

The Measurement of Leadership

Good leadership is important. But what is good leadership actually – and how can we measure it in order to develop effective leaders? Let`s take a psychologist`s perspective.

Mr. Hopton, as Principal Consultant at Saville Consulting, now a Towers Watson company, you are concerned with the measurement of leadership. But leadership is far from being a clear concept. So, what is a “leader” from your point of view?

We`d argue that effective leadership is broadly about the “3Ps” – Professional Leadership, People Leadership and Pioneering Leadership. Professional leaders are likely to be effective at leading in specialist contexts and providing professional or technical knowledge. People leaders are likely to be effective at managing a wide range of people across teams or functions. Lastly, Pioneering leaders are likely to be effective at driving success, change and growth. It is rare to see someone who is strong in all three areas but, when you do, they are likely to be among the most successful leaders. This 3P model was developed based on both our empirical research and our recent review of the existing research literature.

I`ve also previously joked that leadership is essentially about “organising your own demise”! This may seem a pessimistic way to view things, but it is actually backed up by research data. We know, for example, that effective leaders do typically have strong succession plans for the future and a clear idea about who the highest potential individuals are within their organization. Within our 3P model, these areas tend to be related to the concept of Pioneering Leadership.

What are the main challenges that leaders have to face in our turbulent times?

I actually think that our times are perhaps less turbulent than many people think! I`d argue that many of the challenges which leaders have to face today are somewhat more stable over time than people expect. If we look over recorded human history, it is interesting to see so consistently that every generation thinks that it`s the first generation to see unprecedented change and a complete departure from what all previous generations did! In many ways this quirk of human psychology is reassuring for leaders – much research suggests that a good leader now broadly has to do the same things that a good leader from earlier times would also have done. For example, effective leaders have probably always had the challenge of knowing how to deliver results, achieve goals and push things forward.

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That said, clearly the increasingly global nature of work is an important change in modern working practices. Organisations, teams and even reporting lines are now regularly distributed around the world so understanding how best to lead people who may be in very different geographical locations is certainly one of the challenges of modern leadership. Based on our data, effective People Leaders are likely to be best placed to cope with such challenges. Such People Leaders tend to know how to influence, empower and direct diverse groups of people.

It is also true that there is far more technological change and information available in the modern world. So leaders who possess the underpinning job knowledge and technical expertise to be able to filter appropriately through this sea of information are likely to be effective in many contexts. Our data suggest that effective Professional Leaders are likely to be well-placed to deal with such challenges.

Which competencies should leaders have in this context and how can they be structured? Put another way: Do you see some types of leaders?

There's certainly some value in the situational leadership approach which recognises that different people may be more or less suited to leadership in different contexts. Clearly, there are sometimes pre-requisites for effective leadership in certain contexts. For example, it may be imperative for a leader in a civic construction project to have some underpinning job knowledge and experience in building the kind of structure in question.

Nevertheless, there's also some evidence that people tend to behave consistently across situations and other evidence showing that combinations of behaviours and attributes can reflect a stable tendency to lead across dissimilar situations.

In terms of our own data, we've found that certain competencies are shown to be important for leadership effectiveness across different contexts, situations, countries and cultures. For example, behaviours such as making decisions, directing people, empowering individuals, taking action, seizing opportunities and pursuing goals seem to be important for leadership effectiveness across different circumstances. This is borne out in our empirical data, as well as the opinions of over 500 HR leaders whom we surveyed a few years ago across a dozen separate countries.

The implication is that we have identified three broad "types" of leadership which tend to be rather consistent and stable across contexts, situations, countries and cultures. These are the 3Ps which I've described above – Professional Leadership, People Leadership and Pioneering Leadership.

How can we measure leadership in this respect?

The 3P model of leadership described above can be measured using Saville Consulting's Wave Professional Styles assessment. Wave is a self-report online assessment of a person's workplace behavioural motives, talents, needs and preferences. Based on extensive empirical research linking this model to leadership effectiveness, we can be confident that the results of this assessment provide valid and rich insights into an individual's potential to lead.

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And how can companies use this data in a pragmatic way?

There is a dedicated Leadership Report available as an output from the Wave Professional Styles assessment. Companies can access a wealth of data about the leadership potential of a given individual by asking them to complete Wave Professional Styles and then using the output Leadership Report. This report includes results concerning the individual's potential to lead in each of the 3Ps, as well as providing information on a number of more specific leadership styles and making predictions about the individual's situational leadership effectiveness.

Thank you for your insights, Mr. Hopton



Falls das Video nicht korrekt angezeigt wird, können Sie sich das Experteninterview auch auf unserer Website unter www.towerswatson.com/de-DE/Videos/2015/Video-the-measurement-of-Leadership ansehen.

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Tom Hopton is Principal Consultant at Saville Consulting and a Visiting Fellow of Kingston University, London. He graduated from Oxford University as an Experimental Psychologist and is a consultant and trainer to a range of global clients. As well as having worked on the research and development of numerous workplace assessment tools Tom is a published author and a frequent presenter.

Tom joined Saville Consulting in 2007. In 2009 he became the youngest member of the Board of Directors and in 2010 relocated from the Jersey office to the London office to assume responsibility as R&D Manager. He has managed the development of numerous psychometric assessments, models and reports, including many of Saville Consulting's aptitude tests. He has also managed a variety of research activities including Project Epsom, a major long-term validation study of personality questionnaires.

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