admissions projections (e.g., "I just feel like we're going to get more contracts in this summer") or development activities (e.g., "I know we have never received a gift from this family, but this time it will be different.")

Another way to explore these different approaches to decision-making might be to consider a senior leadership team meeting. The Head of School, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Development Director could all be looking at a decision with different criteria. This could lead to greater tensions with a fragmented team OR greater insights and a stronger decision, depending on how the decision-making process is conducted at that meeting. Once again, awareness of a personality tendency can make all the difference.

CONCLUSIONS

This article began with a quote from Peter Drucker, one of the foremost management experts of the 20th Century: Making good decisions is a crucial skill at every level. Being aware of one's tendencies is essential in avoiding missed criteria—whether they fall in the *Aesthetic* or *Science* scales—and will lead to better decisions. This openness to other perspectives can be positive when working with trustees or other staff members who may not lean towards the more qualitative characteristics that many heads of school tend to value.

It may also be tempting to think we know how others are approaching a decision (e.g., if they are leading a small school, or on the operations side of the school) but this projection may create even more problems. So, what is one to do? Here are the suggestions provided by the two heads interviewed for this article:

As you reflect on your approach to decision-making now, what suggestion would you have for other school leaders in order to improve their decision-making?

HEAD WITH HIGH AESTHETIC/LOW SCIENCE SCORES

What would I give to improve decision making? I run a New Heads Institute for an association, and we do this exercise that addresses that question. The thing I say to them is, "Watch, look, and listen to get to know the soul of your school. What does that look like and what are its positives and its negatives? And then consider realistically what you can change and what you can't change?" And then, I tell them they need to have the capacity to accept the things you cannot change.

HEAD WITH LOW AESTHETIC/HIGH SCIENCE SCORES

I think it is very helpful to surround yourself with people that think differently and to be open-minded to hear their perspective on these things.