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one *New York Times* reporter phrased it, questioning whether any company should be so closely tied to the characteristics, style, and actions of one individual.¹

We introduced the idea of “Great Man” leadership in Chapter 1, and the Mickey Drexler example shows that the concept hasn’t completely died. The earliest leadership studies proposed that certain people had natural traits and abilities of power and influence that enabled them to put everything together and influence others in a way that other people could not. Although few today would argue that leadership is based on inborn traits, interest in the characteristics that define a good leader continues. As this example illustrates, current thinking on leadership incorporates a variety of ideas and concepts from the past.

Personal traits captured the imagination of the earliest leadership researchers, but if we look at any two successful and effective leaders they will likely share some traits but have others that are quite dissimilar. Each individual has a unique set of qualities, characteristics, and strengths to bring to a leadership role. In addition, leaders can learn to overcome some potentially limiting traits, such as a lack of self-confidence or a quick temper. Consequently, many researchers have examined the behavior of leaders to determine what behavioral features comprise leadership style and how particular behaviors relate to effective leadership.

This chapter first examines the evolution of the trait approach and the importance of leaders understanding and applying their own unique leadership strengths. Then we provide an overview of the behavior approach and introduce the theory of individualized leadership, which looks at behavior between a leader and each individual follower, differentiating one-on-one behavior from leader-to-group behavior. The path illuminated by the research into leader traits and behaviors is a foundation for the field of leadership studies and still enjoys remarkable dynamism for explaining leader success or failure.

2-1 THE TRAIT APPROACH

Traits are the distinguishing personal characteristics of a leader, such as intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, and appearance. Research early in the twentieth century examined leaders who had achieved a level of greatness and hence became known as the Great Man approach. Fundamental to this theory was the idea that some people are born with traits that make them natural leaders. The **Great Man approach** sought to identify the traits leaders possessed that distinguished them from people who were not leaders. Generally, research found only a weak relationship between personal traits and leader success.² Indeed, the diversity of traits that effective leaders possess indicates that leadership ability is not a genetic endowment.

Nevertheless, with the advancement of the field of psychology during the 1940s and 1950s, trait approach researchers expanded their examination of personal attributes by using aptitude and psychological tests. These early studies looked at personality traits such as creativity and self-confidence, physical traits such as age and energy level, abilities such as knowledge and fluency of speech, social characteristics such as popularity and sociability, and work-related characteristics such as the desire to excel and persistence against obstacles.³

In a 1948 literature review,⁴ Stogdill examined more than 100 studies based on the trait approach. He uncovered several traits that appeared consistent with effective leadership, including general intelligence, initiative, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, drive for responsibility, and personal integrity. Stogdill’s findings also

Traits

the distinguishing personal characteristics of a leader, such as intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, and appearance

Great Man approach

a leadership perspective that sought to identify the inherited traits leaders possessed that distinguished them from people who were not leaders

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indicated, however, that the importance of a particular trait was often relative to the situation. Initiative, for example, may contribute to the success of a leader in an entrepreneurial situation, but it may be irrelevant to a leader in a stable bureaucracy. Thus, possessing certain personal characteristics is no guarantee of success.

Many researchers discontinued their efforts to identify leadership traits in light of Stogdill's 1948 findings and turned their attention to examining leader behavior and leadership situations. However, others continued with expanded trait lists and research projects. Stogdill's subsequent review of 163 trait studies conducted between 1948 and 1970 concluded that some personal traits do indeed seem to contribute to effective leadership.⁵ The study identified many of the same traits found in the 1948 survey, along with several additional characteristics, including aggressiveness, independence, and tolerance for stress. However, Stogdill again cautioned that the value of a particular trait or set of traits varies with the organizational situation.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in examining leadership traits. A review by Kirkpatrick and Locke identified a number of personal traits that distinguish leaders from nonleaders, including some pinpointed by Stogdill.⁶ Other studies have focused on followers' perceptions and indicate that certain traits are associated with people's perceptions of who is a leader. For example, one study found that the traits of intelligence, masculinity, and dominance were strongly related to how individuals perceived leaders.⁷ Others have found that charismatic CEOs are perceived to be more effective than other leaders, even though there is no evidence showing they actually are.⁸

