



LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

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Abstract

Employees aren't required to show their colors, and some don't. One employee who doesn't reveal his colors publicly is CEO J. Michael Talbert, who says he needs to be a bit of chameleon because he has to change his own personality to suit the people he's dealing with at the time. Transocean's training instructor reveals that Talbert's really a green-blue. However, he can act like a competitive red when he needs to, the instructor says, referring to a recent merger.

Keywords: leadership, personality, values, attitudes, patterns, cognitive differences, and so on!

Introduction

We all know that people differ in many ways. Some are quiet and shy while others are gregarious; some are thoughtful and serious while others are impulsive and fun-loving. All these individual differences affect the leader-follower interaction. Differences in personality, attitudes, values, and so forth influence how people interpret an assignment, whether they like to be told what to do, how they handle challenges, and how they interact with others. Leaders' personalities and attitudes, as well as their ability to understand individual differences among employees, can profoundly affect leadership effectiveness. Many of today's organizations are using personality and other psychometric tests as a way to help people better understand and relate to one another.

Organizational leadership is both an individual and an organizational phenomenon. This chapter explores the individual in more depth, looking at some individual differences that can influence leadership abilities and success. We begin by looking at personality and some leader-related personality dimensions. Then, the chapter considers how values affect leadership and the ways in which a leader's attitudes toward self and others influence behavior. We also explore the role of perception, discuss attribution theory, and look at cognitive differences, including a discussion of thinking and decision-making styles and the concept of brain dominance. Finally, the chapter considers the idea that different personalities and thinking styles are better suited to different types of leadership roles.

Personality and Leadership

Some people are consistently pleasant in a variety of situations, whereas others are moody or aggressive. To explain this behavior, we may say, "He has a pleasant personality," or "She has an aggressive personality." This is the most common usage of the term *personality*, and it refers to an individual's behavior patterns as well as how the person is viewed by others. However, there is also a deeper meaning to the term. **Personality** is the set of unseen characteristics and processes that underlie a relatively stable pattern of behavior in response to ideas, objects, or people in the environment. Leaders who have an understanding of how individuals' personalities differ can use this understanding to improve their leadership effectiveness.

A Model of Personality

Most people think of personality in terms of traits. As we discussed in Chapter 2, researchers have investigated whether any traits stand up to scientific scrutiny, and we looked at some traits associated with effective leadership. Although investigators have examined thousands of traits over the years, their findings have been distilled into five general dimensions that describe personality. These often are called the **Big Five personality dimensions**, which describe an individual's extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.¹ Each dimension contains a wide range of specific traits—for example, all of the personality traits that you would use to describe a teacher, friend, or boss could be categorized into one of the Big Five dimensions. These factors represent a continuum, in that a person may have a low, moderate, or high degree of each of the dimensions.

Extraversion is made up of traits and characteristics that influence behavior in group settings. Extraversion refers to the degree to which a person is outgoing, sociable, talkative, and comfortable meeting and talking to new people. Someone low on extraversion may come across as quiet, withdrawn, and socially unassertive. This dimension also includes the characteristic of *dominance*. A person with a high degree of dominance likes to be in control and have influence over others. These people often are quite self-confident, seek out positions of authority, and are competitive and assertive. They like to be in charge of others or have responsibility for others. It is obvious that both dominance and extraversion could be valuable for a leader. However, not all effective leaders necessarily have a high degree of these characteristics.

For example, many successful top leaders, including Bill Gates, Charles Schwab, and Steven Spielberg, are introverts, people who feel drained by social encounters and need time alone to reflect and recharge their batteries. One study found that 4 in 10 top executives test out to be introverts.² Thus, the quality of extraversion is not as significant as is often presumed. In addition, a high degree of dominance could even be detrimental to effective leadership if not tempered by other qualities, such as agreeableness or emotional stability.

Agreeableness refers to the degree to which a person is able to get along with others by being good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, compassionate, understanding, and trusting. A leader who scores high on agreeableness seems warm and approachable, whereas one who is low on this dimension may seem cold, distant, and insensitive. People high on agreeableness tend to make friends easily and often have a large number of friends, whereas those low on agreeableness generally establish fewer close relationships.

