Introduction

Throughout history, humankind has examined the concept of leadership and attempted to grasp what it is, how it can be defined, and what makes a leader. The philosophy of leadership has evolved over time, within the context of culture and other influences, to represent a multitude of ideas. Theories of leadership have emerged to examine whether or not persons are born with leadership abilities, if certain traits can be identified common among leaders, is leadership a set of skills, can these qualities be taught and more. As time continues so will the perception of leadership, there will never be an all-encompassing definition. Through the study of leadership, we can endeavor to understand its elements and gain insight into its many facets. In the process, we may be able to unravel some of the many elements to enable us to become and develop stronger leaders.

Historical Accounts

Even as early as the Greek philosopher Plato (400s-300sBC), human kind has been questioning who should lead and who has the right to be lead. In Plato’s work The Republic (On Tyranny) he discusses the formation of the self-serving tyrant and measures taken to stay in power. He relays, “At first, in the early days of his power, he
is full of smiles, and he salutes every one whom he meets;—he to be called a tyrant, who
is making promises in public and also in private, liberating debtors, and distributing land
to the people and his followers, and wanting to be so kind and good to every one!” But
soon we find that this ruler must take every action to keep himself in power including:
starting wars, removing adversaries, and even those who were his supporters and
helped to put him in power, for fear that “if he means to rule [the tyrant] must get rid of
them; he cannot stop while he has a friend or an enemy who is good for anything.”

Plato’s student, Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC), illustrates a different concept of a leader.
In a Treatise on Government (Book VII, Chapter XIVI) Aristotle relays that the difference
between those who govern and the governed is not so great. He says, “it is evident that
for many reasons it is necessary that all in their turns should both govern and be
governed: for it is just that those who are equal should have everything alike.” He
continues to convey that those who lead should first learn to obey and that government
should consist of “freemen over each other.”

The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu (500 BC) wrote about leadership in his work Tao Te
Ching. His perspective was that ‘True self-interest teaches selflessness’, when we come
to know ourselves in our fullest form we can look outside ourselves. For Lao-Tzu the
most accomplished leader is the one that gives all the credit to the people. He says
“The master doesn’t talk, he acts. When his work is done, the people say, “Amazing: we
did it all by ourselves!” Leaders need to be trustworthy and follow the will of the people.
In the 1600s some other theories of leadership and the right to rule become apparent. King James I wrote *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, which declared kings as Gods, placed on the throne through Deive will. In the piece he declares “as being founded by God himself, who by his oracle and out of his own mouth gave law thereof, what liberty can broiling spirits and rebellious minds claim justly to against any Christian monarchy, since they can claim no greater liberty on their part nor the people of God might have done, and no greater tyranny was ever executed by any prince or tyrant whom they can object.” In other words, to act against the monarchy was an act against God, no matter how tyrannical the monarchy was.

From another perspective, John Locke, also in the 1600s, was working on *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* wherein he laid out a ‘social contract’ in which the governed have the right to dispose of a legislator who acts contrary to their interests. He wrote “Whenssoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavor to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands.”

So it can be seen that the subject of the leader and led has been the focus of study and debate spanning centuries. Many of the fundamental ideas still prevalent today stem from the philosophical conversations of the past. Ideas we are still grappling with, from
what makes a leader, to the foundations of the Declaration of Independence, are many of the same thoughts that have been occurring throughout the centuries.

Defining Leadership

There are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons willing to define it. Warren Benson and Burt Nannis discovered 850 during their research for Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge (1985). Definitions range from those that are relatively straightforward to complicated. In Leadership: Theory and Practice (2010), Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” In the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John C. Maxwell describes leadership as "leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less." In contrast, Winston & Patterson (2006) devised a complicated ‘integrative’ model that includes over 90 variables that ‘may comprise the whole of leadership’. In their work, which included an extensive review of the literature on leadership definitions, they state even these 90 variables are not enough to fully understand leadership.

The complexity of defining leadership has led towards attempts to describe it instead. Leadership has been described in terms of traits or characteristics that a leader has, or in the context of the process, how the leader uses knowledge and skills. Different types of leaders have been identified- Assigned vs. Emergent Leadership. An assigned leader is one who has gained a position or title in their organization and therefore, leadership responsibilities. An emergent leader is one who is perceived as influential by those
around them without regard to formal titles or positions (Northouse, 2010). These types of leadership raise questions about the process of becoming a leader. In whose eyes is the individual a leader? An emergent leader in an organization may not be the one who has the ‘leadership’ title or position, but has the influence to sway opinion. Moreover, the assigned leader may not have the skills or acceptance from followers.

