# CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN THE ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP PROCESSES

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## Abstract

An overview is provided of several lines of development in the study of leadership up to, and within, the contemporary scene. These include consideration of: leadership as a process involving an influence relationship; the leader as one among other participants in this relationship; the transaction occurring between leaders and followers; the differential tasks or functions associated with being a leader; and the nature of leader effectiveness. Several implications are derived for future research, including the need to: attend to leadership as a property of the system of a group; recognize the two-way influence characterizing leader-follower relations; distinguish better between the maintenance of leadership and its emergence, particularly those factors legitimizing the leader's position through processes of succession; focus greater attention on leader effectiveness in terms of the follower's expectations and perceptions of him, especially as they reveal the psychological basis for identification. Contemporary Trends in the Analysis of Leadership Processes

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The history of leadership research is a fitful one. Certainly as much, and perhaps more than other social phenomena, conceptions and inquiry about leadership have shifted about. This is partly due to the variegated quality of the phenomenon itself. But it also is indicative of how closely conceptions of leadership are bound to an era, and to the social and ideological contexts which prevail (Gouldner, 1950).

In a time of landed aristocracy, the study of leadership could, for instance, take the line laid down by Galton's <u>Hereditary Genius</u> (1869), with its heavy emphasis on ganetic determinism. Later, within a time of promised social mobility, becoming a leader could be seen more congenially as a function of individual capabilities, not necessarily bound to birth. The leader's own distinguishing characteristics were then a paramount focus. Ultimately, there developed in the present century an insistent preoccupation with finding the personality "traits" which <u>made</u> a person a leader. The yield from the trait approach was meager and often confused, however.

The eventual shift toward the so-called "situational approach" during the 1940's was spurred by the growing recognition that there were specialized demands made upon leadership depending upon the nature of the group task and other aspects of the situation. Clearly, a deficiency in the older approach was its acceptance of "leader" as a relatively homogeneous role, independent of the variations in leader-follower relationships

across situations. The disordered state in which the trait approach left the study of leadership was amply revealed by Stogdill, in his influential literature survey of 1948, which marked a point of departure for the developing situational emphasis. The publication in 1949 of Hemphill's <u>Situational Factors in Leadership</u> contributed a further push in this direction.

The main focus of the situational approach was to study leaders in different settings, defined especially in terms of different group tasks and group structure. Mainly, though not entirely, through laboratory experimentation, such matters as the continuity in leadership across situations with variable tasks was studied (e.g. Carter, Haythorn, Meirowitz, and Lanzetta, 1951; Carter and Nixon, 1949; Gibb, 1947). The findings of this research substantially supported the contention that "who" became a leader depended in some degree upon the nature of the task. With this movement, however, there came a corresponding deemphasis on the personality characteristics of leaders or other group members. Though a number of studies systematically placed people in groups on the basis of their scores on certain personality dimensions (e.g., Berkowitz, 1956; Haythorn, Couch, Haefner, et. al., 1956; Scodel and Mussen, 1953), more typically, laboratory experimentation tended to disregard personality variables. In McGrath and Altman's review of small groups research (1966), for example, they report only 16 of some 250 studies which employed such measures as variables of study. Thus, in little more than a decade, the pendulum had swung very much away from the leader as the star attraction.

Within the present era, characterized by a greater sensitivity to the social processes of interaction and exchange, it becomes clearer that the two research emphases represented by the trait and situational approaches afforded a far too glib view of reality. Indeed, in a true sense, neither approach ever represented its own philosophical underpinning very well, and each resulted in a caricature. It is our purpose here to attempt a rectification of distortion that these traditions have represented, and to point up the increasing signs of movement toward a fuller analysis of leadership as a social influence process, and not as a fixed state of being.

