**Major Perspectives in Leadership Theory and Research**

The attraction of leadership as a subject of research and the many different conceptions of leadership have created a vast and bewildering literature. Attempts to organize the literature according to major approaches or perspectives show only partial success. One of the more useful ways to classify leadership theory and research is according to the type of variable that is emphasized the most. Three types of variables that are relevant for understanding leadership effectiveness include (1) characteristics of leaders, (2) characteristics of followers, and (3) characteristics of the situation. Examples of key variables within each category are shown in Table 1-3. Figure 1-2 depicts likely causal relationships among the variables.

**Table 1-3 Key Variables in Leadership Theories**

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| --- |
| **Characteristics of the Leader** |
| * Traits (motives, personality)
* Values, integrity, and moral development
* Confidence and optimism
* Skills and expertise
* Leadership behavior
* Influence tactics
* Attributions about followers
* Mental models (beliefs and assumptions)
 |
| **Characteristics of the Followers** |
| * Traits (needs, values, self-concepts)
* Confidence and optimism
* Skills and expertise
* Attributions about the leader
* Identification with the leader
* Task commitment and effort
* Satisfaction with job and leader
* Cooperation and mutual trust
 |
| **Characteristics of the Situation** |
| * Type of organizational unit
* Size of organizational unit
* Position power and authority of leader
* Task structure and complexity
* Organizational culture
* Environmental uncertainty and change
* External dependencies and constraints
* National cultural values
 |

**Figure 1-2 Causal Relationships Among the Primary Types of Leadership Variables**



Most leadership theories emphasize one category more than the others as the primary basis for explaining effective leadership, and leader characteristics have been emphasized most often over the past half-century. Another common practice is to limit the focus to one type of leader characteristic, namely traits, behavior, or power. To be consistent with most of the leadership literature, the theories and empirical research reviewed in this book are classified into the following five approaches: (1) the **trait approach**, (2) the **behavior approach**, (3) the **power-influence approach**, (4) the **situational approach**, and (5) the **integrative approach**. Each approach is described briefly in the following sections.

**Trait Approach**

One of the earliest approaches for studying leadership was the trait approach. This approach emphasizes attributes of leaders such as personality, motives, values, and skills. Underlying this approach was the assumption that some people are natural leaders, endowed with certain traits not possessed by other people. Early leadership theories attributed managerial success to extraordinary abilities such as tireless energy, penetrating intuition, uncanny foresight, and irresistible persuasive powers. Hundreds of trait studies conducted during the 1930s and 1940s sought to discover these elusive qualities, but this massive research effort failed to find any traits that would guarantee leadership success. One reason for the failure was a lack of attention to mediating variables in the causal chain that could explain how traits could affect a delayed outcome such as group performance or leader advancement. The predominant research method was to look for a significant correlation between individual leader attributes and a criterion of leader success, without examining any explanatory processes. However, as evidence from better designed research slowly accumulated over the years, researchers made progress in discovering how leader attributes are related to leadership behavior and effectiveness. A more recent trait approach examines leader values that are relevant for explaining ethical leadership.

**Behavior Approach**

The behavior approach began in the early 1950s after many researchers became discouraged with the trait approach and began to pay closer attention to what managers actually do on the job. One line of research examines how managers spend their time and the typical pattern of activities, responsibilities, and functions for managerial jobs. Some of the research also investigates how managers cope with demands, constraints, and role conflicts in their jobs. Most research on managerial work uses descriptive methods of data collection such as direct observation, diaries, job description questionnaires, and anecdotes obtained from interviews. Although this research was not designed to directly assess effective leadership, it provides useful insights into this subject. Leadership effectiveness depends in part on how well a manager resolves role conflicts, copes with demands, recognizes opportunities, and overcomes constraints.

Another subcategory of the behavior approach focuses on identifying leader actions or decisions with observable aspects and relating them to indicators of effective leadership. The preferred research method involves a survey field study with a behavior description questionnaire. In the past 50 years, hundreds of survey studies examined the correlation between leadership behavior and various indicators of leadership effectiveness. A much smaller number of studies used laboratory experiments, field experiments, or critical incidents to determine how effective leaders differ in behavior from ineffective leaders.

