

Leadership Theories

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Trait Theories of Leadership

It emphasizes that leadership is inherent and not a learned aspect. The characteristics of leadership occur naturally in an individual. However, the theory argues that having been born a leader is not a guarantee that a person will be effective in leadership roles. It is thus important to find platforms that strengthen these qualities lest they grow static. Some of the suggested strategies that leaders can employ in activating their naturally occurring leadership traits include increasing their interaction with other team players (Silva, 2009). Moreover, leaders should continually expose themselves to different situations that demand the application of leadership qualities but in varying ways. The theory further argues that companies can quickly identify persons with the potential to become future leaders by looking at the natural leadership qualities exhibited by the employees (MacArthur, Competition, & Class, 2011).

Different researchers have put forward a list of personality traits that potential leaders possess. While each has a different set, all agree on some qualities such as determination, sociability, intelligence, integrity, dominance, masculinity, and self-confidence. It is the obligation of an individual to exhibit natural traits of leadership in a way that is noticeable to others. People cannot assume that one is naturally a leader without witnessing the qualities of leadership in them (Silva, 2009).

Trait leadership theory has its focus on the leader and not situations or followers. Companies believe an effective leader is the one who displays the desirable characteristics of leadership. As a result, they do not go for people with the intention of training them to develop these qualities. Rather, they want someone who already has the desired traits. However, if an

organization does not have time challenges, it can hire a person without the desired qualities and invest in training to develop the individual into the ideal employee the company wants.

The theory has some limitations such as ignoring the situation aspect. It assumes that as long as a leader has the leadership traits desired by the firm, they are effective. However, it is important to note that situation determines the efficiency of a leader. Some managers can perform well in some cases but not others. Secondly, the theory pays more attention to traits rather than their significance in leadership outcomes. It fails to identify how having these traits will increase employee morale or raise productivity. Thirdly, the approach ignores leadership training and development. If you do not have the perceived qualities of a leader, there are no opportunities to develop them.

In the modern era of technological advancement, skills and competencies can become obsolete demanding the employees to embark on training to maintain their efficiency. Therefore, training is essential in organizations, and companies unwilling to invest in advancing the skills and competencies of their workforce will realize high staff turnover as they will continually fire their workers rendered incompetent by the introduction of technology at the workplace and replace them with the highly-skilled ones. Lastly, the theory emphasizes particular qualities of potential leaders. However, there does not exist a definitive list of leadership characteristics since they vary from one situation to another.

Example

Sales people are extroverts in nature which propels them to value social over individual activities and enjoy being the center of attention. As a result, they are confident to approach potential consumers to market their products and services. Companies will thus refrain from recruiting introverts in sales positions.

Behavioral Theories of Leadership

Unlike the trait theory, this approach focuses on the behavior of leaders rather than their traits. Leaders exhibit their efficiency, not through their qualities but role behavior (MacArthur et al., 2011). Three skills are necessary for leaders to lead their followers competently. They include; technical competencies which refer to the knowledge of processes at play, human skills which involve the ability to interact well with other people, and conceptual competence which is the ability of the manager to invent ideas necessary in designing plans or setting up models.

The theory points out that positive behavior of a manager translates to effective leadership while negative actions disqualify them from holding leadership positions. Some of the desired actions that confirm an individual is a potential leader include determining the goals of a project, motivating the workforce to achieve the objectives, maintaining active communication with the team players during project execution, and encouraging team spirit. The theory emphasizes that positive behavior in leadership leads to employee satisfaction and team members recognize the individual as their head. Further, the behavioral theory of leadership suggests that it is possible for everyone to learn leadership since it is not inherent but something that is developable (Silva, 2009). The secret to being a successful leader lies in being flexible in changing one's behavior to meet the demands of a given situation.

Some of the methods that individuals can embrace to develop leadership include training and observing how other leaders respond to people and situations. The theory has strengths such as giving leaders the opportunity to explore different leadership styles and choose the best depending on the present scenarios such as the concerns of the workforce (MacArthur et al., 2011). Moreover, the approach helps managers to understand the impact of their leadership styles on the staff members. As a result, they can change their leadership to enhance their

relationships with the workforce which facilitate the realization of organizational goals. The theory, however, has some limitations such as ignoring the time factor. A manager's behavior and actions at a particular period might not be useful at another.

Example

Managers can motivate their employees to embrace desired behavior at the workplace by scolding latecomers in a meeting and show appreciation when the employees keep time.

