



Leadership theories have significantly evolved over time, reflecting changes in organizations and society. Understanding these different approaches is essential for any leader wishing to adapt their style and practices to current challenges.

The early leadership theories, which emerged in the early 20th century, focused on the personality traits of great leaders. These theories, known as the great man theories, posited that leadership was innate and reserved for an elite possessing extraordinary qualities such as charisma, intelligence, or selfconfidence. Authors like Carlyle and Galton studied the biographies of illustrious figures in an attempt to identify common traits among great individuals. Although these theories highlighted some recurring characteristics of leaders, they have been criticized for their simplistic and deterministic view, neglecting the impact of the environment and social interactions.

From the 1940s, researchers began to focus more on the behaviors of leaders. Studies conducted by pioneers like Kurt Lewin identified different leadership styles, such as authoritarian, democratic, and laissezfaire. Behavioral theories, such as the managerial grid created by Blake and Mouton, aimed to define optimal combinations between taskoriented and relationshiporiented behaviors. While providing useful frameworks, these approaches showed their limits by proposing normative models and a one best way, insufficiently accounting for the diversity of situations.

Thus, in the 1960s, situational leadership theories emerged. Authors like Fiedler, Hersey, and Blanchard highlighted that the effectiveness of a leadership style depended on the characteristics of the situation, such as the nature of the task, the maturity of collaborators, or the leaders position of power. The Hersey and Blanchard model, particularly influential, suggests adapting ones style directive, persuasive, participative, or delegative based on the

competence and motivation level of collaborators. An effective leader is therefore one who demonstrates flexibility and adjusts their approach to the context.

More recently, transformational and charismatic theories, championed by authors like Bass and Conger, have focused on a leader's ability to inspire commitment and drive change. The transformational leader is one who, through their vision, charisma, and capacity to impart meaning, encourages their collaborators to transcend their individual interests in service of a common goal. They act on both extrinsic motivations, through a system of rewards and sanctions, and intrinsic motivations, appealing to each individual's deep values and aspirations. Leaders like Nelson Mandela or Steve Jobs are often cited as emblematic examples of transformational leadership.

Finally, the most recent approaches emphasize the ethical, authentic, and servant dimensions of leadership. In light of the crisis of confidence in leaders and the search for meaning among new generations, it becomes essential for leaders to embody values of integrity, transparency, and humility. The authentic leader is one who acts in alignment with their deep values and convictions and encourages others to do the same. The servant leader, a concept developed by Greenleaf, is someone who uses their power to serve their collaborators and the common good, rather than seeking to appropriate it for personal prestige. These new approaches invite a rethinking of leadership not as an individual attribute, but as a collective and virtuous dynamic, in service of the common good.

In conclusion, the evolution of leadership theories reflects the increasing complexity of the challenges faced by today's leaders. Far from excluding one another, these different approaches complement each other and offer useful frameworks for developing a leadership style suited to contemporary challenges. The 21st-century leader is one who knows how to combine multiple skills: an inspiring vision, the ability to unite and develop talent, situational intelligence, strong personal ethics, and a keen sense of service. It is by cultivating this subtle balance between firmness and flexibility, between demands and kindness, that leaders can meet the expectations of their teams and society as a whole.