[Developing, Leading and Engaging People]

Lecture Title:

8. [Leading People: Theories and Best Practice]

Lecturer: Paul Gauci

Date: 21st July 2025   13.00hrs-17.00hrs

Masters in Human Resources Management

Learning Objectives

Following this session students will be able to:

- *Critically* explain the theories and general best practices adopted by organisations relating to leadership

- Understand the theories of Leadership: *Trait Theory; Behavioural Theory; Situational Leadership Theory; Transformational Leadership; Servant Leadership*

- Adopt Best Practices: *Establishing a Clear Vision; Empowering Teams; Continuous Learning; Building Emotional Intelligence; Promoting Diversity and Inclusion*

Learning Method

- **Lecture focused on learning objectives and core content** as a key instructional process.

- **Formative assessment through participative learning tools and activities** will be utilised evaluating students' comprehension and academic progress throughout - with respect to understanding and applying HRM concepts.

- The presentation will not just describe these theories but will critically analyze them, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and applicability in organisational contexts.

- It will also cover general best practices.

The Evolution of Leadership Thought

- Brief historical overview: From "born leaders" to learned skills.

- Introduction to the diverse landscape of leadership theories.

- Purpose of this presentation: To critically explore key theories and their practical application.
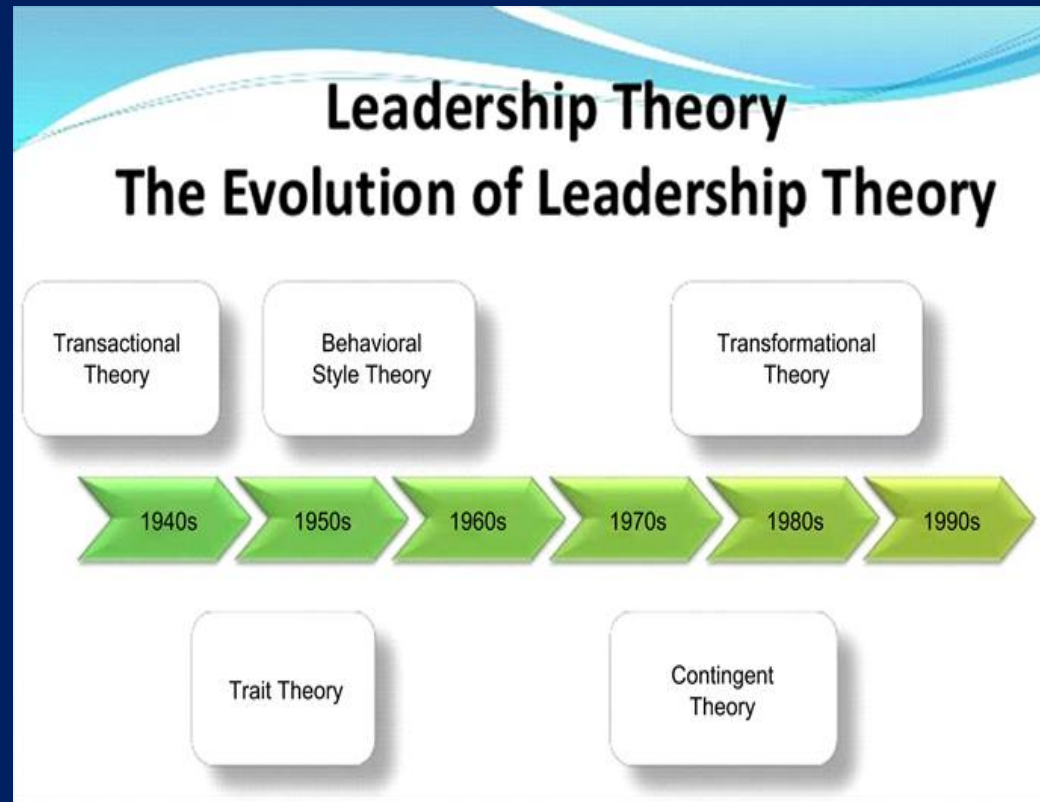
- Overview of Foundational Theories

- Introducing the theories to be covered: Trait, Behavioural, Situational, Transformational, Servant.

