

A Theoretical Treatise and Proposal for An Integrated Approach to Leadership and Management

**Benjamin Muindi, Ph.D.,
Dean & Senior Lecturer,
School of ICT, Media and Engineering,
Zetech University, Kenya**
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8538-0222>

Abstract

Leaders and managers provide direction and influence individuals and groups to achieve goals. They articulate the vision and communicate it to the people by giving information and knowledge on how to achieve these goals. They think strategically and provide solutions as well as create a platform where the solutions come from. While some scholars argue that everything rises and falls with leadership, other scholars have challenged views on leadership and dislodged its centrality, arguing that leaders account only for a small portion of a group's success or failure. Such diverse perspectives lay the ground for objective and holistic scholarship on leadership and call for a candid examination of the leadership experience in its totality. As such, theoretical questions such as what makes leadership necessary and also what human conditions make leadership both necessary and possible cannot go unanswered. If then leadership and management are necessary in the society, what approach or approaches would be deemed ideal? This paper has proposed an integrated approach to leadership and management that seeks to merge diverse approaches including trait, skills, style, situational and transformational approaches as well as ethical perspectives to leadership and management. It is guided by the general theory of leadership that aims at finding coherence in leadership scholarship. While taking the integrated approach, this paper is aware of the dilemma of finding a single philosophical view to leadership. An integrated approach to leadership and management as proposed in this paper is aimed at building a new body of knowledge that will seek to arrest the shortcomings of already existing models of leadership and management. It also seeks to improve scholarship of both leadership and management of people in as far as influencing and working with them to accomplish goals is concerned. It further aims at improving theoretical perspectives to leadership by contributing insights into the application of the General Theory of Leadership. This paper is important because it forms fodder for exploring another approach to leadership that scholars and (leadership) practitioners may find relevant.

Keywords: *leadership, management, integrated leadership and management approach, general theory of leadership, leadership approaches, management approaches*

Everything Rises and Falls With Leadership?

The central role of leaders and managers in the society cannot be overstated. Leaders and managers provide direction to the people they lead and influence groups to achieve common goals (Northouse 2007). They articulate the vision and communicate it to the people by giving information and knowledge on how to achieve these common goals. They think and provide solutions as well as create a platform where the solutions come from. Leadership influences almost every aspect of human life in one way or another. From the basic unit of the society, i.e. the family, to the workplace and all social organizations, leadership and management are at the heart of the process through which people achieve common ends (Pierce & Newstrom 2008, Northouse 2007, Hughes et al 2009). In fact, it is the leaders and managers who set goals and objectives of organizations and get things done by working with and through the people, balancing effectiveness and efficiency, making the most out of limited resources and coping with changing environments to keep the social units afloat (Kreitner 2008, Bartol 1991). Besides meeting common ends, leaders and managers influence quality of life that people under them lead. "Accordingly, bad management is a serious threat to our quality of life" as leaders and managers are the faces of the social organizations (Kreitner 2008, p. 5).

But not all agree on this position. Some scholars have challenged views on leadership and dislodged the centrality of leadership by arguing that leaders account only for a small portion of a group's success or failure. Hackman and Johnson (2004, p. 1), for instance, note that the "fate of a business may rest on the industry trends and market conditions than on decisions by the CEO." Such diverse perspectives lay the ground for objective and holistic scholarship on leadership and call for a candid examination of the leadership experience in its totality. As such, theoretical questions such as what makes leadership necessary and also what human conditions make leadership both necessary and possible cannot go unanswered (Sorenson et al 2011). If then leadership and management are necessary in the society, what approach or approaches would be deemed ideal? This paper has proposed an integrated approach to leadership and management that seeks to merge diverse approaches including trait, skills, style, situational and transformational approaches as well as ethical perspectives to leadership and management. It is guided by the general theory of leadership that aims at finding coherence in leadership scholarship. While taking the integrated approach, this paper is aware of the dilemma of finding a single philosophical view to leadership. As Case et al (2008) posit, there are diverse philosophical approaches to leadership just as there are those people claiming to be leaders: "... common sense dictates that there are, at the very least, multiple philosophies of leadership populating and coexisting in the contemporary organizational world" (p. 242).

An integrated approach to leadership and management as proposed in this paper is aimed at building a new body of knowledge that will seek to arrest the shortcomings of already existing models of leadership and management. It also seeks to improve scholarship of both leadership and management of people in as far as influencing and working with them to accomplish goals is concerned. It also aims at improving theoretical perspectives to leadership by contributing insights into the application of the General Theory of Leadership (Sorenson et al 2011). This paper is important because it forms fodder for exploring another approach to leadership that scholars and (leadership) practitioners may find relevant.