**Leadership, Power and Coercion**

Power is an important concept to explore related to leadership because of its relationship to influence. Northouse (2010) defines power as the capacity or potential to influence people. Alvin Toffler, in his book *Power Shift* (1991) describes power as coming from three areas—through violence, money and knowledge. In The Bases of Social Power, French and Raven (1959) identified five bases for understanding power in a dyadic relationship between the influencer and the influenced. These were:

- Referent power— the followers positive opinion of the leader
- Expert power— the followers perception of the leaders competence
- Legitimate power— the leaders status
- Reward power— the leaders ability to reward
- Coercive power— the leaders ability to penalize or punish

There are many other described forms of power with positive and negative implications. In *The Two Faces of Power*, Mc Clellen (1970) identifies that power can be personalized focused on self-benefit or socialized, benefiting society.
How is leadership different from power and control? It is a common consensus amongst academia exploring leadership that leadership is not about personal power, control or coercion. Separating these ideas allows us to talk about leadership outside of the context of rulers, dictators or other figures that used power for their own means, such as Adolf Hitler. Power over, in this sense, is not considered leadership, as it is against the will of the people.

Approaches to Leadership and Theories

Throughout the 20th Century many have attempted to identify and define what makes a good leader. These studies have included examining traits, from physical to personality, skills, style and even situations that may contribute to leadership abilities. A variety of theories have evolved from the study of leadership endeavoring to highlight methods for understanding and improving the leadership process. The following will introduce some of the prevailing leadership concepts.

Traits

In mid-19th and early 20th Centuries, identifying leadership qualities focused on inherent traits possessed by the leader that were thought to set the leader apart from the rest. The traits approach examined characteristics ranging from the physical- height, stature, strength to personality types- confidence, intelligence and masculinity. Called the ‘Great Man’ theory, it examined persons that accomplished ‘great’ things and strove to find common qualities amongst them. Examples of ‘Great Men’ would be George
Washington or Napoleon Bonaparte. Early descriptions often included masculinity as a trait and overlooked the contributions of women in a male dominated society. In his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Thomas Carlyle, (1840) describes the Great Man as brave, with valor, strength and of divine. He goes so far as to attribute the highest accomplishments of history to these ‘Great Men’ saying:

“For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.”

In 1948 a study conducted by Stogdill changed the direction of thought from a purely traits focus by highlighting the impact of situations on leaders. Stogdill’s approach determined that the traits possessed by the leader must be relevant to the situation in which the leader was acting. Therefore, a particular leader may not be successful in every situation. In a second survey conducted by Stogdill in 1974, the relationship between leadership and situation was reevaluated to produce a more equal view of the interplay between leadership traits and situations. In this study, ten traits were identified that had a positive association with leadership: Achievement, Persistence, Insight,
Initiative, Self-confidence, Responsibility, Cooperativeness, Tolerance, Influence and Sociability.

A multitude of studies have been conducted over the last century to identify which traits make a great leader. Overall, the core traits identified comprise intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. (Northouse pg. 19) In addition, researchers have outlined what are referred to as the ‘Big Five Personality Factors’. These factors appear to have an influence on leadership ability. They include:

- **Neuroticism**- Low levels of depression, anxiousness, insecurity and other traits are associated with strong leadership.
- **Extraversion**- High levels of extraversion were the most strongly associated with effective leadership.
- **Openness**- Informed, creative, insightful, high levels associated with effective leadership.
- **Agreeableness**- Accepting, trusting, to a minor degree associated with leadership.
- **Conscientiousness**- Being organized and thorough associated with effective leadership.

Examining emotional intelligence was another way of viewing the impact of traits on leadership concerning the relationship between emotions and thinking. Goleman’s approach to emotional intelligence in the 1990s, with an emphasis on personal and social competencies, basically concluded that a person cognizant of their own emotions and the emotions of others would be a more effective leader.
The traits approach to leadership focuses in wholly on the characteristics of the leader, not taking into account the influence of followers or situations. Individuals can examine their own traits for deeper insight into who they might be as a leader, or organizations may use traits to identify the characteristics of a person they want to employ. Overall, the defining leadership traits have been inconclusive and subjective. Furthermore, traits as an element persons are born with are not useful for leadership training or development.