By way of beginning, it may be useful to set forth a number of observations which can serve as an overview, before discussing some of the particulars of recent trends in research and thought on leadership. One striking impression conveyed by surveying the literature of the 1960's in contrast to the preceding two decades, is the redirection of interest in leadership toward processes such as power and authority relationships (e.g. Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Janda, 1960; Raven, 1965). The tendency now is to attach far greater significance to the interrelationship between the leader, the followers, and the situation (see e.g., Fiedler, 1964, 1965, 1967; Hollander, 1964; Hollander and Julian, 1968; Steiner, 1964). In consequence, the problem of studying leadership and understanding these relationships in functional terms, is being recognized as a more formidable one than had earlier been supposed (cf. Cartwright and Zander, 1968).

## A Prospectus

As an overview of the major lines of development in the study of leadership, we propose first to establish several general points which grow out of current work. Thereafter, we will indicate some of the directions in which these developments appear to be heading, as well as indicating those areas which require further attention.

1) It now seems clear that one of the points of confusion in the study of <u>leadership</u> was the failure to distinguish it as a process from the <u>leader</u> as a person who occupies a central role in that process. Leadership constitutes an influence relationship between two, or usually more, persons who depend upon one another for the attainment of certain mutual goals within a group situation. This situation not only involves the "task" but also comprises the group's size, structure, resources, and history, among other variables.

2) This relationship between leader and led is built <u>over time</u>, and involves an exchange or <u>transaction</u> between leaders and followers in which the leader both gives something and gets something. The leader provides a <u>resource</u> in terms of adequate role behavior directed toward the group's goal attainment, and in return receives greater influence associated with status, recognition, and esteem. These contribute to his "legitimacy" in making influence assertions, and in having them accepted.

3) There are differential tasks or functions attached to being a "leader," in addition to the long-standing distinction of position

between the <u>appointed</u> versus the <u>emergent</u> leader. While the image of the leader frequently follows Hemphill's view (1961), of one who "initiates structure," the leader may function too as a "mediator" within the group, as a group "spokesman" outside it, and very often also as the "decision maker" who sets goals and priorities. Personality characteristics which may "fit" a person to be a "leader" are determined by the perceptions held by followers, in the sense of particular role expectancies and satisfactions, at a particular time, rather than by "traits" measured via personality scale scores.

4) Despite the persisting view that leadership traits do not generalize across situations, "leader effectiveness" can and should be studied as it bears on the group's achievement of desired "outputs" (see Katz and Kahn, 1966). An approach to the study of leader effectiveness as a feature of the group's success, in system terms, offers a clear alternative to the older concern with what the " leader "did" do or "did not" do.

#### Reconceptualizing Leadership

The main thrust of the situational approach to leadership was to recognize that the qualities of the leader were variously elicited, valued, and reacted to as a function of differential group settings. Summing up this view, Hemphill (1949b) capped the point in saying "... there are no absolute leaders, since successful leadership must always take into account the specific requirements imposed by the nature of the group which is to be led, requirements as diverse in nature and

degree was are the organizations in which persons band together" (page 225).

Leadership events, then, were seen as outcomes of a relationship that implicates the leader, the led, and their shared situation. Yet, within the situational approach, the process of leadership often went unattended. Much of the time, studies concerned leaders viewed in positional terms, with an emphasis on the outcome of influence assertions. Very little attention was given to the followers, especially in relationship to emergent leaders. Maintenance of position was more generally studied than was its attainment through a process of influence.

The leader, moreover, is not separate from the situation but part of it from the follower's vantage point. Among other things, the leader helps to define the situation in which the group operates. As an active agent of influence he communicates to other group members, verbally and by his actions, and these imply demands which are reacted to in turn. In making an impact, the qualities he possesses must somehow he favorably received by followers in terms of a felt contribution to the on-going enterprise. In exercising influence, therefore, the leader may set the stage and create expectations regarding what he should do and what he will do. Rather than stand apart from the leader, the situation which is perceived to exist may be his creation.

It is now possible to see that the trait and situational approaches merely emphasize parts of a process which are by no means separable. One kind of melding of the trait and situational approaches, for example, is to be found in the work of Fiedler. His essential point, sustained by an extensive program of research (see 1958, 1964, 1965, 1967), is

that the leader's ability to be effective in the group depends upon the structural properties of the group, and the situation including interpersonal perceptions of both leader and led. He finds, for example, that the willingness of group members to be influenced by the leader is conditioned by leader characteristics, but that the shape and direction of this influence is contingent on the group relations and task structure (1958). We shall have more to say about this work in due course.

