AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND THE EMERGING OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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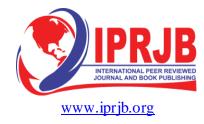University Utara Malaysia

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this general review paper is to provide an overview of leadership with the focus on the evolution of leadership and current leadership theories which is the relational leadership theory.

Methodology: This paper reviews the existing literatures in the area of leadership and further a discussion on the development of leadership.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: This review paper advances our knowledges in leadership by providing a detail discussion on leadership evolution and the current leadership theories.

Keywords: *Leadership, Relational Theories, Transformational and Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of management as a scientific process era, leadership has been one of the most discussed and examined area of interest among the scholars. The main reason of this immerse interest was that leadership had been linked to the organizational performance. Ismail, Mohamad, Sulaiman, Mohamad and Yusuf (2011) proposed that leadership is the main driver in determining an organization's global competitiveness. Similarly, Dixon and Hart (2010) argued that it is important that leaders embrace the most effective leadership styles to motivate diverse groups of employees in a workplace to maintain financial competitiveness.

There is a misconception that management and leadership are two different entities that work interdependence of each other. According to Branson (2015), there are two types of bosses: Managers or Leaders. This means that either you are manager or leader. But there are arguments that manager need to have the ability to lead as well as to manage to ensure that organizations do not face extinction (Kotter, 1999: Daft, 1999). Hence, it is essential that managers or even supervisors who have subordinates working under them, need to develop leadership skills and management skills to ensure that the organization goals are achieved. This view is also shares by Maxwell (1993) who suggests that there are leaders in every level of management and immediate supervisors can learn to be an effective leader. Meanwhile, Yukl (1989) stated that though managing and leading are not equivalent, the main argument was the degree of overlapping between these two constructs. Thus, it is possible to be both a manager and a leader at the same time.

Given the great interest in leadership, this paper discusses the evolution of leadership and reviews the current leadership styles which are presented and promoted in literature and previous studies. These leadership styles are transactional, transformational and servant leadership. There are four sections in this paper which begins with a brief introduction and continues with section two which presents the definition of leadership. Section three gives an overview of leadership evolutions and follows by a discussion of the current leadership styles of transactional, transformational and servant leadership.
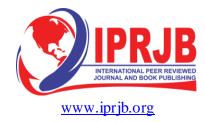
2.0 DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

In the pursuit of understanding the construct of leadership, many definitions of this term been proposed. According to Dubrin, Dalglish and Miller (2006), some of the definitions are;

- Interpersonal influence, directed through communication toward goal attainment
- The influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with directions and orders
- An act that causes other to act or respond in a shared direction

But John Maxwell (1993) sums it up the best: *Leadership is influence*. It is nothing more or less. This is true as leadership is an art of getting followers and the ability to influence them toward a shared worthwhile goal. It is not only important to stimulate the followers to achieve goals but it is also essential to be able to influence the followers to embrace change if needed for a common good.

Change is one of the most common variables when there is a discussion on leadership. Dubrin, Dalglish, and Miller (2006) define a good leader as someone that is able to facilitate changes while Daft (1999) states that an important part of leadership is to influence the

followers to bring change to a desirable outcome. Maxwell (1993) declares that the ultimate test of a leader is to create positive change. If leaders resist change, they are no longer leading. Hence, once a leader can differentiate the different between novel change and needed change, then he/she is ready and must become a change agent.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP EVOLUTION

Leadership is one of the most research areas in the management subjects. There are considerable numbers of research carried out on leadership and from these researches, a number of theories on leadership have been propounded. However, there is a need to integrate and synthesize them in order to have a better view of the main issues. To achieve this goal, the evolution of the leadership approaches will be examined in this section. The leadership approaches are;

