

DKV Corporate Research Centre

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Leadership in the UAE

A joint study with



About DKV Corporate Research Centre

The DKV Corporate Research Centre is the latest in a string of new initiatives launched by Dubai Knowledge Village, focusing on research in the areas of business and corporate related issues whilst offering market data to serve the UAE business community.

Dubai Knowledge Village aims to support and nurture the business community in Dubai by providing significant Data Analysis and a Corporate Research bank. DKV in a joint effort with its very own pool of talent, the DKV Business Partners armed with their wealth of knowledge and expertise in areas of research and consultancy offering up-to-date analysis on Business research data, results and resolutions.

What Makes A Good Leader?

Study Objectives

Organisations today are looking for more than effective managers. They are looking for engaged people who can think and see and plan. They want people who can create something that doesn't yet exist, not just manage what already exists. They are looking for leaders, at every level.

However, when you ask 10 people what makes a good leader you are likely to get 15 different responses.

The purpose of our study was to get some feedback from the business community in the UAE as to what they feel they need from their leaders. Much work has been done globally on trying to identify what makes a good leader, however, many qualities were seen as culturally contingent i.e. they are seen as positive in some cultures and negative in others.

The objective of this study was not to replicate the work of the others that has produced concrete results but to look at these culturally contingent issues and try to establish how they are perceived in the UAE.

To that end we asked the business community to rate 34 potential leadership traits that have been determined in other studies (notably the GLOBE project) to be seen as positive in some cultures and negative in others with regard to their impact on the ability to lead successfully. We wanted to know which of these are seen as effective leadership traits and which are seen as ineffective in the UAE. The leadership traits in alphabetical order are:

- ❖ **Anticipates**
- ❖ **Ambitious**
- ❖ **Autonomous**
- ❖ **Cautious**
- ❖ **Class Conscious**
- ❖ **Compassionate**
- ❖ **Cunning**
- ❖ **Domineering**
- ❖ **Elitist**
- ❖ **Enthusiastic**
- ❖ **Evasive**
- ❖ **Formal**
- ❖ **Habitual**
- ❖ **Independent**
- ❖ **Indirect**
- ❖ **Individualistic**
- ❖ **Intra-Group Competitor**
- ❖ **Intra-Group Conflict Avoider**
- ❖ **Intuitive**
- ❖ **Logical**
- ❖ **Micro Manager**
- ❖ **Orderly**
- ❖ **Procedural**
- ❖ **Provocateur**
- ❖ **Risk taker**
- ❖ **Ruler**

- ❖ **Self-Effacing**
- ❖ **Self-Sacrificing**
- ❖ **Sensitive**
- ❖ **Sincere**
- ❖ **Status Conscious**
- ❖ **Subdued**
- ❖ **Wilful**
- ❖ **Worldly**

A full breakdown of these attributes and their definitions can be found in appendix one at the end of this document.

How did we ask the questions?

For each trait there was an explanation in behavioural terms. For example, for the trait "**Able to Anticipate**" the explanation was "*anticipates, attempts to forecast future events, considers what will happen in the future.*" Respondents were then asked to rate each item on a 7 point scale based on their view as to what impact this characteristics has on a person's ability to be an effective leader. At one end of the scale the ability to do this well would **Contribute Greatly** to a person's ability to lead. At the other end if a person exhibited this characteristic on a regular basis it would **Greatly Inhibit** their ability to be a successful leader. The scale in full (from highest to lowest) were:

Contributes Greatly
Contributes Somewhat
Contributes Slightly
Has no Impact
Slightly Inhibits
Somewhat Inhibits
Greatly Inhibits

Positive and Negative ratings

In order to qualify as a trait that is seen as being a major contributor towards **leadership effectiveness**, we accepted scores of 60% and above in the first two positive ratings only (**Contributes Greatly and Contributes Somewhat**). Likewise, for something to qualify as a major contributor towards **ineffective leadership**, an attribute had to score 60% plus in the Greatly Inhibits and Somewhat Inhibits ratings. Those that did not meet either of these scoring criteria were not seen as being a major influence on leadership and are not discussed in this report. The others however were separated into those that were seen as positive (11 attributes) and those that are seen as negative (5 attributes). The remainder of this document looks at both these areas and tries to establish what this means for those of us in the UAE that are in a leadership position.

