

A Synthesis of Leadership Theories and Styles

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Discussion is often heard concerning the downward spiral of modern organizations due to inadequate, uninspired leadership; hence, it is imperative to continue to focus attention on the many various theories of leadership that have been employed throughout history. It is crucial to place exceptionally talented, knowledgeable leaders in positions of prominence in modern organizations in order to expect and ensure optimum success. "Leadership is one of the most widely talked about subjects and at the same time one of the most elusive and puzzling" (Wren, 1995, p. 27). As the notion of exemplary leadership is advanced, the challenge is to find ways to teach people how to become prestigious, creative leaders in today's challenging business society. In striving to accomplish this goal, a succinct review of the history of leadership theory will be analyzed and synthesized, providing an in-depth exploration of leaders past and present. "There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (Bass, 1990, p.11). Leadership has been described "in essence, a process: a series of actions and interactions among leaders and followers which lead to the attainment of group goals" (Wren, 1995, p. 325). In an effort to thoroughly comprehend the different theories reviewed, this article will focus on the theories of leadership and define strategies that will maintain a collaborative working relationship and respectful team environment in a group setting.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP

Bass cites that "great leaders were important in the development of civilized societies" (Bass, 1990, p.3). Attention also was focused on civilization and the emergence of leadership, with its ability to shape leaders and leaders who had the same ability to shape civilization. Throughout the centuries, attention has been called to the development of good leaders.

One of the earliest recorded leadership reports describes the plight of Moses.

"Time and again, Moses demonstrated leadership traits that are highly prized today. Because we live in the information age, where 'facts' evolve daily and the global marketplace is constantly shifting beneath our feet, the skills Moses used to lead his people through the wilderness are extremely relevant: being flexible, thinking quickly, sustaining the confidence of your people in uncertain times, and creating rules that work for individuals from widely diverse backgrounds" (Baron, 1999, p. xiv-xv).

In addition, Chinese history states that under the leadership of Confucius, a moral example was set. Plato expressed the idea that the leader was the most important person in government. Aristotle advanced the notion that political leaders lacked meaning and virtue. Leaders such as Machiavelli cited the need that leaders should be firm and steady. One of the most profound concepts in early leadership perspectives can be found at West Point Military Academy where Hegel's (1930/1971) *Philosophy of Mind* asserts that leaders must first learn how to follow before they can lead.

APPLICATION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership has been considered one of the most important components in the success of organizations. Maccoby (1979) concluded from his observations that the need of firms to survive and prosper in a world of increasing competition, of technological advances, of changing governmental regulations, of changing worker attitudes, requires "a higher level of leadership than ever before" (p. 313). When organizations experience change, it is imperative that their organizational leadership is adequate to meet the challenge.

Leadership application gradually evolved throughout history. In the United States during the 20th century, numerous experiments assisted in the evaluation of the importance of leadership in organizations. "Between 1971 and 1981, Katzell and Guzzo (1983) concluded that supervisory methods seemed particularly effective in increasing output" (Bass, 1990, p.8). In 1974, Hansen commented that Ford Motor Company was able to close a plant without disturbing or relocating staff. The success of that move was attributed to the application of effective leadership. Military successes also have been attributed to outstanding leadership application. "Leadership has been considered a critical factor in military successes since records have been kept; that is better-led forces repeatedly have been victorious over poorly led forces" (Bass, 1990, p.9).

LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND THEORISTS

"If a theory of leadership is to be used for diagnosis, training, and development, it must be theory-grounded in the concepts and assumptions that are acceptable to and used by managers, officials, and emergent leaders" (Bass, 1990, p.37). In an attempt to extract the most crucial theories and models of leadership, the major components of the theory and the implications surrounding them must be reviewed. Bass and Wren expressed leadership theories as they related to the nature of leadership and the different variables involved. William James (1880) suggested that great men brought about changes in society. "The history of the world, according to James, is the history of Great Men; they created what the masses could accomplish" (Bass, 1990, p. 37). Adherent to the Great Men theory, women leaders were virtually ignored. Credence was seldom bestowed upon women leaders such as Catherine the Great, Elizabeth I, and other great female leaders; however, male leaders, such as Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and military leaders were hailed as esteemed great men. An interesting idea of early theorists advanced the point of view that leadership was directly related to inheritance. Wiggam posited that strong leaders survived and produced an aristocratic class that was biologically superior to others. Although strongly believed by some, "Dowd (1936) maintained that there is no such thing as leadership by the masses" (Bass, 1990, p.37).

Other theorists expressed the idea that leaders should possess qualities that are evident to those around them. This idea developed the conceptual framework for the trait theories of leadership (Kohs & Irle, 1920). L.L. Bernard (1926), Bingham (1972), Tead (1929), Page (1935), and Kilbourne (1935) all of whom explained leadership in definition of traits of character and personality (Bass, 1990, p. 38). Stodgill (1948) criticized the trait theory and asserted that the person and the situation must be considered as well.

Arguments for the significance of the situational theory suggested that situational factors had an important effect on leadership. In the United States, many researchers favored the notion that leaders were born and not made. The leaders recognized that the situation called for certain types of action; the leader did not inject leadership, but was the instrumental factor through which a solution to a problem was

achieved (Murphy, 1941). Situational theorists argued that great leaders emerged as a result of place, circumstance and time (Bass, 1990). “Person (1928) expressed two hypotheses in relations to leadership: (1) any particular situation plays a large part in determining leadership qualities and the leader for that situation and (2) the qualities in an individual that a particular situation may determine to be leadership qualities are themselves the product of a succession of previous leadership situations that have developed and molded that individual” (Bass, 1990, p.39).

