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COULD THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB BE A WOMAN?

HOW WOMEN DIFFER FROM
MEN AS LEADERS



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ABSTRACT

While there are far fewer women than men in leadership roles in organisations, their number is gradually increasing. This increase raises the question of whether, as leaders, women show different business attitudes than men. We used Hudson's Business Attitudes Questionnaire (BAQ) to analyse personality characteristics of over 65 000 men and women. Of that number, 152 were C-level women and 439 C-level men.

Although in the general population differences are small, they do exist. They show women to be more people-oriented and detail-conscious, and men to be more emotionally controlled and extraverted. Both C-level men and women show outspoken characteristics on the rather male dominant personality traits and on characteristics like result-orientation, strategic thinking and autonomy. C-level women, however, demonstrate some extra nuances in relation to openness and altruism, with younger women focusing more on altruism and older women focusing on openness.

These findings have vast consequences for organisations wanting to formulate a proper strategy to develop their future leaders—both men and women. The demographic evolution of the population will force organisations to pay more attention to what women have to offer. At the same time, the specific requirements of new generations of employees might also teach them that C-level women can offer extra added-value as leaders, potentially enhancing an organisation's leadership style.



Hudson European Research & Development Centre



As a strategic choice, Hudson invests widely and systematically in research & development. During the past 8 years, the company has expanded its reputable R&D centre of highly skilled professionals. The mission of this team is to develop innovative HR products and solutions to create a competitive advantage for organisations, as well as a positive candidate experience in times when talent is a scarce resource.

In addition to a team of experienced psychologists, Hudson's European R&D centre includes support and IT teams specialising in on-line and off-line software development. The centre is under the expert leadership of Etienne Van Keer, R&D Director, who has over 30 years' experience in selection, test development and assessment centre techniques. The R&D centre specialises in developing HR models, processes and tools for internal Hudson use, and activities for clients (private and public sector) on a European and global level.

In the current war for talent, diversity, generation Y, globalisation, increased mobility and rapid changes, developing those HR instruments showing the greatest possible added value for both the organisations and their (future) employees is the challenge of the R&D team.

INTRODUCTION

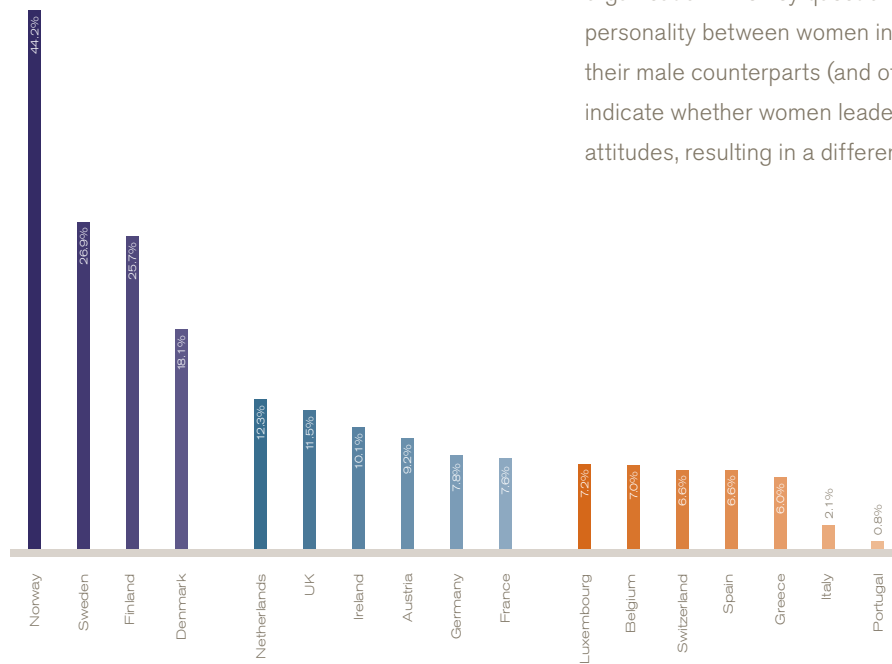
It is a well known fact that there are far fewer women than men in leadership positions in organisations. However, the percentage of women on boards in the top 300 European companies is gradually increasing: up 9.7% in 2008, 8.5% in 2006 and 8.0% in 2004.

Many studies have been undertaken to find out why women are still in a distinct minority when it comes to the top jobs. The goal of this study is not to answer this

question. Instead, this study looks at how women behave in leadership roles, and how their behaviour differs from that of their male counterparts. For example, do women leaders make more of a difference within an organisation than men? Do they have a different focus, a different leadership style, different business attitudes? And consequently, would having more women leaders make a big difference?

To add critical knowledge to analyses of women's functioning as leaders, we evaluate here whether women's key business attitudes differ from those of men, and whether any identified differences are an asset or a barrier to women who want to climb the ladder in an organisation. The key question is: "Is there a difference in personality between women in leadership positions and their male counterparts (and other women), that could indicate whether women leaders have different business attitudes, resulting in a different leadership style?"

GRAPH 1
Percentage of board seats held by women¹





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

HUDSON'S BUSINESS ATTITUDES QUESTIONNAIRE (BAQ)² WAS USED AS A BASIS FOR THIS STUDY.

Hudson's European R&D centre developed the BAQ based on the widely recognised "Big 5" personality model and applied it to the work environment. This questionnaire is used by Hudson consultants and by Hudson client organisations in assessment and development centres worldwide. It measures 25 aspects of an individual's business attitudes which predict professional performance.

