The Great Man Theory and the Concept of Great Leaders

Posted on May 27, 2018

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/the-great-man-theory-and-the-concept-of-great-leaders/

Background

Among the top theories, “The Great Man Theory” has gained worldwide appreciation in leadership studies. Written by Thomas Carlyle, this theory has inspired leaders of all forms. The theory gained its first overarching popularity in the 19th century, focusing on personalities such as Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander, and Mahatma Gandhi. This leadership style inspired and presented the concept that great leaders are born, not made.

A better explanation of this example is when someone appears and knows best how to take control of a situation and can inspire and lead people to success or safety (Kirkpatrick, & Locke 1991). According to Carlyle, the concept of history is structured around the biography of someone great. He furthers this with the notion that these great leaders were proper examples of effective leaders with divine gifts granting them exceptionally inspirational character.

Research on the theory explains and supports Carlyle’s notion, stating that people who were seen as effective were mostly aristocratic rulers. Their success was also part of having it granted to them as a birthright. This was later defended by explaining that people from a lower socioeconomic background had fewer opportunities to put their skills into practice and, therefore, had fewer chances of actually attaining the role of a leader. It proved that leadership is an ability that is inherent.

Influences and Reward

The Great Man Theory forwards the idea that successful leaders who fulfill the role of a “Great Man,” according to Carlyle’s theory, have characteristics that are often found to be very inspirational. They have the natural charismatic ability to motivate, inspire, and promote success in the people under their supervision. The Great Man Theory focuses on the concept of leaders becoming the central functional part of the organization. Examples of this leadership style are evident in many organizations that support it. The reward basis in this leadership style is based on the concept of praise and bolstering the individual’s confidence and reassurance in their skills. Since it is very charismatic, this leadership style is ideal when employees have low morale and require a supportive role to prompt them to work efficiently and accomplish their goals effectively.

Interpersonal Skills

The Great Man Theory and the leaders found to fulfill its criteria are said to have different personal characteristics that make them unique among their followers. Plato presented a similar opinion, stating that these leaders owned superb reasoning capabilities and were rich in wisdom. Being unique in nature, the Great Man Theory forwards the idea that leaders of this leadership style mostly possess exceptional interpersonal communication skills, making them ideal speakers in a group, as well as proper reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Trait Theory

Background

Trait Theory is an exceptional leadership style that provides the concept that leaders owning specific natural skills have the ability to lead. These qualities include being assertive, capable, dependable, very adaptive, and persistent. The Trait Theory was formed by Ralph Stodgill in 1974. Trait Theory, much like Great Man Theory, emphasizes that certain personality traits express the difference between leaders and non-leaders. In a way, the point forwarded by the Great Man Theory, which stated that “Leaders are born, not made,” is also applicable in Trait Theory, since this leadership theory explains with clarity that a leader is someone who has the innate ability to lead.

Researchers found this to be equivalent to the ideas forwarded by Stodgill regarding the leader having an innate ability rather than learning it and grooming the needed skills over time (Colbert et al., 2012). However, considering this, behavioral theory suggests that a leader’s behavior could be influenced and could alter their traits with time. Still, the characteristics of a leader remain true to being inherent.

Rewards and Influences

Much like the Great Man Theory, the Trait Theory of leadership also relies on rewarding individuals in a team or organization based on motivating, encouraging, and praising them for their work. The sense of being acknowledged by someone superior has an incredible effect on an individual’s total outcome and confidence in getting the work done better. The Trait Theory of leadership focuses on introducing leaders in an organization who can influence individuals in a group to solve their problems, be better at their communication skills, and encourage others towards a shared goal or milestone.

Interpersonal Skills

The assessment of a leader following the rules of the Trait Theory leadership style suggests that these

leaders possess prowess in being better judges, owning strong analytical skills, and being conceptually well-skilled compared to non-leaders. They have the ability to connect with others emotionally and are found to be mature, trustworthy, open with others, and reliable. They are ideal candidates to assist others in communicating their work-related problems since these leaders are skilled and have vast technical knowledge.

Path-Goal Leadership Theory

Background

The Path-Goal Leader Theory, or the path-goal theory of effective leaders or path-goal model, is shaped around specifying the leader's behavior or form of leadership style that accommodates the employee's or work environment's goals and objectives. Path-Goal Leadership Theory, written by Robert House in 1971 and later presented in a revised version in 1996, discusses the importance of employees' encouragement levels as they achieve organizational goals (Phillips, & Phillips 2016). It also discusses the level of empowerment and satisfaction of employees who can accomplish their goals on time.

A better approach to understanding the mechanics behind this theory is to assume it is a thought process that allows the leader to choose a particular behavior that will accommodate the employee better. This behavior will be suitable for the employee and the work environment. It will serve as a guide, directing them successfully to complete their daily work-related activities. The Path-Goal leadership style is not strictly based on one chosen leadership style; it focuses on implementing a leadership style that will assist the employee and the organization. In order to implement the Path-Goal model, the leader first needs to assess the characteristics of their employee and the work environment they are present in. Secondly, the leader will choose an appropriate leadership style that will accommodate the employees to perform their jobs efficiently. Lastly, the model emphasizes the motivational factors that are able to assist the employees in succeeding in their tasks.

Rewards and Influences

A close analysis shows that the path-goal leadership style is found to be very effective and widely acceptable in organizations worldwide. Since the leaders are able to participate with their team and decide on matters with the mutual consent of their members, displaying concern for them and being friendly allows them to be very influential. The reward criteria in the path-goal leadership style are based on the acquisition of satisfaction from the employee's perspective. Leaders can set goals for their employees to accomplish and have expectations of having the employees achieve them while being at their highest level of potential.

Interpersonal Skills

Leaders following the principles of the Path-Goal leadership style are found to be very cooperative, friendly, and helpful overall. They are excellent at connecting with their team and assisting them with their work. These leaders have the ability to direct the flow of employee performance by instructing them about how to perform a certain task, assisting them in coordinating their tasks, and scheduling activities. This style is often found to be most effective in organizations with an overall environment of uncertainty or employees who are unsure of their tasks.

References

Colbert, A. E., Judge, T. A., Choi, D., & Wang, G. (2012). Assessing the trait theory of leadership using self and observer ratings of personality: The mediating role of contributions to group success. The Leadership Quarterly, 23(4), 670-685.

Kirkpatrick, S. A., & Locke, E. A. (1991). Leadership: do traits matter?. The executive, 5(2), 48-60.

Phillips, A. S., & Phillips, C. R. (2016). Behavioral styles of path-goal theory: An exercise for developing leadership skills. Management Teaching Review, 1(3), 148-154.