

The New Era in People Management



Exploring the skills and behaviors displayed by people managers today, and how to maximize their impact on people and business.

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SHL

The Changing World of Work

We have heard countless times—the world of work is being reset and we have an opportunity to build something more engaging and sustainable.

Organizations are being held to account for outcomes beyond profits and growth. This means leaders and HR are rethinking how the core mechanics of their businesses operate: New hybrid and flexible working policies; the value and purpose of physical office space; which tools add greatest impact to productivity; how to encourage cross-team and country collaboration; what talent management should look like in a dispersed and highly connected workplace.

The glue binding people and businesses together is squashed in the middle—the people managers. These teams have a crucial role to play in creating, translating, and personalizing experiences of workplaces around the world. In short, they bring to life everyday experiences of work. Yet, some organizations are questioning whether they are needed as business structures become flatter, work digitized, and teams more dispersed.¹

Still, across the world people are reporting declining levels of happiness,² burnout is increasing,³ our adaptability and resilience levels have been depleted,⁴ and people continue to choose to leave work in search of something more meaningful.⁵



While good systems, structures, and tools are essential to moving things forward, we believe it is this population of people managers who hold the key. A manager can account for 70% of variance in engagement scores⁶ and, alongside meaningful work and career progression, employees cite having an uncaring manager as a reason for leaving jobs.⁷

With the right people and the right skills, equipped with tools and support to grow, people managers can help us to bring a new, more fulfilling, and durable world of work into reality.

¹ Business Insider, 2023, [Save the middle manager!](#)

² Gallup, 2022, [The Global Rise of Unhappiness](#)

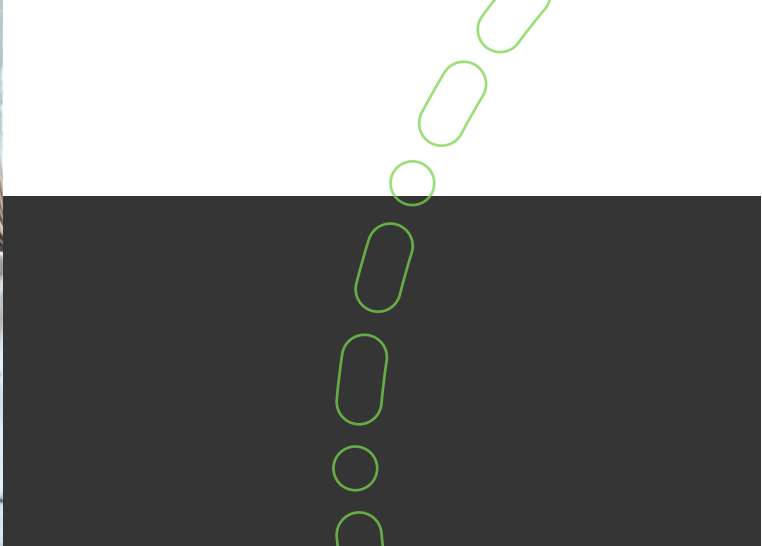
³ Forbes, 2023, [New Outlook On Burnout For 2023: Limitations On What Managers Can Do](#)

⁴ SHL, 2022, [How the Pandemic Changed Our Adaptability and Resilience](#)

⁵ Wellable, 2022, [Why Employees Quit \(And How To Keep Them\)](#)

⁶ Gallup, 2023, [Employee Engagement Solutions](#)

⁷ Wellable, 2022, [Why Employees Quit \(And How To Keep Them\)](#)



People Managers Enhance Employee Experiences and Business Outcomes



The goals and objectives of managing others are fast becoming more holistic.

At the start of the century, management roles were focused on knowledge and expertise, supervision of tasks, and performance analysis—working with teams in the same location with defined tasks and KPIs, across annual cycles. Today, in a hybrid, digitized, and more fluid environment where managers navigate complex, often emotionally charged, and personal challenges, they must lead teams with emotional intelligence. They must project

confidence and influence others, instill trust, and show empathy while working with dispersed teams across cultures and time zones.

