The Emergence of Leadership Styles:
A Clarified Categorization

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Abstract

The study of leadership has become a prominent scholarly and professional focus in an ever-changing, multi-dimensional globalized world. Despite abundant scientific and anecdotal work on the effectiveness and potency of "good" leadership, several leadership-related questions have remained unanswered. For instance, what does good, effective leadership look like? What is a leadership 'style' at its most basic? What leadership styles are at a leader's disposal? While leadership may be seen as one of the most over-researched topics, it remains one of the most misunderstood phenomena of our time (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016). This conceptual paper addresses the notion of a leadership style and purports to categorize the ever-increasing pool of leadership styles that emerge both in scholarly and professional circles. The paper culminates in a graphic depiction of the categorization of leadership styles based on the scientific work of Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939).

Introduction

The world is in the midst of a leadership crisis. Despite the fact that there is a vast body of literature on leadership, it has remained one of the most misunderstood business phenomena (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016). Thus, it becomes of paramount importance to understand the consequences, both positive and negative, that emerge from the various known and validated leadership styles found in modern-day organizations. Further, it is critical to have metrics in the form of known attributes of effective leadership to serve as a benchmark for the effectiveness of each leadership style. A thorough understanding of both the potency and effectiveness of recognized leadership styles will benefit the academic and professional communities alike.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to showcase the different leadership styles in practice in organizations today and to provide a categorization of existing leadership styles. A key objective of this research is to compare leadership styles to a functional and comprehensive working definition of leadership. With this in mind,

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this work begins with a brief review of a working definition of leadership and the key empirically researched attributes of effective leaders. The article then provides a deeper analysis of the various leadership styles by juxtaposing them against the authors' working definition of leaders and the attributes of effective leaders, thereby providing insights into the positive and negative attributes of each style. Next, the paper focuses on a definition of what a leadership style is, and highlights various styles of leadership. Finally, the paper showcases a categorization of leadership, culminating in a graphic classification of leadership styles (Figure 1).

Defining Leadership

The study of leadership is not new and leadership definitions abound. Various scholars have attempted to define leadership operationally and theoretically. Gandolfi (2016) asserts that the combination of five components render a potent working definition of leadership -(i) there must be one or more leaders, (ii) leadership must have followers, (iii) it must be action oriented with a legitimate (iv) course of action, and there must be (v) goals and objectives (Gandolfi, 2016). So how can leadership be defined? Based on the presented five criteria the following definition was selected for the purpose of this research:

"A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives."(Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 7).

This definition was chosen for two important reasons. First, having surveyed the leadership literature, Winston and Patterson (2006) provide a definition as it relates to the components needed for defining leadership as stated above. Second, it clearly demonstrates that leadership is not one-dimensional. In fact, it requires a deep understanding about how people play a role in the ultimate success of the mission and vision of the organization. How leaders develop and grow will be critical to the effectiveness of the organization; their development as leaders must be intentional for the organization to reach its stated objectives and goals.

Key Attributes of Effective Leadership

Given that many scholars, professionals, and thought leaders have weighed into the conversation regarding the attributes of effective leadership, which views matter most? Research reveals a clear line between those attributes of effective leadership that are anecdotal in nature versus those that stem from scientific research. While assertions based on observation and/or personal experience are undoubtedly valuable marketing tools and often carry some practical wisdom, it is the authors of

this study's assertion that they do not get the global leadership community any closer to an understanding of desirable leadership style(s). This paper will focus exclusively on known attributes of effective leadership grounded in scientific, empirical research.

