

# Leadership: A Review of Definitions and Theories

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**ABSTRACT:** The study of different definitions and theories underpinning the leadership concept cannot be over-emphasized. It is expedient in other to aid practitioners, as well as scholars, to have better understanding of who is a leader and what leadership is. The world needs outstanding leader, who are required to lead people and organizations through the ever dynamic and complex environment. While the long history of development and research of the leadership concept has failed to produce a consensus on the definitions and theories, this review will help to better understand the concept and appreciate the complexities in the concept, which in turn will aid the practice of leadership.

**Key Words:** leadership, transformational leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership

## I. INTRODUCTION

The leadership concept has maintained a dominant position in management discuss over the years. Leadership is considered a complex and dynamic concept, and has been shaped by various global forces from politics to world affairs. According to (1), there are over 1,500 definitions and over 66 theories of leadership. While there may not be a universal consensus on the meaning of leadership due to the inherent complexities in the concept, a review of few definitions and theories will help one to appreciate how it has evolved over the year.

## II. REVIEW OF DEFINITIONS

According to (2), leadership is defined as “the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation”. The definition clearly shows that leadership was perceived at the early stage as tool for dominating the led, and doing the bidding of just the leader, without due consideration for needs and expectations of the followers. The (2) definition signifies the use of coercive power by the leader, which in turn negates the ideals of good leadership. In contrast to the definition by (2) is the

one given by (3), where he defined leadership as the capacity to influence others through inspiration and not manipulation. However, while (4) defined it as a process of influence between a leader and the followers, (5) posited that leadership is all about influence, nothing more or less. From the definitions by (3), (4) and (5), there was a shift from the view of (2), and leadership is considered as a process of influence between the leader and the followers. In addition, the factor of influence signifies seeing leadership from the perspective of the qualities or traits of the leader. Taking a radical position, (6) argued that leadership is not only a process of influence of the leaders upon the followers, but an interaction process that could be influenced by anyone involved. He went on to define the concept as an interaction between two or more members of a group with the intention of structuring and restructuring the situation, and as well the perception and expectations of the members. Therefore, leadership is a result of one group member modifying the motivation and competencies of others in the group, a behaviour that can be exhibited by any other group member. This suggest that leadership is not tied to position. Following this line of thought is the definition from (7). He defined leadership as the ability to facilitate and influence superiors, peers, and subordinates to make recognizable efforts towards shared or unshared objectives. The definition invariably reveals that leadership is not limited to the usual leader-subordinate relationship alone, it transcends job titles, responsibilities and roles (8). Aligning with the shared objective aspect of the definition of leadership by (7), is the definition by (9). In defining the concept, (9) posited that leadership is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. It shows that leadership occurs in groups that are bound by common goals. Similarly, Yukl (2010) cited in (10) said leadership is about influencing others to understand and agree with what needs to be done, how to do it and the process of helping individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. In another definition, leadership is

considered as a type of responsibility aimed at achieving particular ends by applying the available resources (human and material) and ensuring a cohesive and coherent organization in the process (11). The definition by (11) resonates with one of the most influential definition of leadership given by (12). According to (12), leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers. These definitions reveal that leadership is a about responsibility, and involves the use or deployment of organizational resources in order to achieving a better organization outcomes.

However, as varied the definitions are, there are some elements of leadership that featured repeatedly. Firstly, leadership is seen as a process. Viewing leadership from the process perspective takes a departure from the trait perspective, with the concept becoming a transactional event between the leader and the followers. The leader-follower exchange process reveals a leader affects the followers and is affected by them. However, the definitions by (6) and (7) reveals the leader-follower interaction process is fluid and dynamic, since leadership is not really positional. Secondly, leadership involves influence. Influence is how the leader affects his or her followers. However, while influence is central to the concept of leadership, it is not the most important. The world according to (1) is looking beyond just leadership influence, but for ethical and effective leadership for the good of the society. In this line of thought is (13), who asserted that leadership is not only about influence and effectiveness, and that leadership that is worth pursuing should be based on ethics and morality. They defined moral or good leadership as influencing of others by means of reason and inclusion, to achieve organizational goals that are in the long-term interest of all involved, with wellbeing of the society in mind. Thirdly, leadership occurs within a group, and it is the existence of a group that gives rise to the need for leadership. Groups are therefore the context in which leadership takes place. Lastly, leadership involves common goal, which binds the leader to the group. The shared goal signifies mutual purpose of a group, which the leader and followers must work in unison to realize. However, in reality much of the responsibility for goal attainment rest on the leader. The study believes the leader must be mindful of the impact of the group's shared goal on the society. Leadership in all its effectiveness must be directed towards the greater good of the society.

