

Review Paper:

Comprehensive Leadership Review – Literature, Theories and Research

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive literature review on leadership. The author sheds light on the historical foundation of leadership theories and then elucidates modern leadership approaches. After contrasting leadership and management, the article touches the overcome trait theories, summarizes the still prevailing behavioral and relational approaches and gives insights into the latest research on the efficiency of the transformational leadership style. The article critically combines historical leadership fundamentals with implications for current practicing managers.

Keywords: Leadership, literature review, trait theories, behavioral approach, relational approach, transformational leadership style.

Introduction

To mark the very beginning of early (or better: classical) human leadership thinking, evolving from the animal origins of social organization and leadership¹², it takes us back a long way into history. Plato¹²⁹ (428/427-348/347), the scholar and philosopher of ancient Greece, inspired by his truth seeking teacher Socrates (470-399 B.C.), originates three types of leadership which he specified as the rule of reason, the rule of desire and the rule of spirit. These three forms, which Plato develops in his work *The Republic* (here used: translated edition of 1945, esp. 175-308), focus on different types of leaders. The rule of reason makes the philosophers become kings in an ideal state and impose the obligation to rule under the maxim of righteousness and ethical excellence, performing political power by virtue and correctness which Plato refers to as the term *arete*.

The characteristic of righteousness of the philosopher king¹² is greatly influenced by Socrates, who has not bequeathed any scriptures. Plato considers his teacher to be the most righteous man of all. The rule of desire depicts a characteristic of political rule which Plato explicitly denies, because it breeds tyranny, despotism and totalitarianism, which was later personified by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)⁷⁹. The rule of spirit finally marks the beginning of military leadership, as it illustrates courage, loyalty and honor and refers to generals as leaders and to the conduct of war.

Aristotle⁴ (384-322 B.C.), Plato's student, criticizes *The*

Republic in his works *The Politics* for its general and idealistic approach and states more practical theses, such as those on hierarchy. Hierarchical orders are on the one hand still valid today as most of the companies adhere to that but on the other hand Aristotle's views are judged to be anachronistic e.g. his slaves-by-nature perspective that regards the woman to be naturally destined to be ruled by the man. He mitigates this extreme view through his Golden Mean approach, changing the servant role of women to that of loving wives and mothers which still remains obsolete in modern liberate societies.

In his work *The Prince* (here used: translated edition of 1961) the Italian writer and political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli¹⁰⁶ (1468-1527) challenges the imagination of an idealistic state and promotes a leader ruling by law and by force concluding that a king (he literally refers to the prince) should be rather feared than loved. While e.g. the leadership of the warlord Attila the Hun (unknown-453) practically aims at conquering other realms¹³⁹, Machiavelli (in his political writings) aims at unifying a king's realm. In his work the ultimate pragmatist¹² breaks with ancient Greek scholasticism, medieval religious doctrines and also with the utopian ideals of his contemporary, Saint Thomas More (1478-1535), when Machiavelli promotes his ideas on realism and calls for a prince using radical means to achieve his personal ambition of glory and honor, even if these means lead to immoral actions. Napoleon I of France (1769-1821) is deeply inspired by *The Prince* as he makes detailed commentaries on this work considering the art of war¹¹³.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), the German Philosopher and precursor of Marxism, states that the essential prerequisite for effective leadership is to make the experience of being a follower before becoming a leader¹². He highlights the relation between the leader and the led. The historical subject of leadership is neither limited to philosophical or political theorists nor can it be reduced to the strategy of warfare, but it also enters classical literature.

One representative also portraying the situational dependence of the relation between leader and follower according to Hegel is the 1895 published story *Master and Man* of the Russian novelist and social reformer Lev N. Tolstoy¹⁶³ (1828-1910). Ahead of his time, he anticipates the contextual relevance for performing leadership and as a pacifist he is credited by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) to be the key influence of the nonviolent leader⁶⁸. Max Weber¹⁷², the German sociologist and economist,

distinguished three pure types of domination in his work *Economy and Society* (1922; published posthumously), namely the legal, the traditional and the charismatic authority. According to Weber, political leaders are legitimated by at least one of these ideal types to justify their dominion over the led¹⁷. Commands are accepted and produce obedience if they rest on legal enactment, if they emerge out of immutable custom or if they are issued by heroic, extraordinary leaders^{39,164}.

Modern leadership approaches and theories

What is leadership? : The categorization of recent theories on leadership and, finally, the author's own empirical study on leadership styles require an agreed-upon answer to the question: What is leadership? As the historical fundamentals show, the roots of the concept reach far beyond, but the literal term leader "only" goes back to the 1300s¹²⁷, the expression leadership exists since the late 1700s¹⁵⁹. As myriads of researches on that issue exist, almost the same number of definitions has emerged over time¹⁷⁰. Different scholars prefer different terminological specifications. This may lead to further clarification and may provide an acceptable answer to the above question.