Before delving into the attributes for effective leadership, it is important to note two guiding principles, that is, (i) virtually everyone has some capacity to form leadership relationships, and (ii) leaders are made and not born. Andersen (2012) postulates that while some people are born with innate qualities and character attributes that propel and/or accelerate their leadership journey, the vast majority of people live in a practical reality where their leadership skills must be intentionally cultivated to achieve their maximum potential leadership output. Such cultivation cannot happen without relationships (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998). These notions bring the conversation full-circle with regard to the guiding principles provided by the authors of this paper.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) are widely regarded as authorities on the study of leadership and have produced some of the most authoritative research on the subject of leadership effectiveness. Over more than thirty years of global research, they have arrived at five key attributes of effective leadership. These are; (i) to model the way, (ii) to inspire a shared vision, (iii) to challenge the process, (iv) to enable others to act, and (v) to encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Examining the attributes in more detail, first, to model the way means that the leader personally demonstrates the behavior they desire or expect to see in their followers (Brown & Posner, 2001). Second, to inspire a shared vision creates mutual context between leaders and followers, while clearly demonstrating what the organization values most (Kelly, 2000). Third, leaders who challenge the process ask the question, "*Why do we do this?*" (Galbreath & Rogers, 1999, p. 169). This type of leader will never be satisfied with a reply that suggests satisfaction with the status quo (Galbreath & Rogers, 1999). The fourth attribute, to enable others to act, means the leader does not seek dominant authority, rather the opposite, by giving away power and decision making ability to followers (Russell, 2001). Fifth, to encourage the heart is to show an outpouring of sincere care and provide genuine celebration for achievements and success (Posner, 2015).

These five attributes of effective leadership are highly relational and require intentional effort by the leader to put into practice, thus, tying directly back to the two guiding principles for effective leadership that have been presented. It requires leaders to open pathways for engagement throughout every level of an organization and with all of its people. In fact, these attributes, once put into practice, are significantly more follower-centric than leader-centric (Gandolfi & Stone, 2016). Understanding the follower centricity of effective leadership will aid in understanding the consequences of the leadership styles presented in a subsequent section of this paper.

What is a leadership style?

While much research exists addressing various leadership styles, there is a surprising shortcoming of research that examines what a leadership "style" actually is. It appears to be an unspoken and assumed element of the leadership styles discussion. Perhaps, this lack of clarity contributes to the widely disparate views on leadership, and may be one of the reasons that academicians and professionals have not agreed on what constitutes leadership. Having said that, what exactly is a leadership style?

First, a look at context is important to help understand why there are so many different leadership styles. Clearly, the global business community has come a long way from when Frederick Taylor gave the world the gift of scientific management. As Buchanan (2013) explains, the world has moved through different phases of leadership since the early part of the 20th Century. Historically speaking, there was first the notion of "command-and-control" that prevailed into the 1980s, which was followed by "empower-and-track" through the mid 2000's, and, finally, the "connect-and-nurture," approach, which is the current approach (Buchanan, 2013). While not every organization has tracked through this sequence in the provided timeframe – some have not even caught up to the second phase, much less the third that Buchanan presented - this progression provides a high level understanding and illustrates dramatic shift points that may help explain why there are so many viable leadership styles in existence. Further, the early theories of leadership made the assumption that good leadership was based on traits (Shazia, Anis-ul-Haq, & Niazi, 2014). Whether it is personality, charisma, or physical features such as appearance, many simply believed, and some still do today, that leaders are born and not made.

It was the notable psychologist Kurt Lewin and his team (1939) who introduced through their research that leaders could be made and were not necessarily just born. In their seminal work, Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939) categorized and introduced three leadership styles that set the framework for future styles to emerge (Martin, 2015) – autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Subsequent styles that emerged began to focus on the leader/follower relationship and how the actions of one will impact the other (Shazia et al., 2014). This was a significant step forward for the leadership styles movement. With this historical understanding in mind, it appears as if the research and practice communities are far from nearing the finish line when it comes to fully understanding and agreeing upon an optimal leadership style. Thus, it is of paramount importance to understand and define what a leadership style actually is.

Three key elements involved in pragmatically leading people have helped researchers arrive at the myriad of existing leadership styles and will likely inform new ones that have yet to emerge. First, Armandi, Oppedisano, and Sherman (2003) note that leadership is about influencing a group of people in the direction of a decided common goal. Whether one believes that leaders are born or made, scholars and practitioners agree that leadership involves influence regardless of the chosen or inherent style. While influence can be difficult to understand given its immeasurable,

intangible nature, influence forces movement both literally and philosophically.

