



The Science of Self-Confidence:

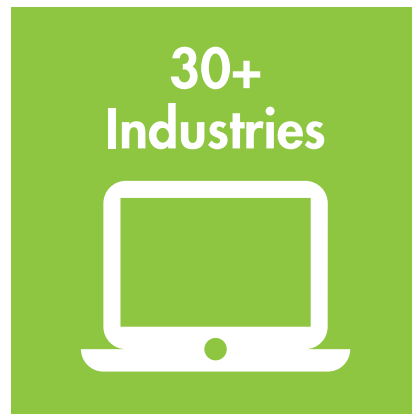
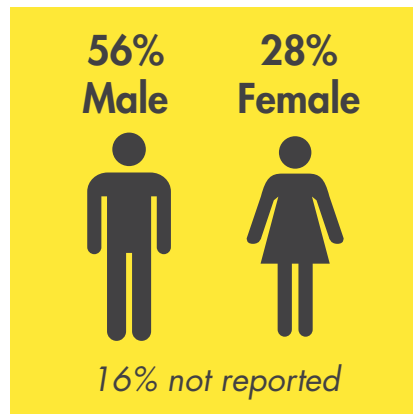
Helping Leaders Gain and Demonstrate the Confidence they Need to Succeed

For leaders, demonstrating self-confidence is a necessity. Self-confident leaders are seen as more competent, and are often given more power and opportunities to lead. Leaders who demonstrate self-confidence continue to appear competent even after evidence to the contrary is presented.¹ The robustness of perceptions of self-confidence highlights the importance of helping leaders develop the ability to demonstrate self-confidence as early as

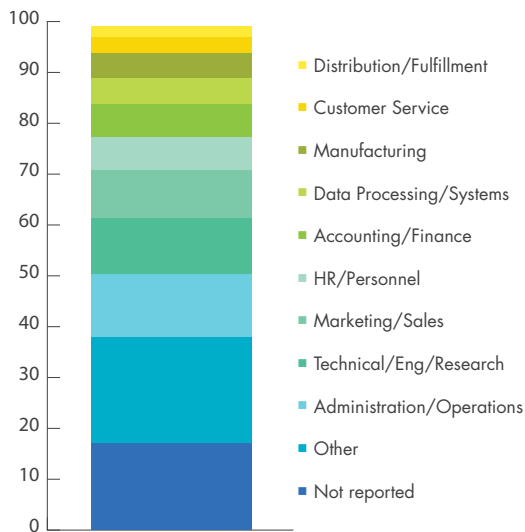
possible. This research summary will examine new global leadership research exploring the relationship between self-confidence and effectiveness, the behavioral correlates of self-confidence and potential risks for individuals who are seen as highly confident. These findings will help practitioners and leaders determine the best path to developing and making the most out of their ability to convey self-confidence.

¹Kennedy, Anderson, & Moore (2013); Locke & Anderson (2015); Murphy, Barlow, & von Hippel (2018)

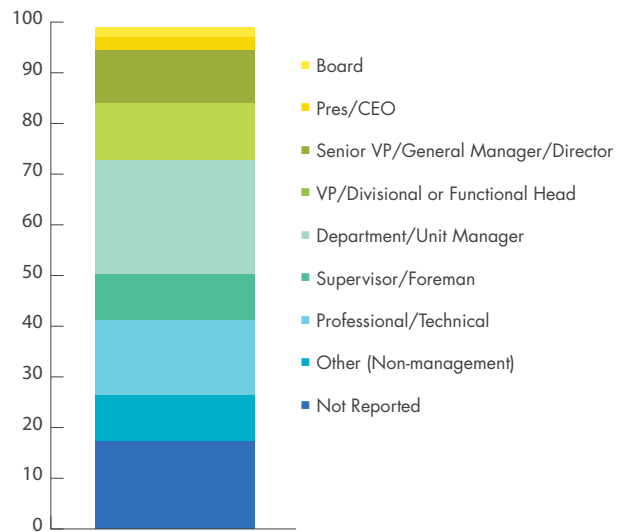
About the Participants



Job Function



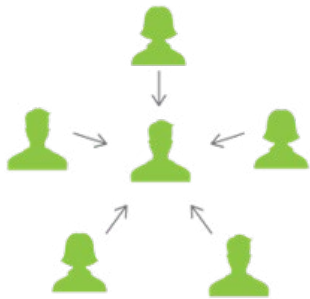
Management Level



The Tool

LEA 360™: the Leadership Effectiveness Analysis

A multi-rater leadership assessment used in more than 100 countries, with more than 1 million total participants.



