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The importance of looking competent
 Posted: April 19, 2010, 11:41 AM by Jonathan Ratner
[Market Call](#), [CEO](#), [Ian McGugan](#)

The corporate world may be even more superficial than you thought. In a paper entitled A Corporate Beauty Contest, three professors at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University tell what happened when they showed photographs of CEOs and non-CEOs to 2,000 people. The professors asked the viewers to rate the faces in the photos on qualities such as how competent they appeared. People consistently rated the faces of CEOs as being more competent looking than non-CEO faces.

Could it be that CEOs are selected for their looks? Maybe so. Their elevated positions don't seem to be entirely the result of superior performance. [The Duke professors](#)—John Graham, Campbell Harvey and Manju Puri—found no statistical evidence that the most competent looking CEOs perform any better than less competent looking leaders. "Essentially the 'look' of competence says very little about effective competence," the authors say.

It does see, though, that competent looking CEOs enjoy far better career opportunities. The Duke professors found that competent looking CEOs earn more than their less competent looking counterparts and that CEOs of large companies look more competent than CEOs of small companies.

The lesson here? If you want to reach the top of the corporate pyramid, your face may matter just as much as your performance.

Freelance business journalist [Ian McGugan](#) blogs for the Financial Post

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