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What makes us "Good" Leaders?

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Abstract:

What makes us good leaders? It's a question that philosophers, politicians, and business strategists alike have been asking for centuries. Generations of scholars have sought to pinpoint the various attributes and characteristics that define leadership beyond a formal organizational role. Going a step beyond, extensive research has also been devoted to deciphering what abilities make certain individuals successful as leaders in comparison to their peers, along with how aspiring leaders can practice these abilities to hone their own leadership performance. All of this research culminates in an intimidating amount of literature, riddled with a broad array of theories and conclusions regarding the most important leadership factors, many of which are contradictory. Even as experts continually seek to refine the concept of what the ideal leader looks like, the discussion surrounding leadership has noticeably shifted in recent years to emphasize a different set of organizational faculties such as employee wellbeing, participation, and culture. This further complicates one's ability to find a synthesis between the various conflicting ideas.

It shall be the primary purpose of the following essay to contribute to this discussion, and, if appropriate, to render a conclusion as to the optimal set of leadership actions. It will begin by exploring the complicated history of leadership theory along with an overview of its most commonly regarded characterizations, both historically and in the present day. It will then take a more scientific approach by examining the lives and the levels of success of various real-world leaders in an effort to identify commonalities. Along the way it will investigate examples of both good and bad leaders in order to learn from their experiences in order to gain insight into what leadership characteristics are associated with organizational success. From there, it will attempt to narrow down a concrete list of the most important faculties of leadership based off of the preceding sections, incorporating additional data and outside research to back up these findings. Only then will it attempt to identify a comprehensive leadership theory that incorporates all the greatest advantages of the theories previously discussed, examining why such a comprehensive theory would lead to optimal performance for both the firm and its employees, and lastly how such a theory could be practically applied. Finally, the essay will conclude with a final discussion of the concept of leadership itself, along with the numerous difficulties involved in finding one all-encompassing leadership approach.

Introduction:

From a very young age, I was captivated by successful leaders. Whether it was a sports player, a million-dollar CEO featured on TV, or even a friend who others in my circle looked up to, I always wondered what it would take to someday be like them. This passion for what made a good leader stuck with me throughout my high school years as I entered the labor market and encountered a broad spectrum of leaders ranging from those who only cared about performance to those who were so hands-off it hurt employee morale. My perspectives were further broadened

throughout my college experiences when working with a wide variety of professors and fellow students. Finally, after beginning a role in corporate America and being exposed to numerous highly successful individuals, my passion for understanding high-quality leadership was cemented as the primary pursuit of my career.

As a natural result of this, throughout my academic and professional tenure I became obsessed with the question of what it would take to become a great leader in the modern era. Reflecting upon my previous experiences I could attribute many of my highest achievements to the mentorship and inspiration of charismatic figures who had inexplicably found a way to move my inner soul, allowing me to accomplish things I would have previously deemed impossible. It is therefore worthy of noting that the following essay will heavily reflect the biases of my own experience. Moreover, it will reflect the biases of a world as seen by a follower- someone who looks toward leadership for its propensity to inspire and motivate rather than from the perspective of improving organizational outcomes irrespective of the impact the process has on stakeholders.

This holistic definition of leadership that keeps in mind both outcomes and stakeholders is no part unique to this essay. The vast majority of leadership definitions, irrespective of when they were written, contain at least implicitly, a reference to the dyadic relationship between those leading and those being led. Ralph M. Stogdill, a pioneer in the study of leadership theories, defined leadership as "an influencing process aimed at goal achievement" (Benmira et al) implying the participation of those being influenced. Similarly, Peter G. Northouse, one of the most well-known authors on the subject of leadership, described it as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse 2016). One of the leading managers at Charles Schwab (a company I worked for and a bastion of great quality leaders) went a step further to call leadership the process of caring for people "To be a successful leader, you have to love people, and that doesn't just mean the people that love you back." All of these descriptions serve to highlight the fact that the act of leadership is integrally connected to the actions or success of the follower. The following essay continues this assumption.

Finally, just as in my own search to find the qualities that would define the "good" leader, this essay also presupposes that such an ideal leader can, at least in theory, exist. It must be admitted that no leadership theory could encompass all possible situations that may arise in the future, especially as the parameters behind what we consider to be admirable qualities or abilities are constantly in flux. Nevertheless, this thesis will attempt to identify the optimal set of characteristics that would give an individual the best opportunity for being a successful leader in this modern age. In order to give this context however, as well as shed light on the various possible abilities that different leaders may possess, it is necessary to explore the history of leadership theory in order to highlight the many approaches to finding what makes a great leader that have existed in the past.

Part I: A History of Leadership Theory

The Trait Approach to Leadership: The Great Man Theory and Beyond

The first primary leadership theory to gain traction among the scholars was the great man theory, which was promulgated by Historian Thomas Carlyle among others in the late 1800s. The great man theory proposed that people who succeeded as leaders were simply "great men" who had been endowed since birth with certain exceptional qualities that allowed them to perform on a different level than others. During times of great need, it taught, such an extraordinary individual would rise above their peers by utilizing their innate abilities to solve the given crises. Leaders, therefore, were born and not made. Those wishing to become good leaders already possessed a predetermined fate based on their propensity to lead and aptitude for greatness, and there was very little that an individual could do to improve him or herself if they were not predisposed to lead (Cherry).

This approach drew its primary inspiration from great historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill who led their people to overcome exceptional difficulties. The theory recognized such individuals as possessing certain extraordinary abilities that the vast majority of others who occupied similar positions of power did not exhibit. Thus, because of the theory's reliance on such unparalleled figures, it was highly descriptive in nature, and failed to provide much guidance on how such leadership qualities could be developed. This would go on to be a common shortfall of many of the early leadership theories.

The great man theory of leadership met with some stark objections, particularly those posed by Herbet Spencer, who believed the theory severely understated the impact of one's environment on the leadership process (Villanova University). Spencer believed the idea of one individual completing shaping their external environment was an unrealistic assumption, and that leaders such as Churchill or Lincoln were shaped by the times in which they lived rather than the other way around. These objections would persist despite popularity of the great man theory throughout the early 20th century. By the mid-1900s however, more complex theories of leadership were developing.

Evolving from the great man theory was the broader trait approach to leadership, which sought to identify the common traits that great leaders possessed in an effort to help organizations find such leaders. Like the great man theory, the trait approach assumed that great leaders were born with unique abilities, and that, these traits could not be learned (at least throughout the early stages of the approach). However, it went a step further in an effort to discover what made these exceptional leaders great, becoming the first leadership approach to narrow down a concrete list of the optimal leadership characteristics.

The most notable bevy of research conducted regarding trait theory was performed by Ralph M. Stogdill. Contrary to many of his time, Stogdill believed that no one trait defined the success of leaders in every given situation and that under differing circumstances, different traits were preferable. Stogdill conducted two distinct research studies, one in 1948 and the other in 1970 in an effort to find a common set of traits exhibited by the most successful leaders. Some of the traits he identified in his first study as being more pronounced in successful leaders included intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability.

Working off of prior research, dozens of others including Mann in 1959, McCall and Lombardo in 1983, Lord, DeVader and Allgier in 1986, and Kirkpatrick and Locke in 1991, continued to search for the traits that made successful leaders (Northouse). As recently as 2017, Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader came up with a list of defining leadership traits while adjusting for the social needs of the modern workforce, showcasing the prevalence of the theory even to this day.

An important component of the trait approach was an examination of personality factors and how these related to successful leadership traits. The five-factor model of personality identifies 5 main factors that contribute to personality including neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Research regarding personality and leadership has identified extraversion as the most positively associated with successful leadership, and conscientiousness with the highest correlation to individual job performance, showing which traits were the most important for a leader to have.