The Search for a Comprehensive Theoretical Framework

Theories play an important role in our understanding of the world around us because they give us insights into phenomenon. Pierce and Newstrom (2008) observed that: “a good theory should summarize what is known about the phenomenon in question. It is a generalized explanation that integrates what has been previously learned through empirical research guided by the canons (principles) of the scientific method” (Pp. 28, 34). Klein and Zedeck (2004) agree with this view and noted that: “theory tells us why (emphasis added) something occurs, not simply what occurs. Research in the absence of theory is often trivial – a technical feat more likely to yield confusion and boredom than insight. In contrast, research that is guided by theory, or that develops theory, generates understanding and excitement” (p. 931). This paper appreciates the place of theoretical conceptualization of the phenomenon of leadership, although this is still an area under investigations by both scholars and leadership practitioners.

In this regard, the integrated approach to leadership and management proposed in this paper is modeled along the quest for a General Theory of Leadership (GToL) conducted at the behest of Prof James MacGregor Burns (Sorenson et al 2011). Burns has been credited with extensive scholarship into the leadership and founded the Jepson School of Leadership Studies and the Centre for Political Leadership and Participation at the University of Maryland. This integrated leadership approach ties in well with the quest by Burns who “... perceived a need for greater intellectual coherence in an extremely wide-ranging field of study and practice” (Sorenson et al 2011, p. 29) and helped develop the so-called GToL to give insights to leadership scholars and practitioners as well as provide a set of principles that can be adapted to different situations.

Some pundits within Burns’ team argued that leadership was too multifaceted to be captured in a single approach or theory and also one-sided approaches to leadership tend to exclude important constructs of the phenomenon of leadership. This concern has been addressed in this paper by extensively reviewing different models and perspectives of leadership and integrating them into a single approach.

At the same time, GToL aimed at providing insights into questions such as what makes leadership necessary and possible? The theory wanted to capture the process that characterizes the emergence, maintenance and transformation of leadership. It later developed and the agenda increased to questions of human nature: what human conditions define the nature of leadership and make it both necessary and possible (Sorenson et al 2011). The proponents of GToL led by Burns have since emerged with key findings that this study noted to be relevant such as the ‘quintessential aims of leadership’ (Sorenson et al 2011, p. 32) where leadership may enlarge or constrict the space for human freedom and imagination; that leadership is established by means of influence and power, constructs as the relationship between leaders and followers were important and that human nature shapes our understanding of the concept of leadership.

GToL explored the dynamics of group leadership such as the relationship between the leader and the followers, and how this relation led to different outcomes. It also concerned itself with ethical leadership and sought to understand “what are the ethical questions that arise not only within groups but also between groups? What are the ethical responsibilities of leadership to the larger world beyond a leader’s set of followers?” (p. 33).

There have been normative theories of the GToL such as the work of Wilbur (2000) who has suggested a trans-disciplinary rather than inter-disciplinary approach to theory building in

leadership. Gill (2006) has also proposed that a leadership theory should touch on four domains including the cognitive, emotional, spiritual and behavioral.

The proposed integrated approach to leadership assumes a constructivist perspective of the world where human beings construct or create reality and give it meaning through social, political and economic interactions. Constructivism presupposes that all knowledge is constructed and is contingent on convention, human perception and social experience. This view is contrasted with the essentialist view where human beings perceive the world rather than construct it (Sorenson 2011).

Mind the Gap: Trait, Skills, Style and Situational Approaches

There is a rich heritage of knowledge on approaches to leadership and management. Northouse (2007) broadly classified these approaches into trait approach, skills approach, style approach and situational approach and later on introduced ethics in leadership. Hughes et al (2009) further argued about the contingency approach to leadership and offers characteristics of the situation; path-go approach which focuses on where the organization is intends to be and the path to get there as well as the dyadic approach which delves into the two-way relationship between the leaders and the followers. Management styles have been extensively studied as well and and Kreitner (2009), and Bartol & Martin (1991) enumerate approaches to management including universal approach, operational approach, behavioural approach, systems approach and contingency approach. The central ideas at both the leadership and management levels have been on the nature and characteristics of the process through which groups attain common goals.