3.1 Great man theories

This is the earliest theory proposed in the early days when a more scientific way of study is first conducted on the issue of leadership. It is believed that leaders were born with certain leadership's traits and natural abilities that made them to be able to influence and exert power over their followers (Daft, 2008; McCleskey, 2014).
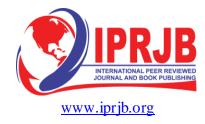
3.2 The trait approach theories

Due to the Great man theories, the early scholars spent a considered amount of time and effort to focus on discovering the traits that make an individual to be a leader. With much interests pour into research to discover the leaders' traits; a new theory is developed which is known as the trait approach theory. In this theory, it is proposed that there are individuals that are born with traits that will make them a natural leader. Traits are defined as distinguished personal characteristics such as intelligence, values, self-confidence and appearance, and successful leaders possess some or all of these traits (Daft, 1999). Table 1 shows some of the characteristics that were identified in the trait approach researches.

Table 1: Trait Approach

Personal Characteristics of leader		
Physical	**Personality**	**Social characteristics**
Activity	Alertness	Ability to enlist cooperation
Energy	Originality	Cooperativeness
	Personal integrity, ethnical conduct	Popularity, prestige
	Self-confident	Sociability, interpersonal skills
		Social participation
		Tact, diplomacy
Work-related characteristic	**Intelligent and ability**	
Achievement drive, desire to excel	Judgement, decisiveness	
Drive for responsibility	Knowledge	
Responsibility in pursuit of goal	Fluency of speech	
Task orientation		

(Source: Adapted from Daft, 1999)

3.3 Behaviour approach theories

As the trait theories losing its interest among the scholars due to a main reason of the difficulties to identity a universal set of traits, academic researchers turn to the approach of looking at the leaders' behaviour rather than their trait. With this development, behaviour theories were conceived. In this approach, it is believed that an individual can be a good leader by adopting the appropriate behaviour. Unlike the trait approach, behaviour approach preaches that leadership behaviour can be learned and, hence it is accessible to everyone (Daft, 1999). There are two major researches that studied the dimensions of leader behaviour which were conducted by Ohio State University and University of Michigan. Though these two studies are using different approaches to determine leader behaviour, there was similarity in their findings. Table 2 compares both the studies' results (Daft, 1999; Dubrin, Dalglish & Miller, 2006).

Table 2

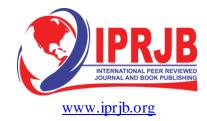| Ohio State University Studies	University of Michigan Studies
Consideration	**Employee-centred**
This category describes the degree to which a leader creates a friendly, warm, emotional support and trust working environment.	This describes the leader characteristic of focusing on meeting the needs of his/her subordinates need and facilitating positive interaction among the subordinates.
Initiating structure	**Job-centred**
This dimension describes the degree to which a leader is a task-oriented and his/her focus on directing the subordinates' work activates in the effort to achieve organisation's goal	This describes the leader characteristic of focusing on task delegation to his/her subordinates to achieve efficiency, cost leader and meet the target performance

3.4 Contingency theories

As behaviour theories no longer able to explain all the phenomena in the leadership issues, in next generation of research, leadership scholars turn to another area of interest which is based on the situational variables that influence a leader's behaviours (Daft, 2008). This is known as contingency theories. In this approach, it is believed that a leader will tailor his/her leadership styles to suit the situation to improve the effectiveness of his/her leadership. The situational variables include followers' characteristics, working environments' characteristic and the external environment. Contingency theories are also known as situational theories in some of the literatures available (Daft, 2008). But according to Rubenstein (2005), contingency theories are slightly different than situational theories as the former has incremental focus in which leadership situation is differentiated into 3 distinct groups which are leader-member relations, task structure and position power. In situational theories, there is no specific differentiating of different group of situations. Similarly, King (1990) also emphasised the distinct differences between situational theories and contingency theories in his discussion on leadership. As a matter of fact, King (1990) argued that situational theories were part of an early stage in the evolution of leadership and the next advancement was the contingency theories. Further, King (1990) stated that contingency theories was the major advancement in the study of leadership as these theories recognized the fact that leadership is

not a unidimensional construct but contained all the characteristics of the earlier theories which included factors of behaviour, personality, influence and situation. In essence, the contingency theories postulated that effective leadership depended on one or more of these factors. King (1990) noted that most noteworthy theories of this era are the Contingency Theory, the Path-Goal Theory and the Normative Theory.

