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HARRISON



## Great Expectations: Today's leaders need to be good. At everything.

Business leaders have always toiled under great expectations.

Leaders must be able to anticipate challenges, devise solutions, and motivate employees. Everything a business leader does and says must be geared towards driving organizational success.

And yet, expectations of leaders have traditionally varied depending on the level they hold within an organization.

For example, senior executives were seen as being the only leaders that needed to think strategically or steer organizational change. Middle managers were primarily expected to execute the strategy created from above; rarely would they be involved in developing it. Frontline managers were seen as having much less responsibility and, thus, were not expected to possess the same competencies of senior leaders.

Based on recent research conducted by Lee Hecht Harrison, it seems that these traditional views are giving way to higher expectations for leaders at all levels. There are signs now that all leaders, regardless of status or position, are operating under greater demands than ever before.

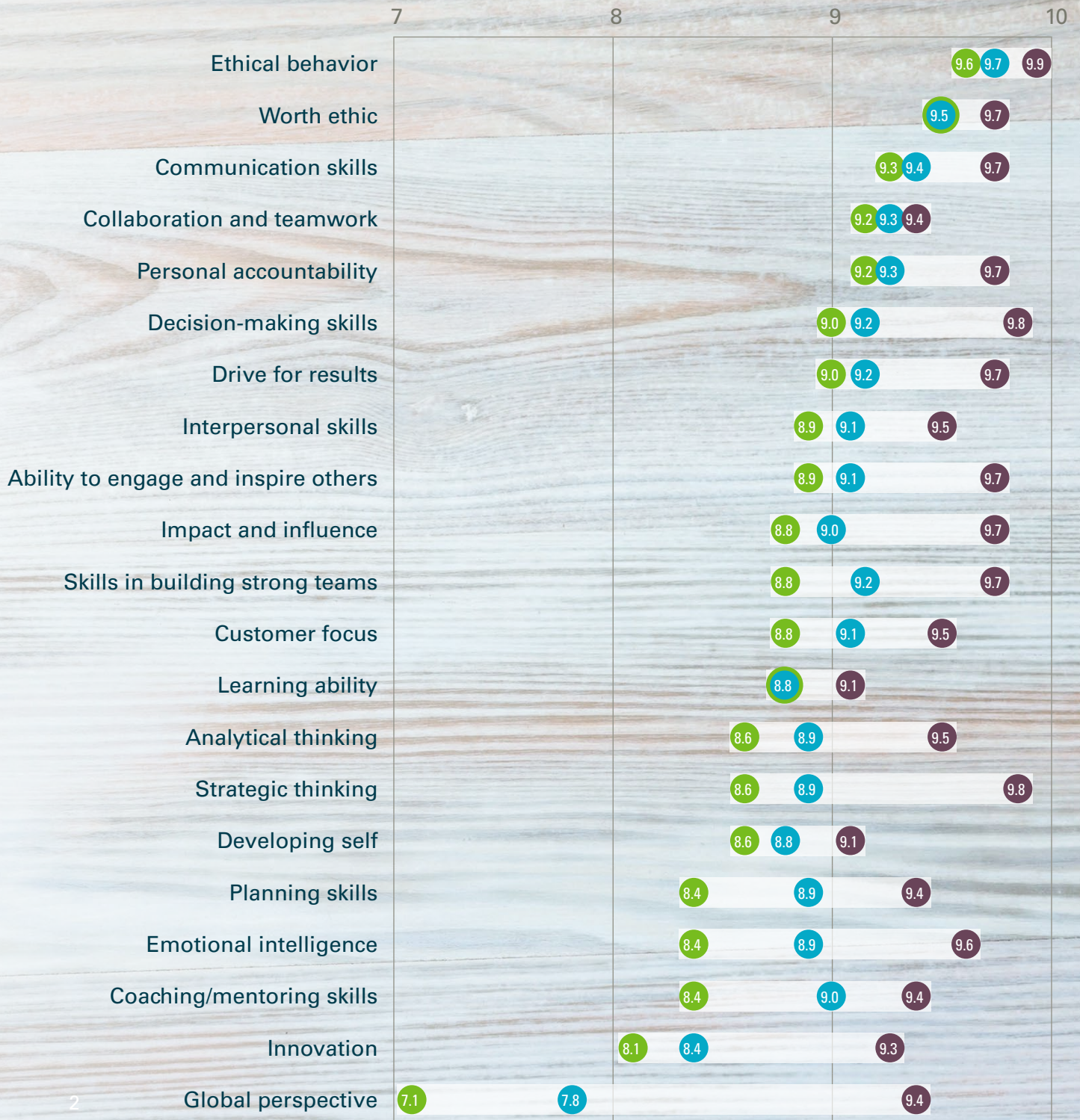
We recently surveyed hiring managers from around the world to quantify and rank their expectations across 21 different competencies for three levels of management: frontline, mid-management, and senior executives. The results showed that, while senior leaders still carry the greatest expectations of all, leaders at other levels of an organization's hierarchy are not absolved of the responsibility of being good at their jobs—sometimes just as good as the most senior executives.