Great people managers can drive more than productivity. Links are increasingly seen between those leading teams of people and outcomes such as improved mental health and well-being,⁸ higher levels of engagement, experiences of inclusive and trust-based cultures⁹, and feelings of happiness and contentment among individuals.¹⁰ An organization's readiness for the future, through skill development, talent mobilization, and its capability to accelerate following changes such as mergers, acquisitions and new regulations also depend upon people managers to make this possible.

⁸ Forbes, 2023, [Managers Have Major Impact On Mental Health: How To Lead For Wellbeing](#)

⁹ Fast Company, 2023, [9 science-backed ways to become a better manager](#)

¹⁰ McKinsey & Company, 2020, [The boss factor: Making the world a better place through workplace relationships](#)

However, often people and companies misunderstand the skills that make a great people manager in today's work environment. Many skills and behaviors relate to being interested in and understanding people, using emotional intelligence to build connections and to adapt approaches, and to recognize that even those leading others are fallible.

The skills and behaviors required for success in people management historically are certainly quite different to those today, and organizations must move fast to support, develop, and empower this group to enable business longevity.

To improve experiences and outcomes at work, we must prioritize human leadership, value the behaviors driving this, and help people managers to hone and sustain these critical skills.





Behaviors That Drive Success in People Management

Using our science-led understanding of people at work, SHL has captured the skills and behaviors critical to achieving specific outcomes that lead to success in people management roles today (Table 1).

Table 1

SHL Behaviors That People Managers Should Display	Skills That Great People Managers Posses	Outcomes That Lead to a Thriving Workforce
Leading & Supervising Working with People Adhering to Principles & Values	<p>Leads as a coach in a trusted two-way adult relationship.</p> <hr/> <p>Motivates, develops, and empowers people, modeling inclusive behavior.</p> <hr/> <p>Shows empathy and acts with compassion.</p> <hr/> <p>Holds people to high standards, tells the whole truth to inspire trust.</p> <hr/> <p>Focuses on engagement and retention by driving personal growth and connection.</p> <hr/> <p>Works to build & maintain shared understanding.</p>	Building a Human Culture Built on trust and two-way adult-adult relationships. Valuing transparency, inclusion, and empathy.
Planning & Organizing Relating & Networking	<p>Implements strategy and vision in a meaningful way for each individual.</p> <hr/> <p>Crafts engaging jobs and focuses on reducing job creep.</p> <hr/> <p>Defines clear targets that link to the company's strategy.</p> <hr/> <p>Proactively builds connections across the organization and externally.</p> <hr/> <p>Role-models fairness and high ethical standards, addresses injustice.</p>	Enabling Meaningful Work Creating connection through meaningful work. Striking the optimal balance of people, purpose, and profit.
Adapting & Responding to Change Creating & Innovating Deciding & Initiating Action	<p>Anticipates and manages ongoing change and ambiguity, giving guidance, and empowering people.</p> <hr/> <p>Encourages innovation and implements continuous improvement.</p> <hr/> <p>Informs relevant contextual factors to support an agile approach in navigating organizational change.</p>	Becoming Agile and Insight-Led Nimble and ready for constant re-alignment to optimize business opportunity & individual potential.



