

The Personal Profile of Lean Leader of Leaders

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Abstract. Today companies worldwide are implementing Lean and hereby make their company more effective. It is our observation, that companies are capable of implementing the various tools and techniques of Lean (VSM, Kaizen, Policy deployment, Performance management and PDCA etc. At the same time, it is our experience that many companies struggle or even fail to develop a CI culture. The authors behind this paper consider a lack of essential mindset and personality traits of the Lean leaders as a major contributor to these struggles. The aim of this paper is to address the question: Which personality traits does Excellent Lean leader of leaders have? As an attempt to answer that question, this paper presents a profile description of an excellent Lean leader of leaders based on an assessment made by a Lean experts panel composed from 26 different Danish companies. The personality profile is divided into 16 traits and furthermore compares the profile to the average Dane..

Keywords. Lean, Leaders of leaders, personal traits

Introduction

The curiosity of this research, derived from a field of practice that still isn't fully explored and therefore raised questions regarding which traits to look for when recruiting and developing Lean managers.

The ambition is to generate and combine knowledge about excellent Lean leaders on different leadership levels and methodology about assessment tools, to clarify which elements that are required to develop a unique assessment tool that specifically targets finding the best qualified Lean manager candidate. This paper its focus to the leadership level, Leader of Leaders [1][2].

Hence, recruiting and developing excellent Lean managers are of the greatest importance as managers, according to Womack, have a pivotal role in setting an example for the employees by addressing the 3Ps (purpose, processes and people) to ensure a sustainable Lean change [3]. It's all about finding the right candidates to fill the shoes as it is not a job for everyone. Key elements for a suitable candidate include the ability to set goals, continually challenge the status quo and raise the target for performance, alongside empowering employees and having the adequate knowledge and tools to operate on an everyday basis [4].

A current trend when recruiting and assessing potential candidates is the use of personality tests that have increased rapidly in recent years, as HR professionals tend to

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use personality tests to predict whether a candidate fits the job profile or not [5]. The reason for this has to be credited to economic and performance related incentives as personality tests can help improve employee fit, help avoid candidate profile misfits and ensure a positive impact on company performance [5].

The reliability of personality tests is a subject of discussion as there are some pitfalls to consider when using personality tests for recruitment and development purposes. Studies have showed that the predictive validity of personality tests are rather low compared to other types of assessment methods, which serves as an indicator that assessment tools can't serve as the sole basis of recruitment, but should be complemented by other methods to ensure a positive outcome [6]. Viewed in isolation, an IQ test has a higher predictive validity since the measurement method is more limited and therefore more accurate [7]. To improve the predictive validity of personality tests, an identification of which personality traits that are desirable in a specific job profile needs to be performed [8]. Using trait theory as a framework for personality tests it is possible to assess whether a candidate is fit for the job or not, given that the desirable traits for the job profile differ significantly from the norm.

1. Research Objective

The aim of this research is to identify specific personality traits that apply for excellent Lean managers on the leadership level: Leader of Leaders. The traits identified in the research are to be used as a target guideline for recruitment and development of Lean managers.

2. Research Design

This paper is based on a research program called The Excellent Lean Leader Profile.

The research program involves different actors from various types of businesses, including 2 universities (Aalborg and Aarhus University), a management consulting firm, and Garuda, the largest supplier of assessment tools for individuals, groups and organizations in Scandinavia. The main focus of this full paper is to showcase the output from an expert panel workshop held in October 2015.

In the selection process Lean managers from 26 medium-sized and large Danish companies were chosen to represent the public, manufacturing and administrative & service sectors. Common ground for all participants was several years of gathered experience and knowledge from working with Lean.

The methodology used during the workshop was inspired by and combined different methods and models, where the socialization, externalization, combination, internalization (SECI) model, the Delphi method and focus group interviews were used in the attempt to extract tacit knowledge from the expert panel through a socialization process (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995).

During the workshop the 16 personality traits from Garuda's assessment tool, Competence Profile, was used to reach consensus among the participants. The aim was to specify which traits that applies to excellent Lean managers, which led to multiple rounds of group discussions and plenary sessions.