1. Positive Traits

The following traits were seen as contributing somewhat or greatly to a leaders' ability to be effective.

1. Anticipates -

anticipates, attempts to forecast future events, considers what will happen in the future

A massive 87% of respondents rated this in the top two boxes (in fact 70% rated it in the highest box – Contributes greatly to Leadership Effectiveness). This would seem to be a reflection of the changing times we live in. We all know that change is the only constant and the changes we have experienced in the past few years have been highly significant. The ability to manufacture products anywhere in the world has had a major bearing on how and where companies set up their production plants. The mobility of the workforce means that employers are able to pick and choose the best talent from whichever countries are able to produce them. The shortage of talent has led to companies having to fight hard to attract talent rather than relying on company names and reputations.

It would seem that we want leaders that pay attention to the events that are unfolding around them and be able to make plans accordingly.

2. Ambitious -

sets high targets, works hard

Just over 80% of respondents said that they wanted to work for a leader that was setting the pace, making us work towards significant targets, but who also led by example by showing a strong work ethic. It seems that we don't shy away from hard work, but we want to see that those applying the pressure are also committed to the cause. Followers will follow, but the example we set has to be the right one as we tend to imitate what we see.

3. Compassion -

has empathy for others, inclined to be helpful or show mercy

64% of respondents felt that this quality contributed greatly or somewhat to the ability to be an effective leader. This flies in the face of conventional wisdom that implies you have to be tough to get on in life. Popular culture is doing all it can to propagate that myth. TV leadership heroes in programmes such as "The Apprentice" show tough leaders (Donald Trump and Alan Sugar) spending the majority of their time shouting at their underlings and telling them that if they don't shape up they will be fired. This is the role model that we see again and again. Yet from an employee point of view, this is not what we want. We need to work with a leader that can see things from the employee's point and show kindness and understanding when required. Yet how many of us in leadership roles are still bound by convention and feel that this approach would be seen as weakness?

4. Enthusiastic -

demonstrates and imparts strong positive emotions for work

This was rated in the top two boxes by 77% of respondents. We need to work for a leader that not only enjoys his/her work, but spreads these feelings of pleasure amongst the team. It is important to us to feel a sense of well being and this can make a tremendous difference to how we look upon our day. Are we energised by our leader's approach or does it suck the lifeblood from us?

5. Intuitive -

has extra insight

It would seem that having good anticipatory skills is not enough. 81% of respondents want our leaders to see beyond the obvious and identify patterns, trends or issues that would remain unseen to most. Again this may stem from the volatile times we find ourselves in. The message seems to be that it is too late to wait until the rest of the world can see something before acting upon it – at best we are playing catch up. If we are to be truly successful then we need to be ahead of the masses and creating a sustainable advantage by being ahead of the game.

6. Logical -

applies sound logic when thinking

It should be no surprise that people would like to see a strong streak of logic in the thinking and decision making from their leaders. Over 85% of respondents said that this contributed towards being an effective leader. Of course logic is a very subjective issue – what appears logical to me may well seem irrational and random to someone else. But every leader should at least be prepared to explain the logic they have used so that their followers can be sure that it was not just a hunch based on emotions that have led to key decisions.

7. Orderly -

is organised and methodical in work

Once again leading by example seems to be important. 73% of respondents said they wanted to see a leader that was structured and orderly. This makes a great deal of sense. If your leader is often telling you that you need to be organised and have some methodology to your work, how do you feel if they constantly forget to bring what they need to meetings or can't see the colour of their desk as it is full of clutter? It would seem people are prepared to follow and listen more effectively when they can see an organised and methodical leader.

8. Self-Effacing -

presents self in a modest way

Once again we fly in the face of conventional wisdom. It would seem that we do not want the all powerful charismatic leader who is constantly seeking the limelight. 63% of respondents said they want a leader that presents himself in a modest way and is happy to give credit where it is due. The so called "great man syndrome" has seen many organisations prosper when the strong outgoing leader was in charge only to see them fall apart when they have left. In the UAE followers are looking for people who do a good job but are happy to take a back seat and let the lower ranking staff take the credit.

9. Sincere -

means what he/she says, is earnest

Your parents would have told you that honesty is the best policy – and it would have been wise to listen to them. 72% of respondents said that they want a leader that they can believe. This sincerity builds trust in an organisation which is absolutely vital to developing and maintaining employee engagement. Leaders may not mean to tell lies but they need to think very carefully about what they say as they will be judged on whether it comes to fruition or not.

