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**The Similarities and Differences between four Leadership Models and How They Might Address Contemporary Leadership Issues and Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

The leadership theories presented in this research are representative of four different eras. The Trait era which began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century correspond to the early period as delineated by Wren (2005), the theory of Bureaucracy advanced by Max Weber (1864-1920) and representative of the scientific management era, the theory of Mary Parker Follett (1886-1933), which arises out of what Wren (2005) referred to as “the social person era” and the theory of Renesis Likert (1903-1981) which underscores the modern era. These four perspectives provide the basis for a comprehensive review of leadership theories within the context of their similarities and differences and a concluding discussion on how they might address contemporary leadership issues and challenges.

This paper is not an attempt to discuss the four theories from a historical perspective; rather it purposes to give some thoughts for reflection on how theories of leadership influence practices in today’s organizations.

## About the authors

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## **Introduction**

As long as there have been human endeavors, people have always been willing to take charge of planning, organizing and controlling work (Friesen, and Johnson 1995). One might say that nature abhors a vacuum and someone will always step forward to fill a leadership void, hence, a natural emergence of leadership. Miller (1989) subscribes to Johnson's thoughts by arguing that such natural emergence grew out of the human instinct for survival in an era where, meeting food, shelter, and safety needs of communities required cooperative efforts and such efforts had to be coordinated by some one with the capacity to direct human endeavors in productive and other activities required for sustaining and building the community.

It is this basic principle which underscores the emergence of leadership and establishes the concept as a phenomenon rooted in ancient economic, political and social systems. As humans develop from simple ways of living into more advanced nations, complex forms of leadership supported by academic models and theories evolved.

Today these models and theories which underpin the philosophical ideals of the subject have had far reaching implications in shaping a more complex understanding of leadership as a discipline and have given many insights into questions such as, what character traits define a leader and what constitute excellent leadership practices?

All activities of organizations public or private, religious or the family are impacted either directly or indirectly by the established principles associated with leadership. Organizational goals and objectives are accomplished through someone taking the lead and responsibility for influencing and directing people and activities and irrespective of whether such leadership is prudent or otherwise it does have significant implications and continues to be cornerstone of man's development or down fall.

## **The trait era**

Borgatta, Bales, and Couch (2001), believed that the great man theory is probably the oldest theoretical perspective to have received attention throughout the evolution of leadership thinking. In an era when scholars were seeking some measure by which leadership could be defined there was the widely acceptable belief that "leaders were different from their followers and that since fate or providence was a major determinant of the course of history, the contention that leaders were born, not made was widely accepted by scholars and those attempting to influence the behaviour of others" (Cawthon, 1996, p.3). Further developments on the nature of leadership along this line of argument led to the advancement of trait theory of leadership as we know it today.

The basic tenet of the trait theory is that leaders can be defined by certain characteristics or traits and these are what separate them from the group or society to which they belong (Navahandi, 2006). Consequently, the trait theory dictates that leaders by virtue of their birth were endowed with special qualities that allow them to lead others. The major assumption being, that "if certain traits or characteristics can be used to distinguish between leaders and followers then existing political, industrial, and religious leaders should possess them" (Navahandi,2006).

During the early period, proponents of the trait theory outlined five characteristics which today are still considered the corner stones of all leadership theories: (1) power, (2) intelligence, (3) persuasion, (4) personality and (5) charisma. As other theories on how to lead and manage successful organizations became prominent, scholars then found that although trait plays a role in determining leadership ability and effectiveness, such role was minimal (Wren, 2005).

The new argument which gained much prominence in early and late 19<sup>th</sup> century thinking on the subject was based on the notion that leadership should be viewed as a group phenomenon which cannot be studied outside a given situation (Navahandi, 2006, p.38) and, thus, the bureaucratic theory which advocates the proper order of doing things became the defining standard for leadership.

### **The bureaucratic versus the trait theory of leadership**

While it cannot be said with certainty that there are considerable similarities between the trait and Bureaucratic theories of leadership, a certain argument could hold true, which is, if bureaucracy is defined by executive responsibilities that stress the importance of the systemic development and application of rules (Clawson, 2002), then there may be some justification for accepting the notion that some similarities between these theories do exist. Further, since the trait theory is based on the notion that power, intelligence, persuasion, personality and charisma are defining parameters for leadership capabilities; the assumption is that similarities between the theories do exist.

