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Leadership Approaches—Developments—Trends



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Foreword

Everyone is talking about leadership. But what are the common approaches, camps and theories? What is current, what are the new classics and what is obsolete? The crisis and the latest Web 2.0 developments have not rendered the topic any less relevant. Which school of thought is closest to yours? This five-part reader on leadership, with its overview of approaches, developments and trends, provides references and guidance to help you anchor your own point of view.

Various scientific theories and approaches are described and contrasted, and their evolution is traced over time. In Part 1: Earliest Theories, the study describes the first theories of leadership, which were originally formulated in the United States and in Germany. Part 2: Systemic Leadership focuses on developments specific to the German-speaking countries. Part 3: Leadership as a Relational Phenomenon, Transformational Leadership, Values and Ethics discusses the development of leadership theories that take into account not only the leader, but also those who follow, the situation and the organization. Part 4: Motivation, Power and Psyche explores psychological research into the personality of the leader. Part 5: Leadership Today concludes the review of this topic, discussing representatives of the new classics in leadership research as well as the latest approaches and trends in the field, including leadership in light of Web 2.0. We end with a discussion of cultural aspects of leadership that are unique to Germany, taking into account the GLOBE study.

Our aim is to provide support for you in your daily, practical work with your executive board, colleagues and employees, and to contribute to the discussion about leadership in Germany and elsewhere.

Gütersloh, April 2011

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Introduction and Overview

Leadership is a social phenomenon that is found everywhere, a deeply human endeavor. For a long time, philosophers, scholars and leaders themselves have sought to develop models for organizing and exercising leadership in the best possible way. Even today, however, there is no single theory of leadership that applies in every case. Indeed, according to Weibler (2004), the main task for current leadership research is to determine exactly what is meant by the term leadership. Interest has centered on a variety of aspects of leadership—the intentions of the leader, leadership behavior or effectiveness in achieving a goal. Former United States President Harry Truman defined leadership as “the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do and like it.” Frances Hesselbein describes leadership as “a matter of how to be, not how to do. We spend most of our lives mastering how to do things, but in the end it is the quality and character of the individual that defines the performance of great leaders” (Hesselbein, 1990: xii). Peter Northouse defines leadership as a process whereby one individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007: 3). Heifetz describes leadership as the ability, through various activities, to mobilize people and organizations to adapt to changing conditions (Heifetz 1998). The main objective of this volume is not to define the concept of leadership, nor to formulate a single, all-encompassing, universally valid theory. Instead, it is to offer the reader a brief overview of a number of different academic theories. Common to all of the models covered in this book is that they seek to describe the phenomenon of “leadership” and/or to provide ideas about ways to (or not to) organize leadership effectively.

The concepts of leadership and management are used synonymously in the following chapters. Despite Warren Bennis’ famous observation that “managers do things right, leaders do the right thing,” when discussing certain models we use the terms management and managers, following the usage of the original authors.

We also make a distinction between leaders and leadership. A leader is an individual who exercises leadership, someone who leads others for the purpose of bringing

about change. Leadership is the process by which a leader promotes change, and generally includes the actions taken by the leader in conjunction with those being led, as well as the existing situation. The “followers” are the objects of leadership, or those who support the vision of the leader (McGovern, 2008). Most modern theories of leadership emphasize the interaction between the leader and the followers, rejecting the view that leadership depends only on the leader as an individual (Reggio et al. 2008).

Readers should note that the materials contained in this volume are in some cases normative prescriptions, in others descriptions. There are differences, moreover, in the degree and quality of empirical review to which the various models have been subjected.

To the extent possible, the individual sections have been organized to reflect historical trends:

Part 1: “Earliest Theories” describes the first theories of leadership, which focus on individual leaders, and the ideas about leadership style and situational leadership that developed out of those theories. It also describes the Harzburg model, which was developed in Germany just as the field of research into leadership styles was being developed in the United States.

Part 2: “Systemic Leadership” is devoted to major developments in the field of leadership theory in the German-speaking countries. It describes various approaches to leadership from the perspective of systems theory, tracing their evolution and highlighting differences and similarities. The intrapreneurship approach, which also had its origins in German-speaking Europe, is described as well.

Part 3: “Leadership as a Relational Phenomenon, Transformational Leadership, Values and Ethics”

The first section discusses theories that focus on the relationship between the leader and followers, such as the servant leadership, leader-member exchange (LMX) and team leadership theories. Transformational leadership is then distinguished from transactional leadership, and the most recent derivative developments are described. Leadership theories that focus on ethical behavior and values, such as authentic leadership, ethical leadership and toxic leadership, make up the final section of this chapter.