The Skills Approach to Leadership

Following quickly on the heels of the trait-based approach was the skill-based approach to leadership. Rather than seeing a leader's capabilities as a set of predefined traits that an individual had no control over, the skill-based approach identified skills as abilities that were not only natural but could also be developed and learned. This concept of being able to develop the skills necessary for success as a leader was the first of its kind and represented an important milestone in the study of leadership theory. As Robert Katz, the primary proponent of the skills-based approach stated, skills are what leaders can accomplish whereas traits are what leaders innately are (Northouse, pg. 56).

Research on the skills approach tended to revolve around three primary topics: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. It was believed that the higher one progressed in an organizational hierarchy, the more human and conceptual skills were required, whereas base-level jobs in an organization tended to revolve around more technical skills. Later studies of the skill-based approach focused on looking at problem-solving skills, social-judgement skills, and skills based on prior knowledge. Altogether, a leader's proficiency in these areas determined their propensity to achieve success in their roles.

As with the great man theory, both the trait and skills approach to leadership faced criticism as well as conflicting results when it came to many studies. Firstly, due to their failure to account for situational factors that influence leadership, these approaches were unable to determine why many followers also possessed these characteristics and what they could do to succeed as a leader. Additionally, these approaches could not draw a direct correlation between leadership performance and the practice of these skills and traits. Although the traits and skills that researchers have identified are generally useful for leaders to exhibit, they only represent a broad range of the many abilities that different leaders have displayed at different times. The trait and skills approach did more to describe and recognize current leaders rather than build a framework for how to become one.

Behavioral and Situational Approaches to Leadership

The next major breakthrough in leadership theory came with the behavioral approach. Unlike the trait or skills approach that attempted to come up with a list of the best leadership characteristics regardless of the situation, the behavioral approach identified two distinct leadership behaviors: task behaviors and relationship behaviors. It recognized that certain skills or capabilities that made one successful in one area might not directly translate to success in the other. This was one of the first leadership theories to take the situation into account when examining best leadership practices, as well as one of the first to recognize that different tasks called for different types of leaders.

The most prominent application of the behavioral approach to leadership was Blake and Mouton's Managerial grid (Northouse pg. 87). Based off of the need for both task and relationship behaviors, the model developed a matrix for two primary factors of leadership: a leader's concern for people (relationship) and a leader's concern for production (task). The model ranked different leaders based on how well they performed in these respective areas, positing that the best leaders scored high on both concern for people and production. Other leaders, such as those who scored high in one area and not the other (such as "country club" management- a high concern for people but a low concern for production) worked well in certain situations, but in general a leader who scored high in both areas was ideal.

The Situational Approach to Leadership broadened this perspective even more by looking at a multitude of situations and determining that each one called for a nuanced response from leaders. Like the Behavioral Approach the situational theory narrowed in on two key perspectives: directive forms of leadership and supportive forms of leadership. Based off of a given leader's capabilities in each of these areas, the approach identified four primary types of leaders: directing (high directive, low supportive), coaching (high directive and high supportive), supporting (low directive and high supportive), and delegating (low in both areas).

This approach to leadership was also novel in the fact that it considered a leader's impact on followers as one of the core tenants of what made a good leader. It examined situations in which leaders were developing their followers in the areas of competence and commitment in order to achieve a specific organizational goal. By utilizing this approach, a leader could examine the degree of competence and commitment certain employees showcased in certain situations and adapt their leadership style to the corresponding level of directive and supportive behaviors.

Despite noticeable advancements in leadership theory, the behavioral and situational approaches still fell short in a few key areas. Firstly, they failed to specify how certain behaviors in different situations influence organizational success, or exactly what behaviors leaders should utilize in said situations in order to achieve the optimal outcome. Additionally, although the models made marked progress over previous approaches in incorporating follower development into their framework, they were unable to show how different levels of follower development could be combined in order to achieve greater outcomes for the organization. However, even with these shortcomings, the behavioral and situational approaches to leadership represented significant advancements in leadership theory and laid the groundwork for what was to come.

The Transformational Approach to Leadership

The Transformational approach to leadership was one of the first leadership theories to put the primary emphasis on followers. Its primary focus was identifying how different leaders could motivate followers to achieve superior performance, and how different leaders adapted their leadership styles to connect with their followers on a deeper level. More specifically, the theory looked at four key leadership behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration that successful leaders exhibited to achieve this goal.

The transformational approach was monumental in that it was the first of its kind to treat followers as full human beings outside of their function in the workplace. Proponents of this approach believed that leaders who could address and fulfill their follower's needs, wants, and desires could achieve the highest form of organizational success since followers would be more than willing to support such a leader.

Going beyond this, the transformational theory taught that leaders were capable of *transforming* their followers to achieve significant outcomes they would not normally be able to achieve on their own. Key to this was a leader's charismatic personality and visionary mindset. Thus, although the approach focused on followers, it still relied heavily on the actions of the leader in order to be successful, making it applicable to leaders in the workforce.

The transformational approach looked at three kinds of leaders: those who were transactional (primarily cared about the task at hand and nothing beyond that- similar to the task-based behaviors of the behavioral approach), transformational (those that transformed their followers- including elements of both task and relationship-based behaviors) and laissez-faire (those who were completely hands off from both a task and relationship-based perspective). It identified transformational leaders as achieving the highest organizational outcomes. Under this umbrella, great leaders were defined by their idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration of followers.

The most significant achievement of the transformational approach was that a myriad of leadership studies showed that it worked (Deng et al.): transformational leaders as described by this method were able to stimulate higher follower performance (and thus improved performance for the organization overall) as well as create a superior work environment for their followers. However, even this approach was not immune to critics. The primary criticism of this approach was that, like the trait or skill approach, it treated a leader's charismatic personality as something unique to them rather than something that could necessarily be learned. In addition, many believed that it placed too great an emphasis on the leader themselves as the sole means by which an organization is transformed, rather than treating an organization as a complex web of factors of which the leader is only one. In essence, like the great man theory, it posited that certain leaders were so extraordinarily remarkable that they single-handedly shaped the environment around them, transcending situational factors that in reality played a crucial role in determining outcomes.

The Servant Leader Approach to Leadership

The transformational approach to leadership was extremely popular in its time, but more recent leadership theorists have suggested an even more follower-centric theory. First suggest by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, the servant leadership approach attempted to combine the seemingly opposed pursuits of leading and serving others. It taught that being a leader necessitates a willingness to sacrifice one's own ambitions for the good of the organization and, more importantly, for the good of the followers and their personal success. Under this approach a leader's passion for advancement and success is subordinated to their desire to help others achieve their own dreams and aspirations both within and outside of the organization.

Servant leadership takes a slightly different perspective than many of the previously mentioned theories in that it is one of the first leadership approaches to involve the active participation of followers in the actual process of leadership, thereby increasing their stake in overall outcomes. More than any other type of leadership theory it attempts to transform the organization form within, teaching that if the individual members of the organization succeed in their own pursuits, they will in turn be inspired to contribute towards the goals of the organization as a whole. This, the theory posited, would not only increase organizational effectiveness, but loyalty among followers, a more positive and engaged workplace culture, and higher investment in the organization of leaders and followers alike.

Another extremely important element of servant leadership: it worked. According to a variety of studies conducted on measuring the effectiveness of leadership theories (Northouse pg. 267), the practice of servant leadership was shown to facilitate more successful employee performance outcomes than even transformational leadership. These results, combined with the altruistic nature of the approach, has made it an extremely popular theory among researchers, and careful study on its manifold effects have continued to this day.

However, it would be remiss not to mention a few shortfalls of the approach's current status. Firstly, as with many of its predecessors, it describes a certain type of leader more than it lays the framework for becoming such a successful leader in the workforce. Second, to the extended amount of research conducted on the theory from varying perspectives, there is little common consensus among scholars as to what exactly servant leadership entails, its precise definition, and what makes a servant leader different from any other type of leader who has good working relationships with his or her colleagues. Despite these shortcomings however, the approach has remained largely popular among researchers and organizations alike and continues to be one of the primary perspectives driving modern leadership theory.

