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A LEADERSHIP PRIMER: MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP DEFINED AND DISCUSSED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FOUR LEADERSHIP MODELS

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Managerial leadership is difficult to comprehensively define. A holistic understanding of managerial leadership is best obtained through examining and integrating multiple models. Four leadership models are reviewed from a historical, definitional, and applicatory perspective. The four models include three well-known, heavily researched theories (situational, transformational, and path-goal) and one relative newcomer (grass roots). Each model provides significant insights into the nature of true leadership, and the combination of these four models provides a holistic overview of leadership. After reviewing each model, the paper addresses points of convergence and divergence in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of managerial leadership.

Introduction

Managerial leadership is a construct that is easy to recognize but difficult to define (Yukl, 1989). Researchers have sought a universalized definition and have failed. Stogdill (as cited in Yukl) states that "four decades of research on leadership have produced a bewildering mass of findings....[and] the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced an integrated understanding of leadership" (1989: 253).

Although leadership models fall in and out of vogue, the absolute idea of leadership remains stable. Leaders have existed throughout history, regardless of the presence of the accurate or inaccurate models used to describe them. The fact that leadership exists as an absolute, non-transitory construct that does not fundamentally owe its existence or progression to a given model means that all models, regardless of their age, have potential application within today's modern leadership environment.

The current paper suggests that a comprehensive understanding of leadership is best obtained through the examination of multiple models. Four models will be reviewed from a historical, definitional, and applicatory perspective. Each model, or piece of the managerial leadership puzzle, provides significant insights into the nature of true leadership, and the combination of these four pieces provides a comprehensive overview of leadership.

The four investigated models (situational, transformational/transactional, path-goal, and grass-roots) include three well-known, heavily researched theories and one relative newcomer (grass-roots). After thoroughly reviewing each model, the paper addresses points of convergence and divergence in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept managerial leadership.

SITUATIONAL MODEL

Historical Context and Definition

Situational leadership theories emerged in the 1960s as society began to reexamine traditional moorings and throw off traditional approaches. Rebellion was in; authority was out (Bodroghkozy, 1991). Relativism raged (Schaeffer, 1976). The idea of a leader who possessed absolute, intrinsic leadership skills fell out of vogue and was replaced by the idea of a relativistic leader who was primarily deemed to be a leader by sole virtue of his or her situation. The theory was first promoted by Hersey and Blanchard in their article on leadership life-cycles (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Bass provides an overview of their theory by suggesting that situational leadership involves the idea that "the leader is the product of a situation" and that "the emergence of a great leader is a result of time, place, and circumstance" (Bass, 1990: 38). Fernandez and Vecchio suggest that according to situational leadership theory, "followers are the most critical factor in leadership events" (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997: 67). Therefore, it can be seen that situational leadership, as its name implies, is more about the situation and less about the person. The theory fundamentally presupposes that anyone can be a leader if provided with the right opportunity.

Applications

The situational model is unique in that its career has included both practical and academic phases of application. Graeff (1983) highlights the enormous popularity of the model within business circles during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Graeff mentions that "an unobtrusive measure of its sustained popularity in industry is its ability to support three full pages of advertising extolling its virtues in the center of a leading

practitioner's journal of training and development" (1983: 285). However, the theory's period of practical application was relatively short-lived as academic critique of the model mounted (Blank & Weitzel, 1990). A few researchers indicated that the model possessed validity only as a training mechanism, others indicated that the model was only partially applicable (Vecchio, 1987), and a sizeable majority indicated that the model was completely void of practical application (Dainty, 1986). As the model's useful life on the practical front waned, the model's momentum on the academic front developed speed by virtue of the model's startlingly new propositions regarding the nature of leadership. Though harsh in their practical critique, Yukl and Graeff admit that the model's "focus on the truly situational nature of leadership and...[its] recognition of the need for behavior flexibility on the part of the leader" (Graeff, 1983: 290) was a valuable addition to academic thought and helped to balance leadership theories away from the one-sided approaches of the trait and behavioral theorists. Viewed from this perspective, situational leadership theory has yielded significant application within leadership thought and leadership practice.

Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Environment

Situational leadership theory apparently lost much of its practical relevance once academic critics began to systematically critique the model and demonstrate its theoretical shortcomings. However, this lack of applicability within the modern leadership environment is only evident when the model is viewed from a micro perspective. Particular micro facets of the model, such as its prescriptive theory (Graeff, 1983) or its views on the interrelationships between subordinate maturity and leadership behavior (Blank & Weitzel, 1990), have been largely discredited, but enough of the model's superstructure remains to provide valuable input for today's leadership dialogue. As isolationism on a personal or organizational front becomes increasingly difficult within today's global economy, the theory's emphasis on external relationships remains vitally important and engagingly practical. Graeff emphasizes that "the recognition of the subordinate as the most important situational determinant of appropriate leader behavior is a perspective that seems justified and highly appropriate..." (1983: 290). Therefore, through its repeated emphasis on the relational aspects of leadership, situational leadership theory has done a great service to leadership thought and remains, from this perspective, eminently practical for today's business environment.

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TRANSFORMATIONAL/TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL

Historical Context & Definition

As highlighted by Wren (1994), a strategic shift in leadership thought occurred in the 1960s. During the early part of the century, a production focus dominated leadership thought, and the human, or follower, was almost tangential. Trait and behavioral leadership theories focused primarily on the individual leader rather than on the leader's environment (Mello, 2003). This focus began to change in the 1960s as society at large began to migrate from a production orientation to a personal orientation (Bass, 1990). Situational leadership theories reflected this shift and possibly moved leadership thought an uncomfortable distance from a balanced product/people paradigm. The stage was set for a reorienting theory to bring leadership thought back into balance, and thus was born the transformational leadership model.

Burns first proposed transformational/transactional leadership in his germinal work entitled, *Leadership* (1978). The theory was further shaped by Bass who developed a keen interest in the construct while reading Burns' book (Hooijberg & Choi, 2000). Bass built upon Burns' theory by clarifying the notion of transformational leadership. Rather than simply describing the actions of a transformational leader, Bass attempted to define the actual characteristics exhibited by a transformational leader. According to Bass, transformational leadership involves "the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration" (Bass, 1999: 11). Williams (as cited in Bass) contends that transformational leaders engage in idealized influence, inspiration, stimulation, and consideration through displaying more "altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue" (1999: 12) than the average non-transformational leader displays. Therefore, transformational leadership involves leading individuals to be all that they can be through providing guidance and direction that elevates the follower above mere by-the-book responsiveness and into an empowered realm of personal and organizational actualization.

Bass differentiates this transformational leadership from transactional leadership by defining transactional leadership as "the exchange relationship between leader and follower to meet their own self-interests" (Bass, 1999: 10). Spiro, Stanton, and Rich operationally illustrate this definition when they state that

transactional leaders "know the right way to do things" (2003: 307). Transactional leadership can be effective in given instances, but overall, it is a less desirable approach (Bass, 1990). While transactional leadership is to be commended for knowing the right way to do things, transformational leadership betters the score by also exhibiting the knowledge of what to do right.

Applications

Transformational/transactional leadership theory has found application within both business and academia. On the practical front, the theory has filtered down to college-level leadership texts and is used to develop the leadership framework of tomorrow's business leaders (Spiro, Stanton, & Rich, 2003). Additionally, the theory continues to generate academic discussion. Though it has faced milder criticism than situational leadership theory has faced, transformational theory has still enjoyed substantive academic review and continues to receive ongoing research attention (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Environment

Throughout recent economic fluctuations, the term corporate rightsizing has emerged as the business euphemism of the day. According to Baruch and Hind, this rightsizing has been accompanied by "a shift away from paternalistic and benevolent employment" (Baruch & Hind, 1999: 295). This shift has resulted in significant employee morale issues and a heightened need for inspiring leadership (Dessler, 1999). When the term inspiration is used, the transformational model and its emphasis on charismatic or inspirational leadership immediately come to mind (Bass, 1999). Employees struggling in a downsized environment are needy candidates for the leadership characteristics highlighted in the transformational model, and Bycio, Hackett, and Allen (1995) have demonstrated that these leadership characteristics engender positive morale developments. In particular, they uncovered positive effects associated with important transformational leadership variables such as charismatic or inspirational leadership, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995). Transformational leadership theory also addresses the modern trend of employee empowerment through creating a paradigm that enables subordinate employees to critically assess a given situation rather than merely consulting the corporate training manual's recommendations on a particular topic.