Leadership

"... is the preeminence of one individual in a group in the process of control." (Mumford)¹²²

"... is the centralization of effort in one person." (Blackmar)²²

"... focuses the attention of group members into the desired direction." (Bernard)²⁰

"... is the art of influencing." (Copeland)⁴⁰

"... consists of a relationship between an individual and a group." (Knickerbocker)⁸⁹

"... is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its effort toward goal setting and goal achievement." (Stogdill)¹⁵⁷

"... induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner." (Bennis)¹⁸

"... is an individual's effort to change the behavior of others." (Bass)⁹

"... is interpersonal influence (...) toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals." (Tannenbaum)¹⁶²

"... is an influential increment over and above compliance with the routine directives of the organization." (Katz and Kahn)⁸⁴

"... transforms followers, creates visions of the goals that

may be attained and articulates for the followers ways to attain those goals. "Leadership persons mobilize resources to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers. (Burns)³⁵

"... is a form of social influence." (Pondy)¹³³

"... is an interaction and leaders are agents of change whose acts affect other people more than people's acts affect them." (Bass)¹³

"... is the ability to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive." (Schein)¹⁴³

"... needs a leader. The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers." (Drucker)⁴⁵

"... refers to a potential or capacity to influence others." (Vroom and Jago)¹⁷⁰

"...is the alignment of subordinates' activities and their motivational activation for goal attainment." (Jung)⁸²

These 17, partly verbatim and partly analogous, defining statements on leadership which cover more than one century of academic work on the subject, substantially share common characteristics that reappear. These features are as follows: First, leadership is a process. Second, it is a way of influencing. Third, it needs a group context. Fourth, it aims at reaching a defined goal. Yukl¹⁷⁷, Antonakis, Cianciolo and Sternberg² and Northouse¹²⁵ find the same common characteristics of leadership. It is remarkable that 100 years old definitions are still not outdated and that definitions of different leadership theorists share the same characteristics.

Contrasting leadership and management: Now, that there is glimpse of terminological clarification of leadership, coming from the above selection of scholars, it is necessary to contrast leadership and management or leaders and managers. The terms are often used interchangeably, even though some scientific communities still have lively debates on the alleged crucial differences between them. These debates require at least a short paragraph on the potential differentiation.

To differentiate between leadership and management may be more likely to succeed while thinking about the differences between leaders and managers. The former only exists if he or she has followers, whereas the latter does not necessarily needs followers, e.g. when you refer to an account manager. Furthermore, the literature occasionally regards the manager with disrespect as bureaucratic administers, while the leader is upheaved to an innovative visionary^{19,91}. Managers act formal; leaders may also rule informal and indirect¹⁷⁵. Judging leadership as good and management as bad³² is not a phenomenon of an antiquated perspective but still appears acceptable and presentable in

scientific circles. Ward et al¹⁷¹ state that “management is getting things done through the effort of others, i.e. subordinates. Value-creating leadership is getting extraordinary things done with the willing help of others”.

Management is for order, regularity and continuity but leadership enables change and inspiring, motivating visions to move forward⁹⁰. If leadership is just one task the manager performs¹²¹, if leadership is the functional dimension of management⁸² or whether the two fields have to be regarded as totally different⁹⁰ is still debated. The author goes along with Northhouse¹²⁴ and Yukl¹⁷⁷ who both argue that there is no exclusive differentiation between leadership and management as leaders perform managers’ tasks and vice versa. If there really is a decisive key difference then “the answer will not come from debates about ideal definitions”.¹⁷⁷

Trait theories of leadership: The Great Man era marks the beginning of the trait approach to leadership. The Great Man theory argues that leaders are born, not made⁸⁷. This approach goes back to Carlyle³⁶ who attributes leaders with special traits of character and believes that they possess an extraordinary personality which distinguishes them from the led. To become a strong leader one is advised to copy the personalities and characteristics of great men (as virtually all leaders were men), even though the imitation of personal traits is unlikely to succeed.

Nevertheless, Galton⁵⁶, Bowden³¹ as well as Borgotta, Rouch and Bales³⁰ promote this approach for almost one complete century. Early studies on traits are often propelled by the emergence of intelligence tests at the beginning of the 20th century³⁷.

Jennings⁸¹ even defends this theory by choosing the biologically occupied terminology of inheritance when he refers to the natural born leader. Great Man theorists propose that there are certain traits which can be identified as universal predictors for effective leadership⁸⁶ and that these traits can be found by studying great leaders of history. Confusingly, different great men had (and of course still have) different personalities, so the generalizability of trait approaches is very limited. There is not the universal leader personality, as great men were statesmen, warlords, generals, tyrants, dictators, diplomats, pacifists, or civil rights activists – all equipped with different characters and different personalities.

Yet, trait theories still have impacts on later leadership research, as some traits are empirically investigated as (non-essential) explanatory variables in leadership contexts^{50,73}. More recent studies still claim that key leader traits do exist and that they provide leaders with the ability to acquire the skills to become effective leaders⁸⁶. Some scholars still remain stuck in the odyssey of seeking universally effective characteristics that produce outstanding leaders, no matter if these attributes are

inherited or acquired^{37,86}.

There surely are some merits for the born-not-made-theory of leadership¹⁰⁸ as it marks the beginning of modern approaches and can be regarded as basis for advanced theories. Traits also have a demonstrated influence on the perception of leadership¹⁰⁴.

However, researchers of today widely seem to have overcome the trait approach, as it is proved to be too simplistic and of only little value for practicing leaders in business organizations¹⁶⁶. “The trait approach to leadership has provided some descriptive insight but has little analytical or predictive value”¹⁰⁵ and is discredited by substantial research¹⁷⁴. Even contemporary findings, which are published during the zenith of the trait era, do not indicate any correlation between a single trait or a set of traits and the enhancement of leadership performance⁸⁰. It is Stogdill¹⁵⁶ who also finds that there is no single attribute or cluster of traits which is identified as relevant across the diversity of leadership situations.