Leadership Approaches Today: Collaborative Leadership, and Inclusive Leadership

Increasingly prevalent in contemporary literature is the notion of more collaborative forms of leadership. These include a decrease in the emphasis on an individual leader's performance and outlook and more of a focus on the development of the team as a whole. Key to this is a distribution of leadership duties across multiple individuals who might not hold a formal position in an organization (Benmira et al). More than anything, collaborative leadership approaches view leadership as a follower-centric process dependent on both the situation and the external environment.

The lines between what constitutes a follower and what constitutes a leader have become increasingly blurred (Hunt et al). Modern theories such as leader-follower exchange-based theories attempt to integrate the two by encouraging participation in the leadership process of all members of an organization and by equally weighting the input of every individual regardless of their formal role. Encouraging this participation by followers, these theories propose, allows for a freer exchange of ideas and ultimately better results by including a variety of perspectives.

A similar modern approach to leadership is the inclusive leadership model, that looks at integrating the inherent differences in the workforce in an attempt to promote employee engagement and morale. The approach devoted ample study to the link between employee inclusion and their overall belongingness, and thus their overall dedication to their employer. In addition, inclusive leadership is also noteworthy in its effort to address many of the miscommunications that arise among people of different backgrounds. This has made it a very practical approach since such miscommunications have harmed nearly every business at some point in the past.

Similarly to the servant leadership approach, the inclusive leadership approach has been shown to positively affect follower creativity and the quality of their contributions. The feeling of safety that comes from an appreciation of their diversity emboldens followers to challenge the status quo and has also been shown to positively facilitate a follower's learning from previous mistakes. By creating an inclusive culture, a leader can both reap the benefits of a diverse group of perspectives and experiences while paradoxically creating an environment in which everyone feels closely connected, despite their differences.

All in all, these modern approaches to leadership have combined and integrated many of their predecessors. Rather than promoting novel theories that look at leadership from completely different perspectives, they have fueled a greater synthesis among scholars. Doubtlessly, leadership theory will continue to be molded and evolve into completely new studies of thought building off of what has been conceptualized before.

Additional Perspectives on Leadership

In a comprehensive study of the varying perspectives that have defined leadership thought over the last few decades, it is also important to examine the findings of other, non-scholarly sources on leadership. This includes individuals who have ample first-hand experience of leadership in a corporate environment, as well as those who were profoundly impacted by a leader at some point in their lifetime. Finally, in order to minimize the biases towards my own personal experiences, it is worthwhile to examine the experiences of others in this field of study.

One of the most notable leadership experts that fits this mold is British-American author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek. Sinek has spoken on a wide variety of leadership topics throughout his career, but his theories regarding leadership most frequently emphasize the importance of helping followers to grow, a perspective consistent with the servant leadership approach. In a summary speech of his best-selling book, *Why Leaders Eat Last,* he described the difference between the traditional understanding of leaders and what the best motivational

leaders have done in service of others. "A leader," he declared. "Is someone who puts themselves at risk to look after others."

A common theme building off of the behavioral leadership approach that ties into this perspective is the difference between leadership as seen as the successful completion of tasks (such as selling the most goods, generating the most profit or achieving the highest satisfaction score) versus leadership as the guiding of people. The traditional view of leadership often viewed the former as a leader's ultimate end. In contrast, Sinek, along with many other modern leadership theorists, argue that the best way to achieve this is by focusing firstly on the cultivation and guardianship of followers. Leaders in business, he writes, much like leaders in other settings such as the army, must be willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of their soldiers. In essence, a leader is someone who rides at the front of their army, not because they are foremost in importance, but because they are willing to take upon themselves the first blow from the enemy lines.

Consistent with this notion is the non-traditional perspective that a leader need not be an individual who acts in a formal position of power. "Leadership," Sinek has said on other occasions. "Is not about being *in* charge, but taking care of the others who happen to be *in* one's charge." This can encompass peers as well as subordinates. Just as Henry Ford once said, "You don't have to hold a position in order to be a leader" (leadership.com). A leader can be anyone who others are willing to follow, and who is willing to put the needs of others above their own. From this perspective, leadership is seen as an extremely altruistic practice, more concerned with responsibility and a willingness to do the work that no one wants, rather than one's position of authority or subject-matter expertise. It teaches that the ability to exert great influence over followers lies not in power solely based on legitimacy, but in setting an example for others to follow.

Similarly to Sinek, world-renowned leadership author and speaker John C. Maxwell proposes that a leader's communication and connection to other individuals around them is what determines their success (Maxwell). According to Maxwell, there are three key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of this connection: an alignment of values, an alignment of vision, and a mutual willingness to invest the time and energy to achieve them both. Once a leader excels at all three, they are better equipped to motivate followers towards the accomplishment of their shared goals.

Maxwell's approach to leadership is extremely practical in that he takes extensive pains to describe how anyone at any level of an organization can achieve this expertise in building connections. This sets his writings apart from those of earlier leadership theorists. For Maxwell, successful leadership is a dynamic ability that can be learned and improved over time. Every single person in an organization, he believes, has the potential to be an effective communicator, connect with others, and thus lead in their own capacity. Similarly, no one arrives at a place in their careers where they are simply "a great leader". One's leadership skills must be continually developed, adapting to the ever-changing needs of the environment and the needs of the people a leader is surrounded with.

In summary, there has been an extensive amount of literature published on the subject of leadership over the past century. A bevy of alternative theories through which the lens of leadership can be viewed have been proposed, beginning with the great man theory in the early 1900s and stretching to the modern day with collaborative and inclusion approaches to leadership. Throughout this time, the discussion has constantly been evolving to encompass a broader array of environmental factors that may influence the leadership process beyond the personal traits of the individual in charge. In addition to scientific literature, authors, and speakers such as Simon Sinek and John C. Maxwell have contributed extensive insights to the field of study based off of their own experiences while leading and being led by others.

All of this builds up to a broad array of perspectives through which leadership and the ideal leader can be analyzed. Fortunately, a large portion of this research flows together from one theory to another so that one might begin to identify similarities between these various approaches in an attempt to combine them into one, comprehensive theory for modern leaders.

Now that the foundation of leadership theory has been laid, the following section of this essay will cover my own experiences with leadership. I will take a deep dive into the various approaches to leadership I have seen utilized in the real world, examining which theoretical qualities have worked and which have not in my experiences with a diverse array of leaders. Along the way I will take meticulous care to tie everything I have observed back into the theories of leadership the essay has already discussed in an effort to come to a better understanding of what makes a real-life leader successful.

Firstly, however, in order to provide better context for my current perspective, I will begin by giving an example of a time when I took on a leadership role and failed, due to my personal misconceptions about what a good leader was like. This anecdotal evidence shall serve to showcase a common mistake that many in the leadership world can make, how other aspiring leaders who find themselves in a similar situation to mine can avoid such an error, and how this experience plays into my broader understanding of the subject of leadership so far throughout my career.

Part II: Evidence from Observation

My Experience as a Leader

One of my first experiences with leadership came about as a result of my academic studies on the subject of management and business. I had just begun my first collegiate semester, and fresh out of high school where I had intellectually excelled, I was eager to prove myself as a hard-worker and leader in a formal environment. It was with this self-confident predisposition that I attended my first class, where the instructor, who prided himself on teaching from an unconventional perspective, facilitated our learning by giving us first-hand experience through leading in-class groups. There was one important caveat: Our grade came not from the professor, but from our peers who were part of our groups. I was undaunted however as I knew what it took to achieve exemplary grades and was more than willing to share this knowledge with the other members of my new group.

This is the first lesson that I learned from such an experience: individual success and achievement in a given pursuit does not directly translate into success as a leader of a team. Looking back once again at the tenants of the behavioral leadership theory, an individual can excel at task completion behaviors but still possess very little skill in relationship-related areas, even if the task that the team sets out to accomplish is similar in nature. Or as seen from the perspective of the skills approach to leadership, my abilities were almost entirely technical in nature rather than human or conceptual. I therefore was blind to everything except the task at hand, heedless of the situation and the people that would need to make it happen.