The trait approach to leadership is the most extensively studied approaches to leadership (Northouse 2007) and focuses on the innate qualities of the leader. It is regarded as one of the first attempts to systematically understand leadership approaches and focused on what qualities and characteristics made leaders in the social, political and military different from their followers. Such characteristics included intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence and sociability. During the early 20th century, it was believed that leaders were born with these skills although later research into the trait approach dislodged this claim. Leaders were seen as great men and women and carried such titles as Catherine the Great, among others, during an era of heroes and hero-worship (Case et al 2006) where the heroic, male, great leaders dominated. Carlyle (1904, p.1) sarcastically captured the leadership traits during the moment:

For, as I take it, Universal history, the history of what man (sic) has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones: the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain: all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may just be considered were the history of these.

Carlyle's (1840) teachings were considered "dangerously explosive" and the "beginning of a new revolution" in the way leadership was conceptualized. New research began to point out that there were no consistent traits that differentiated leaders from non-leaders, and also that an individual does not become a leader simply because they possessed these traits (Case et al 2006, p. 246, Stogdill 1948).

Northouse (2007) points out that the trait approach focuses on the leader alone, not the followers or the situation and “suggests that organizations will work better if the people in managerial positions have designated leadership profiles. To find the right people, it is common for organizations to use personality assessment instruments” (p. 29). It is therefore assumed that an organization will perform better if a leader with the desired qualities is in place.

Just like the trait approach, the skills approach to leadership focuses on the leader, and is concerned with their skills and abilities; emphasizing that knowledge and abilities are needed for effective leadership (Northouse 2007). It is based on the work of Katz (1955). The skills approach is viewed in three dimensions: technical, human and conceptual skills. Katz (1955) views technical skills as knowledge about and proficiency in a specific type of work or activity. Human skills are the abilities to work with people while conceptual skills entail the ability to work with ideas. The three levels of leadership differ on the hierarchy of the leader whereby leaders at the upper levels require conceptual skills for effectiveness; lower cadre leaders require technical skills. At the midlevel, the leaders are required to possess all the three skills.

On the other hand, style approach emphasizes the behaviour of the leader – what the leaders do and how they act. While skills and trait approach focus on the leader exclusively, the style approach expanded the scope to focus on the actions of the leader towards the subordinates. Northouse (2007) observed that the style approach is viewed into two dimensions: task and relationship. Task dimension looks at the behaviour of the leader in helping accomplish goals while relationship dimension helps subordinates in feeling comfortable with the leader. Different studies (Bryman 1992, Yukl 1994) have been conducted to determine between which of the two between task and relationship dimensions produce the most effective form of leadership. Results from studies conducted at Ohio State University and University of Michigan (Northouse 2007) suggested that combining both task and relationship dimensions were effective.

Hughes et al (2009) argue that understanding leaders and followers is much more complicated than thought because the situation offers the biggest challenge away from the complexity of the relationship between the leader and the follower. They note that the situation is not only complex, but it is also dynamic.

Trying to change individual and or corporate behaviour without addressing the larger organizational context is bound to disappoint. Sooner or later, bureaucratic structures will consume even the most determined of collaborative process. The lion and the lamb may lie down together but the lamb won't get much sleep. What to do? Work on the lion as well as the lamb designing teamwork into the organization (p. 540).

The situation here may be organization's culture or the wider scope of a changing global environment such as technology and uncertainty in the job environment as a result of new ways of doing things. Hughes et al (2009) noted that the situation can reduce the effectiveness of a leaders' characteristics such as intelligence, and affect relationships between the leader and the follower. The situational approach gave rise to the contingent model where leadership and managerial practices and techniques are determined by specific situations. This is because each situation presents a unique problem. Such a model of contingency leadership and management is particularly applicable in intercultural settings. Studies (Hughes et al 2009, Northouse 2007) found out that rigidly structured organizations with many layers of management function best when the environment is stable. Otherwise the situation dictates that the organizations need to be more flexible and adaptive to change.

At the managerial level, this study concerns itself with the relationship between the manager and the people towards meeting the goals of the organization. As such Kreitner (2009), Bartol and Martin (1991) explored various approaches to management that included the universal approach, operational approach, behavioural approach, systems approach and contingency approach. There is a notable evolution of these approaches of management with newer models suggesting that people deserve to be the central focus of organized activity and that successful management depends largely on a managers ability to understand and work with the people who have a variety of needs, perceptions and aspirations. This is a sharp contrast from earlier models that suggested that achieving the goals of the organizations was paramount to anything else.