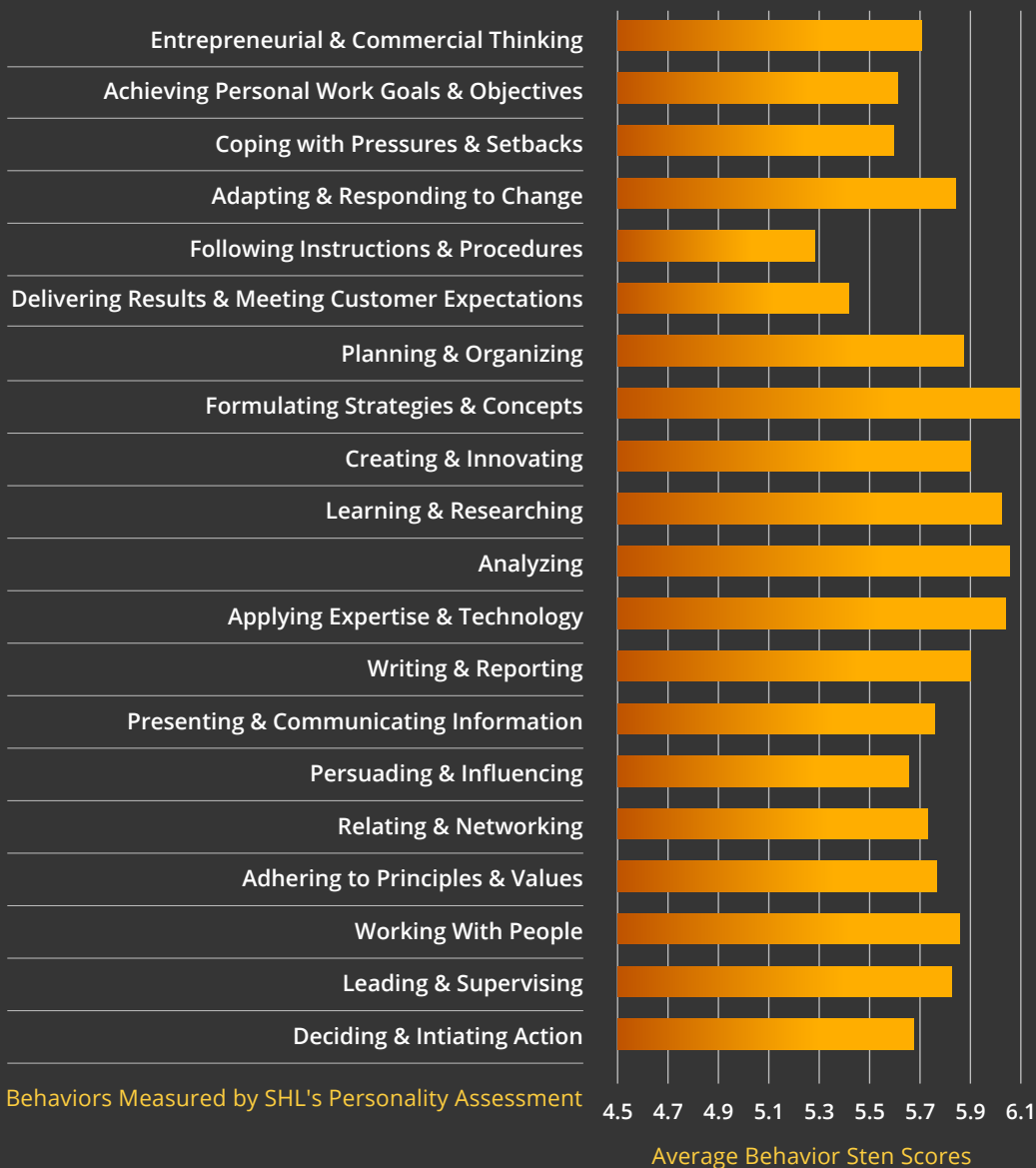
A World of Data Unlocked

SHL's team of in-house psychologists set out to understand the skills and behaviors of people managers today, mapped against those required for success, to understand their readiness for the role, potential for the future, and skills availability among certain groups.

Based on assessment results of 9,288 people managers across 2020 to 2023, from various industries and backgrounds across the globe, SHL has created a 'typical' behavioral profile for a people manager today (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Behavioral Profile of a Typical People Manager Today



Key Finding 1

The typical behavioral profile for a people manager today demonstrates strengths in skills often associated with professional, individual contributor roles.