Skills
In 1955, Robert Katz diverged from the ‘Traits’ mode of leadership in his *Harvard Business Review* article “Skills of an Effective Administrator.” The Skills Approach to leadership presented a model centered on skills and abilities that could be learned and developed rather than an inborn set of traits. Following Katz, Mumford (1991) and associates in the 1990s assembled a skills-based capability model that examined the association between a leader’s knowledge, skills and performance.

The Katz’s Three-Skill Approach outlined the need for three basic personal skills in leadership- technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical skill is a person’s knowledge about the work at hand, human skill includes knowledge of and ability to work with people or ‘people skills’, and conceptual skill refers to a person’s abilities to work with ideas and concepts. Each of these skills is needed in varying degrees depending on what level of the organizational hierarchy a person has attained. For
instance, a top management executive needs low technical skill but high human and conceptual skills.

Mumford, et al. (2000) designed their skills based model around five components: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences. These components are the basic elements of leader performance. The competencies at the heart of the model are problem solving skills, social judgment, and knowledge- affecting the leadership outcomes of effective problem solving and performance. Career experiences influence the leader’s individual attributes and the competencies and environmental influences are factors outside the leader’s control that can influence individual attribute, competencies or leadership outcomes.

Describing leadership from a skills-based perspective opens the position that many people are capable of leadership. Leadership as an identifiable set of skills can be learned, built, improved, instead of reserved for the select few born with the ability.

**Style**

Another way to view leadership is using the style approach. Apart from traits or skills, the style approach to leadership accentuates the behavior of a leader, what leaders do and how they act. The first studies regarding leadership style came out of Ohio State University and the University of Michigan in the 1940s. Later in the 1960s Blake and Mouton continued research relating to style (Northhouse 2009). Much research has
been conducted that would fit within the style genre, but these three studies exemplify the characteristics of the approach.

The Ohio State studies were based around the idea that the researchers wanted to know how individuals ‘acted’ while in a group or organizational leadership position. They developed a 150 question survey called the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire and gave it to hundreds of people from diverse backgrounds, including education, military and corporate settings (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). The researchers determined that the respondents’ behaviors settled into two main types- initiating structure and consideration. Initiating structure behaviors were defined as ‘task’ behaviors, such as organizing, giving structure to work, and defining responsibilities. Consideration behaviors are described as relationship behaviors, camaraderie, respect, and trust. The study concluded that the fundamental role of the leader was to provide structure for followers and nurture them.

The University of Michigan study examined the impact of leader behavior on the performance of small groups. Similar to the Ohio study, two types of behaviors were noted: employee orientation and production orientation. As the descriptive titles imply, employee oriented leaders approach followers with an emphasis on human relations and production oriented leaders focus more strongly on the technical production side of the job. The researchers examined these two behaviors as opposites, with a leader leaning towards one or the other side. Later studies took into consideration these
behaviors may be separated and a leader could have the ability to be strong in both (Northhouse, 2009).

Blake and Mouton broke leadership behaviors up into five main themes revolving around the themes of Concern for People and Concern for Results. Laid out in what was called the ‘Leadership Grid,’ a score can be plotted to determined leadership style (Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1978, 1985). The styles described include:

- Authority –compliance: heavy weight on task, less on people
- Country club management: heavy weight on people and little on task
- Impoverished management: low emphasis on task or people
- Middle-of-the-road management: balance of people and task
- Team management: Heavy focus on task and people

Related to the Leadership Grid two more styles were identified. Paternalism/Materialism describes a leader who acts with high concern for results or high concern for people, but does not assimilate the two. Opportunism describes a leader who can use any style on the grid, but does so for their own interest.

The style approach has added a new dimension to the study of leadership in examining the behavior of leaders and what they do in various situations. In the study of style, no consistent link has been identified between task behaviors, relationships and outcomes.
Moreover, no universal leadership style has been identified that will work in any situation.

**Situational**

The notion that different situations command different types of leadership is the basic tenant of the situational approach to leadership. The original concept, put forward by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969, has been widely used in organizational leadership training and development and has gone through a multitude of revisions. The fundamental principles are that different situations require different leaders and leaders need to be adaptable in style to compliment the situation. Specifically, an effective leader should be able to fluctuate between using a directive or supportive style, changing to fit the needs of subordinates.

