

Leadership: then and now



A review of historical leadership perspectives: Introduction: Leadership has conventionally been taken as a topic of debate. A lot of theories have been put in place in order to describe the concept of leadership. Many consider it an abstract concept that is linked with the in-born qualities of an individual. Yet there are others that consider leadership quite measurable and think that it can be transferred from one individual to another or can be acquired through study and practice. This paper presents a brief review of the leadership perspectives of various theorists, philosophers and educationalists that have surfaced since 1940. Their perspectives about leadership will be analyzed in the chronological order, so as to build up a structured analysis of the historic interpretations of leadership.

Historical leadership perspectives:

From 1940 to 1950, a behavioral approach was used to identify leadership. That is why, leadership theory was often interpreted as the “ great man” theory (Barnett, 2010). According to Nisbet (1950), problems pertaining to the social relations can not be dealt with in the same way as chemists or physicians normally do. A leader builds an organization from the raw materials like an artist who makes a painting from colors. The concept of organization, to Nisbet (1950) is just as solid as a painting, therefore he compared a leader to an artist. “ Leadership is no more comprehensible than any other imaginative creation” (Nisbet, 1950, p. 708-709). Prentice (1961) emphasized that it takes adequate manual dealing for a leader to be successful more than his/her own popularity, fame, power or wisdom. A leader succeeds because he knows how to deal with men that are complex and significantly different from one another in nature, loyalty and mannerism. Leadership perspective of Prentice tells us that leader knows

how to interpret and deal with human psychology in order to make the followers comply with the instructions of the leader. McGregor (1966 cited in Thayer, n. d.) defined leadership in terms of the relationship among the leader, followers, social milieu and the organization. Similar approach was adopted by Gibb (1969 cited in Thayer, n. d.) in his interpretation of leadership. However, Gibb (1969) further narrowed the definition of leadership as he imparted little value to the personality or characteristic features and traits of a leader. According to Gibb (1969), what actually determine a leader's relation with and impact upon his/her followers is the image of leader as perceived by the followers and vice versa. Likewise, Bailey (1969) said that followers expect the leader to shine forth and be a role model for them so as to set an example for them. According to Almond (1973 cited in Thayer, n. d.), creativity and innovation are the most fundamental traits of a leader. A leader needs to be innovative and offer new ideas for good. Followers are influenced by the charisma of their leader. Greetz (1977) emphasized that charisma is symbolic and has to do very less with the personality characteristics of a leader. Thus, Greetz and Gibb place huge emphasis on the symbolism and impact of a leader on the followers. Similarly, Mitroff (1983) like McGregor, asserted that the relationship between a leader and the followers plays a decisive role in making it successful. A leader today, is seen as an individual who directs the whole workforce in favor of the organization while making sure that each and every follower is paid due attention. In the absence of prudent leadership, workers who feel unattended and neglected may lose interest in work and their competency is likely to be affected (Upson, 2010).

Review:

<https://assignbuster.com/leadership-then-and-now/>

Leaders mainly based their perceptions on empirical research from 1945 to 1960. Research became more and more theoretical after 1970. Accordingly, more leadership theories surfaced after 1970. In interpreting their perceptions about leadership, most researchers have chosen either a behavioral, or else, a scientific approach. Leadership thought has fundamentally been conveyed from educationalists and philosophers to young generation through management schools.

Because of its theoretical nature, leadership has been perceived by different educationalists in different ways. Analysis of the literature from 1940 to present suggests that leadership is indeed, a very broad term. Very few people have given their consent to a common definition of leadership. This may be attributed to the fact that leadership involves use of personal traits to control the intrinsic traits of other people (followers). Owing to its undeniable association with the human nature, leadership is very diverse in its interpretation. However, modern day leadership is comprehensively defined and is also considered measurable. Not many philosophers in the past could measure leadership.

References:

Bailey, F. G. (1969). *Stratagem and spoils: A social anthropology of politics*.

New York:

Schocken.

Barnett, T. (2010). *Leadership theories and studies*. Retrieved from

<http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/management/Int-Loc/Leadership-Theories-and-Studies.html>.

Greetz, C. (1977). *Centers, kings, and charisma: Reflections on the symbolics of power*.

<https://assignbuster.com/leadership-then-and-now/>

In *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Mitroff, I. I. (1983). *Stakeholders of the organizational mind*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nisbet, R. A. (1930). *Leadership and social crisis*. In A. W. Gouldner (Ed.), *Studies in Leadership*. New York: Harper.

Prentice, W. C. H. (1961). *Understanding leadership*. *Harvard Business Review*, Sep-Oct.

Thayer, L. (n. d.). *Leadership/Communication: A Critical Review and a Modest Proposal*.

Chapter 11. p. 231-263.

Upton, M. (2010). *What is Leadership Management?* Conjecture Corporation.

Retrieved from

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-leadership-management.htm>.