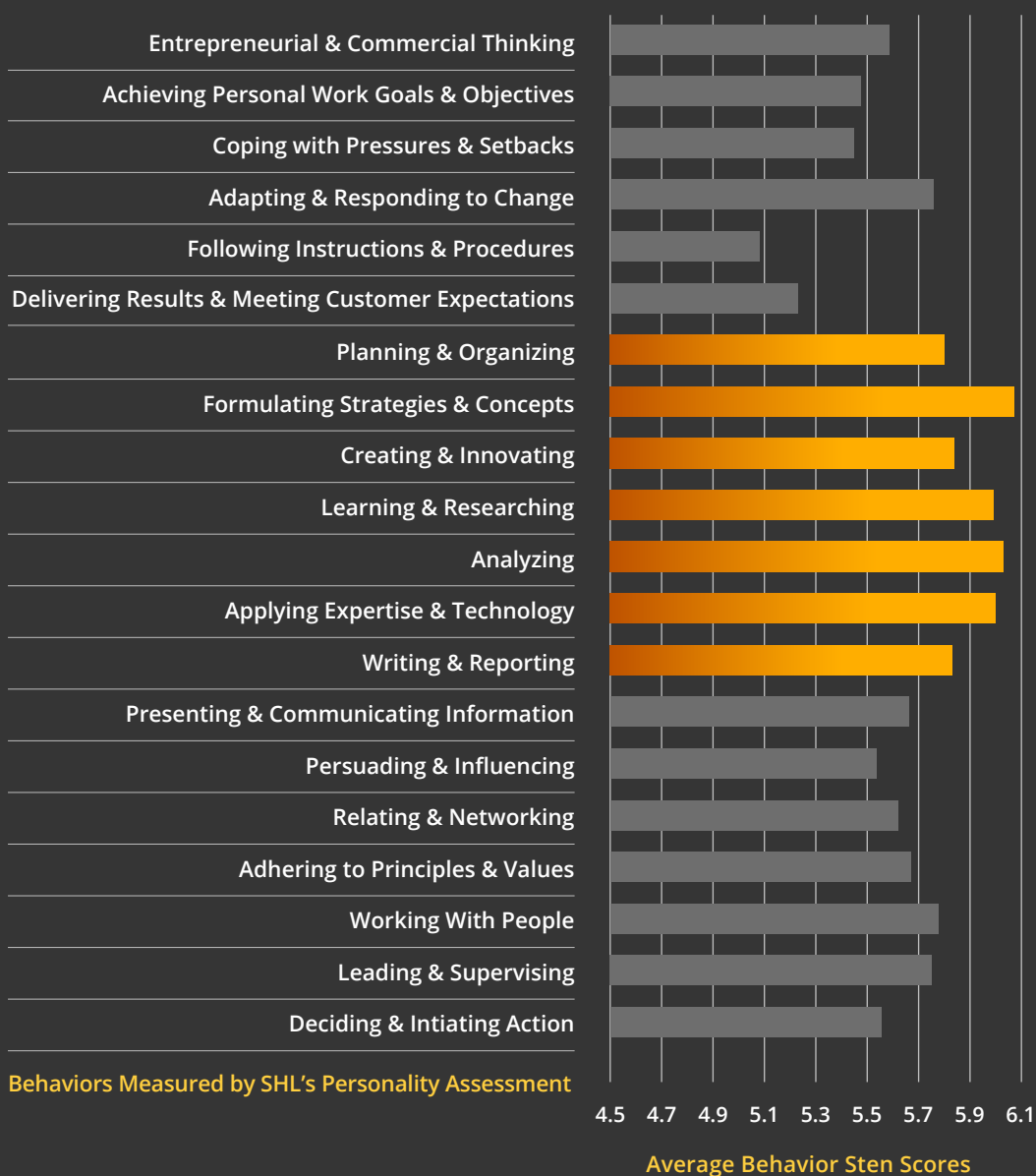
The profile we see is quite mixed, with few standout areas of likely strength. However, looking more closely at the areas of strengths, some themes begin to emerge (Figure 2). People managers today demonstrate likely strengths in **applying expertise, analyzing, learning, working with people, and planning and organizing**—skills often associated with professional, individual contributor roles.

Are we confusing strong performance in individual roles as potential to manage others? And even simply ‘tacking on’ management responsibilities rather than

clearly defining the role? People whose skills do not match their job roles often experience increased levels of stress and burnout, so not only will they be less likely to succeed in the role, but organizations could also end up losing a strong individual contributor too.

In addition, the typical profile reveals greater strength in **Formulating Strategies & Concepts**, more visionary activities, suggesting that organizations may gravitate toward those with these aspirational elements, over the key skills required for success in people management day-to-day – managing, coaching, and supporting teams.

