

## **Traits of Managers in Academic and Corporate IT**

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**Abstract:** Aim of this paper is to investigate and better understand the different traits possessed by academic leaders and corporate executives in IT.

**Keywords** Information Technology, Corporate, Academic, Leadership Role, Hogan Personality Inventory, Hogan Developmental Inventory, Motives/Values/Preferences Inventory

### **I. Introduction and Background**

Are there definitive differences between academic and corporate environments that differentiate and influence core qualities, styles, and strategies between leaders in IT? If these differences are identified, would it be reasonable to educate future IT leaders about these differences as well as best practices that would ensure success of the institution in which they serve? These questions and thoughts are the construct for doing this research. Upon further investigation in the literature, there does seem to be an ample amount of data on specific subjects pertaining to educational and corporate leadership, specifically in the realms of library and information systems research.

### **II. Materials and Methods**

This research was conducted utilizing a search of the literature through online and library references. The literature was evaluated for inclusion and included and/or summarized to display underlying relevance.

#### **2.1 Project Rationale**

This rationale of this project is to gather and present information pertinent to establishing similarities and/or differences between leaders in academic information technology and leaders/executives in corporate information technology.

### **III. Results**

#### **3.1 Leadership Traits**

Common traits of leaders of Information Technology, in both corporate and academic environments, typically encompass interpersonal abilities, technical competency, cognitive aptitude,

and adaptive capability to immediate problems or issues. One of the more interesting result of these traits is in the area of highly developed communication skills. A characteristic trait of an IT leader is simplistic translation, which is to effectively translate technology knowledge to simple and easy to understand reasoning and justification. This type of translation is essential so as to provide value in meaningful ways to critical personnel (e.g. executive members, auditors, financial controllers, or others in leadership) who may have more limited understanding of IT related projects. This skill is absolutely critical in order to convey value of the service.

#### **3.2 Motivations and Aptitudes**

The Witt/Keiffer group did a survey in 2003 with a group of corporate executives and higher education leaders. This study investigated motivations and traits of the participants. To carry this out, it used three instruments: the Hogan Personality Inventory, the Hogan Developmental Inventory, and the Motives/Values/Preferences Inventory. The study noted that in Interpersonal Sensitivity academic leaders scored higher, meaning that they tended to be more compassionate for others differences. It also noted that executives scored higher in mischievous tendencies (e.g. the potential to break and/or bend rules). It also noted that in terms of leisurely activities, academics tended to score higher. It also noted that traits related to altruism were more prevalent in academics and that traits related to commerce were more prevalent in corporate executives.

Noted conclusions included that Academics scored very high in areas of "Tact, perceptiveness, and Relationships" and "Helping others contributing to society", noting also that academics overall scored

much lower in “Money, Profits, and Business Opportunities”. In the corporate space, executives scored well in “Risk-Taking and Excitement” and “Money, Profits, and business opportunities”. It was also noted that executives scored lower in “Helping Others; contributing to society”.<sup>2</sup>

### **3.3 Environments**

#### **3.3.1 Academic Environment**

The academic environment is primarily focused on inclusion and respect for differences in opinion in order

to come to consensus. As Brodsky aptly stated, “American university and college decision-making was based on the principles of collegiality and shared governance, which assumed a community of interest among all the members of an educational institution.” (Brodsky, D., 2002) This goes to the core of governance which drives decisions and also explains some of the key findings of the study above. Indeed, a shared governance model is key at the academic institution given the nature of well-educated personnel, the requirement for inclusion by the academic community in terms of ideas. Given the variety of the constituents in play (students, faculty, staff, researchers, etc.), inclusion drives the need for transparency. It also drives the use of process driven frameworks for decision making. Understanding that everyone, as stated within the process, has approved a change allows for inclusion, accountability, and tractability.

At many academic institutions (and to a certain extent in corporate environments) have had a splitting of resources based on specialty and/or locality as technology has evolved with different types of IT based ecosystems being formed and/or augmented to serve specific needs. These could include AV, library, department based specialty centers, and distance learning. There may be valid reasons for this creation, surrounding tight coupling of content with the technology being used or the degree in which particular departmental needs are changing requiring more direct and dedicated support personnel. According to Albright et. al (Educause, 2008, pp. 16), this is a potential cause of fragmentation among the community of IT leadership. One of the clear recommendations for alleviating this ‘fragmentation’ was to ensure that there was a clear hierarchy setup to ensure accountability.

#### **3.3.2 The Corporate Environment**

The corporate environment utilizes, in general, a

goal-oriented top-down approach for governance. By having the top-down approach, decisions are usually made faster and procedural delays are, in general, fewer in nature. These decisions are made in response to the following factors: direct competition, disruptive technologies, innovation, and regulatory changes. As this is a top-down approach, there tends to be, in general, more uniformity and less of the ‘fragmentation’ that is experienced with higher education.

#### **3.3.3 Regulatory Compliance**

Another core difference is in the types of regulations that must be adhered to in order to run compliant IT departments. Within corporate environments, there are many financial and government regulations that must be controlled, documented, reported, and complied with. Depending on the academic institution, there may be other such compliance requirements that needs to be run such as LCME for medical schools, CEPH for public health, SACS for higher education, or state/federal No Child Left Behind for K-12. In this instance, there will always be compliance requirements that must be adhered to.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Based on the surveys conducted by leaders within these two areas, I would like to say, preliminarily, the strong likelihood that there would be some key differences in values and traits between IT leaders in corporate and academic institutions.

### **4.1 Future Study Proposal**

Based on the findings from the Witt/Keiffer study, the same standardized instruments should be administered to IT leaders in corporate and academic institutions. In interviews conducted for this research paper, it was suggested that, from a management perspective, that there really were no key differences except that the underlying goals of the organizations differed drastically. IT served different clients with entirely different needs at a fundamental level though the same underlying sense of customer service remained the same. This future investigation aims to measure this more precisely.

A longitudinal study on the participants selected for follow-up should include those who change from corporate to higher education and vice versa. The questions posed include:

- 1) Are the personality traits and values affected in changing from one to another?

- 2) Would someone, through adaption become more caring and helpful if they were placed into an academic setting, coming originally from a corporate environment?
- 3) Are there confounding factors that could affect this: sex, ethnicity, for-profit vs. non-profit academic institutions, non-profit vs. for-profit corporations, etc.?
- 4) Would someone who had served in academia adapt and become less helpful and also become more commerce driven when placed into a corporate setting?
- 5) What type of preparation would be necessary to prepare an academic IT leader to be successful in the corporate world?

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What type of preparation would be necessary to prepare a corporate IT leader to become successful in the academic IT world?

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