Personal-situational theories express the belief that war and crises provide an opportunity for leaders to emerge. William James asserted that great men needed assistance with talents necessary to meet the needs of the situation. “Personal-situation leadership to be understood demands attention be paid to (1) the traits and motives of the leader as a man (2) images that selected publics hold of him and their motives for following him (3) the features of the role that he plays as a leader, and (4) the institutional context in which he and his followers may be involved” (Gerth & Mills, 1952, p. 405). Bass (1990) stated that “several reasons accounted for some of the variance in what happens is due to the situation, some is due to the individual, and some is due to a combining effects of the situation and the individual” (p. 40).

The political theory espouses the idea that the wealthy, military, state and church should rule and lead the masses. The political leader must compete for approval from the people and recognize the wants and needs of potential followers. Another aspect of the political theory emphasizes respect for the minorities while making decisions based on the vote of the majority.

“The theories of McGregor, Argyris, Likert, Blake and Mouton, Maslow, and Hersey and Blanchard were concerned with development of the individual within an effective and cohesive organization” (Bass, 1990, p. 43). McGregor postulated two types of theories still prevalent in organizations. Theory X and Theory Y attempt to describe how people relate to some organizations today. Theory X states that people are directed and will not produce unless coerced or made to produce in an organization. Theory Y is based on an assumption that followers will fulfill the needs of the organization because they are already motivated to do so. Argyris (1957) provided a different viewpoint between the organization and the individual. He described his maturity-immaturity theory as the individual’s nature being that of self-discipline and the organization providing the means where individuals can make a creative contribution. On the other hand, Likert (1961a, 1961b, 1967) “suggested that leadership is a relative process in that leaders must take into account the expectations, values, and interpersonal skills of those with whom they are interacting” (Bass, 1990, p. 43). He further explained that effective leaders keep the needs of followers in mind when decisions were made, helping to advance the careers of followers by using their own influence as a leader. In terms of the theory under review, Blake and Mouton (1964, 1965) expressed different viewpoints. Their concept was based on the conceptualization that concern for the organization and the individual were separated. If leaders were concerned for the individual, then their concern for the organization had to be lower than the concern for the individual. They expressed these beliefs on a managerial grid. Leaders who rated the individual and the organization high would produce followers who had a commitment to their work and the organization they represented. During the same time, Maslow’s Theory of Eupsychian Management (1965) made mention the importance of managers supporting their subordinates and contributing positively to their self-esteem. This measure was important because it “emphasized a need for self-actualization, so that everyone would have the opportunity to become what he or she had the capacity to become.

The introduction of the leader-role theory suggested the concept that situations and individuals combine or interact in such a way to bring about the emergence of leaders. During this course of interaction, groups become structured in terms of positions and roles (Bass, 1990).

Characteristically, leaders perform the way they are expected to perform according to the way their roles are defined. Kahn & Quinn expressed the idea that “managers ordinarily must cope with conflicts among the different sources of information about their roles” (Bass, 1990, p. 44). Hunt, Osborn and Martin believed leaders in units where policies and procedures were followed had a tendency to have more leadership boundaries and discretion than leaders who were regulated in other ways.

Fiedler’s contingency theory (1967a) noted that the effectiveness of leaders who were task oriented and relations-oriented coordinated with the demands of the situation. However, a leader that is task

oriented will be effective in any given situation, whereas the relations-oriented leader will be most effective in situations between the two extremes. Fielder believed it was imperative to leaders' success to place individuals in situations that aligned with their skills. "A situation is favorable to the leader if the leader is esteemed by the group to be led; if the task to be done is structured, clear, simple, and easy to solve; and if the leader has legitimacy and power owing to his or her position" (Bass, 1990, p.47).

Exchange theories posit that leaders receive status from the group in exchange for goal accomplishment. The power of the leader becomes depleted when members discharge their obligations to the leader (Bass, 1990). T.O. Jacobs advanced the idea that a leader is as good as the group and their status and esteem correlates with the leader's commitment to the group in assisting them in attaining their goals. According to Kaplan and Lasswell, exchange can be achieved between the leader and the follower.

W.E. Scott (1977) articulated ideas to replace the idea that leaders changed the behavior of subordinates. The behavioral theory identified the need to replace the conception that leadership is due to influence or persuasion with analysis of the observable behavior of leaders that change the behavior of followers (Scott, 1977). Bass acknowledged "the day to day behaviors of the leader may be relatively unimportant to the supervisor-subordinate relationship compared to the leader's behavior when a subordinate experiences an intense demand or when a leader experiences a highly unexpected response" (Bass, 1990, p.49). A review of a study performed by Sims (1977) provided research that concluded if a leader evidenced positive behavior toward the subordinate, workers' performance improved.

The communication theory was based upon the use of rhetoric in small groups in regards to the emergence of a leader (Bass, 1990). Research was conducted by Sharf (1978) and created a rhetorical framework derived from a theory developed by Burke (1969). In his research to analyze the success of leaders in small groups, he sought to reveal the importance of leaders attaining cooperation from members in the group. According to Sharf, the analyses revealed how important it was for the leader to go beyond the symbolic divisions in an evolving leader.

In review of the theories of leadership, the attribution theory will be the final theory discussed. "This theory posits that every leader and follower has his or her own implicit theory of leadership" (Bass, 1990, p.49). In order to understand the leader, the behavior of the leader must first be understood, along with their thought process in regards to the situation they are experiencing at the time (Pfeffer, 1977).

CONCLUSION

The ideas expressed by Bass and Wren suggest that there is some relationship between divergent theories and leadership styles. Although some of the theories in this review were established years ago, they continue to provide an important blueprint for current leaders. As the 21st century progresses, it will be advantageous and necessary to continue to investigate and examine the importance of acquiring and applying exemplary leadership skills.

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