10. Wilful -

strong minded, resolute, persistent, determined

Business in the 21st century is not easy. If a leader is to be truly successful then he/she has to show a strong determination. Followers will take their lead from the comments and actions of those above. If we talk a good fight and then give up or change course at the slightest obstacle then expect your followers to do the same. Conversely, have an unwavering belief in you and your team's abilities and they will deliver a self fulfilling prophecy and not let you down. Over 80% of our respondents are looking for that bulldog spirit to motivate and inspire them to greatness.

11. Worldly -

interested in many things, has a global outlook

Although we operate in one small part of the globe, we expect our leaders to know what is happening elsewhere. Having a global perspective is seen as important by over 80% of our respondents. Perhaps this is to ensure we know the latest and best thinking, or perhaps it is seen as important to help deal with the multitude of nationalities and cultures that make up the modern workforce.

All in all an interesting mix of skills and personal qualities that our employees are looking for if we are to lead in an effective manner.

The next section looks at the opposite end of the scale, what was established as ineffective leadership behaviour?

2. Negative Traits

The following traits were seen as contributing somewhat or greatly to a leaders' **inability** to be effective.

1. Elitist -

believes that a small number of people with similar backgrounds are superior and should enjoy privileges

67% of respondents felt that this was a poor leadership attribute. It would seem that we do not want to work for someone who favours their own at the expense of the rest of us. We want a leader that treats everyone equally (hopefully equally well not equally badly) and that gives the same chances and opportunities. The days of the old school tie and pulling rank based on who you know and not what you know or are capable of, are numbered. We want an egalitarian work society where people are recognised and rewarded based on one thing and one thing only – merit.

2. Micro Manager -

an extremely close supervisor, one who insists on making all the decisions

It should really come as no surprise that 61% of respondents did not see the characteristics of micro management as being an effective part of leadership. Employees do not appreciate a manager that monitors every activity, insists on seeing what you have done and telling you how to complete even the most mundane of tasks. They also do not want to work for someone that makes all the decisions and does not take their views into consideration.

3. Ruler -

is in charge, does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders

Closely related to the traits of micro management are the characteristics of the ruler. 78% of respondents said they did not want to work for someone who forces their opinions on others and is not able to reach consensus decisions by taking others views into consideration. Other research has substantiated that decisions made without any disagreement or without taking the views of others into account actually produce poor quality results. It would seem we want to be able to air our opinions, have our say and then engage in a lively debate to determine the best course of action.

4. Cunning -

sly, deceitful, tends to conceal information from others

This is a very clear message to those that think information is power – 73% of employees would disagree. As was mentioned earlier, trust is a vital component of employee engagement and one sure way to destroy trust, is to be sly and deceitful. The first time an employee finds out that their leader has not told the truth or has withheld information that they feel they should have been told, then it will be the last time that they want to be caught out in this way. Therefore nearly everything else the leader says will be treated with a large degree of scepticism. Building trust can take nearly your whole management/leadership career. Destroying it can take just one careless moment.

5. Domineering -

forces his/her opinions on others

69% of respondents said they do not want to work for someone who continually forces his/her opinion upon them. The alternative is to create an environment where everyone is not just entitled to their own opinion but it is actively sought so that different views and opinions can help make the decisions needed as a team.

3. How good is Business Leadership in the UAE?

As well as trying to determine what employees are looking for from their leaders, we also asked people to rate what they thought about the standard of business leadership in the country. The results were not that encouraging:

1. How would you rate the quality of the leadership in most companies in the UAE?

World Class - 2%

This is somewhat of a concern. In recent years the UAE (and Dubai in particular) has been positioning itself as not just a leader business centre in the region, but on the global stage. If that is the case then it stands to reason that we need leaders of the highest calibre to make that vision a reality. It would seem we are some way from that as we speak.

Very Good - 13%

Only 13% of respondents felt that the business leadership skills in the country were very good. Again, if we are to become the regional centre of business excellence then this figure would need to be a lot higher.

Average - 45%

The vast majority felt that the business leadership skills in the UAE were average. At first glance this may seem to be acceptable. But will it allow the UAE to draw

and retain the talent needed to be a regional centre and a global player? We think not. The old saying goes "*if you want to have better than average employees then you had better provide better than average employment.*" That means having better than average leaders.

