

# How to lead the way

What makes a good leader – and what makes one who is great?

**O**ur leaders can shape history as well as organisations, said Professor Robert Hogan, chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Tulsa, when he addressed a British Psychological Society conference in Glasgow this year.

Professor Hogan's interest in leadership began when he was in the US navy and came to regard military leadership as "an oxymoron".

He said that the two traditions in leadership literature – the guru school or the academic discipline – both miss the point. The first is often highly entertaining and completely unscientific, and the second is scientific but often quite trivial and unrelated to the real world.

Professor Hogan's research has found that leadership is a mixture of situations people find themselves in and personality (see box).

## Stamina

But leadership is more than those components. Some of the world's best leaders have not been obvious high flyers. What they do have in common, according to Hogan, is perseverance. Many chief executives of the best-performing companies have sustained over

15 years' performance and are persistent in their goals despite setbacks and are quite humble in their view of themselves.

## Personality types

The five factors of personality used in psychometric tests are: openness to experience; conscientiousness; extroversion; agreeableness; and neuroticism.

The least correlated with leadership was agreeableness. People with high scores on the agreeable scale are very eager to please, very compliant, easy to work with, dislike conflict, are always pleasant, courteous and thoughtful of others.

They make very good team players, but rarely make good leaders. Leaders need to go beyond caring about what others think of them and need to take tough and unpopular decisions.

A trait that has a significant negative correlation is neuroticism. Neurotics make very poor leaders; who wants to follow someone who is anxious, moody, temperamental, prone to depression, easily hurt and upset, always primed to take offence and very quick to anger?

Psychopaths are a different matter – they are often extremely

## People quit bosses, not organisations

charming and not anxious, mainly due to their complete lack of empathy. Other people mean nothing to them so they do not care what others think. Clinical research estimates that one person out of 10 is a psychopath, and up to four in 10 chief executives display psychopathic tendencies.

The three other aspects – extroversion, conscientiousness and openness – all correlate positively with leadership.

Individuals with a taciturn manner, who find it difficult to communicate with teams and have minds that are closed to new suggestions might sustain a top managerial position, but will not have the "right stuff" to lead.

## Causing and tackling havoc

People in senior positions can cause havoc in an organisation, purely because their position and their impact on those under them.

However, Professor Hogan said that with longitudinal, preferably cognitive, interventions, a poor

## Skills and traits of effective leaders needed in all occupations

- **Intrapersonal skills** – having self-control, being aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- **Interpersonal skills** – empathy, good social, listening and speaking skills
- **Business skills** – job fit and competency
- **Leadership skills** – persuasion, delegation, influence, inspiring and enthusing
- **Integrity** – leaders keep their word, are fair to all staff and do not have favourites
- **Decisiveness** – they make good decisions appropriately and quickly and take responsibility
- **Competence** – they are good at what they do
- **Vision** – they can see the big picture and explain it to others
- **Intuition** – this builds on decision making but includes a leap of insight that differentiates good managers from great leaders
- **Perseverance**

manager or leader can learn to manage workplace behaviours in a more productive, less destructive manner.

Professor Hogan said that 50%-70% of staff rated their managers as being the main cause of dissatisfaction at work, regardless of culture, nation and organisation. He ended by saying that "people quit bosses, not organisations".

Angela Mansi, senior lecturer and director of WorkLife Management

## Ongoing research on why co-operation is important for companies

**C**o-operation is becoming more important for organisational success, Linda Gratton is finding in her ongoing research.

She argues that future sources of competitive advantage will be derived from the capacity of individuals and groups to use what they have learned to explore new

possibilities together.

Today, organisations attempt to be innovative, flexible, customer sensing and many other things – all of which depend on co-operative working. In addition, the ability to co-operate is a critical to successful mergers, partnerships and joint ventures.

Drawing on recent

research, Ms Gratton highlighted the importance of creating a culture of goodwill and an understanding of the habits and behaviours of individuals.

She added that the senior team needed the capacity to master the challenges of time pressures, complexity and creating closer networks.

Contrary to common

perceptions, technology is neither the challenge nor the solution to co-operation, although it can support it in a number of different ways.

It would appear that problems with co-operation often stem from bad process design or lack of strategic focus.

The ability to cooperate and collaborate does not come naturally – but

organisations that learn to do it well will have a major competitive advantage in the decade to come.

● This is an ongoing research project, and any organisation interested in taking part should contact Dr Lynn Keehan, at lkeehan@concoursegroup.com

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