Until now, trait approach theorists fail to empirically prove the existence of a set of leader traits, which create effective leaders^{58,178}. Stogdill unconsciously anticipates the beginning of a contingency approach to leadership and practically ends the trait era with his review of 30 years of trait theory and the correspondent conclusion he draws: “A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits”.^{156,159}

Behavioral theories of leadership

1. The Iowa studies: The behavioral approach in general and the so called Iowa studies in particular stop focusing on traits and start to address leaders’ actions in carrying out the leadership role¹⁷⁰.

Lewin, Lippitt and White⁹⁶ conduct their experimental studies of group life - in secondary literature often referred to as one-dimensional real type approach¹⁵⁴ - at the Child Welfare Research Station of the Iowa State University to examine impacts of three selected leadership styles on social climates. For this purpose, 10 year old pupils (boys only) are organized to clubs with a group size of five to perform activities of interest e.g. mask-making, model airplane construction, mural painting etc. The groups are each confronted with supervisors who guide the clubs with an authoritarian, a democratic or a laissez-faire leadership style. Observation of club behavior is the main source for data collection.

According to Lewin^{95,97} and Lewin, Lippitt and White⁹⁶, leaders realize different group atmospheres through performing these three leadership styles as follows: The authoritarian leader determines the choice of activities; the techniques are dictated one at a time to leave coming steps uncertain and the leader acts personal in praise and criticism. Except from demonstration, there is no leader

participation in the activities. The democratic leader assists and encourages. The choice of activities is a matter of group decision. Techniques and steps are sketched and alternative procedures to choose from are given. Praise and criticism is fact-minded. The laissez-faire leader only provides necessary material and does not participate in the activity processes. He does not interfere with the course of events. There is neither praise nor criticism.

The findings of the Iowa experiments are significant^{95,96}. The group outcome in the authoritarian and the democratic groups is equally high, but low in the laissez-faire clubs. The democratic leadership positively correlates with motivation and satisfaction of the group members. The many directing approaches in the autocratic atmosphere create social pressure and tension. The authoritarian style leaves the smallest space of free movement which is significantly greater in democratic groups. The laissez-faire led clubs unexpectedly do not enjoy a greater space of free movement due to the lack of perspective and the emerging interference among the group members. The rigidity of authoritarian group structure produces much more hostility and aggression compared to the groups led democratically. Authoritarian styles are also predestined to produce apathetic behavior of group members.

However, all seemingly negative outcomes of autocracy must always be analyzed according to the culturally adopted style of living of an individual. This indicates that cultural habits may mitigate the impacts of the authoritarian leadership style on aggression and apathy. The last fact is strikingly relevant for our study as we also empirically investigate the effects of a concept which is related to cultural habits (here: cultural embeddedness) on leadership styles.

Critique may come from addressing the limitations of the Iowa experiments in terms of the generalizability of results, as all the led participants are children. Another criticism may arise from the gender perspective, as the groups are composed of boys only. The degree of realism also has its weaknesses because the experimental setting has a laboratory character and may not be applicable to all organizational contexts and situations.

However, the Iowa studies academically persist; the three leadership styles continue to be representatives of the relation between leaders and led and still capture the scope of business reality. This makes these studies a milestone, for organizational development practitioners^{34,59,110}, for the organizational behavior discipline¹¹⁹, for research methodology in the field of management¹⁷³ and specifically for leadership research.^{5,35,109}

2. The Ohio studies: The Ohio State Leadership Studies (hereafter referred to as Ohio studies), mainly conducted by a research team around the scholar Fleishman, mark the second behavioral real type approach in leadership studies

after the Iowa experiments. The Ohio studies begin in 1945 and are conceptualized as a two-dimensional theory¹⁰⁷. Here, leadership behavior is dominated either by a concern for task objectives or a concern for relationship objectives¹⁷⁶. This two-dimensionality has large effects on the following decades of leadership research; several scholars replicate the Ohio studies with extension^{23,142}. Fleishman⁵⁵, Halpin and Winer⁶⁶ as well as Stogdill, Goode and Day¹⁵⁸ contribute crucial publications on the Ohio studies to literature.

The Ohio researchers' methodology is based on the use of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire to identify two dimensions of leadership. The initiating structure dimension produces task behavior and the consideration for workers dimension produces relationship behavior. These dimensions are found not to be mutually exclusive, so that they co-exist independently and simultaneously, i.e. one can have high scores on both at the same time. Initiating structure here means the focus on the accomplishment of tasks¹⁶⁶ whereas consideration here is equivalent with a concern for human relations between leaders and followers^{64,166}. Effective and successful leaders are believed to realize both, a high task orientation and at the same time a high relationship orientation. Thus, they pursue high performance through attaining goals and promoting a motivating atmosphere for subordinates.

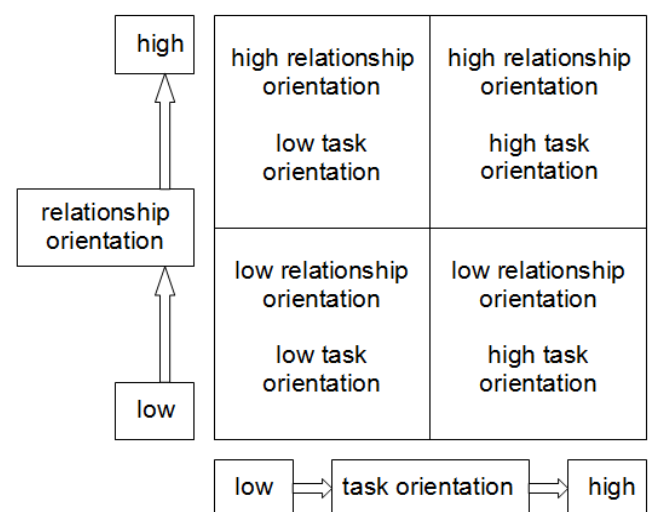


Figure 1: The Ohio State Leadership Quadrants

Source: self-created; with reference to Hersey and Blanchard⁶⁹

The Ohio studies contribute to the field of leadership¹⁴⁵. However, there are two main limitations. First, situational and contextual factors of leadership are not sufficiently taken into concern¹⁷⁰. Critics and reviewers may also argue that the quadrants can overlap and would therefore not be completely independent. Second, the two distinct leadership behaviors are not empirically proved to positively correlate with effective leadership¹⁷⁶. There is no clear evidence for the positive effects of high scores in both dimensions²⁵.