Observer Questionnaire

22 leadership behaviors
31 leadership competencies



Self Questionnaire

22 leadership behaviors
3 research items

Measuring Self-confidence

Conveyed Self-confidence

One of the competencies measured in the observer questionnaire.

On a 7-point scale, observers were asked to rate leaders' self-confidence:

Demonstrates self-confidence (i.e., appears to trusts his/her abilities, judgment and capabilities, conveys the capacity to achieve what he/she wants to achieve)

Felt Self-confidence

One of the research items in the self questionnaire.

On a 7-point scale, leaders were asked to rate their own self-confidence:

I feel self-confident in my role (i.e., the degree to which I trust my abilities, judgment, capabilities, and feel that I have the capacity to achieve what I want to achieve)

Conveyed self-confidence and leadership impact

We explored the importance of conveyed self-confidence by studying its relationship with other measures of leadership effectiveness. Our findings align with previous research in this area, showing that conveyed self-confidence is related to many other measures of leadership effectiveness. Overall, leaders who convey self-confidence are seen as effective in moving forward in business, overcoming new obstacles, taking control and making effective choices.

Why Conveyed Self-Confidence is Critical

It correlates with leadership impact.

Competency	r
Shows resilience	0.56
Ability to make effective decisions	0.53
Takes initiative	0.51
Business aptitude	0.49
Capacity for effective thinking	0.48
Ability to see the big picture perspective	0.47

Competency	r
Overall effectiveness as a leader/manager	0.47
Delivers results	0.47
Future potential	0.46
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.46
Fast learner	0.45
Effectively leads organizational change	0.45