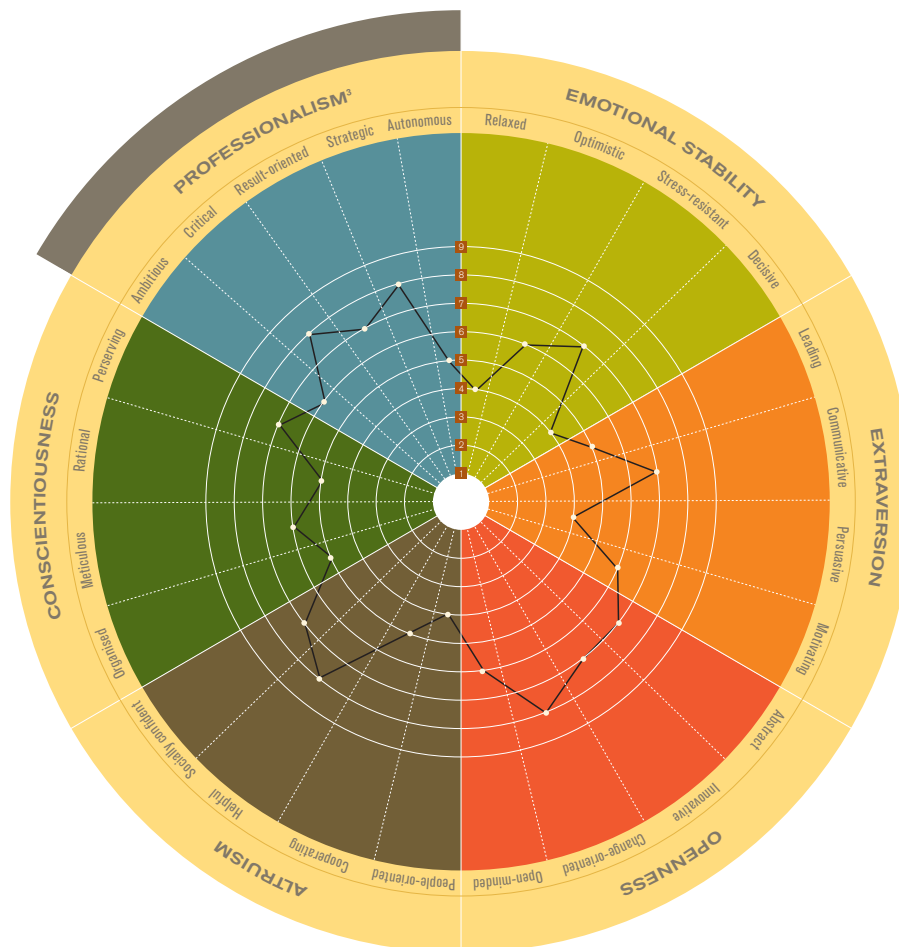


DIAGRAM 1
Business Attitudes Questionnaire: the big 5 (+1 professional domain)





The BAQ has been proven, through hundreds of selection and talent management programmes to give valuable insights into career development and transition, coaching, conflict handling and putting teams together. The unique combination of an absolute measurement (the “normative section” of the questionnaire) and a relative measurement (the “ipsative section” of the questionnaire) of the individual’s personality has proven especially valuable. In the normative section, respondents personality characteristics are compared with those of a reference group of relevant people and indicate where they stand. In the ipsative section, respondents determine their relative strengths and weaknesses across the different personality dimensions.

SAMPLE POPULATION

Over 65 000 men and women in Europe, Australia and the USA completed Hudson’s Business Attitudes Questionnaire (BAQ) in different types of procedures such as selection, assessment and development centres, coaching, succession planning, etc. From that number, 591 international executives in senior leadership positions were asked to complete the BAQ. Of the executives who took part, 152 were women and 439 men.

This research enables us to compare average scores on the different dimensions of the BAQ for different types of groups:

- | Men and women in general
- | Men and women in senior leadership positions

- | Women in senior leadership positions and women in non-leadership positions
- | Men in senior leadership positions and men in non-leadership positions

Comparing these groups let us see whether significant differences exist. It also sheds a specific light on what characterises managers in senior leadership positions.

First, we investigate the difference between men and women in general. This is our benchmark. Next, we investigate the difference between women and men in general and women and men holding leadership positions. Finally, we investigate the difference between men and women in leadership positions.

When comparing populations of the size of this study almost every difference becomes statistically significant. The main problem reported in literature is that the p-value depends essentially on two things: the size of the effect and the size of the sample (Thompson, 1999⁴; Cohen, 1994⁵; Harlow et al., 1997⁶).

We therefore decided to use the effect size methodology (Robert Coe, 2002⁷) in order to determine differences between groups. J. Cohen(1988⁸) defines an effect size of .20 as a small difference, .50 as an average difference and .80 as an important difference. In the following charts we will classify effect sizes of .20 to .39 as small differences (*), effect sizes of .40 to .59 as average differences (**) and effect sizes of .60 to +.80 as important differences (***).




BAQ, a scientifically sound questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire has been thoroughly investigated⁹. The internal consistency of the questionnaire shows alpha coefficients varying between .89 and .97 for the normative section and between .80 and .92 for the ipsative section. The parallel form reliability between the normative and the ipsative section shows coefficients varying between .53 and .82 (all statistically significant at 1% level). Split-half coefficients between the first half and the second half of the questionnaire vary between .72 and .92 for the normative section and between .60 and .85 for the ipsative section.

In order to determine to what extent the internal structure of the questionnaire accurately measures the “Big Five” personality factors, a factor analysis was performed. The varimax rotation resulted in 5 clearly identified “Big Five” factors, with loadings between .47 and .88, which is extremely high. The conceptual professional facets were of course not integrated in this analysis.

