

# What Makes a Successful Leader

Summary Findings from a Study on  
Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, and Personality Type

*First of Three Reports*

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June 28, 2004

***What elements of leadership do executives, managers, and consultants consider most important to success?***

***Do leaders value Emotional Intelligence competencies as highly as traditional leadership competencies?***

***How do perspectives on leadership vary by job level, experience, personality type, and gender?***

In our work with coaching and consulting clients, we found ourselves discussing Emotional Intelligence (“EI”) almost daily, and these conversations left us wanting data-based answers to these questions. Our review of existing studies found a strong correlation between business performance and EI, but no information on how leaders themselves view elements of EI relative to other aspects of leadership.

We initiated exploratory **research with 265 leaders: one-third executives, another third directors or managers, and the rest primarily business owners and consultants**. This report offers the first of three sets of findings from our investigation into Emotional Intelligence, leadership, and personality type. We asked participants to choose the five most and least valued leadership competencies from a list of twenty, which included items that reflect both Emotional Intelligence and general leadership competencies.

**This study finds that leaders consider Emotional Intelligence competencies (such as Relationship Building and Adaptability) more important to leadership**

## **success than traditional leadership competencies (such as Planning and Financial Acumen).**

We analyzed participants' views of leadership and EI by four variables: job classification/level in organization; years of leadership experience; personality type, as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) ®<sup>1</sup>; and gender.

### ***Major Findings***

#### Striking Agreement

Participants in this study were asked to evaluate a set of standard leadership competencies, including both Emotional Intelligence competencies, such as relationship-building and self-awareness, and non-Emotional Intelligence leadership competencies, such as execution and financial acumen.

- ◆ ***Vision* topped the list of critical leadership competencies – across nearly all levels, experience, and personality types. Also ranked in the top five are *Strategic Thinking, Relationship Building, Execution, and People Development*.** Our respondents, then, view successful leadership as a combination of Emotional Intelligence and non-EI skills.
- ◆ Emotional Intelligence competencies are viewed as essential to successful leadership, especially the complex competencies of *Vision, Relationship Building* and *People Development*.
- ◆ **Of the remaining items, leaders rated all the EI competencies—including *Adaptability, Optimism, Empathy, and Self-awareness* – as more important than all other general leadership competencies presented.**

Overall findings are summarized in the chart on the next page.

In interpreting these findings, please note that the segment of our research described in this paper focuses on the subset of Daniel Goleman's EI competencies indicated in bold in the following chart. We chose this subset to focus our questions on a manageable and understandable set of competencies. Our third report, scheduled for October 2004, will include data on the full set of competencies he describes. We selected Goleman's model for our research because of its broad familiarity to corporate leaders, and to training and development professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of CPP, Inc.

**Findings: What's Important to Successful Leadership**  
*All Respondents (n=265)*

	Leadership competencies, by Frequency of Selection (Emotional Intelligence items in bold)	% leaders listing in Top 5
Five Most	1. <b><i>Vision</i></b> <sup>2</sup>	56%
Frequently	2. Strategic Thinking	51%
Selected	3. <b><i>Relationship Building</i></b>	47%
	4. Execution	42%
	5. <b><i>People Development</i></b>	38%
Middle 10	6. <b><i>Achievement Drive</i></b>	36%
	7. <b><i>Adaptability</i></b>	34%
	8. <b><i>Self-Awareness</i></b>	28%
	9. <b><i>Initiative</i></b>	26%
	10. <b><i>Teamwork</i></b>	25%
	11. <b><i>Change Leadership</i></b>	23%
	12. <b><i>Optimism</i></b>	21%
	13. <b><i>Empathy</i></b>	16%
	14. <b><i>Conflict Management</i></b>	15%
	15. External Market Orientation	12%
Five Least	6. Planning	12%
Frequently	7. Analytical Capability	9%
Selected	8. Global Perspective	7%
	9. Functional/Technical Expertise	6%
	10. Financial Acumen	3%