Traits of agreeableness seem to be particularly important for leaders in today's collaborative organizations. The days are over when a hard-driving manager can run roughshod over others to earn a promotion. Today's successful leaders are not the tough guys of the past but those men and women who know how to get people to like and trust them.³ One recent book even argues that the secret to success in work and in life is *likability*. We all know we're more willing to do something for someone we like than for someone we don't, whether it be a teammate, a neighbor, a professor, or a supervisor. Leaders can increase their likeability by developing characteristics of agreeableness, including being friendly and cooperative, understanding other people in a genuine way, and striving to make people feel positive about themselves.⁴ Bob and Stan Lee, brothers who run a family-owned manufacturing plant that makes parts for machines that produce cardboard boxes, are striving to incorporate this advice to improve their leadership effectiveness.

At Corrugated Replacements Inc., Bob and Stan Lee have begun their change initiative with the more easily-implemented ideas, such as a suggestion box. However, unless they can adopt behaviors that make them more agreeable and likable, employees aren't likely to respond positively to any of the other initiatives aimed at improving morale.

The next personality dimension, **conscientiousness**, refers to the degree to which a person is responsible, dependable, persistent, and achievement-oriented. A conscientious person is focused on a few goals, which he or she pursues in a purposeful way, whereas a less conscientious person tends to be easily distracted and impulsive. This dimension of personality relates to the work itself rather than to relationships with other people. Many entrepreneurs show a high level of conscientiousness. For example, Mary Clare Murphy and Christie Miller started FSBOMadison to help people sell their homes without going through a traditional real estate agent. As one of the country's largest for-sale-by-owner Web sites, FSBOMadison now lists almost 15 percent of all houses for sale in and around Madison, Wisconsin. The two women stayed focused on their goal despite resistance from the local real estate industry, and they work around the clock to manage the thriving business. One woman called at midnight to ask whether she should paint a closet to make her house more marketable. "Calls come at all hours, even on Christmas," Miller says.⁵

The dimension of **emotional stability** refers to the degree to which a person is well-adjusted, calm, and secure. A leader who is emotionally stable handles stress well, is able to handle criticism, and generally doesn't take mistakes and failures personally. In contrast, leaders who have a low degree of emotional stability are likely to become tense, anxious, or depressed. They generally have lower self-confidence and may explode in emotional outbursts when stressed or criticized. The related topic of *emotional intelligence* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The final Big Five dimension, **openness to experience**, is the degree to which a person has a broad range of interests and is imaginative, creative, and willing to consider new ideas. These people are intellectually curious and often seek out new experiences through travel, the arts, movies, reading widely, or other activities. Steve Odland, CEO of Office Depot, for example, has spent his vacation for the past 11 years at the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York, which offers arts performances, participation in sports, classes for adults and children, and daily lectures on a wide range of topics, from religion to governance. "When I'm at a Chautauqua lecture with 1,000 people who are intellectually curious," Odland says, "that opens my mind to a breadth of issues and points of view."⁶

People lower in this dimension tend to have narrower interests and stick to the tried-and-true ways of doing things. Open-mindedness is important to leaders because, as we learned in Chapter 1, leadership is about change rather than stability. In an interesting study of three nineteenth-century leaders—John Quincy Adams, Frederick Douglass, and Jane Addams—one researcher found that early travel experiences and exposure to different ideas and cultures were critical elements in developing open-minded qualities in these leaders.⁷ Travel during the formative years helped these leaders develop a greater degree of openness to experience because it put them in situations that required adaptability.

Despite the logic of the Big Five personality dimensions, they can be difficult to measure precisely. In addition, since each dimension is made up of numerous traits, a person can be high on some of the specific traits but low on others. For example, concerning the dimension of conscientiousness, it might be possible for a person to be highly responsible and dependable and yet also have a low degree of achievement-orientation.

Furthermore, research has been mostly limited to subjects in the United States, so the theory is difficult to apply cross-culturally.

Few studies have carefully examined the connection between the Big Five and leadership success. One recent summary of more than 70 years of personality and leadership research did find evidence that four of the five dimensions were consistently related to successful leadership.⁸ The researchers found considerable evidence that people who score high on the dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are more successful leaders. Results for openness to experience were less consistent; that is, in some cases, higher scores on this dimension related to better performance, but they did not seem to make a difference in other cases. Yet, in a recent study by a team of psychologists of the personality traits of the greatest Louisa Kamps, "Reinventing Real Estate", More (October 2006), pp. 75-76.

U.S. presidents (as determined by historians), openness to experience produced the highest correlation with historians' ratings of greatness.