We asked the question, "How important is each of these core leadership competencies when assessing managers?"



LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

- Entry
- Mid-level
- Senior



Ratings based on a 0-10 scale, where 0 represents "Not At All Important" and 10 represents "Very Important."

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Remarkably, the survey results showed that expectations around leadership competencies were incredibly consistent from the frontline to the senior levels of an organization.

For example, the variation of competency expectations from the frontline to the senior executive level was 10% (1.0 on a 10-point scale) or less in 17 of 21 competencies. In seven of those competencies (ethical behavior, work ethic, communication, collaboration/teamwork, personal accountability, learning ability, and developing self), the variation was less than 5% (0.5 on a 10-point scale) across all tiers of leadership.

There were bigger gaps in a few competencies. Senior leaders are still expected to be much better at global thinking, strategic thinking, innovation, and emotional intelligence. Even in those categories, however, the competencies were still considered critically important for frontline leaders, with an average hiring manager ranking of 8 on a 10-point scale.

The survey results confirm several new and important facts about the realities of what it means to be a leader today.

First, the greatest demands and expectations will be borne on the shoulders of the senior-most leaders. There is no new model of business management that relieves senior leaders from this burden, nor should there be. Senior leaders must be good at all major competencies for an organization to effectively deliver on its business plan.

The survey also demonstrated that softer, people-oriented competencies, such as communication, collaboration, personal accountability, ability to engage and inspire others, and teambuilding, are becoming just as important as the traditional, hard, and technical competencies. This finding is supported by other research, including a recent white paper from The Adecco Group called "[The Soft Skills Imperative](#)," which advocates for increased emphasis on people-oriented skills, along with technical skills.



The white paper argues effectively that, although technology is taking over all aspects of our working lives, the ability to understand and interact with people, largely through soft skills, is a huge competitive advantage. The hiring and recruiting practices survey certainly reflects the growing importance of soft skills.

Finally, the results seem to confirm that business organizations are coming to a consensus that it does not make sense to vary expectations around leadership competencies.

In the past, lower-level leaders were not expected to possess competencies that were seen to be the purview of those enjoying the rarified air of the C-Suite. More modern thinking has come to the conclusion that most leadership competencies must be acquired and practiced consistently throughout all levels of leadership for them to be effective.

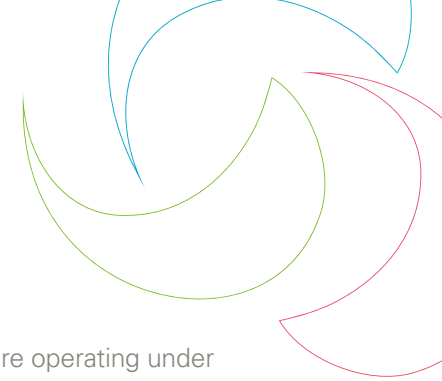
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of an organization's hierarchy. Organizations that spend time aligning themselves to this reality will be much better suited to compete going forward.

