

Leadership measured:
a review of the behaviours and competencies of leadership

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ABSTRACT

Research into which leadership attributes differentiate highly successful leaders from mediocre leaders has failed to excite popular or academic interest. When these attributes are recognised they are often played down and referred to as “soft skills”. Crosbie (2005) states that this is because leaders struggle to define these skills precisely as they seem intangible. For Crosbie (2005) the problem lies in defining leadership behaviours; because if people find leadership attributes hard to define it is no surprise that their focus will be on the more tangible “hard” results that are related to “hard” skills.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature relating to the leadership behaviours/competencies.

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Research into which leadership attributes differentiate highly successful leaders from mediocre leaders has failed to excite popular or academic interest. When these attributes are recognised they are often played down and referred to as “soft skills”. Crosbie (2005) states that this is because leaders struggle to define these skills precisely as they seem intangible. For Crosbie (2005) the problem lies in defining leadership behaviours; because if people find leadership attributes hard to define it is no surprise that their focus will be on the more tangible “hard” results that are related to “hard” skills.

The purpose of this paper is to present a review of the literature relating to the leadership behaviours/competencies that differentiate highly successful business leaders from their average counterparts. This paper adopts the assumptions that technical and base level behaviours/competencies are a given for any business leader to achieve at a task (Schroder 1989). This paper focuses on those high-level leadership behaviours/competencies that are deemed the key differentiating factors between high and mediocre performance.

Methodology

Considerable research has been conducted relating to the characteristics and behaviours/competencies that differentiate consistently highly effective business leaders; as a result there is no shortage of material to review, contrast and compare (Higgs 2002). A content analysis (Babbie 2006) of peer-reviewed literature was undertaken to ascertain the similarities and differences between a range of leadership behavioural models. The specific units of analysis (Babbie 2006) were individual behaviours, competencies or skills specified by the respective authors.

To evaluate the differing models and their specific behaviours/competencies each model will be compared with Schroder's 11 High Performance Management Competencies (HPMC) (1989).

The HPMC model was selected for the following reasons:

- It is a holistic model addressing aspects of leadership in general; including Strategic, Personal Interaction, Inspirational and Achievement orientated behaviours.
- The model has been thoroughly validated and is longitudinal in nature (Hunt 1995). It was specifically validated in a complex and dynamic environment that relates to the challenges faced by business today (Schroder 1989).

Each model of leadership presented will be evaluated in terms of content, applicability and measurability. The objective of this evaluation is not to identify new leadership behaviours/competencies but to draw together those behaviours and competencies that have been identified already and note common themes.

The benefit of this methodology lies in its ability to evaluate a very broad range of information that has already been collated rather than being limited to a particular aspect of business leadership. By taking a broad approach, rather than one that focuses on a particular region, industry or management level, it also leads to the development of a generic leadership model. This paper is limited in that, given the breath of leadership research and the volume of literature available, it will not be practical within the scope of this paper to review all published literature.

Overview of models reviewed

1. Schroder's High Performance Management Competencies (Schroder 1989)
2. Boyatzis's Leadership Competencies (Boyatzis 1982)
3. Development Dimensions International's (DDI) Common Executive Level Competencies/Dimensions (Byham 2000)
4. Yukl's Taxonomy of Leadership of Managerial Practices (Yukl 2002)
5. Sydanmaanlakka's Competence Tree of Leadership competencies (Sydanmaanlakka 2003)
6. Spencer and Spencer's model for superior performance (Spencer 1993)
7. Emotional Intelligence Leadership Competencies (Goleman 2002)

1. Schroder specifically seeks to identify a set of leadership competencies that positively and significantly differentiate the leaders of high performing versus mediocre business units (Cockerill 1992). Schroder's research was longitudinal and based on the performance of the subjects' work units rather than perceived individual performance. It has been used and expanded on by, among others, Cockerill (1993), Iverson (2000) and Spencer and Spencer (1993). As Schroder developed the model to assess and develop business leaders he ensured clarity of the individual behaviours and used a concise five point rating scale used to evaluate them (Hunt 1995).

2. Boyatzis' research, based on American Management Association data already collected, sought to identify general leadership competencies that identified high performing business leaders. His work has been referred to as seminal in this field (Hunt 1995) and has since been used by others including Schroder (1989), Spencer and Spencer (1993) and the Hay McBer consulting group. Boyatzis (1982) defined his competency framework putting each competency into a specific cluster of behaviours and relating their use back to McClelland's motivational preference model.