The study noted that presidents such as Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson were high on this personality dimension. Other personality dimensions the team found to be associated with great presidents were extraversion and conscientiousness, including traits such as aggressiveness, setting ambitious goals, and striving for achievement. Although agreeableness did not correlate with greatness, the ability to empathize with others and being concerned for others, which could be considered elements of emotional stability, did.⁹

It is important to note that few leaders have consistently high scores across all of the Big Five dimensions, yet there are many successful leaders. Higher scores on the Big Five dimensions are not necessarily predictive of leadership effectiveness, and persons who score toward the lower end of the scale can also be good leaders.

The value of the Big Five for leaders is primarily to help them understand their own basic personality dimensions, and then learn to emphasize the positive and mitigate the negative aspects of their own natural style.

Exhibit 1.1 gives some tips for both introverts and extraverts to help them be better leaders. Many factors contribute to effective leadership. As we learned in the previous two chapters, situational factors play a role in determining which traits may be most important. In addition, a leader's intelligence, knowledge of the business, values and attitudes, and problem-solving styles, which are not measured by the Big Five, also play a role in leadership effectiveness.

Later in this chapter, we will discuss values and attitudes, as well as examine some cognitive differences that affect leadership. First, let's look more closely at two personality attributes that have significant implications for leaders.

Exhibit 1.1 Maximizing Leadership Effectiveness

Tips for Extraverts

- *Don't bask in the glow of your own personality.* Learn to hold back and listen to others when the situation calls for it to hibernate.
- *Try to underwhelm.* Your natural exuberance can be intimidating and miss important facts and ideas.
- *Talk less, listen more.* Develop the discipline to let others speak first on an issue to avoid the appearance of arrogance.
- *Don't be Mr. or Ms. Personality.* Extraverts tend to agree too quickly just to be liked. These casual agreements can come back to haunt you.

Tips for Introverts

- *Get out and about.* Resist the urge to hibernate.
Practice being friendly and outgoing in settings outside of work. Take your new skills to the office.
- *Give yourself a script.* Come up with a few talking points you can rely on to covert silence in conversations.
- *Smile.* A frown or a soberly introspective expression can be misinterpreted. A bright countenance reflects confidence that you know where you're going and want others to follow.

Source: Based on Patricia WallinQton. "The ins and Outs of Personality." *CO* (January 15, 2003), pp. 42, 44.

Perceptive Use of Personality Factors

The personality factors we have been talking about will be of greatest usefulness if a list of specifications is prepared for each job. The following examples suggest how a manager should tailor specifications to a job.

It is a good idea to provide complementary abilities in executives and their key subordinates. Thus an executive who has intuition, courage, and a penchant for fast action might want an assistant who has analytical skill and a predisposition for research and fast-finding. If a new supervisor is to be appointed over a group of subordinates who are highly dependent, he will need considerable self-reliance and self-assertion.

The position of production scheduler presents a different problem. His work must interlock frequently and closely with that of a wide variety of people—perhaps a dozen shop supervisors, inventory clerks, purchasing agents, maintenance people, sales representatives and others. Anyone appointed to such a job should have considerable emotional stability if he is to remain problem-centered and get along with everyone.

In contrast, the jobs of researcher and development engineer typically require persons with specialized knowledge and keen decision-making talent. Social sensitivity and emotional stability, although desirable, would not be so essential for such jobs as they would be for a production scheduler. The position of sales representative calls for still different abilities, social sensitivity and self-reliance ranking at the top of the list.

Executives need considerable courage and self-assertiveness when a company is making frequent changes to adopt to new competition or rapid change in technology. A high degree of emotional stability is also desirable, as major changes mean stress for everyone whose job is affected by new practices.

A final remark about individual specializations. The preceding discussion has been couched in terms of fixed and set working environments, including a stable array of subordinates, associates, and social structure. This approach implies that an individual must adjust to fit a position. But sometimes adjustment may run in the other direction. A job may be shaped, at least to some extent, to fit the person. A manager must always think closely about both the job—however it may be revised—and the characteristics of a person who could fill such a job. Also, jobs change over time. If a new strategy is likely to be adopted, then qualities needed in the people who are to meet the revised priorities should be specified.

Personality Traits and Leader Behavior

Two specific personality attributes that have a significant impact on behavior and are thus of particular interest for leadership studies are locus of control and authoritarianism.