Below Average

-

30%

Somewhat alarmingly, just under one third of respondents felt that the business leadership skills in the UAE were below average. This is certainly not going to make it easy to enable the country's vision of business and thought leadership to be realised and serious efforts need to be directed towards ensuring we monitor and develop effective leadership improvement strategies.

Appendix: Culturally Contingent Leadership Questions

Able to Anticipate

Anticipates, attempts to forecast future events, considers what will happen in the future

Ambitious

Sets high goals, works hard

Autonomous

Acts independently, does not rely on others

Cautious

Avoids taking risks, proceeds with great care

Class Conscious

Is conscious of class and status boundaries and acts accordingly

Compassionate

Has empathy for others, inclined to be helpful or show mercy

Cunning

Sly, deceitful, tends to conceal information from others

Domineering

Forces his/her opinions on others

Elitist

Believes that a small number of people with similar backgrounds are superior and should enjoy privileges

Enthusiastic

Demonstrates and imparts strong positive emotions for work

Evasive

Refrains from making negative comments to maintain good relationships and save face

Formal

Acts in accordance with rules, convention and ceremonies

Habitual

Tends to prefer a constant, regular routine

Independent

Does not rely on others, self-governing

Indirect

Does not get straight to the point, uses metaphors and examples to communicate

Individualistic

An unusual person, has characteristics and behaviours different from most others

Intra-Group Competitor

Tries to exceed the performance of others in his/her group

Intra-Group Conflict Avoider

Avoids disputes with members of his/her group

Intuitive

Has extra insight

Logical

Applies sound logic when thinking

Micro Manager

An extremely close supervisor, one who insists on making all decisions

Orderly

Is organised and methodical in work

Procedural

Follows established rules and guidelines

Provocateur

Stimulates unrest with the status quo

Risk Taker

Willing to invest major resources in endeavours that do not have a high probability of success

Ruler

Is in charge, does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders

Self-Effacing

Presents self in a modest way

Self-Sacrificing

Foregoes self interest and makes personal sacrifices in the interest of a goal/vision

Sensitive

Aware of slight changes in others moods , restricts discussions to prevent embarrassment

Sincere

Means what he/she says, is earnest

Status Conscious

Aware of others socially accepted status

Subdued

Suppressed, quiet, tame

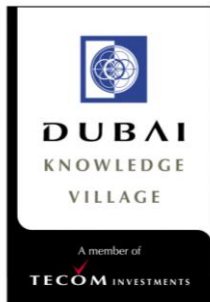
Wilful

Strong minded, determined, resolute, persistent

Worldly

Interested in many things, has a global outlook

About Dubai Knowledge Village (DKV)



Dubai Knowledge Village (DKV), launched in 2003, places the Middle East on the map as a destination for learning excellence. Its 1 KM long picturesque campus provides a ready environment for a variety of knowledge-based entities including training centres and learning support entities.

This thriving knowledge community was founded as part of a long-term economic strategy to develop the region's talent pool and accelerate its move into a knowledge-based economy.

Benefits for Dubai Knowledge Village partners include 100% foreign ownership, 100% freedom from taxes, 100% repatriation of assets and profits and effortless visa issuance procedures.

DKV also offers first-rate facilities for the use of its knowledge partners and their students including serene landscapes, a food court, sports grounds and a gym. Its partners include diverse nationalities such as Australians, Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians, Russians, Belgians, English and Irish.

DKV has over 350 partners which include training centres, professional centres and HR companies. DKV also enjoys the distinction of being the world's only Free Zone totally focused on professional training and learning support services.

About The Core Group



Core stands for the combination of **C**onsulting and **R**esearch. The Core Group is dedicated to helping organisations achieve better results through developing and maintaining high levels of employee motivation.

As an organisation, they have been researching and consulting on these issues in the region since 1991 and have developed a series of frameworks and tools to help any organisation have the best possible chance of achieving and exceeding their goals whilst at the same time providing a stimulating and motivating environment for the work force.

Steve Halligan, Managing Director of The Core Group, over 15 years consulting experience in the region has moved to Dubai in 1991 and is the Managing Director of Dubai based Leadership specialists The Core Group.