



What's in a HDS Score?

Low

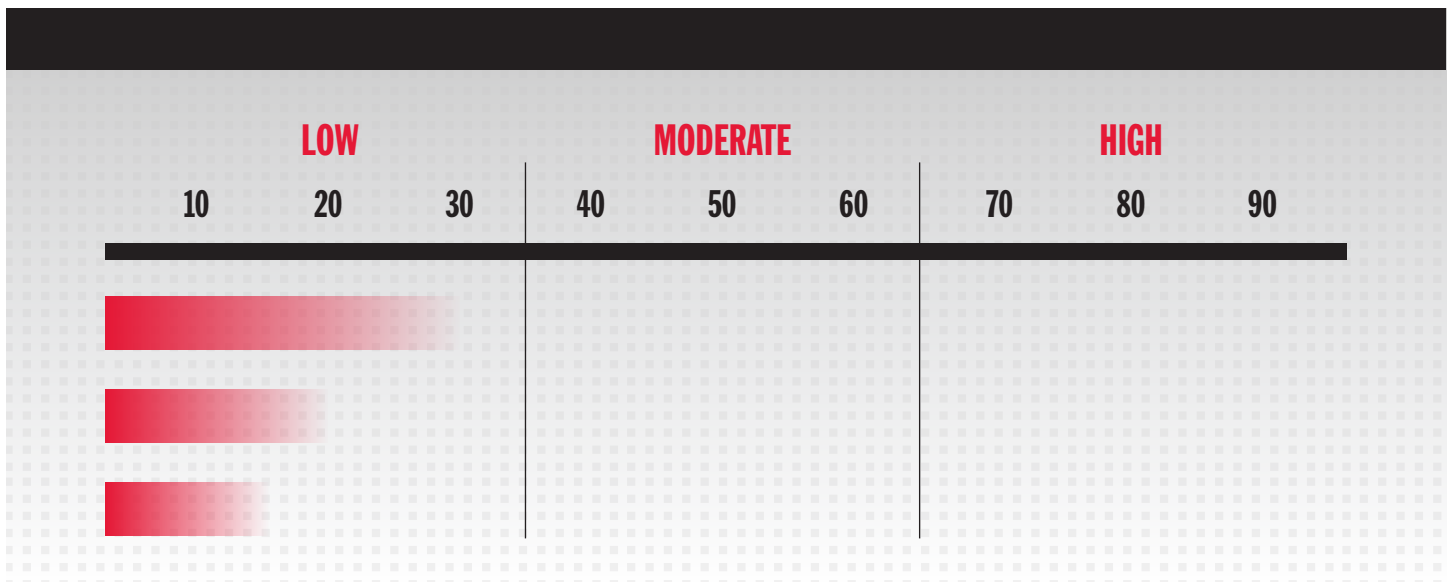
Rodney Warrenfeltz, Ph.D. and Marty Seldman, Ph.D.

Hogan's new workshop, Leadership Formula, is generating significant interest regarding the impact of low HDS scores on performance. The workshop is designed for leaders and combines the power of Hogan assessment insights with behavior changes that can be achieved by applying high-impact coaching tips.

Early in the development of the Leadership Formula workshop, much of the focus included executive coaching cases and the role of derailing behaviors (as measured by the HDS). Many of the cases involved typical HDS elevations and highlighted behaviors that executives needed to stop demonstrating if they were to be successful. However, one case in particular stood out. It involved a C-suite executive that had no elevations on the HDS scales, but still described an ongoing struggle with a tendency to be overly trusting. That led to a discussion about his Skeptical

score, which was in the low single digits. It was apparent that certain behaviors associated with low to moderate risk levels on the Skeptical scale, such as "being insightful about the motives of others," were missing, or at least underused, in his day-to-day performance. He was at virtually no risk of derailing because he was overly distrustful. Rather, his performance suffered because he was not benefiting from certain skeptical behaviors that provide insight about the motives of others.