LOCUS of Control Some people believe that their actions can strongly affect what happens to them. In other words, they believe they are "masters of their own fate." Others feel that whatever happens to them in life is a result of luck, chance, or outside people and events; they believe they have little control over their fate. A person's locus of control defines whether he or she places the primary responsibility within the self or on outside forces.¹⁰ People who believe their actions determine what happens to them have a high *internal* locus of control (internals), whereas those who believe outside forces determine what happens to them have a high *external* locus of control (externals).

Research on locus of control has shown real differences in behavior between internals and externals across a wide range of settings.¹¹ Internals in general are more self-motivated, are in better control of their own behavior, participate more in social and political activities, and more actively seek information. There is also evidence that internals are better able to handle complex information and problem solving, and that they are more achievement-oriented than externals. In addition, people with a high internal locus of control are more likely than externals to try to influence others, and thus more likely to assume or seek leadership opportunities. People with a high external locus of control typically prefer to have structured, directed work situations. They are better able than internals to handle work that requires compliance and conformity, but they are generally not as effective in situations that require initiative, creativity, and independent action. Therefore, since externals do best in situations where success depends on complying with the direction or guidance of others, they are less likely to enjoy or succeed in leadership positions.

Authoritarianism The belief that power and status differences *should* exist in an organization is called **authoritarianism**.¹² Individuals who have a high degree of this personality trait tend to adhere to conventional rules and values, obey established authority, respect power and toughness, judge others critically, and disapprove of the expression of personal feelings. A leader's degree of authoritarianism will affect how the leader wields and shares power. A highly authoritarian leader is likely to rely heavily on formal authority and unlikely to want to share power with subordinates. High authoritarianism is associated with the traditional, rational approach to management described in Chapter 1. The new leadership paradigm requires that leaders be less authoritarian, although people who rate high on this personality trait can be effective leaders as well. Leaders should also understand that the degree to which followers possess authoritarianism influences how they react to the leader's use of power and authority. When leaders and followers differ in their degree of authoritarianism, effective leadership may be more difficult to achieve.

A trait that is closely related to authoritarianism is *dogmatism*, which refers to a person's receptiveness to others' ideas and opinions. A highly dogmatic person is closed-minded and not receptive to others' ideas. When in a leadership position, dogmatic individuals often make decisions quickly based on limited information, and they are unreceptive to ideas that conflict with their opinions and decisions. Effective leaders, on the other hand, generally have a lower degree of dogmatism, which means they are open-minded and receptive to others' ideas.

Understanding how personality traits and dimensions affect behavior can be a valuable asset for leaders. Knowledge of individual differences gives leaders valuable insights into their own behavior as well as that of followers. It also offers a framework that leaders can use to diagnose situations and make changes to benefit the organization. For example, when Reed Breland became a team facilitator at Hewlett-Packard's financial services center in Colorado, he noticed immediately that one team was in constant turmoil. Breland's understanding of individual differences helped him recognize that two members of the team had a severe personality clash and could not see eye-to-eye on any issue. Although Breland tried to work things out within the team, after several months he simply dissolved the group and reassigned members to other areas. The team members all did fine in other assignments; the personality conflict between the two members was just too strong to overcome and it affected the team's productivity and effectiveness.¹³

Attribution Theory

As people organize what they perceive, they often draw conclusions, such as about an object, event, or person. **Attribution theory** refers to how people explain the causes of events or behaviors. For example, many people contribute the success or failure of an organization to the top leader, when in reality there may be many factors that contribute to organizational performance. People also make attributions or judgments about what caused a person's behavior—something about the person or something about the situation.

An *internal attribution* says characteristics of the person led to the behavior ("My subordinate missed the deadline because he's lazy and incompetent"). An *external attribution* says something about the situation caused the person's behavior ("My subordinate missed the deadline because he didn't have the team support and resources he needed"). Attributions are important because they help people decide how to handle a situation. In the case of a subordinate missing a deadline, a leader who blames the mistake on the employee's personal characteristics might reprimand the person or, more effectively, provide additional training and direction. A leader who blames the mistake on external factors will try to help prevent such situations in the future, such as making sure team members have the resources they need, providing support to remove obstacles, and insuring that deadlines are realistic.

Social scientists have studied the attributions people make and identified three factors that influence whether an attribution will be external or internal.¹⁴ Exhibit 1.2 illustrates these three factors.