Additionally, leadership is highly intentional. Rooke and Torbert (2005) assert that differences among leaders are not determined by their philosophy of leadership, personality, or even style of management, at least according to most developmental psychologists. Instead, it is how they read and interpret their surroundings and how those interpretations influence reactions in the midst of challenges. Most successful leaders, no matter their preferred style, make organizational decisions based on a process and philosophy of leadership. This requires a high degree of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and environmental context both inside and outside the organization, all of which will never happen accidentally (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

A third key point is that leadership has as much to do with perception as it does with reality. This should come as no surprise given how often business leaders are heard using the common colloquialism 'perception is reality'. Despite its pithiness, there is great psychological power in this reality. According to McDermott, Kidney, and Flood (2013), leadership effectiveness in the eyes of followers is closely tied to the leader being driven, able to inspire, and prioritize needs, which in turn, produces a sense of safety and calm for followers. Thus, if followers' perceptions of what they need in a leader are met, they will feel secure in their leader through a multitude of different organizational circumstances.

With the understanding that influence, intentionality, and perception are vital components of practical leadership, the authors of this paper define a leadership style as follows:

"An intentional means by which a leader influences a group of people in an organization to a widely understood future state that is different from the present one."

This operational definition intentionally leaves space in which a number of different leadership styles can fit, with the hope of arriving at the most optimal leadership style through a review of those that are currently accepted.

Styles of Leadership

The two most basic characterizations of the popular leadership styles that are widely accepted and practiced today are (i) trait based and (ii) skills based styles of leadership. These juxtapose one another and provide the oldest and most hotly debated question in the study of leadership theory: *Are leaders born or made?*". Armandi, Oppedisano & Sherman (2003) state that when this old-age question is discussed, it regularly takes a tone similar to "*What came first, the chicken or the egg?*". It should come as no surprise that this debate has seemed almost futile in many discussions amongst academics and practitioners alike. While academic researchers began trying to understand what the innate traits of a leader were early in the 20th Century, what the trait theory fails to account for is that the environment

both inside and outside an organization and the followers within an organization influence their interaction with a leader (Armandi et al., 2003). In other words, this confined understanding misses a significant portion of the big picture when it comes to all that is involved in leading people and organizations. Indeed, such a short-sighted view of leadership disqualifies the trait theory as an ideal leadership style for today's organizations, especially in light of the increasing complexity facing organizations.

Not unlike the trait approach to leadership, the skills theory is entirely leader-centric, yet completely counter to the trait approach in that the skills theory states that leadership can be developed through the intentional approach of building known and accepted leadership skills (Northouse, 2007). Thus, it presupposes that leaders are made and not born. This appears to be a step in the 'right' direction from a leadership development perspective, but again with such a limited view, this theory would need to be significantly expanded to account for organizations and people. However, this theory did provide some meaningful guidance for new theories that would emerge over time.

Situational leadership theory, for instance, essentially boils down to "situational favorability" (Horner, 1997, p. 271). This matches an organizational situation to the skills of the leader in an effort to determine how positive or negative the outcome of a particular organizational situation might be and what type of leadership skill sets might be required, based on where the organization currently stands or is attempting to go. This game of matchmaker would suggest that, depending on conditions both inside and outside the organization, leadership could change significantly and regularly over time; in contrast, long tenure for leaders has the potential to produce organizational unrest with leadership. Situational leadership theory deals with follower readiness for where the leader is attempting to take them and the organization (Silverthorne, 2000). Thus, there are multiple forces at work in attempting to match the appropriate leader within a given organizational situation. This theory lacks the critical element of follower development presented in the adopted definition of leadership in this research inferring instead that organizations seek the right person for the right moment in time and little else. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that there is not enough long-term sustainability tied to this theory to make it the most ideal or desired leadership style.

