Understanding the Personality of the Executive

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> *You must look into people as well as at them.*
> **—Lord Chesterfield**

The long-term success of a company depends on selecting the best senior managers and developing their fullest potential. There is no shortage of computerized surveys, standardized tests, 360-degree evaluations, and other instruments that aim to help select and cultivate the best. Yet experience attests that instruments alone fall short of doing the job. Human behavior in organizational settings is so complex that only a multidimensional approach that assesses the individual-organizational interface can come close to anticipating behavior over the long run.

In this chapter, we offer a comprehensive structural psychological approach to understanding the established continuity of the inner world of the executive and its influence on external behavior. This approach supplements traditional industrial and organizational approaches to leadership and executive personality.

STRUCTURAL VERSUS TRAIT AND BEHAVIORAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY

Efforts to understand personality and predict executive behavior can be categorized in two ways (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1997). One is a general, global way of characterizing a person according to his major styles of coping with problems. Another way of describing personality deals with one major quality of the person at a time and only secondarily attempts to understand the relations among these qualities. The latter approach characterizes most psychological models of leadership. A narrow focus on isolated traits or discrete behaviors enables researchers to achieve greater precision in understanding any one quality. Trait and behavioral approaches can be criticized, however, on the basis that individuals do not function as disjointed collections of parts but rather as more or less smoothly integrated wholes. Measuring each characteristic separately does not capture that integration. A global or structural model is useful to provide a framework into which many different specific aspects of personality can be integrated and understood in their relation to one another and to role performance.

We begin with a review and critique of the empirical literature. Building upon this review, we describe a structural approach and its benefits for understanding the personality of the executive. We then demonstrate the utility of a structural approach for elucidating the complex, dynamic nature of executive personality. First, however, it is necessary to clarify the use of two key terms.

DEFINITIONS

The term *personality* has two different meanings, and it is important to keep them separate. On the one hand, it refers to an individual's social reputation and to the manner in which others perceive him. This is personality from an observer's perspective. It concerns the amount of esteem, regard, or status that the person has within his reference groups. Personality in this sense is public and clearly linked to judgments of the person's behavior based on interpersonal performances. On the other hand, personality may also refer to intrapsychic structures, dynamics, processes, and tendencies—intrapersonal behaviors—that explain *why* a person behaves in a certain way in specific circumstances.

The first meaning of personality refers to a person's social reputation: It is public and verifiable and can be assessed descriptively by paper-and-pencil tests (e.g., Jackson's Personality Research Form, 1989) and 360-degree feedback. The second meaning refers to the person's inner nature: It is private and inferable. Epistemologically, the status of these two meanings is quite different. The effectiveness of a leader depends on how he is perceived by others; that is, the reputation he achieves. This is the empirical phenomenon we want to explain or predict. However, a theory of inner processes, their functions and interrelations, is needed to explain or predict the bases of that reputation or effectiveness.

Corresponding to these two meanings of personality are two senses of the word *trait*. On the one hand, trait refers to recurring trends in a person's behavior (i.e., at the interpersonal level). To say that a person is masterful means that he tends to exert control over, influence, or direct other people or things in his environment. In this sense, the word trait is theoretically neutral and purely descriptive. It tells us what we may expect a person to do, but not why he would do it or when he would behave differently.

The term trait has also been used to denote psychological features that exist inside a person and that explain the recurring tendencies in that person's behavior (i.e., at the intrapersonal level). This second use of the term describes what we may expect a person to do and explains why we should expect the person to behave that way. In this chapter, the word trait is used to denote stylistic consistencies in an individual's social behavior.

The word trait will not be used in this chapter to denote structures or systems inside individuals.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Because executives are individuals who occupy the most senior ranks of an organization, they are scarce as subjects of empirical research. The most relevant literature examines the relationship between personality and managerial or leadership effectiveness. Although executives are not necessarily leaders or managers, our overview of the industrial and organizational literature is limited to that research.

Empirical approaches to personality and leadership can be divided into three historical periods: the trait period, from the beginning of the 20th century to World War II; the behavioral period, from the onset of World War II to the 1960s; and the contingency period, from the late 1960s to the present.

Trait Approach

The earliest work in this area grew out of the late Victorian fascination with the "Great Man." Individuals who became leaders were understood to be different, somehow, from those who remained followers. The goal of research was to identify what unique features made an individual a leader. With the rise in the early part of the 20th century of the psychological assessment movement, personality measures were used to screen large populations for these traits. In more than 120 studies conducted over 40 years, leaders and their followers were compared on various measures of psychological traits believed to be associated with successful leadership. The measures ranged from dominance, ascendancy, and extraversion, to physical appearance and intelligence. Reviews of the trait studies identified no consistent or reliable pattern (Bird, 1940; Jenkins, 1947; Stogdill, 1948).

Behavioral Approach

The perceived failure of the trait approach and the growing emphasis on behaviorism in psychology led researchers to direct their attention to the behavior of leaders. In the late 1930s, Kurt Lewin and his associates conducted a classic study (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

These researchers identified three styles, or behavioral patterns, of leadership: democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. The autocratic style was characterized by the leader's tight control of the group's activities and its decisions. The democratic style emphasized group participation and majority rule. The laissez-faire style involved very low levels of activity of any kind by the leader. Working in a controlled laboratory setting, the researchers examined the different effects of each style on small group productivity and morale. The democratic style was found to have slightly more beneficial effects than the other two styles.

Lewin's research is important not so much for its findings as for its conception of leadership as a behavioral style. The distinction between autocratic-directive styles and democratic-participative styles has influenced the focus of much subsequent research. A leader may either take responsibility for making decisions and directing group members or share, in varying degrees, decision making and coordinating functions with them. What behaviors constitute the most effective leadership style has been a major topic of inquiry, whether the research was conducted in an organization, a laboratory, or an assessment center.