As a result, I went about leading by establishing my own goals and expectations, and my deadlines for completing various stages of our project without obtaining a consensus from the other members of our group. Almost immediately, I experienced negative feedback from my colleagues who, due to their busy schedules and a tendency towards procrastination, desired to set their own deadlines for the project. Some of the deadlines they proposed were only a matter of hours removed from when our final presentation would be due, something that the stubborn high achiever in me was unwilling to accept. Eventually, because of my constant insistence that the group abide by what I deemed to be a superior schedule, the whole group turned against me and insisted that I turn the decision-making over to them.

The primary lesson that I learned from that fall was that in order to have a successful team, you have to consider the people ahead of the project. A team's end goal is important, but the task-behaviors involved should not come at the expense of the relationship-based behaviors. To this day I believe that my harder deadline schedule would have been superior from a task completion standpoint. Despite this I was unsuccessful as a leader because I failed to consider the people that were integral to the project's success. I did not ask for any input or attempt to understand the various underlying scheduling needs of my team that impacted their ability to work at that point in their careers. I simply went ahead with what I believed to be the optimal strategy, which regardless of the strategy's quality was a fatal mistake as a leader.

In the end, my ego suffered far more than my grades as I learned to adapt to the more relaxed schedule of the other members of my group and accept decent rather than perfect results. Despite all this when we learned to communicate more effectively towards the end of the semester, our group achieved the highest grade on our project of any team. This example serves to illustrate that as important as a perfect job result may seem, it is vital that a leader put the people first. As much as a leader may believe that they know best, it is crucial to gather a consensus from the larger group. Otherwise, a person in charge of their team runs the risk of no longer leading according to the previously discussed definition of leadership, which greatly emphasizes one's ability to influence others.

A Highschool Football Coach: My First Great Leader

The lessons I learned from my experience as a leader in class were lessons, I should have picked up on before. This failed attempt at leading was not even my most instructive encounter regarding leadership of that time. Less than a year prior, in my senior year of high school, I had the privilege of interacting with a football coach whose exceptional gift for leadership has made

a profound imprint on my understanding of the subject to this day. His passion for investing in others, far above and beyond the goals of the organization (in this case the goal of the team to win the league tournament) was so remarkably transformative it had a deep impact on every single individual he encountered. In the following section I will detail his approach to leadership, emphasizing its effectiveness for both the individual follower as well as the team as a whole.

Coach Myers exemplified a charismatic, transformational embodiment of leadership to his core. One thing I distinctly remember from joining the team early on was his dedication to ensuring that every member, regardless of the seniority or skill-level of their position, felt as if they were uniquely special. I am convinced that the way he spoke with each individual player made them each believe that they were somehow his favorite. My first encounter of this occurred after I became upset that the assistant coaches had assigned me to a less desirable position on our B-squad. When I approached him and asked why, he paused what he was doing, turned his full attention in my direction, and explained in a positive light how the unique abilities he had already witnessed in my play were a perfect fit for how the team hoped to highlight that position. This overwhelmingly positive response towards what could have been perceived as a new player complaining severely altered my mindset even if it didn't change my mind.

This investment in the well-being of each individual player went far beyond maximizing team performance. Later on in the season when we were practicing for the final tournament, I badly twisted my hand on a fluke tackle. Just as any other competitive member on the team I would have gladly participated in our final games even with a broken hand, but Coach Myers insisted that I would sit out unless I recovered, even though by this point I was an integral part of the starting team. Above all else, he cared for the safety and wellbeing of the individual members of the team, even if it necessitated entering the competition we had prepped for all season with a disadvantage.

Winning wasn't everything for Coach Myers, investing in his people was. And even from a purely organizational outcome, it worked. Severely undermanned from a talent perspective in the championship match, our team put forth a herculean effort against a team that had defeated us 47-6 in our inaugural game. Spurred on by a passion to win for our coach, our team won the championship game 24-6, with players such as myself who were relatively new making significant contributions against larger, more athletic opponents.

This was the effort that our coach inspired: aligning closely the tenants of transformational leadership theory he invested in each individual player in an intentional way, galvanizing the team to perform beyond what they believed themselves capable of in an effort to make him proud. More specifically, he excelled at the use of the transformational practice of individual consideration as a technique for improving his follower's investment in their common goals. He also exhibited certain servant leader attributes as well, allowing players to participate in the planning process and giving them much desired playing time even when they were not necessarily the best on the time. In this way, Coach Myers was not only able to leave a profound imprint on every single one of his players but was able to achieve superior performance results that many deemed impossible. He showed that by investing in the people, a leader could achieve high performance in both relationship behaviors and through this task behaviors. This is ideally

what the transformational approach to leadership seeks to achieve, and he embodied this perspective from the moment spring training began.

Leaders in College: The Importance of Understanding Perspective

Driven onward by my previous experiences of leadership, my perspective was further broadened by a large quantity of forward-thinking leaders in various academic fields throughout my college tenure. There have been a myriad of professors and peers that have positively contributed to my overall understanding of leadership, and although I will be unable to recognize every one of them I will spend the following section reviewing the knowledge I gained from a few who stood out.

One particular professor who enhanced my understanding of leadership and connecting with others through ways I did not expect was Dr. Johnson (not the professor's real name), who taught a course on the various definitions of success throughout the history of America. Dr. Johnson and I disagreed on many of our fundamental values, he taught me the importance of listening to others who hold different viewpoints through his own example, rarely sharing his own beliefs but instead presenting the best side of every argument. In addition, he taught me the importance of perspective and how one's experiences in life fundamentally alter the way we perceive truth. This idea is very consistent with the situational leadership theory which teaches that in order to connect best with followers, a leader should examine the unique faculties of their situation and perspective in order to determine the optimal path forward.

Dr Johnson's class wasn't a leadership class in the technical sense, but he did teach me several extremely important abilities that contribute to becoming a good leader. Firstly, he taught me the value of examining different issues from other people's perspectives and seeing events through their unique experiences, even if their beliefs were intrinsically opposed to mine. This viewpoint borrows from certain elements of inclusive leadership theory which promotes having a diverse set of views in order to maximize a team's problem-solving abilities. The viewpoint also coincides with many tenants of servant leadership, allowing leaders to better understand and collaborate with followers that hold very different values.

This, I learned from Dr. Johnson, is a crucial element of what it means to be a leader who is follower-first and is something that is often overlooked by leadership researchers. Through the thoughtful consideration of my ideas (along with those of every individual in class), he was able to open my perspective to many of his in a way that no fact-based argument would have, once again showing how individual consideration can be a more effective tool for change than a leader's individual skills or traits. A leader who invests the effort to engage with followers and truly understand them where they are at will be far more persuasive than one who simply attempts to convince them of their vision by other means.

In addition to Dr. Johnson, Professor Jones, who I had the privilege of working with on several occasions further challenged me to see the truth in other people's perspectives, helping me to consider others who are very different than myself as full individuals deserving of my full attention. Hailing from a background completely different to mine, she proactively challenged my views along with those of the entire class in a way that was both thought-provoking yet

13

polite. Once again, her leadership qualities that included a respect for the individual regardless of his or her values was the most effective means of changing their perspectives.

An additional person who contributed to my understanding of leadership throughout my college career was the president of my business fraternity. A charismatic man who possessed a work ethic like nobody else, he held his team to a high standard while at the same time exhibiting a willingness to personally ensure all our duties were completed. One specific behavior I remember was the excited yet professional way he greeted every single one of our members who came through the door, using their first name and immediately bringing them into the middle of the conversation. This recognition from someone that everyone respected as an outstanding performer helped each individual member to feel valued and to have a greater sense of identity with the group.