3. In the development of their taxonomy of leadership competencies DDI have focussed on characteristics that describe the knowledge, behaviour and motivations of individuals at all organisational levels (Byham 2000). The research used to develop the DDI competencies involved large subject populations within a large number of organisations. The outcome of the DDI research has been the development of a framework of distinct competencies without overlap (Byham 2000).
4. Yukl focused on developing a general rather than specific approach when identifying his 14 behaviour taxonomy of “Managerial Practices”. Yukl’s taxonomy has been developed primarily through factor analysis supported by judgemental classification to maintain continuity with earlier taxonomies and research (Yukl 2002). Yukl’s “managerial practices” are measured through the “Managerial Practices Survey”.
5. Sydanmaanlakka draws on previous research to identify a set of general leadership competencies that are appropriate for intelligent leadership (Sydanmaanlakka 2003). His results are presented in what he describes as “a Competence Tree of a Leader.”
6. Spencer and Spencer’s Generic Managerial Model of leadership competencies is based on 36 different managerial models covering a range of levels (first line supervisors to general managers) in a range of functions (e.g. production, sales, marketing, HRM) and environments (e.g. military, educational, health care, financial services) (Spencer 1993). Spencer and Spencer have developed a clear model of leadership competence that ranks competencies by importance.
7. Goleman (2002) suggests that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is essential for leadership success. EQ is an essential part of general leadership rather than a particular aspect of leadership. Goleman’s work, and EQ in general, have been gaining wider interest and acceptance in the last ten years (Kerr 2006).

Comparative Overview

Only the Sydanmaanlakka and Schroder models were developed with the environment in which business operates as a key parameter. Sydanmaanlakka (2003) attempted to develop the most appropriate “Intelligent Leadership” model with consideration for the future business environment. Schroder and Sydanmaanlakka both specifically recognised that the business environment was turbulent and chaotic. Also recognising a “complex dynamic” environment Cockerill (1993) conducted further validation studies that found the “more complex and dynamic the environment” the more important Schroder’s HPMCs became.

There are two elements of measurement considered in this paper; the clarity of the rating scale and the clarity of the behavioural/competency definitions. Each of the 11 competencies in Schroder’s HPMC model is distinct with no areas of overlap. The HPMC model is further supported by a very specific five point rating scale. The models developed by Boyatzis, DDI and Spencer and Spencer also lend themselves to accurate assessment and in particular, like the HPMC model can be applied using the behavioural observation method (BOM). The Yukl, Sydanmaanlakka and Goleman EQ models are not as quantifiable. The later two in particular, as they are attempting to measure such things as emotional states, are more open to interpretation. The impact of this interpretation is further amplified as they can only be measured with self assessment questionnaires rather than the BOM. See Appendix 1 for a comparison table.

Content Analysis

In terms of comparing overall models presented in this paper, Boyatzis’ is the only one that also covers all of Schroder’s competencies. While Boyatzis does not cover in detail Conceptual Flexibility, Information and Interpersonal Search, he does recognise they have a role to play for business leaders. In addition, Boyatzis also identifies three other behaviours/competencies: Accurate Self Assessment, Spontaneity and Self Control.

Given that Spencer and Spencer drew on the same data as Boyatzis it is interesting to note their model is least similar to that of Schroder. While Boyatzis puts little emphasis on Conceptual Flexibility and Interpersonal Search, Spencer and Spencer do not recognise these competencies at all. They also fail to recognise the need to present information and measure achievement.

Self Assessment is an area that both Goleman and Boyatzis identify specifically and Sydanmaanlakka makes reference too. Furthermore it appears this self awareness can be divided into two components, “ability self awareness” and “emotional self awareness”. The first component is essential to individuals understanding their own abilities, the second component is more difficult to quantify, it is about understanding our own feelings and how our emotional state might change in different situations. Understanding this emotional state should in turn help us to modify our behaviour to enhance our impact on the situation. This then relates to another competency identified by Boyatzis and Goleman, “Self Control”. In his description of Self Control Boyatzis (1982) notes “People with this trait consistently weight the costs and benefits to themselves, and to the social group, organisation or other system of which they are a part before expressing or acting on personal needs or desire”. This leads into what is generally termed by Goleman and others as emotional intelligence. This level of intelligence allows us to not only understand our own emotional state but also that of others. This again will help us to drive our behaviour in a direction that is more likely to have a desired impact in our relationships with others and our mutual achievement. Given the cross functionality and levels of co-operation required in organisations, it can be argued that emotional intelligence is of increasing importance in contemporary business environments. This is not to suggest that emotional intelligence will replace more traditional behavioural based competencies such as Schroder’s HPMCs, but it does suggest emotional intelligence will compliment the use of more traditional models. Sydanmaanlakka takes this approach a step further by considering the factors that affect one’s emotional state. Sydanmaanlakka specifically sets out to evaluate competencies around Physical Condition, Stress Management and Spiritual Condition. While these factors, and their ultimate

relationship with demonstrable behaviour, are very difficult to quantify it is reasonable to expect there would be some correlation between them.

