



RESEARCH

ST LEADERSHIP STUDY

HOGAN PERSONALITY INVENTORY (MVPI): CONCLUSION

by Jamie Estes, April 2023

As with many great thinkers, Peter Drucker never actually said his most famous statement: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” What he did say was that “Culture—no matter how defined—is singularly persistent.”¹ Phase III of the ST Leadership study has focused on the *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory*, which evaluates the fit between a person and an organization’s culture. This insight is essential because organizational culture is so persistent. When a mismatch exists between a leader’s values and an organization’s culture, change in leadership will likely occur before change in culture.

Successful schools have strong cultures aligned with their missions and values. A sense of purpose and direction shared among employees leads to greater motivation, engagement, and productivity. Such cultures build trust and commitment among colleagues, which leads to greater cohesion and teamwork and attracts and retains talented employees.

The founder of Hogan Assessments, Dr. Robert Hogan, has written extensively on this topic, advocating for strong organizational culture. Like Drucker, Hogan believes that culture is a key driver of organizational performance and that leaders must understand and manage culture to achieve organizational goals. He asserts that culture is shaped by the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the organization’s people and that leaders must work to align these elements to create a culture that supports the organization’s goals. A positive culture produces employee engagement, positive reputation, and retention.

For those reasons, selecting a leader is a critical decision that impacts an organization’s culture and performance. Debbie Freed published an article in the Fall 2016 issue of *Independent School Magazine* titled with Drucker’s most famous phrase he never said, *Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast*. She called the selection of a new head “one of the most vulnerable moments in the life of a school.” She expounds, “It’s a time when *espoused theories* collide with *theories in use*—when new ideas smack up against tradition and well-worn routines and practices.” This vulnerability logically stems from the connection between leadership and culture.

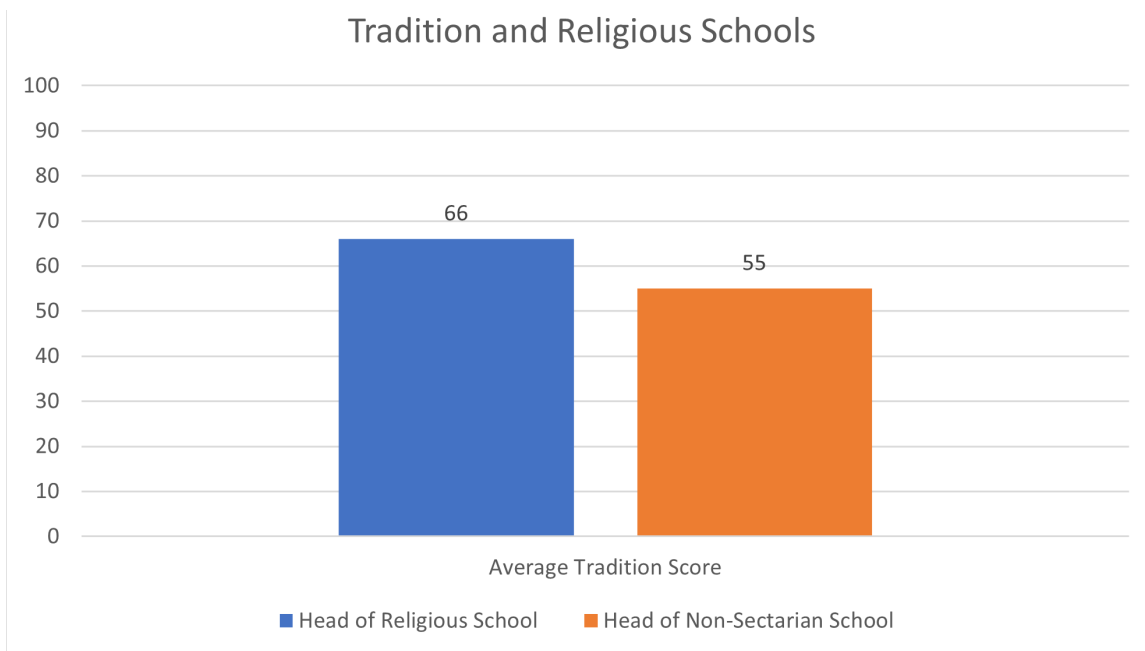
Dr. Hogan suggests that organizations should carefully assess the personality traits of potential leaders and how those traits align with the organization’s culture and values, or as we will explore shortly, the organization’s *desired* culture and values. He also posits that the most effective leaders are those who can adapt their leadership style to fit the specific needs of the organization. Leaders should be able to work effectively with the people in the organization to create a culture that supports the organization’s goals.