In the 1950s, behavioral approaches came to the forefront as research moved away from questions of traits and preconceived styles to what leaders actually do. Rating scales, interviews, and observations were used to identify the specific behaviors of leaders. Several researchers independently verified the existence of two clusters, or factors, of leader behavior. One factor related to interpersonal warmth, the use of participative, two-way communication, and concern for followers' feelings. The other emphasized task-related feedback, directiveness, and goal facilitation. The two dimensions were variously labeled *socio-emotional* versus *task-oriented* leadership (Bales & Slater, 1945) and *consideration* behavior versus *initiation of structure* (Stogdill & Coons, 1957), and *employee-oriented* versus *production-oriented* leadership (Kahn & Katz, 1953).

The identification of two reliable, behaviorally based dimensions of leader behavior was an important step forward. Nevertheless, attempts to consistently predict the effects of these behavioral styles on group and organizational outcomes were unsuccessful. Considerate leader behaviors, for example, did not appear to be reliably asso-ciated with satisfied subordinates, nor was the leader's structuring behavior consistently related to group productivity (Korman, 1966).

Several theorists have surmised that the failure of the trait and behavioral approaches was due to a view of leadership as the effect of a single and unchanging set of behaviors (Bennis, 1961; Gibb, 1954; Stogdill & Shartle, 1955). In fact, the trait and behavioral approaches failed because no one leadership style was universally successful across all situations. Only with the emergence of contingency theories could researchers finally predict leadership effectiveness with an impressive degree of consistent success (Bass, 1990a). Contingency notions propose that the leadership style that will be most successful depends on the nature of the task situation. Modern contingency models attempt to identify and categorize the most critical features of the situation and relate them to the most important aspects of leadership style and behavior.

Contingency Approach

The introduction of the first contingency theory by Fred Fiedler (1967) brought leadership research into a third phase, where it has more or less remained. Fiedler argued that two factors—the situation and the leader's orientation to the work group—determined leadership effectiveness. Specific situational parameters, such as the degrees of control, certainty, and predictability the situation afforded the leader, were crucial in determining leadership effectiveness. Fiedler also identified two leadership styles: relationship motivated and task motivated.

In addition to research that has incorporated contingency models, during the past 20 years a number of other approaches have been pursued. These include examinations of the time and process dimensions of leadership, including the nature of the complex interplay between the attributes of the leader, and the needs, values, perceptions, and judgments of followers (cf. Bass, 1990b; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Graen & Scandura, 1987; House & Howell, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Willner, 1984).

The Cognitive Revolution

The cognitive revolution in psychology has profoundly shaped contemporary leadership studies.

Cognitive theories emphasize the role of cognitive mediation in influencing the contingencies that regulate relations between leaders and followers. A large body of research concerns the hypothesis that interpersonal actions and judgments are a function of the way in which events are construed in the minds of leaders and followers (cf. Binning, Zaba, & Whattam, 1986; Lord, 1985).

Cognitive psychology has also played a major role in recent taxonomies of managerial skills and tasks (cf. Cox & Cooper, 1988; Kanungo & Misra, 1992; Whitley, 1989). Terms such as *schemata*, *scripts*, and *knowledge structures* have been used to refer to underlying patterns of thinking that influence how managers interpret internal and external stimuli, and how this information is transformed into action. For example, Herbert Simon (1987) argued that constructive, reality-oriented habits of problem solving may be key components of a manager's effectiveness.

Elliott Jaques has developed a theory of eight levels of conceptual capacity (Jaques, 1996; Jaques & Cason, 1994). Each level is defined by how far into the future an individual can think or plan. The theory contends that organizations should be structured according to these eight levels, and that individuals should be chosen so that the conceptual requirements of the role match the individual's conceptual capacity.

The literature on the underlying cognitive competencies of leaders and managers emerged in the mid-1980s. This research is important because, for the first time since the early trait studies, scholars were again investigating the psychological characteristics that contribute to a leader's success across different situations and settings. Leadership studies entered a second trait era.

The Second Trait Era

Impetus for this trend was provided by meta-analyses of the early trait data (cf. Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983; Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986; McCann, 1992). The findings of these analyses indicated that, contrary to earlier conclusions, certain individual characteristics, such as *ego strength*, *stress tolerance*, *affective regulation*, and *self-direction*, are linked to leadership effects across a wide variety of situations.

One individual characteristic that has been related empirically to effective leadership under stressful condi-

tions is internal locus of control orientation (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with a strong internal locus of control ("internals") believe that events in their lives are determined more by their actions than by chance or fate. In contrast, individuals with a strong external locus of control ("externals") believe that mostly uncontrollable forces determine events and that there is little they can do to bring negative events to positive outcomes. A strong internal locus of control predicted managerial success in several field studies (Anderson, Hellriegel, & Slocum, 1977; Brockhaus, 1975; Goodstadt & Hjelle, 1973; Miller, Kets de Vries, & Toulouse, 1982; Miller & Toulouse, 1986).

Self-confidence, another personality characteristic, has also been related to managerial leadership. In one study, self-confidence predicted promotion to more senior levels of management at AT&T (Howard & Bray, 1988). In a study differentiating outstanding from average senior managers in six different types of organizations, self-confidence—manifested in the tendency to be stimulated by crises and other problems, rather than being distressed or overwhelmed by them—was the main determinant of managerial competency, influencing the likelihood that one of the other competencies would be expressed (Klemp & McClelland, 1986). Successful managers were described as confident during crises in a study comparing successful and "derailed" managers. A study of "critical incidents" in the work experience of more than 250 managers also indicated that self-confidence distinguished effective from ineffective managers (Boyatzis, 1982).

Emotional intelligence, as described by Daniel Goleman (1995), recently has been related to executive effectiveness (Goleman, 2000). Drawing on research on more than 3,000 executives, Goleman outlined six distinct leadership styles, which fall along the familiar dichotomy of task-oriented versus relationship-oriented styles. Each style, he contends, is linked to a different aspect of emotional intelligence, various competencies, such as empathy, relationship building, and interpersonal communication. In turn, each style has a distinct effect on the working atmosphere of a company or team, and, in turn, on its financial performance. The styles, by name and description, fall along the familiar continuum of leadership styles first identified by Kurt Lewin and his associates.