1. *Distinctiveness*. Whether the behavior is unusual for that person (in contrast to a person displaying the same kind of behavior in many situations). If the behavior is distinctive, the perceiver probably will make an *external* attribution.

2. *Consistency*. Whether the person being observed has a history of behaving in the same way. People generally make *internal* attributions about consistent behavior.

3. *Consensus*. Whether other people tend to respond to similar situations in the same way. A person who has observed others handle similar situations in the same way will likely make an *external* attribution; that is, it will seem that the situation produces the type of behavior observed.

Another bias that distorts attributions involves attributions we make about our own behavior. People tend to overestimate the contribution of internal factors to their successes and overestimate the contribution of external factors to their failures. This tendency, called the **self-serving bias**, means people give themselves too much credit for what they do well and give external forces too much blame when they fail. Thus, if a leader's subordinates say she doesn't listen well enough, and the leader thinks subordinates don't communicate well enough, the truth may actually lie somewhere in between. At Emerald Packaging, Kevin Kelly examined his attributions and improved his leadership effectiveness by overcoming the self-serving bias. somewhere in between. At Emerald Packaging, Kevin Kelly examined his attributions and improved his leadership effectiveness by overcoming the self-serving bias.

Cognitive Differences

The final area of individual differences we will explore is cognitive style. **Cognitive style** refers to how a person perceives processes, interprets, and uses information. Thus, when we talk about cognitive differences, we are referring to varying approaches to perceiving and assimilating data, making decisions, solving problems, and relating to others.¹⁵ Cognitive approaches are *preferences* that are not necessarily rigid, but most people tend to have only a few preferred habits of thought. One of the most widely recognized cognitive differences is between what we call left-brained versus right-brained thinking patterns.

Patterns of Thinking and Brain Dominance

Neurologists and psychologists have long known that the brain has two distinct hemispheres. Furthermore, science has shown that the left hemisphere controls movement on the body's right side and the right hemisphere controls movement on the left. In the 1960s and 1970s, scientists also discovered that the distinct hemispheres influence thinking, which led to an interest in what has been called left-brained versus right-brained thinking patterns. The left hemisphere is associated with logical, analytical thinking and a linear approach to problem-solving, whereas the right hemisphere is associated with creative, intuitive, values-based thought processes.¹⁶ A recent JC Penney television commercial provides a simple illustration. The commercial shows a woman whose right brain is telling her to go out and spend money to buy fun clothes, while the left brain is telling her to be logical and save money. As another simplified example, people who are very good at verbal and written language (which involves a linear thinking process) are using the left brain, whereas those who prefer to interpret information through visual images are more right-brained.

Exhibit 1.2 Factors influencing Whether Attributions Are Internal or External

Observed Behavior

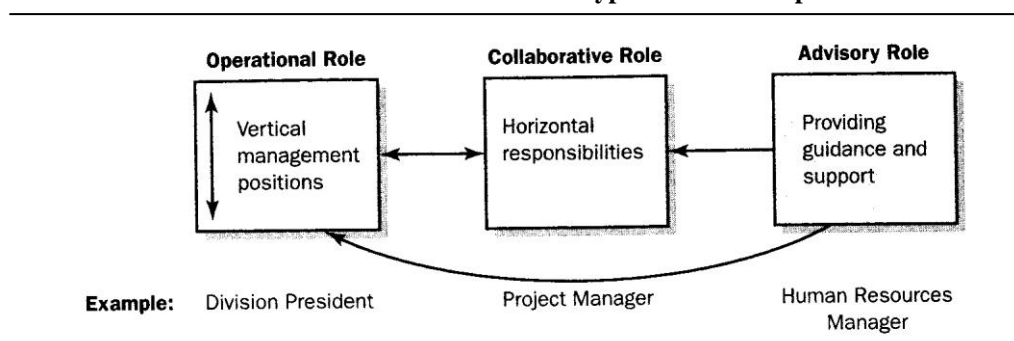
Does the person behave in this way in other situations?	<p>————→ Yes</p> <p>————→ No</p>	<p>Low distinctiveness</p> <p>High distinctiveness</p>	<p>---→ Internal attribution.</p> <p>-----→ External attribution</p>
Does the person have a history of behaving this way at other times?	<p>————→ Yes</p> <p>————→ No</p>	<p>High consistency</p> <p>Low consistency</p>	<p>---→ Internal attribution</p> <p>————→ External attribution</p>
Do other people behave in this way in similar situations?	<p>————→ Yes</p> <p>————→ No</p>	<p>High consensus</p> <p>Low consensus</p>	<p>————→ External attribution</p> <p>————→ Internal attribution</p>

Although the concept of right-brained versus left-brained thinking is not entirely accurate physiologically (not all processes associated with left-brained thinking are located in the left hemisphere and vice versa), this concept provides a powerful metaphor for two very different ways of thinking and decision making. It is also important to remember that everyone uses both left-brained and right-brained thinking, but to varying degrees.