Based on this review, the study gives the following definition:

Leadership is an interaction process occurring in a group with a shared goal and objective, and driven by a member's influence, for the good of the members and greater good of the society.

It therefore becomes the leadership responsibility to align group's goal with the needs and expectation of the society.

### III. REVIEW OF THEORIES

According to (1), there are over 66 theories of leadership, with further search for an all-inclusive leadership theory, while according to (14), there are as many different views of leadership as there are characteristics that distinguish leaders from non-leaders. There is already a shift from traditional trait or personality based theories to situational theories, while modern day theories are also springing up. A review of some of these theories will suffice.

**Great Man Theory.** The Great Man theory propounded by Thomas Carlyle around 1840, is considered as the beginning of the modern study of leadership. His lecture series and the publication of his book *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic History*, led to the birth of leaders were born, not made, and the "great man" theory of leadership. The theory marked the starting point for the contemporary study of leadership. The theory assumes that the capacity for leadership is inherent, that great leaders are born and not made (14). The theory states that certain individuals are born with necessary attributes to be great leaders (15). At the heart of the theory is the notion that there are only few and very rare individuals in any society at any time with the rare characteristics to rewrite human history. Alexander the Great, Joan of Arc, Julius Cesar, Napoleon, and Mahatma Gandhi are usually referred to as great leaders (15). Great Man theory assumes that the capacity for leadership is inherent, that is, inborn and that leaders are born, not made (16; 17), leaders are guided by morality, leaders are divinely inspired (charismatic), they are full of wisdom and they are heroic. The assumption is that a leader is destined to rise to leadership. The theory was given a masculine connotation with the use of the term "great man", because the concept was thought of primarily as military leadership (11).

However, while the theory got support from (18), it was heavily criticized by Stogdill (9). According to Drucker, leadership is of utmost importance and cannot be created or promoted. In addition, while scientific evidence to validate the theory might be scarce, the study at the University

of Minnesota is giving a ray of hope the possibility of genetic composition playing a role in leadership. According to (19) and (20), many personality traits and vocational interests have been found to be related to genetic makeup and life experiences. However, Stogdill criticism led him to the development of the traits theory, positing that the great man theory lacks scientific basis. While (21) also argued that the great man theory is unusable as a scientific theory, it suffered from loss of more credibility because of the way leaders like Napoleon and Hitler ended (22).

This theory from all indications lacks a proven scientific basis, however it cannot be discarded in its totality. While history is replete with natural born leaders, others have achieved great leadership heights through training and development. In addition, while the theory posit that leaders are guided by morality, the issue of morality in itself is becoming relative in the contemporary world, because of civilization, religious perspectives and cultural orientations. Therefore, what a leader in Europe might considered as morally right, could be against the sense of morality of a leader in Africa. However, this study believes that while some have innate leadership qualities, others can develop into effective leaders.

**Trait Theory.** The trait theory came out of the work of Francis Galton through the extension of the work of Thomas Carlyle. Galton investigated the hereditary background of leaders and assessed the probability of great men having great relatives (23). However, during the early 1900s, there were growing interest by scholars to know more about leaders and leadership. They wanted to know from an organizational perspective, what characteristics separate leaders from other people, so that such people with the identified traits can be recruited and given key organizational positions to handle (15). This led to the early research that resulted in the trait approach to leadership, which grew out of the great man theory. It is believed that (24) pioneered the modern (late 20<sup>th</sup> century) study of leadership. The focus was on – who is a leader? What separates leaders from others? What were the personality traits, physical and psychological attributes of individuals who can be called leaders? The Trait theory assume that leaders inherit special characteristics, and that it is the people who have those characteristics that are better suited for leadership (14, 24, 25, 26). The trait theory says that effective leaders possess a similar set of traits (27), and assumes that specific physical, social, and personal characteristics are inherent in leaders (28). According to the proponent, certain traits (whether inherited or developed) are preconditions for

effective leadership. The theory assumes that people inherit certain characteristics or qualities that make them suited for leadership positions. Trait theory identifies particular personality or behavioural characteristics that are shared by leaders.

