



Leadership Evolved: From Innate Traits to Learned Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the ongoing debate of whether great leaders are born or made, exploring various theories and studies that have shaped our understanding of leadership over time. It contrasts the early trait theory, which suggested inherent qualities in leaders, with the behavioral theory, emphasizing learnable and adaptable leadership styles. The article references significant studies like the Ohio State Leadership Studies and the Michigan Leadership Studies, highlighting their contributions to the understanding of leadership behaviors. It concludes that leadership encompasses both inherent traits and skills that can be developed, suggesting that effective leadership is a blend of natural ability and learned behaviors.

KEYWORDS

Leadership, Trait Theory, Behavioral Theory, Ohio State Leadership Studies, Michigan Leadership Studies, Leadership Development, Innate Qualities, Learned Behaviors.

Discussion

Are great leaders born or made? This debate has long been argued, and theories have been made. The adage "great leaders are born, not made" is something we have all heard. The initial notion of what made a good leader was based on this. Following Thomas Carlyle's idea in the mid-1800s, trait theory (or the "great man" theory) of leadership became one of the most widely accepted theories about what makes a successful leader. One can think of innumerable instances where this is ludicrous. The ability of a person to fit a given role is so much influenced by their upbringing and the things they choose to accomplish with their lives that the notion sounds very narrow-minded. Still, alas, that was the predominant theory. The trait theory was subsequently investigated and tested. Measurably, it was discovered that only a few innate traits set leaders apart from followers. In other words, rather than being born, leaders are made (Mulholland, 2019).



Figure 1 Key components of the behavioral theory in leadership

Infographic on Behavioral Theory in Leadership: This figure illustrates key components of the behavioral theory in leadership, highlighting concepts like

adaptability, communication, and decision-making.

A new approach emerged, the behavioral theory of leadership. The behaviors of a leader are considerably accentuated in behavioral theories of leadership; this theory asserts that following a great leader's conduct is the most significant indicator of how successful their leadership will be. The behavioral learning theory emphasizes behavior instead of traits. The behavioral theory of leadership argues that prominent leaders are not born triumphant but may be molded via learnable behavior (Awana, 2022). According to the theory, individuals can only be influential leaders when they can act appropriately among individuals and in various situations. According to this approach, observable conduct trends are classified as "leadership styles." There are many different leadership philosophies, such as task-oriented leadership, people-oriented leadership, country club leadership, status quo leadership, dictatorial leadership, and more. Ultimately, this theory defines success based on a leader's fundamental behaviors and acts. According to recent scientific studies, leadership is 30% inherited and 70% learned (Picklesimer, 2014).

In an article online, Verdhan (2022) mentioned that people think that leaders are not born; instead, they are created. According to this argument, if leaders are created, there must be some consistency in the surroundings and behaviors to which the individual is exposed and learns to conform. In theory, anyone who is taught the same habits can become a great leader.

Over the years of study and testing, this theory of leadership has emphasized many different types of leaders through their actions. The two theories that are most frequently used concerning behavioral leadership theories are Ohio State Leadership Studies and Michigan Leadership Studies.

The University of Michigan launched the renowned Michigan Leadership Studies in the 1950s with the goal of identifying the fundamentals and specific leadership philosophies that increased employee productivity and job satisfaction. Employee- and production-oriented leadership were the two primary leadership philosophies identified by the studies. They also highlighted task-oriented conduct, relationship-oriented behavior, and participative leadership as three crucial traits of good leaders (Kenton, 2019). The research found that general supervision, as opposed to close or direct monitoring, had more remarkable results. Employee onboarding emphasizes the human aspect of work and stresses that individuals have demands that employers should attend to. On the other hand, production orientation emphasizes the technical aspects of employment and views workers as a means of completing production.

The main finding of the studies was that workers could be more productive and interested in their work when there is less direct pressure and control. Nevertheless, criticisms and issues have been raised regarding the research methodology and findings. One criticism is that the context of the team members, the leader, and the

work was not considered. This suggests that the organization's circumstances may call for one leadership approach over another. The employees' temperament can also influence the leadership style. If a more significant direction is required owing to the complexity of the assignment, the performance of the team members may persuade the leader to be more hands-on. Likewise, there is minimal need for greater overt control if workers demonstrate competence and complete their responsibilities efficiently. It may not be necessary for a direct boss to give instructions to a group of seasoned workers who have studied and worked on a task for a long time; therefore, in that situation, it is more likely that the leader will grant them more autonomy. The studies' limited options also fail to account for the fact that one size does not suit all organizations or circumstances. Utilizing the same leadership at two distinct organizations can result in failure or success depending on other factors. Leaders' styles are frequently adapted over time and as needed rather than remaining committed to a particular pattern. Other theories and research on leadership techniques that take into account diverse dynamics, such as the servant leadership ideology, have emerged in more recent years. Nevertheless, the Michigan Leadership Studies continue to be noteworthy.

