

# Historical trends in leadership theory and research

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



Summary of “ Historical Trends in Leadership Theory and Research” Interest in leadership increased during the early part of the twentieth century. In American, elected officials and leaders are held accountable to followers to greater degree than in countries that have experienced of aristocratic, and granting followers the right not only to observe their leaders but also to describe their behavior as it is perceived is not regarded as a threat to the status or authority of leaders. These made leadership became an American creation.

American theory and research in leadership was developing in this context. Practical demands arising from two world wars stimulated new trends and the development of new methodologies. In fact, World Wars I and II mark the boundaries among three major stages in the study of leadership. Definitions of leadership Leadership in the earliest definitions was regarded as a focusing of group processes, and is conceived as a resultant of group processes and member interactions. Some scholars ease the task of the leader by establishing a theoretical base for his or her exercise of authority and control.

More recent definitions regard leadership as an aspect of role differentiation in a group; that is leadership is viewed as the act of initiating and maintaining role structure, and seek to provide a basis for explaining the origin and maintenance of leadership in newly created, as well as in long established groups. Type of leadership Early theorists sought to identify the various types of leaders that are to be found in a society. Six types of leaders were observed: authoritative leader, democratic leader, persuasive leader, representative leader, executive leader and intellectual leader.

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These different types of leaders and the basis for leadership positions are discussed more thoroughly in a few broad theoretical frameworks. Various theories of leadership While many different leadership theories have emerged, various attempts have been made to develop theories of leadership, explaining the emergence or maintenance of leadership or the relationship between leader behavior and follower response.

The author made a brief review of various theories of leadership (trait theories, environmental theories, personal theories, exchange theories, humanistic theories, expectational theories, contingency theories and path-goal theories) Then author concluded that a complete theory of leadership should explain: (1) the emergence of leadership in initially unstructured groups, (2) the maintenance of leadership once a role structure has developed and stabilized, (3) the relation of leader personality and behavior to follower and group response and (4) the conditions under which specific patterns of leader personality and behavior are effective.

Trait research of World War I Leadership trait theory is the idea that people are born with certain character traits or qualities (physical, social background, intelligence and ability, personality and social and task orientation). Since certain traits are associated with proficient leadership, it assumes that if you could identify people with the correct traits, you will be able to identify leaders and people with leadership potential. Most of the time the traits are considered to be naturally part of a person's personality from birth.

From this standpoint, leadership trait theory tends to assume that people are born as leaders or not as leaders. However, the idea that leadership traits are inborn and unchangeable appears to be incorrect. Leadership traits has traits has not proved useful for the selection of leaders. Small group research of World War II and Post-World War II This period of study relied heavily on observations of behavior rather than on measures of personality characteristics. Two lines of research developed rapidly following World War II: (1) the controlled group experiment ; (2) the survey of formal organizations.

The controlled group experiment was largely concerned with: (1) emergence of the leadership role, (2) factors in leader-follower interaction and (3) the relation of leader behavior to group performance. The survey of formal organizations was concerned to some extent with leader-follower interactions, but largely with the relation of leader behavior to follower satisfaction and group productivity. The two lines of research tend to produce mutually confirming results when they converge.

Small group research has been far more sophisticated than the survey, not only in the exercise of experimental controls, but also in the system of variables that it has investigated. Emergence of the leadership role: Leadership is an aspect of role differentiation in a group, leaders emerge through the interaction process by the use of either task or interpersonal skills. Once positioned, they uphold the norms, clarify goals and provide direction for the group. Factors in leader-follower interaction: The trait

approach assumed that the personality of a leader and its effect on followers was relatively constant in all situations.

However, research with experimental groups suggests that the behavior of a leader change under different situational demands and the personality of followers affects their reactions to the leader. Research on conditional relationships indicates that the personality of the leader interacts with the personality of the follower group to determine satisfaction and performance, and the relationship between leader behavior and group performance is contingent upon the ease or difficulty experienced in exercising leadership, and the findings suggest that the behavior of the leader is not fixed in all situations.

Leader behavior and group performance: Leadership is of little significance except as it affects the performance and satisfaction of the group of followers. Thus, the real criterion of leader effectiveness is group performance. In general, personal patterns of behavior tend to foster group cohesiveness and follower satisfaction, impersonal patterns of behavior tend to facilitate group productivity. But various situational factors as well as follower personality moderate the relationship between leader behavior and group performance. Thus, it is difficult to prescribe a single pattern of behavior that will be effective in all situations.