



# BURNHAM ROSEN GROUP

*The Science of Superior Performance*

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



*Many of the people who enter senior leadership positions in large organizations today are different from their predecessors. While the profile of the best leaders is unchanged, the shift in the 'center of gravity' of the majority will have an impact on performance and how to support leadership development.*

## THE DISTRACTED LEADER – HOW THE NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS DIFFER FROM THEIR PREDECESSORS

Most of the choices we make about how to behave happen 'in the moment' and often with little conscious thought. But these choices are guided to a surprising extent by patterns of thinking outside of everyday awareness.

Burnham Rosen Group has studied many different occupations and has uncovered the specific patterns that are associated with the highest levels of performance in each role. Public, private and third-sector organizations have used these insights to develop their people and drive better outcomes for customers, clients or patients.

From time to time the data we gather uncovers broader findings.

For example, data we were gathering in the late 1980s from leadership programs at a range of clients showed the first hint that a significant shift was occurring in the pattern of thinking (motive profile) of successful leaders.

Subsequent targeted research went on to prove that the profile predicting superior leadership performance had changed - from a motivational pattern termed Imperial Power to an InterActive Power pattern (the next page explains these concepts.)

During the last 20 years many people entering leadership roles continue to match or come close to the Imperial Power pattern. These leaders deliver acceptable but not superior outcomes. We might refer to their style as 'traditional'; meritocratic, interpersonally skillful but ultimately in charge.

But more recently we have seen the emergence of a new 'norm.' Increasingly the most frequently occurring profile for leaders is that of Independent Power with some InterActive Power patterns.

### ALSO IN THIS DIGEST

- Why building an organizational sense of Purpose is important but not in itself sufficient
- The implications of this research for your approach to Performance Management



## IMPLICIT MOTIVATION AND LEADERSHIP

### POWER AND THE STAGES OF POWER

Power Motivation is a non-conscious, or implicit, concern with impact and influence-based relationships. Dominance in this motive is associated with interest in roles such as teaching, acting, management and leadership.

Most leaders in large organizations are dominant in this motive. But the expression of this motive in thought and action is subtly influenced by the particular way a leader thinks about Power. There are four distinct patterns. These are known as the Stages of Power.

Like implicit motives, the Stage of Power can be accurately measured for a leader.

**Dependent Power** – This orientation to Power seeks to attract the positive interest and support of powerful others. No leaders are dominant in this orientation, superior or average.

**Independent Power** – This orientation to Power concerned with self-sufficiency and self-determination.

**Imperial Power** – This orientation to Power is concerned with acquisition of power and, in its most constructive form, the use of the leader's own authority to accomplish organizational goals.

**InterActive Power** – This orientation to Power is concerned with purpose and meaning. Research consistently demonstrates this orientation drives superior outcomes for leaders in large, complex organizations.



Implicit motives provide insight into the origin of behavior. *Thoughts* are the focus of a motives approach to research into performance and for personal development. One of the prime patterns of thought the Imperial Leader brings, for example, is a belief in the value of authority. This consequently drives the behavior of striving for authority. We know that today's superior leaders - InterActive Leaders - share this interest in authority, but they are principally concerned that authority is appropriately distributed. Consequently, organizations have fostered concepts like empowerment to encourage Imperial Power leaders to pass authority down.

But the thoughts of many of the new leaders we see today are different from their Imperial predecessors. For example, the Independent Power Leader is less concerned with the acquisition of authority. They are

often surprised others see them as authority figures and they feel uncomfortable with any action that appears to be a display of personal power.

The underlying non-conscious thought pattern of this leader is often dominated by an interest in establishing order. They are sensitive to disorder. We might describe this person as 'distracted' because they are so readily disturbed and un-focused.

In behavior, this pattern drives a number of tendencies. Leaders focus on details; they struggle with ambiguity; they micro-manage, not out of a need to demonstrate their authority, but out of a need to feel things are under control. These leaders often are rule-bound and process-focused. The need for a framework to guide decision-making helps bring a sense of control and order.

Less obviously, the non-conscious need for order can drive high levels of physical fitness and concern with cleanliness, health and wellbeing. The self needs ordering as much as the environment. Note how many senior leaders we see today combine heavy professional workloads with intensive training for marathons or triathlons.