3. The Michigan studies: The Michigan State University Leadership Studies (hereafter referred to as Michigan studies) which begin in 1947 at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, conducted by a research team around the scholars Katz and Likert, propose the third behavioral approach study to leadership asking how a leader acts. The Michigan studies are closely connected to the Ohio studies, as both form a building block for further leadership studies through applying a real type approach using the survey method (here: the Survey of Organizations Questionnaire) to examine the leaders' action⁸³. Behaviors may be friendly and supportive on the one hand or initiating and goal attaining on the other hand⁵⁵.

Likert¹⁰¹ names these two basic styles as production oriented behavior with clear goal attaining concern and employee oriented behavior with a strong focus on interpersonal relations. The similarity to the Ohio studies with their initiating structure and consideration dimensions is obvious. "Both measure leadership effectiveness in terms of how leaders treat subordinates and how they get the job done".³⁸ Unlike the Ohio studies, the Michigan studies must be identified as a one-dimensional theory, although one can argue that it applies two dimensions of leadership behavior. The reason for one-dimensionality is that the two styles (task focusing and relation focusing) lie at the opposite ends of a continuum, whereas the two Ohio dimensions can be realized with high scores at the same time.

Thus, the Michigan studies assert that a leader is not able to act both, production focused and employee centered. This is the crucial difference between the two studies. A more participative behavior focusing on interpersonal relations between leaders and subordinates is found to be effective and consequently to be outperforming the production oriented style.^{101,102}

The two studies share the same criticism. Neither the Ohio studies nor the Michigan studies "have produced a solid body of scientific evidence sufficient to guide practice".¹⁷⁰ Locke and Schweiger¹⁰³, Miller and Monge¹¹⁸ as well as Schweiger and Leana¹⁵⁰ bring into question if there is a strong relation between participative behavior and effectiveness if situational variables are disregarded. Moreover, the Michigan studies assume invariance across the diversity of situational contexts¹⁷⁰; the importance of the situation was ignored.¹⁶⁷⁻¹⁶⁹

4. Theory X and theory Y: Theory X and theory Y are postulated by McGregor from 1960 on to contrast two motivationally different ideas of man. McGregor¹¹⁵ argues that the two theories, which are developed at the MIT Sloan School of Management, do not belong to the same continuum, but may co-exist simultaneously with different scores or parameter values. In McGregor's opinion, it is in the nature of humans that in every individual one

theoretical idea of man prevails and determines the underlying structure of a basic motivation for work.

According to McGregor^{114,116} theory X on the one hand assumes that workers are naturally lazy, seek security and are predestined to be led by external control. Theory Y on the other hand acts on the assumption that the working forces consider their work as naturally as their needs to rest or play. They search for organizational challenges and regard work as a source of satisfaction. Theory X workers may be autocratically motivated through rewards or sanctions disregarding human relations, while the driving force behind a theory Y worker is the creation of an inspiring, stimulating and participative work environment to unfold full motivation and creativity. Theory Y workers' needs are self-control and self-direction.

McGregor, who is influenced by the Human-Relations^{130,134,140} movement and by Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹¹¹, advocates the mentality to assume that the average employee belongs to the class of theory Y workers because assuming a worker belongs to theory X will lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you think that your workers are lazy, this is what they will turn to be. However, McGregor denies the presumption of a self-fulfilling prophecy for theory Y workers. So, unfortunately, the counterpart of the vicious circle of theory X is not a self-enhancing virtuous circle of theory Y.

The main criticism comes from the argument that there is no universal model of man. Some researchers argue that not every worker is or wants to be creative even if stimulated by ideal work conditions⁸⁸. The critics hold the view that there are many employees who better respond to a theory X management²⁹. Furthermore, theory Y has no measurable impacts on job performance.^{49,155}

5. The continuum of leader behavior: In 1958 the scholars Tannenbaum and Schmidt¹⁶¹ develop a one-dimensional ideal type theory to leadership on the basis of the Iowa studies' findings around Lewin, Lippitt and White⁹⁶ which again supports the choice of leadership styles in the author's empirical study. This behavioral approach which culminates in the leadership continuum assumes that leadership behavior can be explained as a bipolar continuum of seven steps of behavioral classes on the range between authority and delegation⁷² or between a boss-centered and a subordinate-centered leadership⁹⁹. The more the leader tends to behave authoritarian, the lesser the led experience participation in decisions and freedom of actions. The more the leader tends to apply a democratic leadership style, the better the led enjoy participation in decision making. Figure 2 visualizes the continuum of leader behavior.