Contingency Models of Leadership

The fundamental idea of this theory is that a leader's efficiency is dependent on the situation at hand. Factors such as the leader's personality, the nature of the task, and the composition of the group determine how well a manager will resolve a conflict. The theory has several sub-theories such as Fiedler's contingency, decision making, and path-goal. The Fiedler's Contingency Theory suggests that two factors shape the efficiency of a leader namely, their leadership style and the amount of control they exercise over the present situation.

Leaders must be willing to cultivate a healthy relationship with their subordinates. Moreover, they must ensure the tasks given to the employees are well defined besides providing them with the ideal procedures for achieving the goals (MacArthur et al., 2011). On the same note, leaders should have the ability to reward employees for their excellent performance and punish them for their incompetence. The theory, however, applies in situations where strict supervision is applicable. The Path-Goal theory argues that leaders should support their subordinates to achieve set goals by eliminating any obstacles that hinder employees from meeting their targets. The decision-making approach emphasizes the leaders should assess a situation and decide how far they will help employees achieve their goal (Silva, 2009).

Example

An employee could have the habit of reporting to duty late. The company policy on lateness demands that the manager punishes the worker by warning the employee for their unacceptable behavior. Instead of following this regulation, the leader chooses to discuss the problem with the employee to establish the reason for late coming. The established cause guides the leader to take the appropriate action on the staff member.

If the manager can help the employee to overcome the challenge and report to work on time, both parties benefit; the employee keeps their job, and the manager is safe from incurring recruitment costs. If the manager finds out that the cause for late coming is a medication that triggers increased sleep in the patient and makes the employee oversleep, the leader can sign an official leave allowing the employee some days off until the medication is over.

Skills Approaches to Leadership

The skills-based leadership theory argues that anyone can be a leader when subjected professional training and development. The three desirable traits that leaders should possess include technical, conceptual, and human. Technical skills refer to the knowledge of the company's line of business. Leaders should have a comprehensive understanding of how processes work and provide support to their subordinates when they want a technical problem solved. Besides understanding the operations of the business, leaders should know the rules and regulations acceptable in the company as well as the specialization of the firm (the products and services produced). It is most important among the supervisors while the middle-level managers do not require it much. Senior executives and CEOs have the least importance for technical skills.

Conceptual skills include competencies to develop new ideas and concepts, setting achievable goals, planning, and strategizing. The lower levels of management do not require high

conceptual skills. However, they should acquire them if they wish to rise to higher levels of management. Employees can explore various strategies to develop conceptual skills such as enrolling for a course or working closely with high-level managers to borrow their styles of developing ideas. Human skills entail the ability to interact well with the workforce. As a result, leaders should demonstrate the willingness to listen to and accept conflicting opinions from the team players (MacArthur et al., 2011). Human skills enhance the achievement of organizational goals and objectives since leaders can engage all employees to embrace team to achieve a common purpose. They are essential to leaders at all levels (seniors, middle-level, and supervisory).

Example

Companies can identify the skills gaps among the workforce by offering skill tests to their employees and using the scores to determine the areas in which employees need further training. If a cleaner indicates that they lack computer skills, it is unnecessary to book them for training since the skill is inapplicable in their line of duty. However, a supervisor needs the knowledge, and the business can recommend training to make the employee more efficient.

Situational Methods of Leadership

Situational leadership theory takes into account the existing work environment such as the needs of the business and modifies the leadership style of the leader to one that helps address the current concerns. The approach does not emphasize adherence to a particular style but the flexibility of the manager to change their management style if and when a need arises (MacArthur et al., 2011). Adaptability is one of the fundamental requirements of the situational leadership model. It challenges leaders to drop one leadership style and pick another that promises a better outcome in a given situation (MacArthur et al., 2011). Situational leadership theory is different

from the rest due to its emphasis on employing different styles depending on the current demands.

The positive side of situational leadership theory is that it gives flexibility to leaders to switch their styles of leading others according to the existing needs. Moreover, it is a comfortable style of leadership to apply in organizations when the company has the right individual in leadership who can assess a situation and adjust their approach without feeling coerced to do by a higher authority. On the downside, Situational leadership can harm the business as it tends to divert the attention of the leaders from the long-term goals of the firm.

Example

A manager who wants to build a workforce that is responsible for its actions can employ Democratic leadership in their management. It involves giving employees the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. As a result, their sense of ownership to the company increases since they feel valued when they witness the firm implementing their viewpoints. When the leader establishes that there is an extended deadline for completing a project, the method is appropriate since there is adequate time to screen employee suggestions and settle for the best. The same leader shifts from being democratic to coercive during emergencies at the workplace. The leader knows what is best for the company at the moment and orders the subordinates to follow orders without asking for their opinion.

References

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