

Traditional and contemporary leadership



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Before we could tackle the complexities of traditional and contemporary leadership we should first answer the fundamental question as to what is leadership.

A text book definition of leadership is the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of a vision or a set of goals . Hitler in his book Mein Kampf writes, the art of leadership consists of consolidating the attention of people to a single adversary and taking care that nothing will split up that attention. But my favorite quote on leadership comes from was the five-star general in the United States Army and the 34th President of the United States Dwight D.

Eisenhower Leadership: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. I know not if either Hitler or Eisenhower had ever read a management text book but they had a pretty good idea of what Leadership was all about. It's about leading people towards a common objective either that be corporate success or systematic genocide. But how does one become a leader Are leader born or made It's the age old philosophical question of nature vs.

nurture which brings us to the most basic oldest and popular leadership model ??? the traits model of leadership???. Leadership traits theory is of the idea that people are born with certain characteristics which differentiate leaders from non leaders by focusing on personal qualities and characteristics. Most of the time traits are considered to be part of a person's personality, hence traits theory tends to assume people are either born as leaders or not. Evidence suggests there are four common

traits shared by most successful leaders. They are intelligence which means most leaders must be of somewhat higher intelligence than their subordinates.

Maturity successful leaders tend to be emotionally mature and have a broad range of interests. Be achievement driven, successful leaders are result oriented and once they achieve one goal they look for another. Have integrity successful leaders on the long term have integrity. Honesty was ranked highest among employees when it came to ranking traits of leaders. If leaders don't practice what they preach followers would see them as untrustworthy. The traits model of leadership can predict leadership however it falls short when it comes to distinguishing between effective and ineffective leaders. The simple fact that an individual exhibits the traits of a leader and others consider them a leader doesn't necessarily mean the leader is successful in getting his or her group to achieve its goals.

The failure in Traits theory led researchers in the early 1940's to behavior theories of leadership. The behavior model of leadership focuses on what leaders actually do and how they do it. The Ohio state university narrowed it down to two categories that substantially account for most of the leadership behaviors described by employees. They called these two dimensions initiating structure and consideration. Initiating structure refers to the extent to which a leader is likely to define and structure his or her role and those of subordinates in the search of goal attainment.

Characteristics of initiating structure are those who assign groups to a particular task, expects workers to maintain definite standards of

performance??™ and ??? emphasizes the meeting of dead lines??™.

Research which was undertaken at the same time at the University of Michigan also came up with two dimensions of leadership behavior.

Employee oriented leader and Production oriented leader.

Employee oriented leaders were those who emphasizes on interpersonal relations and took personal interests in the needs of the employees and accepted individual differences among members. Production oriented leaders in contrast tended to emphasize more on technical or task aspects of the job. Both employee oriented and production oriented are similar to the Ohio state dimensions. Where employee oriented is similar to consideration and production oriented is similar to initiating structure. However it is important to note that Michigan university researchers strongly favored employee oriented leadership where leaders were associated with higher group productivity and job satisfaction in comparison to production oriented leaders, Ohio state researchers suggested both consideration and initiating structure are important to effective leadership. Despite the breakthrough in leadership studies in the 40??™s and 50??™s it was soon apparent that leadership models needed to change with time. Linda Wachner was known for been a tough boss. She became CEO of Warnaco a struggling USD425 million dollar a year apparel company.

In 14 years Wachner transformed the company in to a USD2. 2 billion dollar enterprise. Their products ranged from Calvin Kline to Speedo. Wachners aggressive style often included humiliating employees in front of their peers which led to a high turn over in executive management. Nevertheless her style seemed very successful in fact Fortune magazine named her Americas

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most successful business women in 1993. By 1998 due to a reduction in demand for their goods and a fall in market share Warnaco was forced to file for Bankruptcy in 2001.

Linda Wachner's leadership had not changed to suit the times. Her aggressive headstrong tactics had driven away many competent executives and had isolated her from her employees, shareholders and creditors. From Wachner's example it was clear that leadership success was more complex than simply isolating a few traits and preferable behaviors. What worked in 1990 would not work in 2000. This led researchers to look at more contemporary models of leadership. Due to the inadequacies of traits and behavior theories researchers started focusing more on situational influences.

There have been several studies to try to isolate situational variables. The first and comprehensive contingency model for leadership was developed by Fred Fiedler in 1967. The Fiedler contingency model proposes that effective group performance depends on the proper match between the leadership style and the degree to which the situation gives control to the leader. A key factor to this theory is the individual's basic leadership style. Fiedler created the least preferred co worker (LPC) questionnaire. It asks individuals to think of the one person they least enjoyed working with and rate them on a 1 to 8 scale on contrasting adjectives. Based on your answers if you described the least preferred co worker in relatively positive terms (a high LPC score) you would be labeled as Relationship Oriented.