Blanchard identified four leadership styles: delegating, supporting, coaching and directing. The styles coincide with development levels- the degree that subordinates can accomplish tasks and activities. The development level of the subordinate dictates which leadership style should be used to best advantage (Northhouse, 2009).

**Contingency**

Contingency Theory is the idea that leadership is contingent on matching a leader’s style to the right setting. The most prominent among the prevailing literature surrounding the subject is Fielder’s Contingency Theory (1964, 1967; Fielder & Garcia, 1987). In the context of contingency theory, leaders are designated as either task
motivated or relationship motivated. Task motivated leaders are concerned with ‘getting the job done’ while relationship motivated leaders are focused on the interpersonal aspects and developing stronger ties.

Fielder developed a tool called the Least Preferred Coworker to measure leadership styles. Those scoring high on the scale are classified as more relationship oriented and those low are more task oriented.

Relationship  High  Low  Task

The model is further divided into three situational factors:

- Leader-member- a relational term describing the atmosphere of the group and confidence inspired by the leader, labeled as Good or Poor
- Task Structure- the degree to which assigned tasks are clear, labeled as High or Low
- Position power- the amount of authority the leader has, ability to reward or not, Labeled as Weak or Strong

The circumstances considered most favorable are those where leader-follower relations are high, tasks are structured and the leader position power is strong.
Contingency theory has been supported by much empirical research, forcing us to consider the impact of situations on leaders. Moreover, it can be predictive of what type of leadership style will be most effective in a certain context. One of the criticisms of contingency theory is that it fails to explain why people of some leadership styles are more effective in certain situations than others.

**Path-goal**

Path goal theory describes how leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals. Introduced in the early 1970s by Evans (1970) and House (1971) the objective of path-goal was to improve employee performance and fulfillment by focusing on motivating factors. Related to expectancy theory, the tenant is that subordinates will be motivated to perform if they feel they are capable.

For path-goal, the leader must choose the leadership style that compliments the needs of the worker in order to motivate them. Some of the identified motivating factors involved increasing the number and types of rewards, setting clear and attainable goals and removing obstacles for the worker. In short, path-goal: defines goals, clarifies the path, removes obstacles and provides support. The leadership behaviors commonly associated with path-goal are directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented. Path-goal theory has set forth a framework for how differing leadership behaviors affect subordinates satisfaction and performance. No previous leadership theory has examined what motivates followers. On the other hand, path-goal integrates so many facets of leadership it can be complex to navigate (Northouse, 2009).
**Leader Member Exchange**

The focus of Leader Member Exchange (LMX) is on the interactions between leaders and followers. Previous to LMX, leadership was analyzed exclusively from the perspective of the actions of the leader. In LMX followers are placed into two groups, the ‘In-Group’ or the ‘Out-Group’. Inclusion in these groups is defined by how well the subordinates work and interact with the leader. As may be assumed, in group followers do more and get more from the leader, while out group followers are less compatible with the leader.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) in the early 1990s outlined a process called Leadership Making that sets forth an approach for leaders to develop high quality interactions with all followers. The purpose is to draw all subordinates into the group, making them feel a part and eliminating exclusion into an ‘out group’. Through effective leadership making, the leader can create partnership networks or ‘dyads’ throughout the organization, for the mutual benefit of the organization and the leader’s own personal goals.

LMX is the single approach that places the dyadic relationship at the center of the leadership process. It emphasizes the importance of communication in the leader-follower relationship and warns of the presence of biases that may create or perpetuate ‘in groups’. Much research has been conducted to substantiate the positive influence of LMX on organizations, but it fails to explain how high quality leader-member exchanges are created and no empirical measures have been used.
Transformational Leadership describes a process where leaders and followers are connected that changes and transforms those involved. The focus places emphasis on emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long term goals taking into account the followers’ motives, needs and inclusion as complete entities. Introduced by James MacGregor Burns in his work *Leadership* (1978), Transformational Leadership has been the most heavily studied approach in current leadership theory.

Burns work bound the leader and follower together with leaders addressing the motives of followers to achieve the goals of both leaders and followers. He differentiated between two types of leadership, Transactional and Transformational. Transactional leadership is support with an exchange outcome and models most leadership circumstances. For example, an employee performs well and gets a raise. Transformational is when a leader creates a connection with followers and increases their level of motivation, helping them to attain their full potential. The leader often demands an extraordinary amount from followers, inspiring them to new heights. An example would be Martin Luther King. Burns identified a characteristic he termed pseudo-transformational leadership, where a leader uses power to exploit followers for personal gain.