**Power-Influence Approach**

Power-influence research examines influence processes between leaders and other people. Like most research on traits and behavior, some of the power-influence research takes a leader-centered perspective with an implicit assumption that causality is unidirectional (leaders act and followers react). This research seeks to explain leadership effectiveness in terms of the amount and type of power possessed by a leader and how power is exercised. Power is viewed as important not only for influencing subordinates, but also for influencing peers, superiors, and people outside the organization, such as clients and suppliers. The favorite methodology has been the use of survey questionnaires to relate leader power to various measures of leadership effectiveness.

Other power-influence research used questionnaires and descriptive incidents to determine how leaders influence the attitudes and behavior of followers. The study of influence tactics can be viewed as a bridge linking the power-influence approach and the behavior approach. The use of different influence tactics is compared in terms of their relative effectiveness for getting people to do what the leader wants.

Participative leadership is concerned with power sharing and empowerment of followers, but it is firmly rooted in the tradition of behavior research as well. Many studies used questionnaires to correlate subordinate perceptions of participative leadership with the **criteria of leadership effectiveness** such as subordinate satisfaction, effort, and performance. Laboratory and field experiments compared autocratic and participative leadership styles. Finally, descriptive case studies of effective managers examined how they use consultation and delegation to give people a sense of ownership for decisions.

**Situational Approach**

The situational approach emphasizes the importance of contextual factors that influence leadership processes. Major situational variables include the characteristics of followers, the nature of the work performed by the leader’s unit, the type of organization, and the nature of the external environment. This approach has two major subcategories. One line of research is an attempt to discover the extent to which leadership processes are the same or unique across different types of organizations, levels of management, and cultures. The primary research method is a comparative study of two or more situations. The dependent variables may be managerial perceptions and attitudes, managerial activities and behavior patterns, or influence processes.

The other subcategory of situational research attempts to identify aspects of the situation that “moderate” the relationship of leader attributes (e.g., traits, skills, behavior) to leadership effectiveness. The assumption is that different attributes will be effective in different situations, and that the same attribute is not optimal in all situations. Theories describing this relationship are sometimes called “**contingency theories**” of leadership. A more extreme form of situational theory (“leadership substitutes”) identifies the conditions that can make hierarchical leadership redundant and unnecessary.

**Integrative Approach**

An integrative approach involves more than one type of leadership variable. In recent years, it has become more common for researchers to include two or more types of leadership variables in the same study, but it is still rare to find a theory that includes all of them (i.e., traits, behavior, influence processes, situational variables, and outcomes). An example of the integrative approach is the self-concept theory of charismatic leadership, which attempts to explain why the followers of some leaders are willing to exert exceptional effort and make personal sacrifices to accomplish the group objective or mission.

**Level of Conceptualization for Leadership Theories**

Another way to classify leadership theories is in terms of the “**level of conceptualization**” or type of constructs used to describe leaders and their influence on others. Leadership can be described as (1) an intra-individual process, (2) a dyadic process, (3) a group process, or (4) an organizational process. The levels can be viewed as a hierarchy, as depicted in Figure 1-3. What level is emphasized will depend on the primary research question, the type of criterion variables used to evaluate leadership effectiveness, and the type of mediating processes used to explain leadership influence. Typical research questions for each level are listed in Table 1-4. The four levels of conceptualization, and their relative advantages and disadvantages, are described next.

**Figure 1-3 Levels of Conceptualization for Leadership Processes**



**Table 1-4 Research Questions at Different Levels of Conceptualization**

|  |
| --- |
| **Intra-Individual Theories** |
| * How leader traits and values influence leadership behavior
* How leader skills are related to leader behavior
* How leaders make decisions
* How leaders manage their time
* How leaders are influenced by role expectations and constraints
* How leaders react to feedback and learn from experience
* How leaders can use self-development techniques
 |
| **Dyadic Theories*** How a leader influences subordinate motivation and task commitment
* How a leader facilitates the work of a subordinate
* How a leader interprets information about a subordinate
* How a leader develops a subordinate’s skills and confidence
* How a leader influences subordinate loyalty and trust
* How a leader uses influence tactics with a subordinate, peer, or boss
* How a leader and a subordinate influence each other
* How a leader develops a cooperative exchange relationship with a subordinate
 |
| **Group-Level Theories*** How different leader-member relations affect each other and team performance
* How leadership is shared in the group or team
* How leaders organize and coordinate the activities of team members
* How leaders influence cooperation and resolve disagreements in the team or unit
* How leaders influence collective efficacy and optimism for the team or unit
* How leaders influence collective learning and innovation in the team or unit
* How leaders influence collective identification of members with the team or unit
* How unit leaders obtain resources and support from the organization and other units
 |
| **Organizational-Level Theories*** How top executives influence members at other levels
* How leaders are selected at each level (and implications of the process for the firm)
* How leaders influence organizational culture
* How leaders influence the efficiency and the cost of internal operations
* How leaders influence human relations and human capital in the organization
* How leaders make decisions about competitive strategy and external initiatives
* How conflicts among leaders are resolved in an organization
* How leaders influence innovation and major change in an organization
 |

