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CHAPTER 2

Traits, Motives, and Characteristics of Leaders

The purpose of this chapter is to present a comprehensive description of the personal qualities of leaders. Such a presentation does not imply that the trait theory is more valid or important than other explanations of leadership. Nevertheless, "having the right stuff" contributes to leadership effectiveness in many situations.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

The belief that certain personal characteristics and skills contribute to leadership effectiveness in many situations is the trait-based perspective on leadership. Traits tend to help us understand leadership behavior and effectiveness when integrated in meaningful ways. Old as well as new research concludes convincingly that effective leaders are made of the right stuff.

I. PERSONALITY TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS
Possessing certain characteristics contributes to leadership effectiveness in many situations as long as the leader's style fits the situation reasonably well.

A. General Personality Traits

A general personality trait in the context used here is a trait that would be observable within or outside the context of work. The same general traits are related to success and satisfaction in both work and personal life.

1. *Self-Confidence.* In almost every leadership setting, it is important for the leader to be realistically self-confident. In addition to being a trait, self-confidence refers to a behavior and an interpersonal skill that a person exhibits in a number of situations. Self-confidence is akin to being cool under pressure. Self-confidence was among the first leadership traits researchers identified, and currently receives considerable attention as a major contributor to leadership effectiveness.

2. *Humility.* Being humble at the right times also contributes to leadership effectiveness. Part of humility is admitting that you don't know everything, and admitting your mistakes to team members and outsiders. Humility is the leadership that comes from putting people in the limelight, not the leader.

3. *Core Self-Evaluations.* **Core self-evaluations** is a broad personality trait that captures bottom-line self-assessment, composed of self-esteem, locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, and emotional stability. All four traits are positively related to each other.

4. *Trustworthiness.* Group members consistently believe that leaders must display honesty, integrity, and credibility, thus engendering trust. **Trust** is a person's confidence in another individual's intentions and motives, and in the sincerity of that

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individual's word. A study showed that high levels of trust are also associated with high levels of organizational performance

The popular cliché, "Leaders must walk the talk," holds true. Also helpful is telling the truth and conducting yourself in the way that you ask others to conduct themselves. In this context, **trust** is defined as a person's confidence in another individual's intentions and motive and the sincerity of that individual's word. Trust is also related to *transparency*, in which organizational leadership is open rather than secretive about activities that affect the welfare of stakeholders. Two examples of trust builder are to make your behavior consistent with your intentions, and telling the truth in ways people can verify.

A meta-analysis of 106 studies involving 27,103 individuals found that trust of a leader was highly associated with a variety of work attitudes of group members, such as satisfaction. The relationship between trust and job performance was positive, but low. An online experiment found that integrity facilitated the leader being trusted, which in turn was associated with higher performance.

5. *Authenticity.* Embedded in the trait of being trustworthy is **authenticity**—being genuine and honest about your personality, values, and beliefs, as well as having integrity. To become an authentic leader, and to demonstrate authenticity, be yourself rather than attempting to be a replica of someone else. A study conducted with two telecom firms in China found that employees who reported to supervisors with authentic leadership behaviors tended to to be better organizational citizens, and were also more engaged in their work.

6. *Extraversion.* Being extraverted contributes to leadership effectiveness, and extraverts are more likely to want to assume a leadership role and participate in group activities. A meta-analysis 73 studies involving 11,705 subjects found that extraversion was the most consistent personality factor related to leadership effectiveness and leadership emergence. Research evidence suggests that an extraverted leader may be more effective in stimulating good job performance among laidback than proactive workers.

7. *Assertiveness*. Letting others know where you stand contributes to leadership effectiveness, and also being or appearing extraverted. **Assertiveness** refers to being forthright in expressing demands, opinions, feelings, and attitudes. Being assertive helps leaders perform tasks such as confronting group members, demanding higher performance, and making legitimate demands on higher management.

8. *Enthusiasm, Optimism, and Warmth.* Group members respond positively to enthusiasm, partly because enthusiasm may be perceived as a reward for constructive behavior. Enthusiasm also helps build good relationships with team members. Enthusiasm often takes the form of optimism which helps keep the group in an upbeat mood, and hopeful about attaining difficult goals. Being a warm person and projecting that warmth is part of enthusiasm and contributes to leadership effectiveness in several, ways including giving emotional support.

An experiment with aerospace engineers found a positive relationship between the leader's positive state and (a) the follower's positive state, and (b) performance. The

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study therefore supports the conventional wisdom that leaders with a positive attitude can facilitate group members developing a positive attitude, and performing well.

9. *Sense of Humor*. The effective use of humor is considered an important part of a leader's role. Humor helps dissolve tension and defuse conflict. Self-effacing humor is the choice of comedians and organizational members alike. One of the research-based rules of humor is that higher-status people joke at a higher rate than those of lesser status, and ten to be more successful at eliciting laughter from others.

B. Task-Related Personality Traits

Certain personality traits of effective leaders are closely associated with task accomplishment even though they appear to be more accurately classified as traits than as behavior.

1. *Proactive Personality*. According to its original research-based definition, a person with a **proactive personality** has a relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change. An effective leader often has a proactive personality, and therefore exhibits proactive behavior. A study found proactive high-level managers (as perceived by their managers) establish more challenging goals for their business units which in turn are associated with higher sales performance.

2. *Passion for the Work and the People.* A dominant characteristic of effective leaders is their passion for their work and to some extent for the people who help them accomplish the work. Passion for the work is especially evident in entrepreneurial leaders and small-business owners who are preoccupied with growing their business. Being passionate about the nature of the business can be a major success factor in its survival. One of the ways for an entrepreneur to inject passion into a business is to tell a *creation-of-the enterprise story* that inspires people to understand how the company's product or cause will make the world a better place.

3. *Emotional Intelligence.* How well a person manages his or her emotions and those of others influences leadership effectiveness. **Emotional intelligence** refers to qualities such as understanding one's feelings, empathy for others, and the regulation of emotions to enhance living. Four key factors are included in emotional intelligence: (1) *self-awareness* helps you understand your impact on others; (2) *self-management* is the ability to control one's emotions and act with honesty and integrity in a consistent and adaptable manner; (3) *social awareness* includes having empathy for others and having intuition about organizational problems; (4) *relationship management* includes the interpersonal skills of communicating clearly and convincingly, disarming conflicts, and building strong personal bonds. Research suggests that a leader's moods and associated behaviors greatly influence bottom-line performance. A sense of humor is the most contagious mood.

A recent synthesis of research studies suggests that emotional intelligence is only one of various factors (including other personality traits, cognitive ability, and functional skills) that influence what leaders accomplish.

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4. *Flexibility and Adaptability*. A leader must be flexible and adaptable enough to cope with change, especially because a leader is someone who facilitates change. **Flexibility**, or adjusting to situations, has long been recognized as an important leadership characteristic.

1. *Courage*. Leaders need the courage to take risks and to take the initiative. Courage in the present context refers to behaviors such as prudent risk taking, facing responsibility, and a willingness to put one's reputation on the line.

II. LEADERSHIP MOTIVES

Leaders can be differentiated from nonleaders and ineffective leaders in terms of their motives and needs. The motives described here are task-related.

A. The Power Motive

Effective leaders have a strong need to control resources. They vigorously exert power, think about how to alter the behavior of others, and care about status.

1. *Personalized Power Motive*. Leaders with a personalized power motive seek power mostly to further their own interests, and enjoy dominating others. Leaders with a personalized power motive do not worry about everybody liking them.

2. *Socialized Power Motive*. Leaders with a socialized power motive use power primarily to achieve organizational goals or a vision. These leaders are less defensive than those with a personalized power motive, and they are more willing to accept expert advice.

Note that the distinction between doing good for others and doing good for oneself is often made on the basis of very subjective criteria. A leader who does good for thousands often gains in power and stature.

B. *The Drive and Achievement Motive*

Leaders are known for the strong effort they invest in achieving work goals. **Drive** refers to a propensity to put high energy into achieving goals. **Achievement motivation** refers to finding joy in accomplishment for its own sake.

C. *Tenacity and Resilience*

Leaders are better than nonleaders at overcoming obstacles. Tenacity multiplies in importance for organizational leaders because it can take so long to implement a new program. Resilience is part of tenacity because the tenacious person will bounce back from setback through continuous effort.

III. COGNITIVE FACTORS AND LEADERSHIP

Mental ability as well as personality is important for leadership success. Problem-solving and intellectual skills are referred to collectively as **cognitive factors.**.

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A. Cognitive (or Analytical) Intelligence

Strong problem-solving ability is a fundamental characteristic for effective leaders in all fields. Research spanning 100 years has demonstrated that leaders received higher scores than most people on mental ability tests. The relationship is likely to be higher when the leader plays an active role in decision making and is not overly stressed.

Cognitive intelligence is all the more useful for leadership when it is supplemented by **practical intelligence,** the ability to solve everyday problems by using experience-based knowledge to adapt to and shape the environment. A study of printing industry executives found that entrepreneurs who learn through concrete experience, and amplify their practical experience with growth goals are more likely to lead and operate growing ventures.

B. Knowledge of the Business or Group Task

An effective leader has to be technically or professionally competent in some discipline, particularly when leading a group of specialists. The importance of knowledge of the business is strongly recognized as an attribute of executive leadership. Knowledge of the business is critically important for strategy formulation.

C. Creativity

Many effective leaders are creative in the sense that they arrive at imaginative and original solutions to complex problems. Creative ability lies on a continuum, with one end being represented by business leaders who think of innovative products and services. At the other end of the continuum are leaders who rely on standard solutions to problems.

D. Insight into People and Situations

Another important cognitive trait of effective leaders is **insight**, a depth of understanding that requires considerable intuition and common sense. A manager with keen insight is able to make good choices in selecting people for key assignments. Insight also facilitates the leader's adapting his or her style to the situation.

E. Farsightedness and Conceptual Thinking

To develop visions and incorporate strategy, a leader needs **farsightedness**, the ability to understand the long-range implications of actions and policies. Many of today's business leaders are accused of having a shortsighted emphasis on quick profits. Conceptual thinking refers to the ability to see the overall perspective and makes farsightedness possible. A conceptual thinker is also a *systems thinker.*

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT ON LEADERSHIP

The traits, motives, and characteristics required for leadership effectiveness are a combination of heredity and environment. Personality traits and mental ability are based on certain inherited predispositions and aptitudes, which, however, require the right opportunity to develop. For example, a person may inherit high mental ability but needs the right experiences to learn to develop innovative solutions to problems facing the group. Leadership appears to be a combination of nature and nurture.

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Advances in neuroscience provide additional evidence that leadership most likely has a biological component. An effective leader is adaptive, and adaptivity requires an integrated brain that has strong connections across regions of the brain. EEG records have shown that transformational leadership is linked to dominance of the frontal part of the brain. However, the frontal part of the brain can be developed through concentrated intellectual activity over time suggesting that becoming a transformational leader requires more than having inherited a brain with a dominant frontal lobe.

The outermost areas of the brain govern analytical thinking and technical skills, whereas the innermost areas of the brain govern emotions. A person therefore has the genes that influence the emotional intelligence necessary for leadership. However, experience is important for emotional intelligence because it increases with age.

Some leadership traits are more difficult to awaken or develop than others, with passion for work and people being an example.

V. THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE TRAIT APPROACH

The evidence is convincing that leaders possess different personal characteristics from those of nonleaders. A knowledge of the traits associated with leadership effectiveness helps in the selection of leaders. Awareness of these characteristics can also point a person toward the right developmental experiences, such as learning to become more assertive. The current emphasis on emotional intelligence, which is really a group of traits and behaviors, reinforces the importance of the trait approach. The trait approach is limited because it does not specify which traits are absolutely needed in which leadership situations and how much of each trait is needed. For example, when does ambition cross the line and become greed and gluttony?

Certain traits increase the probability of a person's becoming an effective leader, but the situation often influences which traits will be the most important.

VI. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Considering that emotional intelligence is so important for leadership success, many organizations sponsor emotional intelligence training for managers. A realistic starting point in improving emotional intelligence on your own is to work with one of its five components at a time, such as empathy. You would first obtain feedback about your empathy, and then work diligently on any deficiency. After the attempted improvements in empathy, solicit more feedback. Developing emotional intelligence can also be achieved through *mindfullness*, of being more aware of your thoughts and actions.

A constructive application of trait theory is to think through which cluster of traits is most likely to lead to positive outcomes in the situation at hand. Finding the right cluster of traits to emphasize in a given situation is usually more useful than emphasizing one trait.

COMMENTS ON EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

Leadership Self-Assessment Quiz 2-1: How Self-Confident Are You?

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Most people question their self-confidence at times, helping to make this quiz relevant. Also, self-confidence plays such a major role in leadership effectiveness across situations that it is well worth a student's time to think about self- confidence on a personal level.

Leadership Self-Assessment Quiz 2-2: Behaviors and Attitudes of Trustworthy Leader

Behavioral specifics of being trustworthy are particularly important because of the renewed emphasis on trustworthiness for leaders in recent years. A self-questionnaire about trustworthiness is likely to suffer from distortion and denial because most people consider themselves to be honest and trustworthy.

Leadership Skill-Building Exercise 2-1: Enthusiasm, Optimism, and Warmth on the Job

A major challenge for the person who plays the role of the CEO in this scenario is to project enthusiasm, optimism, and warmth even thought the company's existence is being threatened. The exercise sends the message that the grave competitive threat must be met with careful thinking, and that the leader going into a panic mode, such as being very negative, will not encourage careful thinking.

Leadership Self-Assessment Quiz 2-3: My Tendencies Toward Being a Proactive Personality

This quiz gives the student an opportunity to think about one of the most important aspects of providing leadership to others—being proactive. Without being proactive, it is difficult to provide direction to others. The stastements in the quiz help provide insight into the idea that small, everyday actions are part of proactivity, such as statement 8: "I look around for good opportunities that woujld help me in my career or personal life."

Leadership Self-Assessment Quiz 2-4: The Personal Resiliency Quiz

It is useful for people to think about their level of resiliency because virtually every successful person has to overcome adversity at some point in his or her career. Also, there appear to be a growing number of books and articles about the resiliency of leaders.

Leadership Skill-Building Exercise 2-3: Group Feedback on Leadership Traits

A cursory look at this exercise suggests that it is a form of what was referred to in the past as sensitivity training. This exercise, however, requires all positive feedback, thus decreasing the chances of emotional damage. We believe there is little risk of a participant's being judged as having no leadership traits or characteristics. (This would constitute very negative feedback.)

Leadership Skill-Building Exercise 2-4: My Leadership Portfolio

Reflecting on traits is valuable because it can point to specific areas for development. For example, many people need to search around to find as aspect of their field they might be passionate about.

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Leadership Skill-Building Exercise 2-5: Analyzing the Traits, Motives, and Characteristics of a Well-Known Leader

This exercise provides an opportunity to carefully observe the traits, motives, and characteristics of a leader and at the same time think through what these attributes mean in practice. A good example is what it takes for a leader to appear to have good cognitive skills. What kind of profound statement does he or she have to make to appear intelligent? The CEO of MasterCard made a statement a few years ago that seemed quite intelligent. He said something to the effect that the biggest potential market for his company was not present customers but the approximately 90 percent of the world that is still using cash.

COMMENTS ON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Which personality trait or traits in a leader have you found to be the most effective in dealing with you? Why?

   Answering this question can reinforce the idea that leadership traits have a big impact on leadership effectiveness. A germane example is that many people have been influenced in a positive direction by a leader who is warm and compassionate. As a result of being treated warmly and compassionately, the person might have exerted more effort on the job.

2. Suppose a college student graduates with a major for which he or she lacks enthusiasm. What might this person do about becoming a passionate leader?

   The bold approach would be for this person to make an early career switch into a field he or she cared about, such as a management major shifting to social work. A less bold approach would be to search for an activity in his or her field that is intrinsically exciting. For example, some people are passionate about preparing PowerPoint slides even though they are neutral or negative toward other aspects of the job. The person could then focus on these slides as a source of passion in his or her

3. What have you observed personally to be helpful about a leader displaying sense of humor?

   We assume that responses to this question will be quite varied. A frequent response, however, is that by the leader displaying a sense of humor, tension decreased during a difficult situation. For example, a group of customer service representatives might be concerned about a large number of negative Facebook and Twitter posts about the level of customer service. The manager/leader might open the group discussion about the problem, “I guess we are not as loved as we thought.”

3. Explain how being highly self-confident in a given leadership situation might not be an advantage.

   Leaders who are highly self-confident face several risks. One is that they do not listen carefully enough to input from subordinates because they think they have all the wisdom and information they need. Another problem with being highly self-confident is that it can lead to an image of arrogance which can lead to a negative perception by subordinates. In general, a leader showing some humility leads to a positive perception.

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4. What would lead you to conclude that a leader was non-authentic (phony)?

A leadership behavior that frequently prompts a perception of phoniness is when the leader brags to upper management about the group being outstanding. Also a leader who is charming toward superiors but arrogant toward subordinates is usually perceived as inauthentic. Yet, the same leader often demeans the group effort in his or her daily interactions with the group. Another indicator of phoniness is when the leader rarely ever criticizes a group member, yet gives that personal a very negative performance evaluation.

5. Under what circumstances do you think it is acceptable for a leader to lose emotional control, such as ranting, swearing, or crying?

Ranting does not have many fans, but many people think it is acceptable for a leader to swear to be convincing. Some leaders swear among groups that appear to swear frequently but do not swear in the presence of a group that swears much less frequently. (It might be true that swearing is more frequent in situations without customer contact, such as manufacturing.) A leader crying is likely to be perceived as acceptable mostly under extreme circumstances such as a group member suddenly dying.

6. What are your best-developed leadership traits, motives, and characteristics? How do you know?

Part of this answer could come from feedback the person has received, such as having received many compliments for being enthusiastic or having good problem-solving ability. Another part of the answer could come from introspection about leadership tasks the person has performed well. For example, the person might think he or she has high resilience based on having helped a group work through a high-pressure situation such as lacking funds.