During the First World War, (24) in a known study, found a group of important leadership traits that can be attributed to individuals in various groups became leaders. He then argued that a leader differs from other group member based on eight traits, which include intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability. However, he said the traits must be relevant to the situation a leader finds himself in order for him to be effective. He posits that trait and situational factors determine leadership. Therefore, while affirming the importance of traits in determining leadership, he further raise the role of situational factors in leadership discuss. In a later study, (25) identified ten traits of leadership; drive for responsibility and task completion, vigour and persistence in pursuit of goals, risk taking and originality in problem solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to accept consequences of decisions and actions, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other people's behaviour, and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand. Similarly, (29) confirmed specific traits also distinguish leaders from followers. He however did not emphasizes the role of situational factors. Kirkpatrick and Locke found that there are a set of characteristics that could be ascribe to successful leaders (26). The traits that separates the leaders from others include drive, the desire to lead, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, emotional stability, cognitive ability and knowledge of the business. While (30) have also identified six traits strongly linked to leadership (intelligence, integrity, self-esteem, extraversion, open to experience and conscientious), (31) extended leadership traits to include social abilities.

However, the search for common traits of leadership yielded no consensus but more divergent views. Stogdill posited that leadership could not be defined by the maxims of trait theory (24). According to him, effective leadership is reliant on the situation and the leader's characteristics. He posited that a "person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits", which in turn led to the final reduction of trait leadership research (32). It is therefore

difficult to isolate set of leadership characteristics without recourse to situational factors. Also, Eugene E. Jennings found that there was not a single personal factor that distinguish leaders from followers (33). Therefore, while the theory failed to take into consideration the situational factors, there has been no definitive list of leadership traits and the existing lists are tainted by subjectivity of the individual researchers (9). The apparent inconsistencies in the relationship between leadership traits and leadership effectiveness eventually led scholars to shift their attentions away from this theory and in search of new explanations for effective leadership (14). The rejection of this theory led to the reconceptualization of leadership as relationship between people in a social situation.

**Behavioural Theory.** The realization that traits only are not sufficient for identifying effective leaders, led to leadership research from 1940s to mid-1960s to concentrate on the preferred behavioural styles that demonstrate. The explanations for effective leadership provided by the trait theory neglected the interactions between the leaders and their group members, as well as situational factors. Having the appropriate traits is just likely to predict if one will be an effective leader, therefore, studies were shifted to whether there is something unique about leaders' behaviour. According to the behavioural theory, individuals can learn to become effective leaders through training and observation (14). The theory focuses on the actions of leaders rather than on their personal qualities. The behavioural theories help to identify behaviours that separates leaders from ineffective leaders (34). The University of Iowa explored three leadership styles to find the one most effective (35, 36). The autocratic style described a leader who dictated work methods, solely made decisions and allow employees limited participation in the decision making process. The democratic leader in contrast described a leader who took the view of employees into consideration in making decisions, delegated authority to subordinates and used feedback as a means of coaching the group members. The laissez-faire style leader allowed the group to make decision as the member deemed fit. They found that the democratic leadership style was most effective, however, later studies showed mixed results, creating a dilemma for leaders on whether to focus on achieving higher performance or to focus on achieving higher member satisfaction. This realization of the dual role of a leader's behaviour led to other studies. The subsequent Ohio State studies went ahead to identify two important