**Intra-Individual Processes**

Because most definitions of leadership involve influence processes between individuals, leadership theories that describe only leader attributes are rare. Nevertheless, a number of researchers used psychological theories of personality traits, values, skills, motivation, and cognition to explain the decisions and behavior of an individual leader. Roles, behaviors, or decision styles are also used for describing and comparing leaders. Examples can be found in theories about the nature of managerial work and the requirements for different types of leadership positions (see Chapter 2). Individual traits and skills are also used to explain a person’s motivation to seek power and positions of authority (see Chapter 6), and individual values are used to explain ethical leadership and the altruistic use of power (see Chapter 13).

Knowledge of intra-individual processes and taxonomies of leadership roles, behaviors, and traits provide insights that are helpful for developing better theories of effective leadership. However, the potential contribution of the intra-individual approach to leadership is limited, because it does not explicitly include what most theorists consider to be the essential process of leadership, namely influencing others such as subordinates, peers, bosses, and outsiders.

**Dyadic Processes**

The dyadic approach focuses on the relationship between a leader and another individual who is usually a subordinate or another type of follower. The need to influence direct reports is shared by leaders at all levels of authority from chief executives to department managers and work crew supervisors. The explanation of leader influence is usually in terms of how the leader causes the subordinate to be more motivated and more capable of accomplishing task assignments. These theories usually focus on leadership behavior as the source of influence, and on changes in the attitudes, motivation, and behavior of an individual subordinate as the influence process. Reciprocal influence between the leader and follower may be included in the theory, but it is usually less important than the explanation of leader influence over the follower.

An example of a dyadic leadership theory is the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory described in Chapter 9, which describes how dyadic relationships evolve over time and take different forms, ranging from a casual exchange to a cooperative alliance with shared objectives and mutual trust. Although the LMX theory recognizes that the leader has multiple dyadic relationships, the focus is clearly on what happens within a single relationship. Much of the research on power and influence tactics (see Chapter 8) is also conceptualized in terms of **dyadic processes**. Most theories of transformational and charismatic leadership were initially conceptualized primarily at the dyadic level (see Chapter 12).

Since real leaders seldom have only a single subordinate, some assumptions are necessary to make dyadic explanations relevant for explaining a leader’s influence on the performance of a group or work unit. One assumption is that subordinates have work roles that are similar and independent. Subordinates may not be homogeneous with regard to skills and motives, but they have similar jobs. There is little potential for subordinates to affect each other’s job performance, and group performance is the sum of the performances by individuals. An example of minimum interdependence is a district sales unit in which sales representatives work separately and independently of each other and sell the same product in different locations or to different customers. However, when there is high interdependence among group members, a high need for collective learning, and strong external dependencies, a group-level theory is needed to explain how leadership can influence group performance.

The dyadic theories do not include some leadership behaviors that are necessary to facilitate collective performance by a team or organization. Moreover, some of the dyadic behaviors that are effective in terms of dyadic influence will be ineffective with regard to team performance or organizational performance. For example, attempts to develop a closer relationship with one subordinate (e.g., by providing more benefits) may be dysfunctional if they create perceptions of inequity by other subordinates. Efforts to empower individual subordinates may create problems when it is necessary to have a high degree of coordination among all of the subordinates. The extra time needed by a leader to maximize performance by an individual subordinate (e.g., providing intensive coaching) may be more effectively used to deal with problems that involve the team or work group (e.g., obtaining necessary resources, facilitating cooperation and coordination).