Low HDS score behaviors have never been a secret. Dr. Robert Hogan described them from the early days of interpreting HDS profiles and they are well documented in *The Hogan Guide*. This case was different. It wasn't that this executive failed to demonstrate the positive behaviors associated with a low Skeptical score as described in *The Hogan Guide*. He was. The problem was that he was overly



Our goal is to provide a brief description of low HDS scores, potential performance implications, and potential coaching challenges.

trusting when a trust-but-verify set of behaviors (often associated with mid-range HDS scores) was called for to support effective performance. This case prompted us to consider that low HDS scores could indicate the absence of certain behaviors necessary for effective performance. And with that realization, a whole new set of HDS challenges were born.

It would be premature to make definitive statements about low scores; adequate empirical evidence around the subject does not yet exist. Our goal is to provide a brief description of the concept, potential performance implications, and potential coaching challenges.

THE LOW SCORE CONCEPT

To understand the concept of a low HDS score, begin with a reasonably precise understanding of an elevated or high score. Ninety percent or higher is used as the benchmark for concern about potential derailment. At this level, the interpretation usually begins with, “Under certain conditions of stress or pressure, you are at high risk for demonstrating the derailing behaviors

associated with the scale and those behaviors could result in damage to your career.” There are plenty of variations on that general theme, and almost all of them underscore the potential damaging nature of the behaviors and the importance of getting them under control. It's not just stress or pressure that causes derailing behaviors to be exhibited, although they are probably at the top of the list, it is almost anything that causes individuals to let their guard down or reduce the degree to which they are self-monitoring. Derailing behaviors have an uncanny way of showing up as natural tendencies unless we stay on guard for them.

This brings us to the next important point about derailing behaviors. They are not discreet behaviors. In fact, they are behaviors mixed in with an overall pattern of behavior. The pattern has many positive as well as negative behaviors and even the negative behaviors have positive elements that can work to one's advantage if they don't go over the top. For example, we have all encountered people when they are experiencing an excitable moment. They may talk fast, use words

For each scale on the HDS there is an acceptable level of behavior that may, in fact, be an important strength in a person's performance.

A high score on a scale indicates the potential for associated behaviors to be overused in negative or inappropriate ways.

that convey passion, use hand gestures, etc. When they go over the top, they may yell, bang desks, and throw things. Both of these are patterns of behavior are associated with the Excitable scale, but at some point an acceptable level of excitable behavior starts to become derailing. This view leads to the inevitable conclusion that for each scale on the HDS there is an acceptable level of behavior that may, in fact, be an important strength in a person's performance.

Now let's extend this line of thinking to low scores. For the purpose of this discussion, let's consider a low score to be anything below 20%, and a really low score to be anything below 10%. We described a certain pattern of excitable behavior that would likely be acceptable under many circumstances and, potentially, a strength when it appears as something as acceptable as passion. What happens if a person demonstrates few, if any, excitable behaviors even when the situation calls for it? This is precisely what you might get with a low score on the Excitable scale and almost expect from someone with a very low score. For all practical purposes, it is the absence of certain excitable behaviors that becomes the problem. Simply put, a high score on a scale indicates the potential for associated behaviors to be overused or demonstrated in negative or inappropriate ways.

A low score on scale may indicate the underuse or even the absence of associated behaviors.

IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

The throwaway line that we have been using with respect to this concept is – high scores can get you fired and low scores can get you passed over. Although this is a simplistic view, it is not too far from the truth. Ask a room full of coaches to give examples of executives who have been fired, and it doesn't take long to fill up a flipchart. Furthermore, if you take enough time doing this, you get examples that will touch every scale on the HDS with behaviors that sound like they came right out of *The Hogan Guide* for scores at 90% or above. If you ask that same group of coaches to tell you about an executive fired for their low Excitable behaviors or their low Bold behaviors, you will likely get a very quiet room. That is not to say it doesn't happen. We are sure people can come up with examples of individuals with low scores who were fired. However, we would contend that there was much more at work to create the circumstances for these individuals to be fired beyond the absence of behaviors marked by a low HDS score.

When you think about people who are passed over for a promotion or have had their career hit a plateau, it is worth considering the impact of a low score on an HDS scale. It is not a stretch to think about a person with a low Excitable score

A low score on scale may indicate the underuse or even the absence of associated behaviors.