In order to establish the validity of the BAQ correlations were calculated with the results of 170 applicants on the NEO-PI-R2¹⁰. Significant correlations were found between the factors “Emotional Stability” (-.42 with neuroticism), “Extraversion” (.53 with extraversion), “Openness” (.44 with openness) and “Conscientiousness” (.47 with conscientiousness). The factor “Altruism” being mainly professionally oriented did not correlate with agreeableness, the latter being mainly clinically oriented.

In a study of 57 applicants for a commercial organisation, BAQ gave significant correlations with an evaluation of general job fit (.35** for openness and .39** for conscientiousness) and end year rating (.30 for conscientiousness). It also turned out that most of the facets of openness and most of the facets of conscientiousness correlated significantly with general job fit and that all facets of professionalism correlated with end year rating. We also discovered that openness, conscientiousness and professionalism, along with several of their facets significantly distinguished high performers from low performers.

In the UK and Ireland we compared the results of 88 applicants during different selection procedures with their results on OPQ32¹¹. We managed to find highly significant correlations for all BAQ facets with their equivalent scale in OPQ32. More details can be found in the internationalisation appendix to the BAQ manual.





WOMEN VERSUS MEN: DIFFERENCES EXIST BUT ARE GENERALLY SMALL

WE START BY COMPARING MEN AND WOMEN IN GENERAL. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THOSE TWO GROUPS CAN BE CONSIDERED AS THE BASIC ANALYSIS, AGAINST WHICH ALL OTHER COMPARISONS CAN BE PROJECTED.

The diagram on the following page shows the results. The average of the general population (64,399 people) is set as benchmark with a stanine score of 5¹². This same benchmark is also used in the analyses reported further on.

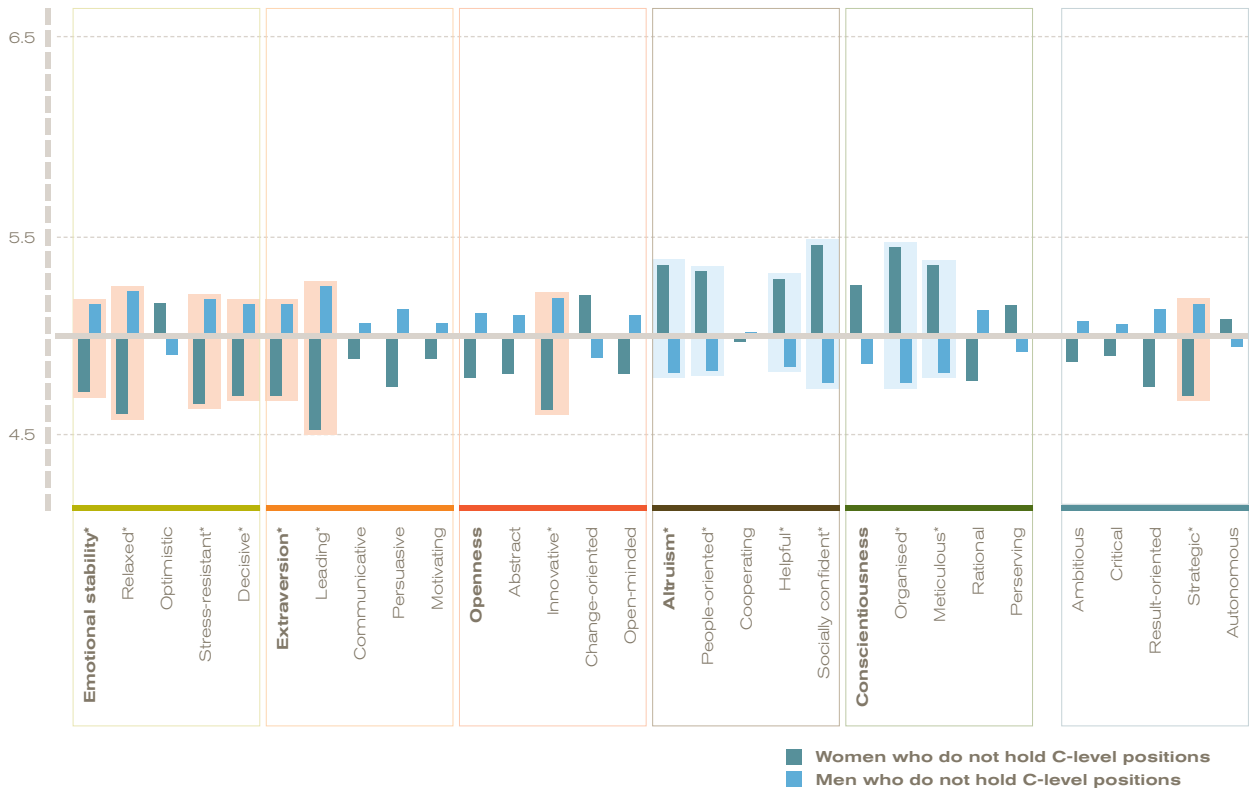
As we can see, differences between men and women exist, but they are small.

In general, women appear to score higher on personality characteristics of altruism and conscientiousness. They describe themselves as more people-oriented, helpful and socially confident than men. They also believe themselves to be more organised and meticulous.

When it comes to emotional stability and extraversion, women's scores are lower. Women describe themselves as less relaxed, stress-resistant and decisive. They see themselves more as followers than as leaders and consider themselves as less innovative and strategic.

If we can draw conclusions from these small differences, we could say that women pay more attention to people-related issues and quality performance, while men seem to attach more importance to an effective control of emotions and an extraverted attitude towards their environment.

