

# FROM TRAIT TO TRANSFORMATION: THE EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES

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Early leadership studies focused upon individual characteristics, but evidence soon became clear that it was impossible to predict a potential for leadership based on personal traits. Following this, explaining leadership in terms of relationships between selected leadership styles and productivity or morale also proved unsuccessful. Group dynamics, or the interaction between group members and the leader, then became the focus of leadership studies. Next, significance of a particular situation in which acts of leadership occur became the dominant theme. The most recent view of leadership stresses the sociology of the organization and the transformational abilities of the leader to assist in change.

## **Nature of Leadership**

A plethora of definitions of leadership has been offered. Katz and Kahn (1966) described leadership as “any act of influence on a matter of organizational relevance” (p. 334). Being more specific on the influence component, Tannenbaum, Weschler, and Massarik (1961) defined leadership “as an interpersonal influence, exercised in situations and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals” (p. 24). Emphasizing the goal aspect, Burns (1979) said:

I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations--the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations--of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations. (p. 381)

Hesburgh (1971) gave an inspiring definition of leadership:

The mystique of leadership, be it educational, political, religious, commercial, or whatever, is next to impossible to describe, but wherever it exists, morale flourishes, people pull together toward common goals, spirits soar, order is maintained, not as an end in itself, but as a means to move forward together. Such leadership always has a moral as well as intellectual dimension; it requires courage as well as wisdom; it does not simply know, it cares. (p. 764)

Bass attempted to differentiate three types of leadership: When the goal of one member, A, is that of changing another member, B, or when B's change in behavior will reward A or reinforce A's behavior, A's effort to obtain the goal is leadership....If A's goal is to change B, A can be observed attempting to change B; this is attempted leadership. B may actually change his behavior as a consequence of A's efforts; this is success-

ful leadership. B's change may result in B's satisfaction, reward, or goal attainment; this is effective leadership. (pp. 89-90)

The list of well-reasoned definitions of leadership could go on and on. Burns (1978) deplored the lack of any central concept of leadership, attributing the deficiency in part because "scholars have worked in separate disciplines and subdisciplines in pursuit of different and often unrelated questions and problems" (p. 3). This plethora of leadership definitions creates a research dilemma for any investigator. Because research conclusions are based on different definitions, the investigator must acknowledge this limitation before making generalizations.

Because there is considerable difficulty in specifying factors associated with leadership, studying leader behavior or actual acts of the leader is more feasible than studying leadership from a research standpoint. McDonald (1967), in supporting this view, said that the way a leader interacts with others, instead of personal traits, is more determinative of how successful he or she is in achieving goals.

Halpin (1956) distinguished leadership from leader behavior. He stated that leadership "presupposes the existence of a specified capacity in regard to 'leading'." On the other hand, leader behavior "focuses upon observed behavior rather than the posited capacity inferred from this behavior" (pp. 11-12).

### **Leadership Ideas and Theories**

Early ideas about leadership were centered around the trait theory or the notion that leaders possessed certain traits more than nonleaders. Among these early theorists was Professor Tead of Columbia University. Tead (1935) listed physical and nervous energy, a sense of purpose and direction, enthusiasm, friendliness and affection, integrity, technical mastery, decisiveness, intelligence, teaching skill, and faith as

necessary qualities in leaders.

Empirical research began to challenge personal trait and undimensional views of leadership. Empirical studies suggested that leadership is a dynamic process, varying from situation to situation with changes in leaders, followers, and situations. The focus in the situational approach to leadership was on observed behavior--behavior of leaders and their group members and various situations (Hersey and Blanchard, 1979).

The University of Michigan leadership studies under the direction of Likert and the Ohio State leadership studies under the direction of Stogdill and Shartle were antithetical to the trait or single-continuum approach. Both the Michigan and Ohio State studies identified two dimensions of leader behavior. One was a task-oriented axis and another was an interpersonal relations-oriented axis. The two dimensions were not mutually exclusive. A leader could combine a high task oriented approach with a high interpersonal relations approach (Wren, 1979).

Both the Michigan and Ohio State studies emphasized observed leader behavior rather than some supposed capacity inferred from this behavior. No theoretical assumptions were made that leader behavior which a leader exhibits in one group situation will be shown in other group situations. While leadership implied good or effective leadership, leader behavior separated description of what a leader does from the evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency of what he/she does. In short, leader behavior focused upon a description of behavior (Halpin, 1956).