In contrast if you were to be described the least preferred co worker in negative terms (a low LPC score) you would be labeled as ??? Task Oriented???. Fiedler assumes that individual leadership style is fixed hence if the situation demanded a task oriented leader and the person was relationship oriented, either the situation needs to be modified or the person needed to be changed to obtain optimum effectiveness. In contrast to fiddlers contingency model Path Goal theory which was developed by Robert house assumes leaders are flexible and that the same leader can display any or all of these behaviors depending on the situation. Path goal theory extracts parts from Ohio states leadership research on initiating structure and consideration. Path goal theory suggests it??™s the leader??™s job to assist followers in attaining their goals and to provide the necessary direction and/or support to ensure that their goals are compatible with the overall objective of the group. An effective leader clarifies the path to help the follower and reduces any road blocks on the way to the achievement of their work goals. House identified 4 leadership behaviors the directive leader lets followers know what is expected of them schedules work to be done and gives specific guide lines to achieve a task. The supportive leader: who is friendly and shows concern for the needs of their followers.

The participative leader consults with followers and uses their suggestions before making a decision and finally the achievement oriented leader who sets challenging goals expects people to perform at their peak. There are two variables which moderate the leadership behavior out comes. They are the environment outside the control of the employee and those that are personal characteristics of the employee such as locust of control experience

and perceived ability. For example directive leadership leads to greater satisfaction when tasks are ambiguous or stressful rather than when they are highly structured and well laid out.

Directive leadership would seem redundant among employees who have a high perceived ability and considerable experience. These more contemporary approaches to leadership are deemed quite necessary in today's modern work place. Gone are the days of the baby boomers and the Gen X's. Gen Y's are more concerned with personal development than organizational loyalty. They are technologically savvy and want to be kept in the loop about things. Work life balance is a top priority.

The leadership methods of people like Linda Wachner would be obsolete and probably take them to many a labor tribunal. Another school of thought on modern leadership looks at the Transformational Leader. The theories we looked at above such as the Ohio state studies, Fiedler's model and path goal theory they have all been in concerned with Transactional Leaders. These kind of leaders guide and motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying roll and task requirements. Transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self interests for the good of the organization and are capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on their followers. Richard Branson is a good example of a transformational leader. Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs of their individual followers, they are able to excite and inspire followers to put an extra effort to achieve group goals and changes their followers awareness on issues.

In comparison to transactional leaders transformational leaders have charisma; they provide a clear vision and instill pride and gains respect and trust. They are inspirational they communicate high expectations they promote intelligence and gives individual consideration to employees coaches and advisors them. So what kind of leader do we need today Think of people like Richard Bryson, Barack Obama, Former Time Warner owner Ted Warner. Despite having common leadership traits the one significant characteristic they shared in common was Charisma. So what is Charismatic leadership Max Webber one of the first sociologist to discuss charismatic leadership defines charisma as ??? a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he or she is set apart from ordinary people and treated as endowed or supernatural or superhuman?;|???. Robert house states followers make attributions of heroic or extraordinary leadership abilities when they observe certain behaviors. Charismatic leaders have a clear vision and articulate that vision well.

They take personal risks and engage in self sacrifice to achieve that vision. They are able to make realistic assessments to environmental constraints; they are sensitive to follower needs and display unconventional behavior contrary to norms. Again Richard Branson been a daredevil adventurer is a perfect example of a charismatic leader who has unconventional behavior. Most researchers debate if charismatic leadership and transformational leadership is one and the same.

Robert house considers them synonymous. However Bernard Bass who first researched transformational leadership considers charisma to be part of transformational leadership but argues that transformational leadership is

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broader than charisma. Another researcher pointed out that the purely charismatic leader may want its followers to adopt their same world view but the transformational leader will attempt to instill in the followers the ability to question not only established views but those of the leaders as well.

We could conclude that the study of leadership is an ever evolving subject. There maybe some differences between traditional and contemporary leadership brought by changing times but the foundations remain the same. As time changes and technology improves the role of a leader becomes more complex. Similarly the study of leadership has also become more complex. The study of traits theory led to people looking at behavioral theories on leadership which in turn looked at situational influences. This led to Fiedler's contingency model of leadership and also to path goal theory. More modern research introduces transformational and charismatic leadership.

As to what future models on leadership would look like your guess is as good as mine. The more complex humanity gets and as our wants change over time so would our concepts on leadership. Leaders of the future need to adopt with change and so does the study of leadership