

Senior Executives: A Unique Personality Profile?

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Presentation Summary

- Summary of existing literature
- Specific research questions
- Methodology used
- Results
- Discussion of results
- Implications for organisations

Senior Executives

- Study of leadership effectiveness and the ‘ideal leader’ is by no means new
- BUT few studies have explored the idea of a unique personality profile amongst Senior Executives
- Resilience and emotional strength to cope with high job demands

Summary of existing literature

- Bartram (1992) compared the 16PF profiles of a UK management sample with the general population
- Statistically significant differences found on all 16 scales

Summary of existing literature

- Profile of the ‘average’ management position applicant
- “An independent, stable extravert who is neither particularly tough minded nor tender minded but who is somewhat more controlled and conventional than the average for the general population.”

Summary of existing literature

- However, little research has attempted to separate out managers into specific occupational levels.

Summary of existing literature

- Bayliss et al (2009) – coping strategies of police officers under stress
- Salovey et al (2002) & Campbell-Sills et al (2006) – emotion identification and acceptance are key to managing stress
- Is the same true of Senior Leaders?

Summary of existing literature

- Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability “...to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others” (Goleman, 2001.)
- Abraham (2004) – EI acts through specific emotional competencies to influence performance

Summary of existing literature

- Bosma et al (1997) – impact of job design on stress
- Senior level jobs – high demands but also high levels of control

Goals of the research

- Study looks at the personality profiles of Senior Executives
- Questions on workplace attitudes and behaviours
- Is there a specific set of personality characteristics which enable Executives to cope effectively with high job demands?

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1** – Executives will score higher on Dominance, Social Boldness, and Openness to Change reflecting higher independence and a greater desire to influence others.
- **Hypothesis 2** – Executives will score higher on Emotional Stability and lower on Apprehension reflecting lower levels of anxiety
- **Hypothesis 3** – Executives will score lower on Sensitivity reflecting an ability to put emotions aside when making tough decisions

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 4** – Executives will report being higher on the following organisational outcomes:
 - Job satisfaction
 - Job enjoyment
 - Emotional Investment
 - Emotional Strength
- **Hypothesis 5** – Executives will report being lower on the following organisational outcomes:
 - Stress at work
 - Likelihood of quitting

Methodology used

- Nationally representative sample (n = 1,212) of UK & Irish working age participants
- Participants completed 16PF5 questionnaire, and additional questions covering the following topics:
 - Job satisfaction and enjoyment derived from work
 - Emotional investment and emotional strength required at work
 - Stress at work
 - Likelihood of quitting

Methodology used

- Participants were classified into occupational groups based on their reported job level:
 - Senior/Executive level (n=90)
 - Middle management (n=200)
 - First level management/supervisor (n=179)
 - Employee (n=269)

Results

- Senior Executives compared with middle managers, first-line managers, and employees
- Senior Executives scored the highest, across all occupational groups, on:
 - Global Independence ($p < .001$)
 - Dominance ($p < .001$)
 - Liveliness ($p < .05$)
 - Social Boldness ($p < .001$)
 - Openness to Change ($p < .001$)
- **Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported**

Results

- Conversely, Senior Executives scored the lowest, compared to all other occupational groups, on:
 - Sensitivity ($p < .01$)
 - Apprehension ($p < .01$)
- **Hypothesis 2 was partially supported, and Hypothesis 3 fully supported**
- In comparison to other occupational groups, Senior Executives reported:
 - Investing more emotionally in their work ($p < .001$)
 - That their jobs required a great deal of emotional strength ($p < .001$)

Results

- Despite this, they reported feeling:
 - Less stressed at work ($p < .001$), in comparison with middle and first-line managers
- They also reported:
 - Higher levels of job satisfaction ($p < .001$)
 - Higher levels of enjoyment from their work ($p < .001$)
- They reported being less likely to think about quitting their jobs ($p < .001$)
- **Hypotheses 4 and 5 were therefore supported**

Discussion

- So is there a specific set of personality traits which characterise Senior Leaders?
 - The results of our research suggest that there is!
- Paradox between higher degree of emotional investment while feeling less stressed at work
- So where do Senior Executives find this emotional strength?

Discussion

- 16PF profiles reveal lower levels of Apprehension and Sensitivity
- More effective at emotional detachment?
- More effective at identifying, responding to, and regulating emotions?
- Self control and resilience?
- Greater congruence between job demands and control (Bosma et al, 1997)

Implications

- Implications for organisations' understanding of Executives
- Danger of mixed messages in workplace communication
- Mediating factor = emotional strength
- Need for greater understanding of working styles and approaches of Executives
- Coaching and developmental implications

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