Figure 2. Strengths People Managers Typically Display



Key Finding 2

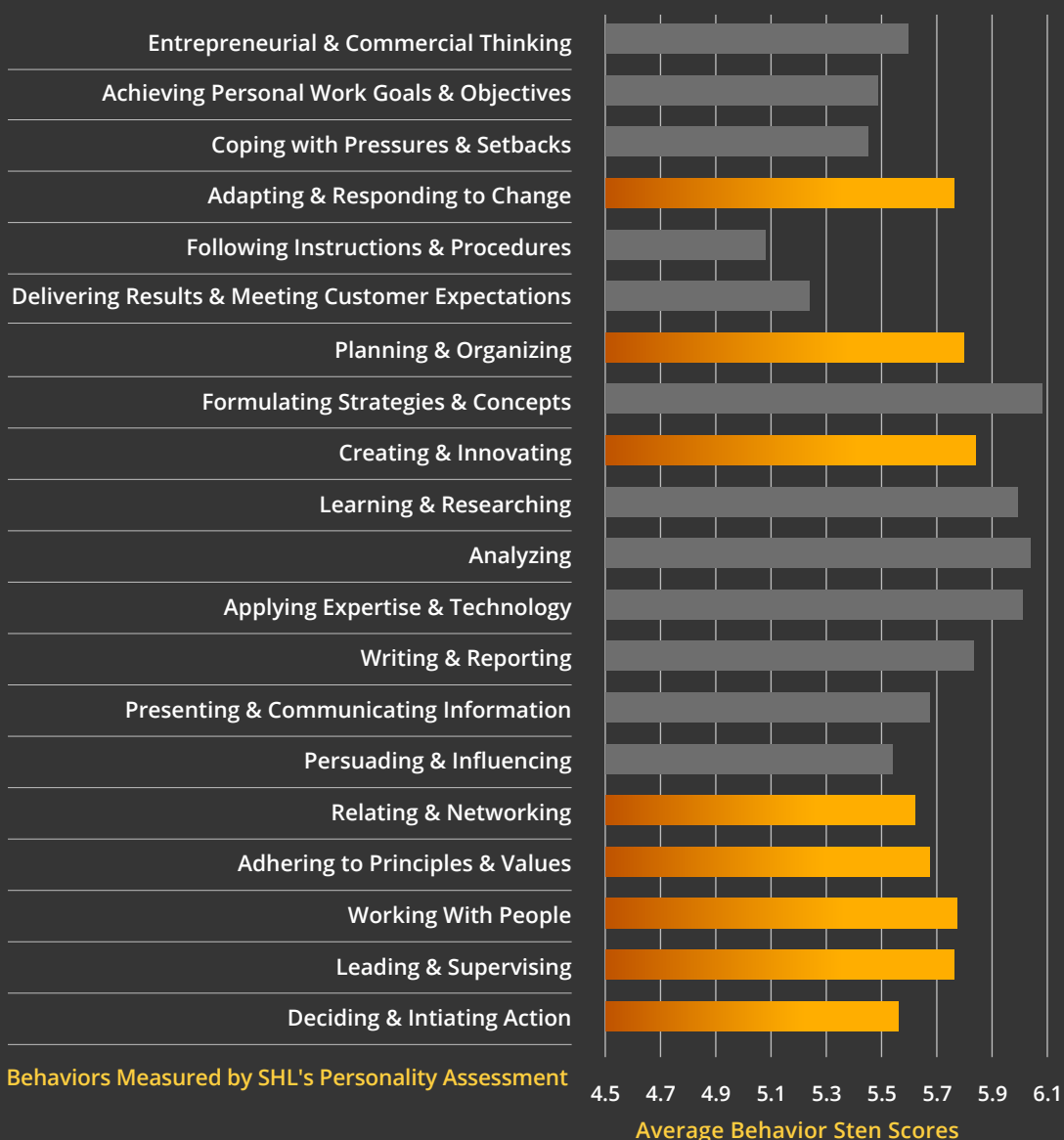
People managers have only moderate fit to the behaviors required for success as a manager today.