The chart in appendix 2 plots the total number of matches with Schroder's 11 HPMCs from each of the six models reviewed. It has not taken into consideration whether the match is strong or weak, simply the total number of matches. Weighting the matches would produce a more valid result however even without this, a clear trend emerges.

Three HPMCs stand out as being included in all models evaluated, Concept Formation, Self Confidence and Proactivity. This infers that, above all else business leaders with the conceptual ability to understand their operating environment; the confidence in their ideas to express them; and the drive to take action to turn them into reality are the three characteristics that will differentiate mediocre from high performing business leaders. Furthermore, of these three HPMCs it is the Self Confidence and Action orientated behaviours that are most significant. Based solely on this it could be argued that confidence and action are more important than intellectual and strategic capability. However, intellectual and strategic ability, being the starting point for the right actions, at the right time and for the right reasons, should, logically, be the most important leadership competency. Arguably, this theory is flawed, and any action, is better than no action. Alternatively, much of the research may have been influenced by modern business's short term focus on results, currently exemplified by the increasingly high turnover of CEOs (Ambler 2005). The longitudinal nature of Schroder's research could explain why he places more emphasis on this area than many of the other models evaluated. This is an element of business leadership that warrants further research to better understand the impact of intellectual and strategic ability on short, mid and long term business performance.

It is also of value to consider those HPMCs that are least covered which are Information Search, Conceptual Flexibility, Interpersonal Understanding, Presentation, Impact and Achieving Orientation. The first two of these competencies relate directly to intellectual and strategic

ability; more specifically they relate to the quality of the information on which decisions are made and the flexibility with which the information is analysed and tested.

Given the flatter structures and emphasis on cross boundary team working of modern organisations (Hunt 1995), it is surprising that Interpersonal Understanding is not more widely recognised. It could be possible that organisations are not as flat or team orientated as is publicised (Ambler 2005), therefore diminishing the need for this competency. If this is the case it would support a need to focus on achievement over understanding of other's perspectives. However, a lack of understanding closely relates to interpersonal conflict (Van Gramberg 2006) and inefficiencies in communication. Therefore, this area warrants further research to better understand the relationship between this competency and individual and organisational performance.

Presentation and Impact having a low representation was also surprising. An explanation might be that the ability to communicate is taken for granted and it is therefore not measured quantitatively. Impact might also be a by product of people taking action; people are more likely to be influenced by others taking and directing action than they are when someone tries to convince them intellectually via a logical explanation. If this is the case then it too supports the importance of achievement orientated competencies over cerebral competencies. If it is not the case it suggests a leader who can influence intellectually is more likely to gain buy in and support than one who simply instigates and drives action. This is also an area that is worth further research, particularly in relation to a leader's ability to influence people.

Schroder's HPMC of Achieving Orientation relates specifically to the measurement of actions, to ascertain their impact on performance, to facilitate the specific modification of the actions to improve performance. It is this measurement element of achievement that is poorly covered by the other models evaluated. This could be that it is viewed as an element of cognitive ability, or, perhaps that it is viewed as a technical competence practiced by, for example, Accountants and

Financial Directors. This too, is another competency that affects performance and warrants further research.

Accurate self assessment of one's own abilities is a competency that both Goleman and Boyatzis identify. Schroder does not label it a competency but does make specific reference to it and advocates assessment centres as key tools to help facilitate it (Schroder 1989). If accurate self assessment is a leadership competency as opposed to a personal quality then the challenge is how to measure it accurately.