A careful consideration of the theory of bureaucracy proves the need to vest authority and power in people. Wren (2005) contends that "some form of authority is the cornerstone of any organization. Without it, no organization can be guided towards an objective; authority brings order to chaos" (p.228). Such authority and power, according to the bureaucratic theory of leadership, should be vested in people "by virtue of their abilities and skills" (Clawson, 2000). Thus, from a bureaucratic perspective, the notion is that power and responsibility is entrusted to the 'common man' who exudes such qualities as outlined by the trait theory. Yet irrespective of the similarities which can be found between the trait theory and some of the underlying principles of bureaucracy, there exist a number of differences.

Beyond the concept of the ability to lead based on character traits, the bureaucratic theory advances division of labour. Formal rules and regulations are considered as the basis for enduring uniformity and discipline. The arranging of office positions in a hierarchical order, the formal documentation of office authority with strict adherence of its incumbent to such rules of authority, and the practice of hiring managers from within differentiates the bureaucratic model of leadership from the thought that traits are enough to ensure enduring leadership of organizations (Clawson, 2000;Scott, 2005).

## **The theory of Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) versus the trait and bureaucratic theories**

The thoughts of Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) have significant implications for leadership. According to Wren (2005), Follett's theory spans five critical areas of the leadership and management spheres; the group, conflict, business organization, authority and power and task leadership.

With regard to the group, Follett believed that the essence of group principle is to bring out individual differences and integrate them into unity" (Wren, 2005. p.303). A close examination of this argument substantiates Follett's conviction that people are all not the same; they exude different characteristics, which is the basic tenet of the trait theory. However, Follett did not stop with such mere recognition; she went on to advocate that in the interest of unity of the whole group such characteristics and individual interest must be set aside (Bartol and Martin, 1998).

Additionally, inherent in Follett's theory is the recognition of a bureaucratic structure of organization and society. The fact that she recognizes the existence of power and authority gives credence to such assumption. For it cannot be argued, that by the very nature of her theories on authority and power, such recognition of bureaucracy is absent or nonexistent in her discourse. Wren (2005), best illustrate this line of argument by stating that "in this second era, Follett sought to develop "power-with, instead of power-over , and co-action to replace consent and coercion" (p.308). It seems, therefore, that Follett's theory of, "power-with instead of power-over" (Wren, 2005.p.308), sought to bring a new meaning to relationships which exists within bureaucratic structures.

Another, similarity between Follett's theory and the bureaucratic theory of leadership can be cited from her reasoning that authority should be vested in people with experience and the necessity to achieve goals through coordination and control (Wren, 2005). She also cautioned that the most ingenious corporate structure means nothing unless someone leads it well (Harrington, 1999). Similarly, bureaucracy dictates the need for people in authority to occupy and office and the notion that appointment to offices should be based on a personal expertise (Navahandi, 2006. p.38).

In essence, the bureaucratic theory asserts the need for structured organizations with strict defining rules and regulations while the trait theory is based on leadership of a single individual or individuals exerting control over subordinates by virtue of certain traits and characteristics. To bridge overarching principles underscoring these theories Follett advocates integration.

On the other hand, the underpinning difference between the trait, bureaucratic and Follett's principles on leadership can be best explained by what she posit in her discourse on the topic, what is absent from the trait and bureaucratic theories. Such notions as, conflict should be resolved through integration of interests and obedience to the law of the situation, power sharing, establishing good organization by creating a feeling of working with rather than against someone, recognition that authority resides not in the person or position but in the situation, and the "development of a social consciousness, instead of individualism" (Wren, 2005; Scott, 2005; Bartol and Martin, 1998) sets these three theories apart , yet offers much similarities.

## **Rensis Likert (1903-1981)**

Rensis Likert (1903-1981), proposed a system of leadership and management which focuses on the entire organization. His main argument was “of all the tasks of management, leading the human endeavor are the central and most important one because all else depended on how it is done” (Wren, 2005, p.442). Based on this belief, Likert proposed a system of leadership which takes into consideration the whole organization. His proposal pertains to aspects of the organization such as its structure; methods, form and flow of communication, issues relating to motivation, procedure for decision making, evaluation of employees and how members of the organization relate to each other (Pugh and Hinings, 1981). The underlying premise of Likert’s theory is that four systems of leadership pervade an organization and each system is associated with certain leadership behaviour.

The first system is regarded as the exploitative authoritative system, the second being the benevolent authoritative system, the third he describes as the consultative system and the fourth as participative group’ system (Wren 2005).