It is tempting to attribute this change in thinking patterns to smart phones and their ever-intrusive demands for attention. However, some interesting population-research carried out in

1997 suggests these patterns became more prevalent in an age-specific section of society long before the smart phone.

This research looked at the motive profile of 30-45 year old professional males and found a striking increase in the level of Independent Power. We are now experiencing the significance of this finding. This data predicted what we now see – the emergence of Independent Power as the new motivational norm in today's senior leaders.



## PURPOSE

WHY IT MATTERS MORE NOW THAN EVER TO SEE BEYOND WHAT WE DO TO WHY WE DO IT

Independent Power patterns of thinking unconsciously bias people's thoughts about themselves and their work towards valuing what they bring – their capability or professional credentials. There is an unconscious subordinating of the purpose of work.

This bias adds to the independent feel of their leadership impact. Moreover, if a leader does not feel a sense of purpose about their work then it is unlikely they will foster that sense of purpose in those they lead.

Many commercial companies, particularly in the West, have revised their mission statements and have moved away from a focus on competition to focusing on the purpose of the work their business does.

This is a helpful environmental prime for leaders but on its own it is unlikely to materially affect how an individual thinks about their own work. How leaders behave is strongly influenced by their non-conscious thinking patterns about influence. Giving people insight to this effect is a powerful catalyst for change.



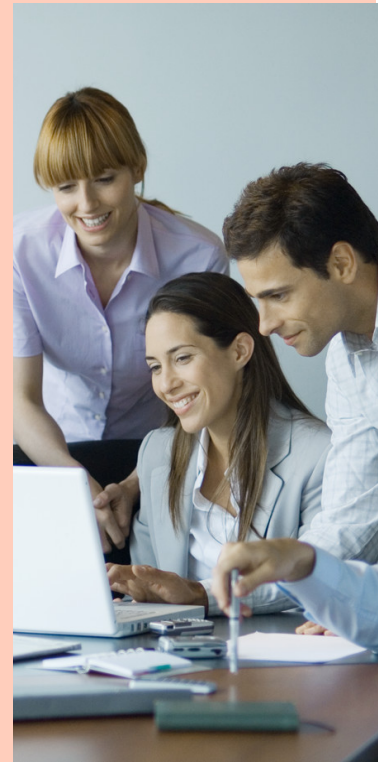
## THE DISTRACTED LEADER

- High levels of respect for individuals and a desire for mutual relationships.
- Often picks up on details, knows this trait can be an irritation to others and a poor use of time, but feels better when things are tidied away.
- Can be obsessive in some aspect of behavior (health, tidiness, lists).
- Often sees choices as black and white. Uncomfortable with ambiguity.
- Anxiety is mostly around concerns with competence and making choices.
- Whilst seeking to bring order the overall impact can be to create chaos.
- Does well in early and middle management positions but finds more senior roles increasingly uncomfortable and unmanageable.

## AS ORGANIZATIONS RESPOND TO THIS NEW NORM, WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

Do you value people and their differences? Are you uncomfortable with the trappings of authority and concerned how others might perceive your legitimacy to lead? How do you feel about your leadership role in traditional performance management systems? The top down cascade of objectives and managerial power to force-fit ratings against a set distribution feels Imperial in tone. As Imperial Power becomes less defining of the motivation profile of the majority of leaders we would expect leaders to increasingly reject the style of performance management that has been in place for many years, regardless of its effectiveness.

What are the risks though? Some insight to this comes from understanding the impact of Independent Power thoughts on leadership behavior. What can occur is the loss of the legitimacy and primacy of organizational performance because defining and addressing performance is experienced as a source of disorder and discomfort. If your business is going down this route to performance management, beware of arguments that performance cannot be objectively defined. The underlying pattern of Independent Power is towards focusing on the self and this can result in an aversion to measures of performance. Leaders are ultimately accountable for the impact their business has on customers, and this is an accountability that cannot be wished away.



Burnham Rosen Group specializes in using evidence-based methods to understand the drivers of high-performance and to create organizational interventions that lead to improvements in outcomes. We help organizations around the world understand what differentiates performance and we help them select and develop and people in order to improve performance.

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