The contingency leadership style is squarely based on the organization. It proposes that the effectiveness of a leader will depend solely upon the organizational context to determine if the leader's style will be effective or ineffective (Northouse, 2007). This is a one-to-one relationship between the leader and the current reality of an organization. Like situational leadership, the followers could have influence on the contextual present of the organization. However, nowhere does this style take into account the needs of those who are following the leader toward the organizational mission.

Shifting gears once again, transactional leaders often tend to focus on transactions in furtherance of a set of goals rather than show concern for the people executing those goals (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). While this style of leadership

focuses more on the interaction of the leader and the follower than each of the previous examined styles, the focus is still on output and production, which is ultimately for the benefit of the organization. Presumably, any set goals are more for the benefit of the organization than for those who serve in it. In the transactional leadership style, leader- or follower-orientation is predicated on a set of mutual benefits (Tung, 2016). In other words, the leader makes it clear to the follower, if you give me X, I will give you Y. Sales roles provide a great generic example here and most often those roles are in the best interest of the organization. Thus, it may be concluded that the transactional leadership style is a mission (organization) first style of leadership.

The leader member exchange (LMX) style of leadership in its most basic sense is about working dynamics; the more effective the working relationship is, the closer the leader and follower are and, presumably, the follower becomes more effective in their work, with the inverse also presumed to be true (Northouse, 2007). This leadership style has been colloquially referred to as the "in club" and the "out club". This should make one question the health of these types of dynamics, as this style suggests that being on the boss's "good side" is the best path forward. It is highly personal in nature, which brings its focus toward the leader/follower orientation, or people (employees) first at the initial glance. However, the ultimate measure of this style is about worker effectiveness, once again supporting the needs of the mission before those of its people.

Transformational leadership is built on the premise of "idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (Gregory, Moates & Gregory, p. 807). This style is highly people or employee centric. The leader must appeal to the ideals of the followers in order to influence them. The leader's goal is to inspire the employees and motivate them toward the vision that they have created for the organization. These leaders stimulate the intellect of their followers by helping them be a part of the solution; such leaders genuinely care about the individuals in the organization. This style is so close to servant leadership that it can be difficult for many to distinguish between the two. The key point of understanding when it comes to the transformational leadership style is that the leader engages the followers as closely as he or she does, in order to solicit their efforts in achieving the vision he or she has set, because, the leader knows that he or she cannot achieve the vision alone. Thus, the transformational leadership style is most definitely a mission (i.e., organization) first style of leadership.

Servant leadership represents the final leadership style to be explored in this brief review and discussion of categorization. Based on the pioneering work of Robert Greenleaf, who coined the term servant leadership in 1970, Spears (2004) states that to become a great leader, the leader must first be a servant to those they lead. Spears (2004) contends that Greenleaf's ideas of real leadership or true leadership only arise when there is a genuine motivation to help others with no ulterior motives, essentially making it the primary driving force of the leader. In servant leadership, the emphasis is clearly on the followers. As a direct consequence, all other organizational priorities become secondary to this notion of serving those

whom the leader leads. Thus, from a categorization of leadership styles perspective, servant leadership is the only style that emerges that puts the people within the organization ahead of its mission.

Categorization of leadership styles

Throughout decades of study, many leadership styles emerged to be considered valid and effective. This is due to the fact that a leadership style is a tangible demonstration of the process a leader chooses for leading (Shead, 2011). While in itself quite accurate, such a vague definition of leadership styles naturally lends itself to the emergence of several styles that have come to be accepted both in the communities of research and practice. A review of the literature suggests that noted scholars and practitioners cite as few as three styles, while others categorize six, eight or in excess of twelve major styles. For instance, Blanken (2016) cites charismatic, innovative, command and control, laissez-faire, pace setter, servant, situational, and transformational leadership as legitimate leadership styles. Yet, even in this attempt, several known and popular leadership styles are clearly omitted.