The exploitative authoritative system is characterized by the use of coercion to accomplish organizational goals; one way flow of communication from the top down where decisions are imposed on subordinates, greater responsibilities for higher level managers, limited scope for team work and a distant relationship between supervisors and subordinates.

Under system benevolent, there are rewards for accomplishment of goals but decision making is centralized. The system facilitates feedback of subordinates to management, however, suggestions and recommendations are restricted to what management considers as pertinent to the organization and their personal positions as leaders. Also, while there is some amount of delegation at the lower levels, leaders, expect their subordinates to be subservient.

In a consultative system, while major decisions are made at the top of the organizational hierarchy there is a wider consultative approach which involves all the internal stakeholders to be affected by the decision. Communication flows both ways, that is, upwards and downwards but upward critical communication is cautious (Pugh and Hinings, 1981).

The participative group system is defined by three basic concepts: “(1) the principle of supportive relationship; (2) the use of group decision making and group methods of supervision; and (3) setting high performance goals for the organization” (Wren, 2005, p.442).

Additionally, Wren (2005) found that Likert proposed a 5<sup>th</sup> system in which “an organization’s hierarchy of authority would be replaced with a reciprocal system of participation and influence and when there are conflicting situations, groups will work together through overlapping memberships (‘link pins’) until a consensus could be reached” (p.443). Such authority, Wren (2005) contends, “Would depend on the interpersonal skills of creative leaders who had the ability to get others committed and working towards organizational goals” (p.443).

Overall, the underlying principle of Likert’s theory is that leaders could adopt behaviours to take account of the situation at hand (Pugh and Hinings, 1981).

The very nature of Likert’s outline of the “four types of leader behaviour” (Wren, 2005) attest to the similarity between his theory and the trait theory of leadership.

The similarity is found where leaders possess certain trait which causes them to behave in a certain manner. Such behaviour determines a person's style of leadership and the extent to which that behavior is executed will have a positive or negative effect on the organization's performance as a whole. On the other hand, where there are differences between Likert's theory and the trait theory of leadership such differences exists by virtue of fact that Likert's theory goes beyond the mere recognition of traits as the guiding principle for leadership.

Inherent in Likert's theory on leadership behaviour is the notion that organization do operate as bureaucracies. The very fact that he gives credence to hierarchical structure of management where communication is either top down or bottom up or both ways, and decisions resting with final authority, are aspects of bureaucratic premise which can be construed as integrated into his arguments of leadership based on behaviour. For example, Likert advocated vesting authority in creative leaders with the interpersonal skills and ability to achieve organizational goals by ensuring employees are committed to these goals and where such goals are achieved due rewards must be given (Wren, 2005).

Where, leadership based by behaviour differs from bureaucratic leadership, however, is found in Likert's principle of supportive leadership. "The principle of supportive leadership means that a leader must ensure each member of the organization view the experience as supportive and that one builds and maintains a sense of personal worth and importance" (Wren, 2005).

There are also a number of similarities between Likert's theory on leadership and those delineated by Mary Parker Follett. One such similarity is found within the principles of participative leadership. Like, Follett, Likert advocated unity within the organization. He argued that the actions of the individual and outcomes must be in congruence with the organization. In other words, the organization and the individual must one and in this regard, the development and recognition of a system where the actions of the organization is a direct outcome of the actions of the individual, and the action of the individual is a direct outcome of the action of the organization. (Pugh & Hinings, 1981). To this end, Likert's systems 4 and 5 mirror many of the thoughts presented by Follett (Wren, 2005).

Scholars, however, argue that even though there are obvious similarities between the theories of Likert and Follett, Likert's would be viewed as more established in that the principles he advocated were actually tested within various organizational setting. Follett's ideas, on the other hand, are regarded as mere theoretical underpinnings of what should constitute good leadership practice (Friesen & Johnson, 1995).

### **Theories of leadership and how they might address contemporary issues and challenges**

The question of how trait theory might address contemporary leadership issues and challenges are best described by Navanhandi (2006). "There should be a modern approach to understanding the role of traits in leadership. Several key traits are not enough to make a leader but they are pre-conditions for effective leadership" (p.43).

