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# Senior managers: Are they really different?

Human Capital Consulting | Deloitte Leadership UK



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**Senior managers: Are they really different?**

# Who makes it to the top?

A study of  
personality,  
reasoning factors  
and business  
mindset factors in  
1500 international  
managers

Many suggestions have been made as to the personal qualities or competencies which single out those who make it to the top. Supporting evidence has typically come from anecdotal experience or formal research studies.

As practitioners engaged by clients to help them make career and development decisions with and about people this is a subject of great interest to ourselves. In common with everyone else we have theory, published research and our own experience of assessing managers to inform our judgements. In addition though we also have an extensive database of

psychometric information on managers whom we have assessed during the course of many years of consulting work.

The purpose of this paper is to describe what we found when we analysed the data of over 3800 managers with the objective of seeing whether we could find any significant differences in the psychometric data between those who reach senior positions and those who do not.

## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Psychometric measures

We use a battery of 5 psychometric tests of personality and reasoning in our assessment process for managers and 'high flyers'. They are as follows:

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### NEO PI-R

A 240 item paper and pencil personality inventory based on the five factor model of trait personality. The five domains measured are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness

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### Myers Briggs Type Indicator™

A measure of 'psychological type' which profiles people on 4 dimensions of personal preference, Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, Judging-Perception

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### GMA(A)

A measure of flexibility of thinking and the ability to identify patterns or systems

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### Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (W-GCTA)

A test of analytical reasoning skills which measures five aspects of critical thinking ability: Drawing Inferences, Recognising Assumptions, Deductive Reasoning, Logical Interpretation, Argument Evaluation

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### Consequences

A test of divergent thinking which measures the ability to generate creative alternatives in problem-solving situations.

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# The psychometric measure

We also use a standardised repertory grid interview procedure to evaluate the breadth and depth of manager's business and leadership schema. The 8 areas evaluated by the process are:



## Customer

Identifying and responding to customer needs



## Commercial

Understanding how products and services make money/profit



## Strategic

Defining future direction for the business



## Management

Knowing how to get things done through others



## Inter-cultural

Understanding how to fit in with other cultures



## People

Understanding how to influence people



## Political

Knowing how to use the internal political system to achieve objectives



## Risk Management

Recognising when the organisation is exposed to risk

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# Research objective

The study was to explore the relationship between the personality traits, reasoning abilities and business and leadership schema measured by our psychometric tests, and management success as defined by reaching a senior position and being successful there. The objective was to identify whether there are any personality, reasoning or business and leadership schema differences between those who reach senior positions and those who do not. We conducted the study in two steps; first we adopted a fairly general approach and compared all the senior managers in our database with all other managers to see whether there were any differences at this rather broad level.

Second we narrowed the investigation down to a small population of senior managers whose track record was known to us. The aim of the second study was to identify whether there were any differences in personality, reasoning and business and leadership schema between those with a track record of success compared to those with an inconsistent track record. In terms of methodology it was not our intention to conduct an in-depth piece of research at this stage; we were keen simply to establish whether there was 'anything of interest' which in due course might warrant further investigation.



## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Are people who have reached the top different from those who have not?



### Sample

For the first study we selected two groups from our database; 'managers of managers' i.e. senior managers, and 'managers/supervisors.' The sample sizes were 899 'managers of managers' and 668 'managers/supervisors'. The gender split in the total sample was 14% women and 86% men. The managers in the sample were drawn from a wide range of industry sectors including utilities, telecommunications, financial services, engineering, manufacturing, and professional legal and accounting practices.

All of the managers were from international companies. The managers were from a wide range of functions including Finance, Operations, Sales/Business Development, Engineering/Technical and General Management (i.e. CEOs, Managing Directors, Regional or Divisional Heads). The total sample was 76% British with the remaining 24% comprising a wide range of different nationalities. N.B. data availability issues meant that the sample for the MBTI™ analysis was only 461.

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### Results

The analysis was a simple comparison of the two groups. We were looking for significant differences between the two groups on any of the dimensions in the psychometrics.

See Appendix 1 for the results.

### Conclusion

The results show that 'managers of managers' do significantly differ from 'managers/supervisors' on a number of personality, reasoning and business and leadership schema dimensions. Broadly the senior managers are higher on extraversion and drive and lower on neuroticism.