This begs the question as to how much we know about the categorization of leadership styles? Shead (2011) asserts that there is not a singular right way to view and understand the various leadership styles and suggests that varying views on understanding leadership styles all contain value. While this very well may be true and is a useful part of the ongoing leadership styles discourse, it does not help bring further clarity to the discussion and could in fact, perpetuate more confusion and uncertainty.

With this understanding, it becomes clear that a deeper understanding of the categorization of leadership styles would be an invaluable addition to both the academic and professional communities. Thus, having examined the wide ranging categorization of styles, the authors of this article have reviewed the work of Kurt Lewin and colleagues, Douglas McGregor, and Daniel Goleman and team, as each of these individuals have contributed with their work in their respective time to the study and understanding of leadership styles. This section also addresses another aspect of the categorization of leadership styles from the perspective of leader-centered versus follower-centered styles, all of which is explored with the aim of bringing enhanced clarity to the leadership styles categorization discussion.

As previously stated, Lewin et al.'s (1939) work produced three leadership styles, autocratic (also referred to as authoritarian), democratic (or participative), and laissez-faire. Specifically, autocratic leaders are hands-on leaders who take charge and set clear expectations for the what, when, why, and how tasks done by followers should be completed. Autocratic leaders take sole responsibility for making decisions without input from followers in the organization (Cherry, n.d.). Lewin et al. (1939) believed that their second proposed leadership style, democratic leadership, was largely the most effective style, as it promotes input on decisions, both large and small, from followers within the organization and further promotes a spirit of collaboration in the completion of goals and tasks (Cherry, n.d.). Presumably, the

democratic style would lend itself to more two-way communication between leaders and followers as opposed to the one-way style of communication often seen within autocratic leadership. Lewin et al's (1939) third style, laissez-faire leadership, translates to "leave well alone" (Pawar, 2014), where leaders are completely hands off when it comes to how followers complete their tasks and provide significant amounts of decision making authority amongst followers. Cherry (n.d.) notes that while this style can be effective when there is a high degree of expertise and motivation among followers, it can also create role confusion and become demotivating when lack of clarity and vision from the leader persists. While each style in each category of leadership styles offers its own benefits and disadvantages, Lewin et al.'s (1939) early work was critical in laying the foundation for the more formal study of the categorization of leadership styles and future study and the work that would emerge in subsequent decades.

McGregor (1960) differed from Lewin et al. (1939) by classifying leadership styles into two categories, centering his work around the orientation of how the leader perceived his or her followers. McGregor (1960) postulated that leaders see followers in one of two ways, termed "Theory X" or "Theory Y". Accordingly, if a leader sees his or her followers as responding only to orders connected with reward and punishment, then the followers were unmotivated and uninspired, which would fall under Theory X (Head, 2011). To the contrary, Theory Y suggests that a leader sees his or her followers as passionate, highly motivated, and a group of people who can critically think and make decisions on their own (Head, 2011). While these two theories are starkly opposed, each fits nicely within one of Lewin et al's (1939) three leadership styles. A Theory X leader would by its own definition need to act as an autocratic leader for tasks to be completed within an organization. Pawar (2014) suggests that this type of leader likely has no time or inclination to consider the needs of followers. On the other hand, a Theory Y manager would likely bend toward being democratic leader (Pawar, 2014). One could also make the claim that a theory Y leader could fall into the laissez-faire category of leadership if the right circumstances presented themselves. While McGregor's (1960) work represents a valuable contribution to the study of leadership styles, his work, though taken from a different vantage point, strengthens the case for the legitimacy of Lewin et al.'s (1939) work.
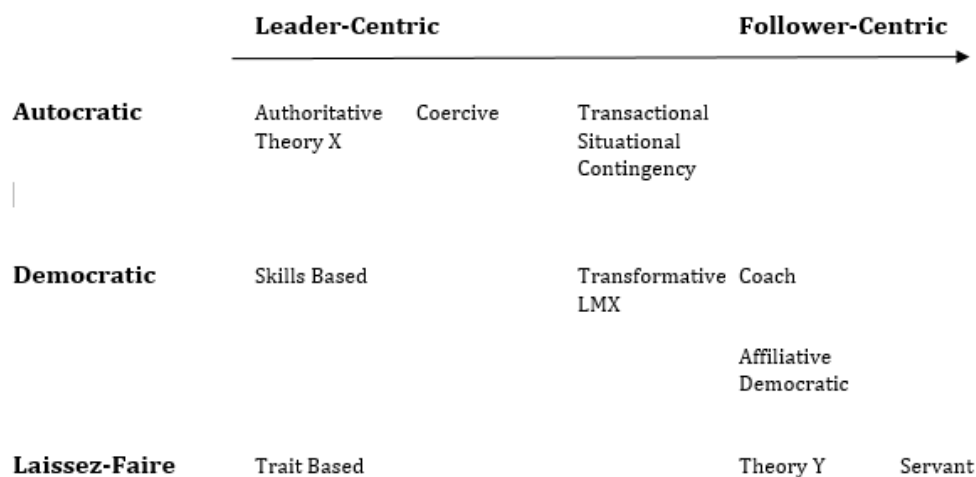
Goleman, McKee, and Boyatzis (2002) posited the existence of six leadership styles. He distinguished among coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coach. The coercive style is a command and control approach that requires compliance; the authoritative style directs people to a common vision created by the leader (Greenfield, 2007). Leadership power closely aligns with the singular decision-making that is taken on by the autocratic leader as described by Lewin et al. (1939). The coach, afilliative, and democratic leaders are focused on things such as relationships, team building, consensus, and people development respectively (Greenfield, 2007). Thus, these three follower-centric styles match up closely with the democratic leader as defined by Lewin. The outlier of Goleman et al.'s (2002) six leadership styles, the pacesetter, may not be what one