Some Notable Differences

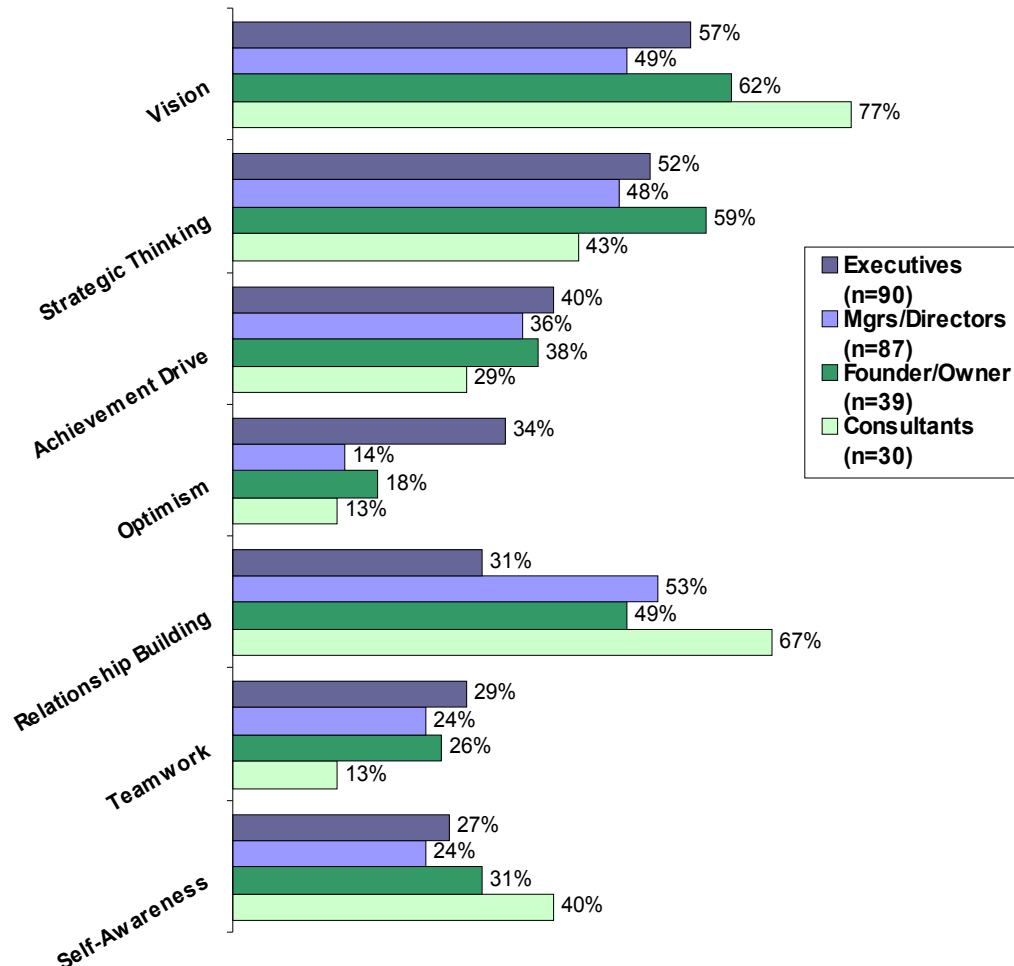
We did find, however, that differences in job classification and level, leadership experience, personality type, and gender reveal important distinctions regarding the competencies seen as crucial to successful leadership.

- ◆ **Experienced leaders rated certain competencies somewhat differently than leaders at earlier stages in their careers.** For example, the more experienced the leader, the more value placed on *Change Leadership* and *Optimism* and the less value placed on *Execution*.
- ◆ **Women and men ranked items quite similarly, with just a few differences.** Women rated *Strategic Thinking* and *Relationship Building* more highly than did men, who rated *Achievement Drive* more highly.
- ◆ **While participants from all job levels valued EI competencies, they varied in which ones they consider important.** For example, of all job levels, far more Executives (34%) valued *Optimism* as a leadership competency than did Managers/Directors (14%), Founder/ Owners (18%), or Consultants (13%). At the same time, far fewer Executives (31%) valued *Relationship Building* than did Managers/Directors or Consultants (50-70%).

<sup>2</sup> *Vision* is also referred to in Goleman's work as *Inspiration* (*Primal Leadership*, © 2002) or *Leadership* (*The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace*, © 2001).