To sum up, the Michigan leadership research failed to indicate whether a leader's actions are a cause or an effect. They did not make it clear whether highly productive groups are caused by employee-centered leadership or whether employee-centered leadership is a result of highly productive groups. In addition, neither the tasks nor the subordinates' qualities were considered. Other situational factors and group traits were also disregarded. Finally, it has been said that the behavioral types proposed by Michigan Leadership Studies are static. Depending on the situation, a leader should use one of the two approaches—task orientation or employee orientation. However, a practical approach could work in one circumstance but not another. Additionally, leaders do not limit themselves to a specific approach. To suit themselves, they adopt both orientations to varying degrees.

The Michigan Leadership Studies were conducted roughly the same time as the Ohio State Leadership Studies, both of which stressed the importance of tasks and people. The Michigan Leadership Studies adds "Participative leadership" to the Ohio findings, taking the issue beyond persons and into the realm of leading terms. A behavioral leadership hypothesis called the Ohio State Leadership Studies demonstrates that two types of behaviors—initiating structure and consideration—have an impact on a leader's ability to succeed. One can train, educate, and enhance oneself to become a leader; this is another Ohio State Leadership Studies finding. When trait theory dominated the discipline of leadership studies in the mid-1940s, scholars at Ohio State University attempted to draw conclusions about how distinct leadership characteristics affected leadership success. To further understand leadership, the research team developed the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire, or LBDQ (Lindberg, 2021). There are 150 statements about leadership traits in the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire. Each respondent rates the frequency of each

behavior on a scale from never to always, with five possible options. Leadership studies can be systematized and quantified using the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire.

In 1945, the Ohio State leadership studies investigation might be systematized using the leader behavior description questionnaire, allowing for a clearer understanding of behavior patterns. The questionnaire has been modified over the years. It is still utilized in leadership studies, creating it one of the most significant consequences of Ohio State Leadership Studies, often known as the Ohio State Model of Leadership Behavior. After successfully identifying various diverse behaviors affecting leadership effectiveness, they were divided into two categories: initiating structure and considering behavior. The Ohio Leadership Studies' two conduct categories are Consideration and Initiating Structure. A leader can exhibit both traits in varying degrees at the same time. Initiating structure is a type of leadership behavior that aims to bring clarity and structure to an organization. Setting clear goals, providing constructive criticism to enable improvement, and setting performance and production standards are some of the behaviors in the Initiating Structure category. Setting job descriptions and defining the division of labor, recurring coordination of work, focusing on completing milestones and performance targets, and monitoring and handling operations and execution are all part of the job (Lindberg, 2021).

A high level of Initiating-Structure behavior implies a high delineation of roles, duties, expectations, schedules, and so on, leaving minimal uncertainties for personnel, similar to Taylor's Scientific Management. High levels of Initiating Structure behavior also indicate that the leader takes all choices, punishes poor performance among followers, and emphasizes the significance of results. An extreme situation will resemble the autocratic leadership style of the Lewin leadership types, which should be avoided at all costs. In other leadership models, starting structure is known by different names, but one can learn more about it here: task-oriented leadership. If employed excessively, the initiating structure can be compared favorably to a mix of the over-pace-setting and domineering leadership from Goleman's six leadership styles. This leadership styles category has all the styles mentioned earlier.

A group of leadership practices known as consideration behavior puts a strong emphasis on connections and the well-being of others. Here are some key features of consideration behaviors: paying close attention to team members and other stakeholders; treating individuals well and considering them as equals; offering assistance to team members; being strongly supportive, amiable, and available; stressing the welfare of the team members; creating trust and a positive team environment, and displaying compassion and a genuine desire to understand each team member's capabilities. Their consideration behaviors determine the leader's level of compassion and attention to individuals. High-consideration conduct denotes a desire for trust, concern for the followers' sentiments, and a readiness to forge tight bonds among team members. Active listening is a skill that a leader who displays high

concern behavior employs to comprehend each team member's strengths and limitations and to provide them with the necessary support.

According to Daniel Goleman's leadership theories, consideration behavior is comparable to democratic leadership paired with mentoring and affiliative leadership. Finding the ideal balance is challenging, and democratic leadership requires a high level of leadership expertise to acquire. According to the Ohio State leadership study, these two leadership traits can result in four possible results, called quadrants, with four distinct leadership philosophies reflecting the leader's conduct. The most significant findings of the Ohio State Leadership Studies are that high consideration behavior and a high initiating structure are displayed simultaneously by the most influential leaders and that leadership skills can be acquired (Lindberg, 2021). The idea that leaders may evoke two different sorts of actions at once was also novel in comparison to previous research and theories at the time. The results of the Ohio State Leadership Studies deviate significantly from the then-dominant trait theory of leadership. According to the theory of qualities, a person can succeed as a leader if they possess a number of different characteristics. One may acquire traits from birth; thus, some people are destined to be leaders while others are not. Trait theory suggests that one can still develop oneself leadership skills. See the much older Great Man Theory of Leadership for something completely different. According to this idea, one is either a leader or a follower from birth.