Other individual characteristics that have been related to leadership and managerial effectiveness include practical intelligence (Atwater, 1992; Atwater & Yammarino, 1993); social intelligence (Zaccaro, Gilbert, Thor, & Mumford, 1991); stress tolerance (Howard & Bray, 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983); response flexibility (Skinner & Sasser, 1977); the capacity for crafting a bold vision that anticipates future changes (Kotter, 1999); and self-monitoring (the capacity to monitor and control expressive behaviors in oneself; Ellis, 1988; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991).

Recently, some theorists have used the five-factor model of personality to organize and explain what other researchers had discovered about leadership (cf. Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). The five-factor model relates to the structure of personality ratings (i.e., trait words), which may be expressed in terms of five broad dimensions or factors—conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, surgency, and intellect. These factors are said to reflect what Hogan and his associates refer to as the "bright side" of personality. Proponents of the model argue that leadership requires the presence of bright-side traits as well as the absence of "dark-side" characteristics—that is, behavioral tendencies that undermine a person's ability to form a team and that may alienate subordinates.

It is important to note that the five-factor model refers to the structure of trait words, not to hypothesized inner psychological structures or systems. The model tells us about interpersonal behavior from the observer's perspective. Because individuals are predisposed to think about others in terms of these factors (Norman & Goldberg, 1966), the factors have been considered midlevel cognitive prototypes (Cantor & Mischel, 1977) or cognitive schemata (Fiske & Linville, 1980). Thus, although the five-factor model may tell us something about individual cognition, it is not a structural model of personality, as has been argued (cf. Digman, 1990).

The cognitive revolution shifted the focus of leadership research from the level of public perception (interpersonal)—the focus of behavioralism—to the level of private perception and the information-processing characteristics of leaders and followers (intrapersonal). This shift allowed research on behaviors that are observable by others and on those psychological characteristics of leaders that can be inferred.

LIMITATIONS OF TRAIT, BEHAVIORAL, AND CURRENT APPROACHES

Significant progress has been made in identifying the traits, behaviors, and decision tendencies that influence managerial leadership. Unfortunately, however, research has neglected important issues in understanding personality. Fundamentally, it fails to address the relationship between overt, easily observed traits, behaviors, and decision styles of executives, and their inner worlds—particularly irrational and unconscious motives, values, and fantasies.

No matter how much they may reject the notion, executives bring their inner selves and private lives to work with them every day. From a structural perspective, this is a truism that scarcely merits comment. Yet those psychologists who typically advise organizations rarely address executives' inner worlds—to the detriment of the organization and the individual. Their work suffers from several fundamental conceptual and methodological shortcomings.

A focus on discrete personality traits or isolated behaviors. Trait theories attempt to explain and predict a person's way of thinking, feeling, acting, and reacting in a certain situation, with its specific characteristics and psychological significance, by combining values from a set of traits. Accounts of personality are framed in terms of one major quality of the person at a time, and only secondarily in terms of relationships among these qualities. Trait theories do not treat psychological functioning as a dynamic process, even when noting the importance of interactions among personality characteristics (cf. Goleman, 2000; Klemp & McClelland, 1986; Yukl, 1994). What needs to be understood is personality in all of its facets.

The trait approach leaves several questions unanswered: (a) Are these traits indeed different tendencies, or do they reflect an underlying personality structure? How do attributes such as self-esteem, self-confidence, sociability, and intelligence relate to other individual characteristics, such as need for achievement, moral responsibility, regulation of affects and impulses, and an overall sense of "identity"? (b) Do deficiencies in the latter characteristics undermine the degree to which the former attributes can contribute to a leader's effectiveness?

A focus on short-term functioning. An executive's style is fundamentally the outcome of a developmental

process. Most research and applications to executives explain behavior in isolation from any developmental processes that may have led to the person's present state. It does not consider the origins of relevant aspects of the individual, the timing and environmental events in his past and present, and the ways those factors interact to produce current behavior. As a result, traits or behaviors seem to emerge *de novo* in the person. How a trait or behavior comes into being, whether it is likely to remain stable or change in subsequent years, and what factors are likely to affect its emergence and further development are rarely discussed.

The most effective executives exhibit a protean quality of resiliency and creativity, a continued readiness to develop new skills for coping with emergent, dynamic, and complex situations. Yet industrial and organizational psychologists, typically those most likely to be working with executives, come from academic backgrounds that give them neither the conceptual tools nor clinical training to assess the potential of individuals to grow and adapt over time. Consequently, they miss one of the most important indicators of functioning in executive roles.

A focus on behavior in the work role. The private activities, personal needs, and values of the person outside work are seen as off limits. While executives' private lives per se are their own, they bring their personal lives into their work in ways that are not always rational or easy to control. It is unrealistic to believe that events and experiences outside the professional sphere do not affect executives' formal decisions and programs. Without knowledge of a person's capacity to deal with all of life's demands, as a family member, citizen, or friend, the ability to predict executive effectiveness is severely constrained.

A focus on rational, conscious thought. Conscious thought is often seen as a simple and obvious activity, resulting from a state of full self-awareness and full self-control. Less rational, frequently pathological and antisocial sides of behavior, such as neurosis, narcissism, sexuality, and exploitation of others, are minimized or ignored. Unconscious dynamic factors lead to intrapersonal conflict and, sometimes, psychopathology. From a structural perspective, for example, lack of self-confidence may be a symptom of deeply rooted conflict centered on an individual's repressed infantile wishes. Executives who are unable to master career disappointments may subse-

quently fail because they founder on unresolved conflicts at the center of their experience with disappointment (Zaleznik, 1984).

