

# Evolution of leadership models

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



What is leadership? And how has the theory on leadership developed?

Greenwood (1993) paints an interesting if somewhat surprising picture as he reviews the development of leadership theory from the turn of the twentieth century onward. Greenwood (1993) describes how in the early 1900s the Father of Scientific Management, Frederick Taylor while not directly writing about leadership in his description of the role of the supervisor introduced the matter of traits and its link to situation.

He did so as he described the ideal traits to be found in an effective foreman even while acknowledging that no one person would have all those characteristics and so there was the need for by dividing the work into specialized areas. Further, from the nineteenth century Thomas Carlyle examined the characteristics of great men “ positing that the rise to power is rooted in a heroic set of personal talents, skills or physical characteristics” (Heifetz, 1998: 16).

At the start of the twentieth century, other scholars (Bird, 1940, Tead and Metcalf, 1920, Barnard, 1938), also affirmed that successful managers have certain traits. However, in 1948 Stogdill’s seminal work highlighted the inconsistencies in the trait theory studies significantly dismantled the theory noting that: The evidence suggests that leadership is a relation that exists between persons in a social situation, and that persons who are leaders in one situation may not necessarily be leaders in other situations.... Stogdill, 1974 cited in Greenwood, 1993: 7

Interestingly, Davis (1934) referring to traits noted there was no checklist for success but stated that leadership characteristic “ they are necessarily a function of the characteristics and requirements of the leader and the

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particular situation, as well as the innate capacities of the executive himself” (Davis, 1937 cited in Greenwood, 1993: 8). By 1955 Koontz and O’Donnell building on his work posited that the trait theory was of little promise noting that leadership involved the power of persuasion upon followers and that the quality of leadership was impacted by certain environmental factors. Leadership theory was also influenced by human relation considerations, which emerged around about the same time. These thinkers made the link with leadership as it relates to the leader’s ability to connect with people, to empathise, develop teams and to delegate and emphasized that the follower was central and leadership focused on the needs of the follower. So while the movement did not develop a leadership theory it introduced the linkage between individual needs, observations and group dynamics and appropriate styles of leadership behavior.

Blake and Mouton challenged Davis’s theory of behavior stating that “ the dimensions needed for an effective description of operational conduct are attitudinal variables, not behavior variables” (cited in Greenwood, 1993: 13). Using the managerial grid and attitudinal variables the writers posited that there was one best way to lead but differing tactics depending on the situation. This premise is not supported by the situational theory, which focuses on many leadership styles which depends on the situation.

In many ways situational theory is a convergence of many schools of thought; although the path to its development has been ‘ messy’ and sometimes circuitous. The theory is based on “ leadership effectiveness ... strongly tied to a leader being demanding and simultaneously sensitive to the needs of the followers” (Greenwood, 1993: 14). It predicts leadership

performance based on interaction between leadership personality and the leader's control of the situation. In this regard, the theory is a variance with Blake and Mouton's view of one best style.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) classical work supports the contingency theory and described seven leadership styles, which were employed depending on interrelatedness of three key issues: forces in the manager, the subordinate and the situation. As noted by the writers, the successful manager of men can be primarily characterized neither as a strong leader nor as a permissive one. Rather, he is one who maintains a high batting average in accurately assessing the forces that determine what his most appropriate behavior at any given time. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973: 180) Situational Model versus LMX

The situational approach has evolved into a situational leadership model, which combines the four styles of leadership linked with the nature of the task and the performance readiness of the individuals to determine the most appropriate leadership style. Performance readiness is based on two principal issues ability and willingness. By combining the leadership styles with performance readiness continuum matrix one is able to match performance readiness with leadership style. So for instance a low performance readiness (R1) would require a telling style (S1) (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2008).

The work of Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder (1993) writing on creating readiness for organisational change provide a framework of readiness and urgency, which is related to the Situational Model and supports the premise that readiness is linked to leadership style. On the other hand, the LMX <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-leadership-models/>

theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) is a more recent theory, which examines the three domains of leadership; that is leader, follower and relationship in order to increase predictability of leadership practices. It incorporates operations and relationship in the leadership process.

However, Stage 3 Leadership Making and Stage 4 – Team Making two important elements of the leadership process are still evolving. In my opinion, while the concepts are of interest it has not yet matured sufficient to be a useful tool when compared to the Situational Model. In summary, the situational model while not the end all and be all of leadership theory provides a useful tool for practitioners to apply in their professional practice. Concluding remarks I am amazed at the state of leadership theory despite the many years of intense study. Such is the complexity of the issue.

In my own professional practice I often adopt a leadership style that is in line with the contingency theory. With my team the style based on the model tends to be S2 while with some of the pilots countries where there is a concern with preparedness ranging between R1 and R2 I tend to adopt a telling or selling leadership style. Additionally, given the time limitation on the project readiness of the stakeholders can generally be described as low readiness/high urgency. I am not in apposition to replace staff so I will have to rethink my communication strategy ( Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993).

I start where I began what is leadership? In a sense I know more about what leadership is not. It is not about traits or personalities nor is it leader focused. Leadership in many ways is still an art, it is relational, reflexive,

intuitive and is a state within, which the leader and follower are inextricably linked.

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