According to Tannenbaum and Schmidt¹⁶¹, the choice of the appropriate leadership style depends on the characteristics of leaders and followers as well as on the

situational context. Leaders may choose their style to meet the demands of the situation⁹⁹. Particularly the last fact extends former behavioral approaches to leadership and functions as a precursor to contribute to the later rise of contingency theories which explicitly demand the awareness of the varieties of situations¹⁷⁰.

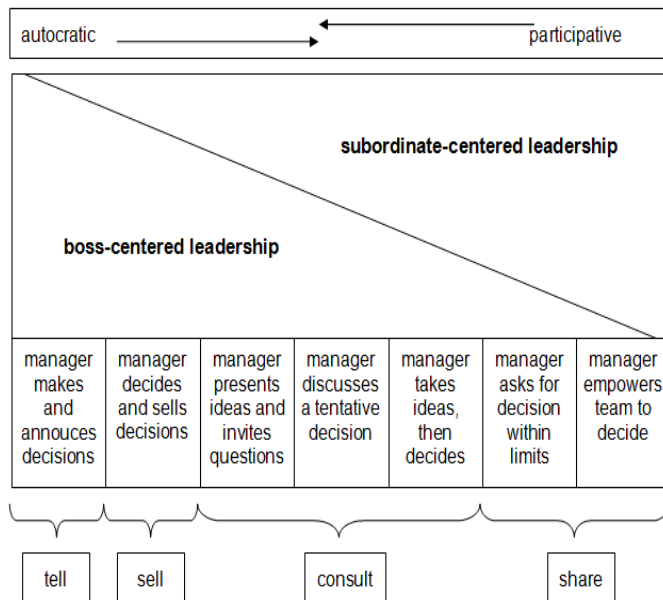


Figure 2: The Leadership Continuum

Source: self-created; with reference to Tannenbaum and Schmidt¹⁶¹

The leadership continuum is criticized for its ideal type character because it fails to be applied to real business contexts; it rather advances theory than helps practitioners. Apart from that the relation between the continuum and performance remains unclear, Tannenbaum and Schmidt¹⁶¹ do not provide a prediction for leadership effectiveness that corresponds with the choice of style⁴⁶.

6. The managerial grid: In 1964 the scholars Blake and Mouton²³ publish conceptualized leadership theory between 1958 and 1960 which they illustrate in the so called managerial grid. The grid visualizes a two-dimensional behavioral approach to leadership and is deeply influenced by the prior research of the Ohio studies and the Michigan studies, which are on their part influenced by the Iowa studies^{24,27}. Blake and Mouton explicitly replicate and extend the Ohio state leadership quadrants (figure 1). What Fleishman⁵⁵ calls initiating structure and consideration during the Ohio research, Blake and Mouton name concern for performance and concern for people²³. Three out of five leadership styles which emerge from the grid have a strong resemblance or are identical with the original styles of Lewin, Lippitt and White⁹⁶. The grid asserts that high scores on both dimensions are equivalent to the use of the ideal leadership style (Fig. 3).

Many scholars use the managerial grid for researches on leadership, typically for studies focusing on organizational

development.^{16,21,65,85} However, critics argue that one best leadership style does not exist. Like Fleishman's Ohio model, also the managerial grid is criticized for its claim to realize leadership effectiveness through high scores on both, people orientation and performance concern. This so called high-high paradigm is not empirically supported.^{94,126} Moreover, the grid shows little concern for the situational context in the original Blake and Mouton approach, although a revised theory mentions a (normally applied) dominant style and a (rarely adopted) backup style of a leader. The backup style is only used in stressful circumstances^{26,28}.

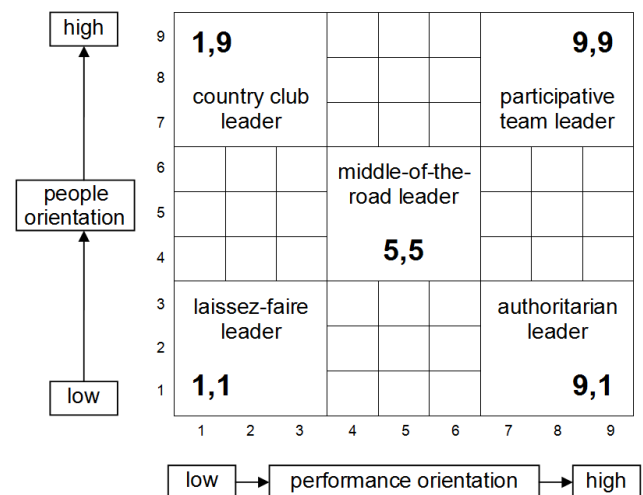


Figure 3: The Managerial Grid

Source: self-created; with reference to Blake and Mouton²³ and Bass¹⁵

7. The three-dimensional theory: Reddin¹³⁶ develops a three-dimensional theory of leadership and by that he is one of the scholars who mark the beginning of the transition from behavioral approaches to contingency theories of leadership³. Thus, it may be debatable to associate his work rather with the field of situational approaches than with the era of behavioral theories. However, as Reddin's work mainly covers the use of the right leadership styles which clearly emphasizes his behaviorist perspective, his three-dimensional theory is predominantly a behavioral approach, but certainly with a strong situational impact.

Reddin¹³⁶ whose three-dimensional model is influenced by the findings of the Iowa studies, the Ohio studies, the Michigan studies and the managerial grid, argues that next to the relationship orientation and task orientation, a third dimension has to be added: leadership effectiveness. In his view, no matter if the basic two dimensions realize high or low scores, the corresponding leadership style may be effective or ineffective; all leadership styles claim the right to exist and may be appropriate as long as they are applied with regard to the situation¹³⁷.