3.5 Influence theories

The next important development in the area of leadership is the influence theories. In this approach, the focus point is the influence processes between the leaders and the followers. One of the main theory of this era is the charismatic leadership. This refers to the influence of leader which is not based on formal authority but on the leader's qualities and his/her charismatic personality (Daft, 2008). Yukl (1989) concluded that with charismatic leadership, the main focus is on an individual leader and not the leadership process of which is shared among multiple leaders. Further, House (1971) and Dubrin, Dalglish and Miller (2006) suggested that charismatic leader uses impression management to cultivate relationship with the group members. Thus, leader with traits such as strong need for power, high level of self-confident and strong confident will be well suited to practice this form of leadership (House, 1971).
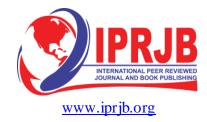
3.6 Relational theories

The current area of focus in the study of leadership is the relational theories. In this approach, the main component is how leaders and followers interact and influence each other. Rather than looking at how a leader influence the followers; this approach focuses on the relational process that allows a meaningful engagement among all the participants in the workplace settings and everyone contributes to achieve the desirable organization outcome or vision. Two of the related areas of study in relational theories are the transformational leadership and servant leadership (Daft, 2008).

4.0 A MODEL OF LEADERSHIP EVOLUTION

The leadership evolution can be summarized into four major eras in which each era represented by the prevailing leadership thinking at that moment of time but which may be less influential in this current business environment (Daft, 2008).

Leadership Era 1. This is an era before the industrial evolution. The business environment is stable and organization is small and simple to manage. Hence, a person who can see the big picture and able to fix all the puzzles together is consider a hero in the eye of the society. This is the era of Great Man leadership and the emphasis is on the trait theories.

Leadership Era 2. This is the era when the concept of hierarchy and bureaucracy emerged as part of a process in managing an organization. Though, the business environment is still stable, an organization had grown so large that it is no longer able to be managed by a single individual. To ensure the business activities are performing efficiently and effectively, rules and procedures are designed and implemented. With this development, hierarchy of authority became the choice of management style for most organization. This management style provided the organization with an effective mechanism to supervise and control the employee, and to make informed-decision based on precise procedures. During this era, it has seen the rise of "rational manager" who is the type of manager that manages by directing and controlling the subordinates using an impersonal approach. The behaviour and contingency theories worked well in this era as in this stable environment, leaders are given the time to

analyse the situation and develop careful plan which will be able to help them to control what happened. But in the next era, when the business environment becomes chaotic, these theories are no longer relevant.

Leadership Era 3.   In this era, the business environment became chaotic and a new approach of leadership is needed for organizations to survive and to achieve growth. Hence, this change of business environment offers opportunity for new idea to be evaluated and discussed, and from this development, we see the emergence of new leadership styles such as team leader and the change leader. The art of influence became the much sought-after skill as there is a great need to change organizational structures and cultures. The leader's influence factor helps to facilitate this process. The concept of leadership being a person in charge is no longer relevant and in this new environment, leadership is a concept where the responsible of leadership is shared among team leaders and members, shifting from one person to another person depending on which person has the most knowledge or expertise in the matter at hand.

