

The evolution of leadership strategies research paper examples

[Business](#), [Management](#)



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Abstract

We have seen changes in the way management theory and leadership strategies are looked upon in the last 100 years. Conjured under the backdrop of numerous and varied events such as the industrial revolution in the early 1900s, the equalization of the treatment of races and gender, through the various economic depressions and worldwide political changes, the management aspect of business and life in general, has evolved at a sharper and more meaningful rate. This paper examines the evolution of management, from its early beginnings, to the scientific method espoused by Taylor, the findings of Henri Fayol, the summation of the human factor involvement by Max Webber, to the servant leader concept espoused by Greenleaf. The evolving waves of management theories have yet to stop as well and in the next 100 years, we will encounter new ways of explaining

things making us more effective, efficient and happier leaders of the world. Thus an examination of the history of this evolution is important and a worthwhile academic undertaking.

Introduction

The online resource Business Dictionary (2013) defines the word “Leadership” as those individuals in an organization that lead a group of people. Leaders exhibit clear and defined visions, share that vision to their followers in an effective and willing manner through the provision of appropriate information and acceptable methods while balancing the interest of all stakeholders of the organization .

Leadership is very important in today’s society. There are always opportunities to provide and exhibit leadership. Normally leaders arise when times are unstable, when there is a need to be an example of honest and ethical behaviour, when trying to influence followers and stakeholders towards a positive direction, and to when there is a desire to provide an environment that fosters progress, equality and sustainability . In today’s world, there is an opportunity to become a leader in almost any aspect society. If a person desires change and provide leadership when and where needed, then that person can become a leader.

One of the oldest theories of leadership is summarized under the “ Great Man Theory”. This theory, which was very popular in the 19th century, was borne from the various mythologies that people actually believed in about the popular leaders of that time . The Great Man Theory suggests that leaders are “ born” and not “ made”. This was taken as truth because the

great leaders then seem to have appeared ready to take on their jobs in those instances. It is the famed historian Thomas Carlyle who said in 1888 that “ The History of the World is but the Biography of Great Men” which meant that the how the whole world turned was because of the achievement of men with outstanding characteristics and capabilities . The Great Man Theory also suggested that leadership capabilities were inherited. This conclusion was made because the men that were evaluated for their leadership capabilities were men who were already in the position to lead (i. e. aristocrats). Even today, when we think of great leaders, we believe that there is some inheritance of good leadership qualities. Hence we associate a son to his father’s achievements, believing that the apple does not fall very far from the tree.

Significance of Leadership

Leaders are important because the decisions they make have profound effects on the lives of other people and very often they do create histories by affecting world-impacting events. However modern experts of leadership have now veered away from the fallacies of the Great Man Theory and now propose that all leaders are “ made” and not “ born” as what the theory suggests. The famed New York sociologist Herbert Spencer even said that leaders are “ products” of society, supporting the argument against the Great Man Theory. In his book entitled “ The Study of Sociology” he said “ you must admit that the genesis of a great man depends on the long series of complex influences which has produced the race in which he appears, and

the social state into which that race has slowly grown Before he can remake his society, his society must make him".

Types of Leadership

The types of leadership were defined by psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1939 that did a study on leadership styles in a school setting. According to this study, as summarized in by Cherry (2013), the different leadership styles are:

- Autocratic or authoritarian leadership - these are leaders that provide clear expectations from his constituents meaning they know exactly what is required to be done and how it should be done by whom. Because of this clarity of vision, an authoritarian leader does not need to consult with any other person for decision making. One of the drawbacks of this type of leadership is that there is very little creativity resulting from the decisions made by an autocratic leader. This style is also prone to abuse, as demonstrated by countries having dictators as country leaders. However, it is important to note that when decisions have to be made soon rather than later, this type of leadership style is most effective.

- Democratic leadership - this corresponds to an effective leadership style that offers guidance to constituents and participates in group-led decision making. Although this leadership style makes the group less productive, the quality of decisions are often higher and better since there is a consultative process that leads to a decision that benefits the entire group.

- Delegation leadership - also known as the Laissez-Faire leadership, this type is the least productive since this gives the group all the decision making

duties and does not offer any guidance. There is very little room for “ leadership” this way (Lewin, Lippit, & White, 1939).

Evolution of Leadership

Management experts explain that the reason why leadership theories have changed in the last century is due to the changing times and the role leaders have to play in their respective organizations. From what is known to be “ carrot-and-stick” types of entrepreneurs and managers to what many experts believe to be “ servant leaders” of today, the range of styles and the evolution of responsibilities is due to the increasing importance of leadership in each and every facet of society. Today leaders exhibit more of their personal values and character rather than utilize strong-arm techniques. How did leaders evolve into such admirable and civilized specimens of society and what lead to this evolution? After the “ Great Man Theory” the evolution of management studies have taken on a progressive stance. The “ Trait Theory” was very similar to its predecessor, the “ Great Man Theory” and assumes that leaders are those that have inherited qualities that make the effective. However, management students argue that many people have the necessary traits that are similarly found in great leaders but that these people are not in leadership position to significantly effect change. Therefore the “ Trait Theory” fails to hold proof that traits are inherited to make good leaders.

