



By Dori Meinert

Vote for Quirky

Most people expect their leaders to be able to think outside the box. But creative people are often seen as quirky and are blocked in their attempts to climb the leadership ladder, researchers have found.

"We have these contradictory demands. We want the leader to be someone who provides order, ensures that people follow the norm. We want them to reduce uncertainty," explains Jack Goncalo, assistant professor of organizational behavior at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. "On the other hand, we have creative people who seem like risk takers, who are quirky, who are seen as increasing uncertainty rather than reducing it.

"So when we're faced with someone who has a creative idea ... we don't want this person in charge because we can't predict their behavior," he says. That means "creative people get filtered out on the way to the top."

Researchers asked 55 employees at a multinational refinery in India to rate their 291 colleagues—all working in a creative division—for their ability to come up with ideas and their leadership potential. The results found a strong correlation between being creative and being seen as poor management material. The results were then tested on U.S. college students, who expressed similar views.

The study by Goncalo, Jennifer Mueller at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and Dishan Kamdar of the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad was scheduled to be published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

The findings help explain why creativity was cited as the most important trait of successful leaders in a survey of 1,541 chief executive officers by IBM's Institute for Business Value last year—yet 51 percent of those leaders said they felt unprepared for the challenges ahead, Goncalo says.

Bias against creative people can be minimized by changing people's perceptions of leadership. When researchers asked their test subjects to think about "charismatic" leaders, "they actually viewed those people as having more leadership potential," Goncalo says.

In other words, anything but quirky.

Together We Can

While many college students hit the beaches and bars during spring break, some students this year opted for Maximum Impact—an alternative vacation volunteering alongside employees of Deloitte LLP at troubled elementary and high schools in Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tenn. More than 1,400 college students applied for 80 spots in the program run by Deloitte in partnership with United Way and Teach for America.

While volunteering, the students, primarily sophomores and juniors, got a chance to talk with Deloitte employees and develop friendships long before the students begin formally job hunting.

Those relationships serve the company well in recruiting, says Diane Borhani, Deloitte's national director of campus recruiting, based in Chicago. The company plans to hire 5,400 graduates this year.

College students place high importance on social responsibility, she says. "We do a great deal of giving back to the community, so we figured this is a great way to show them."

Yinka Agbi, 21, who was a volunteer in 2008, said the program "had a huge impact on me." She was hired as a full-time tax consultant for Deloitte in October 2010.

Although Deloitte pays the students' housing, airfare and meals, the trips aren't vacations.

"They work," Borhani says. "While we do some social events in the evening, it's certainly not your typical spring break for college students."