In summary, trait research has been an important part of leadership studies throughout the twentieth century and continues into the twenty-first, as illustrated by this chapter's Leader's Bookshelf, which suggests that a trait of *selflessness* is the secret to genuine and lasting leadership success. Several other traits, including optimism and a cheerful attitude, have recently gained attention as important for successful leaders. Britain's Royal Navy takes cheerfulness so seriously that it tracks how leader cheerfulness affects morale and effectiveness.⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1, humility, including a willingness to admit mistakes and make oneself vulnerable, has emerged as an important trait in today's collaborative world.¹⁰

Exhibit 2.1 presents some of the traits and their respective categories that have been identified through trait research over the years. Many researchers still contend that some traits are essential to effective leadership, but only in combination with other factors.¹¹ A few traits typically considered highly important for leadership are optimism, self-confidence, honesty and integrity, and drive.

2-1a Optimism and Self-Confidence

Recent research points to a positive outlook and a cheerful attitude as keys to effective leadership.¹² **Optimism** refers to a tendency to see the positive side of things and expect that things will turn out well. Numerous surveys indicate that optimism is the single characteristic most common to top executives. People rise to the top because they can see opportunities where others see problems and can instill in others a sense of hope for the future. Leaders at all levels need some degree of optimism to see possibilities even through the thickest fog and rally people around a vision for a better tomorrow. Although hundreds of experiments support the notion that people possess ingrained tendencies toward either optimism or pessimism, leaders can train themselves to deliberately focus on the positive rather than the negative and interpret situations in more positive, optimistic ways.¹³

A related characteristic is having a positive attitude about oneself. Leaders who know themselves develop **self-confidence**, which is general assurance in one's own

“What I've really learned over time is that optimism is a very, very important part of leadership. . . . People don't like to follow pessimists.”

Robert Iger,
Chairman and CEO of
The Walt Disney
Company

NEW LEADER ACTION MEMO

People generally prefer to follow leaders who are optimistic rather than pessimistic about the future. Complete the questionnaire in Leader's Self-Insight 2.1 to assess your level of optimism.

Optimism

a tendency to see the positive side of things and expect that things will turn out well

Self-confidence

assurance in one's own judgments, decision making, ideas, and capabilities

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LEADER'S BOOKSHELF

Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success

by Adam Grant

Contrary to popular belief, good guys don't always finish last. In fact, in the book *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*, Adam Grant asserts that a trait of selflessness can help leaders be more effective and more successful. Grant, the youngest tenured professor ever at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, suggests that good leaders are those who give the most and view their success as "individual achievements that have a positive impact on others."

ARE YOU A GIVER, A TAKER, OR A MATCHER?

Grant proposes that we all assume one of three basic approaches toward others—that of a *giver*, a *taker*, or a *matcher*.

- **Givers focus on what others need and give selflessly.** They give time and energy, or anything else that is asked of them, without expecting anything in return. Grant uses the example of billionaire Jon Huntsman Sr., founder of Huntsman Chemical,

who once left \$200 million on the table when negotiating with a man whose wife had just died, simply because he thought it was the right thing to do. As leaders, givers more easily delegate and collaborate with others, listen to others, give credit to others, and share power and responsibility.

- **Takers put their own interests first.** Takers are selfish people who want to win, no matter who else loses. As leaders, they typically try to influence others by gaining dominance and control over them. They collaborate only when it benefits them personally and rarely share credit for successes. Takers often win in the short run but they are much less likely to build success over the long term.
- **Matchers strive for a balance of giving and taking.** Matchers try to achieve an equal balance between what they give and what they get in return. As leaders, they network and collaborate strategically, expecting

something in return that will be of benefit to them. They play a juggling act in an effort to serve their individual interests while still being fair to others.

DOES IT PAY TO BE NICE?

Grant applies scientific research and weaves in numerous real-life stories to support his premise that givers end up being the most successful among the three groups. His advice is to "focus attention and energy on making a difference in the lives of others, and success might follow as a by-product." Leaders who are givers help a wide range of people in the organization, develop everyone's skills to support the greater good, and strive to bring out the best in everyone. By investing in the success of their followers, leaders who are givers build their own success and a legacy of enduring greatness.

