Overview of Leadership Theories
By Sue Panighetti

This is a discussion on various different leadership theories and how they apply to leading others. Use the Leadership Points for Dialogue to help explore each of these theories and how they may or may not relate to each other.

Theory X/Y
It is important to understand that our own underlying assumptions and beliefs about the human nature of others in the workplace often influence how we respond to personnel issues, crisis, morale issues, authoritative directives, etc. Douglas McGregor described Theory X and Y leadership styles in his 1967 book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. He proposed his theory at a time when corporations were run in the top-down style and were loosing the competitive edge in the world market. He argued that the structure of organizations could be improved if leaders made them less formal and encouraged participation of the entire group in decision-making. He also stated it is our assumptions about the nature of human beings, our leadership philosophies that control how we lead.

Theory X was the traditional view of direction and control by management at that time. The Theory X manager believes that employees are motivated mainly by money, are lazy, uncooperative and have poor work habits. The Theory X manager believes that the average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all else. So the Theory X manager uses tactics of control; uses procedures and techniques that tell people what to do; and spends time determining whether they are doing it correctly. This manager administers rewards and punishments for work. The Theory X manager is likely to experience difficulty relinquishing authority, demonstrating respect, delegating tasks and empowering others. According to McGregor, using this type of management style alone, organizations will fail to discover, yet alone utilize, the potentialities of the average employee.

Theory Y managers have an optimistic and positive view regarding human nature and exhibit behaviors that demonstrate a basic belief in the dignity and worth of human beings. They believe employees are capable of problem solving and self-governance. They see people as seeking responsibility, using a high degree of imagination, ingenuity and creativity in problem solving,
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and gaining positive internal rewards associated with achieving at work. Theory Y managers are preoccupied with creating an environment that encourages commitment to organizational objectives and employee satisfaction and self-actualization. The Theory Y manager provides opportunities for employees to exercise initiative, ingenuity and self-direction in achieving goals.

Leadership Points for Dialogue

• How does a Theory X leader treat others?
• Are there times that a Theory X leader can be positive for an organization?
• How does a Theory Y leader deal with poor performance issues on his/her team?
• What blind spots can a Theory Y leader have when dealing with others?

Situational Leadership

Another theory of leadership ties the leader’s behavior to his/her understanding of what the situation requires. Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard developed the theory of Situational Leadership. Situational Leadership is based on a relationship between the amount of direction and control (called directive behavior) a leader gives; the amount of support and encouragement (called supportive behavior) a leader provides and the competence and commitment (called the development level) that a follower exhibits in performing a specific task.

Directive behavior is the extent in which the leader engages in one-way communication; spells out the follower’s role and clearly tells the follower what to do, where to do it, how to do it, when to do it and then closely supervises the performance. This is also known as task behavior. Ask the class to give examples of when this would be appropriate (e.g.---new employee).

Supportive behavior is the extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication, listens, provides support and encouragement, facilitates interaction, and involves the follower in decision-making. This is also known as relationship behavior. Ask the class to give examples of when this type of behavior would be used (e.g.---monitoring a project an experienced motivated employee is heading).
There are four leadership styles that use these two types of behaviors as the basis of their origin. The DIRECTING style utilizes high directive behavior and low supportive behavior. The leader provides specific instructions for the follower and closely supervises the task accomplishment. The COACHING style uses both high directive and supportive behaviors. The leader explains decisions and solicits suggestions from the follower but continues to direct the task accomplishment. The SUPPORTING style uses high supportive behavior and little directive behavior. The leader makes decisions together with the follower and supports efforts toward task accomplishment. The DELAGATING style uses both low supportive and directive behavior. The leader turns over decision and responsibility for implementation to the follower.

In order to know which type of style and behavior is necessary for the specific employee and situation, the leader must correctly assess the follower’s development level. The leader must consider two separate components: COMPETENCE (job readiness) is the knowledge, experience and skill that an individual or group brings to a particular task or activity and COMMITMENT, the follower’s motivation and or confidence.

An effective leader must be able to assess the follower’s development level and utilize the proper leadership style to assist the follower to be successful.

**Leadership Points for Dialogue:**

- Considering Theory X and Y which is more task behavior and which is more relationship behavior oriented?
- What types of questions and behavior would you use to assess someone’s development level?
- Are you more comfortable with one leadership style over another? Why? How is that related to your assumptions about people?
**Transformational/Transactional Leadership**

There is a difference between leading and managing others. Managers focus on systems and results, have a short-term view, ask how and when, and keep their eye on the bottom line. Leaders are involved in innovation, have a long-term view, focus on people and relationships, inspire trust in the vision and have an eye for the horizon. At this point have the class give examples of different job tasks of leaders and managers and flip chart their responses.