In relation to intellectual ability they are stronger on analytical thinking and creative thinking. They also have much better developed business and leadership schema. These results are in line with other studies linking the NEO to performance measures. The results are also in line with our experience of assessing senior managers i.e. they are typically brighter, more driven, more assertive, more dependable, more open to others, more intuitive (in MBTI™ terms), more emotionally balanced and their business thinking is much broader and better integrated.

## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Are senior managers who have demonstrated consistent career success any different from those who have not?



### Sample

For the second study we concentrated on the 'managers of managers' sample only and on those managers whose performance we had observed over a number of years. We then classified them into 2 categories. The first group included those managers where there was clear evidence of a track record of success in one job after another. The second group included managers where there was clear evidence of not having succeeded in some respect e.g. moved out of role prematurely for negative reasons. The criteria were intended to be as 'objective' as possible i.e. classifications based on actual track record rather than on subjective opinions of effectiveness.

The sample was a subset of the sample from the previous study and comprised 101 senior managers drawn again from a wide range of sectors, with 12 different functions and 9 different nationalities represented. There were only 3 women in the total sample. Following the classification process the outcome was a group of 51 consistently strong performers and a group of 50 rated as having not succeeded in some respect. The groups were compared using data from the same tests as in the first study.



## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Are senior managers who have demonstrated consistent career success any different from those who have not?



### Results

See Appendix 2 for the results.

### Conclusion

The results indicate that the senior managers who have a consistently successful 'track record' stand out in that they are more positive and optimistic about people, have a stronger sense of duty, are interpersonally warmer and are less stress prone. In intellectual terms they are brighter and more creative in their thinking and their business and leadership schema are significantly more developed than the senior managers with 'patchy' track records.

With regard to drawing any firm and generalisable conclusions caution has to be exercised given that the sample is a highly selected one. However the findings are consistent with other studies investigating characteristics of successful managers and with our own experience of working with and assessing senior managers from many countries around the world.

## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Appendix 1

Appendix 1. Differences between Managers of Managers and Managers/Supervisors on personality and reasoning measures

	Managers of Managers: meanscores	Managers/Supervisors: mean scores	Difference
<b>Neuroticism</b>	64.3737	68.5569	-4.1832 ***
N1 Anxiety	12.0990	12.8099	-0.7109 **
N2 Angry hostility	10.2058	10.9431	-0.7373 **
N3 Depression	9.4360	10.2725	0.8365 ***
N4 Self-consciousness	11.8432	12.4207	-0.5775 **
N5 Impulsiveness	14.2914	14.9012	-0.6098 **
N6 Vulnerability	6.4994	7.2096	-0.7102 ***
<b>Extraversion</b>	125.9132	123.4701	2.4431 **
E1 Warmth	23.1335	22.9057	0.2278
E2 Gregariousness	19.6819	19.4446	0.2373
E3 Assertiveness	21.2848	19.9656	1.3192 ***
E4 Activity	21.9088	21.0465	0.8624 ***
E5 Excitement-seeking	18.1780	18.6287	-0.4507 *
E6 Positive emotions	21.7264	21.4775	0.2489
<b>Openness</b>	118.5517	117.9790	0.5727
O1 Fantasy	16.4638	16.5269	-0.0631
O2 Aesthetics	17.7341	17.4476	0.2865
O3 Feelings	21.3059	21.2320	0.0739
O4 Actions	19.4271	19.6108	-0.1837
O5 Ideas	20.0445	20.0704	-0.0259
O6 Values	23.5929	23.0913	0.5016 **
<b>Agreeableness</b>	115.5695	116.3728	-0.8033
A1 Trust	21.9221	20.9775	0.9446 ***
A2 Straightforwardness	17.7998	18.0000	-0.2002
A3 Altruism	23.0289	23.1557	-0.1268
A4 Compliance	17.7186	18.0210	-0.3024
A5 Modesty	16.2102	16.8353	-0.6251 **
A6 Tender-mindedness	18.8899	19.3683	-0.4784 **
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	133.9600	130.8877	3.0723 ***
C1 Competence	24.1991	23.6707	0.5284 **
C2 Order	19.0078	18.9371	0.0707
C3 Dutifulness	24.9277	24.1183	0.8094 ***
C4 Achievement Striving	23.2848	22.2919	0.9929 ***
C5 Self-discipline	23.8532	23.2560	0.5972 **
C6 Deliberation	18.6908	18.6138	0.0770