According to the scores on people focus and task focus, Reddin develops four major (neutral) styles: related (high

on people orientation, low on task orientation), separated (low on both), dedicated (high on task orientation, low on people orientation) and integrated (high on both) as in fig. 4. These basic styles can be used in situations which are appropriate or inappropriate to them¹³⁶ so leadership behavior depends on the situation⁹⁸. This leads to the assumption that each basic style has one effective and one ineffective counterpart.

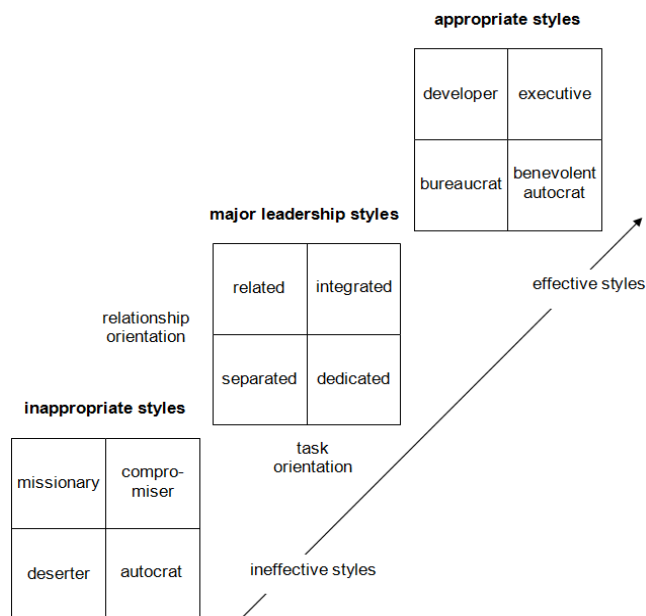


Figure 4: The Three-Dimensional Theory

Source: self-created, with reference to Reddin¹³⁹

Critics argue that it is not clear if the two basic dimensions are independent. Furthermore, the model is a too general concept, so that the practical relevance is considered low¹⁵⁴. Apart from that, the third dimension lacks a theoretical underpinning and an empirical support for the effect of the situation on leadership effectiveness is missing¹²³.

Contingency theories of leadership

1. The “contingency” model: Fiedler⁵² enters the era of contingency theories of leadership by asserting, that three factors have impacts on whether a leader is effective or not: In the tradition of Fleishman’s Ohio state leadership quadrants⁵⁵, Blake and Mouton’s managerial grid²³ and with resemblance to the aforementioned three-dimensional approach of Reddin¹³⁶, Fiedler chooses task orientation, human relation orientation and situational favorableness to study leadership effectiveness.

He uses a quite innovative and at the same time disputable instrument to measure and test the degree to which a leader focuses on task achievement or interpersonal relations³⁷. Fiedler⁵⁰⁻⁵² assumes that a leader who assesses an imagined least preferred co-worker (LPC) in a favorable light, which is expressed by high scores on an LPC scale, tends to lead with a strong focus on human relations, whereas a leader assessing the LPC rather negatively, which is expressed by a low score, is more task oriented¹⁷⁰. Situational

favorableness, recalled later into situational control, consists of the level of cooperation by the led, the clarity of the task and the degree of the leader’s formal authority⁵³. Fiedler⁵² finds out that leaders with a low LPC score (task oriented) achieve the highest degrees of leadership effectiveness in situations with very high or very low situational control. High LPC scoring leaders (relationship oriented) are effective in situations with a moderate level of control. “The implication of Fiedler’s theory is for a leader to be placed in a situation that is favorable to his or her style”.¹⁷⁰ Fiedler⁵¹ states that the job should fit the manager and not vice versa.

Fiedler’s contingency model faces various criticisms from many scholars.^{61,117,144,151} Apart from the high level of complexity³⁷, the other main two critical opinions are as follows: First, the model does not include the option to be both, relationship oriented and task focused³⁷. Second, leaders are often not able to determine the degree of situational control¹⁰. However, Fiedler’s approach contributes to theory and practice as it provides significant empirical support for impacts on leadership effectiveness^{132,160}.

2. The situational theory: In 1977 Hersey and Blanchard⁷⁰ develop their situational leadership theory which first appears under the name life cycle theory. Next to the two variables of the Ohio studies, consideration (for relationship orientation) and initiating structure (for task orientation), Hersey and Blanchard advocate a third situational variable that refers to the maturity of subordinates. According to the two scholars, performance is a function of maturity, consisting of job ability and psychological willingness. The scholars distinguish four different degrees of a subordinate’s maturity⁷¹. The lowest level of maturity prevails if a follower is neither willing nor able (M1); the highest degree of maturity prevails if an employee is both, willing and able (M4). If one is able, but unwilling his or her maturity is assumed to be higher (M3) compared to a subordinate who is willing but unable (M2). Here, the behavior of a leader, i.e. if he or she should act task focused or relationship oriented, strongly depends on the maturity level of the led (Fig. 5).

Following the argumentation and given a superiority of ability over willingness in terms of their impact on maturity leads to the assumption that the ability is the main source of influence on performance. However, this conclusion is disputable and arguments for a vice versa interpretation also exists⁶⁰. Other critics argue that the maturity of the led ignores other contextual features that may occur in the relation between leaders and followers¹⁷⁰. A sound theory explaining the middle range of maturity (M2, M3) is missing and undermines the robustness of the situational theory⁶⁰. This reveals some internal consistency problems¹. These erode the applicability of this theory for practitioners as a large number of subordinates may be classified to belong to this middle level maturity section.

