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# NUS team: Good boss needs more than testosterone

Joint business-medical study looking into link between hormones and performance

■ BY VICTORIA VAUGHAN

IN YEARS to come, getting a job may require one to have more than a sparkling resume.

Increasingly, scientists and economists around the world are collaborating on research to determine which biological factors have an impact on a person's ability to excel at work.

The burgeoning field, called the biology of business, has made its way to Singapore.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), academics at its business school are working with their medical school counterparts to look at the relationship between hormones and individual traits.

Earlier this month, they published their first paper.

A team led by Dr Jayanth Narayanan, 35, an assistant professor of management and organisation at NUS Business School, looked into the relationship between testosterone levels and leadership.

It found that although testosterone, associated with the desk-thumping behaviour that typifies many a hard-charging executive, is important in leaders, it is not the only factor.

Said Dr Narayanan: "High testosterone is some kind of advantage, but merely having it will not make you a leader if you don't pay attention to the social and emotional needs of the group."

The study involved 579 NUS students - 259 males and 320 females - who were monitored throughout a semester.

It found that there was no clear relationship between leadership and the levels of testosterone.

Researcher Gerald Koh, an assistant professor of epidemiology and public health at NUS, and one of the team members, said: "The finding was surprising. I expected to find people who had greater leadership qualities to have higher testosterone levels."

When contacted, experts suggested that though

the results were informative, the field was currently too new, but it could have a role in hiring and firing processes in future.

Dr Graham Tyler, director of Singapore-based business psychology company PsyAsia, said that if more studies were done in this area and conclusive evidence was found, it could be a part of an organisation's recruitment process.

"It's a contentious area, as biological profiling is deterministic, but there are environmental factors to take into consideration which can have a bearing on performance," said the business psychologist.

He noted, for example, that aptitude tests are becoming increasingly popular with employers in Singapore. Such tests can predict between 9 per cent and 36 per cent of a person's job performance, depending on the type of questions asked.

Dr Narayanan agreed that such research should not be used wholly to determine whether to hire a person or not.

"There are ethical implications. You would have to demonstrate absolutely that certain hormones have a link to desirable outcomes," he said.

"It's also not something someone can change, so it could lead to discrimination."

[vvaughan@sph.com.sg](mailto:vvaughan@sph.com.sg)

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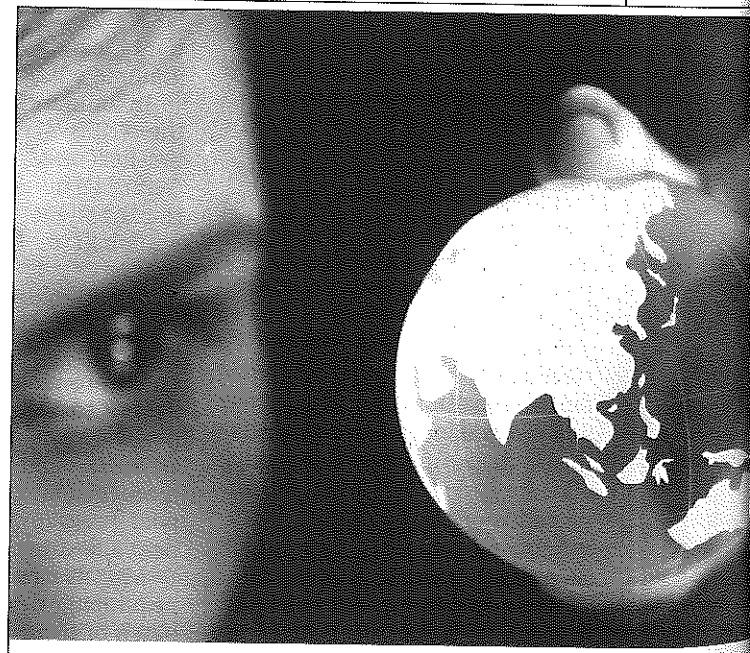
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