Although he utilized a slightly different leadership approach than many of the other leaders I have mentioned (possessing a greater achievement and task orientation rather than an exclusively relationship-based one) our fraternity leader was able to accomplish outstanding results. He believed strongly in leadership by example and thus was willing to pick up the slack of any other member who failed to fulfill their duties. Membership soared as students were attracted to his outgoing personality and drive. Both before and after his term as president, even under the guidance of decent leaders in their own right, the overall environment lacked the discipline, engagement, and motivation which he was able to facilitate. Though a large part of his leadership style was based on his personal capabilities, my fraternity leader taught me the importance of charisma and using people's names.

Leadership in College: Examples of Failed Leadership

In contrast to the many outstanding examples I encountered of leadership throughout my academic tenure, not all the leaders that I worked with were exceptional at their jobs. In fact, there were a few notable instances where certain leaders exhibited the exact opposite traits of those previously mentioned, leading to negative outcomes both for them and for the goals they were trying to accomplish. In order to provide a broader perspective on the various levels of effectiveness that different leaders achieve, I will spend the following section giving examples of leaders who were not successful in the practices they utilized.

One important instance of an unsuccessful leader that provides an insightful example was a public speaking instructor who I worked with while still in high school. The content she presented often made her students (the followers in this example) uncomfortable, and multiple ethical concerns were raised about her class. The primary issue she exhibited as a leader however, irrespective of the moral or ethical dimension of her content, arose with how she treated this discrepancy in values with her followers.

From early on in the semester, this instructor volunteered to her class that she had experienced communication issues regarding these ethical dilemmas with followers in the past. But rather than attempting to understand the opposing side's viewpoint like Dr. Johnson or Professor Jones would have done, she doubled down on her beliefs, insisting that because she held a position of power, she could leverage that position however she saw fit, irrespective of

follower feedback. Eventually, I too became engaged in a back and forth with this leader based on content that made me uncomfortable, and just as before, rather than discussing my concerns, she insisted that her method was appropriate without hardly addressing me. Very soon after, just as other students had done in the past, I was forced to drop the class due to my increasing uneasiness.

This story illustrates an eye-opening example of what not to do as a leader. Unavoidably, certain disputes will arise between leaders and followers based on differing perspectives and values, even if both sides are behaving ethically. In such situations it is highly important that a leader not dismiss their follower's concerns, even if from the leader's perspective, such concerns may appear unwarranted. Especially when multiple followers communicate a similar concern, a leader should consider what they have to offer since failure to do so may cause a loss of moral among followers and ultimately a loss of talent for the organization, as in my case. Consideration for followers, as has already been illustrated in every positive example of leadership up to this point, is fundamental to good leadership. Leaders who fail to consider the needs of their followers, such as the instructor in this example, fail to garner loyalty among followers and therefore are unable to achieve the desired outcomes of the organization they work for.

Aside from this case, the majority of my experiences with ineffective leadership at school came as a result of a lack of communication or from leaders who were too hands-off and hard to reach. Oftentimes, this laissez-faire approach to leadership left us followers scrambling to figure out everything on our own, which led to a decrease in follower confidence and a more stressful environment. This reality illustrates the fact that there is a fine balance for leaders to achieve between being overly directive towards employees and being too laid back. Neither a laissez-faire nor an aggressively task-oriented or transactional approach to leadership is enough to propel an organization forward long-term. Good leaders must therefore actively facilitate engagement and participation on top of allowing their followers a certain degree of agency.

While attending school, I worked in the fast-food industry part time and experienced the usual range of leaders that one might expect. These included the average task-oriented leaders who solely cared about revenue and the efficient completions of one's duties, leaders who made employees feel uncomfortable with the way they behaved in the workplace, and even a couple of genuine leaders who were relatable and tried to recognize their workers for their accomplishments. All in all, my experience of leadership in the fast-food industry was rather subdued and presented neither an exemplary model for how to lead effectively, nor a harsh lesson for how not to lead. In the end they represented very basic, traditional forms of leadership, that served to help me aspire to more in my own career.

Leaders in the Corporate Business World

Despite all this prior experience, it wasn't until I began a corporate internship with Charles Schwab in 2023 that I was able to truly appreciate the effect that outstanding leaders can have on their team and the workplace. Over the course of the following year through this internship and later transitioning to a more permanent role, I was exposed to an extensive display of excellent leaders who were extremely effective in both their task and relationship-based

behaviors. The many practices and beliefs of such leaders would be far too extensive to relate in adequate detail given the limited parameters of this essay. Nevertheless, in this final section detailing my personal experience with leadership, I will endeavor to cover the most impactful of these corporate leaders in an attempt to discover what made them so successful.

One of my first interactions with leadership during my internship at Schwab occurred during a meeting with a managing director (I will omit his name for the sake of privacy) and motivational speaker. "Leadership," he began his presentation to our group. "Is not simply a passion or a destination. It's a conscious choice." Throughout the rest of the meeting, the managing director resoundingly emphasized the importance of service as the primary attribute of a successful leader. "If you are someone who aspires to become a great leader," he told us. "You must ask yourself this question: Do you inherently feel that you have the heart of a servant?"

It isn't difficult to understand how closely this view of leadership traces the servant leadership approach. It is also very similar to the way in which Simon Sinek applies the concepts of servant leadership theory to practically guide listeners through the leadership process. The stark similarity between the beliefs of these two business leaders can be further illustrated through some additional quotes from that meeting. "Leaders stand in front of their teams not because they are better but because they should be the first to take the blame for any problems that arise." He told us. "In a hierarchy of duties, they should be the lowest on the totem pole because it is their job to lift everyone else up."

Delving further into leadership theory, on the subject of leader-follower interactions, he had the following to say. "Your boss can be one of two things. Either your boss can be the person that blocks you from advancing in your career or the type of person who opens the floodgates to help you advance." Once again, this highlights the importance of a leader's role in the life of their followers. Once again, irrespective of organizational outcomes, a leader is fundamental to their follower's success in their own careers, making it the leader's responsibility to do their best to assist their followers in this capacity. Just as the theory of servant leadership teaches, these qualities in a leader will lead to better follower performance and growth, better outcomes for the organization, and a positive impact on society at large (Northouse pg. 264).

Though this particular managing director certainly helped in establishing such practices as the cultural norms where we worked, his beliefs were echoed by a whole host of additional directors and managers. Something you have to understand as not just a leader, but for all employees of an organization, reiterated my particular department's director, is that "There really is no such thing as work-life balance. You just have life, and you have to figure out where work fits into it." For much of the 20th century, businesses viewed work solely as a contract between the company and their employees. What modern leadership theorists have begun to realize is that, due to the reality that work occupies such a significant portion of an employee or follower's life, the impact a leader can have in the workplace directly translates to an impact in that employee's life.

Another important facet of leadership that was often reiterated by the leaders I encountered at Schwab was the concept of not needing a formal authority role to lead. "I hire

leaders, not managers." One director told our group. "Leaders get people to do things by getting to know their people. I want people on my team who lead their peers without a title. You can teach them how to coach and manage, but you can't teach a heart that cares about people."

All of this theory worked extremely well in practice on our team, through the guidance of our young manager who was one of the best leaders I have ever encountered. Since day one she perfect embodied the notion of putting the people first, spending the vast majority of one-on-one monthly review sessions to getting to know what her followers did outside of work rather than discussing particular metrics or task-related topics. Despite being extremely busy with a variety of roles including that of a mother, she remained approachable and positive in every single encounter I ever had with her despite the overwhelming stresses she delt with every day.

This is an example of a facet of leadership not easily explainable by modern leadership theory: the concept of a leader's intrinsic motivation and how certain leaders are gifted with an ability to do extraordinary things- to be present for their team even in the midst of multiple conflicting priorities. This ability is partially explainable by trait and skill perspectives of leadership theory; however, they alone are inadequate to describe how such a practice is learned. The leadership approach that comes closest to explaining this is the adaptive leadership theory that describes "getting on the balcony" or adopting a mindset that can see beyond one's particular circumstances at a given time to view the broader picture. This picture includes the lives of everyone else involved on the team.