- Emphasizing the need for critical evaluation rather than blind adoption.

Theory 1: Trait Theory - The "Great Man/Woman" Approach

- Leaders possess inherent, stable characteristics <u>(traits)</u> that differentiate them from non-leaders (e.g., intelligence, confidence, integrity, charisma).

- Historical Context: Early 20th century focus.

Critical Analysis of Trait Theory

- Strengths: Intuitive appeal, identifies desirable qualities. Useful for selection (e.g., integrity).

- Weaknesses: Limited predictive power (traits don't guarantee success), ignores situational factors, difficulty in defining universal traits, "chicken or egg" dilemma (are traits inherent or developed?).

- Modern Relevance: While not standalone, traits like emotional intelligence are recognized as important, but trainable.

Theory 2: Behavioural Theory -

- What Leaders Do

- Focuses on observable behaviors of leaders, assuming leadership can be learned. (e.g., Ohio State Studies: Consideration & Initiating Structure; Michigan Studies: Employee-Oriented & Production-Oriented).

- Core Idea: Effective leaders display specific patterns of <u>behaviour</u>.

Critical Analysis of Behavioural Theory

- Strengths: Shift from "who" to "what," emphasizes teachable skills, offers practical implications for training and development.

- Weaknesses: Neglects situational context, no universal "best" style, some behaviours might be effective in one context but not another.

- Modern Relevance: Still valuable for leadership training (e.g., active listening, delegation, feedback).

Theory 3: Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard)

- Effective leadership depends on the readiness (competence and commitment) of the followers.

- Leaders must adapt their style (directing, coaching, supporting, delegating).

- Readiness levels (R1-R4) and corresponding leader behaviors (S1-S4)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAuwgjmF5xc

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Critical Analysis of Situational Leadership Theory

- Strengths: Highly practical and intuitive, emphasizes leader flexibility, focuses on follower development. Widely used in training.

- Weaknesses: Simplicity can oversimplify complex situations, defining "readiness" can be subjective, limited empirical support for all claims, potential for manipulation if not used genuinely.