Just as there is a difference in the tasks and characteristics of each, there is also a difference in leadership styles as they relate to the positions we hold. Transformational Leadership is a theory that was originally articulated by James McGregor Burns in the 1970’s in his book, *Leadership*. Later on Bernard Bass, Warren Bennis and Nanus added to this work by honing in on the transformational leader. Burns, however, defined leadership as falling into 2 broad categories of leadership behavior in influencing others. One category is called Transformational Leadership. The behavior in this category is founded on the belief that leaders and followers can raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality. The heart of transformational leadership is the leader’s desire and ability to raise the consciousness of others by appealing to powerful moral values and ideals. They act as teachers, mentors, and coaches. Transformational leaders “transform” people and organizations by: changing them in mind and heart; enlarging vision, insight and understanding; clarifying purposes; and by making behavior congruent with beliefs, principles or values.

There are four types of transformational leadership behavior:

1. **Idealized influence**---this is a behavior that arouses followers to feel a powerful identification and strong emotion toward the leader.

2. **Inspirational Motivation**---a leadership behavior that models high values as an example and includes communication on an inspiring vision. It also promotes symbols to arouse greater effort and a feeling of belonging.

3. **Individualized Consideration**---this behavior provides coaching, support and encouragement of specific followers.
4. *Intellectual Stimulation*---a behavior that influences followers to view problems from a fresh perspective and with a new increased awareness.

The end result of transformational leadership is that it empowers others to take more initiative in their work, inspires them to be more committed and builds their self-confidence. A transformational leader instills feelings of confidence, admiration and commitment in the followers. He or she is charismatic, creative, develops a special bond with followers, articulates a vision with which the followers can identify and for which they’re willing to work. Each follower is coached, advised and delegated some authority. The transformational leader stimulates followers intellectually, arousing them to develop new ways to think about problems. They commit people to action and convert followers to leaders.

Transactional Leadership focuses on rewarding an individual for specific work performance or being task and problem solving driven. They clarify role and task requirements for staff. They are interested in the end result, the bottom-line and make sure that work is completed to meet that goal. Transactional leadership is often involved in the tasks of managers and the details on how to get those tasks done. They too use motivational skills in moving people towards completion of tasks but for a different reason than transformational leaders.

Transactional leaders are interested in doing things the right way and transformational leaders are interested in doing the right things and as such these styles work hand in hand with each other.

**Leadership Points for Dialogue:**

- Is it possible for a person to employ both transformational and transactional styles of leadership?
- Does a person’s role within an organization define the style of leadership to be used?
- Is there any correlation between Transformational leadership and Theory Y leadership? How are they related?
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Servant Leadership

At the end of the 20th century we have seen traditional autocratic and hierarchical modes of leadership yield to newer models that attempt to simultaneously enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of many institutions through a combination of teamwork and community, personal involvement in decision making and ethical and caring behaviors. An example of this type of leadership is servant leadership.

Servant Leadership was a phrase coined by Robert Greenleaf as a practical philosophy which supports people who choose to serve FIRST and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals and institutions. A servant leader may not hold a formal leadership position. Greenleaf wrote, “The servant leader is servant first….it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve---after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or, at least, will they not be further deprived?”

Servant leadership begins with a true motivation to serve others and to build shared goals within an organization. The involvement of employees in decision-making creates increased job satisfaction and commitment to a collective vision. Servant leadership challenges the notion of the traditional leader as a stand-alone hero. It focuses on a holistic understanding, building a shared vision, effective self-management, encouraging interdependence, learning from mistakes, encouraging creativity from all, questioning assumptions, promoting shared trust, and embracing humility. This type of approach is also one that can help create a powerful legacy. For servant leaders, it’s about lifting others to new levels of possibility and accomplishing as a team much
more than what one person might accomplish alone. These individuals find that the magical
synergy that results when they put aside their egos, share visions, and nurture true organizational
learning brings collective joy, deep satisfaction and amazing results.

The type of behavior servant leaders exhibit include: listening without judgment, being
authentic, building community, sharing power, encouraging interdependence and developing
people. Examples of servant leadership: Peace Corps, Mother Theresa, Phil Jackson (ex LA
Lakers coach), and Southwest Airlines. We will be discussing Servant Leadership more
thoroughly in Course Three---Organizational Leadership.

**Leadership Points for Dialogue:**

- Can you think of any examples within your own life of servant leaders?
- Is it possible to be a servant leader within a public safety organization?
- Can a Transformational leader also be a servant leader? Why or why not?
- Can a Theory X leader be a servant leader? Why or why not?