To achieve the three key outcomes in Table 1, people managers need to display strengths in specific skills. Building a human culture requires skills in **Leading & Supervising**, **Working with People**, and **Adhering to Principles and Values**; enabling meaningful work requires **Planning & Organizing**, and **Relating & Networking**; and becoming agile and insight-led requires strength in **Deciding & Initiating**

Action, Creating & Innovating, and **Adapting & Responding to Change**.

A fundamental misunderstanding of the skills required for people management may be impacting the hiring and promotion approaches for these roles. When looking at the specific skills required for success, the people manager population only demonstrated a moderate level of readiness for the role (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Strengths People Managers Need to Succeed Today



Given the strengths we see against a more individual contributor profile and this moderate view of fit to skills required for people management today, perhaps organizations are hiring and promoting based on performance in Individual Contributor roles.

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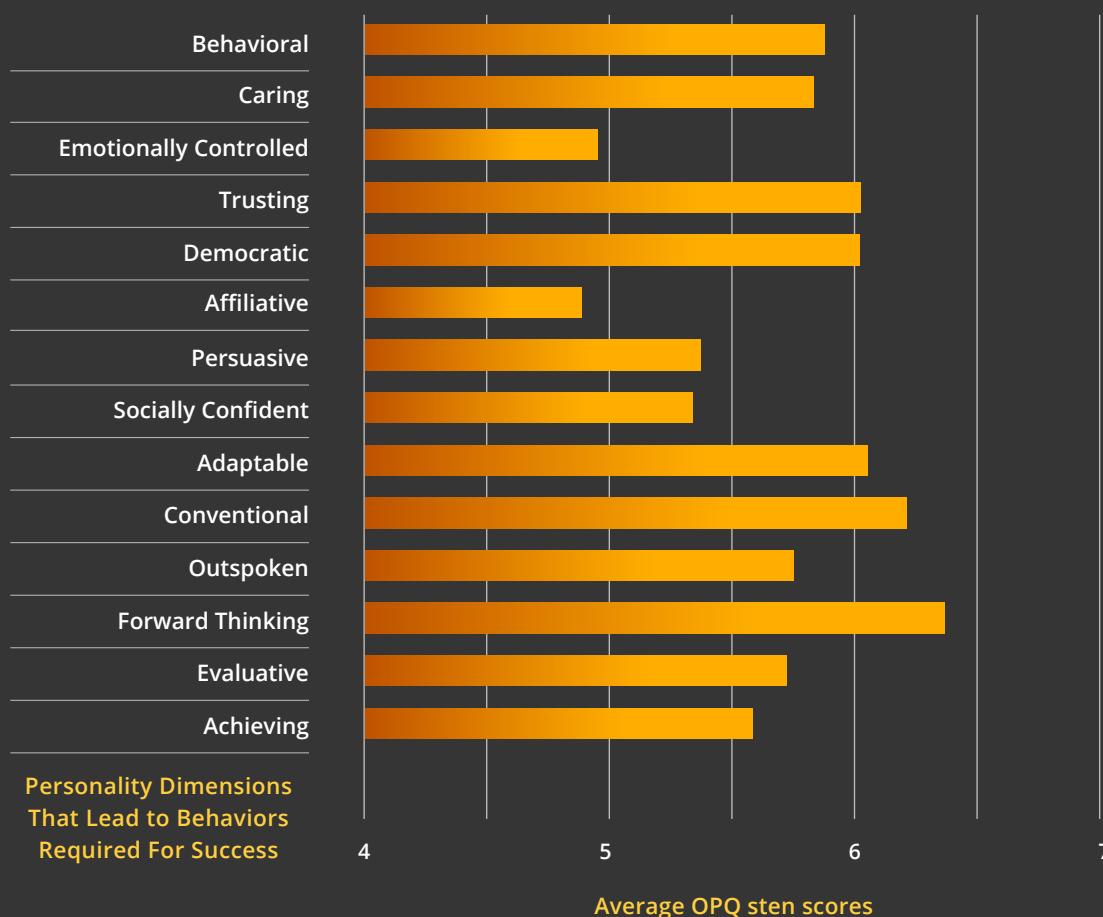
Key Finding 3

The typical profile for a people manager today demonstrates some potential to face today's challenges but also highlights some areas to develop.