Cawthon (1996) argues that the trait theory of leadership is alive and well. It began with an emphasis on identifying the qualities of great people; next it shifted to include the impact of situations on leadership and most currently, it has shifted back

to re-emphasize the critical role of traits in effective leadership (Northhouse, 2004). Further, the recent rise in popularity of transformational leadership dictates that leaders do need such traits as delineated by Navanhandi (2006) in order to augment their capacity to lead today's organizations. Given this premise, those responsible for leading and managing organizations are now engaging transformational techniques. The effectiveness of such engagement, however, is dependent on how far there is the general belief that traits are valuable components which should be considered in the organization process (Rost, 1991).

The basic assumption of the bureaucratic theory of leadership is that the boss knows best and with every thing else this model of leadership is fraught with numerous short comings. For example, the fitting of people into predefined jobs descriptions tended to alienate them from their work, encouraged a one-way-top down communication pattern, and discouraged learning activities (Clawson, 2000). This means that the problem of bureaucratic leadership looms large for many organizations, "especially North American and European firms as they wrestle with the underlying principles, technological breakthroughs, and ferocious competition in a new emerging paradigm" (, p.21). Such a situation begs the question of how might the bureaucratic model address contemporary leadership issues and challenges.

Much of the theoretical perspectives which are inherent in the bureaucratic theory of leadership still have implications for leadership and management as we know it today. Breaking down jobs into well defined tasks, selecting managers on the basis of their qualifications and experience, enacting formal rules and procedures to ensure uniformity and discipline along with applying rules and control uniformly and impersonally are all aspects of the theory which when applied effectively can have lasting impact on organizational development and prosperity. For, example, formal rules and procedures set the tone for conflict resolution, while systems of control ensure operational efficiency (Scott, 2005).

During the early Social Person Era, at a time when managers believed that workers should be seen and not heard, Follett's theory of employees as valuable assets with the ability to add greatly to their work if their ideas and complaints were listened to, were not welcomed (Coye and James (2005). However, in today's organizations Follett's thoughts have implications for a number of issues arising from the leadership and management process. For example, on the issue of coordination, many organizations promote communication across the status quo. The process is now both horizontal and vertical as leaders and managers recognize the inherent benefits of direct contact with their subordinates, regardless of the position they hold within the organization.

Also the importance of human interrelationship as a driving force of organizational change and longevity has gained much recognition. More specifically, Follett's ideas on integration herald modern methods of conflict resolution (Bartol and Martin, 1998) and it generally believed that for contemporary organizations, Follett's theories on leadership can have even greater impact on such issues as communication, conflict resolution and management and worker negotiations if they are adequately considered and put into practice. In the long run, organizations can learn from Follett's preference for constructive conflict to compromise and her belief that employees should have a voice in how things are done, only if they share the responsibility (Harrington, 1999).

Likert's theory continues to be of significant value to today's management and leadership practices. For contemporary organizations the Likert's scale is a valuable

tool for research and analysis of information pertaining to specific business situations.

Additionally, the business which is profit oriented and has the concern for its human resources as underpinning its philosophy and practice is likely to adopt the system 4 style of leadership. According to Likert (1977), all organizations should adopt the principles of system 4. This is not to say, however, that the other styles of leadership should be totally disregarded as each system must be assessed for the contributions it can bring to organizational efficiency (Likert, 1977).

In practice, If Likert's system 4 leadership theory is to be effectively applied to today's organizations, then the barometer for a measure of organizational effectiveness must be defined by its ability to foster productive and supportive work groups who must be encouraged commit to achieving the goals set out by the organization. This means, that the practice of motivating employees to meet targets must be driven by contemporary leadership techniques and principles. Employees must be viewed and respected for the worth and diversity they bring to the organization and this must be an integral part of the organization's culture.

In the final analysis, "The most ingenious corporate structure means nothing unless someone leads and manages it well" (Herrington, 1999, p.152). This means that issues of leadership and its implications for personal and organizational efficiency and effectiveness will forever pervade. For as long as there are shifting paradigms with regard to how organizations should be led and managed, there will always be a search for the best way to lead.

History has taught us, however, that there is no one best way to ensure effective leadership because every organization is unique, every group of people is different and every manager or leader has the arduous task of determining what style or model of leadership is most effective under the situation.

Leadership therefore, is not static, it is ever changing and as time changes, managers, leaders and researchers will continue to take sides and denounce each other (Scott, 2005). Irrespective of the outcome, the search for the best way to lead an organization will continue. This means that leadership models and theories will always propel organizations to seek the best course for lasting efficiency.

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