Leadership and perception of beauty

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Abstract

Many fields explore the origins of leadership qualities, with Galton’s (1874; 1869) ‘nature vs nurture’ contention being the central point of conjecture. Contemporarily, Galton’s (1874; 1869) ‘nature versus nurture’ contention has been re-imagined as ‘personality versus expertise’. Although contemporary literature attempts conflating terminology specific to either personality and behaviour, the phenomena remain distinct (Bass, 1990; Beebe, 2010; Burns, 1978; Cattell, 1943b; Kania & Richards, 2012; Stogdill, 1974; 1948). Moreover, Theory X and Theory Y conflate leaders who maintain willing fellowship and those who can compel others to follow. With regard to personality and expertise literature, as well as McGregor’s (2002) Theory X and Theory Y, Ladkin’s (2008) philosophy-based ‘leading beautifully’ paradigm is discussed. Following which, a new ‘leading beautifully’ model is proposed emphasising willing fellowship’s role in leadership, as well as leaders’ inherent ableness to perceive harmonious forms. It is proposed that all individuals are born potential leaders, psyches expressed through personality which predicts their situation-based leadership (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). Ultimately, leaders with greater mastery of leadership will become better leaders, but inherently all individuals may lead.
leaders and their role in maintaining directed action (Friedman & Friedman, 2014; Ingstrup & Crookall, 1998). Nonetheless, amidst the multitude of paradigms and fields attempting logical articulation of leadership qualities’ origins, Galton’s (1874; 1869) ‘nature versus nurture’ remains the fundamental point of disillusion. (Bass, 1990; Beebe, 2010; Burns, 1978; Kania & Richards, 2012; Stogdill, 1974). That is, contestation remains concerning an individual’s capacity to maintain willing fellowship in the pursuit of a common goal as an innate or learned quality (Stogdill, 1974). As such, this article aims to discern if the ability to lead is an inherent quality or skill passed on through education and training.

With similar objectives, Stogdill’s (1948) review of the literature prior to 1948 aimed to develop holistic groupings of qualities possessed by leaders. The eventual pool of possible ‘personal factors’ derived from the literature supposedly being characteristic of leaders was nevertheless so extensive as to be convoluted (Stogdill, 1948). Consequently, Stogdill (1948) determined only personal factors investigated by three or more studies were relevant to the review. Subsequently, Stogill (1948) discerned 27 recurrent personal factors from the literature, including ‘intelligence’ and ‘popularity’. Though, little consensus accrued amongst the literature suggesting this group of personal factors were simultaneously possessable by one leader. Rather, the literature suggested personal factors varied greatly amongst leaders. As such, Stogdill (1948) determined such findings were supportive of no leadership qualities being inherently specific to leaders.

Still, Stogdill’s (1948) personal factors are not necessarily qualities which are possessable by any individual; rather, personal factors were largely descriptive of observable phenomena. For example, Stogdill (1948) states ‘popularity’ and ‘intelligence’ are two of the 27 personal factors supposedly inherent to leaders. These phenomena were at the time generally understood as measurements of either social bonds or cognition, as opposed to personal factors. That is, popularity refers traditionally and contemporarily to the manner in which an individual is accepted socially by others (Bowen, 1926). Moreover, intelligence remains understood as a measurement of cognitive functioning (Spearman, 2014). Such laxity has permeated contemporary research, remaining ultimately as a hinderance when determining the origins of leadership qualities (Ackerman & Kanfer, 1993; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Mumford, Baughman, Costanza, Uhlman, & Connelly, 1993; Peterson, Smith, Martorana, & Owens, 2002).

Stogdill’s (1948) personal factors, however, were inclusive of other personal factors more likely possessable by an individual, such as ‘dominance’ and ‘self-confidence’. Such characteristics, or more appropriately labelled ‘traits’, should be discussed within context of personality. Contemporary understandings of personality are based on Cattell’s (1943a) work on ‘adjective scales’. Adjective scales can be generally understood as antonymic adjectives paired together and allocated to ‘clusters’ or dimensions of personality. Cattell’s (1943a) adjective scales established precedent for key personality research which followed (Fiske, 1949; Goldberg, 1981; 1982; Norman, 1963; Tupes & Cristal, 1992). Notably, McCrae and Costa (1985) came to label a specific set of five trait clusters as the ‘five-factor model’ of personality.