Another limitation of most dyadic theories is inadequate attention to the context. In most dyadic theories of effective leadership, aspects of the situation are likely to be treated as moderator variables that constrain or enhance leader influence on individual subordinates. The dyadic theories underestimate the importance of the context for determining what type of leadership is necessary to enhance collective performance by multiple subordinates.

**Group Processes**

When effective leadership is viewed from a group-level perspective, the focus is on the influence of leaders on collective processes that determine team performance. The explanatory influence processes include determinants of group effectiveness that can be influenced by leaders, and they usually involve all members of a group or team, not only a single subordinate. Examples of these collective explanatory processes include how well the work is organized to utilize personnel and resources, how committed members are to perform their work roles effectively, how confident members are that the task can be accomplished successfully (“potency”), and the extent to which members trust each other and cooperate in accomplishing task objectives. The leadership behaviors identified in dyadic theories are still relevant for leadership in teams, but other behaviors are also important.

Behavioral theories describing leadership processes in various types of groups and teams are discussed in Chapter 10, and leadership in executive teams is discussed in Chapter 11. Much of a manager’s time is spent in formal and informal meetings, and the leadership processes that make group meetings more effective are also described in Chapter 10. Another key research question in the group approach is to explain why some members are more influential than others, and how leaders are selected. An example of a theory dealing with these questions is the “social exchange theory” discussed in Chapter 8.

As compared to the dyadic theories, most group-level theories provide a much better explanation of effective leadership in teams with interactive members, but these theories also have limitations. The need to describe leader influence on member motivation is usually recognized, but the theory may not include psychological processes that are useful for explaining this influence. The need to influence people and processes outside of the team is usually recognized, but external relationships are usually viewed from the perspective of the team. The focus is on the efforts of leaders to improve team performance (e.g., by getting more resources), but the implications of leader actions for other subunits or the larger organization are seldom explicitly considered. Shared leadership is more likely to be included in a group-level theory than in a dyadic theory, but distributed leadership by multiple formal leaders is seldom explicitly included, even though it is common in some types of teams (e.g., military combat units with a commander and an executive officer).

**Organizational Processes**

The group approach provides a better understanding of leadership effectiveness than dyadic or intra-individual approaches, but it has some important limitations. A group usually exists in a larger social system, and its effectiveness cannot be understood if the focus of the research is limited to the group’s internal processes. The organizational level of analysis describes leadership as a process that occurs in a larger “open system” in which groups are subsystems (Fleishman et al., 1991; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mumford, 1986).

The survival and prosperity of an organization depends on adaptation to the environment and the acquisition of necessary resources. A business organization must be able to market its products and services successfully. Adaptation is improved by anticipating consumer needs and desires, assessing the actions and plans of competitors, evaluating likely constraints and threats (e.g., government regulation, input scarcity, hostile actions by enemies), and identifying marketable products and services that the organization has unique capabilities to provide. Some examples of activities relevant for adaptation include gathering and interpreting information about the environment, identifying threats and opportunities, developing an effective strategy for adapting to the environment, negotiating agreements that are favorable to the organization, influencing outsiders to have a favorable impression of the organization and its products, and gaining cooperation and support from outsiders upon whom the organization is dependent. These activities are aspects of “strategic leadership.”

Survival and prosperity also depend on the efficiency of the transformation process used by the organization to produce its products and services. Efficiency is increased by finding more rational ways to organize and perform the work, and by deciding how to make the best use of available technology, resources, and personnel. Some examples of leadership responsibilities include designing an appropriate organizational structure, determining authority relationships, and coordinating operations across specialized subunits of the organization. Strategic leadership in organizations is described in Chapter 11.

As compared to dyadic or group-level theories of leadership, organization-level theories usually provide a better explanation of financial performance. Distributed leadership is less likely to be ignored in an organization-level theory, because it is obvious that an organization has many designated leaders whose actions must be coordinated. Management practices and systems (e.g., human resource management, operations management, strategic management) are also ignored or downplayed in dyadic and team leadership theories, but in theories of organizational leadership the need to integrate leading and managing is more obvious (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). More attention is likely for subjects such as organizational structure and culture, organizational change, executive succession, and influence processes between the CEO and the top management team or board of directors. A limitation of most theories of organizational leadership is that they do not explain influence processes for individual leaders (except sometimes for the chief executive), or influence processes within teams (except in some cases the top-management team).