Source: *Give and Take*, by Adam Grant, is published by Viking.

judgments, decision making, ideas, and capabilities. Self-confidence doesn't mean being arrogant and prideful but rather knowing and trusting in oneself. Self-confidence is related to *self-efficacy*, which refers to a person's strong belief that he or she can successfully accomplish a specific task or outcome.¹⁴ A leader who has a positive self-image and displays certainty about his or her own ability to achieve an outcome fosters confidence among followers, gains respect and admiration, and creates motivation and commitment among followers for the mission at hand.

Active leaders need self-confidence and optimism. How many of us willingly follow someone who is jaded and pessimistic, or someone who obviously doesn't believe in himself or herself? Leaders initiate change, and they often must make decisions without adequate information. Without the confidence to move forward and believe things will be okay, even if an occasional decision is wrong, leaders could be paralyzed into inaction. Setbacks have to be overcome. Risks have to be taken. Competing points of view have to be managed, with some people left unsatisfied. The characteristics of optimism and self-confidence enable a leader to face all these challenges.¹⁵

2-1b Honesty and Integrity

Positive attitudes have to be tempered by strong ethics or leaders can get into trouble. Consider Bernard Madoff, who masterminded the largest financial fraud in history and was sent to jail on 11 criminal charges, including securities fraud and perjury. As a leader, Madoff displayed strong self-confidence and optimism, which is

NEW LEADER ACTION MEMO

As a leader, you can develop the personal traits of self-confidence, integrity, and drive, which are important for successful leadership in every organization and situation. You can work to keep an optimistic attitude and be ethical in your decisions and actions.

EXHIBIT 2.1 Some Leader Characteristics	
<p>Personal Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy Passion Humility Physical stamina <p>Intelligence and Ability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intelligence, cognitive ability Knowledge Judgment, decisiveness <p>Personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimism Cheerfulness Self-confidence Honesty and integrity Charisma Desire to lead Independence 	<p>Social Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sociability, interpersonal skills Cooperativeness Ability to enlist cooperation Tact, diplomacy <p>Work-Related Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drive, desire to excel Dependability Fair-mindedness Perseverance, tenacity <p>Social Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Mobility

Sources: Bass and Stogdill's *Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Management Applications*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1990), pp. 80–81; S. A. Kirkpatrick and E. A. Locke, "Leadership: Do Traits Matter?" *Academy of Management Executive* 5, no. 2 (1991), pp. 48–60; and James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

one reason he was able to attract so many investors. The problem was that he didn't have a strong ethical grounding to match. Due to Madoff's scam, thousands of people were swindled out of their life's savings, charities and foundations were ruined, and pension funds were wiped out, while Madoff and his wife lived in luxury.¹⁶

Effective leaders are ethical leaders. One aspect of being an ethical leader is being honest with followers, customers, shareholders, and the public, and maintaining one's integrity. **Honesty** refers to truthfulness and nondeception. It implies an openness that followers welcome. **Integrity** means that a leader's character is whole, integrated, and grounded in solid ethical principles, and he or she acts in keeping with those principles. Leaders who model their ethical convictions through their daily actions command admiration, respect, and loyalty. Honesty and integrity are the foundation of trust between leaders and followers.

Sadly, trust is sorely lacking in many organizations following years of corporate scandals and rampant greed. Leaders need the traits of honesty and integrity to rebuild trusting and productive relationships. People today are wary of authority and the deceptive use of power, and they are hungry for leaders who hold high moral standards. Successful leaders have also been found to be highly consistent, doing exactly what they say they will do when they say they will do it. Successful leaders prove themselves trustworthy. They adhere to basic ethical principles and consistently apply them in their leadership. One survey of 1,500 managers asked the values most desired in leaders. Honesty and integrity topped the list. The authors concluded:

*Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership. After all, if we are willing to follow someone, whether it be into battle or into the boardroom, we first want to assure ourselves that the person is worthy of our trust. We want to know that he or she is being truthful, ethical, and principled. We want to be fully confident in the integrity of our leaders.*¹⁷

Honesty
truthfulness and nondeception

Integrity
the quality of being whole and integrated and acting in accordance with solid ethical principles

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