In particular, organizations need to re-tool their leadership development initiatives to develop a wider array of competencies in the lowest level of leadership. Frontline leaders must be taught early on that they have a role to play in organizational success and that they must work hard to acquire competencies that will serve them well if and when they scale the leadership hierarchy.

When looking to fill a leadership role, hiring managers must work diligently to convince their organizations that the demands of modern leadership require leaders who are not only good at hard, technical competencies, but also have a strong grasp of the softer, more difficult to quantify competencies that allow them to work constructively alongside others and inspire colleagues to do more and better.





# Leadership Competency Checklist

All leaders—whether they are new leaders, middle managers, or senior executives—are operating under greater expectations than ever before. To be successful, they must continuously develop and improve skills that enhance their leadership ability. Our checklist is a useful tool that managers and individuals can use to assess performance and identify those competencies that are most relevant to a specific leadership position and target areas of weakness where development would drive enhanced leadership performance.

## To get the most out of the checklist:

1. Review the competencies and rate them by level of importance.
2. Circle all the competencies that identified as critically important.
3. Rate the level of competence in each (basic, effective, or very effective).

COMPETENCY	NOT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	CRITICALLY IMPORTANT	LEVEL OF COMPETENCE (Basic – Effective – Very Effective)
Ethical Behavior				
Work Ethic				
Communication Skills				
Collaboration/Teamwork				
Personal Accountability				
Decision-making Skills				
Drive for Results				
Interpersonal Skills				
Engage/Inspire Others				
Impact and Influence				
Building Strong Teams				
Customer Focus				
Learning Ability				
Analytical Thinking				
Strategic Thinking				
Developing Self				
Emotional Intelligence				
Coaching/Mentoring				
Innovation				
Global Perspective				

EMPLOYERS EXPECT MORE OF ALL THEIR LEADERS.  
BUT ARE THEIR EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC?

After examining the survey results, you may be wondering: can any one leader be all these things, all the time?

The reality is that despite the sky-high expectations, very few leaders can be good at all the competencies rated in the survey. In fact, it may not even be necessary for every leader to be good at every competency.

If you are leading at a company with a very local focus, it may not be necessary to display a capacity for global thinking. If you are leading a single-purpose team, communication and emotional intelligence will be important competencies, but analytical thinking may not be an absolute necessity.

Still, if you are seeking a leadership position, how can you make sense of the broad array of expectations and use it to your advantage in an interview?

First and foremost, prioritize the competencies that are most relevant to the position you are seeking.

Look at your organization or the organization at which you are seeking a leadership position—look at the general environment and try to determine what it is that this organization is trying to accomplish. Ask yourself, How can I make the best contribution to the leadership culture at this organization? Then work on developing the competencies that will be of greatest benefit.

You cannot be good at every leadership competency. But you can always work diligently toward becoming the best possible leader for the leadership position you are seeking.

Most leadership competencies must be acquired and practiced consistently throughout all levels of leadership for them to be effective.

## About the Research

This study examined candidate sourcing and hiring trends among Human Resources managers with responsibility for sourcing and/or hiring candidates for their companies. A total of 277 online interviews were conducted in 2016, representing all company sizes and all major industries across North America, Latin America, EMEA, and Asia-Pacific

## About the Authors

**Vince Molinaro** is the Global Managing Director – Leadership Transformation at Lee Hecht Harrison. He is also the author of *The Leadership Contract* – a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestseller. Vince has spent more than 20 years as an adviser to boards and senior executives looking to improve leadership in their organizations.

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## About Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH)

Lee Hecht Harrison helps companies simplify the complexity associated with transforming their leadership and workforce so they can accelerate results, with less risk. We do this by helping their employees navigate change, become better leaders, develop better careers, and transition into new jobs. As the world's leading integrated Talent Development and Transition company, we have the local expertise, global infrastructure, and industry leading technology required to simplify the complexity associated with executing critical talent and workforce initiatives, reducing brand and operational risk. Teams in more than 60 countries around the world leverage our proven programs and global experience to deliver tailored solutions to clients that align talent with the needs of their business.