- Modern Relevance: A cornerstone for adaptive leadership, particularly in coaching and mentoring.
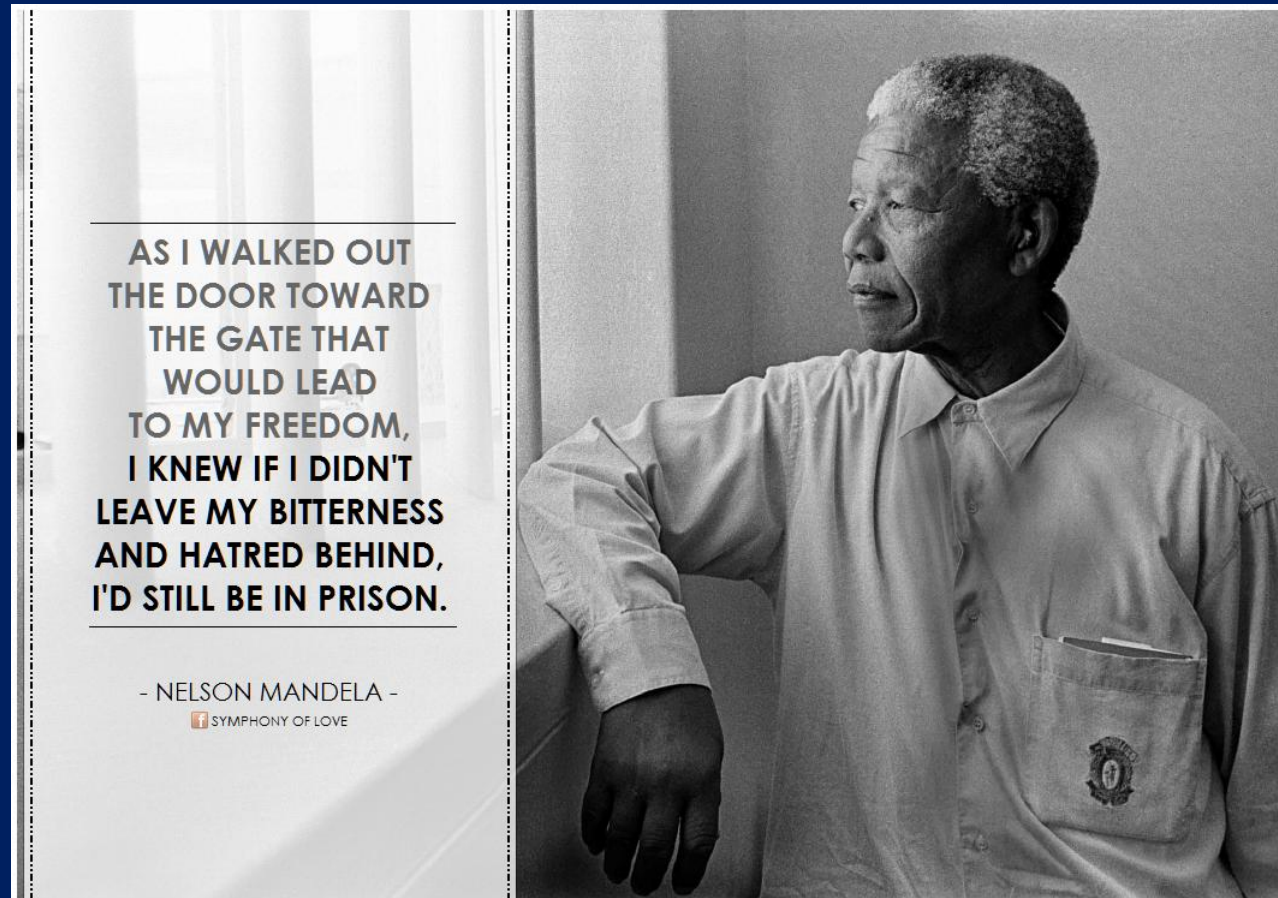
Theory 4: Transformational Leadership

- Inspiring Change

- Leaders motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. (Burns, Bass).

- Four I's: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration.

Nelson Mandela – A Transformational Leader

AS I WALKED OUT
THE DOOR TOWARD
THE GATE THAT
WOULD LEAD
TO MY FREEDOM,
I KNEW IF I DIDN'T
LEAVE MY BITTERNESS
AND HATRED BEHIND,
I'D STILL BE IN PRISON.

- NELSON MANDELA -

SYMPHONY OF LOVE

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnrRE6Wg_f4

Critical Analysis of Transformational Leadership

- Strengths: Powerful for driving change, fostering innovation, enhancing follower motivation and commitment, strong empirical support.

- Weaknesses: Can be seen as overly charismatic-dependent, potential for unethical manipulation (if "values" are misaligned), may neglect routine tasks, difficult to measure effectiveness in all contexts.

- Modern Relevance: Highly relevant for strategic change, crisis management, and building high-performance cultures.

Theory 5: Servant Leadership
- Serving Others First

- Leader's primary motivation is to serve the needs of others (employees, customers, community), prioritizing their growth and well-being. (Robert Greenleaf).

- Key Characteristics: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Persuasion, Conceptualization, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the growth of people, Building Community.

Critical Analysis of Servant Leadership

- Strengths: Fosters trust, collaboration, ethical behaviour, employee engagement, and long-term organisational health. Focuses on social responsibility.

- Weaknesses: Can be perceived as "soft" or lacking assertiveness, may not be suitable for all crisis situations requiring quick, decisive action, implementation can be challenging in hierarchical structures, potential for leader burnout.