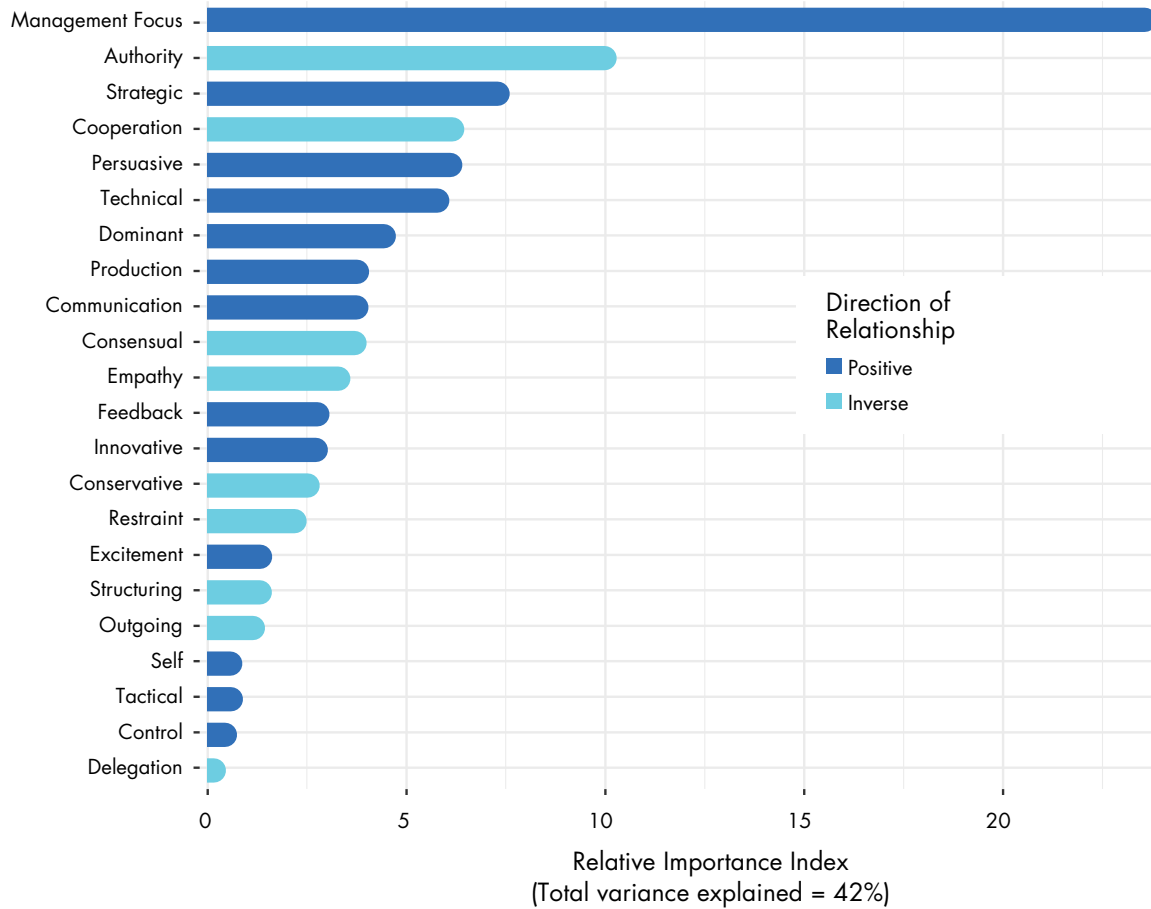
Source: MRG Study

Relationship between conveyed and felt self-confidence

When helping leaders increase their ability to convey self-confidence, it is tempting to begin by helping them increase their felt self-confidence with the expectation that increases in felt self-confidence will lead to increases in conveyed self-confidence. However, we found a weak relationship between the LEA measures of felt and conveyed self-confidence ($r = .15$). Moreover, felt self-confidence was not associated with any particular pattern of self-perceived behaviors.

Behaviors that impact conveyed self-confidence

To help leaders identify the most efficient path to higher levels of conveyed self-confidence, we conducted a relative weights analysis to determine which of the 22 LEA leadership behaviors have the greatest impact on conveyed self-confidence. Leaders who exhibit these high impact behaviors are also more likely to be seen as self-confident by their observers. The pattern of behaviors associated with conveyed self-confidence suggests that these leaders seek opportunities to be in charge and feel comfortable in that role, consider the long term impact of their decisions, exert influence and expand their expertise, are persuasive and do not prioritize others' agendas.



Conveyed self-confidence and demographics

To fully understand how leaders can increase their ability to convey self-confidence, it is important to consider any relevant contextual factors. We examined some of the nuances of conveyed self-confidence by exploring differences in self-confidence ratings by demographic group as well as differences in the behaviors that convey self-confidence in those groups.

Generations

We found no differences in ratings of conveyed or felt self-confidence by generation.

Generation	Conveyed Self-Confidence (mean out of 7)	Felt Self-Confidence (mean out of 7)
Baby Boomers	5.73	5.66
Gen X	5.81	5.65
Gen Y	5.86	5.57

There were some differences in the behaviors that observers associate with conveyed self-confidence depending on the generation of the leader they were rating.

Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials
Strategic	Strategic	⊘
⊘	Consensual (lower)	Consensual (lower)
⊘	Technical	Technical
⊘	Persuasive	Persuasive
Production	⊘	Production
Feedback	⊘	⊘
⊘	Communication	⊘
⊘	⊘	Empathy (lower)
Management Focus	Management Focus	Management Focus
Authority (lower)	Authority (lower)	Authority (lower)
Cooperation (lower)	Cooperation (lower)	Cooperation (lower)

Gender

We found no differences in conveyed self-confidence by leader gender. However, men rated themselves higher than women on felt self-confidence.

Leader gender	Conveyed Self-Confidence (mean out of 7)	Felt Self-Confidence (mean out of 7)
Women	5.80	5.47
Men	5.85	5.71

There were some differences in the behaviors that observers associate with conveyed self-confidence depending on the gender of the leader they were rating.

Men	Women
Management focus	Management focus
Tactical	⊗
Consensual (lower)	⊗
Authority (lower)	Authority (lower)
Cooperation (lower)	⊗
Restraint (lower)	⊗
Communication	Communication
Self	⊗
⊗	Strategic
⊗	Technical
⊗	Persuasive

Avoiding the risks of high self-confidence

There are potential risks for leaders who convey high levels of self-confidence. To be their most effective, leaders who appear confident should also demonstrate competence in other skills. We explored the importance of also conveying a willingness to listen and ethical leadership. The analyses below only include leaders at the top 33% of conveyed self-confidence.