Another element of transformation is Charismatic Leadership. Charisma is described as a certain gift that an individual holds that enables them to do extraordinary things,
especially in regards to followers. Weber (1947) described charisma as superhuman and of divine origin (Northouse pg. 173). The main characteristics of a charismatic leader are said to be dominance, a strong desire to influence others, self-confidence, and a strong sense of personal moral values.

Other perspectives on transformational leadership to note are those outlined by Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002). In a survey conducted with 90 leaders, Bennis and Nanus identified common strategies leaders use for transforming organizations. They narrowed these down to four main elements: vision of the future, social architects, trust and, positive self-regard.

Kouzes and Posner asked leaders to describe their personal best experiences in leadership roles. Through this they developed a model of five fundamental practices. These practices are: model the way, inspire shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Kouzes and Posner went further to recommend steps, emphasizing behaviors, to help people become more effective leaders. A tool developed by them called the 360-degree Leadership Practices Inventory has been widely used for leadership growth.

Transformational leadership has been well researched, involving high profile leaders in large corporations. It broadens the scope of leadership from a focus on the leader giving rewards to the leader participating in the growth and needs of followers. The dimensions of transformational leadership have been hard to define because it involves such a wide
range of activities. Another criticism is that transformational leadership brings back the ideas that leadership is based on predisposition or personality traits rather than learnable behaviors. Moreover, the leaders involvement of changing followers values towards a new vision has been questioned in terms of who’s vision is it really, and is it better than the previously held vision of the follower (Northouse, 2009)?

**Can leadership be taught?**

The volume of literature, study and development courses surrounding the subject of leadership indicates the general consensus is that leadership can be taught. Far from something a person is born with, current thought promotes that leadership abilities can be identified and the skills to lead can be developed. John Gardner for one, in his book *On Leadership* (1990) states, “Many dismiss the subject with the confident assertion that "leaders are born not made." Nonsense! Most of what leaders have that enables them to lead is learned. Leadership is not a mysterious activity. It is possible to describe the tasks that leaders perform. And the capacity to perform those tasks is widely distributed in the population.”

Adding to Gardner’s view authors Kouzes and Posner state, “Conventional wisdom portrays leadership as something found mostly at the top. Myth and legend treat leadership as if it were the private reserve of a very few charismatic men and women. Nothing is further from the truth.” (2010). In addition to the endless volumes in print, a multitude of personal assessment tools have been developed over the last century
aimed at helping potential leaders in identifying their strengths, personality characteristics and leadership styles.

Katharine Cook Briggs along with her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, developed a personality type indicator test to help women joining the workforce in the WWII era (Myers-Briggs website). Myers-Briggs They felt that understanding personality type could make perceptions clearer and judgments sounder. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is one of the most widely used personality assessment tools used today. Along the same lines, Dr. Anthony Gregorc created the Gregorc Style Delineator that identifies four personal style types: Concrete Sequential (CS), Abstract Sequential (AS), Abstract Random (AR) and Concrete Random (CR). Based upon a psychologically-formulated matrix of 40 descriptive words, the Gregorc Style Delineator is said to be an extraordinary tool for helping individuals gain a better understanding of themselves and others. It is Gregorc’s view that:

“Every human being is endowed with a uniquely proportioned set of mental qualities for interacting with the world. These endowments manifest as specific behaviors, characteristics, mannerisms and products known collectively as style. Our mental qualities cause us to be attracted to specific people, places, and things that are appropriate for us. They also cause us to reject and be rejected by inappropriate people, places, and things.”
Tom Rath’s *Strengths Finder 2.0* (2007) takes the perspective that individuals should focus on developing their strengths rather than wasting time on trying to improve weaknesses. The strength finder arranges an assessment around 34 themes and ideas for action and strives to identify a person’s ‘Top Five’. By focusing personal development on these five one can become “a lot more of who you already are.”

The only certain thing about leadership is that it is an amazingly complex and layered philosophy encompassing a multitude of elements. We will never successfully define one universally accepted concept of leadership. As long as persons exist striving to define it, there will be an unlimited number of differing opinions on what leadership is. Through the influence of society and culture, leadership is constantly changing and reinventing itself. One only has to examine the perspectives on leadership just over the past few decades to see how far thought on the subject has expanded. Imagine what the literature will look like ten or twenty years from now.
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