Each group discussion was isolated on choosing between and highlighting the descriptions and texts that gave the best description of the ideal Lean leader. To do so

each group was given a short description of all 16 traits along with a scale for each trait that had five to six sub- divisions, see example in figure 1. It should be taken into account that the expert group weren't able to choose the outer scores (the gray area in the illustration), as the outer scores are found to be irrelevant for any Lean leader. In the process every group had to give a primary and a secondary score within each trait.

After each round the various groups presented their results and the reasoning behind their answers to summarize the trait. The research group anticipated differences in the group assessments, which led to the use of a basic statistical analysis.

The results from the workshop led to a profile description of the ideal lean leader, which afterwards were given to all participants for further review and feedback.

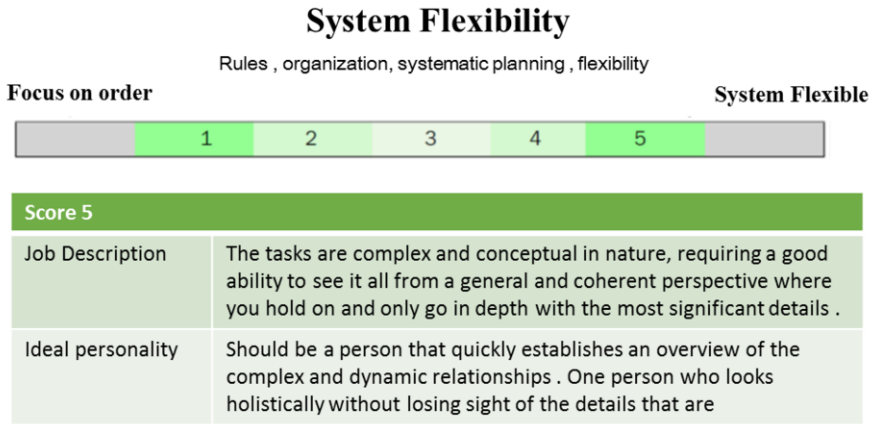


Figure 1. System Flexibility.

3. The Framework of the 16 Traits

The 16 personality traits in the Competence Profile that served as framework for the workshop can be divided further into three categories.

First: In situations where the Lean leaders feel content with them self and can do as they wish how do they process the tasks and problems they face in their daily work? This is the Head work of the Lean Leader. The category covers the traits: System Flexibility, Comprehensiveness, Abstract Thinking, Risk and Impulsive.

Second: In situations where the Lean leaders feel content with them self and in harmony with the people they socialize with in their daily work, how can the relationships with these people be characterized? This is the Heart work of the Lean Leader. This category deals with the areas of: Empathy, Social Contact, Social Flexibility, Support and Confidence.

Third: In situations where the Lean leaders work on solving a problem, how do they go about it and how great an influence do they have or wish to have on the process of solving a specific problem? This is the Leg work of the Lean Leader. This final category handles the traits: Competitiveness, Influence, Self Confidence, Independence, Psychological Strength and Physical Energy.

4. Empirical Result

This section presents the results of our empirical work. It consists of 16 traits that will be introduced separately by picturing a short description of the outer scores for each trait. This allows us to illustrate the Lean leaders’ score within the trait – further guidelines for the illustrations are displayed in figure 2. To conclude each trait a job and a personal profile description will be presented.

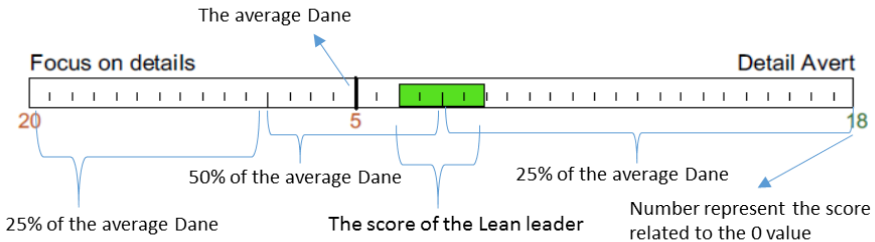


Figure 2. Illustration guideline.