Leadership Era 4.   This is the era of digital information age. In the previous era, the business environment experienced changes and in this era, the changes in the environment became faster and it will seem that everything is changing. Information is easily accessible and available in a shortest time which is facilitated with the dawning of internet. Era 4 represents the learning leaders who emphasizes the important of relationship and influences the others through vision and value. They believe in the concept of a learning organization where not only they learning and changing in both their personal and professional lives but they also make it their goal to encourage the development and growth of the others. This gives birth to the new theory which is the relational theories.
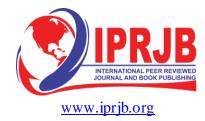
4.1 Implications

Looking at the flow of the leadership evolution from the Great Man leadership to rational management to team leadership to learning leadership, it is concluded that the prevailing leadership theories reflected the era or context of the organizational and society. The transition of a stable environment to a chaotic one causes today leader to struggle to make sense of the business world and also to discover the much-needed skills and qualities in this situation. Thus, in Era 3, where the issues of diversity, team leadership, empowerment, and horizontal relationship are increasing relevant. Further, there are leaders that transcend to leadership styles that focus on change management and applying influence as a mean to share vision and values with the followers in order to achieve high performance outcomes and continuously adaption to survive in this hostile business environment (Daft, 2008; King, 1990).

5.0 EMERGING OF TRANSACTIONAL, TRANSFORMATION AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

In current era of leadership study, three of the most noteworthy leadership styles are Transactional Leadership, Transformation Leadership and Servant Leadership. To have a better understand of leadership in this era, it is best to synthesis these leadership styles.

5.1 Transformation leadership

According to McCleskey (2014), for the past 30 years, transformation leadership has been "the single most studied and debated idea in the leadership area". Bass (1990) proposed that one of the better ways to achieve superior leadership performance is by embracing the transformation leadership as a way of life in an organization. While Daft (2008) suggested

that transformation leadership is able to instil significant changes in the organization's vision, strategy and culture as well as in the area of promoting product and services innovation. Dubrin, Dalglish and Miller (2006) proposed that transformation-based leaders achieved these superior performances by focusing on their personal characteristic and their relationship with the followers.
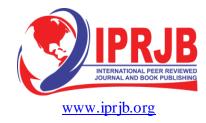
Daft (2008) and McCleskey (2014) concluded that the transformational leaders were able to achieve performance outcomes by influencing their followers to put the organization's need ahead of their own need while elevate the followers' level of needs from the lower level of physical needs to the higher level of psychology needs based on Maslow Hierarchy of Needs theory. These are the main reasons that transformation leadership is able to create positive impact on the performance of an organization which including higher profitability while at the same time, followers experience positive development in both their private and professional life.

In his effort to determine the characteristic of transformation leadership, Bass (1990), has shortlisted these four major characteristics;

- Charisma. This characteristic will provide the vision and the mission while at the same time, instil a sense of pride and gain both respect and trust
- Inspiration. Communicates high expectation, uses symbols to focus efforts, and expresses important purpose in a simple way.
- Intellectual Stimulation. Promotes intelligence, rationality and the ability to solve problems
- Individualized Consideration. In this characteristic, the leader gives personal attention and treats each employee individually as well as ensuring their development by advising and coaching

Transformation leadership is one of the most study leadership styles in this current business environment and these researches have proposed that transformation leadership influenced organization outcomes. Bycio, Hackett and Allen (1995) concluded that there is a positive relationship between transformation leadership and organization commitment while Jung, Wu and Chow (2008) linked transformation leadership with CEO success. This indicated that transformation leadership is becoming a tool to achieve leadership superior as suggested by Bass (1990).

While in a Malaysia context, there is also evidence to support the notion that transformation leadership has a positive relationship with organization outcomes. Ismail, Mohamad, Sulaiman, Mohamad and Yusuf (2011) find that transformation leadership is positively and significantly correlated with organization commitment. This finding is also supported by Lo, Ramayah and De Run (2010) who research show similar result. Idris and Ali (2008) concluded that transformation leadership influenced in a positive manner on the financial performance in Malaysian business firms while Omar, Zainal, Omar and Khairudin (2009) concluded that transformation leadership is significant related to a higher level of organization citizenship behaviour in self-managed work teams. These findings in Malaysia support Bass (1990) suggestion that transformation leadership is becoming the main leadership style in today business world.