dimensions of leader behaviour (37). The first dimension was called initiating structure, which involves the extent to which a leader is able to define his or her role and that of the group member in attaining goals. This include behaviours that prioritize organizing work, defining work relationships and goals. The second dimension was referred to as consideration, which is the extent to which a leader is able to build work relationships that are marked by mutual trust and respect for the subordinates' contributions and how they feel. The study found that a leader high in both initiating structure and consideration was able to achieve more in terms of productivity of the group members, who are also more satisfied. However, the high task performance and high member satisfaction were found not in all situations. Similarly, the University of Michigan studies carried out at the same time with the Ohio State studies, was intended to isolate the behavioural characteristics of leaders that are tied to performance effectiveness. They identified two dimensions of leadership behaviour in similarity with the Ohio State studies, which they termed employee-oriented and production-oriented (38). While the employee-oriented leaders are believed to prioritize interpersonal relationships, the production-oriented leaders emphasize the task aspects of the job. The employee orientation behaviour of leaders sees employees as human beings, appreciates their uniqueness and gives special attention to their needs. In contrast, the production orientation behaviour merely sees subordinates as a means of getting the job done (39). The study concluded that employee-oriented leaders achieved more in terms of productivity from their group members and that the members were equally more satisfied. While the production-orientation behaviour can be likened to the initiating structure behaviour of Ohio State studies, the employee-orientation behaviour can be likened to the consideration behaviour. However, relying on all the earlier studies, (40) put forward the managerial grid, by using the behavioural dimensions of "concern for people" and "concern for production", to evaluate how leaders make use of those behaviours by ranking them on a scale of 1 (low) to 9 (high). They concluded that manager with high concern for people and high concern for production leadership style achieve more than others. In contrast to (40), (41) posited that there is no substantive evidence to support the claim that leaders with high concern for people and production are most effective in all situations. However, the leadership grid in terms of ideas and

findings is similar to the other two studies; the Ohio State and the University of Michigan studies.

The behavioural theory assume that leaders need to portray certain behaviours (people and task behaviour) to achieve desired goals. This theory focuses on the actions of leaders and not on intellectual qualities or internal states (14). According to the behavioural theory, people can learn to become leaders through various trainings and observation. The theory assumes that a leader's behaviour is the best predictor of his leadership influences which in turn determines his leadership success, and reminds leaders that they act based on task level and relationship level. Therefore, while they need to be more task oriented in some situations, they need to be relationship oriented in others. Invariably, leaders make impact on based on the task they perform and the relationships they are build (9).

The behavioural theory of leadership has not only broaden the scope leadership research, it has been substantiated by numerous research studies, offering a viable approach to understanding the leadership process. However, (42) criticized the theory on the fact that findings from numerous studies have remained inconclusive. He went further to say that no constant link has been established between task and relationship behaviours, as well as leadership outcomes like morale, employee productivity and job satisfaction. While the various theories put forward the high-high leadership style as the most effective, (43) and (44), suggested that while the claim is true, it does not hold in all situations. Also, (45) argued that research did not support the claim that demonstrating the two leadership behaviours as identified by the theory, would necessarily make leaders effective.

While the trait theory failed in proving a definitive set of traits a leader must have, similarly, the behavioural theory failed to provide a universally agreed behaviours of leaders, and failed to take into consideration the environment in which behaviours are demonstrated. However, this study believes the behavioural theory has contributed an important factor in determining effective leadership, but there are still more variables that need to be considered. In addition, viewing effective leadership from the behavioural perspective might be limiting, because even the human behaviour is complex and could be deceptive.

**Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership.** Researchers shifted focus to situational factors, when they realized that predicting leadership effectiveness is more

complex and goes beyond some few traits and preferred behaviours. They began to look at which leadership styles is appropriate for which situation, and what are the different situations. One of the earliest situation-contingent leadership theories is the one put forward by Fred E. Fiedler from the University of Washington (46), known as the contingency theory of leadership. The theory assumes that no single leadership style is appropriate for all situations, and that the best style is contingent on the context faced by the leader (14). The theory posit that effective leadership is dependent on the extent of fit between the leadership qualities, the leadership style and the specific situation faced by the leader (47). The contingency theory focuses on variables related to the environment that might dictate the right leadership style suited for a particular work situation. According to Fiedler, organization must evaluate a leader according to underlying traits, evaluate the situation faced by the leader and thereafter construct a match between the two factors in order to achieve group effectiveness through leadership. He proposed that individual's basic leadership style, either task-oriented or relationship-oriented is key to leadership success. He went further to develop the least preferred co-worker (LPC) questionnaire to measure whether a leader prioritizes task or relationship (34). Leaders with high LPC scores are relationship-oriented (they need to develop and maintain close interpersonal relationships), while those with low LPC scores were considered task-oriented because they prioritized task accomplishment before establishing good interpersonal relationship with followers (15). Furthermore, (48) identified three contingency dimensions of situational factors that influence effective leadership as leader-member relations, task structure and position power. Leader-member relation refers to the degree to which group members accept the leader, their level of loyalty to the leader, and their ability to work well with the leader. Task structure involves the extent to which the task details the goal to be achieved, and how to achieve it, while position power involves the leader's ability to influence the followers. After studying 1200 groups where he compared the task-oriented and relationship-oriented styles of leadership in eight situational categories, he concluded that leaders who are task-oriented perform better in favourable situations and in very unfavourable situations, while those who are relationship-oriented do better as leaders when faced with moderately favourable situations. He posited that a leader cannot change his or her leadership style, and to achieve effective

