

Comparison of behavioral and contingency approaches to leadership

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



Abstract

The behavioral theory of leadership and the contingency theory of leadership are two different approaches used by behavioral scientists to understand leadership; the intention is to present a comparative analysis of the two leadership theories. A detailed description of the two theories has been presented. Ideas and concepts from web-based articles have been utilized for presenting the comparative analysis of the two theories. No attempts have been made to recommend or to identify any one theory as being superior to the other; however similarities and dissimilarities of the two approaches have been identified.

Introduction

A leader is a person in a group who possesses the personality and skills that make other people follow him, the leader has the capability to make other members of the group act in a way that helps in the achievement of common goals. (Ward). In context of modern business organization, managers assume the role of a leader. Leadership has been widely studied by researchers and they have come up with several theories which explain how few individuals possess the ability to control a group. The trait theory was first used to explain why some people are capable of assuming the role of a leader? According to this theory leadership is a trait which means some people are endowed with certain attributes which make them a natural leader. The trait theory was later replaced by the behavioral theory which assumes that a leader is accepted as a leader because he exhibits an appropriate behavior which marks him out as the leader; this theory also

showed that any person can become a leader by developing an appropriate behavior. The behavioral theory was later replaced by the contingency theory which seeks to explain leadership in terms of relationship between different groups of individuals. (StatPac)

Behavioral Approach to Leadership

The Idea of behavioral leadership surfaced during 1950's and 1960's. The propagators of the behavioral theory studied what leaders did, and what their behavior was towards their followers? Researchers identified patterns of behavior which was exhibited by leaders and grouped them into distinct styles. (Classical leadership)

The following are the four main styles of behavior that managers can adopt for different purposes.

Concern for task

This style emphasizes on task. The followers or subordinate are only seen as means of accomplishing the task. (Classical Leadership)

Concern for people

This style is also referred to as humanistic approach. When managers adopt this style of leadership they exhibit a more people centric behavior which implies that people are not equated as mere means of production. The manager recognizes that subordinates need for growth and provide opportunities for development of subordinates.(Classical Leadership)

Directive Leadership

Managers who desire absolute control of their subordinates usually tend to adopt this behavioral style. Practitioners of this style do not allow their subordinates the freedom to exercise discretion, they expect their subordinates to act in accordance to instruction and subordinates are expected to approach the leader in regards with all issue that require discretion.(Classical Leadership)

Participative leadership

When leaders adopt this style they are willing to share some authority and decision making power with their subordinates. (Classical Leadership)

Generally

Directive leadership style is employed when subordinates have to perform repetitive task, directive style is also ideally suited for the purpose of training new employees. The participative style is ideally employed while handling a team of highly skilled individuals; generally middle level managers adopt this style while handling operational managers.

Contingency Approach to Leadership

Contingency theory assumes that the leadership style depends on situational conditions, which implies that a leader who is successful in a particular situation may not necessarily be successful in another situation. (Classical Leadership)

The situational conditions can be analyzed on basis of three factors which are;

Relationship: Relationship implies to the nature of emotional bonding that exists between the leader and his subordinates. The relationship is said to be good when the leader is liked by his subordinates. Similarly the leader-subordinate relationship can be stated as being poor when the leader is not liked by his subordinates. A leader who shares a good relationship with subordinates is in an advantageous position because the subordinates tend to be more co-operative and enthusiastic about work. In a situation where the leader shares a bad relationship with subordinates, the subordinates tend to be less enthusiastic about work and follow the leaders instruction only because they are required to do so because of the authority that the leader holds (Classical Leadership)

The Structure of Task

The term structure is synonymous to the term job description. Any activity that the subordinates are expected to perform have a certain degree of responsibility associated with it. The job description defines the exact procedure which has to be followed in order to accomplish a certain task, further more the job description also identifies various success or failure related outcomes of the task where the performer of the task can or cannot be held liable for the outcome of that task. If the job or task is well defined the leader is able to yield a greater control over his subordinates. (Classical Leadership) A well defined structure of task gives the manager the power to hold a subordinate responsible in an event of a negative outcome. If the structure of task is not well defined then subordinates develop a tendency to put the blame of negative outcome on environmental factors by citing excuses such as equipment failure. A well defined structure of task will

help the leader to determine the appropriate cause of outcome and if he finds that a subordinate has been irresponsible in the event of performing a task then the leader is in the position to take a justified disciplinary action against the guilty subordinate.

Authority and Power:

A Leader can enjoy a greater influence on subordinates if the organization provides him with a greater authority and power. (Classical Leadership) Amount of power or authority that a leader enjoys is determined by the extent of responsibilities that is bestowed upon the leader by the organization. Power indicates the extent to which a leader can exercise his discretion. When managers are given a complete authority over their subordinates, the subordinates become highly controllable because they are aware of the fact that their manager holds the power to initiate actions that may affect them adversely.

Four distinct leadership styles are defined under the contingency theory these styles can be adopted to handle different situations.

Telling (high task/low relationship behavior)

This style requires that managers provide a lot of guidance and supervision to their subordinates. This style is ideally suited for repetitive task and can also be implemented for training new recruits. (Classical Leadership)

Selling (high task/high relationship behavior)

Although the manager provides direction they also make an attempt to encourage subordinates to build faith in the task which they are to perform.

(Classical Leadership)

Participative (low task/high relationship)

This style is used when subordinates are capable of making decision. The role of the leader is to provide guidance and support. (Classical Leadership)

Delegating (low task/low relationship)

The leader monitors the main issues but the responsibility of the task is completely handled by the subordinates. This style is adopted with a group of highly competitive subordinates. (Classical Leadership)

Conclusion

It is observed that the contingency leadership theory stems from the behavioral theory. Both approaches seek to define leadership in context of the behavior exhibited by a leader in different situations. The contingency theory however helps in a better understanding of the behavior of a leader in a particular situation by also taking into account two factors that are a part of the organizational framework. Authority and job description are the two organizational factors that are taken into account while determining the effectiveness of a leader. Based on these factors one may be in a position to determine whether a person who has been an effective leader in a certain situation can or cannot exhibit successful leadership in another situation.

The behavioral model does not allow for organizational factors so it becomes difficult to analyze whether a certain behavior which works well under a

certain organizational condition will continue to yield positive result if organizational factors are changed. For instance it is not possible to analyze using the behavioral model the change in the effectiveness of the leader if organizational policies are changed, using the behavioral model it cannot be predicted whether an operational manager will continue to be an effective leader when a change in organizational policies prohibit him from taking disciplinary actions against his subordinates.

In context of leadership style there is an adequate similarity between the behavioral leadership theory and the contingency leadership theory, furthermore the similarity also exists where implacability of these styles is concerned.

The participative style which appears in both the contingency and the behavioral model has similar implications and is applied in similar situations. The Telling style of the contingency approach bears similarity to the directive style listed under the behavioral theory. So it may be stated that only a difference in terminology exists where pre- defined styles are concern

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