5.2 Transaction leadership

According McCleskey (2014), empirical supports for transactional leadership usually include both the transactional and transformation leadership. Hence, there are number of literatures available that study both the leadership styles simultaneous but it must be noted that there are a few significant differences between these two leadership styles. One of the most significant differences is that transactional leaders focus on meeting the needs of their followers at the lower level of physical needs (Chan, 2010) while transformation leadership seek to elevate their followers to the higher level of psychology needs (Washington, Sutton & Sauser, 2014).
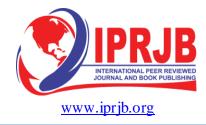
Transactional leadership is defined as an exchange process between the leader and the follower (Daft, 2008). The transactional leader identifies the needs and wants of his/her follower and then clarifies how to satisfice these needs and wants in exchange of the employees' meeting the desirable outcome of their tasks and responsibility. Lo, Ramayah and De Run (2010) defined transactional leaders as those who motive their follower by appealing to the self-interest of the followers.

Current published research paper found that transactional leadership influenced organizational performance. Chaudhry and Javed (2012) with a population sample derived from the banking sector in Pakistan found that transactional leadership had a positive relationship with the employees' level of motivation in the workplace. In a Malaysian setting, Omar, Zainal, Omar and Khairuddin (2009) concluded that transactional leadership increased the level of employees' organizational citizenship behaviour in an organization. However, they also found that transformational leadership had a higher degree of influence on increasing employees' engagement with organizational citizenship behaviour compared to transactional leadership. Meanwhile, Ismail, Mohamad, Mohamed, Rafiuddin and Zhen (2010) discovered that both transformational and transactional leadership were positively correlated with trust in the leaders. These findings reinforced the conclusion that transactional leadership influenced organizational performance.

Academic literatures that are available that provide findings that support transactional leadership will also show the positive relationship between these outcomes and transformation leadership (McCleskey, 2014). But some of the findings had also shown that transformational leadership had a higher degree of positive influence on outcomes compared to transactional leadership (Omar et al., 2009). One of the explanations is that transactional leadership creates a temporary relationship (Dublin, Dalglish & Miller, 2006) as it is shallow, a short-term exchange of gratification and it is also suggested that it creates resentment among the followers (McCleskey, 2014). Similarly, Bass (1990) offers the same line of argument as he suggests that transformation-based leaders are more likely be seen by their colleagues and employees as effective leader compare to transactional based leader. Hence, in this tough business environment where the success depends on continuous change for betterment, transformation leadership style will help the transactional leaders to not only maintain the stability of the organization but also promoting positive change.

5.3 Servant leadership

According to Dubrin, Dalglish and Miller (2006) servant leadership is considered a quite new concept in the leadership's literature. A servant leader is a leader that serves his/her followers by ensuring that the followers are able to achieve their goals and not the leader's own personal goal. Robert Greenleaf is credited as the main propeller of this leadership style.
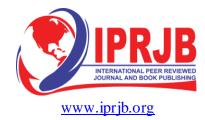
There are four basic precepts in Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership model which are (Daft, 2008);

i.   *Put service before self-interest*. This refers to the servant leader behaviour which is to ensure that the interest of the followers and the organization is prioritized before self-interest. In servant leadership, the needs of the followers are the priority; follow by the organization need and lastly personal need (Jaramillo, Bande & Varela, 2015). Servant leader also emphasis on developing followers' knowledge and skills-set in order to give his/her followers an opportunity to achieve personal and professional growth.   This leader will ensure that his/her decisions and/or actions are good and right for the others even if the actions are not in any way will improve the leader's financial standing.

ii. *Listen first to affirm others*. This refers to the action of the servant leader who will listen and fully understand the followers' problems and affirm his/her confident in them. The most important note to be taken in this leadership style is that a servant leader does not impose his/her will to others.

iii. *Inspire trust by being trustworthy*. This refers to the ways that a servant leader builds trust. He/she achieves this goal by keeping his/her promises, honest with each other, gives up control and focuses on the well-being of others.

iv. *Nourish others and help them become whole*. This is another important dimension of servant leadership concept. Servant leaders provide emotional healing to its constituents as they care about their followers' well-being which includes their spirits as well as their minds and bodies. Servant leader also make it their priority to create a working environment that emotional healthy for the followers to work in.