The most significant contribution of the Ohio State leadership studies, conducted from 1946 to 1956, was the isolation of Consideration and Initiating Structure as basic dimensions of leadership behavior in formal organizations. These variables were identified as the result of a series of investigations which attempted to determine,

through factor-analytic procedures, the smallest number of dimensions which would adequately describe leader behavior, as perceived by the leader's subordinates and as the leader perceived his/her own attitudes toward his/her role. Initiating Structure was described as the extent to which an individual is likely to define and structure his/her role and those of his/her subordinates toward goal attainment. A high score on this dimension would characterize individuals who play an active role in directing group activities through planning, communicating, scheduling, and trying out new ideas. Consideration was described as the extent to which an individual is likely to have job relationships characterized by mutual trust, respect for subordinates' ideas, and consideration of their feelings. A high score on this dimension would indicate a climate of good rapport and two-way communication while a low score would indicate that the supervisor is likely to be more impersonal in his/her relations with group members (Korman, 1966).

Stodgill (1974) began his study of leadership at Ohio State University in 1946 under a grant from the Office of Naval Research. Although his work did much to enhance the situationalist view of leadership, he later reviewed and abstracted numerous research findings on Leadership which led to some conclusions contrary to the situationalist view. These more current findings showed that a leader is characterized by a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals, venturesomeness and originality in problem solving, a drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and a sense of personal identity, willingness to accept the consequences of decision and action, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other persons' behavior, and a capacity to structure social interaction sys-

tems to the purpose at hand. From these findings, Stodgill concluded that personality is a factor in leadership differentiation, but he insisted that this conclusion did not represent a return to the trait approach. Rather, he maintained that it represented a sensible modification of the extreme situationalist point of view. Stodgill said that the trait approach tended to treat personality variables in "atomistic fashion," suggesting each trait acted alone to determine leadership effects while the situationalist approach denied influences of individual differences, attributing all variation between persons to fortuitous environmental demands.

During the 1960s and 1970s, organization humanism was at the heart of managerial philosophy. A leading component of organizational humanism was participative managerial leadership. Participative leadership, espoused by the human relationists and organizational humanists, was a movement to reduce power and status differences between the superior and the subordinate. The worker was to be given greater voice in decisions (Wren, 1979).

Vroom and Yetton (1973), relying on supporting empirical evidence, formulated a comprehensive normative model for participative management which would give subordinates greater participation in problem-solving and decision-making processes. Although their model was a prescriptive framework, it did not assume that leadership methods that are effective in one situation are necessarily effective in another situation. The model was founded on the assumption that the effectiveness of an organizational decision is a "joint function of situational variables expressed as problem attributes and leader behavior expressed as processes for making decision" (Vroom and Yetton, 1973, p. 204).

Participative management can usually be associated with a creative environment. A creative organization may be best described

as one that maintains an atmosphere of involvement, one that encourages its employees to become fully participative (Lahti, 1973).

Likert (1961) of the University of Michigan, a proponent of participative leadership, has spent most of his life studying leadership in organizations. The objective of his research has been to determine the organization structure, principles, and methods of leadership which result in the best performance. Likert's (1961) general design in most of these studies has been to examine kinds of leadership and related variables employed by the best units in organizations in contrast to those used by the poorest.

Likert and Likert (1976) integrated principles used by the highest producing managers into a general organizational system which was called System 4. In comparison with management systems used by most organizations today, System 4 is a more highly developed and complex system. It requires those using it to learn more complex leadership and interaction skills. It displays characteristics of more effective forms of organizing human interaction and efforts. Much research shows that it is more effective in enabling an organization to decide upon its objectives and accomplish them efficiently. Likert and Likert (1976) maintain that when an organization shifts to System 4 from traditional organization theory, performance improves, costs are reduced, and improvement occurs in the satisfaction of members of the organization.

Likert observed that in most productive business organizations, much interaction occurred with both individuals and groups. A flow of information down, up, and among peers occurred; there was a general acceptance of communication from below; and generally, there was an open and honest questioning (Eble, 1978).

Yet empirical research could not confirm that the participative management style was

the best. Even Likert found that high morale did not always lead to higher production. Furthermore, he could not conclude that a production-centered supervisor always had a low-producing section. The question became under what circumstances did one work better than the other. Could Initiating Structure and Consideration be balanced? This question formed the basis for the development of adaptive leadership roles (Wren, 1979).

Adaptive leader behavior questions the existence of a "best" style of leadership. It is not a question of best style but of the most effective style for a particular situation. Its basic concept, according to Hersey and Blanchard (1979), is that "the more managers adapt their style of leader behavior to meet the particular situation and the needs of their followers, the more effective they will tend to be in reaching personal and organizational goals" (p. 101).

One of the most noteworthy adaptive leadership models is the Managerial Grid developed by Blake and Mouton (1978). In the Managerial Grid, five different types of leadership based on concern for production or task and concern for people or relationship are located in four quadrants similar to those identified by the Ohio State leadership studies. Concern for task is illustrated on the horizontal axis. Task becomes more important to the leader as his/her rating advances on the horizontal scale. A leader with a rating of nine on the horizontal axis has a maximum concern for task. Concern for relationship is illustrated on the vertical axis. Relationship becomes more important to the leader as his/her rating progress up the vertical axis. A leader with a rating of nine on the vertical axis has a maximum concern for relationship (Hersey and Blanchard, 1979).

