LEADERSHIP THEORIES: THE WAY FORWARD

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Leadership is a construct that has been the subject of continuous scholarly discourse (Silverthorne, 2001; Dionne et al., 2014; Northouse, 2021; Kouzes and Posner, 2023). It has also attracted the attention of practitioners and scholars who are interested in defining leadership approaches that facilitate positive organisational outcomes (George, 2003; Harrison, 2018). The term leader dates to 1300s, whereas “leadership” emerged in the 1800s (Stogdill, 1974). Leadership is argued to be the most influential factor in attaining organisational success (Mumford et al., 2000; Gardner et al., 2020). A basic Google Scholar search for “leadership” returned 5,260,000 results on the 20th of May 2023. Likewise, searching for *lead on the Wiley online library yielded 8,447,981 results. A cursory examination of the result categories reveals an explosion of literature by researchers and practitioners over the years. For example, the enquiry conducted on March 9, 2021, yielded the following outcomes: from 1791 to 1988, there were 1,007,531 results. From 1989 to 2009, the search yielded 2,105,598 results; from 2010 to 2021, the number increased to 2,362,535. This trend was also evident in other databases, such as Web of Science and Sage journals, where analogous searches were conducted. The attention the phenomenon has received from mainstream literature demonstrates its complexity (Northouse, 2018; Northouse, 2021).

Yet, the construct lacks a consensual definition, which may be unattainable (Vroom and Jago, 2007; Antonakis, Day and Schyns, 2012; Omeihe et al., 2023). In fact, Stodgill and Bass (1981) assert that the number of definitions are as diverse as the individuals who have attempted to describe it. Table 1 provides an overview of the definitions offered by scholars.

**Table 1 Definitions of Leadership**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moore (1927)</td>
<td>“The ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation (p. 124).”</td>
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<td>Bogardus (1934)</td>
<td>“Is a process in which the activities of many are organised to move in a specific direction by one (p. 5).”</td>
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This becomes complex as achieving a consensus on the definition of leadership remains elusive, as evidenced by the challenge of succinctly defining it even within the confines of this abstract. These definitions illustrate how scholars have attempted to comprehend the construct (Yukl, 2010; Yukl, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2011), reiterating Northouse (2018) claim that the possibilities for defining the construct of
leadership are infinite. With suggestions that neither an accurate nor erroneous definition of leadership exists, only the varied perspectives of scholars are presented (Winston and Patterson, 2006; Summerfield, 2014; Ciulla, 2020). All of these prove that scholars are unrelenting in their study of the construct (Fairholm, 2002).

The domain of leadership is replete with theories rich in content and approaches (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011; Harrison, 2018). Hence, several theories have emerged over time (Dinh et al., 2014), shifting from the notion of extraordinary leaders to include traits, behaviour, situational, contingency, transformational, charismatic servant, ethical, authentic and advancing into emergent theories (Stogdill, 1975; Khan, Bhat and Hussanie, 2017). Scholars persist in substantiating the significance of leadership within diverse contexts, accompanied by concerted studies aimed at proposing methodologies for the development of leadership based on these multifaceted theoretical frameworks. This trend has spurred the growth of a key sector within the domain broadly described as “Leadership Development”.

**Leadership Development**

Leadership development is a recently established field in comparison to the broader domain of leadership (Vogel et al., 2020). This crucial area of research has evolved into a distinct subfield, clearly distinguishable from the conventional approach to researching leadership (Day and Dragoni, 2015). Evidence reveals that leadership development is a thriving industry as organisations disburse over $366 billion yearly on leadership development across all business cadres (Hieker and Pringle, 2021). This spending seems justified due to the apparent impact of enhancing leadership capabilities on organisational performance (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Several approaches to leadership development have emerged with extant literature on transactional, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), charismatic leadership, leader member exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) embodying the roots of leadership development. The goal of above approaches was to develop
leaders that enact these specific leadership approaches. Interestingly, leadership development studies shifted from a practice-centred foundation to theory development, exemplified primarily by authentic leadership development (Vogel et al., 2020). The early advocates of authentic leadership pursued a theory of leadership development for the AL construct (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). This was mainly spurred by the ethical dilemmas within organisations towards the end of the 20th century (George, 2003; George et al., 2007).

The legitimacy of leadership and leadership development domain have been established for leaders and aspiring leaders. However, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the repair of failed leadership, highlighting the significance of this paper in emphasising the importance of leadership repair. While this paper does not present a path for repairing all leadership theories that have emerged over time, it redirects scholarly attention to this critical area and serves as a starting point for future studies. This dynamic process of leadership repair will be central to determining the path to redemption for failed leaders. This is a particularly crucial and essential area requiring extensive research by scholars, as it will constitute an avenue for leadership growth and mobility.
References


Vogel, B., Reichard, R. J., Batistič, S. and Černe, M. (2020) 'A bibliometric review of the leadership development field: How we got here, where we are, and where we are headed', The Leadership Quarterly, 32(5), pp. 1-19.