Understanding one's emotions and the impact they can have on behaviour is an area only raised by Goleman and Sydanmaanlakka. Goleman (2002) specifically refers to leaders being "attuned to their inner self, recognising how their feelings affect them and their job performance..." while Sydanmaanlakka (2003) refers to one's "...ability to managing mental energy ... in a positive way". Given that the relationship between how we feel (and related thinking) and how we act is going to affect performance, this is an important area of focus in relation to leadership effectiveness. However as this is an internal thinking process it becomes difficult to quantify and relate back to actual performance. While this may pose some challenges for research this is none the less an emerging and important aspect of leadership that deserves further exploration and quantification in relation to its impact on leadership performance.

Boyatzis and Goleman make reference to an ability to maintain self control; Boyatzis also notes Spontaneity which would appear incongruous with Self Control. Goleman's Self Confidence focuses more on a leader's feeling while Schroder's Self Confidence focuses more on the actions of the leader. It would be reasonable to assume there would be some correlation between the two, i.e. if people feel confident they are more likely to act in a confident manner. This could be the case between Boyatzis' Empathy and Schroder's Interpersonal Understanding, if people think about the perspectives of another they are more likely to take action to confirm their understanding.

As Schroder's approach focuses more on observable behaviour while Goleman's focuses on attitudinal state they must be measured using different approaches. Schroder's HPMCs can be assessed via Behavioural Observation Methods (BOM) including business simulations and work shadows, Behavioural Interviews (BEI), 360° Surveys and Self Assessment surveys. Because Goleman's EQ Leadership Competencies are based on the feelings and thinking of its subjects, i.e. their attitudinal state, the only true method of assessment is via Self Assessment Surveys. As a result Schroder's HPMCs can be assessed with a higher degree of validity to obtain more reliable data enabling the accurate development of benchmarks and standards. Also, from a practitioner's perspective, there is a wider range of assessment methodologies available to better meet client cost versus quality demands, for example an automated 360° Survey is a relatively cost efficient manner in which to assess the competencies across an entire and geographically diverse firm. An alternative for the assessment of senior executives might be using the BOM via business simulations or work-shadowing.

Of significant difference to all the other models reviewed are the competencies covered by Sydanmaanlakka in his Well-being cluster. Such competencies as Physical Condition, Spiritual Condition and Humbleness do not appear to be supported by hard data. Furthermore, logic is not easily applied; for example, it is difficult see how physical condition will affect the ability to lead in an environment that requires little or no physical ability. However, this is not reason to discount Sydanmaanlakka's Well-being competencies. "Eastern philosophies" have long espoused a whole of body and mind approach to the way we lead our lives (Bass 1990). While these competencies are difficult to quantify and relate to actual performance, further research to "demystify" them making the competencies and their impact more tangible, if not initially quantifiable, is certainly warranted. This in turn will drive their use by practitioners to aid leadership assessment and development and again promote further research.

Summary

This paper has argued that Schroder's HPMC is an effective generalist business leadership model. However, it could also be argued that perhaps Schroder, and the other models reviewed, have attempted to cover too much with their models. It could be that there are just three main areas of business leadership, being Conceptual, Confidence and Pro-activity. The alternative could be that researchers, being driven by the needs of business, have been attempting to define the competencies of leadership too narrowly. Highly effective leadership may need to include the other elements of Schroder's HPMCs and the emotionally intelligent competencies suggested by Goleman and Sydanmaanlakka. In summary there are four questions raised by this evaluation that are worthy of further research:

1. In the mid to long term what is the correlation between a leaders performance and their conceptual, self confidence and pro-active orientations?
2. What impact on a leader's performance does their ability to demonstrate Interpersonal Understanding have?
3. Is a leader's ability to influence others driven by their ability to demonstrate through their own actions or to put forward logical arguments?
4. Further qualification of the relationship and correlation between a leader's feelings, physical state, actions and performance?

While it is possible to quantify leadership capability, when there are more satisfactory answers to the above questions, both the researcher and practitioner, will find measuring the competencies/attributes of a leader more accurate. This in turn will have positive ramifications for both the selection and development of business leaders. This will allow a better match between the needs of an organisation and its environment and the attributes of individual and collective leadership teams.

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Appendix 1. **Content Comparison Competencies/Behaviours**

	Information Search	Concept Formation	Conceptual Flexibility	Interpersonal Search	Managing Interaction	Development Orientation	Self Confidence	Presentation	Impact	Proactive Orientation	Achievement Orientation	Other
Boyatzis												
DDI												
Yukl												
Sydanmaanlakka												
Spencer & Spencer												
Goleman EQ												



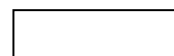
= Strong



= Average



= Poor



= Not Covered

Appendix 2 – Representation of competencies against Schroder’s HPMC’s