leadership, organization must either change the leader or adjust the situation to fit his or her leadership style (34).

Some studies have supported Fiedler's findings (19, 49, 50). For example, (51) reported evidence supporting the Fiedler's model. However, the theory has been criticized for being unrealistic in its assumption that leaders cannot change their leadership styles to fit different situations, in contrast to the belief that effective leaders have the ability to switch leadership style depending on situational factors. There have been mixed and contradictory results from testing the model as well. For instance, (52) reported findings contrary to Fiedler's model. In addition, (53) posited that even under the best conditions the LPC scale has only about 50 per cent reliable variance.

Despite the criticisms of the model, the study aligns with the model, in that effective leadership is an interplay of the leader's trait or characteristics and the prevailing context, but in contrast, a leader can change his or her leadership style suite the prevailing context. Leadership style is not fixed.

**Situational Leadership Theory.** The theory was developed by (54), leveraging on (55) 3-D management style theory. According to (56), the core of the theory is that different situations require different leadership styles. The situational theory proposes that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational factors (14), and that different leadership styles are more suited to different circumstances. They posited that different leadership styles be employed based on the situation at hand, as defined by both the orientation of the leader (either task or relationship-oriented) and the maturity or experience of the followers. The theory posit that leaders who want to be effective must use the right style of behaviours at the right time in each employee's development. The focus was on the employees' readiness, which is the combination of their competence and commitment levels, remains key in determining the effective leadership style. Leaders are expected to be highly directive and supportive when dealing with employees who are at the earliest state of developing, since they will have low competence despite being highly committed. When the employee grows and become more competent, the leader is expected to engage in more coaching behaviours, and the leader should exhibit more supportive behaviours when the employee has achieved moderate to high levels of competence. However, the leader should delegate more when dealing with highly committed and highly competent workers. In the same vein, (57) found

that situational leadership has a positive relationship with employee's productivity.

However, studies have churned out mixed results in a bid to provide support for the situational leadership theory (52, 58). While the theory has been commended for its prescriptive rather than descriptive nature, as well as its emphasis on leader flexibility (58, 59), it has also been criticized for its several weaknesses. The Hersey-Blanchard model for example has been criticized for lack of internal consistency of it various measures, coupled with its conceptual contradictions and ambiguities. Graeffalso argues that the model from the situational theory has no theoretical or logical justification (58). In addition, Blake and Mouton posited that Hersey and Blanchard did misinterpreted their initial empirical findings (60). Fernandez and Vecchio in their study using university employees failed to find strong evidence to support the basic assumptions of the situational theory (52). Subsequent study in 2006 by (61) also failed in its testing of the assumptions and validity of the model. Thompson and Vecchiousing data from 357 banking employees and 80 banking supervisors, found no empirical evidence for the situational leadership model (62). Furthermore, some studies have found that in some situations and contexts, the leadership behaviours prescribed by Hersey-Blanchard model seem detrimental and impact negatively on group's efficiency and the satisfaction of followers (60).

