

LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND STYLES - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

One could say there are as many theories about leadership as there are researchers in the field. Building awareness of the existing approaches to leadership will help us: 1) recognize various styles in particular situations and assess their impact on people and results, and 2) adopt and use the style that is resonant with our personality/values and relevant to the needs of the situation.

MAIN IDEAS

Over time, a number of theories of leadership have been proposed. These theories include many aspects of leadership, one of which is “leadership styles”. Some of the key perspectives (schools of thought) of leadership theories include¹:

- **Great Man Theory:** based on the premise that great leaders are born and not made. Leadership traits are intrinsic to the person.
- **Trait Theory:** focuses on analysing mental, physical and social characteristics that are common among leaders (e.g. intelligence, strength, ...).
- **Behavioural Theories:** focuses on the behaviours of the leaders as opposed to their mental, physical or social characteristics, this includes leaders’ motivation and their orientation to the person and orientation to the tasks/results (a helpful framework is the Managerial Grid by Blake and Mouton).
- **Participative Leadership:** focuses on the involvement in decision making - this includes Lewin’s (1939) leadership styles (Autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire) and Likert’s (1967) leadership styles (Exploitive authoritative, Benevolent authoritative, Consultative, Participative).
- **Transactional Leadership:** views leadership as a transaction made between the leader and followers. Focuses on the clarity of what is required and motivation by reward and formal discipline/punishment. See hierarchy of needs, X & Y, or dual-factor theories
- **Transformational Leadership:** focuses mainly on the energy, charisma and vision of the leader to generate trust, inspire others and achieve transformation.
- **Contingency Theories:** state that a leadership style that works in some situations may not be effective in others. In this sense, there is no one best way of leading.
- **Situational Leadership:** Practice and experience soon revealed that in any given situation, effective leadership does not usually rely on only one style (autocratic, transforming, laissez-faire, consultative, people-focus, task-focus...). There are moments when different leadership styles apply. Hence, under this theory, the best action/behaviour of the leader is largely dependent on a range of situational factors, such as the context, the difficulty of the job, the motivation and the capacity of the team, the leader’s perception of himself...
- **New leadership schools** focused on other styles deriving from the above theories, including Neo-Charismatic Leadership, Visionary Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, Heroic Leadership, Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership...

Researchers have also studied models of dysfunctional leadership (Narcissistic Leadership, Bureaucratic Leadership,...).

The above approaches to leadership can be divided into two categories: descriptive theories (describing how leaders act) and normative theories (built on a set of moral principles or norms and providing guidelines for promoting ethical and life-giving leadership). Our approach in this manual is values-based and grounded in authentic, servant and emotionally intelligent leadership (see Bill George and Robert K. Greenleaf respectively) as well as the developmental theories of Leadership (William Torbert) and the theory of adaptive leadership (Ronald Heifetz).

New directions for leadership in a complex world

With today's complex challenges, organisations are facing thorny issues impossible for one type of leader to solve alone. Answers are no longer scripted and quick off-the-shelf fixes are not useful anymore. Sustainable solutions require ongoing processes of inquiry, learning, and adaptation at individual and collective level. In VUCA environments, it is less about embracing a particular style of leadership and more about continuously creating capacity to tackle challenges. The development of this adaptive capacity is the focus of Adaptive Leadership Theories (Ronald Heifetz) and Action Inquiry (William Torbert) which will be the focus of subsequent sections.

Leadership beyond authority: Ronald Heifetz emphasizes that all existing perspectives on leadership that focus on traits, styles, and situations have one key element in common. Each assumes that leadership is centered in the person who occupies the leadership position (authority) in the group. When analyzing leadership work in a group, he suggests to focus on the function's perspective of leadership and analyze the behaviors and interventions performed in the group instead of keeping attention only on the person in the formal authority role. For Heifetz, the essence of leadership work in a group is to help the group make progress and achieve its purpose. Since the behaviors of the formal group leader (the person in authority) and the remaining members are interdependent during the process of group interaction, both members and formal leaders face a collective responsibility and are called to exercise leadership to help the group face its challenges and move forward.

Leadership Agility: Another important contribution to our understanding of what it takes to lead in a rapidly changing and complex world is the work on leadership agility by William Joiner & Stephen Josephs. These leadership experts suggest that leaders are called to be comfortable with constant change and develop leadership agility at different levels. This capacity will determine our ability to achieve sustained success in an environment of accelerating change and increasing interdependence. In the broader sense, agility is our ability to sense and respond to changes in the general environment with actions that are focused, fast and flexible. By growing our ability to consciously step back, shift our thinking and gain a broader a deeper view of the situation, we are able to better re-engage and adapt to rapid change and lead through complexity. What does this imply?

- **Self-Leadership Agility:** the stance to see all experiences as opportunities to learn and grow (seeking feedback, developing new skills)
- **Stakeholder Agility:** the ability to work more effectively with diverse stakeholder and leverage our people resources (understanding stakeholders, resolving differences)
- **Creative Agility:** the ability to turn challenges into opportunities and reframe problems (stepping back from our habitual assumptions, analysing problems, creating optimal solutions)

- **Context Setting Agility:** the ability to scan the environment; frame initiatives; clarify the outcomes (scoping initiatives, setting direction)

Growing our agility throughout the various models: Our mastery of the above four vital competencies is a developmental journey: our ability to respond effectively to an increased level of change and complexity is intimately related to our ways of knowing and meaning-making. This will be further explored as we move forward in the module.

IGNATIAN NOTE

Pedro de Ribadeneira, a Jesuit who knew Ignatius well, wrote a treatise on Ignatius’s manner of government. Perhaps too idealistically, Ribadeneira tells us of how Ignatius could adapt his way of leading others in response to their needs:

He likewise showed his prudence and skill in another very important matter, namely, in knowing how to serve his subjects; because it sometimes happened that some one had great talent for a particular branch: for teaching or preaching, or dealing with princes, or helping his neighbour, and on the other hand, joined to these good qualities some imperfections which had power to destroy and hide the good which there was in that subject; and in order to improve the fruit which he was able to hope for, and for his humiliation, he would point out this human weakness.

But the prudence and wisdom of our holy Father was so great and divine that he knew how to make use of the good without the bad, and gather the corn without the cockle choking the good seed of our Lord; because he led his subject so straight and foresaw things with such care and prevision as was simply marvellous.

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Exploring leadership styles and models and understanding their relevance
2. Introducing new approaches to leadership (adaptive and developmental)
3. Initiating a reflection on how the above theories apply in our context and what adaptations are needed to lead more fruitfully.
4. Introducing leadership agility and linking the concept with the various modules

“In and of themselves, innocence and holiness are worth more than all else. However, unless prudence and agility in dealing with others are likewise present, these persons are lacking something, and are incapable of leading others.”

Ignatius of Loyola

[1] Peter Northouse offers more detail on each theory in his book “Leadership - Theory and Practice”, other experts like Antonakis and Day offer another grouping in their book “The Nature of Leadership” (chapter 1) which includes other schools like Biological/Evolutionary, Information Processing, New Leadership, Relational, and Sceptics.

[2] “Who do you say Ignatius is? Jesuit Fundamentalism and Beyond” - Philip Endean SJ