DIAGRAM 2
Differences between men and women





MALE LEADERS SHOW A MORE EXTREME MALE PERSONALITY PROFILE

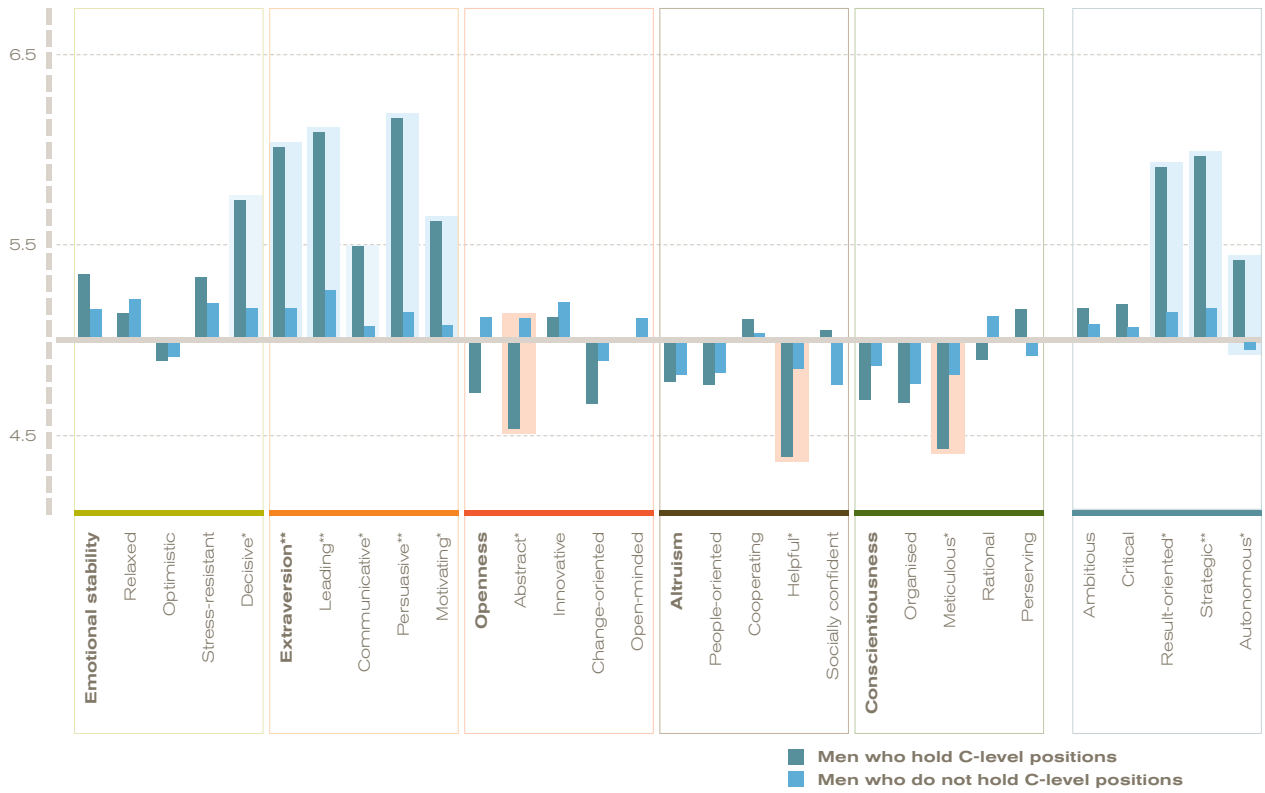
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE SMALL DIFFERENCES WE DISCOVERED, WE WONDERED HOW MALE C-LEVEL LEADERS DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES FROM MEN IN GENERAL.

What is immediately apparent is the fact that C-level men show significantly higher scores in the domain of extraversion. This underlines their strengths in leading, persuading and motivating people and, to a certain extent, in communicating. They also show relatively high scores in decisiveness, result-orientation, strategic approach and autonomy.

Looking at the personality traits on which C-level men score lower than average men, we see that they describe themselves as less focused on the factor of openness, being less abstract-thinking, and paying less attention to the personality traits of helpfulness and meticulousness.

However, what is most noticeable is that C-level men tend to attribute mainly “typically” masculine characteristics to themselves, while completely ignoring the more “typically” feminine aspects. They describe themselves as leaders with a great deal of impact and strong personal opinions who are focused on achieving their long term objectives. They are less caring, and focus less on details, comparatively stronger areas of strengths of women.

DIAGRAM 3
Differences between men in leadership positions and men in general





WOMEN AT THE TOP: A MALE LEADERSHIP PROFILE WITH FEMININE NUANCES

A KEY FINDING OF THIS STUDY IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH C-LEVEL WOMEN LEADERS DIFFERENTIATE THEMSELVES FROM AVERAGE WOMEN.

As shown in the following diagram, women in leadership positions differ greatly from women in general. They have a much more pronounced personality profile that is almost the opposite of an average female profile. Like C-level men, C-level women position themselves very high on the factor of extraversion, showing important differences in leading, communication, persuasion and motivation. They also see themselves as strong in decision making and strategic thinking, and, to a certain extent in result-orientation and autonomy. However, they also show higher scores when it comes to openness, being open-minded and abstract thinking.