**Path-Goal Leadership Theory.** The path-goal leadership theory was developed by Robert J. House in his 1971 paper; A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness, which he later refined in conjunction with T R Mitchell. Similar to the contingency theory by Fiedler, the path-goal theory posit that the type of leadership required for improving organizational effectiveness is dependent on situational factors facing the leader. The theory differs from the contingency theory in believing that leaders can switch their leadership styles to match the prevailing context (15). The path-goal theory suggests that effective leadership involves the alignment of leader's behaviour, followers' characteristics and task characteristics (63). It suggests that an effective leader provides organizational members with a path to a valued goal. According to the theory, the main task before leader is to motivate the followers by increasing or clarifying personal benefits derivable from striving towards and achieving the group's goal, and as well clarifying and clearing the path to achieving the group's goal (63). House identified four leadership behaviours, which include directive, supportive,

participative and achievement oriented. Each of these styles can be effective, depending on the characteristics of employees (such as their ability level, preferences, locus of control, achievement motivation) and characteristics of the work environment (such as the level of role ambiguity, the degree of stress present in the environment, the degree to which the tasks are unpleasant). The assumption is therefore that a leader can and should be able to adapt his or her style of leadership to match the situation at hand, in order to provide direction and support as needed by the followers, and also structure the path the followers can achieve their goals (34). The theory also makes specific predictions about what type of leader behaviour will be effective under which circumstances (63, 64). Accordingly, the directive leadership style is believed to clarify the path to the goal by giving clear directives and guidance goals, tasks and setting performance standards. It is hypothesized to be the appropriate behaviour when task is complex and unstructured, and the followers are inexperienced, believe they lack power and want the leader to give them clear direction. The supportive style emphasizes more on improving the working conditions and focusing on the welfare of the followers, while it is believed to be the best style when task is simpler and predictable, and the followers have enough competencies to handle the job, and believe they have power. All that is required of the leader in this scenario is to provide protection and care for the followers to handle work stress. The participative style is more suited to work conditions when tasks are unstructured and complex, and when the followers are confident of their abilities, rejecting close control and preferring to take charge of their work. Lastly, the achievement-oriented leadership style encourages followers to achieve personally outstanding results. It is hypothesized to be more appropriate when tasks are unstructured, complex and unpredictable, but the followers are experienced, believe they lack power and prefer the leader to set their goals, while they accord him or her a lot of respect. The theory emphasizes the importance of varying one's leadership style, depending on the situation or context. According to the theory, effective leadership defines goals, clarifies path to goal attainment, remove obstacles from the path and provide the needed support to goal attainment by the followers.

While the biggest contribution of the theory has been the suggestion that leaders can vary their leadership styles in contrast to the Fiedler's contingency theory, it finds support in the

research that while nature (genes) may be our internal guide, nurture (experience) determines what we do (65). However, the theory has received criticism for being too complicated (9) and not yet fully validated (19).

**Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Leadership Theory.** The leader-member exchange theory was first described by the works of (66), (67) and (68). While most previous theories have emphasized effective leadership from the perspective of personality traits and behaviours of leaders, as well as context, the leader-member exchange theory took a different turn and conceptualized leadership as a process that is based on the interactions between leaders and followers (9). According to the theory, the dyadic relationship between the leaders and the followers is the fulcrum of the leadership process. While other theories focused on what leaders do towards their followers and assuming that leaders treat followers collectively as group, adopting an average leadership style, the LMX theory changed this narrative, and emphasized the differences that might exist between the leader and each of his or her follower. The theory says that leaders create in-groups and out-groups, and those followers in the in-group will have higher performance ratings, less turnover, and a greater job satisfaction (34). However, while the process of placing followers in each of the group lacks clarity, evidence has shown that followers in the in-group share some similarities with the leader. These include gender, personality traits, demographics, and attitude, while that may also possess high level of competencies compared to followers in the out-group (69). Placement into groups is done solely by the leader, however relying on the characteristics of the followers. According to (66), the in-group members receive more attention from the leader, and as well deliver more to him or her, while the followers in the out-group restrict themselves to just their official organizational roles. Later study by (70) change the direction of the theory from just looking at the differences in the leader-member interaction, to the quality of the exchange and its attendant effect on creating positive organizational outcomes for the leaders, followers, groups and the entire organization. According to the theory, the quality of the exchange relationship between a leader and a particular member of a work unit, team, or organization is the basic unit of analysis (71). Graen and Uhl-Bien found that high quality leader-member exchanges resulted in less employee leaving the organization, more positive performance evaluations, higher frequency of

promotions, greater organizational commitment, more desirable work assignment, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, greater participation, and faster career progress (70, 72).

