

Whitepaper on Leadership Impact



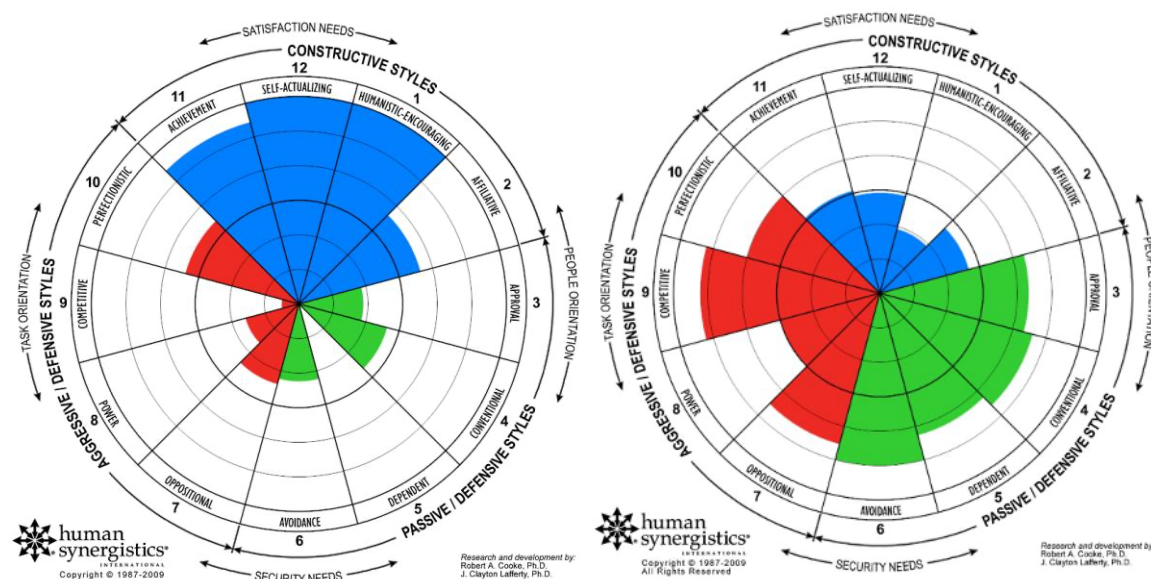
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Transforming Engagements Ltd.

“By putting the employee first, the customer effectively comes first by default, and in the end, the shareholder comes first by default as well” – Richard Branson

In a recent study of 18,000 companies, McKinsey found that companies focusing on both people and performance achieve consistently better results than those focusing only on people, only on performance or on neither.¹ Human Synergistics International (HSI) has spent decades researching how people’s behaviour affects organisational effectiveness. Their research shows that constructive behaviours like achievement and encouragement lead to higher effectiveness than passive/defensive behaviours like avoidance or aggressive/defensive behaviours like perfectionism.² This whitepaper shares what constructive leadership looks like, and how leaders can encourage behaviours and practices that enhance performance.

In Rwanda, TES has completed 360° leadership impact surveys across five organisations to date. Initial trends in this data support the conclusion that constructive behaviour is associated with higher effectiveness than defensive behaviour. The most effective Rwandan leaders (left) rate strongly on constructive styles like achievement, self-actualization and humanistic-encouraging, while the least effective (right) get high ratings for competition and avoidance.

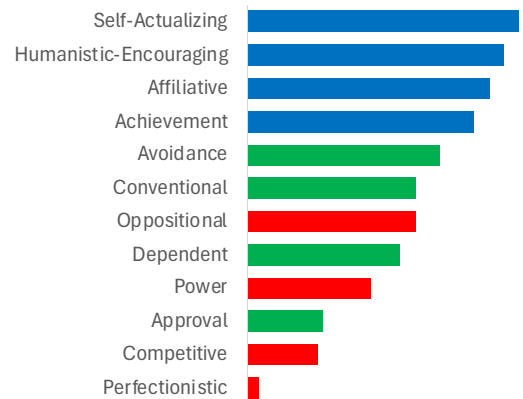


HSI uses circumplexes like these to score behavioural styles. The circumplex shows task-oriented styles on the left & people-oriented on the right. Styles at the top address positive satisfaction needs and those below address negative security needs. Constructive styles are blue, passive green and aggressive red. Each circle inside the circumplex shows the subject’s score vs the thousands of other people that have been tested with this survey. The smallest circle close to the centre shows the score for the lowest 10% of respondents, the 2nd closest 25%, the darker circle halfway up shows the score for 50% of respondents & the last two show 75% & 90%.

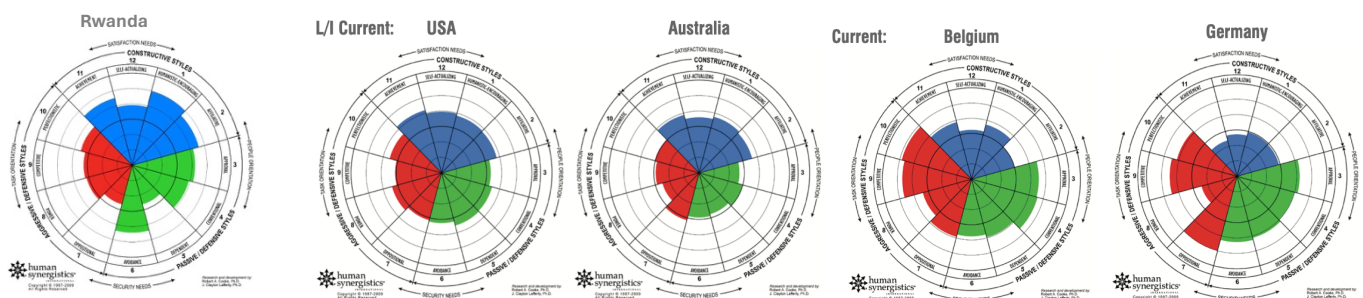
¹ Magdavkar, A. et al. (2023) *Performance through people: Transforming human capital into competitive advantage*. McKinsey. <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/our-research/performance-through-people-transforming-human-capital-into-competitive-advantage>