McCrae and Costa’s (1985) five factors were: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism. The factors most usually associated with leadership being Conscientiousness and Extraversion (McCrae & Costa, 1997; 1995; 1988). Extraversion as it relates to leadership is characterised by traits such as outgoingness, energetic, sociability, and cheerfulness (McCrae & Costa, 1997; 1995; 1988; 1985). Furthermore, Conscientiousness as it relates to leadership is characterised by order, discipline, will for achievement, carefulness, and precision (McCrae & Costa, 1997; 1995; 1988; 1985). The difficulty in articulating boundaries between possessable traits and behaviour remain evident in McCrae and Costa’s (1995) five-factor model of personality. McCrae and Costa (1995) acknowledge this, stating such issues exist because personality traits are labelled and measured according to the likely coinciding behaviours. That is, traits are possessed by individuals and how these traits manifest within behaviour may be used to distinguish one individual’s personality from another.

Moreover, Digman (1990) states there may be inherent linguistic inadequacies which exacerbate these such issues. Though, Digman (1990) affirms the difficulty of distinguishing one phenomenon from another does not indicate interchangeability nor necessitate conflation of either. Rather, the practice of structuring and labelling personality traits according to the coinciding behaviours is largely lax usage of language which
dilutes understandings of both phenomena (Digman, 1990). This is made evident by Cattell’s (1943b) definition of personality which clearly separates personality from behaviour. Specifically, Cattell (1943b) straightforwardly defines personality as the traits an individual possesses which can be used to predict their behaviour. That is, personality is usable to predict behaviour, but otherwise has no relationship with behaviour. Consequently, personality traits should be descriptive of possessable, nonphysical facets of the psyche capable of influencing behaviours.

Nonetheless, an individual’s personality traits should not be defined by likely coinciding behaviours because personality is not discernible solely by behaviour. The discrepancies of which, Zaccaro (2007) states are predominantly related to an individual’s ‘expertise’ and ‘cognitive abilities’. Zaccaro (2007) also cites internal motivations, problem-solving skills, and values, but these concepts either constitute personality traits, behaviours, or are interdependent on expertise or cognitive abilities (Fleishman & Peters, 1962; Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000). Expertise is defined as the constant development of an individual’s knowledge through skill acquisition during experiences such as training (Zaccaro, 2007). Moreover, cognitive abilities refers to a variety of intelligences which aid an individual’s ability to interact with phenomena (Zaccaro, 2007). The aggregate of expertise and cognitive abilities essentially represents nurture as the contemporary dichotomised half of Galton’s (1974; 1969) ‘nature versus nurture’ contention.

Specifically, ‘mastery’ can hereafter be defined as an individual’s constantly developed knowledge and acquired skills which aid interaction or behaviour with phenomena. As such, Galton’s (1874; 1869) ‘nature versus nurture’ contention can be recast through contemporary perceptions of the human psyche as ‘personality versus mastery’. In this regard, the capacity to lead is either determined by innate traits possessed by an individual or the knowledge accrued by an individual. Nonetheless, Galton’s (1974; 1969) contention has no account for influences of others upon an individual which is neither hereditary nor experienced. McGregor’s (2002) Theory X and Theory Y offer such account in regard to managerial leadership via exploring the desires of employees. That is, McGregor (2002) believed leadership is dependent only on the persons comprising a fellowship, and no specific set of qualities could define leadership.

McGregor’s (2002) Theory X states humans possess an inherent dislike for work and avoid it wherever possible. As such, Theory X conceptualises managers as leaders, and because workers avoid work, workers must be coerced or controlled by leaders into working. Moreover, Theory Y purports humans inherently enjoy work when it is fulfilling and does not impede on their non-working lives (McGregor, 2002). As such, Theory Y purposes individuals are without need of incentivisation. Rather, cooperative work is fulfilling because followers’ needs are satiated in unison with the leader’s. Though, monetary incentives provided by managers are alone no less coercive than threatening person health detriment to individuals whose subordination is unsatisfying. That is, regardless of the origins of leadership qualities, a leader cannot lead without individuals who are willing to be led.