PATH-GOAL MODEL

Historical Context and Definition

R.J. House's path-goal theory of leadership grew out of motivational research conducted at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (Evans, 1996). Similar to situational leadership theory, path-goal theory appears to have been heavily influenced by then-current socioeconomic thought. The powerfully formative cultural influence of the 1960s on path-goal theory's central tenets is seen in Jermier's description of the theory as "anti-elitist" through its "follower-centered concepts and a subtext loaded with servant-type leadership rhetoric" (Jermier, 1996: 314). The theory, in House's own words (as cited in Schriesheim & Neider), involves defining a leader as an individual who increases "personal pay-offs to subordinates for work-goal attainment[s]..." (1996: 317). House postulates that a leader enables subordinates to achieve these work-goal attainments through establishing a "path to these payoffs" that reduces "roadblocks and pitfalls" and increases "the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route" (Schriesheim & Neider, 1996: 317). The theory additionally contends that leadership behaviors are situationally determined (Bass, 1990) and can be categorized into eight classes of leadership behavior that interact with subordinate differences and moderator variables in order to achieve an optimal outcome (House, 1996). The theory possesses a great amount of intuitive appeal and has been extensively reviewed. Hebb (as cited in Evans) states that "a good theory [is] one that stays around long enough to help one get to a better theory" (1996: 306). The path-goal theory has stimulated intense debate and spawned many new leadership theories, and from this vantage, one can consider the theory to be good.

Application

Though intuitively appealing, path-goal theory has seen relatively few practical applications. The reason appears to be that, unlike situational or transformational leadership theory, the path-goal model was insufficiently radical to capture the public's attention. The situational shift from behavioral leadership approaches had already taken place (Bass, 1990), and the path-goal's valuable behavioral additions went relatively unnoticed within industry. However, the same cannot be said for its academic notice (Jermier, 1996). Although path-goal theory has not enjoyed consistent empirical support (Dainty, 1986), it has received consistent academic analysis (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Ahearne, 1995).

According to Jermier, the reason for this attention stems from the way in which path-goal theory denied certain academic assumptions such as the then-prevailing assumption that leadership centers around a "group" rather than around a "dyadic" phenomenon (1996: 312). Though path-goal has been unable, within the limits of its own theoretical parameters, to scientifically verify the denial of these assumptions, the theory has spawned further academic research and the development of new theories to address previously uncovered issues. Hence, the model's application within academia has been significant (Evans, 1996). As Miner states, the "theory is on the right track" (1980: 350), but, unfortunately, it has not left itself enough room to follow that track to consistent practical application and utility.

Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Environment

In today's business environment where strategic planning for even the minutest of scenarios has become normative, the path-goal theory of leadership offers an intuitive complement to reigning practice. In Humphrey's abbreviated overview of strategic planning, the strategic process is defined as a three-step series in which executives "determine where the organization is, agree on where they want to take it, and establish a plan to get there" (Humphrey, 2004: 96). This strategic planning model sounds suspiciously similar to the theoretical underpinnings and practical out workings of the path-goal theory. House (as cited in Bass) indicates that the "successful leader shows the follower the paths (behaviors) through which the rewards may be obtained....[and] clarifies the goals of the followers, as well as the paths to these goals" (1990, p.46). One is almost tempted to say that modern strategic planning is simply a macro, organizational development of path-goal theory. As is the case with situational leadership theory, utilizing this macro view of path-goal theory smoothes over its many micro wrinkles and offers the theory a useful life in today's environment. The model provides modern managers, struggling with how to apply strategic organizational concepts into their personal management styles, a conceptually friendly approach that offers generic leadership guidelines.

GRASS-ROOTS MODEL

Historical Context and Definition

The grass-roots model may prove to be one of the first of many correcting models aimed at reorienting leadership research and thought toward a practically useful rather than a theoretically abstract methodology.