Another kind of evidence about the importance of the leader's construction of the situation in leadership comes from recent research on conflict. Using a role-playing test situation involving four-person groups, Maier and Hoffman (1965) found that conflict could be turned to productive or non-productive ends, depending on the attitude of the discussion leader. Where the leader perceived conflict in terms of "problem subordinates," the quality of the decision reached in these discussion groups was distinctly inferior to those circumstances in which the discussion leader perceived disagreements as the source for ideas and innovation. In those circumstances, innovative solutions increased markedly.

A leader, therefore, sets the basis for relationships within the group, and thereby can affect outcomes. As Hemphill (1961) suggests, the leader initiates structure. But more than just structure in a concrete sense, he affects the process which occurs within that structure. Among the other aspects of process which have received little attention in the study of leadership is the "goal-setting" activity of the leader.

Its importance appears to be considerable, though few studies have treated it. In one of these, involving discussion groups, Burke (1966) found that the leader's failure to provide goal orientations within the group led to antagonism, tension, and absenteeism. This effect was most acute when there was clear agreement within the group regarding who was to act as the leader. Though such expectations pervade the research on leadership, they have only infrequently been noted.

Legitimacy and Social Exchange in Leadership

Viewed as a social exchange, the person in the role of leader who fulfills expectations provides rewards for others which, in the context of group achievement, return rewards to him in the form of status, esteem, and heightened influence. Because leadership embodies a twoway influence relationship, a recipient of influence assertions may respond by asserting influence in return, that is by making demands on the leader. The very sustemance of the relationship depends upon some yielding to influence on both sides. As Homans (1961) has put it, "Influence over others is purchased at the price of allowing one's self to be influenced by others" (page 286). In his terms, authority depends upon esteem to be influential. By granting esteem itself, or symbolic manifestations of it, one may in turn activate leadership, in terms of a person taking on the "leader" role.

A growing body of literature sustains the utility of a social exchange viewpoint in understanding leadership and its interpersonal qualities. The exchange process can be seen, furthermore, as a vehicle by which the leader's role is legitimated, in terms of the rewards from others signalizing the acceptance of his status.

This feature of leadership has been demonstrated in various experimental settings. In one definitive study conducted by Pepinsky, Hemphill, and Shevitz (1958), subjects who had been low on leader activity were led to behave far more actively in that role by the group's evident support for their assertions. Alternatively, other subjects known to have been high on leader activity earlier were affected in precisely the opposite way by the group's evident disagreement with their statements. In simplest terms, an exchange occurs between the group and the target person. The group provides reinforcement which in turn elicits favored behaviors. In other terms, the reinforcement of a person's influence assertious signalizes his position of authority.

In a similar vein, Rudraswamy (1964) conducted a study in which some subjects within a group were made aware of their own higher status. Not only were they found to attempt significantly more leadership acts than others in their group, but they even out-distanced on that scale those subjects who had been given more relevant information about the task itself.

Other, more recent, work has suggested that even the use of lights as reinforcers will exert a significant effect on the target person's proportion of talking time as well as his perceived leadership status (Bavelas, Hastorf, Gross, and Kite, 1965; Zdep and Oakes, 1967). Thus, the lights not only produced a heightening of leader acts, but also created the impression of greater influence with the implication as well of legitimacy.

It is also clear that agreement about who should lead has the effect in groups of increasing the probability of leader acts (e.g., Banta and Nelson, 1964). Relatedly, in a study of five-man groups involving changed as against unchanged leadership, Pryer, Flint, and Bass (1962) found that group effectiveness was enhanced by early agreement on who should lead.