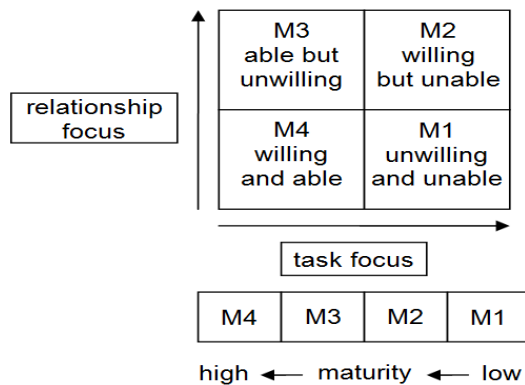


Figure 5: The Situational Theory of Leadership

Source: self-created; with reference to Hersey and Blanchard⁷⁰

3. The path-goal theory: In 1971 the scholar House⁷³, an Ohio State University alumni, produces - inspired by Evans⁴⁷ - a much-noticed leadership approach, which belongs to the contingency theories. His so called path-goal theory, once revised⁷⁷, claims that leadership effectiveness depends on a leader's behaviors, the follower's expectations and the organizational situation. House⁷³ promotes the view that a leader's main task is to pave a path by behaving in a way to ensure that the employee's goals match with organizational goals.

Thus, the basic role of a leader is to shape paths to subordinates' and organization's goals^{74,170}. An effective leader is believed to reduce barriers for subordinates to motivate them and to attain goals through four different leadership behaviors: directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented⁷⁴. The leader should provide enabling conditions^{73,166} and make the followers see that their organizational task orientation helps to achieve personal goals³⁷.

The path-goal model is criticized for not being sufficiently empirically tested^{48,146}. The practicability of this approach is low because determining the appropriate leadership behavior according to the expectancies and needs of the followers is seen as too complex to be performable by a leader in day-to-day managerial practice^{166,170}. A low-clarity and low-structure situation is found to be best compatible with directive, task oriented leader behavior whereas a highly structured and well predictable situation demands supportive relationship oriented leader behavior.

However, results at the same time reveal that also the opposite is true; thus the path-goal findings are inconsistent³⁷. Particularly, participative leadership in later studies⁶³ on the path-goal subject is practically always found to be positively correlating with the degree of subordinates' motivation, satisfaction and performance so that House's differentiation becomes obsolete.

4. The normative decision model: Vroom and Yetton¹⁶⁷ and later Vroom and Jago¹⁶⁸ contribute with their

normative decision model to the contingency theories of leadership. The Vroom-Yetton-Jago model supports a leader in decision making processes and offers certain help answering the question of how much subordinates' involvement in decision making is appropriate^{168,169}. This contingency theory responds to prior leadership research by explicitly taking group work into much greater consideration¹⁶⁷. Like other situational approaches, the Vroom-Yetton-Jago theory also argues that the choice of an adequate leadership style only succeeds when the scope of the organizational context is fully captured¹⁶⁷. The effectiveness of participation is dependent on specific situational variables¹⁷⁰. A leader's behavior is deeply influenced by the situation⁹⁸.

The scholars' prescriptive model contains five different leadership styles which range on a single continuum from extremely autocratic via consultative to extremely participative. The styles determine followers' involvement in decision making. As a side note and to affirm the right choice of leadership styles in our own empirical study, this continuum again shows a striking resemblance to the two main styles which the research of Lewin, Lippitt and White⁹⁶ promotes. Each potential style may be an appropriate response to a certain situation. To examine the situation and to finally determine which style is most effective in this situation, Vroom and Yetton¹⁶⁷ argue to use a decision tree. The process of answering up to eight key questions (e.g. if there is a certain quality requirement for the decision, if the problem is clear and structured or if the followers' acceptance of the decision is necessary) is considered helpful while navigating through the decision tree to find the recommended leadership style.

In relation to other contingency theories of leadership the Vroom-Yetton-Jago approach is most distinctly criticized for its level of complexity¹⁰. Even if the theory and the corresponding findings are attractive, consistent and to an acceptable extent empirically supported^{37,54}, the degree of intricacy significantly lowers the value of the model for practitioners. However, this approach at least theoretically equips a leader with a method that is able to promote leadership effectiveness¹⁶⁶. With regard to some highly important decisions, the time to pass through the decision tree is worth being taken.

A relational theory of leadership

The so called leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory is the most prominent relational model¹⁶⁵ and takes an exceptional position among leadership approaches, as the main focus is not on traits, behaviors or situations but on the dyad of leader and led⁹³. Thus, group relationships play a minor role in this approach. Dansereau, Graen and Haga⁴¹ develop the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) model, which is seen as the basis for the LMX theory. According to the VDL model a leader psychologically separates his or her followers into two sub-groups. The in-group is comprised of subordinates to whom the leader has a very close,

personal, occasionally informal and valuable relation; the members of the out-group remain within a greater personal distance to the leader and experience a rather formal contact. The underlying reasons for forming two differing kinds of relations are the shortage of time and hence, the practical impossibility to pay equal attention to all subordinate^{57,93}.

Graen and Uhl-Bien⁶² argue that every relationship between leader and follower begins with the out-group stadium and some initial testing phase. It then possibly continues to the next step and the development of trust, loyalty and respect. The third and closest level is reached when both, leader and follower, have a strong self-interest to intensify the exchange of mutual support. Certainly, only very few followers enter the final stage of relationship and become dyad partners¹⁶⁵. The dyad of leader and in-group member and the corresponding reciprocity¹⁵² are empirically proved to produce a high quality relationship that effectively supports motivation, satisfaction and performance^{43,57,147}.

