

Approaches to leadership and management studies in the workforce



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What are the different approaches to the study of leadership, Management and Teamwork and how they are relevant to today's workplace? Choose at least two different theories for each topic and discuss critically how they are relevant to current organisational practice.

One of the earliest theories of leadership, and what made a good leader, was the traits or qualities approach. This theory formed the basis of most early leadership research. This theory paved the way for future research with more fully developed hypotheses, such as . Early trait researchers focused on what personality attributes contribute to making a person an effective leader, rather than later research which incorporated examples of great leaders. Leadership was seen as a unidimensional, measurable personality trait and researchers believed that great leaders are born great leaders. They investigated the difference between leaders and followers, to identify any correlation/differences which they may come across. It was found that only a few traits can very slightly distinguish a between a leader and a follower, such as height, extraversion and intelligence. These small differences were put down to errors in leader selection, or other extraneous variables such as the failure to measure critical attributes.

Researchers produced a list of leadership traits, which were meant to indicate a person's ability to lead effectively. None of the lists were exhaustive, and some missed out critical leadership attributes. This theory is still an important one, however, as even today lists of traits are still used to identify strong leaders. In 1989 John Gardner published a study of many leaders and concluded that there are some attributes that appear to make a leader successful in any situation. These traits included characteristics such

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as self-confidence, intelligence and perseverance. The fact that this theory, however basic it may be, is still being used in the modern day demonstrates that its findings must be sound.

Although it was assumed that leadership was an attribute that somebody is born with, researchers found that the differences between leaders and followers varies widely across different sectors, jobs, people etc. This evidently shows us a limitation to this theory. Unfortunately, it seems that leadership is not a trait that you can be born with, and further research will be required to fully understand what distinguishes a leader and a follower. In addition, researchers often found that some individuals who had all the attributed they associated with a good leader to be less likely to become a leader. This means that this theory cannot accurately be applied to help us recognise what makes somebody a good leader, and so it is a limited theory.

In my own opinion, I believe that the trait theory needs some further backing up with further research, but that the basic premise is sound. When I work as a team leader at Sainsburys, I am required to lead a group of people to ensure that queues are managed and customers are kept happy. I am also required to deal with colleagues, and as part of this I am required to have an understanding of them and their needs as well as keeping them motivated. I believe that I was promoted to the role I currently hold because I hold some of the personality traits that Garnder published in 1989. On the contrary, I would argue that I do not hold every quality on the list, and I have been promoted over people who perhaps hold more of those qualities. That said, I believe that this theory is strong, and will be made stronger by further research and evidence being given.

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A more thoroughly developed model of leadership includes the transformational leadership theory. This theory is opposed to transactional leadership, where a manager would foster a relationship of mutual dependence, whereby an employee will benefit from doing what their manager asks. Transformational leadership can create higher levels of commitment from the employee, whereby “ leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation” (Burns 1978). This theory was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, in his research into political leaders, but his findings have now been extrapolated into organisational behaviour. Now, 30 years of research have shown that a combination of transactional and transformational leadership styles positively creates a wide array of performance outcomes (Bass & Bass 2008).

There are three key elements of transformational leadership, each amplifying the emphasis on creating a vision for the organisation. Firstly, the leader is encouraged to exercise individual consideration. When an employee feels like his views are being listened to, they are much more likely to experience heightened levels of motivation. This is a well-known need for employees, and many organisations pay special attention to this factor. Indeed, at Sainsburys, monthly Great Place to Work (GPTW) groups are held in stores and store support centres across the country, to allow grassroots involvement in the direction of the company. Colleagues are encouraged to speak to their GPTW representative about issues or queries they may have, and when they receive a response it gives the impression of very open and individualised communication. Secondly, another well

recognised factor of leadership is intellectual stimulation. It's important that employees are being challenged in their job roles, not only to benefit the organisation with upskilled colleagues, but to stimulate and encourage creativity. For a leader who follows this theory, unexpected situations can be seen as learning opportunities, and colleagues feel as if they are making great progress in their role, and as such are more likely to continue to follow your direction. Thirdly, inspirational motivation is perhaps the most effective factor of transformational leadership. Leaders set high standards and are seen to follow them. They set a good example of themselves as something for their followers to idealise. Purpose and meaning are provided for the task at hand, and this gives followers a reason to perform well. For example, at Sainsburys, my manager will often be seen on the front end, setting an example of queue management and presentation. If the standards are not high enough, my manager will provide a vision for colleagues as something to aspire towards. This means that colleagues are willing to invest more effort in their tasks, with higher levels of optimism and beliefs in their abilities.

To summarise, this theory seems to have spread widely as is certainly encouraged by senior management in my workplace. The research that Bass & Bass 2008 have provided on top of the original theorem strengthens its place in organisational practice. The theory is also transferrable to the worlds of education and politics, whereby leaders seek approval, optimism and commitment from followers. This leads me to conclude that the transformational leadership theory is strong, as it is currently in practice in different sectors all over the world.

Teamwork

A key theory of teamwork is the social identity theory. A feature of the significance of group membership is the concept of social identity theory. Tajfel and Turner originally developed the idea of the social identity theory as a means of understanding the psychology of inter group discrimination. Within large scale organisations there will be a wide array of different but overlapping groups representing a variety of functions. An effective organisation is dependent upon the extent to which these groups can work together. Unfortunately, different groups are often part of complex relationships which can foster conflict and miscommunication. Therefore, different groups can be divided into “ them” and “ us” based through a process of social categorization (i. e. we put people into social groups). This is known as in-group (us) and out-group (them). Social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image. The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image (Tajfel and Turner 1979). For example, a colleague working the deliveries at a supermarket (a very manual and physically exhausting task) may perceive their colleagues on the checkouts as lethargic and lazy as they don't appear to be working as hard. Likewise, a colleague on the checkout (who deals with difficult customers all day) may perceive the warehouse colleague as rude and territorial, as they don't deal with customers at all. This can lead to a large rift dividing two groups who are working towards a common goal.

The social identity theory has recently been recognised and acted upon by Sainsburys. In 2018, they announced plans to revamp the hierarchy in stores. They reduced the number of different departments (or groups) from 22 to just 5. Colleagues would have to learn how work on other departments in their job family, which combined many different small groups into much larger ones, with the intention of creating a Winning Team. This winning team would work together towards a common goal, checkout staff may be required to help work deliveries, whereas warehouse staff may be required on the checkouts to support busy periods. This mixing of groups helped to reduce the effects of casual stereotypes that had arisen around different departments. Although this was a difficult change for the company to make and enforce, the effect it has had has been positive. Successful inter group bias enhanced self-esteem among colleagues, and their willingness to work together towards a common goal has increased. This is a great example of this theory being considered in industry, which demonstrates the strength of the theory.

Bibliography

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