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Researchers are beginning to advocate a rejection of the abstract and a return to the practical, refreshingly simple beginnings of leadership thought. For example, Burmeister suggests the use of Occam's razor when developing leadership theories (2003). Burmeister then continues by defining leadership as fundamentally involving "vision, inspiration, and followers" (Burmeister, 2003: 153). This definition illustrates an emerging, syncretistic trend in leadership research. Bergmann, Hurson, and Russ-Eft (1999) illustrate this trend with the grass-roots model of leadership. The model pays homage to implicit leadership theories (Keller, 1999) while primarily building upon what Berrey, Avergun, and Russ-Eft (1993) demonstrate to be the growing emphasis on teams and team leadership during the 1980s and 90s. Grass-roots leadership theory recognizes the cross-organizational nature of teams and approaches leadership from the team-centered orientation that has gained organizational prominence in recent years (Norris, 1999). The model views leadership as a grass-roots phenomenon that is exhibited in teams and operational subgroups throughout all levels of the organization.

As initially presented in the book *Everyone a Leader: A Grass-roots Model for the New Workplace* (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999b), the model appears to be little more than a team-oriented reformulation of situational leadership's contention that anyone can be a leader, given the proper environmental scenario (Bass, 1990). However, though the model admits a powerful situational component, the theory also incorporates a healthy behavioral component. The grass-roots model defines leadership as the interrelationship between 17 concrete behavioral competencies and the "emotional labor" required to synergistically maneuver these competencies in today's paradox-laced environment (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999: 18). The competencies are not viewed from the perspective of trait theory in which leadership is construed to simply involve the given leadership traits of an individual (Mello, 2003). Rather, the competencies are viewed from a behavioral/situational perspective that allows for the continuing development of leaders and for the exhibition of leadership by multiple parties within an organization.

Application

The grass-roots model of leadership is so new that a verdict on its future practical or academic application is difficult to deliver. However, it is safe to suggest that the theory's academic implications have thus far been minimal. Though the theory refreshingly addresses the

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need to return to simple, practically operable leadership models, no academic articles have emerged in direct response to the grass-roots model. However, current research is highlighting the need for the model's practical differentiation between leadership traits and behaviors. The model contends that while innate leadership traits exist, these traits are exhibited by particular behaviors that can be developed by grass-roots individuals who find themselves in situations requiring leadership (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999). Therefore, though often imperceptibly linked, leadership traits and leadership behaviors are not fundamentally equivalent. Traits are innate and are manifested by behaviors which themselves may or may not be innate. Traits can be mimicked through developing the behaviors that are often the physical representations of a given trait, and in this manner, individuals who are not born-leaders can approximate fundamental leadership traits in certain situations.

As an example of today's imprecise differentiation between traits and behaviors, Hawke (2005) demonstrates that employees tend to view and express their thoughts regarding effective leadership in behavioristic terms, whereas Kaplan-Leiserson (2005) discusses effective leadership from the perspective of personal traits. Both terms are utilized in current literature, and although both trait and behavioral theorists argue valid points, many do not appear to realize the separate, yet complementary, nature of the terms and the need for a clarifying method of differentiation (Estep, 2004; Latour & Rast, 2004; Popper, Amit, Gal, Mishkal-Sinai, & Lisak, 2004; Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004). The grass-roots model provides a practically simple differentiation between the two constructs and, from this perspective, offers academicians straightforward utility. However, arising from the model's lack of academic credentials, this practical utility will probably be consigned to the dustbin. The model's industrial application, though, is on surer footing thanks to AchieveGlobal's utilization of the model in their corporate training seminars.

Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Environment

Although the grass roots model possesses little foundational elegance, its surface structure is a different matter. The model offers a simple approach to leadership that is easily digested by employees of varying organizational influence in today's fast-paced world of business (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999). When life is characterized by a state of perpetual white water, little time is available for reflective research and

decision-making (Vaill, 1996). Therefore, quick fixes are often sought, and the grass-roots model provides such a fix. Although it does so in a less-than-rigorous manner, the grass-roots model does manage to combine important leadership elements from trait, behavioral and situational leadership theories. The model offers a compilation of leading theories and places this compilation within a framework of operational ease. Granted, the grass-roots model is little more than a repackaged repetition of the past, but such repackaging is not altogether negative if it enables constructive application.

POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

Even the most dissimilar of humans share an underlying uniformity by virtue of their membership in the human race. The same can be said for leadership models. An underlying uniformity exists between the most disparate models by virtue of the fact that each approach attempts to describe the same universal. Within this section, both uniformities and points of divergence will be explored. These points of divergence often arise because the study of leadership is actually a bifurcated study containing two separate, yet related, areas of exploration. One avenue deals with who the leader actually is, and the other deals with what the leader actually does. Models of leadership vary based on whether the researcher limits the discussion to the first avenue, the second avenue, or a combination of both avenues. If a standard protocol delineating the limits of leadership research were developed, convergence of thought would probably begin to emerge. However, since no such protocol exists, disparity, tempered by an underlying uniformity, reigns.

