Leadership and Management[1][2]

Leadership and management are among the most studied topics in the social and behavioral sciences with literally hundreds of thousands of published papers, books, and presentations and seemingly almost as many definitions of them. From Socrates in the 5th century BC who talked about transferable leadership capabilities to Daniel McCallum, an engineer working for the railroads in the 1850s who wrote about managerial power, to thousands of I/O Psychologists working today, philosophers, leaders, and researchers have long been interested in the concepts of leadership and management.

It is important to understand the difference between leadership and management. While there are no universal definitions of either concept, it is generally recognized that leadership deals with phenomena like influencing, direction-setting, and establishing vision while management deals with executing, administering, and directing organizational activities. Put another way, managers carry out what leaders envision. Business schools traditionally focus on the many domains of management (e.g., production, human resources, systems, and hospitality), each with its own body of theories, research, and practice, while leadership is more the domain of I/O Psychology.

While early writings on leadership came mostly from philosophers and poets, the earliest scientific research on leadership attempted to identify the important and common traits among leaders, the so-called "Great Man" theories. Investigations revealed that there was not a single, universal group of traits that marked leadership (Stogdill, 1948). Researchers have looked at skills (i.e., learned capabilities) and behaviors (e.g., what leaders actually do) but have not been able to identify universal leadership attributes.

Leadership researchers have looked at the impact that situations have on leaders and the interactions between leaders and followers but found that no one model completely captures leadership. Later approaches to leadership have focused on the charismatic (House, 1977) aspects of leadership, arguing that the main role of leaders is to influence and transform their followers. Research in leadership has advanced with investigators looking at more complicated, multi-faceted and team perspectives of leadership (Kozlowski, et al., 1996; Zaccaro, 2001) of leadership. Current research in leadership includes work on gender/diversity/cultural differences (House, et al., 2013) and leader ethics (Basford, et al., 2014). While no one framework fully captures what leadership is and how it affects organizations, all of these different approaches provide valuable insight for individuals and organizations and they work to select, develop, and assess leaders.

In terms of assessment, there are differing ideas about the extent to which leadership matters. One perspective is that leadership is not very important because characteristics of the environment and situational contingencies overwhelm the effect of any one individual. For example, could any CEO have prevented damage to BP's reputation after the Gulf oil spill? The other perspective is that leadership does matter but its impact is the result of a complex interaction between the individual, the environment, and the situation. Where would the United States be with respect to civil rights, voting, employment, and housing rights without the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? Dr. King's efforts (the individual) were essential but the changes may not have happened if large portions of the country were not ready for it (the environment) and if abuse of civil rights activists had not been publicized in the media (the situation).

Author Contact: textbook@siop.org

What past and present research about leadership tells us is that it is a complex and important aspect of modern organizations. Leadership is a dynamic and constantly evolving area that has benefitted from multiple theoretical perspectives and a wide variety of applied practices. It is important across levels of the organization (individual, team, organization) and across individuals, cultures, and nations. While there is more to be learned, overall, leadership researchers, practitioners, organizational members, and leaders themselves generally agree that leadership is an important factor that plays a major role in the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of modern organizations.

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