Conveyed Self-confidence and Willingness to Listen

Two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in how well they conveyed willingness to listen were compared using Wilcoxon tests with p-values adjusted for multiple comparisons. The results show very different behavior profiles:

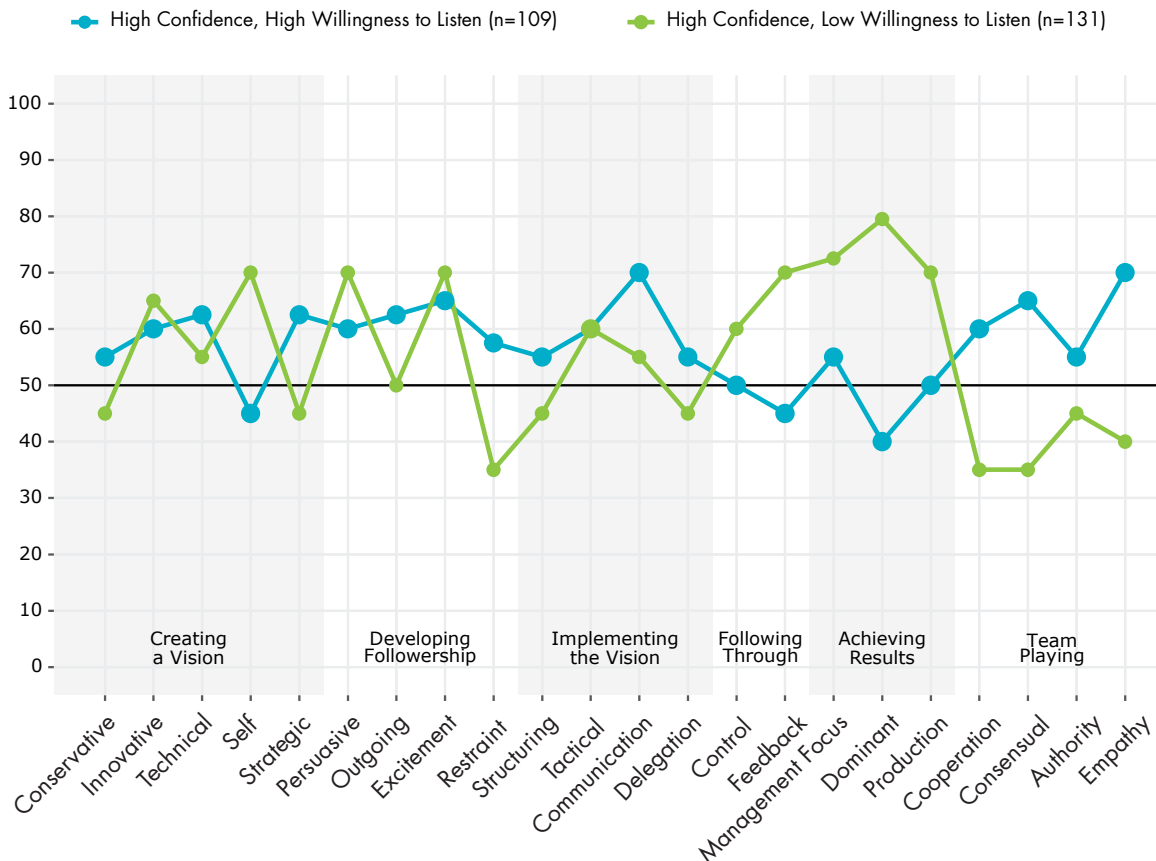
High Willingness to Listen + High Conveyed Self-Confidence

People-focused cares about others, helps colleagues, establishes rapport, asks for help, thinks ahead, is cautious, expands knowledge, communicates clearly and remains calm and reserved

Low Willingness to Listen + High Conveyed Self-Confidence

Aggressive, independent, blunt, power-minded

Not only were there behavior differences between the groups, but conveying high self-confidence + high willingness to listen makes a leader appear more effective across most of the LEA 360 competencies.



LEA 360 Leadership Behaviors: Comparing the two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in level of conveyed willingness to listen

Effect Sizes

- High Confidence, High Willingness to Listen higher than High Confidence, Low Willingness to Listen
- High Confidence, Low Willingness to Listen higher
- No difference ($p > 0.05$)



LEA 360 Leadership Competencies: Comparing the two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in level of conveyed willingness to listen



Odds a member of one group scores higher than a member of the other group

Conveyed Self-confidence and Ethical Leadership

Two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in how well they conveyed ethical leadership were compared using Wilcoxon tests with p-values adjusted for multiple comparisons. The results show very different behavior profiles:

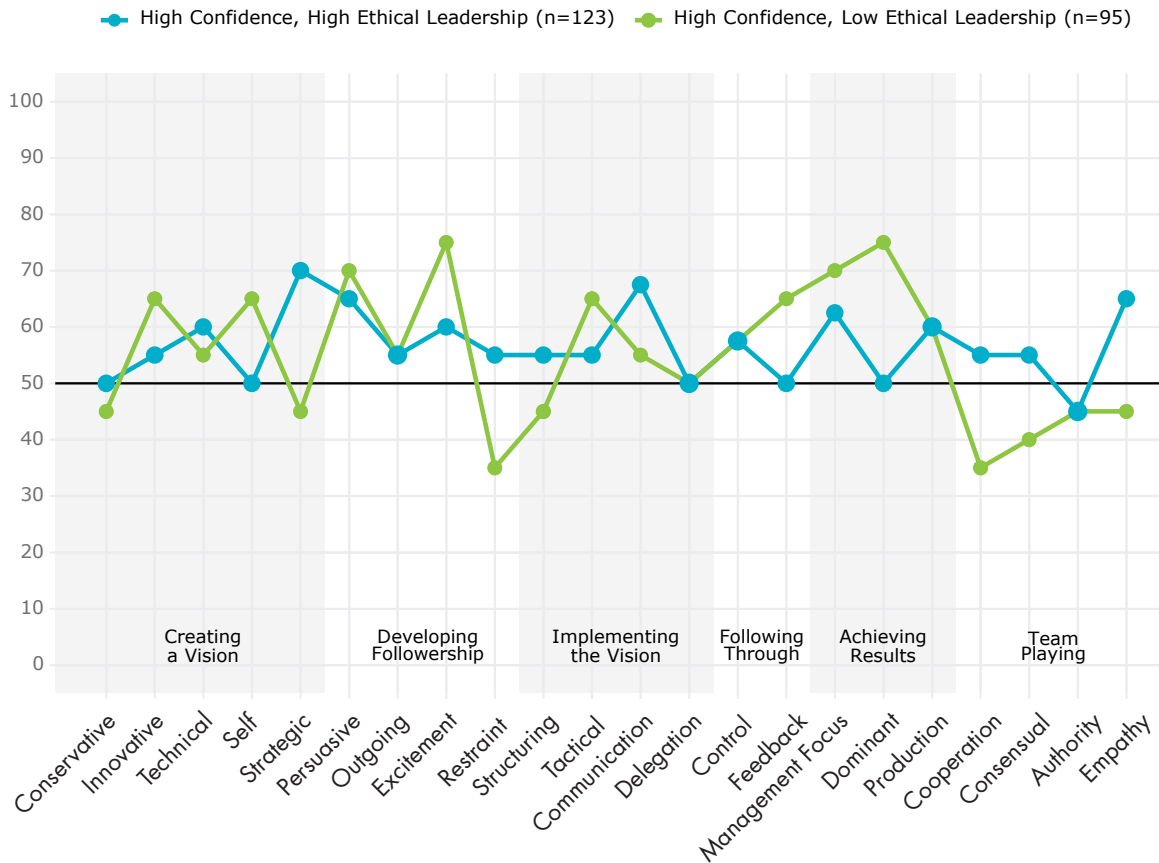
High Ethical Leadership + High Conveyed Self-Confidence

Reserved, cares about others, helps colleagues, communicates clearly, thinks ahead, is cautious and organized, and expands knowledge