Unconscious dynamic factors underlie the difficulty many executives have in dealing with their own and others' anger (Kets deVries, 1984). Efforts to appease feelings of guilt and denial of anger may lead to irrational decisions. These irrational interactions can have ruinous consequences for a business or work group, such as an excessive dependency of superiors and subordinates on each other (Levinson, 1984). By failing to account for the impact of irrational and unconscious forces on overt behavior, we cannot predict how a manager is likely to function when put in an executive role.

Associated with these conceptual limitations is the problem that traditional executive assessments employ methods that are, on their own, unable to identify the factors that differentiate potentially effective from potentially less effective executives in pools of already highly functioning candidates. They rely on structured, objective assessment methods that tap consciously controlled thoughts, perceptions, and actions. The measures they use include behavioral rating scales, interpersonal checklists, structured interviews and role-plays, questionnaires, and self-report inventories.

Because the purpose of such measures is transparent, individuals who are well adjusted or psychologically sophisticated can easily "fake good." Individuals who are already successful by normative standards quite naturally take advantage of the structure inherent in such tests to produce what they usually correctly infer to be the appropriate image. (In 1946, for example, when Robert McNamara arrived at Ford, a company he would later head, he was given a psychological assessment in which he was asked whether he would prefer being a florist or a coal miner. McNamara knew Ford had a right answer in mind that had nothing to do with his preferences; personal communication from a McNamara scholar.)

Even putting aside the question of deliberate faking, the information obtained from self-report measures is limited. A person may be completely forthright in describing his behavior, but nevertheless still omit important data. Often this occurs because the individual lacks awareness of the conflicts and motives that shape his behavior. Especially in conditions of high emotion and conflict, a person may wish to avoid unpleasant or out-

of-control states of mind. To prevent the anticipated displeasure or threat, ideas and emotions are unconsciously barred from a conscious representation that would otherwise occur. Thus, what managers say about how they respond to stressful events does not necessarily reveal how they actually cope in such situations. Yet how managers handle stressful events is an excellent lead indicator for predicting how they will deal with the sorts of issues we expect executives to handle in a successful, capable manner.

A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO THE PERSONALITY OF THE EXECUTIVE

A structural approach is capable of overcoming the conceptual and methodological limitations noted above. From the perspective of this framework, personality is conceived as a complex structure, with characteristic, relatively stable functional dimensions that interact and respond to changing circumstances. This view assumes an internal organization of psychological processes that cannot be directly observed but which underlie the cohesiveness and directedness of personality at a single time and over longer periods of development. It also assumes that individuals have the capacity to develop new capabilities, such as the conceptual capacity to meet the increasing complexity of executive roles (Jaques, 1996). The term *structural* refers to the relations among different levels or functions of personality. A structural approach thus offers a developmental framework into which different facets of personality may be integrated and understood in dynamic relation to each other.

Interrelations among traits. A structural approach yields insights into the integrity of personality and the cohesiveness of an individual's value system. In addition, it provides a lens from which to judge the degree of self-criticism to which an executive is prone. Consequently, a structural approach can explain the behaviors developed to compensate for the ensuing feelings of inadequacy and depression. In some cases, for example, severe self-criticism may be the source of self-defeating behaviors or an inability to tolerate success.

Life-span development. A structural approach accounts for the possibility that individuals may grow and adapt. It thereby helps in judging whether an executive is more likely to develop new capabilities by active-

ly coping with challenge and change or whether the person is more prone to capitulate passively to frustration. Knowing the individual's developmental history makes it possible to specify particular stressors to which an executive may be uniquely vulnerable.

Cross-domain issues. A structural approach permits inferences about a person's characteristic modes of maintaining psychological equilibrium and their transformations into behavioral patterns across domains, be they public or private. It allows us to differentiate between characterological behaviors—such as a consistent readiness to blame others—from those that occur only under certain circumstances—in reaction to specific situations.

Unconscious and irrational factors. A structural approach accounts for unconscious and irrational motivational factors that shape an executive's personality, decisions, and actions. Lack of self-confidence may arise from repressed infantile rage towards parenting figures. Repressing the need to depend on others makes accepting the legitimate dependency of subordinates difficult for some executives. Fear of having to take charge, guilt for negatively appraising a subordinate, and depression upon loss of a stable supportive organizational structure are other examples of potentially unconscious influences on executive behavior.

APPLICATION OF A STRUCTURAL APPROACH

The usefulness of a structural approach in identifying which individuals will emerge as the most effective leaders among a population of already highly functioning individuals selected for their leadership characteristics has been empirically demonstrated (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996; Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1998). The relationship between integrative capacity and evaluations of leadership effectiveness was examined in a nine-month program for developing business leaders. The setting was an intensive leadership development program at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. Integrative capacity was conceptualized as a central dimension of the structural psychological characteristic, active coping, and differentiated from the cognitive construct, integrative complexity. Self-report, semi-projective, and projective measures of integrative capacity obtained at the beginning of the program were correlated with peer and faculty ratings

of leadership at the end of the program. Significant correlations ranged from .27 ($p < .05$) to .52 ($p < .001$). Intelligence and integrative capacity contributed separately to leadership. The findings support the value of examining variables related to personality structure and the use of projective techniques to assess candidates for positions of business leadership. A second study examined the effects of gender, coping, and motivational orientation in evaluating individual leadership. The data reveal significant gender differences on measures of motivation, with men showing higher levels of agentic-instrumental tendencies and women exhibiting higher levels of communal-social qualities ($p < .05$). Women exhibiting strong agentic characteristics were negatively perceived as leaders ($p < .05$). There was no relationship between agentic or communal qualities and evaluations of leadership received by male leaders. Finally, individuals with active coping tendencies were evaluated as more effective leaders for both genders. The fact that active coping predicted leadership in these two elite samples, selected for intelligence as well as other personality attributes associated with leadership potential, demonstrates the usefulness of a structural approach in assessing candidates for executive roles.

