

Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns of Effective Senior Leaders

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This article identifies seven strong (high scores) and seven weak (low scores) motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) and how they impact leadership effectiveness.

In considering the topic, we note three qualifiers:

- “Leadership” and “Management” are two related, but different functions. In one sense, most great leaders are also good managers, but many great managers do not necessarily make good leaders. The patterns in this article are related to *leaders*; that is, to people who occupy the positions at the top

levels of organizations and who are responsible for managing vision, developing strategy, and overseeing execution at the system level.

- Some of the differences among leaders relate to the fact that different roles (e.g., marketing vs. quality vs. operations) represent different contexts and, therefore, have different requirements in terms of MAPs. There may even be different requirements (i.e., motivational and attitudinal patterns) for the same role in different organizations. So, a one-size-fits-all model or profile would not apply to all settings or roles.
- Sometimes effectiveness is a result of having a strong motivational and attitudinal pattern that drives behavior and in some cases of having a weak pattern that does not provide motivation that would interfere with leading effectively.
- Finally, there are often multiple patterns that, in combination, trigger the motivation to behave in certain ways. In one section we talk about the *Group Responsibility* and *People* patterns together. Otherwise, we focus on individual patterns and their relationship to leadership behavior.

As a result, we have created two lists for effective leaders—one related to the strong patterns that tend to correlate with effective leadership and the other containing patterns that tend to be low or weak in effective leaders.

Basis for the Lists

The lists below are a product of several years work with leadership effectiveness and development in American organizations. Since culture can be a powerful variable in determining what patterns are typical in effectiveness in a role, the conclusions below are not likely to have a global application. Regardless, the framework and rationale provide the reader with a basis for determining the corresponding patterns for effectiveness in their respective organization and/or country culture.

Since 2002, we have assessed several hundred leaders' MAPs and leadership behaviors. Most of the leaders were in large businesses, but some came from government agencies, not-for-profit institutions, education, small companies, and start-ups. In this case, the lists are a product of our analysis of business leaders including some data from a research project involving the CEOs from Baldrige Award Winning Organizations.¹

Leadership and Strong Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns (High Scores)²

Strong MAPs (high scores) are important as the “upstream” drivers of behavior related to effective leadership. These represent the seven most important strong patterns based on our research and experience.

Goal Orientation

Americans tend to score high on Goal Orientation. Most effective leaders score in the upper range or above the standard group. Leaders in most contexts want to focus on and pursue goals.

Breadth

The Breadth pattern is a measure of the extent to which the individual wants to see the “big picture.” Effective leaders generally score high to very high on the Breadth pattern. They want to pay attention to the larger landscape of the organization or business.

Future

There are three Time Orientation patterns. The one where most effective leaders score differently is on *Future*. Leaders tend to want to pay more attention to the long view than do others.

Power

The *Power* pattern is an indication of the extent to which a leader wants to be in charge and wants to exercise power and authority. The most effective leaders do not tend to score extremely high or extremely low on this pattern. In this case, a mid-range score on this pattern is more typical of effective leaders.³

¹ Larson, Milan D., Latham, John R., Appleby, Charles A., and Harshman, Carl L. (2012) “CEO Attitudes and Motivations: Are They Different for High-Performing Organizations?” *Quality Management Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 55-69.

² For the purposes of this article, high and low will refer to the “Relative Percent” score; that is, the relationship of an individual's absolute score to the range of the standard group. See Appendix A for further explanation.

³ There is an additional interpretation of McClelland's Power Need. It pertains, in the case of a high score, to someone who wants to build a powerful team or organization. This interpretation requires information from and about the individual leader.

People & Group

These two patterns seem closely related in effective leaders. The *People* pattern is one of the interest filters that define the focus one wants in his or her work. A moderate to high score on this scale indicates that the leader wants to deal with people as part of the work role.

The *Group* pattern is an indication of the extent to which the individual wants to have contact with people as part of the job. Most leaders will want moderate to high contact with people in the course of performing the role.

Evolution

This is one of the three scales that provide an indication of the leader's orientation to change. A high score on the *Evolution* scale, which is typical of effective leaders, indicates a motivation for planned, incremental change. We sometimes call this a "continuous improvement" pattern.

Shared Responsibility

This is one of the two patterns (the other being *Sole Responsibility*) that provide an indication of the individual's motivation related to responsibility. The *Shared* pattern indicates a motivation to collaborate and work with others (team environment); that is, to share responsibility. There will be a range of scores among leaders on this scale. We find, however, that the more effective leaders—especially in team-oriented cultures—will score from mid-range to high on this scale.

