

rather than on what the leader is. Nevertheless, there are problems with this school of thought. It assumes that high consideration, or people orientation, and high initiating structure, or task/production focus, lead to high performance. In reality, the relationship between the two broad variables may be more complicated. Also, behavioural approaches, rather like trait theories, ignore the context or situation in which leaders and followers find themselves. That context is likely to partly determine the most appropriate style to adopt. For example, an organisation might have a long-engrained norm which necessitates or encourages the adoption of a task orientation. This cultural characteristic may prevent a leader from significantly deviating from that approach. Leadership is context-specific, or at least this is what the situational theories suggest.

Situational theory

When certain aspects of the behavioural and trait approaches are combined with consideration of context, or the situation in which leaders find themselves, a complex but more promising explanation of leadership is apparent. We saw in Chapter 4 that consideration of situational or contingent factors improved our understanding of motivation in the workplace. Similarly, our insight into leadership is enhanced by a consideration of these contingent factors. Once again, contingency theory adds complexity, but richness, to our understanding of organisational behaviour and probably gets us closer to understanding organisational realities.

Fiedler's contingency theory

The **contingency theory** is that *leadership behaviour interacts with the favourableness of a situation to determine effectiveness*. It argues that some situations are more favourable than others and, as a consequence, require different behaviours. This theory requires the assessment of both the leader's style and three broad characteristics of the situation or context:

- *leader–group member relations* – the nature of work group atmosphere and subsequent loyalty, trust and so forth;
- *task structure* – clarity of the group's work and understanding of the group's goals; and
- *position power* – a leader's legitimate power to tell others what to do.

Leadership style is said to be 'relationship-centred', where the leader is motivated to maintain good interpersonal relations, or 'task-orientated', in which case the leader is motivated to get on with the job. It is ascertained by requiring leaders to indicate their orientation towards their least preferred co-worker (LPC). Those who describe their LPC in 'accepting' terms are relationship-orientated whereas task-orientated leaders believe their LPC has few redeeming qualities. This, Fiedler argues, demonstrates a personality trait referred to as the leader's motivational pattern. It is not unlike Theory X and Theory Y discussed earlier. A highly favourable situation would be one where relations were sound and reliable, tasks were clearly structured and goals widely understood and where position power was strong.

A task orientation is considered more suited to highly favourable or highly unfavourable situations. To take an example, if there is an urgent impending requirement, say for the launch of a marketing campaign to meet an advertiser's deadline, the manager may, recognising the nature of the task and relying on position power (see Chapter 8), adopt a highly task-orientated approach, giving clear instructions and deadlines and requesting compliance. Alternatively, where a manager enjoys good relations with workers and if the tasks to be performed are clearly structured – that is, not much debate or decision-making ability is required in order to perform them satisfactorily – a task orientation may be best employed to ensure high productivity. The 'simplicity' of the task might not warrant a more participative or people-orientated approach, and the good relations that exist could survive the adoption of a task approach. It is argued that this is common in the fast-food industry where little skill is required on the part of kitchen staff overseeing the preparation of burgers and fries!

A relationship orientation is best suited to average situational favourability. Fiedler suggests that an organisation should not focus on attempts to change a leader's personality but should select leaders to match the situation's favourability. Although this approach might be of some value in recognising that both situation and a leader's orientation can determine the appropriate choice of leader, it is of less value as a selection technique or a tool of 'social engineering' within organisations.

ILLUSTRATION IN FILM

Gandhi

The 1982 film *Gandhi* depicts the Indian struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi. He was a complex character and displays a range of styles, contingent upon the situations he finds himself in, to progress the cause. That said, it is his leadership which is shown to win the day. Personal sacrifice, determination, a moral vision, integrity and perseverance are all in evidence.

Discussion

How does Gandhi's reported leadership relate to the theories set out in this chapter? Was he a transformational leader?

Conclusions

The situational approach to leadership embraces both leadership style or behavioural issues and the context or situation in which leadership is taking place. It is, therefore, more complex but better reflects reality than earlier approaches. Nevertheless, not even the models presented above can fully explain the characteristics of effective leadership. They do not adequately embrace the complexities of interpersonal behaviours and relationships, nor do they accommodate the rapidity of change which characterises modern organisations.

For example, if organisations follow Fiedler's advice and appoint leaders to match the situation, then organisational dynamism might so alter 'the situation' as to make the appointed leader ineffective. Additionally, there remains considerable subjectivity concerning the assessment of an individual leader's style and personality. Someone might appear to have the necessary qualities to match the perceived nature of the situation yet not be an effective leader (and vice versa).

Although many contingency or situational theories take note of organisational and environmental variables, little attention is paid to organisational culture (see Chapter 9) or organisational politics (see Chapter 8), both of which may have a profound influence over leadership styles and approaches.

A final criticism is that most of the research presented here implies that leadership is an individualistic concept; that is, it considers the role of the leader as an individual. We explore joint or multiple leadership (pluralism) in the next section.

New perspectives on leadership

Non-Western leadership theories

There are a number of globally well-regarded theories that do not have their origins in the United States and Western cultures. Bhagat et al (2012) outline five such theories, two key ones which have stood the test of time, are discussed here.

PM Theory, developed by Misumi (1985) in Japan, *stresses two functions leaders need to ensure are provided. 'P' is the performance or task activity and completion, while 'M' is a maintenance function ensuring that there are good relations between workers completing the task.* These complimentary functions, if combined effectively, determine leadership effectiveness. It argues that a strong emphasis on both by a leader ensures complementarity and greater effectiveness than if one leader emphasised P and another M (Smith and Peterson, 2002). Good leaders emphasise both P and M in an interwoven way, consistent with the high-context nature of Japanese society (Gannon and Newman, 2002). Subsequent research has indicated that effectiveness among Japanese leaders is enhanced where there is little difference between P and M, although it is recognised that situations differ and may require different approaches (Smith and Peterson, 2002).

It might be argued that the Western model or continuum, the 'task vs people' orientation, recognises the critical importance of both approaches. That said, it tends to underplay the essential requirement of PM Theory that both go together and complement each other in, as has been noted, an interwoven fashion. One without the other, or where there is a distance between P and M efforts, will lead to less effective leadership, it is argued. Bhagat et al (2012) suggest that the route to leadership success and promotion in Japan is by demonstrating both P and M behaviours in equal measure.

Secondly, we briefly review Sinha's (1980) **NT Theory**. Like Misumi, Sinha *focuses on two dimensions of effective leadership behaviour: 'N', or nurturance, and 'T', or task. Nurturance refers to behaviours like coaching, supporting, encouraging, recognising and taking an interest in individuals, while task focuses on the job itself and driving outcomes and results.* The author notes that task orientations are common among Indian leaders, but Sinha's own research has shown that whereas many Indians actually prefer or expect a