To illustrate the added benefits of such an approach for understanding, supervising, and developing executives, we describe two financial executives who are engaged in the same level of financial work in the same Fortune 500-company. Each is functioning cognitively at Elliot Jaques' Level V, with a five- to ten-year conceptual horizon. Each is in charge of the company's financial operations in different parts of the world. The required behaviors and accountabilities of their roles, although exercised in different cultures, are virtually the same.

The executives display many of the qualities that have been positively correlated with managerial leadership. These qualities include: internal locus of control; practical intelligence; response flexibility; conscientiousness; achievement orientation; self-monitoring; stress tolerance; and self-confidence—manifested in the tendency to be stimulated by crises and other problems, rather than being distressed or overwhelmed by them. In addition, they have both been successful in previous financial roles, and they are conceptually on developmental tracks that could potentially put them in top management, CEO, or board chairman roles.

Most of these qualities could be identified using the kinds of paper-and-pencil tests, behavioral event interviews, and simulation known by most readers. A structural approach to assessment, utilizing techniques that give information about an executive's personality dynamics, yields a more comprehensive understanding. It affords the depth of insight required for making astute developmental recommendations for executives and their superiors. Accordingly, below we describe the nature of such assessments and the types of information they provide.

Multi-Method, Multi-Level Methodology

Selection for executive roles requires finding a way to know how disturbed a candidate's thinking becomes when he is under severe emotional stress. Even if it were possible to subject the individual to such stress, we would not want to do so for ethical reasons. Instead, we may pose such situations through confronting the candidate with vague or affectively laden stimuli. From these miniature stresses, we try to infer or predict an individual's responses to more severe stimuli.

Selection for executive leadership requires more than exposure to stressful stimuli. To predict how an individual will cope with the demands of an executive role over time, we should assess how unconscious phenomena relate to more conscious, experiential, and observable psychological phenomena (such as behaviors, values, thoughts, and feelings). This process calls for a variety of tests to tap both surface and underlying aspects of personality. Traditionally, such a battery consists of an array of assessment techniques along two separate but related dimensions, ranging from structured to unstructured, and from objective to projective.

To relate the objective-projective dimension to the structured-unstructured dimension, we can view objective and projective tests as stimuli that present differing degrees of situational constraint on behavior. According to Walter Mischel's (1977) distinction between strong and weak situations, strong situations (e.g., objective stimuli) leave little room for the expression of individual differences, because everyone sees the situation in the same way, understands the expectations, and knows the sanctions for failing to comply with those demands. Such situations tend to suppress individual differences.

Conversely, ambiguous situations, which contain few cues to action or information about behavioral sanctions (e.g., projective stimuli), allow for greater expression of individual differences (Schutte, Kendrick, & Sadalla, 1985). One study showed that by manipulating the situational strength, researchers could systematically vary the validity coefficients from low (.13) to moderate (.32) to substantial (.42; Monson, Hasley, & Chernik, 1981). Monson concluded that individual differences in personality would have their strongest impact on behavior in relatively unstructured, psychologically weak situations. This conclusion has practical relevance for selection for executive roles, where one is trying to assess individual differences in a relatively homogeneous pool.

In psychological assessment, there is a frame of reference of tests that are highly structured, semistructured, and unstructured. This dimension refers to the degree to which the tasks involved in a test have or do not have a high degree of specificity. Structured tests tend to be close to the concept of questions with right and wrong answers. The more the test permits the individual to use his or her own ideas and imagination in responding to the task, the less structured the situation is. Thus, for the most structured tests, the tasks are specific, with little opportunity for the respondent to make an individual interpretation of the task. For unstructured tests, the tasks are vague and unfamiliar, and they require that the respondent contribute much to the interpretation of the task itself. The tests within a battery are chosen so that the three levels of structure are represented.

Structured tests are typically represented in the usual self-report measures. Tasks are so highly defined that the respondent is fully aware of what is expected of him and has minimum choice. He is expected to find the standard answer, rather than the one reflecting personal choice, thereby eliminating the need to use his own personal resources in order to cope with the task. Because this task requires that the individual respond with a prescribed answer, his responses provide little information about the individual's uniqueness as a person. Indeed, the more unique the respondent's answers to self-report measures, the stronger is the inference that an internal psychological process has become so dominant that it has pervaded the situation from which the individual should be able to exclude it. By contrast, unstructured tests offer respondents minimal information regarding the demands of the task.

Therefore, respondents must turn to themselves, formulate what the task involves and how to cope with it, and summon the energy to commit to a response.

The review of a person's responses to structured, semistructured, and unstructured tests thus permits comparative inferences on all three levels of personality, to assess whether the person has the capacity to cope effectively with all three types—structured, semistructured, unstructured—of demands. If the respondent is not successful on all three, then it should be noted whether there is difficulty only in the more personal, unstructured situation, whether the difficulty is more pervasive and includes difficulty at the semistructured level, or whether the difficulties permeate all aspects of functioning.

This continuum of structured, to unstructured, situations may be mapped onto life situations to help us understand the degree to which an individual is dependent on external guidance and direction for effective coping. Our definition of the effective and emotionally healthy person is based on the concept of the capacity to cope with most of life's situations, ranging from those that permit little initiative to those that require a great deal of initiative. A battery of tests, of the type just described, provides a basis for judging the individual's ability to match that definition. From this description, one might expect that, for example, more effective coping on unstructured psychological tests would differentiate effective from ineffective executives. Using unstructured tests to assess an individual's coping capacity is clearly superior to observing whether the person stutters during a behavioral simulation or has a sweaty palm.