7. Provide an example of a leader you have observed who appears to have good cognitive intelligence, yet who is lacking in practical intelligence.

It probably won't be easy for students to find a good example because most people who find their way into a leadership position have at least an average degree of practical intelligence. A possible example might be a highly intelligent inventor/entrepreneur who starts a company to manufacture and market his or her brilliant idea. However, this person has limited practical intelligence leading him or her to insult and turn away potential investors.

8. Which do you think is the most outstanding leadership trait, motive, or characteristic of the person teaching this class? Explain your answer.

The more humble instructors among us might feel a little embarrassment if informed of these answers. The important point is that the student supports his or her answer with some reasonable evidence. For example, a student might note that the professor/instructor is highly enthusiastic. The student should then give several examples of the manner in which the instructor expressed enthusiasm, such as raving about the results of a group project.

9. If leadership ability is partially inherited, to what extent is it sill worthwhile for a person without any family members who have held leadership positions to pursue a career as a high-level business leader?

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The aspects of leadership that are mostly hereditary relate to personality and cognitive factors that facilitate a person becoming a leader, such as having high energy and being intelligent. If no family members have become leaders it could be because they lacked the opportunity or did not capitalize on the opportunity. A person should therefore not be dissuaded from pursuing leadership positions just because no family members were leaders.

10. Many people who disagree with the trait approach to leadership nevertheless still conduct interviews when hiring a person for a leadership position. Why is conducting such interviews inconsistent with their attitude toward the trait approach?

    Conducting interviews is inconsistent with an anti-trait approach because a major purpose of the interview is to assess personal characteristics that would be related to job effectiveness. Another purpose of the interview is to assess interpersonal skills, which are closely related to traits. If the interview were simply used to discuss the terms of employment and to assess experience, then the interview would not be inconsistent with a trait approach.

PLAUSIBLE RESPONSES TO CASE QUESTIONS

Leadership Case Problem A: Store Manager, Ensign Jimmy Badger

This case illustrates the growing practice of retail-store chains to hire former junior military officers, as well as some of the challenges these former military officers might face.

1. Which leadership characteristics of Jimmy Badger are revealed in this case?

   Jimmy Badger is certainly assertive about such matters as parking lot cleanliness. He appears to be authentic is that he sticks to his principles. Badger's passion shows through as he attempts to set high performance standards for his store. His strong drive and achievement motive are also reflected in the high performance standards he is trying to establish.

2. To what extent should Jimmy modify his leadership approach?

   Jimmy might need to move more slowing in expecting such leaps in performance from store associates, at least as perceived by store associates. Top-management at the retail chain, however, probably likes what Jimmy is attempting to accomplish.

3. What do you think of the home-improvement store's positive bias toward hiring former military officers for its management training program?

   A positive bias toward former junior officers is most likely positive in most respects. The teamwork and discipline for former military officers is most likely an asset in the stores. However, people with other types of experience should not be excluded from consideration because if they are excluded they are being discriminated against. For example, a former restaurant manager or assistant manager might be effective in a store leadership role.

Associated Role Play

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A couple of focal points in this role play are notable. Lola Sanchez does not want to discourage Jimmy Badger, yet she sees room for improvement. Another focal point is whether proud Jimmy can take a little constructive criticism. Having been a military officer, he should be able to profit from criticism.

Leadership Case Problem B: Blunt Brittany

This case illustrates how a leader's personality tendencies can create problems in developing smooth working relationships with work associates, including her boss!

1. In which leadership trait or characteristic does Brittany seem to need the most development?

   Brittany needs to develop her sensitivity, which is part of emotional intelligence. Her insensitivity also manifests itself in insulting other such as calling Jeff an "old timer."

2 How would you rate Brittany's warmth and enthusiasm as a leader?.

   Most people would agree that Brittany has low warmth and sensitivity. This is her biggest problem and will probably limit her career as a leader of people.

3. What action do you recommend that Derek take to improve Brittany's leadership effectiveness?

   Brittany needs to read about sensitivity and emotional intelligence, and attempt to apply the ideas with an emphasis on tact, diplomacy, and sensitivity. She is advised also to attend a workshop on the same subject. Equally important, Derek should provide her feedback about how she is perceived, assuming he gathers such information.

Associated Role Play

Once again a role play touches on a key leadership and management responsibility, attempting to change the work behavior of a subordinate. In this instance the leader and the subordinate have quite different perceptions of the problem. Derek has observed that Brittany is insensitive, whereas Brittany believes that some of her direct reports are thin skinned. The information in Chapter 10 about coaching should prove helpful in doing a professional job in this role play.

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