Part 4: “Motivation, Power and Psyche”

This chapter looks primarily at the contributions of psychological research that deal with the phenomenon of leadership. First it presents selected theories on motivation, and on the relationship between leadership and motivation. It turns then to the micropolitical approach, which makes power a focal issue. Perspectives drawing on the psychology of personality and psychodynamics again focus on the personality of leaders, but also take into account other personalities and how they interact. The chapter concludes with sociopsychological approaches (attribution theory) and positive organizational behavior, an offshoot of positive psychology.

The last chapter, Part 5: “Leadership Today”, concludes the (historical) overview of leadership research, citing selected representatives of the new classics in leadership research (such as Warren Bennis, Peter Drucker and Edgar Schein) and theories of holistic and adaptive leadership. This is followed by a description of current topics and trends in leadership research, including leadership in light of Web 2.0. An examination of cultural aspects of leadership specific to Germany concludes this chapter.

Unless otherwise indicated, the reader is based on the mutually helpful texts *Leadership—Theorien, Ansätze und Forschung im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Leadership—Theories, Approaches and Research in the German-Speaking Countries) by Maria Stippler and the “Leadership Theory Summary Paper” by Seth Rosenthal and Sadie Moore. The purpose of the Rosenthal and Moore study (2009) was to describe the latest research on leadership conducted in the United States. Complementing that work, the study by Stippler (2009) summarizes features and trends that are specific to the German-speaking world. Both of the above studies were compiled in 2009 on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung as part of the Leadership Development program; they have been combined, enhanced and published in the form of the present reader by the Corporate Culture in a Globalized World program.

Part 1: Earliest Theories

Maria Stippler, Seth Rosenthal, Sadie Moore

1 Introduction

This chapter describes the origins of modern leadership research. It begins with three person-centered leadership theories: the “great man” theory, trait theory and skills theory. These three approaches are similar in that they focus on the leader as an individual. Little consideration is given to the role of those who follow and of the prevailing situation. The “great man” theory focuses on the personality of the leader, while trait theory emphasizes characteristics that remain stable over time and are independent of the situation. Both concepts are based on the assumption that the crucial factors in successful leadership are inborn. This is not true of the third person-centered model, skills theory, which focuses on skills that can be developed and trained.

The next section of this chapter looks at the next area with which leadership research was concerned: leadership styles, situational leadership, contingency theory and the path-goal theory. Here scholars recognized that successful leadership is not merely a function of the personality of the leader, but also depends on the situation; greater emphasis was placed on how leaders behave in specific contexts.

After considering these theories, which were developed primarily in the United States, we look at Germany and what was happening there during the same period. The Harzburg model is an approach to leadership that seeks to eliminate authoritarian structures, with delegation of responsibility playing an important role.

2 Person-Centered Theories of Leadership

Prior to the 20th century, nearly all leadership discourse focused on the individual leader rather than on the relationship between leaders and followers. Early theories of leadership focused on leaders, virtually ignoring the relationship between leaders and followers. The search for the hallmarks of successful leaders can be found in Chinese

literature as far back as 600 BC, in Egyptian and Babylonian legends, and in the works of Plato (Bass and Stogdill, 1990).

Leadership was thought of as flowing in a single direction from the leader to the following masses, which were seen as collective entities. Theories that fall under this rubric include the great-man theory, trait theory and skills theory.

The great-man theory

Until the mid-20th century, most research and popular discourse on leadership focused on “great men.” These early theorists modeled their concept of leadership after great social, political and military leaders from history.

Leaders were viewed as unique people who were endowed with innate qualities and characteristics that naturally enabled and even predestined them to lead. They were not like other people. Indeed, in his essay “The Hero as King,” Carlyle exhorted followers to revere “able and noble” leaders, who knew what was best for them. This theory also held that these gifted leaders were able to singlehandedly shape history and society, and that they would have been leaders no matter what the circumstances.

Trait theory

Studies of leadership from the early 20th century focused on identifying the specific traits and abilities that characterized successful leaders. Known as trait theory, this model assumed that effective leaders have particular abilities and characteristics, and that these traits are stable, enduring, easily transferable across situations, and clearly identifiable and measurable. Proponents of trait theory sought to identify the most desirable and effective leadership traits (Bass, 2008).

