

SHIPPINGWATCH

The ideal maritime leader is an illusion

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Four potential maritime executives had their personal and professional profile drafted by HR consultancy firm Humanostics and make the results available to ShippingWatch's readers. Behavior is key to understand leadership.



This article starts with what will probably be perceived as a relief by many candidates for executive maritime positions:

There is no ideal maritime leader! The perfect maritime leader does not exist!

It all depends on the company you are going to work for and the unit or people you are going to head. Consequently, it also depends entirely on who you are. And how you behave!

However, the misconception is alive and well that one should possess specific characteristics, competencies and skills to become "the right maritime leader".

If you ask Jesper Præstensgaard, who has worked around 30 years in the liner industry including executive positions with Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, more than anything else it has to do with how you behave as a human being. Today Præstensgaard is partner and CEO of Humanostics, an HR consultancy firm working, among other things, with how to match companies and candidates.

"Companies much too often hire on the basis of competencies and fire because of behavior. In that respect, you often see a mismatch because the person you get turns out to have a very different profile from the one you were seeking. Behavior is driven by what naturally motivates a person, and that may be very different than the buzz words normally associated with leadership," Præstensgaard tells ShippingWatch.

To reach a goal you should be persistent. But without flexibility, it is difficult to get there

JESPER PRÆSTENSGAARD, PARTNER AND CEO, HUMANOSTICS

"Whether you are a team player, analytical, impatient, formal or persistent, any feature determines which kind of leader you may be but does not necessarily determine if you can possess any leader position. If I were to work in admin, I would probably prefer a leader who is analytical and has a structured working mentality," he explains and adds:

"To reach a goal you should be persistent. But without flexibility, it is difficult to get there."

Recently, Præstensgaard interviewed four potential maritime executives all enrolled at the Blue MBA, Executive MBA of Shipping and Logistics, at Copenhagen Business School. Each had a personal profile drafted via the Predictive Index describing what they are basically like and how they behave on a personal and professional level.

With the permission of each candidate, ShippingWatch presents a summary on the basis of what was revealed in the profile followed by a comment from the candidate about whether this picture fits with how they perceive themselves.

Omar Ali believes in win-win negotiation

First up is Omar Ali, Supply Chain Manager, Gambia Milling Corporation



- Omar is naturally empathetic towards people (especially the underprivileged and disadvantaged) with a positive, inclusive, non-threatening communication style.
- He promotes teaching and sharing of skills, knowledge and working collaboratively with others to help in any capacity. Accommodating diverging opinions, often putting team/company goals ahead of personal goals. He believes in sharing authority and teamwork.
- Unhurried and deliberate. He is a stable person who prefers to do things the established way. Dependable and consistent but with a flexible approach. Cooperative, easy-going, and agreeable in getting along with others.
- He is a focused, uncritical listener who is methodical, steady, analytical, even-paced and who believes in "win-win" negotiation rather than "win-lose" outcomes or zero-sum games.

“Upon reflection, the leadership profile summary is a fairly accurate reflection of my leadership style with some notable exceptions. Whilst I do prefer consistency and a familiar environment, I’m not afraid to take on contrarian views and to challenge my own preconceptions. I am flexible and pragmatic, willing to change for the better and can be very persistent if need be, particularly where I believe in something as a matter of principle.”

Jesper is informal and outgoing

Second is Jesper Skjong, Market Analyst, Fearnley Offshore Supply



- Jesper is a warm, informal, outgoing person who gets along comfortably with most people, meets new people easily and enjoys doing so, and works as well in group situations as well as one-on-one.
- A persistent, eager helper; has the kind of comfort with intangibles required to do work requiring an intuitive understanding of others' viewpoints and feelings.
- People find this individual easy to talk to and feel no pressure or impatience from this rather easy-going, accepting person.
- Informal and a little offhand in style; fairly casual about the exact standards or policies of the company's book or the precise accuracy of the details of their own work, preferring to delegate details rather freely, with loose follow-up.
- Has the kind of patience required to focus steadily on a consistent process over long periods of time and work which should primarily involve contact and communication with people rather than precise handling of details.

"In general this profile goes well with my own perception of myself and my leader skills. I hope that I will end up in a work environment where this type of leadership style is accepted by colleagues and thus effective in inspiring them in their performance."

"I am very comfortable with working with people"

Then comes Saleem Kadernani, Head of Business Development at Ports Development Company at King Abdullah Port, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:



- Extrovert and outgoing personality, communicating effusively, flexibly and engagingly, drawing others into the conversation. The profile shows that he is focused on people, building relationships and teams rather than technical matters. He is not interested in details and delegate freely.
- Can work with unstructured projects, where flexibility of working with people and a focus on goals rather than plans is necessary. He is also independent and persistent with consistent pursuit of goals in a calm, methodical manner, even when setbacks occur.

"I believe that this profile does capture my personality, as I am very comfortable working with people and prefer to focus on the big picture. I am not a detailed person, which was also suggested by the diagnostics profile."

"As a leader, as the profile suggests, I delegate freely – so I normally ensure that the people in my team are capable of independent work without the need of detailed follow-up. I believe strongly that a leader should provide the vision and then let the people figure out (within reason) their own way of getting there. This could be a vision for the company, a vision for the function or even a vision a specific task."

An outside-the-box thinker

And finally, Yiannis Pastellas, Business Development Manager, Safebridge, comments on the results:



"I have done a number of assessments which all were somewhere close to my profile. The Predictive Index assessment, I would dare say, is close to 100 percent corresponding to my perception of myself. Having said that, we had intensive training during the CBS program to understand how to evaluate our own perception in comparison with what others think of us. The description from the report describing a Maverick as an innovative, "outside-the-box" thinker, who is undaunted by failure, suits my style and matches what others think of me, which surprised me when reviewing the report."

"I have been in a position within our company that was an operational/administrative function which does not cover my best abilities, and had I known PI before, I would discuss the challenge in different terms. Luckily, together with our top management and constructive discussions, I changed roles, and now I am using my best abilities."

Diversity makes a team strong

Concluding, Jesper Præstensgaard explains:



"Each and everyone possesses leader skills. Where you fit in depends on behavioral factors, the company you are going to work for and the position you are offered. Compare a digital start-up in the maritime industry to a 150-year old classification company. Or a position with a tanker carrier in charge of safety and zero tolerance of mistakes. You are probably expected to run a risk in the start-up, you are definitely not allowed to do so in the latter. Diversity makes a team strong, but it is also difficult because we all have a tendency to judge people who behave differently from ourselves. With self-awareness and understanding of what motivates the behavior of others comes acceptance and respect, a necessity if you want well-functioning teams."

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