This concern for improvement in the lives of followers is further illustrated in her dedication to facilitating collaboration. One primary example that stands out to me is when I approached her with an idea for a team-wide program that could benefit the overall internship experience. The very day that I informed her I would like to make this proposal, she took a significant time out of her schedule to set up a meeting where we could discuss the research I had done and my recommendation. Throughout this entire process she was extremely supportive, allowing me to talk unhindered for almost twenty minutes straight before discussing next steps on how such an idea might be further modified and implemented. In the end, not only did she support me in creating this achievement-related rewards system for our entire team, but she trusted me to oversee all the logistics of the implementation, only looking the end result over for final approval.

This example pinpoints a hallmark of collaborative and participative leadership theories. Before presenting this idea to my manager, I had experienced a period of complacency at work, and this ability to create change in the workplace severely improved my morale, in addition, I hope, to the morales of a few other workers who may have benefited from the program we installed. By granting followers the ability to participate in the leadership process, leaders not only improve overall employee morale, but provide them with significant investment in the company. This improves follower loyalty in addition to work-ethic and helps to foster a much more collaborative environment where followers feel empowered to offer their input to help the company grow.

In total, these experiences with leaders and leadership throughout my career have not only increased my understanding, but my passion for the subject as a whole. Interacting with both very successful and non-successful leaders in real life can often teach us more about leadership than any essay or theory ever could. I am profoundly grateful to the leaders that shaped my life by providing me with the many instructive leadership lessons I have herein explained.

These stories are particularly useful as they illustrate the effectiveness of different theoretical approaches already discussed, along with shedding light on additional leadership techniques that have not been as thoroughly explored that contribute to leader-follower interactions. Now, armed with this information regarding the effectiveness of certain leadership techniques based on my personal experience, I will spend the following section of this essay examining additional historical examples of leaders in order to avoid the biases of using exclusively my own experience. Therefore, the primary focus of this section will be to provide a brief illustration of the leadership approaches used by a broad spectrum of leaders throughout the centuries along with the leadership theory that most closely coincides with their practices.

Historical Examples of Different Types of Leaders

Julius Caesar

Despite living many centuries ago, Julius Caesar's approach to leadership echoes what many leaders teach to this day. According to Leadershipgeeks.com, Caesar's dominant leadership quality was his ability to connect with his troops as a general on the battlefield. Just as in the case of my former fraternity president, he made an intentional effort to get to know the names of all of his officers, showing his dedication to building strong relationships in order to support the overall task of winning the war. Another primary quality he exhibited that is consistent with leadership theory was that of being a bold risk-taker (as seen in his ambition to conquer many of the gothic tribes in northern Europe) which is one of Stogdill's initial ten traits that successful leaders exhibit.

Napolean

Similarly to Caesar, Napolean also famously knew his troops by name and invested significant time and energy into winning over the people to his cause. Additional leadership traits that Napolean exhibited was a desire to constantly learn as well as an aspiration to achieve great things. He exemplified the theory of charismatic leadership in that he was a larger-than-life figure (he thought of himself as destined by God to be a great ruler from early on in life) that was able to inspire greatness from his followers through an outgoing personality, which is also closely associated with transformational leadership.

Gandhi

Unlike many of the leaders previously mentioned, Gandhi was a quiet, humble man who did not set out to be a famous leader but became one anyway through his ability to influence people. The primary way he embodied this was by becoming a model of kindness and service. In an essay published from Regent University, Barnabas et al. point out the many similarities

between Gandhi's actions and the leadership theory of servant leadership, most notably through his voluntary subordination to others, his moral authenticity, and through a transforming influence of followers.

Martin Luther King Jr.

As a man who took a lot of inspiration from Gandhi, Martin Luther King was a leader with a specific vision who exhibited extremely inspirational tendencies for those who followed him. A motivational speaker who called on his listeners to aspire to a higher cause, Martin Luther King is often described as a perfect ideal of what the transformational leadership approach seeks to achieve. He perfectly encapsulated the transformational concept of inspirational motivation through which he was able to inspire wide-spread reform. King, like Gandhi, has also been described as a servant leader, although an article by Hidayat Rizvi notes that unlike many contemporary servant leaders, his teachings came from his own unchanging religious and moral convictions.

Steve Jobs

As in icon of the business world, Steve Jobs is often remembered for both positive and negative aspects of the transformational approach to leadership. On the one hand, he was able to garner spectacular results from his followers by making nearly impossible goals seem achievable and motivating his employees to achieve them. On the other hand, the means he used to achieve these ends, coercing followers to workday and night to the detriment of their wellbeing was emblematic of more pseudotransformation techniques since the outcomes of this pressure were often harmful. This maltreatment of employees led to his initial firing from Apple in 1985. However, as he grew older, Jobs would go on to learn how to rely on his followers for important aspects of the business instead of managing everything himself, allowing his company to achieve greater outcomes than any other in the modern era.

Adolf Hitler

Completing the spectrum of different forms of transformational leadership, Adolf Hitler embodied pseudotransformational leadership, a style very similar to the transformational model, only one that inspired followers to a destructive rather than superior outcome. Hitler also possessed a strong-willed ambition and a charismatic personality through which he was able to gain popularity during his initial rise to power, two traits generally associated with positive leadership outcomes. In the end he was able to exert great influence over his followers, but his example serves as a warning of how these same capabilities can be misused for authoritarian ends.

Mother Theresa

Mother Theresa was another modern leader who followed the model of servant leadership. Like Gandhi, she was eager to put herself on an equal level with her followers, the poorest of the poor in India. In Mother Theresa's case, her very mission, once again motivated by personal convictions, was to serve the people which she interacted with on a daily basis. Through service, she was able to transform the lives of both the community members which she worked

19

with, and thousands of additional observers who hoped to follow her path. Thus, by putting service and individual consideration first, and leading by example she was able to inspire a multitude of followers to follow in her path and increase the success of her charity organization.

Summary of Historical Leaders

In conclusion, although many of these leaders existed in completely different historical and occupational backgrounds, they still exhibit many of the same key qualities that are consistent with both leadership theory and my own personal experience with leaders. By examining a wide range of leaders outside the scope of business, these examples serve to provide a comprehensive picture that seeks to get to the heart of leadership: they help to identify overarching leadership practices that succeed regardless of the situation or the occupation of the leader. Finally, these particular leaders were chosen at random from a multitude of individuals often cited as the most influential leaders of their time, in an effort to further reduce the bias that may come from selecting certain types of leaders.

In the next to final research-based section of this essay, I will be examining the conclusion of other leadership authors attempting to come up with a comprehensive list of the ideal leadership abilities. I will further probe deeper to discover the individual underlying aspects of each theory these researchers found helpful (for example, the individual traits from the trait theory, or the individual behaviors from the behavioral theory, etc.). This will help to paint a more detailed picture on a granular level of what some of the optimal leadership qualities might be, as well as provide specific outcomes rather than overarching theories.

Examining the Findings of Modern Leadership Researchers

In an attempt to discover what leaders in the real world would identify as the most important qualities of leadership, a study in the Harvard Business Review polled nearly 200 different leaders from several different countries and disciplines. The quality with the highest response rate, as mentioned by 67% of all leaders polled, was that good leaders have high ethical and moral standards. Once again this illustrates that leadership isn't simply about achieving organizational outcomes but encompasses much more. In fact, altruistic tendencies dominated the list, with outcomes such as a dedication to follower development, providing a safe space for follower trial and error and creating a strong sense of comradery also included in the top ten qualities (Giles).

Outside of this dedication to high ethical principles, the second most important theme discovered by this research was that good leaders communicate efficiently. In line with the teachings of John C. Maxwell, 56% of individuals polled said that communicating clear expectations was fundamental to successful leadership, while 42% said that good leaders communicate openly and often. Communication has been a quality that has consistently arisen as one of the primary facets of good leadership regardless of the method of study.

