Getting Beneath the Surface

Are your actions and motives putting you, your people and the business at risk?

Understanding and working with values, motives and
potential leadership derailing behaviours.

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INTRODUCTION

As leaders and managers we are on show and our actions often speak louder than our words. In challenging times this is even more evident because when under pressure, cracks may appear and our leadership is put to the test.

- Are we worth following into the future?
- What is our vision for the future?
- What do we stand for?
- How well can we manage ourselves and our teams and businesses in a crisis or tough times?
- How do we motivate and retain our talent?

These and other similar questions often go unasked and unanswered. This leaves us and our people at risk of being unaware of what can be addressed and how to play to our strengths.

Increasingly, people want to know what we stand for, what we value, and what we will not compromise in the quest for a viable, healthy business.

This discussion paper focuses on some key areas that are often left unexplored, yet can have a dramatic impact on our leadership and managerial success:

- The importance of culture, motives, values, preferences and team cohesiveness
- Leadership derailers and coping styles

As each leader and manager is an individual, they must find their own way to manage and lead. However, when we are assessing and understanding our own and others' behaviours, we often refer to personality style as a key reference point. While certain personality assessments can provide accurate and reliable predictors of performance, there is more to a person's capability and satisfaction or a team's interactions than meets the eye.

As a starting point we like to look at three key areas when taking into account an individual's potential contribution to a role and workplace performance.

1. Out in the open: Personality
2. Beneath the surface: Motives and values
3. Under pressure: Coping strategies, derailers and the dark side

This does not exclude other important factors such as technical competence, experience, knowledge or cognitive ability. These play a critical part in a role or team, however given technical competence, experience, knowledge and appropriate levels of intelligence are sound for the task at hand, what else can impact the performance and culture of your team and business?

Out in the open: Our personality is what we and other people see every day. Our personality can be referred to as *our everyday preferences* or 'dominant' behaviours. These traits will impact on what we like to do and in turn, what we are better at doing. As with any personality appraisal there are no good or bad tendencies; just differences between people. It is those differences that allow us to compliment each other's style and effectiveness at work. By providing some insight into our everyday preferences we can learn how to better leverage what we do well and what we may need to focus our development on.

Beneath the surface: Motives and values are powerful forces that lie beneath the surface of any individual, organisation, community and country. They are what motivates and drives us from the inside. They relate to what makes us feel satisfied, happy and interested in our own life. They may not be visible everyday or be evident in our behaviours; however they are critical to team culture and team cohesiveness.

Under pressure: How do we cope under pressure? What happens to us when we crack? When placed under high levels of pressure, most people will rely on coping mechanisms or their strengths that help them manage in day to day activities, but due to the pressure they actually become counterproductive tendencies. We refer to these as 'risk factors' and they can emerge is our *dark side*. These coping mechanisms can become detrimental to your ability to build trust based relationships and impact on your leadership and management style.

Although the personality or 'out in the open' component is a crucial one, the remainder of this article will focus primarily on what is *beneath the surface* and the impacts of not understanding yourself when *under pressure* as these two elements are not, as yet, as recognised or understood as they could be.

BENEATH THE SURFACE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE, MOTIVES, VALUES, PREFERENCES & TEAM COHESIVENESS

Culture is strongly related to group values, and in turn group values are heavily influenced by what leaders prefer and encourage. As such, cultures have the power to attract people or expel them and assessing values affords powerful insights.

Values are beliefs about what is important or desirable. Extensive research as discussed by Dave Winsborough in his 2008 article has shown compelling reasons for matching people with organisation cultures and how it adds bottom-line value:

- Firstly, it is important that employees' values match those of the organisation in order to create a cohesive and supportive environment.
- Secondly, a close value match between individuals and the organisation means the individual experiences significantly greater job satisfaction.
- Thirdly, where the organisation's values and those of the individual align, employees stay longer and are more likely to adjust to the environment.
- Finally, the most productive organisations are those where employees stay and enjoy the job.

Throughout many aspects of life people with similar values are inclined to gather together. This similarity establishes a basis for trust, cooperation and cohesiveness. This generalisation has been shown to be true; individuals within organisations tend to be more similar than they are different.

The following graph represents a sample leadership team, with each member completing an assessment measuring inner values and motives. All members have been mapped on the graph and the **black line** indicates the average trend across the group and as you can see certain individual scores are nearly identical across all six managers. There are no good or bad value clusters in teams, and it is important not to make assumptions about the value labels without understanding their meaning in association with this specific assessment. This management team's results demonstrate that their values and motives culture is likely to be very strong and in sync which does suggest they will be a cohesive team. However, given their strong values and motives alignment, this tight bond could affect their ability to successfully induct new people into their team.

We have seen this type of value alignment pattern across several long standing management teams. What these management teams have come to realise as a result of understanding the trend, is that they need to ensure their current cultures do not have negative impacts on the success of their teams and businesses when new members come on board. They will bring their own values and motives and consequently values, must be embraced. This is particularly critical in terms of succession planning and recruitment practices.