Matching Leaders with Roles

Leaders, like all individuals, can differ significantly in their personalities, attitudes, values, and thinking styles. These individual differences help in part to explain why a leader might succeed in some situations yet fail in others, despite appearing to have all the necessary skills and abilities for the job.

Exhibit 1.3. Three Types of Leadership Roles



Recent research suggests that different types of personalities and thinking styles might be better suited to different types of leadership roles.¹⁷ Exhibit 1.3. illustrates three types of leadership roles identified in today's organizations by a team of experts at Hay Group, a global organizational and human resources consulting firm. The researchers found that, although there is a core set of competencies that all leaders need, there is significant variation in the cognitive skills, behaviors, and personalities that correlate with success in the different roles.

Operational Role This role is the closest to a traditional, vertically-oriented management role, where an executive has direct control over people and resources to accomplish results. Operational leaders fill traditional line and general management positions in a business, for example. They set goals, establish plans, and get things done primarily through the vertical hierarchy and the use of position power. Operations leaders are doggedly focused on delivering results. They tend to be assertive, always pushing forward and raising the bar. Successful operations leaders are typically analytical and knowledgeable, yet they also have the ability to translate their knowledge into a vision that others can become passionate about.

Collaborative Role This is a horizontal role and includes people such as project managers, matrix managers, and team leaders in today's more horizontally-organized companies. This role, which has grown tremendously in importance in recent years, is quite challenging. Leaders in collaborative roles typically don't have the strong position power of the operational role. They often work behind the scenes, using their personal power to influence others and get things done. Collaborative leaders need excellent people skills in order to network, build relationships, and obtain agreement through personal influence. They also are highly proactive and tenacious, and they exhibit extreme flexibility to cope with the ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the collaborative role.

Advisory Role Leaders in an advisory role provide guidance and support to other people and departments in the organization. Advisory leadership roles are found, for example, in departments such as legal, finance, and human resources. These leaders are responsible for developing broad organizational capabilities rather than accomplishing specific business results. Advisory leaders also need great people skills and the ability to influence through personal knowledge and influence. In addition, leaders in advisory roles need exceptionally high levels of honesty and integrity to build trust and keep the organization on solid ethical ground.

The Hay Group research findings shed new light on the types of roles leaders fill in today's organizations and emphasize that individual differences can influence how effective a leader might be in a particular role. Success as a leader involves more than mastering the knowledge and skills of a particular job. A leader's personality, values and attitudes, and thinking style also play a part.

Summary and Interpretation

This chapter explored some of the individual differences that affect leaders and the leadership process. Individuals differ in many ways, including personality, values and attitudes, and styles of thinking and decision making.

Values are fundamental beliefs that cause a person to prefer that things be done one way rather than another. One way to think about values is in terms of instrumental and end values. End values are beliefs about the kinds of goals that are worth pursuing, whereas instrumental values are beliefs about the types of behavior that are appropriate for reaching goals. Values also affect an individual's attitudes. A leader's attitudes about self and others influence how the leader behaves toward and interacts with followers.

Another area of individual differences is cognitive style. The whole brain concept explores a person's preferences for right-brained versus left-brained thinking and for conceptual versus experiential thinking. The model provides a powerful metaphor for understanding differences in thinking styles. Individuals can learn to use their "whole brain" rather than relying on one thinking style. Another way of looking at cognitive differences is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which measures an individual's preferences for introversion versus extraversion, sensing versus intuition, thinking versus feeling, and judging versus perceiving.

Finally, we talked about three types of leadership roles: operational roles, collaborative roles, and advisory roles. Recent studies suggest that different types of personalities and thinking styles are better suited to different types of leadership roles, and leaders can be more effective when they are in positions that best match their natural tendencies.

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