Closely related to the structured-unstructured continuum in psychological assessment is the objective-projective dimension. Objective assessment techniques—including simulations and behavioral interviews—represent clear, unambiguous stimuli that permit a high degree of conscious control over what is revealed about the self. Consequently, such techniques assess observable aspects of personality functioning. Individuals who are successful by normative standards find it easy to fall back on the structure of the test situation to produce what they understand to be the desired image. In particular, candidates for top executive roles are already quite good at behaving appropriately, and they are skilled at monitoring their responses. These individuals are likely to maintain firm, steady eye contact with their interviewers,

exude poise, and shake their interviewers' hands with a cool, authoritative grip. Objective techniques are therefore poor predictors of executive functioning among managers in line for top executive roles.

Projective techniques, in contrast to objective assessment techniques, present relatively vague and ambiguous stimuli for eliciting underlying personality characteristics. One technique (Sentence Completion Technique; Pratch, 1996) asks the respondent to complete several incomplete sentences (e.g., "He was happiest when . . ."). Another (Thematic Apperception Test; Murray, 1938) asks the respondent to make up stories that describe a series of pictures. The key to projective techniques is that, like the unstructured tests, the stimuli provide little structure to guide the response. They thereby reveal aspects of individual functioning related to underlying structural dimensions inaccessible with objective tests.

INTEGRATED CASE DESCRIPTIONS

To assess the executives discussed below, the following battery of tests was used: Jackson's Personality Research Form (1989); Wechsler's Abbreviated Adult Intelligence Scale (1999); Raven's Advanced Progressive Matrices (1988); Pratch's Sentence Completion Technique; and Murray's Thematic Apperception Test. These tests, in conjunction with detailed developmental histories, provided information for building hypotheses and drawing conclusions regarding each executive's personality and likely performance in role.

The time-span measure of a role corresponds to the length of the longest task or assignment, from point of inception to targeted completion date. This measure provided information pertaining to the level-of-work complexity for the role (Jaques, 1996). The longest-range assignments for the roles of each of the three executives have a time horizon between five to ten years.

Current potential capability is defined as the highest level of work an individual could effectively handle if he possessed all the necessary knowledge and experience and were fully committed. This is a reflection of the complexity of the individual's mental processing. It seeks to answer how complex a problem a person can handle effectively. Each of these executives is able to construct sequential patterns and weave multiple sequential patterns together at a symbolic level of information complexity. They are

able to use abstract concepts to handle problems. Their current potential capability is appropriate for roles with assignments in the five- to seven-year range. Thus, they possess the current problem-solving ability to handle the level of work required by their present roles.

Furthermore, their *future* potential capability over the next ten years (Jaques, 1996) suggests that they are increasingly likely to process information at an abstract level of complexity. They are all likely to be able to make the transition from an operational level to the corporate level of cognitive complexity. Simultaneously, once they develop this ability to think more abstractly and strategically, their time horizons potentially could expand to the seven- to ten-year range, making them likely candidates for more senior executive roles.

Figure 1 shows that although the two executives are currently capable of handling the complexity of roles having a five- to seven-year time horizon, what Jaques calls Stratum V, their developmental trajectories differ. Brian, at age 30, falls within Mode VIII; in ten years, his potential time horizon will be between 15 to 20 years. In 20 years, he will be capable of handling the demands of a major multinational corporation, with the potential to consider and influence events affecting the company 20 to 40 years in the future. Peter is 46; he will be limited to a role having at most little more than a ten-year time horizon.

Brian Bennish, 30, VP Finance, Asia

Brian is a thoughtful, patient, hard-working, and caring young man. He is motivated to succeed at work while maintaining a loving home. His integrity is beyond reproach; he has a well-established value system that has been tested in various ways in the past. He can be trusted to do the right thing—for the company and for his family. He pushes himself hard to fulfill his responsibilities accurately and on time and expects others to demonstrate similar dedication. Brian approaches problems in an orderly, highly analytical fashion. His cognitive style is cautious and he is therefore not quick to make decisions, especially when people are not straightforward or honest. Extremely well organized, he prioritizes effectively and tries to make every minute count. He retrieves information readily, both from his own head and from the organization.

FIGURE 1. TIME-HORIZON PROJECTION. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.
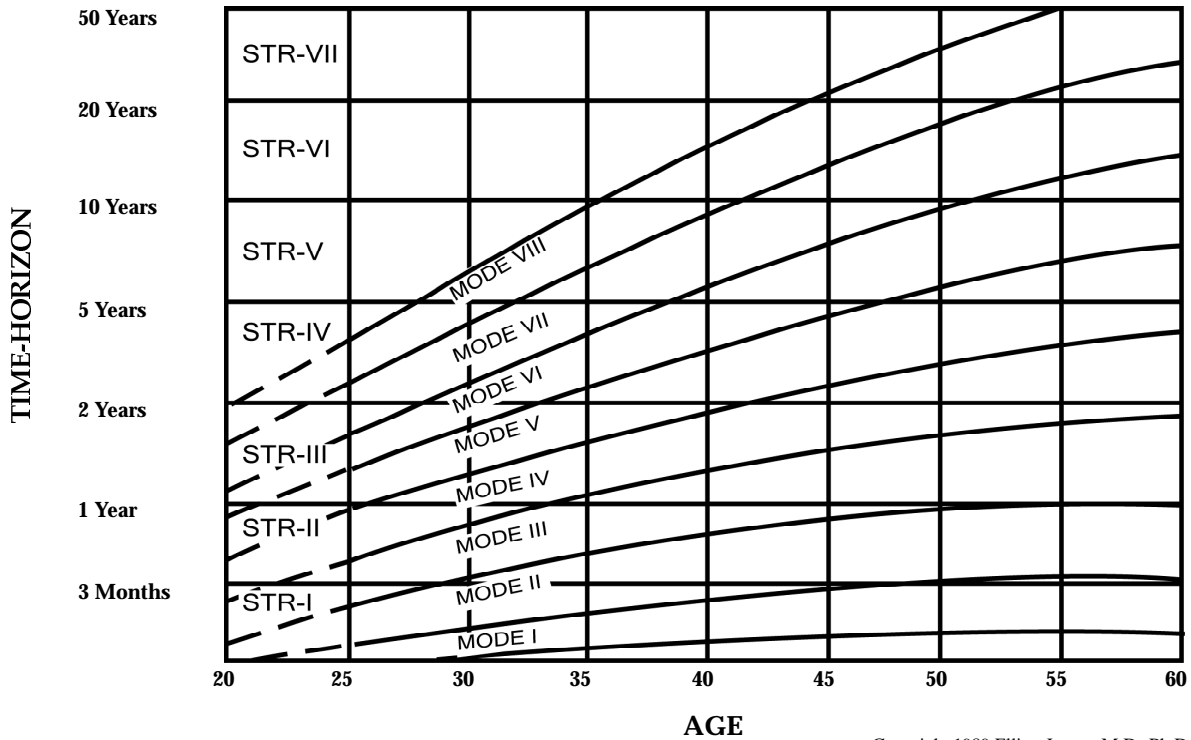
Copyright 1989 Elliott Jaques, M.D., Ph.D.