4.1. The Lean Leader related to system flexibility

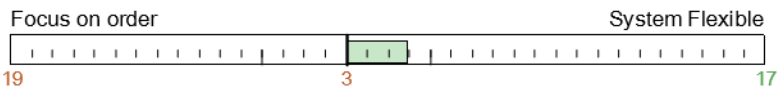


Figure 3. Measure of flexibility.

Job Profile: The task’s solution and possible solutions are controlled to some extent by fixed rules, frameworks and systems. Within these, it applies that certain key tasks require independent planning, organization and choice of solution methods and processes.

Ideal personality: Should be able to solve tasks where solutions and possible solutions are not limited by any fixed rules, frames and structures. Must have well organized working habits and emphasis on concrete planning, controlling, and organization.

4.2. The Lean Leader related to Comprehensiveness



Figure 4. Measure of comprehensiveness.

Job Profile: The variety and complexity of the given tasks are fairly large, and the given solutions have great importance for the whole, which is why the most important details require a thorough and independent processing.

Ideal personality: Should have a comprehensive view and general knowledge where the more detail oriented routine tasks are left to others. Should be able to handle complex and dynamic connections with focus only on the most important details.

4.3. The Lean Leader related to Abstract Thinking



Figure 5. Measure of abstract thinking.

Job Profile: The key tasks represent problems that are best solved through an intellectual intervention and using models, theories and abstract concepts.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who likes to work with tasks calling for a high degree of intellectual thinking. A person, who finds it exciting and challenging to work with new practical, conceptual and strategic features, which demand a more abstract general character where models and theories can be used.

4.4. The Lean Leader related to Risk

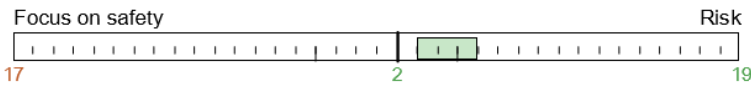


Figure 6. Measure of risk.

Job Profile: The nature of tasks and their content is varied. For key tasks it applies that the premise decisions taken are often fluid and uncertain, and are often made under some time pressure.

Ideal personality: Should be a consistent decision-maker, who likes to make decisions based on as well concrete analysis as estimated valuations of collected data. A person who is also willing to make decisions in areas where the consequences are of vital importance. A person, who purposeful can zigzag his/her way through matters.

4.5. The Lean Leader related to Impulsive

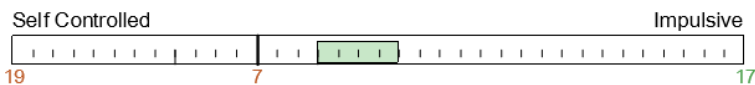


Figure 7. Measure of impulsiveness.

Job Profile: Tasks are solved under conditions where the person responsible, in between, may be under some time pressure or because of the nature of the task. Decisions are, however, made in a reasonably open environment where the more impulsive reaction is accepted.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who stays calm and keep cool in hectic situations. A person, who does not overreact if the task solving is not working out as planned or if you get unexpected criticism. As co-operation mostly is together with known persons, who get to know each other, is there a certain understanding for the more spontaneous and emotional reaction.

4.6. *The Lean Leader related to Empathy*



Figure 8. Measure of empathy.

Job Profile: Tasks are solved in cooperation with others, which is dependent on a common understanding and acceptance of the division of tasks and responsibilities, and thus aware of the interdependence.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who is conscious in his/her efforts of wanting to understand other people’s personality, social and professional background for acting as they do. A person, who focuses on other’s attitudes, motives and feelings, and who, from this, is good at integrating him/herself in the interaction with others.

4.7. *The Lean Leader related to Social Contact*



Figure 9. Measure of social contact.

Job Profile: Task solution requires that the person responsible is active in the effort to establish, maintain and deepen contacts with a group of collaborators.

Ideal personality: Should be an active, out-going and contact seeking person, should however, not be governed by a need to be the centre and exposing him/herself. A person, who finds it easy to maintain and widen the contacts to known people.

