

WHERE EXACTLY DO LEADERS COME FROM?



Leaders are born. Or are they made? Is it heredity or environment that gives birth to those we view as great leaders?

That debate has raged for decades producing more books on leadership than most of us have time – or interest – to read. Collective wisdom has it that leaders are both born *and* made. More than just a wishy-washy conclusion, substantive research on the topic can be cited as evidence that it is who we are and how we are cultured, trained and behave that influence leadership capability.

The most recent example of such research (reference cited below) compared many individual differences that could potentially predict leadership effectiveness.

The research involved a “meta-analysis” which is basically a really big analysis of data pertaining to 25 individual characteristics and their relationship with various measures of leadership effectiveness. The individual characteristics were categorized into two groups: those that are more stable such as personality and intelligence; and those that are more temporary and can be learned such as knowledge and skills. In research jargon, these are referred to as “trait” and “state” individual differences, respectively.

Results of this analysis found trait and state individual differences were fairly similar in their ability to predict leadership effectiveness. In other words, leaders are both born *and* made to a fairly equal extent. Of the trait individual differences, the best predictors of leadership effectiveness were achievement motivation, energy, dominance, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, creativity, and charisma. Of the state individual differences, the best predictors of leadership were interpersonal skills, oral communication, written communication, management skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making.

As a practicality, this means emphasis should be placed on selecting for trait individual differences and developing in your high potential employees those state individual differences as best strategy for strengthening your organization. This is something VRH has been helping its clients do for decades. We can help you sharpen your selection process using appropriate assessment strategies tailored to your organizational need. Visit our website www.vrhconsulting.com and contact us today to discuss how we can partner with you to provide decision assurance.

To read the full research, follow the attached link.

Hoffman, B. J., Woehr, D. J., Maldagen-Youngjohn, R., & Lyons, B. D. (2011). Great man or great myth? A quantitative review of the relationship between individual differences and leader effectiveness. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 84, 347-381. doi: 10.1348/096317909X485207