

How do the US presidential candidates fare in a proven leadership analysis?

CHPD's High Performance Behaviours (HPBs) are 11 leadership characteristics that have been proven to be linked to business performance. They make the difference between average and high performance.

Steve Parry and Russell Deathridge, both consultants accredited in CHPD's HPB model, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each presidential candidate, and offer leadership tips for a future president.

Here's a summary of the candidates' respective strengths and weaknesses:

High Performance Behaviour	Barack Obama	Hillary Clinton	John McCain
Information search	●	○	○
Concept formation	●	○	●
Conceptual flexibility	○	○	●
Empathy	○	●	○
Teamwork	○	●	○
Developing people	○	○	○
Influence	○	○	●
Building confidence	●	○	●
Presentation	●	●	○
Proactivity	○	●	○
Continuous improvement	○	○	○

● = Stronger ○ = Neutral ● = Weaker

The following tables give the detail behind the above summary. For more information on CHPD's HPB model, visit www.chpd.com or email info@chpd.com.

Barack Obama



Stronger HPBs

Presentation

A relaxed but powerful orator, Obama draws huge crowds at his rallies, albeit of partisan supporters. Yet he projects his message with a power and clarity that can beguile even neutral observers and poor speeches are very rare even under the pressure of endless campaigning. A vintage example of hope and resolve;

"...out of many we are one; that while we breathe we hope, and where we are met with cynicism and doubt, and those who tell us we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people in three simple words. YES. WE. CAN." Victory speech, South Carolina January 26 2008.

Building confidence

Obama exudes calm under pressure and even in defeat expresses confidence in eventual success. Expressions of doubt or pessimism are inimical to him and his supporters respond strongly to his morale raising. In a different context, he moved decisively to condemn the controversial remarks made by his former pastor Jeremiah Wright categorically denouncing *"inflammatory and appalling remarks [Mr Wright] made about our country, our politics, and my political opponents"*. Press Statement March 14 2008. By clearly and firmly stating his view on this outburst (once it became public and provided a potential vulnerability for his opponents) he effectively limited the potential damage from this episode.

Weaker HPBs

Concept formation

Obama has few distinctive ideas that he has shared so far. Radical new approaches in the major policy areas are not yet apparent. A hesitant approach is evident over the hot topic of Iraq: he had previously supported a motion to continue funding occupation. Now he has committed himself to withdrawing all troops by 2010 without going into depth about what has changed to permit this.

Information search

There is some evidence Obama may find gathering information to inform decisions something of a chore, detectable again in foreign policy as in this alarming statement on the issue of taking unilateral action to flush out terrorist cells in Pakistan, which came back to haunt him after the presidential race got underway.

"If we have...intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will." Speech, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, August 2007.

Other intelligence material would likely have shown the severe risks of trying to militarily intervene in the affairs of a nuclear armed state without the support of the ruling regime.

Hillary Clinton



Stronger HPBs

Empathy

Clinton has an excellent recall of names and faces and more warmth than she is credited for, particularly in face to face communication. This is why she has built a broad front of support in her presidential campaign which has kept her in contention despite her slipping electoral position. She also takes time to listen and absorb the personal concerns of voters such as young mother Kim Beaugard at Plymouth State University in October 2007. The financial struggle she faced in sending her daughter to college was referenced by Clinton in later campaigning stops. All in the service of gaining votes it is true but evidence of an ability to read others' true feelings.

Proactivity

Clinton works exceptionally hard towards her political objectives. She exhibits a drive and determination to overcome obstacles to success and to implement solutions to problems despite setbacks. A striking example is her determination to push ahead with her plans for universal health care which have weathered many a storm. There is speculation that sponsoring this may be the condition she extracts from Obama if she decides to withdraw from the Presidential race.

"I believe health care is a fundamental human right and a moral obligation of the United States of America finally to achieve for our people." Speech, February 9, Virginia Jefferson Jackson Dinner.

Weaker HPBs

Presentation

Under pressure Clinton tends to lose composure and can make mistakes that compromise the message she is trying to communicate. For instance, she could not resist the temptation to overdramatize her 1996 visit to Tuzla US air force base in Bosnia.

"I remember landing under sniper fire...we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles to get to our base". Speech, 17 March Washington DC.

In a media environment saturated by 24 hour rolling news and satirical footage posted to YouTube such "misspeaks" can prove costly.

Teamwork

Whilst Clinton has formed a capable backroom team during her campaign, her potential weakness here is her heavy reliance on her husband's interventions. There is obvious loyalty between the two based on shared success but initially Bill took a central and not always helpful role (as shown by his intemperate remarks in a television interview after the South Carolina primary). It could be that the centralisation of the team around this pair inhibits interaction between, and contributions from, a wider circle of talents.

John McCain



Stronger HPBs

Building confidence

In contrast to his rivals, McCain has maintained a consistent approach to Iraq by showing tenacity and confidence in eventual success, despite the issues on the ground. In response to criticisms that he will simply continue with the policies of George W Bush in Iraq in a military holding pattern, he set out his vision of the scene there as he expects it to look in four years time;

*“By January 2013 . . . the Iraq war has been won...the increase in actionable intelligence that the counterinsurgency produced led to the capture or death of Osama bin Laden and his chief lieutenants.”*Speech, Columbus Ohio May 15 2008.

Concept formation

In a field of three hopefuls with convergent policies, McCain has had some success in portraying himself as the man with a fresh approach. So while his stated policy on carbon emissions is less stringent than the Democrat candidates (65% reduction by 2050), he was the only Republican contender to openly support capping carbon emissions. In addition, given heavy American dependency on foreign oil and coal fired power generation, it might be argued that his target, if adhered to, is a more realistic response to the issue.

Weaker HPBs

Conceptual flexibility

Although his war record is an asset in some quarters, in foreign policy it perhaps makes him bellicose and prone to dismissing alternatives out of hand. Take his response to Obama’s suggestion that the US could use diplomacy and talk to the regime in Iran. *“Such a statement betrays the depth of Senator Obama’s inexperience and reckless judgment. These are very serious deficiencies for an American president to possess”*. Speech, National Restaurant Association, Chicago May 19, 2008.

Singing “Bomb, Bomb Iran” to the tune of the Beach Boys at a meeting in South Carolina in April 2007 was intended as a joke but might end up as a policy statement.

Influence

McCain is persistently labelled a maverick because of the strong opposition to his nomination in some sectors of the Republican Party. The behaviour of influence is about building alliances by aligning your interests with others. McCain seems less willing to work at building support for his policies and ideas within his own party. It is no easy task as some partisan Republicans despise him but the danger is that unless he can reach an accommodation based on mutual benefit, McCain will have to defend against both his Democrat opponent and attacks from the hostile flank of his own party.

Tips for the candidates

Based on the above analysis, Steve Parry has the following suggestions for action to address possible leadership weaknesses of the three candidates:

Barack Obama

- Should discuss potential ideas for his first term more freely and avoid being forced into reacting to external pressure for policies
- Should get his team to search more widely for information before making a decision, particularly for material which provides a counterpoint to a prevailing view

Hillary Clinton

- Should decide the core message that she wishes to get across and concentrate on communicating that powerfully and vividly – without exaggerating
- Should promote talent within her team when she sees it so fresh thinking is brought in to balance Bill's heavy influence

John McCain

- Should avoid limiting his options out of prejudice. Analyse their pros and cons to see if even seemingly unacceptable ideas might have some merit
- Should explore if there is common ground with his entrenched opposition and then look for ways to align his interests with theirs to the benefit of both sides