Willing fellowship distinguishes leaders from authoritarian figures ethically, as well does not equate managers to authoritarian figures universally. As Wilson (1993) describes, a follower’s achievable fulfilment in a moral sense is imbued by leaders ascribing purpose and value within the fellowship. Theory Y therein exemplifies a moral approach to leadership because followers are perceived as seeking fulfilment via purposeful and cooperative productivity (McGregor, 2002; Wilson, 1993). Conversely, Theory X plainly describes an immoral approach to leading, as coercion of unwilling persons is necessary (McGregor, 2002; Wilson, 1993). In this regard, managers may be leaders while providing monetary incentivisation pending moral leadership. The concept of which is largely philosophical, but discussions of practical morality are plentiful.

Historically, the philosopher Plato extensively discussed the influence which perceptions of morality has on the ‘psyche’ or ‘soul’. These philosophies have been collated by Ladkin (2008) into a paradigm explaining how individuals lead others. Labelled ‘leading beautifully’, the essential premise of Ladkin’s (2008) paradigm is Plato’s philosophies pertaining to the perception of beauty. Plato believed beauty was something which was not a quality inherent to an entity, but that any entity could gain beauty depending on the context (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). That is, any entity in its appropriate context and proportion is perceivable as beautiful, filling the observer with joy and peace (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). Largely, this was thought
to occur because something which is beautiful, as Plato understood it, is incapable of immorality, and so something beautiful is also ‘pure’ (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008).

Furthermore, any entity misused, either in context or proportion, becomes immediately perceivable as ugly and immoral (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). As such, a follower is beautiful when they are efficient and useful within a fellowship (Ladkin, 2008). For all constituents of a fellowship to become so is to create a ‘harmonious form’ (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). Within a harmonious form, fellows are proportionally and contextually utilised, therein accentuating their usefulness or ‘beauty’ (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). In this way, fellows gain a sense of fulfilment from their role within a fellowship, or harmonious form. The leader’s role in ‘leading beautifully’ thereafter is tending to the harmonious form and identifying components which are not in appropriate context or proportion (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). That is, leaders as catalysts must continue to enable followers’ sense of fulfilment without incentive or force, but by maintaining the fellowship’s harmonious form.

While Ladkin (2008) does not discuss the origins of leadership, it is clear from the ‘leading beautifully’ paradigm that leadership must be inherent. This is because all individuals are capable of perceiving beauty, or harmonious forms, and so all persons inherently possess the capacity to lead (Duke, 1986; Ladkin, 2008). Those who lead will still vary situationally (Fielder, 2006), as traits possessed by individuals will influence the likelihood of leadership behaviour (Cattell, 1943b). That is, as Stogdill (1948) discerned, no specific set of qualities necessarily deemed individual leaders. Rather, of those possessing traits necessary for behaving as situational leaders, superior mastery in tending to the specific harmonious form will lend towards superior leadership. Specifically, a leader’s ableness in tending to harmonious forms is reliant on mastery, but ultimately is subsequent to inherently possessing the perception of them.

In conclusion, a leader is born as such, with a ‘psyche’ expressed through personality, altering behaviours and allowing individualistic interactions with reality (Duke, 1986). Within various fields of study, terminology associated or derived from personality are misused and conflated with phenomena generally understood as entirely separate (Bass, 1990; Beebe, 2010; Burns, 1978; Kania & Richards, 2012; Stogdill, 1974; 1948). The concepts of personality, behaviour, perception, and intelligence remain understood as distinctly different aspects of personhood and should be presented as such (Bowen, 1926; Cattell, 1943a; 1943b; Spearman, 2014; Zaccaro, 2007). Galton’s (1874; 1869) ‘nature versus nurture’ contention has been re-imagined as ‘personality versus mastery’ via contemporary literature which seeks understanding of human individualism. In regard to leadership, it is essential to not only understand those who lead, but also those which follow. Ladkin’s (2008) ‘leading beautifully’ paradigm offers a philosophy-based model for understanding how leaders tend to their followers and the fellowship as a whole. Still, such a paradigm is hindered by conflation of key phenomena. With an adjusted ‘leading beautifully’ paradigm which emphasises perception, mastery, and personality as separate phenomena, leadership qualities being inherent is a defendable position. To do so does not diminish the role of mastery in leadership, but does suggest leaders become so because of their inherent ‘nature’.

References:


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