Motives: Sample Leadership Team
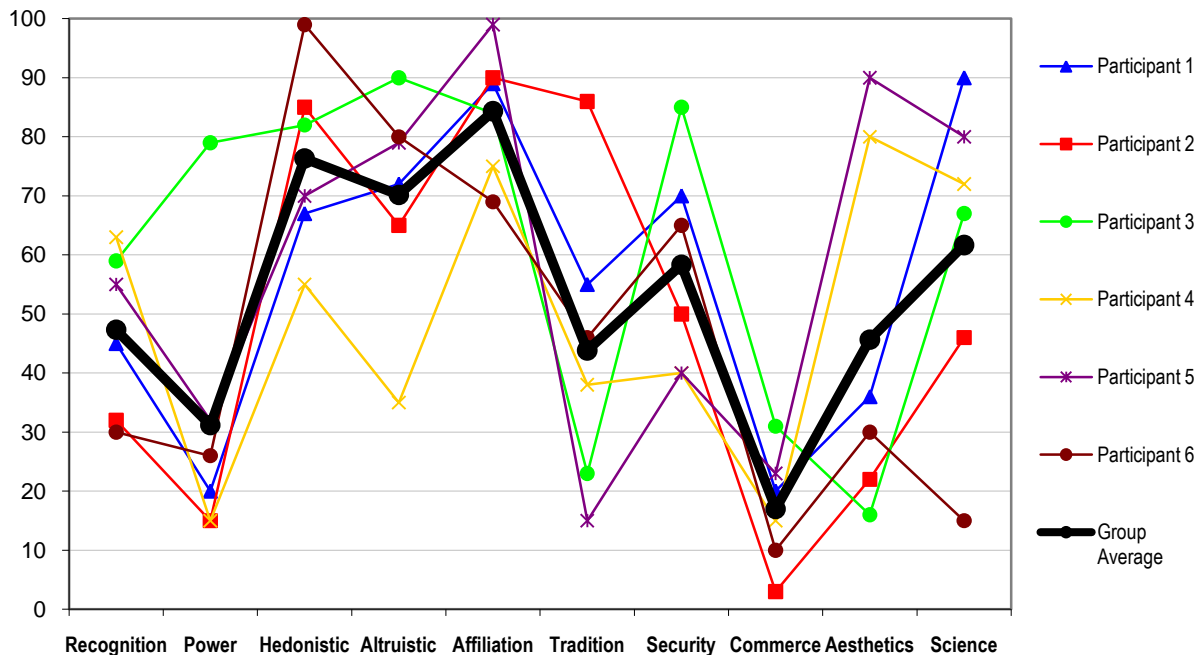
Although the information gathered from the motives and values can shape culture, it is important to remember that our motives and values do not necessarily come across in our everyday behaviours or impact on our ability to perform in a role.

However, we suggest that just as 'competence' is important, of equal impact is acknowledging what makes us feel satisfied, happy and interested at work and how this impacts on our interactions, how we motivate our team, and why we make the choices we do.

UNDER PRESSURE: LEADERSHIP DERAILERS & COPING STRATEGIES

Leadership and people management involves building and maintaining a high-performing team. Anything that detracts from your ability to build a team also detracts from your performance as a leader and a manager.

Coping strategies are the behaviours that you have developed over time (even from childhood) to cope with increased levels of pressure. This pressure can be due to change, high stress, boredom, multi-tasking, work overload, unhappy environment, or finding yourself outside your comfort zone.

When placed under such pressure, most people will display certain counterproductive tendencies. We usually refer to these as 'derailers' or your potential 'dark side'. Under normal conditions these characteristics may actually be strengths, however when demands increase, our reliance on these mechanisms can impede our effectiveness and erode the quality of relationships with customers, colleagues and direct reports.

It is very important to note that these characteristics can have highly positive implications and we can help you master your strengths. To gain insight into what has helped make you successful and how this may become 'unstuck' can be invaluable to your career progression.

A specific example of when a strength can become a derailer is when confidence turns into arrogance. It is a fair assumption that confidence can be one important contributor to a successful career in management. To be 'confident' means to have courage, to be bold, to be self-assured, and people are more likely to follow or believe in a confident leader. However, this strength can become a derailer when you are under pressure as your self-assured nature goes too far and you stop listening to other people, become condescending, egotistical and make ineffective decisions.

This is not to suggest that all confident managers will demonstrate arrogance, but this is one of several potential dark sides that could have an impact on your career.

The graph below represents a sample leadership team who completed a specific assessment tool used to measure these 'dark side' tendencies. Confidence, as mentioned above, is categorised under BOLD. If a person's score on this scale or any other scale listed below is above the 90th percentile this is an indicator that under undue stress or increased pressure this strength could become a potential derailer or dark side.

The **black line** indicates the average trend across the group. There is no score in the Group Average above 90th percentile, however across this group of six leaders there are 19 high 'risk scores' which could potentially translate into derailing behaviours or actions should the pressure get too much.