Intellectually, Brian has the capacity not only to abstract but also to be practical. He makes good use of language to draw from experience. His judgment is sound—he is thoughtful, can see the whole picture, and knows when to act but does not always do so quickly enough. He needs to trust his judgment more so that he *does* act forthrightly when appropriate.

Brian has the capacity to take charge when necessary. He takes a responsible stance toward problems and the needs of the company. He has demonstrated a willingness to go beyond arenas in which he is already secure to attack problems tactically from new positions. He is oriented toward the organization's success rather than personal aggrandizement. He has an intense wish to master new challenges and to move up in the organization as recognition of competence. He struggles internally with his ambition because of the potentially negative impact he thinks it might have on others.

Brian picks up feelings and reads body language well. In fact, he is more aware than most of subtle cues in groups. A basically trusting individual, he is still somewhat naïve and does not yet recognize early enough when others are dishonest or manipulative. Highly involved with the company, he allocates serious, continuing time to developing relationships with individuals in the groups for which he is accountable, seeking information on their problems. He builds relationships quietly over time. He has the potential to develop a feel for the pulse of the organization.

Brian works well with authority figures. He accepts his needs to depend appropriately on others as well as others' needs to depend on him. He is cooperative and can also stand on his own, although he is not yet entirely comfortable doing so. He is able to yield to the leadership of a more competent, specialized person without feeling loss of a leadership role. He seeks a mentor who will listen to him and offer support as he develops his own direction.

Very presentable, Brian has a wide-ranging vocabulary, and senses the moods of others. He may earn the respect of peers for verbalizing and presenting their problems. He can see humor in most situations, including his own shortcomings. His humor is warm and affectionate. He has a natural ability to ease tensions in groups. He is firm in holding his position without being intimidating. These strengths have been significant assets in cultivating his company's relationships in Asia.

Brian has a consistent high energy level, paces himself well, and can take sustained pressure. He remains calm and deliberate in stressful situations while still expressing a sense of urgency. Although he uses effective coping devices, such as consulting with others, he tends to dwell on problems and accepts more than his share of responsibility for them. Indeed, he seems to take the world's troubles onto his heart and overextends himself. In addition, when events do not unfold as expected, he becomes frightened and worried. He finds himself too tightly wound, unable to relax, and has difficulty sleeping or concentrating on matters other than work.

Brian is thoughtful about the progression of his career. Although he has not crystallized a direction for himself (and this is partly a function of age), his goals are consistent with the needs and values of his company. He enjoys teaching and working collaboratively with others. He enjoys finance and operations. He relished a previous assignment in operations because it allowed him to play in an operational role from a financial perspective. Eventually, he is interested in a lead financial role and also in general management. He appreciates the social responsibilities of such a role, and may very well develop the presence to be able to fulfill a public role.

Extremely conscientious, Brian sticks to a task and sees it through regardless of the difficulties encountered. Underlying his persistence is an optimism that stems from a confidence that a solution will be found. His self-confidence is mature and realistic, inclining him to work issues through on his own rather than rely on direction from others.

Developmental needs. Brian is well suited to move up in the executive ranks to become CEO. Given the breadth of his career interests and abilities, he should continue to be exposed to increasingly broader financial and operational responsibilities. His assignment in Asia has given him valuable experience dealing with other cultures, business practices, and financial institutions in those cultures.

Brian is a talented, values-oriented person who is concerned with others, particularly nurturing and protecting others. He has not yet figured out what he wants for himself and does not want to be told what to do. He needs a sensitive and caring mentor who is attuned to his struggles, who will sit and talk with him about life and work, and who can present a wise view, let him grow, and think about where he wants to go.

Brian's core problem is his severe conscience. On the one hand it fosters his consistent integrity and pursuit of organizational success. On the other hand, it imposes on him urgent responsibility for matters beyond his control. To meet these felt obligations, he overextends himself, fearful that he may not live up to his excessive self-imposed demands and unable to temper them by himself. His harsh conscience also keeps him from fully appreciating his considerable competencies, telling him that he is not good enough. His sensitivity and wish to be helpful will make him vulnerable to exploitation— they will delay his taking appropriate action early enough to cut off the event fast enough. He may not be appropriately tough enough in situations that require critical judgment, disciplining action, and coping with manipulators.

Brian needs to be able to tolerate what he cannot do, what is beyond his immediate control. He needs to learn how to read and deal with people who are not honest and direct. He needs to learn not to blame himself for everything because his guilt can distort his understanding of what is occurring. He needs to relax and trust his judgment more. His seniors can help him to be more hard-nosed about his decisions, develop a degree of skepticism and distrust about what he is told, and to take a more forthright stand when necessary.

Structural approach—benefits. Typically, psychological assessments conducted by industrial and organizational psychologists describe the subject in his current stage of development. Few extrapolate to the future from the strengths they identify, how those strengths may become liabilities. Brian's case is illustrative. We did not simply describe his conscientiousness; we explained how his conscience demands that he care for others, assume responsibility, and behave with integrity. That severe conscience, not tempered, could give rise to stress and thereby detract from his efficiency. Brian's case demonstrates how a structural framework enables psychologists to understand the underlying cohesiveness of his personality by showing how, for example, he presently copes well with his strong internal demands on himself and maintains his effectiveness.