Blake and Mouton (1978) state that the first leadership style in the managerial grid is the impoverished style (1-1) where the

“exertion of minimum effort to get required work done is appropriate to sustain organization membership” (p. 11). Second, there is the country club style (1-9) where “thoughtful attention to needs of people for satisfying relationships leads to a comfortable friendly organization atmosphere and work tempo” (p. 11). Third, there is the task style (9-1) where “efficiency in operations results from arranging conditions of work in such a way that human elements interfere to a minimum degree” (p. 12). Fourth, there is the middle-of-the-road style (5-5) where “adequate organization performance is possible through balancing the necessity to get out work while maintaining morale of people at a satisfactory level” (p. 12). Fifth, there is the team style (9-9) where “work accomplishment is from committed people; interdependence through a ‘common stake’ in organization purpose leads to relationships of trust and respect” (p. 12).

Fiedler’s Leadership Contingency Model pioneered the modern theme that there is no one best way to perform the leadership function. Fiedler suggested that a number of leader behavior styles may be effective, depending on the elements of the situation (Wren, 1979).

With his 3-D theory, Reddin (1970) maintained that there were four basic styles of managerial behavior (i.e., integrated, dedicated, related, and separated), any one of which could be effective in certain situations and not in others. Each one of the four basic styles had a less effective equivalent (i.e., compromiser, autocrat, missionary, deserter) and a more effective equivalent (i.e., executive, benevolent autocrat, developer, and bureaucrat), resulting in eight managerial styles. Effectiveness depended on using the appropriate behavior to match the situation. Two basic tenets of Reddin’s 3-D Theory were that there is no consistent evidence that one style is generally more effective than another and that manager training

must focus on style flexibility rather than style rigidity.

Blanchard and Hersey (1970) have conducted much research concerning adaptive leadership behavior. They developed the Life Cycle Theory which was based on the curvilinear relationship between Initiating Structure and Consideration behavior and “maturity.” The theory attempts to provide understanding of the relationship between an effective style of leadership and the level of maturity of group followers. In the Life Cycle Theory, maturity was defined by achievement-motivation, relative independence, and the ability to take responsibility of an individual or group. It was recognized that components of maturity were often influenced by the level of education and amount of experience relevant to one’s particular job demands.

Advocating structured behavior as appropriate for working with immature people, Life Cycle Theory suggested that leader behavior should move through (1) high Structure-low Consideration behavior to (2) high Structure-high Consideration and (3) high Consideration-low Structure behavior to (4) low Structure-low Consideration behavior, provided followers progress from immaturity to maturity (Blanchard and Hersey, 1970).

Hersey and Blanchard (1979) refined the Life Cycle Theory by adding an effectiveness dimension as Reddin had done; their model was then called the Tri-Dimensional Leader Effectiveness Model. Under this model, any of the basic styles could be effective or ineffective depending on the situation. In distinguishing the Tri-Dimensional Model from Reddin’s 3-D Theory and Blake’s the Managerial Grid, Hersey and Blanchard maintained that their model measured observed behavior while Reddin and Blake measured predisposition or attitude toward production and people. Although Hersey and Blanchard thought that the Ohio State Model

(with Initiating Structure and Consideration dimensions) also measured how people behave, they insisted that the Tri-Dimensional Model differed from the Ohio State Model in that it added an effectiveness dimension.

Still later, Hersey and Blanchard (1979) referred to their model as Situational Leadership Theory. The basic concept in Situational Leadership Theory is that as the level of maturity of the group continues to increase in terms of accomplished specific tasks, the leader should begin to reduce his/her task behavior and increase relationship behavior until the group reaches a moderate level of maturity. As the group begins to move into an above average level of maturity, then the leader should decrease not only task behavior but also relationship behavior. In short, Situational Leadership Theory focuses on appropriateness of leadership styles according to the task-relevant maturity of followers.

Where do we stand with leadership theories today? There continues to be a concern for adaptive or situational leadership theory; however, there appears to be some noteworthy changes in emphasis which have developed in recent years. For example, thought is now focusing on the cultural and symbolic manager or leader--the person who manages from the sociological standpoint of the organization. In this regard, the leader's success depends largely on the ability to assess information in order to determine what is happening in the organization to stimulate individuals' attachment to it. In short, the leader "picks up" on the essence or the organization and becomes its symbolic spokesperson for that essence. Thus, the leader becomes a pattern match (i.e., he or she is suited to the organization that he or she leads or symbolizes).