Based off of a wide range of sources, including the Harvard Business School online, Academy to Innovate HR, and Masterclass Leadership courses, I conducted my own comprehensive review to identify the abilities that most frequently appeared in some of the most

prominent leadership articles. The following list of capabilities, many of which have been discussed before, includes the most common leadership qualities observed by these researchers.

1. Good Communication

Once again, the ability to communicate clearly and effectively tops the list of important leadership qualities. This basic practice is a skill that paves the way many of the outcomes in more complex theories of leadership, including relational-based behaviors in the behavioral approach to leadership, the primary tenants of participative leadership, as well as more modern leadership theories such as transformational, servant and inclusive leadership.

2. Accountability

A leadership quality that goes hand in hand with leadership based on ethical principles but is not often as widely discussed among academics is accountability. Good leaders must be ready and willing to take the blame for their mistakes and the mistakes of their team. Furthermore, a leader must be willing to take ownership of every action conducted under their direct or even indirect supervision in order to create a safe space for followers to hone their own abilities.

3. Problem-Solving

Key to a leader's ability to guide and develop followers is their own aptitude for problem-solving and being proficient in the outcome-oriented facets of their job. This is further emphasized in leadership theories throughout their evolution, being included as one of Stogdill's ten original traits, a primary area of study for the skill approach to leadership, and existing as a capability that directly influences the behavioral approaches' task-based behaviors. Even if a leader excels at communicating with their followers, they will quickly lose this loyalty if they are not able to problem-solve at a level above ordinary workers.

4. Emotional and Social Intelligence

Emotional and social intelligence are primary factors that go into a leader's ability to identify with and gain commitment from their followers. If a leader lacks either of these capabilities, even if they communicate often, they will remain out of touch with the other members of their team. Once again, this is an ability that is often overlooked when it comes to leadership theory that is key to relationship success. If anything, it most closely aligns with either the relationship-based behaviors of the behavioral approach or the skill-based approach. Many additional leadership qualities, such as empathy, inclusivity, and follower motivation stem from this ability.

5. Decision-Making

Similar to problem-solving, a leader's ability to make clear, concrete decisions in the face of complicated and ambiguous situations is an important part of the leadership process. The ability of a leader to make the right decisions for the organization is crucial to building up follower loyalty and trust. Leaders set the standard for what the workplace is supposed to look like, and if leaders are not confident in their own decisions, and if such decisions result in more

harm than good, followers will also lose confidence in their own abilities to achieve high performance.

These five capabilities of competent leaders are just a few of many that consistently appeared across the findings of different leadership writers. Other common leadership qualities include conflict management, transparency, adaptability and encouraging innovation. Although these qualities exist in isolation and may at times be a product of a leader's personal skill or the working environment in general, they are important to recognize as additional capabilities that contribute to becoming a successful leader. These qualities, combined with the complexities of differing leadership theories, help to illustrate a broader pattern of what all good leaders have in common.

Now that the essay has covered the basic leadership theories, along with my personal experience of leadership and the experiences and research results of many different leadership experts, this final section will bring it all together by comparing these various findings in an attempt to identify and narrow down the optimal leadership practices. It will begin by looking at previous measurements of leadership success, in particular if there is any existing evidence that would indicate a higher real-world success rate of one leadership theory over another. Then, armed with these results, the essay will conclude by listing the leadership qualities most commonly identified from the myriad of previously discussed sources, hailing these as the optimal attributes of a leader and attempting to combine them into one, comprehensive leadership theory.

Part III: Leadership Theory Success Rates and Results

A Comparison of Different Leadership Theories

Despite the prevalence of academic literature on the subject of various leadership theories, there has been very little research dedicated to their overall comparison in an attempt to find which is superior, particularly over an extended period of time. While a few leadership theories have been extensively measured as to their application for improved performance in the workforce, others remain relatively theoretical by attempting to describe, rather than develop, good leaders. Furthermore, different situational contexts make it even more difficult to measure an objective comparison among leadership theories, as different leadership approaches may be more effective under different environments.

Finally, the lack of an objective measure by which to make this comparison (should leadership be measured by strictly organizational outcomes? Or is follower well-being the most important?) renders it almost impossible to choose an "ideal" leadership theory that would be effective in almost every situation. Nevertheless, the measurement of various leadership theories in a vacuum as they relate to positive impacts on both follower perceptions and organizational success may render a standard by which at least some of these theories may be compared.

The leadership theory with the most academic research on its potential for effectiveness is the transformational approach to leadership (Jensen et al). In addition, it has been frequently

demonstrated throughout multiple studies to lead to both positive organizational outcomes and increased participation and achievement of followers. This makes the transformational approach to leadership widely cited as one of the most effective approaches to practice.

The practice of servant leadership has also been shown to lead to positive outcomes, particularly as they relate to overall follower well-being, performance and belonging. This in turn leads to improved performance for the organization, albeit tangentially. This is one of the reasons why servant leadership is one of, if not the most popular modern leadership theory and why it continues to be extensively studied.

Although the theory itself can be vague as to how it differentiates itself from other leadership approaches, inclusive leadership has also been shown to be effective in the way that it fosters follower creativity and innovation. The extensive umbrella of inclusive leadership tendencies often falls under both transformational and servant leadership theories, further delineating how each of these can be effective through the specific practice of inclusivity.

Still other leadership theories, such as the extensive situational model which measures directive versus supportive leadership behaviors, work more as an outline that describing specific situations and therefore struggle to show how their application can effect organizational success. Similarly, the behavioral approach, although extremely useful as a measurement by which the practices of real-world leaders can be categorized, fails to specify how different behaviors in different situations lead to improved organizational outcomes.

In addition to these, both the trait and great man theories of leadership are entirely descriptive of the qualities of good leaders while at the same time being very difficult to practice for individuals who don't possess certain innate characteristics. The skill-based approach to leadership also falls into this category to a certain extent. Even when certain skills can be developed by individuals who don't possess effective leadership traits, the skill-based approach fails to specify if or how these skills lead to improved performance. This is partially due to the fact of the limited research on the topic, as many of these leadership skills do lead to positive organizational outcomes. However, they can be difficult to measure and are often further explained by other leadership approaches.

Bringing it all together: Identifying common leadership tendencies across all sources

Now that the essay has identified the effectiveness and application of certain leadership theories, and attempted to compare them given the available research, the following section will be dedicated towards drilling down a comprehensive list of leadership qualities that have been found to be common across all the methods the essay has previously inspected. From there, it will go on to explore how all these tendencies might be wrapped up into one, comprehensive theory of leadership.

Based on both the observational and research-based findings of this essay, the research indicates substantial support for both the transformational approach to leadership and the servant leadership approach. In addition to these, the discussion of task versus relationship-based behaviors from the behavioral approach has also proved useful, while certain forms of inclusive

leadership practice help to paint a clearer picture. Traits and skills can be useful in describing certain parts of these theories, but since they are not applicable in influencing organizational outcomes the research of this essay indicates they may be disregarded.

The effectiveness of the transformational approach to leadership can be seen in numerous examples. The individual consideration that my high school football coach used to bring about superior performance that even his players did not believe themselves capable of is one startling example. Other examples include Julius Caesar or Martin Luther King Jr., who was able to spearhead substantive change in the American Civil Rights movement. These real-world examples, on top of the already existing research and applicability of the tenants of this approach make transformational leadership a necessary part of a comprehensive leadership theory.

Both research, but more importantly experience and follower feedback indicate that servant leadership also plays an important role in what it means to be a successful leader. The altruistic, service-oriented approach of Simon Sinek along with many of my personal mentors and leaders in the corporate world showcase how this is true. Through the practice of servant leadership, my manager at Schwab was able to significantly impact employee morale and retention. Gandhi and Mother Theresa were able to save lives by using this approach. Although it may not lead to the same impact on organizational outcomes as transformational leadership, servant leadership leaves an even greater impression on the followers who at the end of the day are a leader's primary concern.