The LMX theory may be criticized for its unique position and the disregard of situational factors. However, the LMX approach is closely connected to what has emerged as transformational leadership^{42,57,147} which essentially advances leadership research and recently contributes to literature as the latest state-of-the-art approach. Especially the third level of LMX, when leaders and followers begin to like each other, marks the link between the LMX approach and transformational leadership.^{42,62,93}

The transformational theory of leadership

The transformational approach to leadership, which is brought to light mainly by Bass¹¹, is based on the ideas of Burns³⁵ and is inspired by the charismatic leadership theory of House⁷⁶, while the literal term transformational leadership goes back to Downtown⁴⁴. The transformational era currently is the most promising stage during the evolution of leadership theory¹⁶⁶. Bass¹³ argues that transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. The leader who leads according to ideal transformational principles recognizes the needs and the abilities of his or her subordinates and of the organization as a whole and is able to match them. This admittedly idealistic approach conceptualizes a vision of a future scenario and by that it arouses intrinsic motivation of subordinates. Thus, followers become leaders themselves⁷ stirred by a trustworthy leader.

Burns³⁵ develops a transformational understanding of leadership through separating it from a transactional approach. While the transformational theory focuses on followers who transcend personal interests to become intrinsically motivated agents of collective achievement, the transactional approach is based on mutually beneficial transactions³⁷.

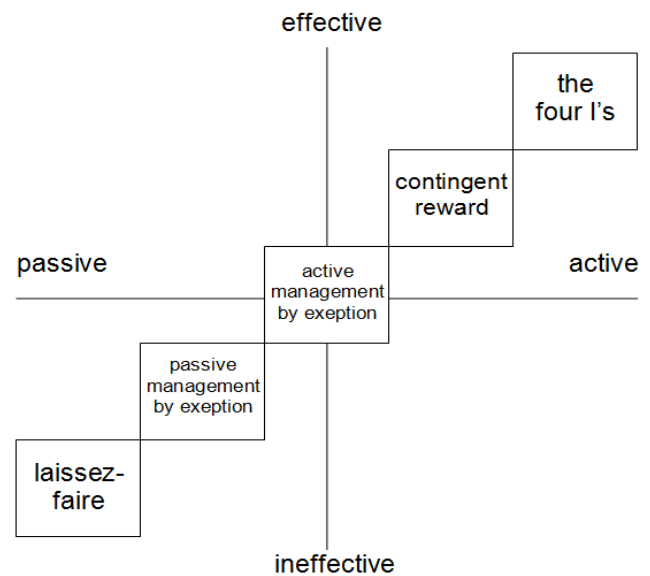


Figure 6: The Full Range of Leadership Model

Source: self-created; with reference to Bass¹³

Specifically, four characterizing transformational elements (due to the common initial letter often referred to as the four I's) are contrasted with three transactional elements^{7,13}: First, a transformational leader is always charismatic^{13,76} and breeds idealized influence. This ensures to have the led meet the moral demand to regard their own personal interests less important than organizational interests. Second, the leader produces inspirational motivation to align the followers to a common goal. Third, the leader challenges the led through intellectual stimulation and encourages creativity and innovativeness of subordinates. Fourth, the leader realizes individualized consideration through fully understanding the personality, the abilities and goals of the led to nurture their talent and to unfold their potential. These four characteristics polarize with the following transactional elements of leadership:

First, the relationship of the transactional leader and his or her subordinates is based on contingent reward which functions as a quid pro quo system. Second, the leader performs either active (a) or passive (b) management by exception which means that the leader uses specific systems or processes to keep the led under surveillance and intervenes in case of an anticipated (a) or occurred (b) mistake incident. Bass¹³ finally integrates a laissez-faire leadership style as an additional transactional leader behavior. This integration leads to what he calls the full range of leadership model, a graphical illustration which summarizes the full scope of transactional and transformational leadership (Fig. 6).

According to Burns³⁵ transactional leadership, which mainly focuses on a formal exchange of work for reward and the rather ideal transformational leadership are incompatible. However, Avolio and Bass⁷ empirically proved that a combination of both may be effective and

may produce positive impacts on performance. A continuing exchange of work for reward may be a source for mutual trust, which is one of the bases of successful transformational leadership⁶. Transformational leadership may be built on a transactional fundament, but the more a leader tends to apply the four transformational elements the more effective his leadership is^{14,67} and the more a leader is able to influence the whole organization in all directions¹⁷⁵. Research results show that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership^{39,86,128}. If transformational leadership depends on the situation is still debated^{14,138}.

One further very interesting factor, especially for managing practitioners, is that transformational leadership is trainable i.e. leaders can learn and practice to become transformational leaders or to improve their ability to lead transformational^{8,15,153}. However, Northouse¹²⁴ considers transformational leadership and sees elements of personal traits and natural talents that are inherent in gifted personalities. This undermines the assumption of trainability.

Bryman³³ criticizes the disregard for contextual factors. Miner¹²⁰ argues that the transformational approach needs some theoretical underpinning concerning what factors nurture transformational leadership. Other scholars warn that transformational leadership shifts away from the top hierarchical level to be applied throughout an organization, which may cause conflicts between the agendas of different organizational departments^{148,149}. Finally, the benefits of transformational leadership clearly outweigh its deficiencies but more research is needed to support the promising impacts of this approach^{120,177}.

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