A structural frame of reference also affords the insight that Brian's tension, integrity, and tendency to underestimate his competency result from his strict conscience. We made these inferences from Brian's overt,

public behaviors, as well as covert, less consciously-controlled communications about himself, elicited in response to semi-projective and projective techniques. To potential mentors of Brian we offered advice designed to help him to temper the demands of his conscience, gain greater self-confidence, and avoid the potential future shortfalls of being too trusting and too conscientious. This case demonstrates the added benefits of a structural approach in explaining the interrelations among overt traits, behaviors, and decision tendencies and in projecting Brian's likely future course of development.

Peter Schwartz, 46, VP Finance, North America

A recent hire from another company in the same industry, Peter's primary emphasis is on giving to and getting. Warm and caring, he works to earn the respect of others. He enjoys the challenge of solving problems and gets pleasure from the work itself rather than bragging about the outcome. He is not impulsive and will not make hasty decisions. He is not aggressive or confrontational. If attacked, he will accommodate or leave. He will not fight for his position, and he needs others to accept his ideas and encourage him. He is a good team worker who generates trust, fairness, friendliness, mutual help, and regard—with creativity and good feeling.

Peter's strategy in life is to try to blend in. He is willing to sacrifice aspects of his desires or ambitions in order to attain harmony and good will as long as he can do the work he enjoys with colleagues he trusts and who can trust him. He has difficulty setting his own direction and is not one to create a new business, to put in a structure, to generate rules, or to guide others. He is a self-effacing, loyal employee who needs a team and a leader with rules and direction. With that, he will work hard and achieve in a way that makes others feel good. He can be the glue that keeps a group together.

Peter struggles when leaders let him down. He is not a high charging, directing individual—not someone to generate energy. He becomes confused when others hold conflicting views of the same situation. When he has to draw the line and control others, he may not exercise his power.

Peter's strengths, like Brian's, can become potential liabilities. He denies his aggression, funneling it constructively into teamwork efforts that make others like and respect him. His peers will expect him, because of their relative youth, to provide them with guidance, experience, and wisdom. This he can give, in his congenial style. He may disappoint them, however, if he does not behave authoritatively. In addition, he is likely to be surpassed by younger, more competitive executives who have greater potential complexity of information processing and who will exceed his pace.

Developmental needs. Peter's seniors should help him to exercise leadership and take a stance when appropriate. When others need to be called to account for their actions, he should be encouraged to give straightforward feedback on their performance. He should be supported in situations of conflict so that he is able to think clearly and take charge.

Structural approach—benefits. Peter's case illustrates the added benefit of considering an executive's phase of development, both in terms of Jaques' modes of conceptual ability and in terms of Erik Erikson's stages of adult development (Erikson, 1963). To anticipate Peter's future course within the company, both views on development help to identify potential pitfalls and limitations. Most psychological assessments by industrial and organizational psychologists do not explicitly address these developmental issues and their implications.

According to Jaques' framework, Peter's current potential complexity of information processing is adequate to handle the role of the VP finance, North America. His *applied* capacity, however, may not be sufficient to perform the work of the role. His maximum potential capacity is a role with little more than a ten-year time span (see Figure 1, page 18).

At 46, Peter is approaching an age at which executives are expected to mentor junior colleagues. A nurturer by nature, Peter is likely to foster the development of those who report to him through gentle, positive feedback. Because he is uncomfortable with the rebellious, aggressive parts of himself, however, he is unlikely to be able to help subordinates grow by telling them what they are not doing well, what they must do to meet his requisite standard, by when, and with what consequences for their future prospects. His executive effectiveness will diminish as others learn to regard him as insufficiently authoritative or capable of setting and enforcing clear accountabilities. By accounting for the developmental tasks associated with each phase of psychological development, a structural

approach allows us to help plan for executive roles and advise executives of the normative expectations associated with age-related role performance.

DISCUSSION

These two executives possess the level of cognitive complexity to handle the technical parts of their current roles. They also have limitations, some of which are amenable to coaching and development, some of which are not. Each is developmentally in a different conceptual mode and a different phase of the life span. Brian has the capacity to take a more forthright stand with appropriate encouragement. Eventually, as his ambitions crystallize and he gains broader experience, he will simultaneously develop the conceptual capacity that would put him in the running for the role of CEO and board member. If his teammates and seniors tell him to be more directing of other, Peter can become more authoritative. Given the projected limits of his conceptual capacity, he is unlikely to be suited for a position in corporate governance.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes a structural psychological approach to understanding the personality of the executive. Managers and consulting psychologists alike may find this approach an operationally useful supplement to traditional industrial and organizational conceptions and frameworks. Its usefulness lies in its power to explain behavior—not merely describe it—giving rise to the ability to predict with greater confidence how a person is likely to behave under various conditions. A structural approach addresses both the dynamic requirements of the role—the environment, including technical and interpersonal variables over time—and the personality of the individual being considered for that role. It considers the nuances of personality as a dynamic process. It provides a developmental framework for understanding an executive's potential to grow with the changing demands of the role. This aspect is particularly important in executive assessment, for it is important to know how an individual will cope with the increasing demand as the level of leadership responsibility increases, to evaluate, develop, and support others. A structural approach also offers an integrative perspective capable of making sense of the interactions among various behaviors observed across the objective-projective psychological testing spectrum. It is therefore a valuable tool when assessing candidates for executive roles.

The trend in academic and industrial and organizational psychology has been to focus on isolated behaviors, traits, and decision styles. The structural approach we have described provides a means by which the continuity of various facets of personality—public and private, rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious—can be understood and integrated in dynamic relation to one another as part of an organic whole.

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