



What personality traits make for successful leaders?

Strategic leaders are responsible, accountable and lead with a vision. They are critical to the success of a business and they are the lynchpin for the key stakeholders be it internal or external. The recent news of Bob Iger redeeming his old seat as CEO of the “Disney Company” was not just a hiring exercise but a brilliant move by Disney because they knew this person would give confidence to the board, investors and key stakeholders. This strategic positioning is testament to how important it is to have a leader with the right personality traits to succeed in a role.

Our personality governs our thoughts, emotions and behaviour, and because our personality is a stable psychological construct (more so the older we are) they are strong predictors of performance and potential. To recognize which personality traits has the highest chance of succeeding in a senior leadership role is valuable as well as understanding the intensity of a trait that will make them a successful leader.

Fortunately, research to identify and measure personality traits that could predict performance and potential at work was undertaken by \*Thomas International with a sample size of over 3,500 senior leaders across 50 countries. Their findings discovered six personality traits that make a successful senior leader at an optimum level (intensity). They split the traits into two groups with the first group being the stable traits and considered less likely to be influenced by industry nuances.

“Conscientiousness” was identified as the single most important trait for a leader because it combined self-discipline, organised approach to work and the ability to control impulses. Next was “adjustment”, because at an optimum level a leader with this trait would react well emotionally to stress (internal or external), pressure and relationships. Lastly “curiosity” which is as its namesake describes how someone would approach innovation, change, new information and methods. The ideal leader would be an individual who has this trait at an optimum level as a leader who is excessively curious will tend to chase every shiny new thing.

The following traits are not considered any less important but are influenced by the role itself, sector or industry. A CEO who has high “risk approach” may not be ideal within a care setting for example but may work well in a start-up. Likewise, senior leaders who have low levels of “ambiguity acceptance” would be successful within a business that has rigid hierarchies, processes and guidelines. Lastly “competitiveness” is about the desire to win, need for power and their reaction to winning and losing. It is important for a business to consider how competitive they want their leader to be because to have an extremely competitive CEO may not be healthy for a business, likewise to have a CEO who has a low competitiveness level may come across as timid or submissive which may not be good for key stakeholders outside of the business such as investors.

Statistically less than 1% of those taking the leadership personality assessment have all six traits in the optimum range, while 5% have one in three and 20% having one trait at the ideal level of intensity. The question all businesses should be asking is what personality traits do we need for our leaders?

\*Source: MacRae I, Furnham A, 2014, *High Potential: How to Spot, Manage and Develop Talented People at Work*. January