SHL has identified the personality preferences, measured by our personality assessment, the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ), most likely to help people managers demonstrate behaviors required for success.

Delving deeper into personality across the people manager population reveals a mix of natural potential to thrive in today's complex and ambiguous environment, as well as some areas for development (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Personality Preferences of Typical People Managers



The profile reveals strong potential in areas such as being **forward thinking, trusting, democratic**, and willing to share emotions (having lower **emotional control**). Being able to use emotion to build understanding and connection with others could provide a strong attribute if used well. These behaviors will likely help build great people managers in today's workplace.

Development areas for the typical people manager today include being **caring** and **affiliative**, having **social confidence**, and ability to **persuade others**.

Organizations can target investment in developing and refining these people skills. Emotional intelligence, showing empathy, and relating and connecting with others are all key ingredients that will ripple across your organization. If prioritized and targeted, these skills can be cultivated.

Key Finding 4

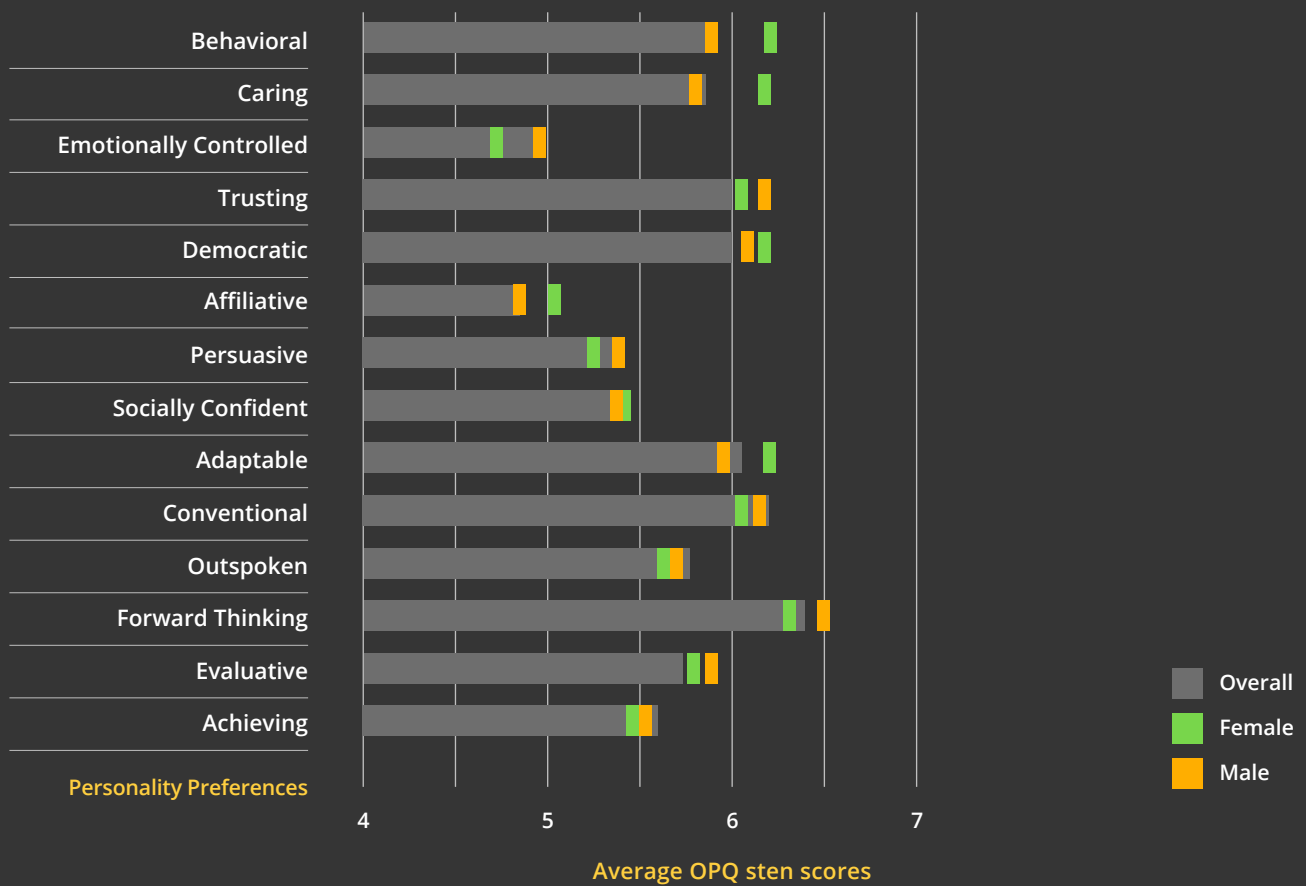
Women show stronger potential in several areas that are likely to build great people managers.