- Modern Relevance: Increasingly valued in flat organizations, fostering psychological safety, and building sustainable business models.

Synthesizing the Theories:
No Single "Best" Approach

- Summary of key takeaways from each theory.

- Emphasis that effective leadership is often a blend, context-dependent, and requires adaptability.

- The "contingency" (situational) approach to leadership.

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Exercise: Individual Self Assessment

What's Your Leadership Style?

- https://www.mindtools.com/azr30oh/whats-your-leadership-style

Formative Assessment

Duads Exercise and Class Discussion:

What are the challenges
to exercise Leadership today?

Formative Assessment

Group Exercise: Challenges in Leadership Today

remote work,

AI

global complexities,

multi-generational, diverse
workforce

sustainability.

General Best Practices
in Modern Leadership

Shifting Paradigms: From Command & Control to Empowerment

Best Practice 1:
Fostering Psychological Safety & Trust

- Creating an environment where employees feel safe to speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without fear of punishment.

- How Leaders Do It: Active listening, vulnerability, admitting mistakes, consistent behaviour, open communication.

- Benefits: Innovation, learning, engagement, reduced turnover.

Best Practice 2:
Promoting Empowerment & Autonomy

- Giving employees ownership over their work, decision-making authority, and the freedom to choose how they achieve goals.

- How Leaders Do It: Delegation, clear goal setting (not micromanagement), providing resources, trusting capabilities.

- Benefits: Increased motivation, creativity, accountability, skill developmen

Best Practice 3:
Effective Communication & Transparency

- Clear, consistent, and honest communication from leaders. Two-way communication is vital.

- How Leaders Do It: Regular updates, open-door policy, active listening, constructive feedback, explaining "the why."

- Benefits: Reduces ambiguity, builds trust, aligns efforts, manages expectations.

Best Practice 4: Developing Others & Coaching

- Explanation: Leaders act as coaches and mentors, investing in the growth and development of their team members.

- How Leaders Do It: Identifying strengths, providing growth opportunities, constructive feedback, active coaching conversations, succession planning.

- Benefits: High-performing teams, talent retention, future leadership pipeline.

Best Practice 5:
Leading with Empathy & Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

- Understanding and managing one's own emotions, and recognizing and influencing the emotions of others.

- How Leaders Do It: Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social awareness, relationship management.

- Benefits: Stronger relationships, conflict resolution, improved team cohesion, better decision-making.

"The quality of relationships - characterized by trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose - is a central element in fostering leadership development."

(McCauley & Palus, 2020, p. 8).

Best Practice 6:
Adapting to Change & Leading Through Uncertainty

- Explanation: In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, leaders must be agile and guide their teams through change.

- How Leaders Do It: Vision casting, resilience, clear communication during change, fostering innovation, scenario planning.

- Benefits: Organizational agility, sustained competitive advantage.

Best Practice 7:
Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- Creating a workplace where all individuals feel valued, respected, and have equal opportunities.

- How Leaders Do It: Challenging biases, advocating for underrepresented groups, fostering inclusive culture, diverse hiring practices.

- Benefits: Enhanced creativity, broader perspectives, better decision-making, increased employee satisfaction.

Best Practice 8: Ethical Leadership & Integrity

- Acting consistently with strong moral principles and setting a positive example.

- How Leaders Do It: Transparency, accountability, fairness, taking responsibility, leading by example, fostering an ethical culture.

- Benefits: Builds trust, enhances reputation, reduces risk, creates a positive work environment.

Ethical, relational and contextual leadership

- HR must build a generation of ethical, self-aware leaders, emphasising relational leadership (how the leader works with their team), values-based leadership (ethical sense of self), and contextual leadership (the environment within which they operate).

(CIPD report, Perspectives on Leadership, 2012)

The Learning Leader:
Continuous Self-Development

- Emphasizing that leadership is a journey of continuous learning and adaptation.

- How Leaders Do It: Self-reflection, seeking feedback, professional development, staying informed, embracing growth mindset.