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	Managers of Managers: meanscores	Managers/Supervisors: mean scores	Difference
<b>MBTI™</b>			
Extraversion	15.5810	15.1244	0.4566
Introversion	10.3651	11.5529	-1.1878 *
Sensing	12.1818	13.4663	-1.2845
Intuition	12.8617	11.9091	0.9526 *
Thinking	17.5138	17.4567	0.0571
Feeling	4.8300	4.6683	0.1617
Judging	16.7659	17.1914	-0.4255
Perceiving	11.2648	10.5433	0.7215
<b>GMA (A) (Harsh norms)</b>	7.9461	7.6432	0.3029
<b>Watson Glaser CTA</b>	64.5098	62.5724	1.9374 ***
<b>Consequences</b>	35.4240	33.0000	2.4240 ***
<b>Business and Leadership Schema</b>	19.0048	14.4563	4.5486 ***

## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Appendix 2

Appendix 2. Differences between Managers of Managers with consistent career success and Managers of Managers with inconsistent career success on personality and reasoning measures

	Mgrs of Mgrs with consistent career success: mean scores	Mgrs of Mgrs with inconsistent career success: mean scores	Difference
<b>Neuroticism</b>	62.0196	66.3265	-4.3069
N1 Anxiety	11.3333	12.1224	-0.7891
N2 Angry hostility	10.2157	10.8776	-0.6619
N3 Depression	8.4510	10.0612	-1.6102
N4 Self-consciousness	11.5882	11.5918	-0.0036
N5 Impulsiveness	14.7255	14.3265	0.3990
N6 Vulnerability	5.7059	7.3469	-1.6410 *
<b>Extraversion</b>	130.6078	124.2653	6.3425
E1 Warmth	23.6667	22.0204	1.6463 *
E2 Gregariousness	20.9608	19.3673	1.5935
E3 Assertiveness	22.0196	21.6327	0.3869
E4 Activity	22.7451	22.1837	0.5614
E5 Excitement-seeking	19.0784	17.9592	1.1192
E6 Positive emotions	22.1373	21.1224	1.0149
<b>Openness</b>	121.6275	115.4082	6.2193
O1 Fantasy	16.9216	15.9388	0.9828
O2 Aesthetics	17.9020	17.2449	0.6571
O3 Feelings	22.3529	20.7143	1.6386
O4 Actions	20.3725	19.0816	1.2909
O5 Ideas	20.2353	18.9592	1.2761
O6 Values	23.7843	23.2857	0.4986
<b>Agreeableness</b>	116.4706	111.7347	4.7359
A1 Trust	23.0784	20.7347	2.3437 **
A2 Straightforwardness	18.4706	16.5714	1.8992 *
A3 Altruism	23.4706	21.4286	2.0420 **
A4 Compliance	17.3137	17.2857	0.0280
A5 Modesty	15.8039	16.8776	-1.0737
A6 Tender-mindedness	18.3333	18.8367	-0.5034
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	136.5686	135.4286	1.1400
C1 Competence	24.7451	24.2857	0.4594
C2 Order	18.7255	20.0000	-1.2745
C3 Dutifulness	25.8235	24.4286	1.3949 *
C4 Achievement Striving	24.3725	23.5306	0.8419
C5 Self-discipline	24.3725	23.8776	0.4949
C6 Deliberation	17.7451	19.3061	-1.561

## Senior managers: Are they really different?

# Appendix 2

Appendix 2. Differences between Managers of Managers with consistent career success and Managers of Managers with inconsistent career success on personality and reasoning measures

	Mgrs of Mgrs with consistent career success: mean scores	Mgrs of Mgrs with inconsistent career success: mean scores	Difference
<b>MBTI™</b>			
Extraversion	17.5000	15.6250	1.8750
Introversion	8.2500	10.0625	-1.8125
Sensing	10.3500	11.8750	-1.5250
Intuition	13.7500	12.4375	1.3125
Thinking	15.8000	18.0000	-2.2000
Feeling	5.5500	5.0000	0.5500
Judging	14.7500	17.5000	-2.7500
Perceiving	13.7500	10.6875	3.0625
<b>GMA (A) (Harsh norms)</b>	8.0800	7.0408	1.0392*
<b>Watson Glaser CTA</b>	67.4667	63.0435	4.4232**
<b>Consequences</b>	36.8367	32.4375	4.3992***
<b>Business and Leadership Schema</b>	26.1765	24.1600	2.0165***

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If you would like to find out more, please do get in contact.



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