Another detectable trend in recent years is the movement from a quantitative to a more qualitative approach in the assessment

of leadership. Traits and lifestyles of a leader have once again become important factors as well as the leader's grasp of sound management techniques that accomplish tasks in an organization.

Adair (1983) noted that recurring qualities in leaders are aptitude, character, and integrity. Integrity is defined as "to be clear about your purpose in life" (p.82). According to Jackson and Dafoe (1983), integrity is more than simply being honest or setting goals. It is thought to be the most essential quality a leader can have.

The lifestyle of a successful leader is being scrutinized carefully today (Adair, 1983). A balanced professional, family, and recreation life is desirable. Coping with stress is a significant part of a sound lifestyle. Much attention is being given to physical fitness, healthful diet, and good personal habits. A leader must be able to cope with the stresses of his or her life in order to be able to make good decisions for the organization. In short, an organization needs a leader who has the ability to take charge of his or her own life.

Sound management techniques have been the subject of enormous research in the last decade, and techniques to motivate employees have been at the heart of this research. Miller (1984) argues that leaders enhance motivation by effectively communicating with and setting good examples for subordinates. Benis (1982) believes that a leader's example setting can significantly alter the behavior of others, thereby motivating them. To put it another way, leaders do what they require of others. Finally, Hutchinson (1983) maintains that a leader needs to adopt an open communication policy to boost individuals' motivation to give them a clear understanding of the goals of the organization.

Still another recent emphasis of leadership theory is the contribution a leader makes to society as a whole. Since society

has the ultimate control over the success or failure of an organization, leadership must meet social expectations (Hutchinson, 1983). With leadership becoming more dependent on social expectations, the leader of an organization, whether it be for profit or nonprofit, should be concerned that he or she leaves the environment in a better condition than it was found. Included in the environmental concerns is a broad range of social concerns such as education, health care, social services, community development, and other interests that can better the human condition (Hutchinson, 1983).

Perhaps the best embodiment of current leadership theory is the transformational leader. Tichy and Devanna (1986) contend that transformational leadership is about change, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the capacity to move resources for greater productivity. Central to transformational leadership are change and adaptability. With a highly volatile American economy, affected by intense foreign competition, a kind of corporate leadership is needed which can adapt to rapidly changing conditions outside an organization by acting as a catalyst for change within an organization. The same could be said for educational and political organizations which also need transformational leaders. In essence, it is the kind of leadership needed to manage uncertainty.

Transformational leaders persuade others to endure changes and show them how to adapt to these changes. A transformational leader creates a vision of change that a critical mass of employees will accept as desirable for the organization. Once a critical mass accepts the vision, then the leader must mobilize commitment on the part of the followers (Tichy and Devanna, 1986). Characteristics of transformational leaders include that they: (1) identify themselves as change agents; (2) are courageous individuals; (3) believe in people; (4) are value-driven; (5) are lifelong learners; (6) have the

ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty; and (7) are visionaries (Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

### Summary

Some summary comments on the study of leadership are warranted. Early leadership studies focused upon individual characteristics. There were attempts to determine if certain traits of personality, intelligence, physique, or perception were either associated with those who lead or could be used to distinguish those who might become leaders; however, the evidence was clear that leaders do not possess common traits and that it is not possible to predict a potential for leadership on the basis of personal traits.

Researchers next tried to identify certain styles of leadership as clues for individual effectiveness. Studies hypothesized relationships between selected leadership styles and productivity or morale, but they were not successful in explaining leadership. Evidence indicated the leadership style perceived as effective was that which met the expectations of the group to be led.

The next consideration of leadership style as it related to performance of functions by group members led to the investigation of interaction between group members and the leader. This consideration, called group dynamics, has contributed much to the contemporary study of leadership.

A recent consideration of leadership recognizes the significance of a particular situation in which acts of leadership occur. It focuses on organizational determinants of leadership--e.g., nature of the environment, distribution of power, nature of tasks, and priority among goals. According to this view, leadership must be consistent with organizational expectations (Firth, 1976).

An even more recent view of leadership considers such things as sociology of the organization, lifestyle and social contribution of the leader, effective motivational

techniques, and transformational abilities of the leader to assist in change and adaptability. This macroview of leadership recognizes the tremendous change inherent in a highly complex and interdependent world.

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## IMAGINATION

Imagination - the power that lifts us from the present tense to the world of possibility - is a gift beyond almost all others because it allows us to transcend the world THAT IS and leap into another world, that which MIGHT BE As Shakespeare described the imagination:

This is the gift I have, simple, simple; a...spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: These are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb in pia mater...The gift is good in those in whom it is acute and I am thankful for it.

Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*,  
Act IV, Scene 2, Line 67.



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