According to Ohio State Leadership Studies, leaders' behaviors, not their personality qualities, determine how effective they are. The idea that anyone can discover how to be an outstanding leader is made possible by the fact that behaviors can be learned and acquired (Smith, 2011). Four leadership trajectories are produced by the Ohio State Leadership Studies' Initiating Structure and Consideration behaviors: Low levels of both behavior categories; high levels of initiating structure; low levels of consideration behavior; and high levels of initiating structure and high levels of consideration behavior combined. According to Ohio State Leadership Studies, organizations and enterprises perform better when combined with a high starting structure and highly considerate conduct. A superb leader, then, has high levels of both initiating structure and consideration behaviors. According to later studies, a high initiating structure results in solid production and low job satisfaction. People that exhibit highly considerate behavior and low starting structure love their jobs and take fewer sick days as a result, but they also do less well. The Ohio State Leadership Studies concluded that initiating structure and consideration conduct, two types of behavior that impact leadership performance, are both highly exhibited by influential leaders and that leadership skills can be taught and mastered. According to the characteristic leadership theory, one is not born with the ability to lead. The Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire and the break from trait theory, which allowed for the idea that one can learn and improve leadership skills, were the distinctive and vital contributions of Ohio State Leadership Studies.

The Ohio State University studies from the 1940s and the Michigan leadership studies, two of the most well-known behavioral leadership studies, are still referenced today.

The behavioral theory provides various benefits, the most significant of which is that leaders may understand and determine what actions to take to evolve into the kind of leader they like to be. It allows leaders to be adaptable and flexible in the face of changing circumstances (Awana, 2022). Another significant benefit of this leadership style is that it signifies that anyone may evolve into a great and effective leader. One disadvantage of behavioral theory is that it allows for flexibility but does not specify how to respond in specific situations. Various leadership styles are derived from behavioral science, but none is appropriate for every situation. Examining a task-oriented leader versus a people-oriented leader is a fantastic way to illustrate behavioral theory. A task-oriented leader will examine the procedure to determine whether the workflow must be modified if there is a team performance issue. A leader who cares about people will turn to the people and inquire what the problem is. The behavioral leadership idea assists leaders in focusing on their actions and using their decisions to be great leaders, regardless of their chosen behaviors.

The behavioral leadership paradigm is grounded in individual leaders' actions and behaviors. This encourages a sense of adaptability to react to a given scenario effectively. Instead of attempting to adapt an extraneous paradigm to the problem, it might ensure an acceptable response for the solution. Behavioral theory promotes the notion that anyone may be a leader, in contrast to several other leadership theories. It implies that leadership skills are acquired via certain behaviors rather than innate traits. This makes it possible for everyone to become a leader depending on their decisions and what they learn. When solving problems, the behavioral leadership approach places more emphasis on actions. This motivates them to consider the processes that lead to specific problems occurring. The leaders' decision-making may be improved by using this knowledge in place of decisions that only affect a small group of people.

The behavioral leadership theory does, regrettably, have certain drawbacks. This leadership paradigm considers a single leader's distinctive deeds. As a result, there is a chance that the leader will bias the decision-making process. Leaders can prevent this by being more conscious of their potential biases, developing self-awareness, and soliciting input from their peers. Although the behavioral theory of leadership gives leaders flexibility, it also implies that it does not offer suggestions on how to react in particular circumstances. This could feel difficult if one is dealing with a brand-new issue that one does not know how to handle. However, this adaptability equips leaders to decide wisely based on specific circumstances (Indeed Editorial Team, 2019).

Recognizing one's preferred leadership style or philosophy will help to identify how to become the most excellent leader possible. It is beneficial to understand leadership theories and styles in the workplace and to understand what one can do to continue or

improve on that leadership philosophy. Great leaders are required for any enterprise that wishes to expand its operations and achieve its objectives. Furthermore, every organization can have exceptional leaders without acquiring additional senior-level staff. Many people believe that a born leader and a made leader are two different things. Some people might be naturally good leaders. Even the most experienced leaders have continued to grow and gain new abilities. A competent leader helps the individuals who work for them carry out their duties by using influence and persuasion rather than simply telling them what to do.

Although some individuals may already have some of the abilities and traits that define a great leader, they may constantly develop and improve their leadership talents. A leader training program can help someone who does not seem to be a leader in the outside world strengthen their leadership abilities. Giving leaders the resources and specialized training they need to develop as great leaders is all that is necessary for effective leadership in an organization. An effective leader does not approach management from a prescription-only perspective, delivering a healthy dose of a planned response to a given situation. As dynamic as the context in which it develops, leadership is. It is something that can be enhanced, changed, and supported.

There are various ways to consider leadership, from highlighting excellent leadership characteristics to focusing on factors influencing how people lead. Like other disciplines, leadership has many facets and the reasons why certain people make excellent leaders depend on a variety of circumstances.

In the end, the truth is that both are true: a person might be born with inherent leadership skills, and a person can pick up these skills via experience. Whether or not someone is a "born leader," they all have the potential to develop their leadership capabilities.

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