The following chart illustrates some of the differences in how leadership competencies were valued by people of different job classifications/levels.

### What's Important to Successful Leadership? Selected Data, by Job Level/Classification\*



\* Percentages reflect the number of people of each job level who identified that competency as one of the top five for successful leadership. The ratings do NOT reflect the capabilities of these people.

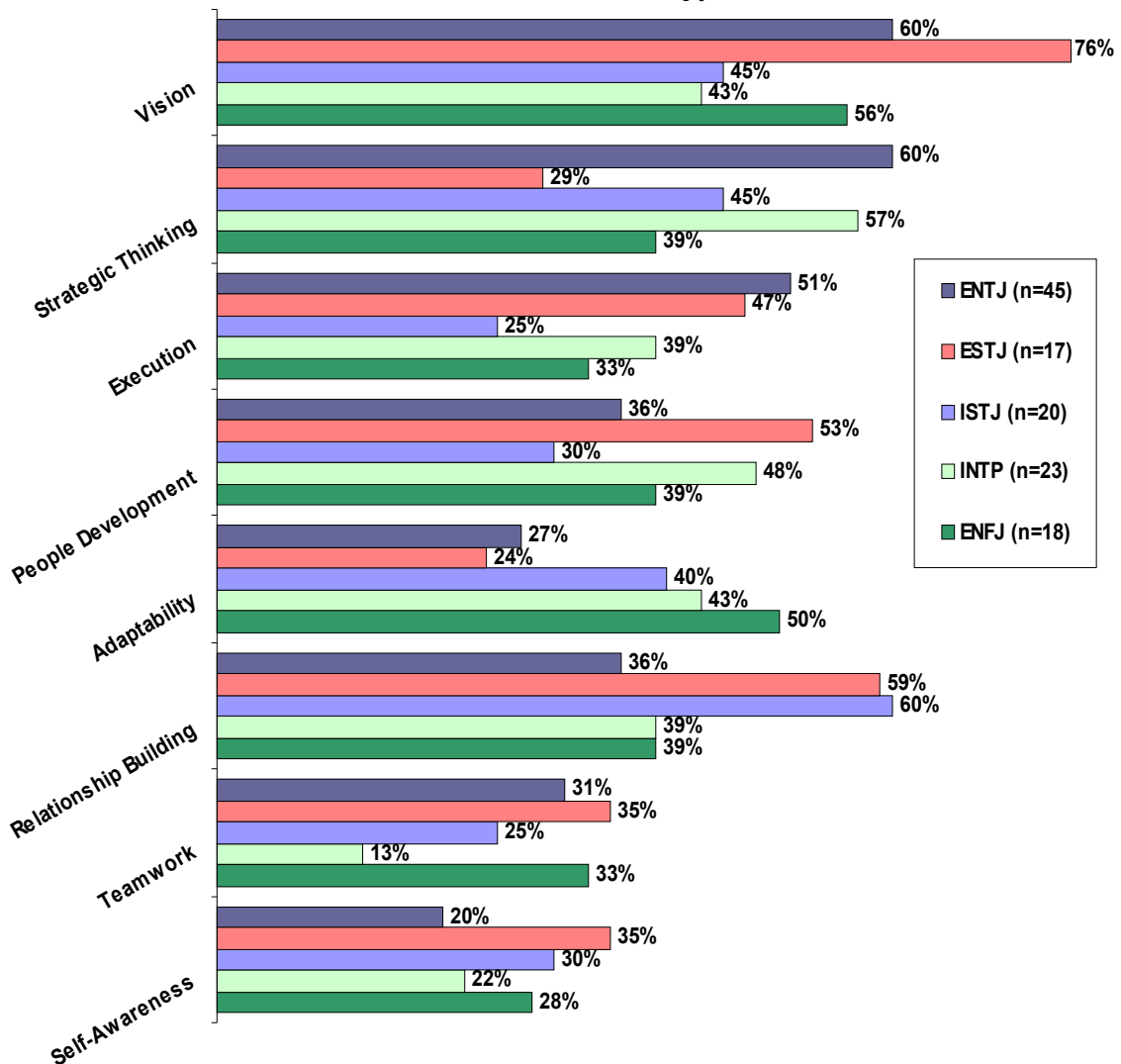
- ◆ **Leaders of different personality types rate the competencies notably differently.** Our findings largely affirmed thoughtful descriptions of the MBTI® types. For example, we anticipated that leaders with Feeling Judging (FJ) preferences – those whose personality descriptions most closely match Goleman and colleagues’ descriptions of emotionally intelligent leaders – might rank the core EI competencies highly, and this proved true.