When a basis is provided for legitimately making influence assertions, it is usually found that individuals will tend to act as leaders. This of course does not deny the existence of individual differences in the propensity for acting, once these conditions prevail. One recent study, by Gordon and Medland (1965), found that positive peer ratings on leadership in army squads was consistently related to a measure of "aspiration to lead." And, similarly, the more vocal members of discussion groups betray a willingness to make contributions which in turn would yield differential reinforcement and thereby the extension of legitimacy. As is implied in the "idiosyncrasy credit" concept (Hollander, 1958), the potential for acting as a leader, and being perceived as such, very much depends on corroboration by peers and the expectations they hold. This applies in an especially acute fashion in leadership succession, another area of potentially fruitful study. There is a further question of the relative importance in legitimacy of factors such as "knowledge" and "office," in Weber's terms, which could be further investigated (see e.g., Evan and Zelditch, 1961).

Leadership Functions and Group Structure

A major deficiency in the older trait approach was its conception of "traits" within the framework of classic personality typologies. Personality measures were applied to leaders, often in profusion, without reference either to the varying nature of leadership roles or the functions they were to fulfill. As Mann's review (1959) revealed, such measures yield highly inconsistent relationships with leadership. To take a common instance, "dominance" and "extroversion" were sometimes related positively to status of the leader, but mostly were neither related positively nor negatively to such status.

Primarily, the difficulty here stems from a failure to treat the characteristics of the leader as they are perceived--and, what is more, as they are perceived as <u>relevant</u>--by other group members, in a given situation. As Hunt (1965) and Secord and Backman (1961) have pointed out, traits must be seen within their relevant interpersonal context. In short, followers hold expectations regarding what it is that the leader ought to be doing here and now.

One prevailing expectation, which yields consistent findings across situations, is that the leader's competence in a major group activity should be high. As one example, Dubno (1965) found that groups tended to be more satisfied when leaders were demonstrably competent in a central function and did most of the work associated with that function. This is seen, too, in an experiment with five-man discussion groups, in which Marak (1964) found that the rewards associated with the leader's ability on a task led to greater perceived as well as actual influence. Julian, Hollander, and Regula (1967) have reported an

experiment indicating that perceived competence and successful performance were two significant determinants of the endorsement of a "group spokesman." These were differentially affected, however, by whether the spokesman had been elected or appointed.

One probable source for the disparate findings concerning qualities of the leader is the existence of differential expectations concerning the functions the leader is to perform. In simplest terms, there are various leadership roles. Without cataloguing these, it nonetheless may be helpful to point out that while the leader is one who often "initiates structure," in various settings he may be a "mediator" inside the group as well as its "spokesman" outside it. In some contexts, the leader essentially is a "decision maker" who as Bavelas (1960) has put it "reduces uncertainty." And that by no means exhausts the roster.

In their study of leadership roles, Clifford and Cohen (1964) conducted research in a camp situation with 79 boys and girls ranging in age from 8 to 13. Over a period of 4 weeks they had nine elections by secret ballot asking the youngsters to indicate how the others would fit into various roles, including such things as planner, banquet chairman, swimming captain, and so forth. Their results indicated that the perceived attributes of campers were variously tied to their election for different leader roles. In summing up, these researchers say, "...the problem should be rephrased in terms of personality variables required in a leader role in a specific situation, which is in turn a function of the follower's perceptions" (page 64).

Another example of the effects of differentiating the characteristics of a leader's role is seen in an experiment conducted with four-man

groups by Anderson and Fiedler (1964). In half the groups the leaders were told to serve as a "chairman" in a participatory way and in the other groups to serve as an "officer in charge" in a supervisory way. They found that the more participatory leaders were significantly more influential and made more of a contribution to the group's performance. More to the point, the relationship between leader attributes, such as intelligence, and group performance, was highly significant for some tasks under the participatory condition, but not for any of the tasks under the supervisory condition. They therefore conclude that the characteristics of a leader, including intelligence and other personality attributes, become more salient and more highly relevant to group achievement under conditions of participation by the leader, as against circumstances where a highly formal role structure prevails.

