

WHAT DO LEADERS THINK WHEN THEY THINK ABOUT GOOD LEADERS?

Helena Gonçalves, Católica Porto Business School

Arménio Rego, Católica Porto Business School

People tend to assume that the most effective leaders are, above all, those with good technical skills. Such a view underestimates that leadership is a process of social influence, involving relationships between leaders and followers in a given context. For this process to be effective, leaders must possess, in addition to technical skills, social-relational skills, cognitive-conceptual skills, and personal leadership skills (Garvin, 2013, Rego & Cunha, 2016; Yukl, 2013). In this study, we test if such a framework is reflected in the prototypes of outstanding leadership as espoused by individuals with leadership roles. Two samples were collected: (1) 473 middle-level supervisors of EDP who were participating in an Ethics course; (2) 468 participants in executive training at Católica Porto Business School (CPBS). All individuals were asked to identify two characteristics of the leader that was most striking in their lives. The main results, consistent across the two samples, were as follows: (1) the great majority of qualities mentioned involve social-relational skills and personal leadership skills; (2) the mention to technical and cognitive skills (e.g., intelligence) was quite modest (10% - 12%); (3) the most cited specific skills were ethical behavior and social support. The main differences between the two samples were as follows: (a) CPBS training executives overvalued the leader's coaching skills, an understandable finding considering that they were executives involved in training and development processes; (2) EDP supervisors overvalued the ethical behavior of leaders, a result also understandable in participants attending a course of Ethics. The results confirm theoretical and empirical evidence pointing out the relevance of social-relational and personal leadership skills for leadership effectiveness. However, it cannot be concluded that technical and cognitive competences are less relevant. Actually, they are important and even necessary in some circumstances and leadership roles, although not sufficient (Stoller et al., 2016).

Keywords: leadership; skills; ethics; social support; coaching

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