There is similarity between servant leadership and transformation leadership (Washington, Sutton & Sauser, 2014) as both of these leadership styles focus on the welfare of the followers but there is one significant difference. In servant leadership, the followers' needs and interest take precedence over the organization and the leader's need (Schwerker & Schultz, 2015), while in transformation leadership, the followers are encourage putting the organization need before self-need (Jaramillo, Bande & Varela, 2015).

Compared to transformation leadership, servant leadership does not receive as much interest as the former. But literatures that are available clearly suggested that servant leadership does have positive relationship with many of the organizations' desirable outcomes and also employees' positive behaviour. Bambale, Shamsudin and Subramaniam (2012), and Ehrhart (2004) concluded that there is a positive relationship between servant leadership and organization citizenship behaviour, while Jaramillo, Bande and Varela, (2015) and Schwepker and Schultz (2015) found that servant leadership enhanced the performance of the sales team. In Malaysia, there is an indication that servant leadership style exists in the local working environment. Bakar and McCann (2016) found that servant leadership is positively correlated with employees' engagement in organizational citizenship behaviour and this relationship is mediated by leader-member dyadic communication style. The respondents were derived from the manufacturing industry in Malaysia. Hence, servant leadership plays an important role in enhancing the performance of employees and ultimately the overall performance of the organization.

Lo, Ramayah, Hii Min and Songan (2010) commented that there is lack of conclusive evidence of type of leadership practice in Malaysia. However, the literatures that are

available give an indication that the leadership style in Malaysia is leaning towards transformation leadership as multiple researches (Idris & Ali, 2008; Ismail et al., 2011) show that the transformation leadership has positive relationship with organizational desirable outcomes in the Malaysia workforce environment. But there is lack of literature on the influence of servant leadership in the management level in a Malaysia context. Hence, there is opportunity to fill this gap of knowledge with a study on the direct influence of servant leadership on the employees' behaviour and the influence on organization's outcomes in the local business environment.

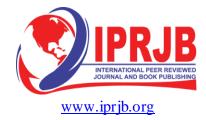## 6.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This literature review paper provides a general definition of leadership and highlights the important of understand the overlapping of domains of activity between management and leadership. It is suggested that to be an efficient and effective manager, he or she need to develop leadership skills to improve the performance of his/her department.

Further, this review gives an overview of the leadership evolution in which key leadership theories are discussed and how these theories influence the practices in modern organization. It also shows both the early and current approaches that are still remain relevant in the area of leading and managing an organization until today. This brief overview of the leadership evolution offers future scholars an opportunity to appreciate the complexity of the leadership evolution and see how the leadership theories of different era are link among each other. This will enhance the future scholars' understanding of the subject of leadership.
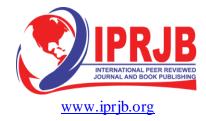
Lastly but not the least, this review offers a brief discussion on the latest leadership practices in the business world today and how they are connected to each other. It presents evidence that transactional leadership is not able to sustain a high performance working environment due to its characteristic of this model which is a temporary relationship (Dubrin, Dalglish & Miller, 2006). Once a particular exchange between the leader and the follower is completed, there is no longer a relationship between these two parties. In this type of working situation, it is difficult to embark an effort to create a working environment that motivates the employees. Hence, to achieve a high performance working environment, transactional leaders need to instil element of transformation leadership in their leadership style (McCleskey, 2014; Bass, 1990). This review paper also discussed the emergent of servant leadership and provided suggestion on future researches in this area.

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