might imagine it to be at first glance. The mentality of the pacesetter often leads to a lack of trust in followers, thus causing the leader to undermine, albeit unintentionally, the actions of the follower (Ackley, n.d.). When such a situation arises between leaders and followers, it is highly plausible that the leader might take matters into his or her own hands, thus potentially reverting to an autocratic style of leadership to accomplish the goals they have set for the followers in a given situation. While Goleman et al.'s (2002) vantage point provides an important insight, it may be concluded that each of the six styles he presented found their roots in Lewin et al.'s (1939) work.

Finally, Masslenikova (2007) suggested that leadership styles could be categorized as either leader-centered or follower-centered. She posits that leader-centered styles would include authoritarian, transactional, and charismatic leadership. Particularly regarding authoritarian, or autocratic leadership, this certainly aligns with Lewin et al.'s (1939) definition of an autocratic leader. In contrast, follower-centered leadership styles would include participative, servant, and transformational leadership (Masslenikova, 2007). Again, this validates Lewin et al.'s (1939) work in that follower-centric leadership styles often hinge on the inclusiveness of the democratic leader.

This brief review of the categorizations of leadership styles has revealed that there are various ways they may be viewed and placed into meaningful categories. Therefore, the authors of this paper propose the following categorization model in the form of a continuum to provide a visual representation of how each of the accepted leadership styles discussed tie directly back to Lewin et al.'s (1939) original three leadership styles and viewed on a leader-centric versus follower-centric continuum. This is graphically shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Categorization of leadership styles - Leadership styles continuum

	Leader-Centric		**Follower-Centric**	
Autocratic	Authoritative Theory X	Coercive	Transactional Situational Contingency	
Democratic	Skills Based		Transformative LMX	Coach
				Affiliative Democratic
Laissez-Faire	Trait Based			Theory Y Servant

Source: developed for this research study

Concluding Thoughts

This review of the categorizations of leadership styles has revealed that there are various ways to view them and place leadership styles into meaningful categories. A lot will depend on a person's context or point of view on the most important elements of leadership assessment. Clearly, most leadership scholars tie their work back to Lewin et al.'s (1939) pioneering work with its three overarching leadership styles. While many leadership styles have emerged and will continue to emerge, most if not all have their roots in one of Lewin et al.'s (1939) three categories.

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