One attribute of the leader which is vital from the standpoint of followers is his motivation toward the group and its task. This is seen in Rosen, Levinger, and Lippitt's (1961) finding that "helpfulness" was rated as the most important characteristic leading to high influence potential among adolescent boys. In a more recent study of the role dimensions of leader-follower relations, Julian and Hollander (1966) found that both the variables "interest in group members" and "interest in group activity" were significantly related to group members' willingness to have a leader continue in that position. This fits the findings of a field study by Nelson (1964) who conducted his research with 72 men who had spent twelve months together in the Antarctic. While generally those men most liked as "leaders" had characteristics highly similar to those who were most liked as "followers," he found that perceived

motivation was the major factor which distinguished the two. Hollander (1958) has considered this a critical aspect of the leader's ability to retain status, though nonconforming. In Nelson's study, the highly liked leaders were seen significantly more to be highly motivated toward the group and this is in line with his hypothesis that "...a critical expectation held of the leader, if he is to maintain esteem, is that he display strong motivation to belong to the group" (page 165).

A study by Kirkhart (1963) investigated group leadership among Negro college students as a function of their identification with their minority group. He found that those selected most frequently by their peers for leadership roles in both the "internal system" and the "external system" activities of the group, scored higher on a questionnaire expressing Negro identification. This quality of being an exemplar of salient group characteristics has been noted by Brown (1936) as a feature of leadership, and relates to processes of identification with the leader which will be discussed later.

## Effectiveness of the Leader

By now it should be clear that the leader is not effective merely by being influential. The entire interpersonal system is implicated in answering the question of the leader's effectiveness. As Katz and Kahn (1966) observed, any group operates with a set of resources to produce certain "outputs." Within this system, an interchange of inputs for outputs occurs, and this is facilitated by leadership functions which, among other things, direct the enterprise. The leader's contribution, and its consequences, vary with system demands.

Taken by itself, the typical conception of leadership as one person directing others can be misleading, as we have already observed. Though the leader provides a valued resource, the group's resources are not the leader's alone. Together, such resources provide the basis for functions to be fulfilled in the successful attainment of group goals, or, in other terms, group cutputs.

Given that a group must work within the set of resources it has available, its effectiveness can be gauged in several ways. Stogdill (1959), for one, distinguishes these in terms of the group's performance, integration, and member satisfaction as group outputs of a leadership process which involves the use of the group's resources. Thus, the leader and his characteristics constitute a set of resources which can be turned to the effective utilization of other resources. A person who occupies the central role of "leader" has the task of contributing to this enterprise, within the circumstances broadly confronting the group.

One prominent exemplification of the system demands and constraints on the leader's effectiveness is seen in Fiedler's "contingency model" (1964, 1965, 1967). He predicts varying levels of effectiveness for different <u>combinations</u> of leader and situational characteristics. Thus, depending upon the leader's orientation toward his coworkers, in the context of three situational variables--the quality of leader-member liking, the degree of task structure, and the power of the leader--he finds distinct variations in this effectiveness.

In one recent test of his model, Fiedler (1966) conducted an experiment to compare the performance of 96 three-man groups that were culturally and linguistically homogeneous or heterogeneous. Some operated under powerful and others under weak leadership positions on three types of tasks varying in structure and requirements for verbal interaction.

Despite the communication difficulties and different backgrounds, heterogeneous groups performed about as well on the non-verbal task as did the homogeneous groups. Groups with petty officers (powerful) as leaders did about as well as the groups with recruit leaders (weak). The main finding of the experiment was support for the hypothesis from the contingency model that the specific leadership orientation required for effectiveness is contingent on the favorableness of the group-task situation. Partial support for this comes also from a study by Shaw and Blum (1966) in which they manipulated some of the same variables with five-person groups, and with three tasks selected to vary along a dimension reflecting different levels of favorability for the leader. Their results indicated that the directive leader was more effective than the non-directive leader only when the group-task situation was highly favorable for the leader, but not otherwise.

Part of the favorability for the leader clearly resides in the perceptions of followers, and a relatively untapped feature of the leader's effectiveness is the degree to which members identify with him. More than metaphorically, identification with a leader represents important psychological ties which may introduce symbolic factors in his ability to be influential. A recurring theme in the literature of social science, harking back to Weber (see 1947), concerns the "charismatic leader." While this quality has a history of imprecise usage, a thoroughgoing study of the nature and basis for identification with the leader holds the potential for furthering our knowledge of the leadership process.