4.8. *The Lean Leader related to Social Flexibility*

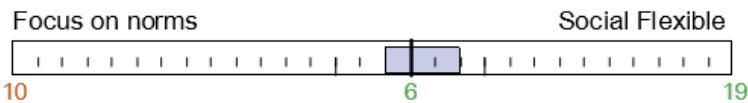


Figure 10. Measure of social flexibility.

Job Profile: Tasks are solved in an environment where there is some acceptance of, but also a limit to the patience and tolerance towards people with an alternative approach to disciplined task-solving and social behavior.

Ideal personality: Should be a person who can function in a work environment where there is some acceptance, but also limits of patience and tolerance towards people with an alternative approach to disciplined problem-solving and social behavior.

4.9. *The Lean Leader related to Support*

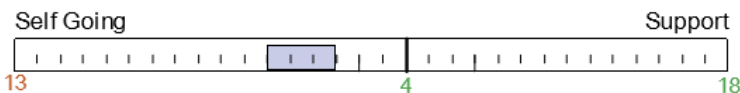


Figure 11. Measure of support.

Job Profile: Tasks are solved under conditions where the task-solver, only in exceptional situations, is dependent on or has to ask for others' acceptance, support and encouragement.

Ideal personality: Should be a person who can provide independent efforts and initiate things in time without the need for support, praise and recognition.

4.10. The Lean Leader related to Confidence

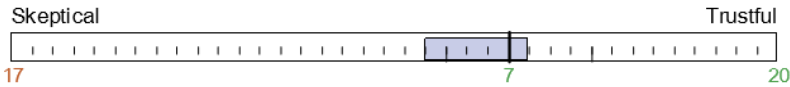


Figure 12. Measure of confidence.

Job Profile: Tasks are solved in an environment where the direct contact to others, in general, is characterized by openness and trust, which is why only situationally there is a need to remain skeptical of others' behavior, ideas and motives.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who meets other people with a high degree of trust and kindness in his/her daily work, based on the philosophy that confidence and openness meet with confidence and openness. However, he/she must be a person, who can look objectively to others. Must be able to deal with situations where the personal trust not always is shown.

4.11. The Lean Leader related to Competitiveness

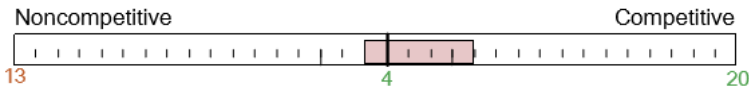


Figure 13. Measure of competitiveness.

Job Profile: Task solution, goal and setting requirements for result creation requires a certain degree of individual involvement and in many areas sets requirements on independent proactive and performance-oriented activities.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who is always setting new and higher goals. The aim, the ambition to be among the best and improve whatever he/she is doing should be an important source of energy.

4.12. The Lean Leader related to Influence



Figure 14. Measure of influence.

Job Profile: The task's optimal solution requires that the person responsible for the solution takes independent initiatives to initiate and participate in the decision-making process, including, in certain situations, to make authoritative binding decisions.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who does not keep a low profile in the decision making process. A person, who is constantly making an effort of carrying through his/her ideas and points of view without losing flexibility, neither on the

intellectual nor personal level. A person, who finds it easy to give orders without being dictatorial.

4.13. *The Lean Leader related to Self Confidence*



Figure 15. Measure of self confidence.

Job Profile: The tasks are of such a nature that in many contexts they place great demands on the task-solver's ability to independently deal with unforeseen and unknown problems and situations in a constructive and proactive manner.

Ideal personality: Should be a person, who keeps his/her self-confidence in the direct confrontation with other people and meanings. A person, who constantly seeks new challenges and new limits for his/her ability.

4.14. *The Lean Leader related to Independence*

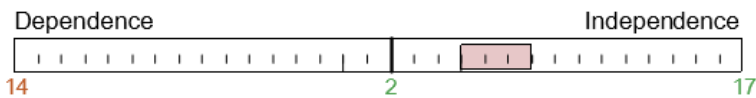


Figure 16. Measure of independence.