**Multi-level Theories**

Multi-level theories include constructs from more than one level of explanation (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Rousseau, 1985). For example, the independent and dependent variables are at the same level of conceptualization, but moderator variables are at a different level. An even more complex type of multi-level theory may include leader influence on explanatory processes at more than one level and reciprocal causality among some of the variables. Multi-level theories of effective leadership provide a way to overcome the limitations of single-level theories, but it is very difficult to develop a multi-level theory that is parsimonious and easy to apply. The level of conceptualization has implications for the measures and methods of analysis used to test a theory, and multi-level theories are usually more difficult to test than single-level theories (Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). Despite the difficulties, there is growing interest in developing and testing multi-level theories of leadership. Efforts to develop multi-level theories, similarities in explanatory processes at different levels, and approaches for multi-level analysis are described in Chapter 16.

**Other Bases for Comparing Leadership Theories**

Key variables and level of conceptualization are not the only ways to compare leadership theories. This section briefly describes three other types of distinctions commonly used in the leadership literature: (1) **leader-centered** versus **follower-centered theory**, (2) universal versus contingency theory, and (3) **descriptive** versus **prescriptive theory**. Each type of distinction is better viewed as a continuum along which a theory can be located, rather than as a sharp dichotomy. For example, it is possible for a theory to have some descriptive elements as well as some prescriptive elements, some universal elements as well as some contingency elements, and an equal focus on leaders and followers.

**Leader-Centered or Follower-Centered Theory**

The extent to which a theory is focused on either the leader or followers is another useful way to classify leadership theories. Most leadership theories emphasize the characteristics and actions of the leader without much concern for follower characteristics. The leader-focus is strongest in theory and research that identifies traits, skills, or behaviors that contribute to leader effectiveness. Most of the contingency theories (in Chapter 7) also emphasize leader characteristics more than follower characteristics.

Only a small amount of research and theory emphasizes characteristics of the followers. Empowerment theory describes how followers view their ability to influence important events (see Chapter 5). Attribution theory describes how followers view a leader’s influence on events and outcomes (see Chapter 9), and other theories in the same chapter explain how followers can actively influence their work role and relationship with the leader, rather than being passive recipients of leader influence. The leader substitutes theory (see Chapter 7) describes aspects of the situation and follower attributes that make a hierarchical leader less important. The emotional contagion theory of charisma (see Chapter 12) describes how followers influence each other. Finally, theories of self-managed groups emphasize sharing of leadership functions among the members of a group; in this approach, the followers are also the leaders (see Chapter 10).

Theories that focus almost exclusively on either the leader or the follower are less useful than theories that offer a more balanced explanation, such as some of the theories in Chapters 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12. Most theories of leader power (Chapter 8) emphasize that influence over followers depends on follower perceptions of the leader as well as on objective conditions and the leader’s influence behavior.

**Descriptive or Prescriptive Theory**

Another important distinction among leadership theories is the extent to which they are descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptive theories explain leadership processes, describe the typical activities of leaders, and explain why certain behaviors occur in particular situations. Prescriptive theories specify what leaders must do to become effective, and they identify any necessary conditions for using a particular type of behavior effectively.

The two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and a theory can have both types of elements. For example, a theory that explains why a particular pattern of behavior is typical for leaders (descriptive) may also explain which aspects of behavior are most effective (prescriptive). However, the two perspectives are not always consistent. For example, the typical pattern of behavior for leaders is not always the optimal one. A prescriptive theory is especially useful when a wide discrepancy exists between what leaders typically do and what they should do to be most effective.

**Universal or Contingency Theory**

A universal theory describes some aspect of leadership that applies to all types of situations, and the theory can be either descriptive or prescriptive. A descriptive universal theory may describe typical functions performed to some extent by all types of leaders, whereas a prescriptive universal theory may specify functions all leaders must perform to be effective.

A contingency theory describes some aspect of leadership that applies to some situations but not to others, and these theories can also be either descriptive or prescriptive. A descriptive contingency theory may explain how leader behavior varies from one situation to another, whereas a prescriptive contingency theory describes effective behavior in a specific situation.