Exploring the data by gender reveals some interesting differences (Figure 5).

While men report likely greater strength in focusing on a vision, influencing others and being open in sharing their emotions (perhaps relating more towards older perceptions of managing through expertise and

authority), women generally demonstrate greater natural strength in understanding behaviors of others, showing empathy, adaptability, and being energized through connections. These are the traits that could build great people managers today, if we identify them, nurture them, and get them in the right places.

Figure 5. Personality Preferences by Gender





Time to Drive Strategic Change

From the findings of this paper, it is without doubt time for organizations to properly define what makes a great people manager today, value and reward their contributions, provide them with the skills and tools to sustain and thrive, and celebrate those who can and want to be good at this highly skilled position.

Here are SEVEN ways organizations can start shaping a new era in people management:

1. Define and value real people management skills and celebrate it for what it is. Being great at managing others is a critical skill and brings significant value to people and companies.
2. Design the job well and set your people managers up for success. People management is not simply an "add on" to an individual contributor role.
3. Create an accurate and objective view of what good looks like in the role – the skills and behaviors required for success today.
4. Hire, develop, and promote individuals with potential and capability to deliver against this and offer alternative routes to grow.
5. Nurture organizational cultures where trust, empathy, and openness are prioritized and supported.
6. Target talent programs to identify and accelerate true people manager capability.
7. Pay attention to differences in cultural style and invest in developing capability to adapt in managers.

People Managers at SHL



Karen Hodges

"Give time and space for managers to manage by structuring roles appropriately. Managing people takes time, and too often managers have another full day job as well. Ensure the structure and role responsibilities give managers time to manage."



Lucas Ellinikakis

"Success for me as a manager is when my team members trust me, feel empowered, confident, and are enjoying themselves at work."



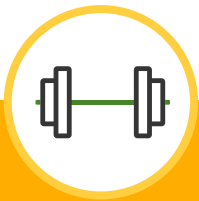
Marie Popp

"The team's satisfaction and engagement are my measures of success, as I strongly believe that employees will perform better if they like what they do and are able to use their strengths."



SHL's Manager Hiring Solution

Using our science-led understanding of people at work, SHL has captured the behaviors essential to success in people management roles today. Our Manager Hiring Solution identifies individuals that can:



Build a strong culture based on transparency, inclusion, and empathy



Create connection through meaningful work, striking a balance between people, purpose, and profit



Become agile and insight led, ready for constant realignment to optimize business opportunity and individual potential.

Competency	1	2	3	4	5	Important for success?
Interacting and Presenting						
Relating and Networking						✓
Persuading and Influencing						
Presenting and Communication Information						
Adapting and Coping						
Adapting and Responding to Change						✓
Coping with Pressures and Setbacks						
Organizing and Executing						
Planning and Organizing						✓
Delivering Results and Meeting Commitments						
Following Instructions and Procedures						
Creating and Conceptualizing						
Learning and Researching						
Creating and Innovating						✓
Formulating Strategies and Concepts						

[Watch a Demo](#)



SHL brings powerful and transparent AI technology, data science, and objectivity to help companies attract, develop, and grow the workforce they need to succeed in the digital era.

We empower talent strategies to unlock the full potential of your greatest asset—people.

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