Dark Side: Sample Leadership Team
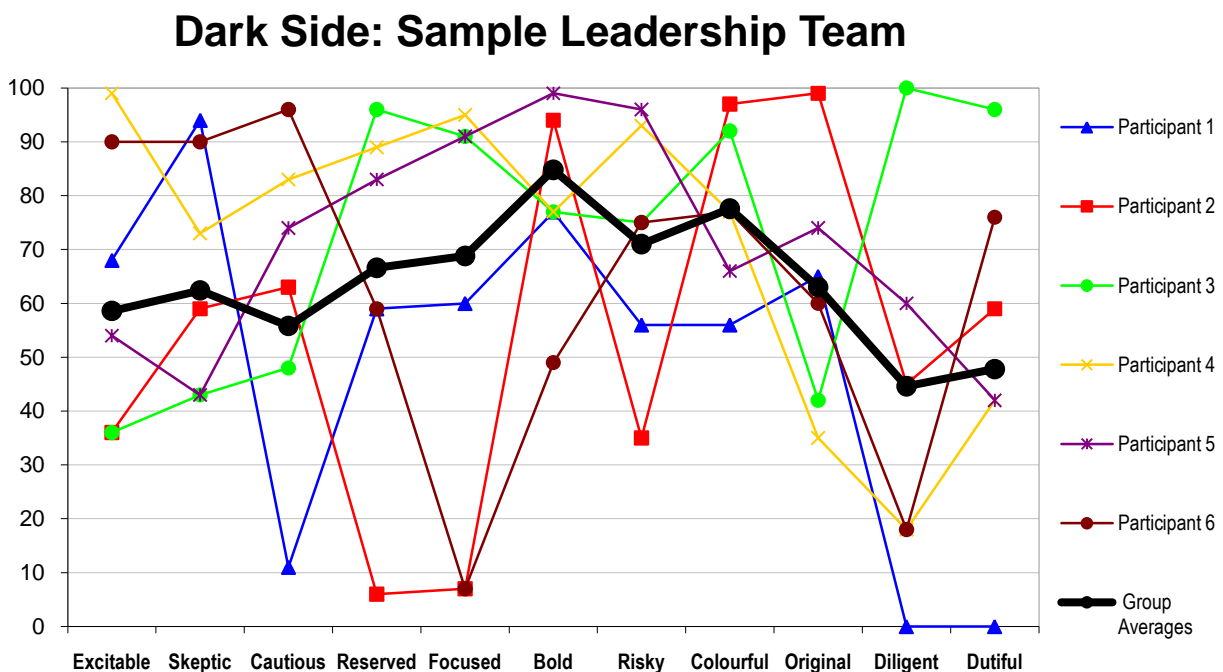
Identifying and being made aware of your leadership coping strategies will allow you to develop as a leader and a manager. It provides insights about your behaviour that could potentially undermine or inhibit your performance and ability to effectively build trust based relationships and is designed to raise insight to assist in leading people more effectively. It is important not to make assumptions about the dark side labels without understanding their meaning in association with this specific assessment.

The best way to answer the initial question "Are your actions and motives putting you, your people and the business at risk?" is to decide if you can clearly articulate what drives and motivates you and your people, or if you can identify your 'dark side?'

Although it can be easy to make assumptions about you or your team, BARRETT can use formalised tools and processes to help you understand potential leadership and management challenges and give you some insight regarding how you and each of your team members affect others. The overall aim is to help you see how tendencies (behavioural, motives, and coping strategies) can advance or inhibit your career and leadership effectiveness.

For optimal personal or team development and professional growth, we recommend combining the three factors to paint the whole picture of an individual:

- 'out in the open' characteristics
- 'beneath the surface' motives
- 'under pressure' coping strategies

Individual and Team Development Options
Interpretive Reports and One-on-One Coaching
Interpretive reports with a feedback session and/or a one-on-one coaching session around these factors raises individual's awareness and improves effectiveness in any career that requires contact with other people.

Management Team Summary Reports and Group Feedback
For groups or teams, identified or de-identified data (personality, values and dark side) can be collated to provide a snapshot of how the group looks as one unit, that is, where you come together as a team or vary. This can then be worked through with Barrett consultants and the Management team, or the whole team in a workshop format with suggested areas to focus on included.

Applied Leadership and Management Development Modules
With greater self-awareness and insight, leaders and teams can embark upon a series of training sessions to give all members the tools and resources to build strengths and develop their areas of concern. Modules include:
- Culture, Values, Personal Insight and Change
- Being an Effective Manager and Being an Effective Sales Manager
- 21st Century Coaching Strategies
- Situational Leadership
- Effective Recruitment Practices
- Assessing and Managing Workplace Performance
- The Optimistic Manager
- Time Management and Effective Delegation
- Managing and Leading Teams
- Conflict Resolution and Learning to Argue Fairly
- The Working Leader (applied leadership)
- Innovation and Future Thinking

FOR PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Please contact **us** on **03 9532 7677** or email contact@barrett.com.au for more information and how these assessments can help you and your organisation. To subscribe to BARRETT's free newsletter, please visit www.barrett.com.au