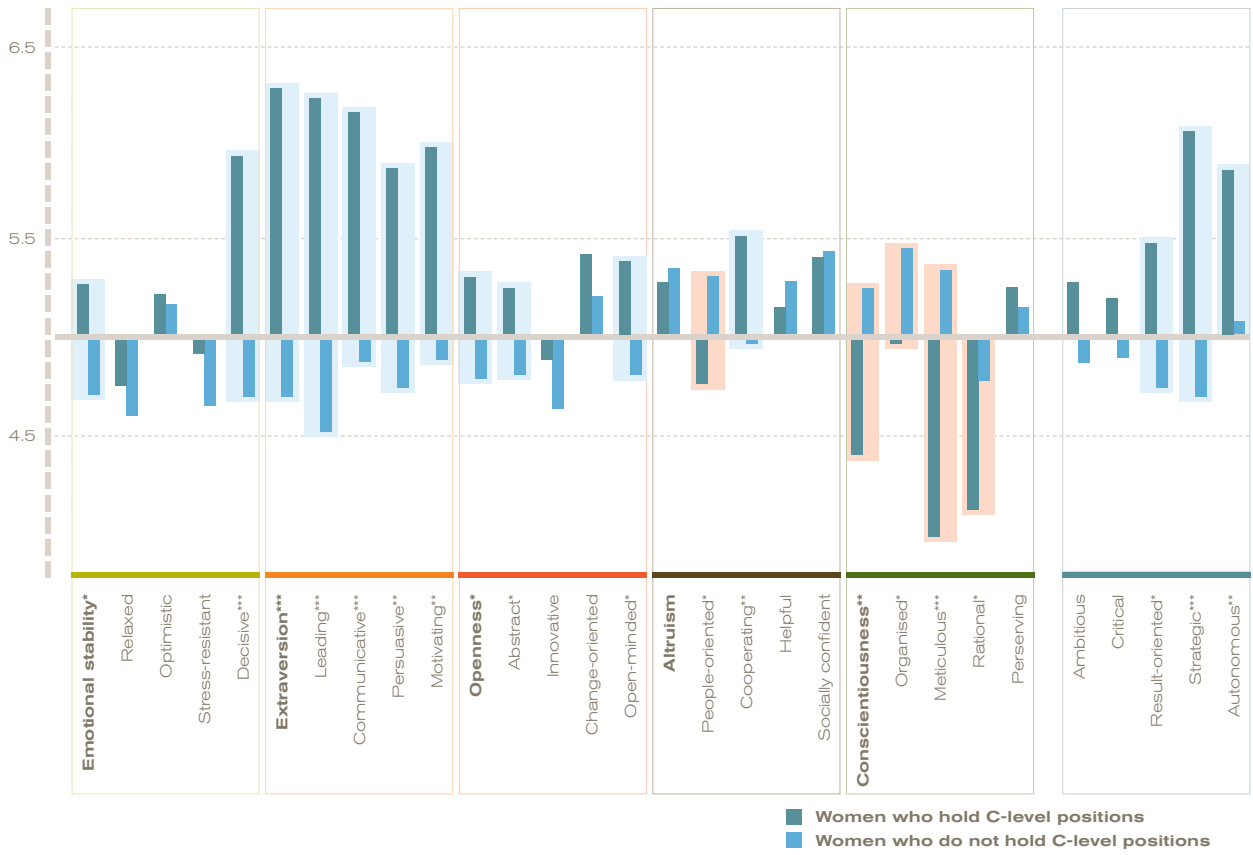
When looking at the more feminine characteristics, C-level women seem to score lower on altruism and conscientiousness compared with average women. While they view themselves as being rather co-operative, they are, at the same time, less people-oriented. They also describe themselves as less meticulous, rational and, to a certain extent, less organised.

This approach does not come without challenges. When we consider the literature, Gabriela Cora (2008¹³) confirms that “the discussion argues that women who act like their male counterparts in leadership positions are more prone to being disliked and cause stressful situations at work”.

Wolfram et al. (2007¹⁴) came to similar conclusions: “gender role discrepant female leaders (i.e. autocratic) got less respect than gender role discrepant male leaders (i.e. democratic). But no difference was found with regard to gender role congruent female (i.e. democratic) and male (i.e. autocratic) leaders”.

It could therefore be argued that C-level women might enjoy more respect in the workplace if they developed their more typically female personality traits.

DIAGRAM 4
Differences between women in leadership positions and women in general





C-LEVEL MEN AND WOMEN: TWO OF A KIND?

FROM THE DIAGRAMS WE HAVE DISCUSSED BEFORE, WE COULD DRAW THE CONCLUSION THAT C-LEVEL WOMEN AND MEN SHOW A SIMILAR PERSONALITY PROFILE WITH MAINLY TYPICALLY MASCULINE CHARACTERISTICS. ON CLOSER EXAMINATION HOWEVER, THINGS ARE NOT QUITE SO SIMPLE.

Looking at the mainly male personality characteristics, we could say that there are a many similarities between the personality profiles of C-level men and women. But a number of very interesting elements emerge.

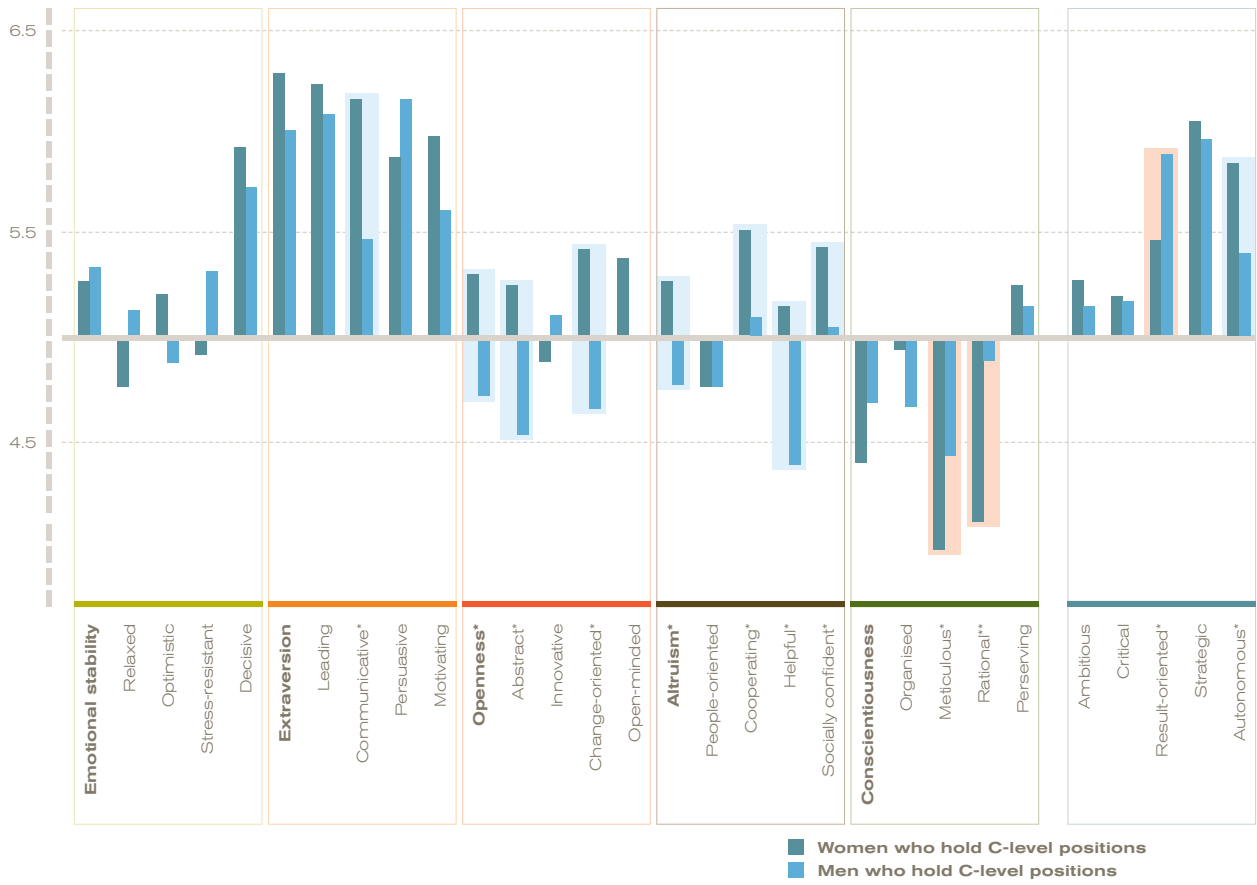
Compared to C-Level men, women indeed tend to focus less on immediate results; take the bigger picture into account and take an autonomous stand. They keep a distance from the concrete details of day-to-day issues; have a conceptual view of things, and appear to be more open to change. They also pay more attention to open communication in the organisation, and adopt a more "human" approach with room for co-operation, mutual support and sociability.

These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Eagly, A. H. and Johnson, B. T. (1990¹⁵). These authors did not find any evidence for the gender-stereotypic expectation that women lead in an interpersonally-oriented style and men in a task-oriented style. This is in line with the previous that show that both men and women leaders focus on having a strong impact and go for the strategic objectives that need to be achieved.

However, the authors also found that women tend to adopt a style that is more democratic or participative, and less autocratic or directive than men. This is again in line with our results, which show higher altruism scores for women.



DIAGRAM 5
Differences between men and women in leadership positions





HOW WOMEN BECOME LEADERS, FROM WARM TO MINDFUL

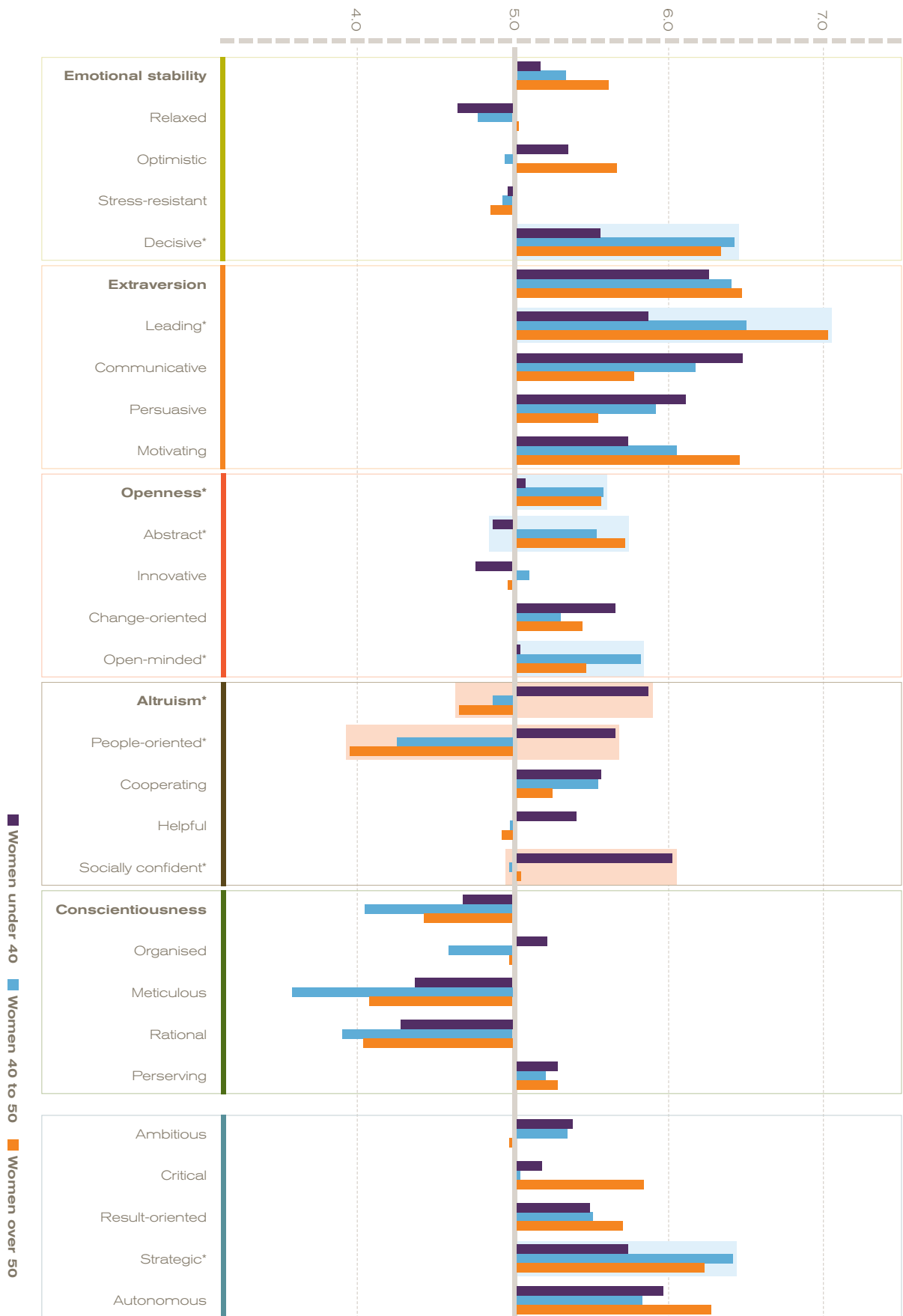
IT IS ALSO INTERESTING TO INVESTIGATE AGE DIFFERENCES IN THESE GENERAL TENDENCIES. IN THE DIAGRAM ON THE NEXT PAGE WE SHOW THE RESULTS OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ACCORDING TO THREE CATEGORIES OF AGE: BELOW 40, BETWEEN 40 & 50 AND ABOVE 50.