Leadership and Weak Motivational and Attitudinal Patterns (Low Scores)

Sometimes a low or weak pattern is important so that the motivation does not conflict with the behavior required to be effective. Here is our list of the seven critical low patterns.

Convinced by Doing

There are four data channels that provide an indication of how the leader wants to be convinced. The most consistent finding in these patterns is that effective leaders tend to score low on being convinced by doing something. They do not want to try or "test drive" something to be convinced.

Use

The *Use* pattern is one of three that describe how a leader wants to distribute his or her energy among three work activities—the other two being understanding the work (*Concept*) and organizing it (*Structure*). A low score on the *Use* pattern compared to the other two is an indication that the leader is not motivated to actually do the work, but rather to understand and organize it. (Leaders with a high *Use* pattern often reflect either "ready-fire-aim" behavior or want to be near the work and, as such, may micro-manage it).

Activity

This is one of the "Interest Filters" that indicate what the leader wants in his or her job. The *Activity* pattern provides a measure of the extent to which the leader wants a lot of action or activity as part of the job. Most effective leaders will score low on this scale; that is, they do not need a lot of activity in their work. It is not necessarily an indicator of lower effectiveness to be higher on this pattern.

Individual Motives⁴

This pattern provides an indication of the leader's desire to make decisions based on personal criteria. While leaders tend to score toward the high end of the standard group, many of the most effective leaders will score lower (mid-range) on this pattern. We note, however, that most effective leaders do not tend to score extremely low on this pattern.

Tolerance

This norms or rules pattern provides an indication of the extent to which the leader is motivated to deal with others whose rules are different than their own. The fact that most effective leaders score in the low or very low range on this pattern is an indication that they want to deal with (surround themselves) with others who share their "rules." If there is a variation from the general range for effective leaders, it is toward the mid-range rather than toward extremely low.

Sole Responsibility

In the previous section (high patterns), we identified *Shared Responsibility* as one of the patterns on which effective leaders tend to score higher than others. In this case, the companion pattern—*Sole Responsibility*—is one on which effective leaders tend to score lower than others.

Depth

The last pattern in this list is also a companion to one of the patterns in the high list above (Breadth). Effective leaders tend to score low to very low on *Depth* indicating little motivation to pay attention to or deal with details.

Conclusion

On one hand, we have a lot of confidence in the summary above. It is based on dealing with hundreds of leaders in different organizations and is supported by data and research.

On the other hand, as noted earlier, one-size-does-not-fit-all.

Almost everyone will endorse that concept based on the fact that we are all different people. Even more, different situations call for different kinds of leadership. Taken to its extreme, the principle suggests that it is virtually impossible to identify the characteristics of effective leaders.

While we endorse the principle of diversity among individuals, we concurrently claim that it is possible to identify how motivational and attitudinal patterns (MAPs) vary by the nature of the leadership function. For example, we have worked with leaders in certain contexts (high risk, highly regulated) and find that the patterns of effective leaders, especially those who are closer to the work, tend to vary from some of those identified above. For example, some effective leaders in these environments may be higher on MAPs such as *Procedures*, *Problem Solving*, and *Past* than their counterparts in different kinds of organizations with different performance requirements.

⁴ LAB Profile and Standard Group data (US) indicate that the majority of managers in the U.S. score higher in Individual Motives. In this case, however, the most effective leaders scored lower on this pattern and higher on External Reference than other leaders or the U.S. 2007 Standard Group.

Such findings result in our cautioning organizations using this kind of information to be certain that you have an understanding of how patterns in your organization's leadership are related to excellence in that function. Some patterns seem to be universal (e.g., Goal Orientation, Breadth) while others may be less so (low Tolerance in organizations that require individuals to align with the leader's norms and higher Tolerance in organizations where diversity of thought or action is important).

Further, you may find important differences in certain roles versus others (e.g., marketing vs. quality). If you want a powerful tool to help you understand what patterns relate to effectiveness in your organization, consider developing a Model of Excellence.⁵ At the very least awareness of one's individual patterns, those of the "culture" of the organization, and those of the people with whom you deal (boards, customers, peers, direct reports, et al.) will be a powerful addition to your leadership toolbox.

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⁵ For more information about a Model of Excellence, see www.modelofexcellence.com.