Participants with FJ preferences selected *Adaptability*, *Self-Awareness* and *Empathy* more often than did other leaders. While FJ and TJ leaders (Thinking Judging, the most frequent types found at management levels)

placed equally high value on *Vision*, *Relationship Building*, and *Developing People*, FJ leaders also highly valued *Adaptability*, while TJ leaders highly valued *Achievement Drive*. Thinking Perceiving (TP) leaders valued *Achievement Drive* and *Initiative* more highly than other pairings, but placed much lower value on *Teamwork* and *Self-Awareness*. *Relationship Building* was ranked as the most important competency by Feeling Perceivers (FP).

Some interesting differences were found when we looked at “whole types,” which refers to the full four-letter name describing MBTI personality types. This chart highlights some of the interesting differences between five types.

### What's Important to Successful Leadership? Selected Data, for Five MBTI Types\*



\* Percentages reflect the number of participants of that type who identified that competency as one of the top five for successful leadership. The ratings do NOT reflect the capabilities of people of those types. This graph shows data for five of the sixteen MBTI types included in our research.

## ***Major Implications***

- ◆ Individual leaders can increase their potential for success by **mastering the most highly valued competencies, including building relationships, developing people, thinking strategically, offering vision, executing work, taking initiative, and fostering teamwork.**
- ◆ **To excel at these highly-ranked competencies, leaders also need to focus on the EI “building block” competencies of Self-Awareness, Empathy, and Adaptability.** Leaders expect successful peers to excel in the complex capabilities of inspiring and developing others. EI research shows that these complex competencies depend on solid skills in the EI basics, such as self-awareness and empathy. This study shows that leaders may underestimate the importance of the basics.
- ◆ **When seeking to influence others, leaders should be aware of differences that may affect what they value in leadership.** Executives, peers, and team members may define effective leadership differently. These expectations varied substantially, in our research, by personality type, job classification/level in organization, and gender.
- ◆ **When assessing individual/organizational development needs, or when engaging in succession planning efforts, leaders should be aware of personal blind spots or stereotypes they may hold.** To the extent that executives view their own strength profiles as especially desirable, they may overlook high potential leaders with different and perhaps complementary strengths.
- ◆ **To engage leaders in their own skill-building, coaches and consultants can frame development needs in a type-specific manner.** For example, to encourage NT leaders to take time to learn how to lead change more effectively, emphasize the link to strategic objectives; to attract SJ leaders into change leadership programs, stress the link to building important relationships.

These implications are relevant to several audiences:

- ◆ **Leaders** who want to develop their own emotional intelligence and lead their teams to high performance;
- ◆ **Executives, managers, HR/OD professionals** who want to design career paths, succession planning, leadership training, and coaching programs that enable best performance from leaders of different personality types;
- ◆ **Consultants, coaches, and trainers** who help leaders assess their competencies and develop their performance, and
- ◆ **Theorists and researchers** in emotional intelligence, leadership, and personality type.

The second release of findings from this study addresses how leaders define, develop, and rate their Emotional Intelligence. A summary of this report is available from <http://www.ideashape.com/leadership-research.htm> .

The third release of findings, projected for October 2004, will address how leaders of various personality types rate themselves across a range of EI dimensions. This report will define four leadership factors that emerged from statistical analyses of our findings and that relate to or extend current literature on leadership and EI. For more detail on the methodology, analyses, and findings from this first release, or to discuss implications of these findings for your organization, please contact one of the authors.

We greatly appreciate the people who have informed and encouraged us in this work. In particular, we thank our 265 study participants for making time to complete the survey. Tracy Zhou, PhD, Bob Boozer, PhD, and Heather Myers, MA, provided able statistical consultation and analysis. We also thank the many colleagues who have provided us with their thoughtful feedback during the development of these papers.

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