The results clearly show that younger feminine leaders are more socially confident, show more warmth and altruism, and use a more democratic, participative style of leadership, while also scoring lower on decisiveness and leading. Senior women leaders focus more on intellectual aspects, such as abstract thinking, strategic thinking and open-mindedness and are as such more mindful.

It seems that younger women leaders mainly adopt a leadership style that makes them favourable (warm and mindless, i.e. they score higher on altruism and lower on openness), whereas senior women leaders mainly adopt a favourable and effective leadership style (cool and mindful, i.e. they score lower on altruism and higher on openness).

This is an interesting result. Kawakami, White, & Langer (2000¹⁹) found that "to be most favourably evaluated, female leaders should be mindless and warm. However, [...] in order to be evaluated both favourably and effective, female leaders should be mindful and cool."

DIAGRAM 6
Differences between women in leadership positions according to age






Are personalities set in stone by the age of 30?

The results of our survey raise the question of whether C-level managers already showed their current personality profile at the start of their careers.

Traditional theory would certainly assert that personality no longer evolves after the age of 30. According to Gendlin E. T., (1964¹⁶):

“... it could be said that, far from explaining personality change, theories have been endeavouring to explain and define personality as that which tends not to change when one would expect change.”

More recent research however clearly shows that personality characteristics can further evolve, as argued by Bhattacharya, S., (2003¹⁷), Heatherton T. F. & Weinberger, J. L., (Eds.), (1994¹⁸).

In the context of the important HR issue of how to develop high potentials (both women and men) for future leadership roles, it would be interesting to know what would make people develop towards these roles. Bhattacharya, S., (2003¹⁷) leaves the question open:

“There could be socially prompted changes where a person changes to keep up with the world around them. Or you could also imagine people’s personalities developing to allow them to take on those roles.”

Based on our experience in development centres realised for organisations worldwide, we would argue that the latter hypothesis is the right one and that therefore organisations can only win by investing heavily in the development of their workforce to prepare their top potentials for future leadership roles.



Age differences: A question of generation or experience?

It is often suggested that differences exist between generations (Generations X and Y as opposed to the generation of Baby Boomers). Our data seem to suggest that in the general population younger people are slightly more people-oriented and ambitious, but rather less extraverted, leading, motivating and strategic.

When looking at C-level leaders, we discover a totally different picture. Young C-level men seem to show a more outspoken profile, while young C-level women seem to profile themselves as more altruistic. More experienced women on the contrary show more openness (especially when it comes to abstract thinking), decisiveness and leading capacities.

A question to ask here is to what extent young C-level men tend to overestimate themselves (the sky seems to be the limit), while young C-level women show a more realistic and authentic image of themselves.

The data at our disposal does not give an answer to this question. A longitudinal study would be necessary in order to find a conclusive answer.

	Men Global	Women Global	C-Level Men	C-Level Women
Emotional stability			*	
Relaxed			*	
Optimistic			*	
Stress-resistant				
Decisive			**	
Extraversion				
Leading			**	
Communicative				
Persuasive			*	
Motivating			*	
Openness			*	
Abstract			*	
Innovative				
Change-oriented			*	
Open-minded			*	
Altruism			*	
People-oriented			*	
Cooperating			*	
Helpful				
Socially confident			**	
Conscientiousness				
Organised				
Meticulous			*	
Rational				
Perserving				
Ambitious			*	
Critical			*	
Result-oriented			*	
Strategic			*	
Autonomous				

 Young: lower score  Young: higher score

TABLE 1
Differences according to age



OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS FACE A DOUBLE BIND “SYNDROME”

Our findings show that women in leadership positions run the risk in day-to-day life of not having a clear identity in the eyes of others. This is because they do not fully match the stereotype of a woman, nor that of a leader, (usually a man), at the top of an organisation.