Ethical approaches to leadership and management has been regarded as a nascent approach to the discipline (Northouse 2007) with the earliest recorded writing on leadership ethics springing up in 1966. Ciulla (1998) noted that ethics was at the heart of the leadership and management process and is concerned with values and morals that individuals and the larger society find appropriate. Ethical approach gives a system of rules to determine what is wrong and what is right. Northouse (2007) highlighted the five principles of ethical leadership and management as respect, service, justice, honesty and community. Ethical leadership approach means that leaders and managers should treat the people as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. It also means treating followers in a just manner: “no one should receive special treatment or special consideration except when their particular situation demands it. When individuals are treated differently, the grounds for different treatment must be clear, reasonable and based on sound moral values” (p. 352).

Recent scholarship (Bass 2000, Lubin 2001, Stone and Patterson 2005) into leadership and management proffers transformational and servant leadership models as high order approaches where high concern for people and for production is at the centre of the process. The high concern for people by the leader and manager rests upon the fact that the people are their responsibility: “chasing profits is peripheral; the real point of business is to serve as one of the institutions through which society develops and exercises the capacity for constructive action” (Harvey 2001, pp. 38-39). This approach is founded on the argument that growth of an organization is contingent on the development of the people.

Conclusion: A proposal for an integrated approach to leadership and management

This paper would like to propose an integrated model of leadership and management that combines all the approaches reviewed above. The rationale of the proposal is that there has been no particular approach to leadership and management that has been fully sufficient. Literature available has suggested that major approaches studied have inherent weaknesses such as the inability to determine effectiveness of performance (skills approach), heavy focus on the leader (trait, skills and style) and also a changing and dynamic environment (situational approach).

Proposing an integrated approach to leadership therefore means that leaders and managers should have different skills sets, and personal attributes and other characteristics that enable them to perform effectively under different situations. While research suggests that the trait, skills and style approaches are related to performance in leadership and management, there has been deficiency of correlation between the two. As such, it is not easy to determine what particular skills set, personal attributes or style best fits for all. The weakness inherent in these approaches becomes the strength of the proposed integrated model.

The integrated approach also ties in with the constructs of the GToL and covers key concerns such as role of values (ethical leadership and management), leader-follower relationship, power and context as well as culture (the situational). By applying the approach, it will therefore mean that the quest for intellectual coherence in an extremely wide-ranging field of leadership and management practice will be achieved. The gist of this approach is that leadership and management are too multifaceted to be captured in single approaches. This makes the integrated approach an ideal one.

References

- Bass, B. M. (2000). *The future of leadership in learning organizations*. *Journal of leadership studies*, 7(18).
- Bartol, K. M., & Martin, D. C. (1991). *Management*. McGraw Hill: New York
- Bryman, A. (1992). *Charisma and leadership in organisations*. London: Sage.
- Bryman, A., et al, eds. (2011). *The sage handbook of leadership*. London: Sage
- Carlyle, T. (1904). *On hero and hero-worship and the heroic in history*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ciulla, J. B. (1998). *Ethics, the heart of leadership*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Gill, R. (2006). *Theory and practice of leadership*. London: Sage
- Hughes, R.L., Ginnett, R.C., & Curphy, G.J. (2009). *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience*. McGraw Hill: New York. Sixth Edition.
- Katz, R. L. (1955). *Skills of an effective administrator*. *Harvard Business Review*, 33(1), 33-42.
- Kreitner, R. (2009). *Principles of management*. Arizona State University. 11th edition
- Klein, K.J., & Zedeck, S. (2004). *Theory in applied psychology: lessons (re)learned*. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(931-933).
- Lubin, K. A. (2001). *Visionary leader behaviours and their congruency with servant leadership characteristics*. *Dissertation Abstracts online*, 3022943
- Northouse, P. G. (2007). *Leadership*. Sage Publications: London.
- Pierce, J.L., & Newstrom, J.W. (2008). *Leaders and the leadership process*. 5th edition
- Peter Case, Robert French & Peter Simpson. (2011) *Philosophy of leadership*. In Bryman, A., et al, eds. (2011). *The sage handbook of leadership*. London: Sage
- Sorenson, G., et al (2011). . *The enduring and elusive quest for a general theory of leadership: initial efforts and new horizons*. In Bryman, A., et al, eds. (2011). *The sage handbook of leadership*. London: Sage
- Stogdill, R. M. (1948). *Personal factors associated with leadership: a survey of literature*. *Journal of Psychology* 25(35-71).
- Stone, A. G. & Patterson, K. (2005). *The history of leadership focus*. School of leadership studies, Regent University.
- Wilbur, K. (2000). *A theory of everything*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Yulk, G. (1994). *Leadership in organizations* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall.