

# Traits and Characteristics of Leadership

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## Strategic Leadership

Strategic or upper-echelon leadership contributes a new level of complexity to the process by focusing on the entire organization, rather than just a single department. Upper-echelon leaders have executive discretion, which is moderated by both external environmental factors (such as market growth or the type of industry) and internal organizational factors (such as stability, size and structure, and culture).

## Demographics and Personality Traits

A number of studies have been conducted to identify the various individual characteristics of upper-echelon leadership. Research has shown that older chief executive officers (CEOs) tend to be more averse to risk, and insider CEOs attempt to maintain the status quo. These types of personalities are therefore less likely to make any changes in the organization. Research has also examined the upper manager’s functional background and its impact on an organization’s strategic choices. One of the most successful outcomes of this research is the concept of locus of control. Managers with an internal locus of control stress research and development (R&D), and are thus more likely to be innovators than those with an external locus of control.

Researchers have described four strategic leadership types, based on the degree to which strategic leaders are challenge-seeking or have a need for control (see Figure 1):

- The High Control Innovator, a challenge seeker who maintains tight control of the organization.
- The Participative Innovator, a challenge seeker who delegates control.
- The Status Quo Guardian, a challenge-averse leader who maintains tight control.
- The Process Manager, a challenge-averse leader who delegates control.

**Figure 1: Strategic Leadership Types**

		<b>Desire for Control</b>	
		<b>High Control</b>	<b>Low Control</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	<b>High challenge</b>	High control	Participative

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<b>Seeking</b>	<b>seeking</b>	innovator	innovator
	<b>Low challenge seeking</b>	Status quo guardian	Process manager

(Nahavandi, 2003)

Each type of strategic leader deals differently with the six strategic forces: perception of environment, technology, strategy, culture, structure, and leadership (Nahavandi, 2003).

### **Culture and Gender**

The importance and impact of culture and gender on leadership are the subjects of recent studies. Little empirical data has been collected, although findings suggest that strategic leadership differs from one country to another. Evidence also suggests that female executives in traditional organizations succeed if their styles mirror male leadership styles, while other studies reveal that the supportive style more typical of women encourages greater employee participation and empowerment (Nahavandi, 2003).

### **Future Leaders**

The traditional "command and control" leadership style is not suited for the rapid social, cultural, and organizational changes now occurring around the world. The leaders of the future will be required to adopt a different mindset toward external and internal shareholders. They will have to demonstrate integrity and honesty towards all shareholders and develop an astute awareness of cultural factors. It is not humanly possible for any one person to understand all the implications related to the different cultures in the world; however, a leader can ask questions, listen to answers, and refrain from judgment.

In the future, leaders will be required to have integrated perspectives about their organization's function. These leaders will be successful if they remain flexible and open to new experiences, and effectively manage change. Leaders in the twenty-first century should be willing to experiment and challenge their assumptions.

It is imperative that these leaders commit to ongoing learning, training, and practice, so that they might acquire and retain the many skills and tools

## Traits and Characteristics of Leadership

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required to effectively lead their organizations. Finally, tomorrow's leaders must learn to balance and integrate their careers with their personal lives.

### **Reference**

Nahavandi, A (2003). *The art and science of leadership* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.