If it is not the traits that make a leader, maybe leadership is attributed to the variables within the environment that dictates the style of leadership that thus make a leader effective. This is the main hypothesis of the “

Contingency Theory” which states that a particular situation calls out for a particular type of leadership; therefore no particular style of leadership is “the best”. This theory stipulates that variables such as leadership style, specific aspects of the situation and even the quality of a leader’s followers or his team influence the success of the leader.

Similarly, “ Situational Theory” suggests that there are different types of leadership suitable for each situation. This supports the “ Contingency Theory” but focuses on the best course of action given the situation. The Situational Theory gives equal weight to an authoritarian style of leadership with a democratic style of leadership because the situations are different and suited for each style of leadership regardless of their results and outcomes.

Over the years, management professionals and academics focused on human behaviour as an aspect of leadership and management. “ Behavioural Theories” of leadership focus on “ making” a leader and not on “ inheriting” leadership traits. The theories that support human behaviour state that anyone can learn how to become an effective leader. Shortly after the birth of “ Behavioural Theories” of leadership, the notion of “ Participative” leadership came into focus. These theories suggest that a leader has to input all the contributions of his group members to be able to come up with well-rounded decisions. In “ Transactional Theories” the role of supervision, organization and group performance is the central focus of leadership strategies giving weight to the use of various approaches in influencing how group members behave. Finally, “ Relationship Theories” provide an idea on how the relationship between leaders and followers provide the necessary impetus for success. Leaders who follow relationship theories foster growth

in themselves and in their followers by providing a conducive working environment and setting high ethical and moral standards that they themselves practice .

Events that Shaped Leadership Theories

Leadership has been exhibited in great feats of human achievement. There is unquestionably effective leadership when the pyramids of Egypt were being built, when the Great Wall of China was being laid out, when the Taj Mahal in India was being drawn up or when the ancient architectural structures in Rome were conceived. We attribute the success of these marvels to the leaders that were in the position at that time to effect those marvels, but we never question the leadership frameworks they have used. In fact, the study of leadership started only in the 19th century due to the rise of “ entrepreneurial capitalism”. Even today, the idea of entrepreneurship is one of the most valuable principles of capitalism and merits its own detailed studies . By the 20th century, entrepreneurial capitalism gave way to “ managerial capitalism” due to the rise of entrepreneurs/business owners who, having gained success in their businesses used their funds to refinance their growth thus ushering in the formation of large organizations that were originally funded by external parties. The proliferation of these new types of organizations paved the way to widening management gaps, new challenges, and new opportunities for personnel development.

In the early 1900s, a mechanical engineer named Frederick Winslow Taylor started what is now known as the “ Scientific Management” movement. This

movement focused on how work was performed and the total effects of this metric on productivity at different levels of the organization. Taylor believed that it was more important for people to work optimally than for people to work hard. By 1909, the book “ The Principles of Scientific Management” was published by Taylor. In this book, he summarized that there is an effect of job optimization on work productivity and that this is the area that managers and workers should focus in collaborating on. This book ushered in the requirement of supervisors working closely with their workers and having standards of productivity. It also led to the promotion of the idea that a worker should receive fair compensation for a fair day’s work. It also led to efficiency studies not just in the human resource aspect of production but also in the physical and mechanical aspects of it. Taylor led studies on design efficiency of equipment, time and motion studies, all summarized in four principles famously known as “ Taylorism”. These are:

- Use of the scientific method to determine optimum way of doing tasks instead of using “ rules of thumb”;
- Job and personnel matching instead of random job assignments;
- Use of work performance monitoring instead of just “ commanding”; and
- Allocating time for planning and training to managers and performing jobs to workers .

At about the same time, Jules Henri Fayol, an engineer managing French mines concluded that the task of management is common to all aspects of human life. He also summarized that the business of managing these aspects have five basic functions which are:

- Planning

- Organizing
- Commanding
- Coordinating
- Controlling

Because of the universal applicability of these five basic administrative functions, Fayol concluded further that managers are indeed “made” and not “born” as opposed to the preceding management theories that leaders inherit leadership skills instead of learning them .

In today’s society, we laud leaders who show the characteristics of “servant leaders”. People from Nelson Mandela, to Mother Theresa, to Margaret Thatcher are lauded as great leaders because they all choose to serve-first. These leaders encouraged trust, collaborative efforts, and an almost mythical use of ethical capabilities and moral ascendancy. A servant leader is a true leader and not just a follower and the best outcome of a servant leader, according to Greenleaf himself, is when his followers are transformed into their own servant leaders.

Summary and Recommendations

In the last 100 years, the events that served as the backdrop for the evolution of management theory and leadership strategies are numerous and varied. From the industrial revolution in the early 1900s, to the equalization of the treatment of races and gender, through the various economic depressions and worldwide political changes, the management aspect of business and life in general, has evolved at a sharper and more meaningful rate. From mere workers people are now partners and co-

owners. From mere entrepreneurs we have become catalysts of economic change. And from simple leaders we have become human servant leaders. The world has not stopped evolving and management theory has yet to stop as well. In the next 100 years we will encounter new ways of explaining things making us more effective, efficient and happier leaders of the world.

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