While low HDS scores do not create the high profile events that often come from elevated scores, the damage they may do to a career could be just as devastating.

being passed over for a promotion because he or she didn't seem to have the passion necessary to motivate a team. How about the low Bold individual that miss out on a career-changing assignment because they didn't verbalize sufficient self-confidence to convince the decision maker that they could handle the job? Examples like these bring low scores on the HDS into focus. They certainly do not create the high profile events that often come from elevated scores; however, the damage they may do to a career could be just as devastating.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Which low (or high) HDS scores hold the most potential for impacting a person's career? To fully address this question you have to consider the situational context in which the person finds him or herself. There are three critical components to the situational context including culture, leader, and role. Culture context includes norms, values, taboos, and even success factors in an organization. Leader context can be thought of as

the HDS profile of a person's manager and the profiles of other key leaders in an organization. Role context includes the competencies or success factors for the role a person occupies or aspires to. Why is this important? The situational context can elevate or diminish the impact of the behaviors associated with a person's HDS profile.

For example, a person with a high Bold score may not be in danger for derailing on Bold behaviors if the organization is run by a group of leaders that exhibit high Bold behaviors. On the other hand, a person with a low Bold score in that same organization might be in considerable danger for being passed over for important opportunities because he or she might be viewed as lacking self-confidence, failing to sufficiently self-promote, or getting lost in the midst of overly political people. The behaviors of the leaders in this example mask the derailing behaviors typically associated with a high Bold score and amplify the understated behaviors of a low Bold score to the point they create cause for concern. Furthermore, if individuals and their manager have dramatically different scores on a scale and the associated behaviors are an integral part of the manager's performance, it could significantly alter the manager's perception of the individual's ability to be successful (i.e. a manager may interpret an individual's underuse or overuse of behaviors associated with an HDS scale as a sign of a performance weakness because the behaviors look different from their own).

In the Leadership Formula workshop, we describe the situational context as the Score Card. The Score Card is dynamic. It can change with the change of leadership or when a person changes organizations or even roles. Leaders that pay attention to the Score Card have a much better

Paying attention to the Score Card can minimize the impact of their HDS profile at the high or low end.

chance of minimizing the impact of their HDS profile at the high or low end. This is not to imply that a person's HDS profile is going to change dramatically over time. Quite the contrary, it means that one would be well-advised to know the Score Card, have a high degree of self-awareness regarding their HDS profile, and pay close attention to the behaviors (or lack of behaviors) that could limit his or her success. The notion of a dynamic Score Card interacting with the full range of behaviors measured by the HDS presents a relatively complex tapestry of challenges an individual must navigate to successfully climb the leadership ladder. It is a realistic perspective and certainly speaks to the importance of HDS results beyond the traditional view of a derail.

COACHING CHALLENGE

Consider the following:

1. *As a coach, would you rather help a leader bring a behavior(s) associated with an elevated HDS score under control or help a leader manifest a new behavior that is contrary to his or her natural tendency?*
2. *As a leader, would it be more difficult to dial back on a problem behavior(s) or display a new behavior that does not come naturally and needs to appear to others as sincere?*

For most of you, the answer probably is, it depends. That is the point we are trying to make. Low-end scores and their associated behaviors can be just as problematic as behaviors associated with high-end scores. The two sets of low scores that create problems for leaders are the low Skeptical leaders, who are too trusting for their current situation, and the low Bold, low Colorful leaders who are too quiet in meetings, don't self-promote, are underestimated, and don't look like leaders. These are tough coaching challenges that underscore the impact of low HDS scores and, in many circumstances, might even present greater coaching challenges than those traditionally associated with high HDS scores.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

If you are interested in learning more, the Leadership Formula workshop contains the most comprehensive discussion of low score HDS behaviors and how to deal with them from a coaching standpoint. Additionally, we discuss them in the new Hogan Advanced Interpretation Workshop as part of a range of interpretation challenges for advanced users of all three Hogan inventories.

Low scores have the potential to impact how we interpret and coach around the HDS, and are a significant topic among Hogan users. We look forward to the vigorous conversation and debate in the months ahead.

LOW END BEHAVIORS

Below is a sample of some of the low end HDS behaviors that we have observed. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, nor is it the final word on what might exist at the low end that could present a challenge.