² Sanders, E. J. & Cooke, R. A. (2012). *Financial Returns From Organizational Culture Improvement: Translating ‘Soft’ Changes into Hard Dollars*. (2012). Human Synergistics. https://www.humansynergistics.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/financial_returns_from_culture_astd_v-2-0.pdf

Constructive styles are highly correlated with overall leadership effectiveness, as shown on the right.³ The most potent behavioural style is **Self-Actualisation** which describes leaders who take pleasure in encouraging high quality and innovative work. They set challenging, attainable goals and support creative thinking and self-development. **Humanistic-Encouraging** has the second highest association with effectiveness and describes leaders that care about others and take time to understand, encourage and develop them. Next is **Affiliation**, which emphasizes constructive interpersonal relationships based on honesty, respect, openness, collaboration and celebrating each other's success. **Achievement** has the fourth most powerful association with effectiveness. This describes leaders' interest in achieving goals and solving problems. Achievement-oriented leaders communicate regularly about performance, give positive feedback to employees about their accomplishments and coach those around them to help them succeed.



Although our local sample is still small, it is interesting to (carefully!) compare our average Rwandan leadership profile to that of other countries.⁴ Like the US and Australia, the dominant styles in Rwanda are constructive, with Humanistic-Encouraging and Affiliation being the strongest.



On the negative side, the strongest defensive style in Rwanda is **Avoidance** which also has the highest association to poor effectiveness (see bar graph above). Avoidant leaders have little interest in achievement and are happy to leave decisions to others. They try to avoid blame and punishment at all costs. The second most prevalent defensive style in our local sample is **Approval** where leaders do everything to fit in and be accepted. Next is **Conventional**, which has the second highest association with poor effectiveness. Conventional leaders accept the status quo and think rules are more important than ideas. **Dependence**, the tendency to be very respectful to superiors and leave decisions and initiative to more senior people, was less prominent in our sample.

Aggressive behaviours were also less evident in Rwanda, particularly in comparison to European countries. German leaders are highly **Oppositional**, which is also the aggressive behaviour with the strongest association with poor effectiveness. Oppositional leaders try to gain influence by being critical and opposing others' ideas. The **Power** style is associated with domineering behaviour, with leaders showing no confidence in others and always wanting to be in charge. **Competitive** leaders turn work into a contest and give top priority to being seen to win against internal competitors. **Perfectionism** has the lowest negative impact on leadership effectiveness and is task-focused, with little tolerance for errors and little interest in other people.

³ Data sourced from Table on page 57 of Human Synergistics International. (2013). *ACUMEN WorkStyles Technical Report on Methods & Validity*. <https://www.humansynergistics.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/lws-methods-validity-report-2013.pdf>

⁴ Szumal, J.I. (2014). *The Impact of Leaders and Managers Across and Within Different Countries*. Human Synergistics International. https://www.humansynergistics.com/docs/default-source/research-publications/impact_ldr_mgr_across_countries.pdf

Leaders play a critical role in building and sustaining constructive cultures and the high performing organisations that they support. The following steps that might be helpful in encouraging constructive behaviour within your teams.

1. Prioritise the behaviour(s) you want to change in your organisation

The first step in improving the behaviour of your team, your reports or yourself is to identify the one or two behaviours that you would want to change. These can either be negative behaviours that you want to reduce, or positive behaviours that you would like to increase.

Do not try to change more than one or two behaviours at a time. Prioritize behaviours that you can identify clearly and where you have confidence that change is achievable.

2. Identify the “from... to” journey that you will follow in making this change

Once you have chosen a behaviour, think about what you could do to change it. The easiest way to reduce a negative behaviour is to replace it with a positive behaviour. If your team is currently avoidant, you could reduce this behaviour by challenging the team to be more self-actualizing. For example, you can give the team time to brainstorm innovative solutions to shared problems and then provide them with the resources and support they need to implement their ideas.

Another “from... to” journey that could be relevant might be moving from power-oriented behaviour to affiliative behaviour. It would be much harder for team members to maintain a dominant and dismissive posture towards their coworkers if the group is investing significant time together getting to know each other and are sharing their feelings openly.

3. Identify the processes you can use to support the change

The best way of improving behaviour is to integrate change management into your existing processes, for example:

- **Goal setting** and **performance management** are perfect settings to discuss achievement and self-actualisation. Investing time to make these discussions more inclusive can really improve the success orientation and motivation of teams.
- **Individual coaching** is the best platform for encouraging others and really understanding and supporting their development needs.
- **Development planning** is another way to help team members talk about their needs, and to discuss any aggressive or passive behaviours that are barriers to their advancement.
- **Relationship building** can address beliefs and behaviours that might be preventing peers and departments from collaborating effectively.
- **Team building** provides a valuable means of improving affiliation and reducing avoidance and any other anti-social tendencies.

4. Use your calendar to ensure you’re prioritising your time on your priorities

For any change process to succeed, you need to invest the time necessary to build alignment and commitment across the people involved. Your calendar is the best tool for this – every week you should be ensuring that you have time allocated to the one-on-ones, the team meetings and cross functional catch-ups you need to make progress.