A primary point of convergence among the four models concerns the idea that situational elements moderate leadership behavior. Each model agrees that the definition of leadership should not be limited to the discussion of who the leader intrinsically is. The models agree that the leadership discussion should also incorporate a review of what the leader does. In this manner, each model diverges from the central tenets of trait and behavior leadership theory. Situational leadership theory clearly diverges farthest from this limiting factor and nearly falls off the proverbial other cliff in its attempt to distance itself from trait and behavior theory. Transformational leadership theory likewise rejects the contention that internal characteristics alone comprise the leadership domain. However, transformational leadership theory does so in a less radical manner. It diverges from situational

leadership theory by allowing for a richer understanding of the traits and behaviors that interrelate with situational variables in order to create a leadership construct. As originally conceived, path-goal theory closely followed situational leadership theory's position regarding the relative nature of leadership. However, it has since been reformulated to include various intrinsic, behavioral variables that offer a broader-based approach to the subject (House, 1996).

Grass-roots leadership theory is theoretically refreshing, yet foundationally ambiguous. It agrees that leadership involves both the who and the what of a situation, but it tries to have its cake and eat it too when it follows situational leadership theory's example by asserting that "anyone can be a leader" (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999: 15). This contention is plausible if one retains the limits of situational theory by ignoring the behavioral components of leadership. However, once a behavioral component is admitted, the contention's ability to withstand critical attack crumbles. It is at this very point that grass-roots theory diverges from situational leadership theory and admits a behavioral element within true leadership. To withstand the inevitable attack, grass-roots theory deftly sidesteps the issue by making a theoretical distinction between traits and behaviors (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999). The distinction has merit, but scanty academic review has limited its impact.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be agreed that Stogdill's statement (as cited in Yukl, 1989) regarding the bewildering state of modern leadership thought is correct. Theories abound, they overlap, they contradict, they cautiously support, they die, and they are then reborn a generation later under a new banner. The situation is confusing, but it is not necessarily injurious. Although models abound in chaotic confusion, the very fact of their existence argues for the progression of leadership thought. Individuals are still thinking about leadership, and as long as thought continues, progress will eventually be made. Until this progress arrives at a comprehensive definition of leadership, leadership can best be understood through examining a variety of existing models.

The four models examined within this paper provide complementary insights into the nature of managerial leadership, and when combined, offer a remarkably holistic overview of the construct. Situational leadership provides an understanding of the important situational variables that affect the development

and display of leadership. As opposed to the contentions of the trait and behavioral theorists, situational leadership argues that leadership is more than the mere possession of a personal characteristic that society views as being associated with leadership. According to situational leadership theory, there are no specific personal characteristics that qualify an individual to be a leader. Rather, leadership emerges when certain personal characteristics collide with a situation whose nature requires the guidance of those particular characteristics. Transformational leadership theory balances situational theory's one-sided approach by contending that specific personal characteristics are an important, universal component of true leadership. Path-goal theory contributes to the discussion through highlighting the fact that leadership often centers around a group rather than around a dyadic relationship, and the grass-roots model completes the picture by emphasizing that leadership includes both behavioral and situational elements and that the manner in which behaviors can externally imitate true leadership traits means that individuals across all levels of the organization can engage in leadership.

Therefore, several statements regarding the nature of leadership can be made. First, although traits can predict leadership, they are unable to predict leadership effectiveness (Smith & Foti, 1998). The conclusion arising from this fact is that traits are an important component of leadership, but they are not the sole factor within the discussion. Second, the behaviors that represent given leadership traits and the situations that interact with these behaviors also play an important role within the leadership equation. However, the question regarding whether or not leadership behaviors can be acquired by individuals who do not possess innate leadership traits remains open for further research. Finally, a general definition, arising from an amalgamation of the four examined theories, is that managerial leadership involves the situationally-bound utilization of appropriate behaviors to transformingly enable followers to achieve personal or organizational objectives and goals.

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