In the eyes of the average woman, women who are leaders appear to behave more like men, because they take the lead and are career and result-oriented. But in the eyes of their male colleagues, they behave like women, paying more attention to intangible, emotional elements, like communication, co-operation and human well-being. Women in leadership roles have to face this prejudice, especially in a context where these roles are male dominated and the typically feminine characteristics seem to be less usual in leaders.

In addition, they have to deal with the disadvantage that behaviour which fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role (and thereby violates the typically female personality profile) is evaluated less favourably when this behaviour is enacted by a woman (Eagly & Karau, 2002²⁰).

This seems to put women leaders in a double-bind situation: If they act like a leader, using typically men characteristics, they are perceived as being hard, because they act against the typically female personality profile. If they act like a woman, they are perceived as being inefficient, since typically male personality traits are perceived as more effective leadership characteristics.

Finally, if we evaluate the effectiveness of leaders in relation to their personality characteristics, female leaders seem to give up some of the typically feminine personality characteristics that could be useful in a leadership role. For instance, women in general score higher on the factor “conscientiousness” compared with men. Women in leadership roles, on the contrary, score lower than their male counterparts and much lower than the average women. This could be considered as very significant, since “Conscientiousness” is, amongst the Big 5, the factor which correlates both with effectiveness (Antonakis & House, 2004²¹) and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 2006²²).

WITH WARMTH AND MINDFULNESS FEMALE LEADERS CAN OVERCOME THE DOUBLE BIND

The incongruence between the typically female “warm” personality profile and the typically “cold” male personality profile of a leader seems to create difficulties for female leaders. In particular, younger women seem to be confronted with this double bind: They show more warm behaviour than more experienced colleagues. While this is perceived as being favourable, they have to find a way out of this double bind in order to be perceived as effective as men in leadership positions.

It seems that senior women have found the solution. They show less warm but more mindful behaviour. And research has shown that mindful but cool behaviour is perceived as both favourable and effective. So, female leaders do not have to stay within the warm role. Instead, they are free to adopt more cool behaviour because they will still be positively perceived and seen as genuine as long as they are mindful (Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000²³).

RESEARCH REVEALS UNIQUE FEMININE TRAITS TO SUCCEED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Despite the double-bind C-level women have to face, their unique business attitudes give them great opportunities to make a difference. This because their overall personality profile can be linked with a leadership style that seems to be more effective (Antonakis & House, 2004²⁴; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003²⁵; Bass B. M., Avolio B. J., Atwater L, 1996²⁶).

According to these authors, women who are leaders (compared with their male counterparts) exhibit more optimism and excitement about goals and future states (Inspirational motivation), focus more on development and mentoring of followers, and pay attention to individual needs (Individualised consideration). These are important aspects of the so called “Transformational leadership style”.

Compared with men, they show a less transactional leadership style and a less laissez-faire leadership style. The implications of these findings are more than encouraging for female leadership, because all of the aspects of the leadership style in which women exceed

men relate positively to leaders’ effectiveness, whereas all of the aspects in which men exceed women have negative or no effect on effectiveness.

THIS DOES NOT IMPLY THAT WOMEN ARE BETTER EQUIPPED AS LEADERS THAN MEN

The question of whether female leaders are more effective than their male colleagues probably needs a more nuanced answer. Whether the business attitudes of female leaders are indeed more effective depends to a large extent on the organisational context. For example, Carless (1998²⁷) has drawn attention to the “gender congeniality” that focuses on the fit between gender and particular leadership roles (Pounder & Coleman, 2002²⁸).

It may be that certain organisations or situations (such as the military), require a more masculine personality or style, and are therefore more congenial to men. Equally, the leadership of educational institutions or hospitals could be more congenial to women.

IT SUPPOSES HOWEVER ORGANISATIONS TO GO FOR A DIFFERENT APPROACH

In rapidly changing, high-technology environments the effective management of human talent is key to success. This requires many organisations to adopt flatter, less centralised, more flexible structures and to develop participatory, open-communication strategies (e.g. Drucker, 1988²⁹, Hitt, Keats, & DeMarie, 1998³⁰, Volberda, 1998³¹) and talent management strategies.

These perspectives emphasise democratic relationships, participatory decision making and team-based leadership skills that are more in line with the typically feminine personality profile or leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990³²).

To the extent that organisations shift from a more traditional view of leadership towards a more democratic and participative view, women should have more opportunities to enter into leadership positions. Organisations should think about which business attitude and leadership style they expect from their leader(s) and as a consequence, consider whether the right man for the job might, in fact, be a woman.



BAQ, an effective tool in assessment and development of leaders

The Business Attitudes Questionnaire developed by Hudson's European R&D Centre can identify major characteristics for C-level leaders, both men and women. The instrument also appears to be sensitive enough to identify nuances that could make the difference in an organisation.

The leadership characteristics identified allow us to develop an effective benchmark profile that can be used in both assessment and development situations.

In assessment situations, the profile helps to clearly identify leaders who show real possibility for effectiveness in their future role. A word of caution, however: the profile must be completed to carefully measure the critical competencies of potential candidates in relation to their future role. Indeed, an optimal personality profile that is not underpinned with the necessary background, experience and competencies would never lead to success.

In a development and coaching context the personality profile helps identify key characteristics that could be further developed. This would help leaders establish a management style that is optimally tailored to the situation in which they operate. Here too, extra information, based on professional cases or other instruments, would help achieve optimal results in the coaching process.



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RESOURCES

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