The distinction between universal and contingency theories is a matter of degree, not a sharp dichotomy. Some theories include both universal and situational aspects. For example, a prescriptive theory may specify that a particular type of leadership is always effective but is more effective in some situations than in others. Even when a leadership theory is initially proposed as a universal theory, limiting and facilitating conditions are usually found in later research on the theory.

**Organization of the Book**

The diversity and complexity of the relevant literature make it difficult to organize a survey book on leadership. No single way of classifying the literature captures all of the important distinctions. The primary basis for organizing chapters is according to type of leadership variable studied. The behavior approach is reviewed first (Chapters 2, 3, and 4), then the trait approach (Chapter 6), and the situational approach (Chapter 7), then the power-influence approach (Chapter 8). Important lines of research that cut across the primary variables are treated in separate chapters whenever possible. Participative leadership, which involves both the behavior and power-influence approaches, is covered in Chapter 5. The major theories of charismatic and transformational leadership are usually classified as “integrative” because they involve more than one approach, and these theories are covered in Chapter 12. Other ways of integrating the literature are briefly described in Chapters 7, 11, and 16.

Level of conceptualization is used as a secondary basis for organizing the material. Chapter 6 describes leader skills and personality traits that are conceptualized primarily at the individual level. Chapter 9 includes both dyadic and some individual level theories. Group-based approaches are described in Chapters 10 and 11.

The concepts in other chapters usually span multiple levels. The leader roles and behaviors described in Chapters 2 and 3 can be used in theories at any level but are most often used in dyadic theories. Participative leadership and empowerment described in Chapter 5 are primarily dyadic and group-level theories, but leaders can also influence empowerment for a large organization. The early contingency theories described in Chapter 7 are conceptualized primarily at the dyadic or group level. The transformational and charismatic theories in Chapter 12 are also primarily dyadic, but they are sometimes extended to include some group-level and organization-level elements. Chapter 13 describes ethical leadership theories (including transforming leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and authentic leadership); leader values are conceptualized at the individual level, but ethical leadership has implications for dyads, groups, and the overall organization. Chapter 14 deals with some special issues that have implications for different levels, including gender and leadership, cross-cultural differences in leadership, and management of diversity. Leadership development is a topic that cuts across levels of analysis, and it is discussed in Chapter 15. Chapter 16 provides an overview that includes a summary of major findings about effective leadership and some concluding ideas about the essence of leadership at any level of analysis.

**Summary**

Leadership has been defined in many different ways, but most definitions share the assumption that it involves an influence process for facilitating the performance of a collective task. Otherwise, the definitions differ in many respects, such as who exerts the influence, the intended beneficiary of the influence, the manner in which the influence is exerted, and the outcome of the influence attempt. Some theorists advocate treating leading and managing as separate roles or processes, but the proposed definitions do not resolve important questions about the scope of each process and how they are interrelated. No single, “correct” definition of leadership covers all situations. What matters most is how useful the definition is for increasing our understanding of effective leadership.

Most researchers evaluate leadership effectiveness in terms of the consequences for followers and other organization stakeholders, but the choice of outcome variables has differed considerably from researcher to researcher. Criteria differ in many important respects, including how immediate they are, and whether they have subjective or objective measures. When evaluating leadership effectiveness, multiple criteria should be considered to deal with these complexities and the different preferences of various stakeholders.

Leadership has been studied in different ways, depending on the researcher’s methodological preferences and definition of leadership. Most researchers deal only with a narrow aspect of leadership, and most empirical studies fall into distinct lines of research such as the trait, behavior, power, and situational approaches. In recent years, there has been an increased effort to cut across and integrate these approaches.

Level of analysis is another basis for classifying leadership theory and research. The levels include intra-individual, dyadic, group, and organizational. Each level provides some unique insights, but more research is needed on group and organizational processes, and more integration across levels is needed.

Another basis for differentiating theories is the relative focus on leader or follower. For many years, the research focused on leader characteristics and followers were studied only as the object of leader influence. A more balanced approach is needed, and some progress is being made in that direction.

Leadership theories can be classified as prescriptive versus descriptive, according to the emphasis on “what should be” rather than on “what occurs now.” A final basis for differentiation (universal versus contingency) is the extent to which a theory describes leadership processes and relationships that are similar in all situations or that vary in specified ways across situations.

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