In 1948, Ralph Stogdill, using the results of 124 studies from the previous 40 years, compiled a comprehensive encyclopedia of the perceived traits of successful leaders, such as intelligence, alertness, persistence, self-confidence and initiative. He argued, however, that simply possessing these traits was not sufficient for becoming a successful leader; the traits had to match the needs of particular situations (Bass, 2008).

In 1974, Stogdill published his second review of the literature, which included 163 studies, and showed that certain traits make successful leadership more likely in any situation. These traits include:

1. The drive toward responsibility and task completion;
2. Vigor and persistence in achieving goals;
3. Venturesomeness and originality in problem solving;
4. The drive to exercise initiative in social situations;
5. Self-confidence and sense of personal identity;
6. Willingness to accept the consequences of decisions and actions;

7. Readiness to absorb interpersonal stress;
8. Willingness to tolerate frustration and delay;
9. The ability to influence other persons' behavior; and
10. The capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand.

In 1959, Richard D. Mann summarized the leadership traits identified by several different studies, singling out such characteristics as intelligence, masculinity, dominance and extraversion as qualities shared by successful leaders (Mann, 1959). A further analysis of the data by Lord, DeVader and Alliger (1986) confirmed that masculinity and dominance greatly influence followers' perceptions of leaders; the authors argue that these traits distinguish leaders from followers (Sohm, 2007).

Modern scholars agree that leaders tend to share certain traits, such as intelligence, endurance and extraversion (Wegge and von Rosenstiel, 2004), but trait theory has generally been abandoned, for two reasons (Lührmann, 2004): First, it is impossible to compile a definitive list of leadership traits that are beneficial in all situations, and second, this approach ignores the role played by followers and the situation.

Skills theory

By the mid-20th century, research on leadership evolved to focus on skills and behaviors that could be learned and developed rather than on innate characteristics. In 1955, Robert Katz published an article entitled "Skills of an Effective Administrator," in which he identified leadership skills that could be nurtured. He argued that effective leaders need three types of skills: technical, human and conceptual. Technical skills include the knowledge related to performing a particular job—for example, knowledge of a specific subject or of methods, processes or organizational structure. Human skills, which enable the leader to work productively with other people, include an understanding of human behavior and group processes, the ability to communicate, empathy, and the ability to create and maintain relationships. Conceptual skills make it possible to develop and formulate "big-picture" ideas. They include, for example, logical and analytic thinking, the capacity to grasp complex ideas, good judgment, an ability to take the long view, intuition, creativity and the ability to bridge differences (Northouse, 2007; McGovern et al., 2008).

Contemporary researchers, such as Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly and Marks (2000), are recasting skills theory as a comprehensive skill-based model of leadership that emphasizes a leader's ability to solve large-scale conceptual and organizational problems.

They expanded Katz's basic paradigm into a more complex approach, arguing that a leader's basic competencies can be affected by her experiences and environment.

This approach outlined five interrelated components of effective leadership performance: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career expectations and environmental influences.

There is some disagreement as to whether this should be seen as a separate model (Northouse, 2007) or as an offshoot of an existing one (Yukl, 2010). In any case, skills theory emphasizes the importance of context and places learned skills, rather than inborn traits, at the center of effective leadership. It is similar to trait theory in that both theories focus on leaders' core attributes, but both also face difficulties in assembling universal lists of leadership attributes that are applicable across dissimilar situations.

Although trait theory and skills-based approaches are still supported by some scholars, most leadership theory has moved away from a focus on the traits and abilities of leaders to more nuanced explorations of leadership as a relationship between leaders and followers.

3 Research on Leadership Styles

In contrast to the theories described above, which focus on the traits and abilities of the leader, the following models emphasize how leaders actually behave. These approaches assume that the most effective leadership style will be determined by the situation, rejecting the notion that a single catalogue of traits or skills can be successful in dissimilar situations. These researchers also consider the interactions between leaders and followers in determining the styles most effective for working within particular contexts.

Style theory

Style theorists generally identify two main categories of leadership behavior: task behaviors and relationship behaviors. Task behaviors provide structure, define roles and help a group achieve its goals. Relationship behaviors facilitate harmonious group morale and cohesion by helping members feel comfortable with themselves, their cohorts and their situations (Northouse, 2007). The style approach seeks to identify how leaders can most effectively combine these two behaviors for optimal outcomes.

Leadership-style research at Ohio State University

During the 1960s, several studies at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan, as well as work by Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, investigated the style approach (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

At Ohio State, researchers developed the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), which asked subordinates to answer a number of questions about their leaders.

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