Key Takeaways -

- Integrating Theory and Practice

- No single "best" theory; context is king.

- Effective leadership is multifaceted and adaptive.

- Modern leadership emphasizes people, purpose, and adaptability.

- Leadership is a skill developed through continuous learning and practice.

Exercise: Applying Leadership in Your Context

- Reflect on your own leadership style.

- Call to action: Identify one area for personal leadership development.

Formative Assessment

Groups Case Study: Leading Through Change
– The Journey of Anika Sharma

formative assessment

- **Background:**

- Anika Sharma was promoted to the position of Regional Director at a multinational manufacturing company. Known for her technical expertise and ability to meet deadlines, she had successfully led several project teams. However, this new role demanded something different – leading a diverse team across regions, managing change, and making strategic decisions that impacted the long-term direction of the company.

- In her first six months, Anika faced multiple challenges:

- A key regional market was underperforming.

- Several experienced team members resisted a new digital reporting system.

- Morale was low due to a recent restructuring.

- Initially, Anika responded by relying on her tried-and-tested problem-solving skills. She worked longer hours, tried to fix issues herself, and pushed for faster implementation of the new system. However, she soon realized that her approach was not sustainable. The issues persisted, and burnout was setting in.

- Recognizing the need for a shift, Anika began seeking mentorship from senior leaders, enrolled in an executive leadership course, and started actively listening to her team. She introduced weekly check-ins to understand team concerns and created cross-regional task forces to involve more people in problem-solving.

- Over time, performance improved, resistance decreased, and the team began to align more with Anika's vision. More importantly, Anika herself grew – learning to delegate, to lead with empathy, and to adapt her style to different contexts. She later reflected, "Leadership isn't a destination; it's a journey of learning, listening, and evolving every day."

Reflection Questions:

1. What initial challenges did Anika face in her new leadership role?

2. How did Anika initially respond to these challenges, and why was this approach not effective?

3. What changes did Anika make in her leadership style, and what were the outcomes?

4. What does Anika's story illustrate about the nature of leadership?

Discussion:

1. What initial challenges did Anika face in her new leadership role?

Anika faced several challenges including an underperforming regional market, resistance from experienced staff to a new digital system, and low team morale due to a recent company restructuring.

2. How did Anika initially respond to these challenges, and why was this approach not effective?

Initially, Anika relied on her past methods – trying to fix problems herself and working long hours. This approach wasn't effective because it didn't address the root causes of the issues, led to personal burnout, and failed to engage her team in the change process.

3. What changes did Anika make in her leadership style, and what were the outcomes?

Anika began seeking guidance from mentors, pursued further learning through a leadership course, and started listening more to her team. She implemented collaborative practices like weekly check-ins and cross-regional task forces. As a result, team performance improved, resistance to change decreased, and morale increased.

4. What does Anika's story illustrate about the nature of leadership?

Anika's story illustrates that leadership is not about having all the answers, but about continuously learning, adapting, and growing. Effective leadership involves listening, collaboration, and being open to change.

Key Takeaways:

- Leadership is not static; it evolves with experience, context, and feedback.

- Continuous learning (through courses, mentorship, reflection) is vital for leadership growth.

- Effective leaders listen, adapt, and engage others to achieve shared goals.

- Challenges are opportunities for growth and self-awareness.

Shared Responsibiity

From SHRM article "Leadership Comes in Little Moments" (Feb 2023):

"Leadership is an activity, not a position of authority.""If you don't have the title, you can still use your influence."

"When everyone leads, you can solve the toughest challenges."

References

- Armstrong M. (2009) Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice - Kogan Page 11th Edition

- CIPD report, Perspectives on Leadership, 2012

  www.cipd.co.uk

- McCauley, C. and Palus, C., (2020) Developing the theory and practice of leadership development: A relational view. The Leadership Quarterly, p. 16.

- SHRM article "Leadership Comes in Little Moments" (Feb 2023) www.shrm.org

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