The articles we have presented in Phase III have focused largely on our observations about MVPI data, which speaks to the intersection of leadership and culture. For instance, we pointed out that school leaders score highest, on average, for the MVPI scales Altruism and Aesthetics. [The Hogan Guide](#) says this about people who score high on Altruism: “They prefer work in which they can help others, including careers in teaching, medicine, hospitality, social work, counseling, and human resources.” In other words, people’s inherent motives and values lead them to the profession of teaching. Add the layer of “high aesthetics” and we gain insight why [altruistic people](#) drawn to education might choose a career in independent schools. Again, from the Hogan

¹The Wall Street Journal (1991), “[Don’t Change Corporate Culture—Use It!](#)”

Guide: "Individuals with high scores . . . appreciate opportunities to use their imagination and are happiest in work environments that allow experimentation, exploration, and creative problem solving." Together, these observations lead us to see that people become teachers because of their altruistic impulses and they pursue careers in independent schools because of their value for aesthetics.

Let's peel back another layer. How might personal motives and values impact educators' preferences for certain types of independent schools? Over the years, we have observed that candidates drawn to religious schools scored higher on the Tradition scale. According to the Hogan Guide, people who score higher on this scale "care about maintaining tradition, custom, and socially appropriate behavior." It would make sense, then, that they would be aligned with institutions grounded in codified belief systems. In Phase III of the Study, 88 participants were heads of religious schools, representing a broad range of faith traditions—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim. The remaining 101 heads lead non-sectarian schools. We were curious to see whether the aggregate data would reflect our anecdotal observation. Indeed, it did.



As with every scale we examined, there were both high and low Tradition scorers in both datasets, but in general, people who score higher on this scale tend to serve in religious schools. When assessing potential fits for a religious school, it is important to note candidates' values and how they align with the school's values. The MVPI can provide some insight.

A school's culture is more complex than a label as "independent" or "Christian." We work with many Episcopal schools. Though certain cultural elements are shared, we are struck by how much these schools differ from one another.

The question, then, is how does a school identify its culture? As persistent as school culture might be, defining it is another matter. Independent School Management and other similar organizations offer culture surveys, but these tend to focus on cultural "health" rather than cultures' key markers—what each school rewards and celebrates, expectations regarding how people will interact, and how and why decisions are made.

When we begin our work supporting a school's leadership search, we often use a culture survey. Participants respond to a series of statements describing a school and rate how strongly they agree or disagree that the statements describe their school. Examples include:

Our school emphasizes socio-economic diversity and access. (Altruism)

Our school values and devotes resources to ensure an attractive and high-quality environment. (Aesthetics)

Our school endorses and teaches traditional values. (Tradition)

Some of these statements describe not how a school is but how the person taking the survey would like the school to be. Therefore, we ask participants to rate each statement in two dimensions. First, they rate the described value's **presence** in the school. Then they rate the value's **importance** to them. This way, we get a picture not only of how people describe the school's culture, but also what they would like that culture to be in the future, knowledge that could inform a search committee for what type of leader, from a cultural and values perspective, they should be seeking.

Which brings us to a final point about the *Motives, Values, and Preferences Inventory*. This assessment, more than the *Hogan Personality Inventory* (HPI) and *Hogan Development Survey* (HDS), is aspirational. The MVPI provides insights into what people want to be rather than what others perceive them to be (though the two perceptions often, we all hope, align). It describes identity more than reputation. And for that reason, it is most powerful when interpreted along with the other assessments. As with our culture survey where we look at the disconnect between the presence of a cultural value and the importance of a cultural value, only by analyzing the full battery of Hogan assessments can we get a fuller picture of the culture a candidate will want to create (MVPI), the culture the candidate will create (HPI), and what will get in the way (HDS).

WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

Since June 3, 2019, when we first invited heads of schools to participate in the ST Leadership Study, we have had two goals: to identify how heads of schools differ in personality from leaders in other sectors and to glean from that data worthwhile stories about what it all might mean. Those who have stuck with us through the years likely recognize that we are more comfortable with the stories than the data. In Phase IV, we plan on doing a better job of bridging that gap, with a bit of help from our friends at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (UNC-C).

We provided anonymous data from the study to our colleagues at UNC-C. They ran a series of data analyses that produced interesting observations. The result will be a series of articles co-written by ST and UNC-C in which we examine more carefully (and scientifically) the interplay between scales and more specifically how Heads of School differ from corporate leaders. We look forward to this work and to sharing it with the independent school community. For now, we thank again everybody who participated in the Leadership Study and for all the support and encouragement you all have provided over the past four years.