In a two-phase social psychological investigation of political leadership, Hollander (1963) reported that continuing loyalty to Eisenhewer

in 1954, and subsequently to Kennedy in 1962, accounted for a considerable bolstering of their party's adherents in determining their view of issues and conditions, and in producing votes for the party in a midterm congressional-senatorial election. The ideological component of these "loyalists" in both periods was also found to be highly consistent; in the economic realm, for example, even where personal well-being varied considerably, identification with the President of one's own party yielded similar attitudes and voting patterns.

There may indeed be virtue in reopening to study 'Freud's contention (1922) that the leader of a group represents a common "ego ideal" in whom members share an identification and an ideology. Laboratory experimentation on groups has not provided a basis for studying such identification in light of the ephemeral, ad hoc basis for the creation of such groups. As we move increasingly from the laboratory to study more naturalistic settings, one of the significant qualities that may well make a difference in leadership is precisely this prospect for identification.

## Some Conclusions and Implications

Our selective review and discussion has touched upon a range of potential issues for the future study of leadership. We have by no means been exhaustive in providing details beyond noting suggestive developmenties. It is evident, however, that a new set of conceptions about leadership is beginning to come into view after a period of relative quiescence.

In this concluding section, it is these newer, general ideas that we wish to emphasize in providing a bridge to future research. The

methodologies they demand represent a challenge to imaginative skill, especially toward greater refinements in the conduct of field experiments and field studies which enable a look at the broader system of relation. ships in leadership. Then, too, there will be a need to consider the two-way nature of the process of influence with greater attention paid to the expectations of followers within the system. As we have reiterated here, the key to an understanding of leadership rests in seeing it as an influence process, involving an implicit exchange relationship over time.

No less important as a general point is the need for a greater recognition of the system represented by the group and its enterprise. This recognition would provide a vehicle by which to surmount the misleading dichotomy of the leader and the situation which has so long prevailed. By adopting a systems approach, the leader, the led, and the situation defined broadly, would be seen as interdependent inputs variously engaged toward the production of desired outputs.

It is also apparent that the highly static, positional view of leadership must be overcome. The maintenance of leadership has tended to weight the balance against a more thorough probing of emerging leadership and processes of succession. Investigators should be more aware of their choice, and the differential implications held, as between emerging and ongoing leadership. In this regard, too, the significance of the legitimacy of leadership and its sources and effects, requires greater attention in future investigations.

In studying the effectiveness of the leader, more emphasis will have to be placed on the outcomes for the total system, including the fulfillment of expectations held by followers. The long-standing over-concern

with outcome, often stated only in terms of the leader's ability to influence, must give way to a richer conception of process. Not irrelevantly, the perception of the leader held by followers, including their identification with him, needs closer scrutiny. In this way, we may come closer to a recognition of those stylistic peculiarities which make given persons effective leaders.

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| An overview is provided a<br>study of leadership up to, and<br>include consideration of: lead<br>influence relationship; the fra<br>followers; the differential to<br>a leader; and the nature of lead<br>tions are derived for future of<br>to leadership as a property of<br>way influence characterizing<br>better between the maintenance<br>particularly those factors lead<br>processes of succession; focus<br>ness in terms of the followers<br>especially as they reveal the | d within, the c<br>adership as a p<br>eader as one am<br>nsaction occurr<br>asks or function<br>eader effective<br>research, inclu<br>f the system of<br>leader-follower<br>e of leadership<br>gitimizing the<br>s greater atten<br>s' expectations | ontempo<br>rocess<br>ong oth<br>ing bet<br>ons asso<br>mess.<br>ding th<br>a grou<br>relati<br>and it<br>leader'<br>tion on<br>and pe | rarv scene. These<br>involving an<br>er participants<br>ween leaders and<br>ciated with being<br>Several implica-<br>e need to: attend<br>p; recognize the two-<br>ons; distinguish<br>s emergence,<br>s position through<br>leader effective-<br>rceptions of him, |  |
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