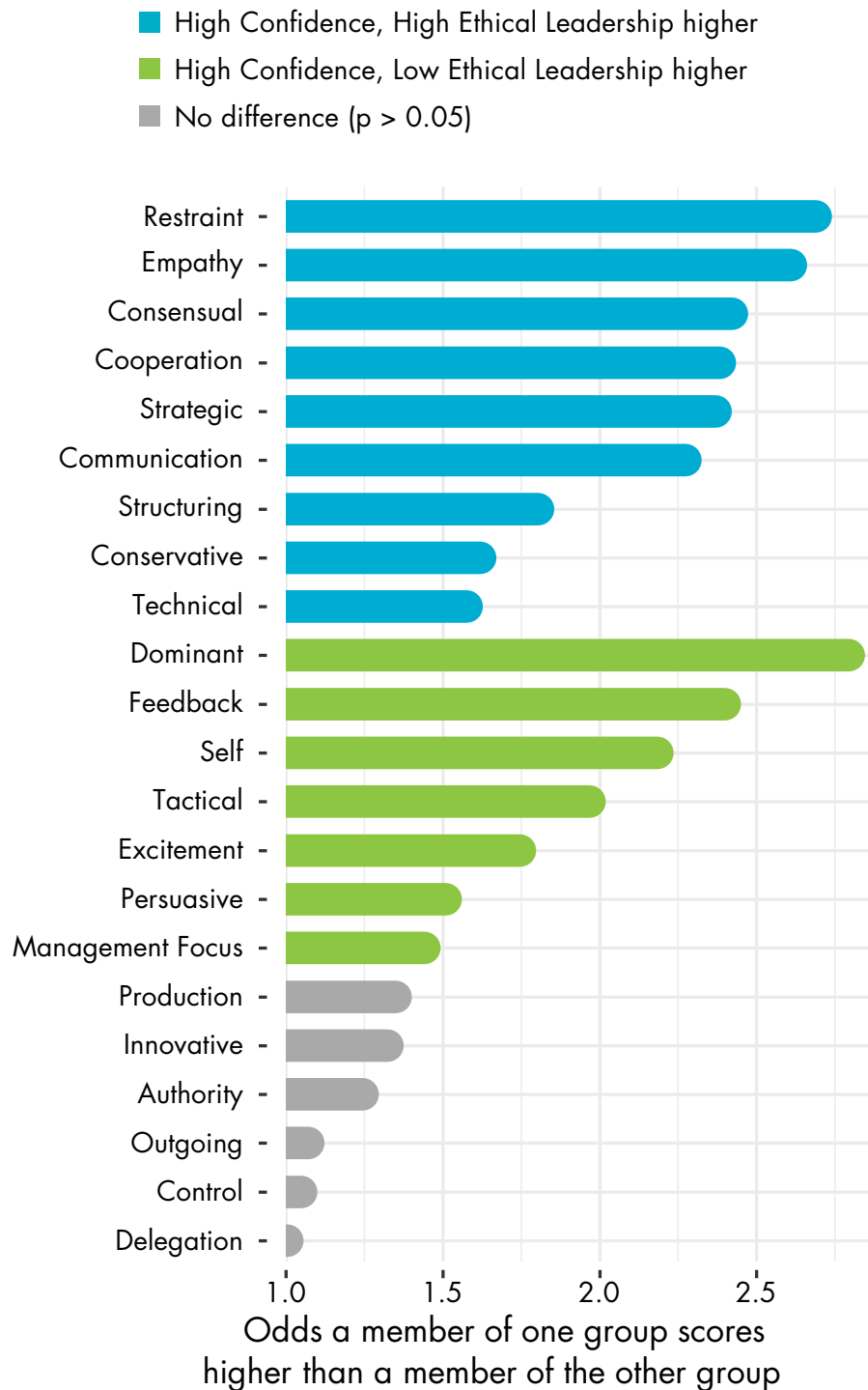
Low Ethical Leadership + High Conveyed Self-Confidence

Aggressive, independent, may be blunt, takes command, sells ideas and is emotionally expressive

Not only were there behavior differences between the groups, but conveying high self-confidence + high ethical leadership makes a leader appear more effective across all the LEA 360 competencies.



LEA 360 Leadership Behaviors: Comparing the two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in level of conveyed ethical leadership



LEA 360 Leadership Competencies: Comparing the two groups of leaders who were high on conveyed self-confidence but differed in level of conveyed ethical leadership



Odds a member of one group scores higher than a member of the other group

About MRG

MRG is a global leader in designing assessments that foster a deep self-awareness and impact people in profound and meaningful ways. The MRG suite of scientifically designed instruments, backed by more than three decades of research, includes solutions for Leadership and Personal Development, Sales and Service.

MRG assessments give you the tools to support unique leaders as they chart their personal paths to success and fulfillment.

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The MRG Research Library offers resources on team development, succession planning, diversity and inclusion, high potential development, leadership best practices, and much more.

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About the Authors

Maria Brown, PhD | Head of Research, MRG

Maria holds a Doctorate Degree in Psychology from Vanderbilt University. Before joining MRG, Maria was an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Murray State University, where she headed the Language Learning Laboratory. She regularly presents empirically-based insights on key topics in leadership to a variety of audiences around the world. Her research has been published in a number of scientific journals and her research on educational practices was recognized by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology.

Tricia Naddaff | President, MRG

Tricia has been consulting to individuals, teams and organizations for over 30 years and her experience includes coaching, product design, research, and business development. She has been a speaker for Tedx Dirigo, is a contributing author to the book *Enlightened Power: How Women Are Transforming the Practice of Leadership*, and is a contributor to *Global Coaching Perspectives: the Association for Coaching Magazine* (UK). Tricia received her graduate degree in Management from Lesley University and her undergraduate degree from Boston College.

Sources:

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research@mrg.com | www.mrg.com | +1.207.775.2173 +353.1.280.4430