Job Profile: The job includes key tasks whose solutions are subject to some established procedures, as well as authoritative given orders, which often call for the jobholder's independent and constructive critical position.

Ideal personality: Should be a person with a basic need for independence. A person, who does not necessarily do what is expected of him, but has a independent and critical point of view and does not mind being in opposition if he/she disagrees. However, the independence must not be larger than the person accepts the superior frames and rules.

4.15. *The Lean Leader related to Psychological Strength*

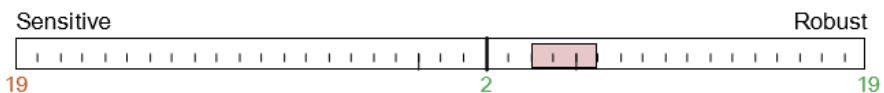


Figure 17. Measure of psychological strength.

Job Profile: The task's nature and solution represents many unforeseen difficulties and challenges. The jobholder will, in certain key areas, experience a practical time-related and/or psychological pressure and may also meet resistance and criticism from others.

Ideal personality: Should be a solid and strong person, who does not take criticism, defeat or personal humiliations too seriously. A person, who has the excess energy to consider and evaluate criticism in a constructive way. A person, who does not keep a low profile for fear of difficulties or personal opposition.

4.16. The Lean Leader related to Physical Energy



Figure 18. Measure of physical energy.

Job Profile: The tasks are of such a nature that they require a fairly high degree of self-initiated physical and/or intellectual activity, the level of which may vary from situation to situation.

Ideal personality: Should be a person who likes to be in motion all the time, both physically and mentally. A person for whom it is important that something happens all the time, and thus a person who keeps things going, does not wait for things to happen, and will impatiently push others in front of them.

5. Discussion

From the assessment it has been concluded, that 5 of the 16 traits are within the 50% quartile of the Dane. Furthermore, it shows that 7 of the scores are represented in both the 50% and 25% quartile. In 4 cases the score is purely within the 25% quartile. Lastly there are 6 cases where the score touches the mark of the average Dane.

Dealing with that many traits it's crucial to outweigh their relative importance to each other. The expert group was subsequently asked to contemplate which 5 traits they deemed more important.

1. **Comprehensiveness:** The incentive for comprehensiveness is based on the opinion of the expert group, that it is important for a lean leader to know the details of the operations, while maintaining a comprehensive view and control at the same time.
2. **Confidence:** The incentive for choosing confidence is that respect towards people is a key element in the TMS and therefore it is critical that lean leaders are capable of having faith in and trusting their employees to do their job.
3. **Psychological Strength:** As Lean is built on the premises of a Learning organization paradigm and a CI mindset, learning from your mistakes and errors is seen as a core element of an improvement culture, thereby making it a necessity that lean leaders are psychologically capable of handling criticism in a constructive manner and hereby developing a constructive feedback culture within the company.
4. **System Flexibility:** A key part of the foundations in Lean is standardization. CI cannot happen if there are no standards to improve from, therefore making structure an important trait for lean leaders to create and sustain a Lean environment through standardization. On the other hand, the leader must possess a mindset that challenges the status quo and makes him think beyond current standards and fixed rules for new ideas.
5. **Empathy:** The incentive for this trait derives from research, showing that people who work together in high performance teams tend to create far greater results in a Lean environment. Therefore, the lean leader possesses a critical

role in forming team spirit and one of the traits that promote this behavior is empathy.

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented and discussed the results regarding the research of characteristics of excellent Lean leaders that derive from the assumption that Lean Leaders have a specific profile. The output of the empirical study is a profile consisting of the 16 traits. In addition to this output the expert group chose 5 traits that they believed were most important: Comprehensiveness, Confidence, Psychological Strength, System Flexibility and Empathy. To further strengthen the assumption that Lean leaders have a specific profile further empirical study can be carried out within foreseeable future. At this early stage the current results can be used as a guideline or as a template to compare candidates in recruitment processes. Furthermore, it seems obvious to use the results as a tool for internal organizational development of Lean managers by using gap analysis to enable strategic competence development. Finally, another way to put the results into use is as a self-awareness tool for Lean managers.

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