A Comprehensive Theory of Successful Leadership

Bringing these two theories of leadership together, along with certain aspects of behavioral, situation and inclusive leadership, one can begin to conceptualize a framework for how a comprehensive theory of leadership may be developed. The similarities between these two primary theories of leadership further help to demonstrate that this is possible. A study conducted by Hoch et al. in 2018 (Deng et al) showed a .52 positive correlation (from a range of -1 to 1 with 1 being perfect correlation) between transformational and servant leadership, showcasing how many of their practices and outcomes overlap and how they may be fused together.

In addition to the strictly theoretical portion of this comprehensive approach, significant consideration must be given to the applicable side of leadership as well. This can be applied through the many leadership lessons taught by experts such as Simon Sinek or John C. Maxwell, as well as the personal experiences I have encountered through my own interactions with successful leaders. These concepts are further cemented by the practices of some of the most successful leaders in history, who executed many of the concepts that these theorists discuss.

Therefore, bringing everything together, and under the guidance of and relationship with the theories of transformational and servant leadership, I will attempt to delineate a list of successful leadership qualities based on everything the essay has explored up to this point. Moreover, I will discuss how these following characteristics play into both transformational and servant leadership practices, along with parts of any other leadership theories that may be incorporated within. Finally, after describing this comprehensive list of findings, the essay will

conclude by discussing some of the potential shortfalls of such a leadership model, delving into how no one leadership theory can be thoroughly complete in all situations and aspects.

List of Findings: The Practices of the Most Successful Leaders

Based on the proceeding experiences and research, I have identified a list of the top five most essential leadership practices for becoming a successful leader in the modern world which will be discussed in greater detail below. These practices include two that are follower-centric (Put your people over profits, know who your followers are), two leader-specific practices (lead by example, not authority, and know yourself in order to possess contagious motivation) and one final practice that sums up the other four (Achieve your optimal success together). The following paragraphs will discuss in detail what each of these mean, how they might be practiced, and the research that showcases their effectiveness.

1. Put Your People Over Profit

A leader who puts the wellbeing and morale of the people on their team over simple organizational outcomes and profits will be extremely successful in their role, as illustrated by nearly every example of this essay. This practice exemplifies the core tenant of the servant leadership approach- that a leader should be more concerned about helping and serving the people around them than generating performance outcomes. This was the primary tenant of good leadership that I failed to realize in my first ever experience as the leader of a team. I tried to achieve a high-performance outcome without considering the needs of my people, which led to prolonged conflict and therefore substandard results. This was the practice that my manager at Charles Schwab exemplified to a tee, by caring about the personal growth and participation of her team members over simply the business needs of the firm. Finally, this practice is the most common leadership quality that substandard leaders- such as my highschool speech teacher, get wrong. As paradoxical as it may sound, putting the needs of followers ahead of the needs of the organization actually leads to higher organizational performance by increasing the commitment of those who make up the organization.

2. Know Who Your Followers Are

The second essential leadership practice, *know who your followers are,* is closely linked to the first and is a pivotal part of both transformational (individual consideration) and servant leadership theories. A leader who can get to know their followers on a personal basis is not only better equipped to be able to serve them as in the first leadership practice, but by understanding the needs of individual followers a leader can be better equipped to motivate them by determining how those needs intersect with the goals of the firm. This practice more than any other treats followers as full human beings whose workday only compromises part of their lives, rather than seeing them simply as tools to an organization's ends.

Knowing who your followers are can be as simple as getting to know their names, as illustrated by my fraternity leader or even Julius Caesar. It can involve an honest attempt at seeing the world and the working environment through the lens of their unique experiences, such as Dr. Johnson attempted to do with all of his students. Communication also falls under the scope

of this leadership practice as only through establishing good communication networks can leaders begin to understand follower needs. Finally, the concept of connection that John C. Maxwell emphasized, the forming of a bond between a leader and their followers, unites a team in a common goal and positions them for greater success.

3. Lead by Example, Not Authority

As a leader it can often be tempting to lead simply from a position of authority, using one's title or company rank as justification for their decision-making. My third finding from this body of research, however, starkly contradicts this viewpoint, arguing that a leader's authority should come from the example that they set for others. Just as Simon Sinek often reminds his listeners, an individual does not need to possess formal authority or rank within an organization to be a leader. Rather, it is in what that individual does, how he or she conducts themselves, and their willingness to take on the tasks that no one else wants that defines them as a leader.

This third principle of leadership is illustrated by the lives of great leaders such as Gandhi or Mother Theresa who are willing to commit themselves to acts of great bravery in order to foster the change they see as vital. It can further be seen in through the concept of accountability by which a leader holds themselves to the same if not higher standard used to measure their followers. In addition, this practice relates back to conscientiousness, the number one trait used to predict job performance, as a conscientious leader is one who is willing to take responsibility for his or her own actions and the actions of their team overall.

4. Know Yourself: Possess Contagious Motivation

Whereas the first two leadership practices were mainly concerned with the well-being of followers, both *Lead by example,* and this fourth practice*,* concern the character of the leader themselves. *Know Yourself: Possess Contagious Motivation* is a practice that captures the essence of the transformational approach to leadership. In order to lead and got to know their followers, a leader must first know themselves by understanding their own intrinsic motivation. A quality shared by all charismatic leaders that followers are drawn to is that they are driven by an unwavering, fundamental belief that guides their every action- a vision aimed at a higher moral good that is both contagious and ambitious in its outlook.

This vision can be identified in groundbreaking leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., or on a smaller scope by those like my highschool football coach who, like Dr. King, was also a man of strong faith. As an unparalleled general Napolean also exhibited belief in an idealistic vision for his country and his purpose in his life. From the perspective of a corporation, the managing director at Schwab showcased this practice as well in the vision he had for the company and in the way his excitement for achieving this mission resonated with the followers who heard him speak.

What sets these leaders apart is they all knew what they believed, and because of this fundamental understanding of themselves, they were able to communicate a clear vision to their followers with contagious enthusiasm.

5. Achieve the Optimal Success Together

Pulling all four of the previous leadership practices into one, it becomes apparent from this body of research that a leader cannot become great on their own. The role of followers, existing both as an end to which the leader's efforts are directed and as companions on the journey to success, is core to the concept of leadership. The existence of a leader implies the existence of those being led, and regardless of the goals of the organization in which the two operate, leadership remains a dynamic process through which their interactions are directed. The findings of this essay conclude that in order to be successful oneself, a leader must first work towards the success of their followers and their team. Therefore, the ideal modern leader is someone who continually strives to this end, for only through deep, authentic interactions with others can a leader themselves by elevated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on modern leadership principles researched in theory and observed in the real-world, this essay finds that a combination of the transformational and servant leadership theories comprise the current best approach to leadership. Breaking these theories down further, by utilizing the practices of putting people over profit, knowing who your followers are, leading by example and not authority, knowing yourself and possessing contagious motivation, can modern leaders achieve success along with their followers and teams.

Given the vast array of both academic literature on leadership and the various styles and perspectives of leaders in the field, it can be difficult to identify any one ideal leadership approach that works best in every situation. Even the conclusions outlined in this essay can only specify in general terms some of the optimal leadership practices that may prove effective in certain possible cases. It would be impossible to define a comprehensive leadership theory that would account for all the possible situations and environments that a leader could find themselves in, and thus this essay can only attempt to identify common leadership practices that would lead to positive outcomes in a majority of situations.

In addition, the concept of what organizations and followers alike consider to be the "ideal" leader is constantly evolving, as showcased by the ever-changing focuses of leadership theory. What were thought of to be the optimal leadership practices forty years ago are no longer considered to be optimal today, and thus the conclusions of today could be easily overtaken by the discoveries of the future. Thus, in an ever-evolving world, an essay such as this can only contribute to the wide body of leadership research that has been undertaken and will continue to be undertaken for as long as humanity exists.

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29

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