Several studies have provided support for the LMX theory. In a meta-analysis of 164 LMX studies (73) concluded that leader-member exchange is consistently related to member job performance, job satisfaction, employee commitment, role conflict and clarity, as well as employee turnover intention. Atwater and Carmeli examined the connection between employees' perceptions of leader-member exchange and how it affects their energy at work and creativity. They found that perceived high quality leader-member exchange was positively related to employees' energy at work, which in turn increases their involvement in creative work (74). Eisenberger, Karagonlar, Stinglhamber, Neves, Becker, Gonzalez-Morales and Steiger-Mueller found that leaders who are able to establish a supportive relationship with their subordinates through emotional and other kinds of support, generate organizational commitment from the employees, which in turn increases their performance (75). However, the theory has also received its share of criticisms. Rousseau has criticized the theory for paying no attention to the content and value of the exchange relationship between the leader and the followers, most especially the interdependencies between the leader and follower (76). Also (77) discovered that poorly performing in-group members were given high performance ratings irrespective of their actual performance, thereby raising doubts about the assumption that performance is the cause of the quality of the exchange relationship. Another challenge with the theory, is its assumption that each follower has an identifiable manager, who control the resources value by the member. This seems inconsistent with the contemporary reality, where an employee may report to more than one manager (78). There is also the potential problem of differential treatment and bias if the leader has the sole discretion to select members into the two identified groups without any rational basis.

**Skills Theory of Leadership.** The skills theory of leadership emerged as a prominent theory in 1955, when Robert Katz published his paper "Skills of an Effective Administrator" in the Harvard Business Review. According to Katz, the skills theory posits that leaders require certain skills in order to be effective in their work (1). Leaders are believed to have human skills, as well as technical and conceptual skills. The theory posits

that learned knowledge and acquired skills and abilities are key factors in the practice of effective leadership. The theory argues that learned skills, a developed style and acquired knowledge are the requirements for leadership performance. This belief in skills theory demands that considerable effort and resources are devoted to leadership training and development (79). The theory proposes that good leaders have a set of skills developed over time. Katz observed some executives and arrived at three skill areas that they had in common and made use of on a regularly. Katz's work in the mid-1950s therefore set the tone for the conceptualization of leadership from the perspective of skills and abilities. However, it was in the mid-1990s that an empirically based skills approach really gained prominence in leadership research. There was a shift away from thinking about leadership from the angle of personality traits, which assumes that leaders have innate and fixed traits, to skills and competencies that can be possibly acquired from practice and learning (9).

While there are several studies seeking to affirm the relevance of the developable skills needed for tackling complex organizational challenges in the mid-1990s, the studies by Mumford and his team stood out and led to the development of a comprehensive skill-based model of leadership (80). Mumford and his team expanded on the approach with their paper "Leadership Skills for a Changing World: Solving Complex Problems" published in *The Leadership Quarterly* in 2000. They proposed a capabilities model that specifies five major components affecting leadership performance, which are majorly skill-based. While Katz identified technical skills related to the field, human skills related to communicating with people, and conceptual skills needed for setting vision, as the major areas that leaders need to develop, Mumford and his team, identified problem-solving skills, social judgement skills and general knowledge as the three major competencies a leader must have. The Mumford model went further to acknowledge the relevance of personal characteristics, performance, career experience and the situation in which the leader work as major factors affecting leadership effectiveness.

The skills theory acknowledges the fact that anyone can become a leader if only the individual is ready to work towards acquiring the needed skills. This is in contrast to the trait theory. The theory also makes selection of leaders easier because inventory of required skills in specific areas can be taken. However, the theory has been criticized for just identifying skills but not giving



in-depth explanation as to how and why the identified skills affect leadership. Furthermore, it is believed that personal traits influence the development of skills, while general knowledge and ability to learn skills can have roots in biological traits. Therefore, the claim that it is different from the trait theory is not totally true, because of its emphasis on individual attributes which are trait-driven (9). In addition, the skills approach is majorly descriptive. It merely describes leadership from a skill perspective. Rather than providing an explanation for success in leadership, it only provides structure for understanding the nature of effective leadership. It is a leader-centered model that emphasizes the importance of developing particular set of leadership skills and abilities.

**Psychodynamic Leadership Theory.** The psychodynamic approach to the concept of leadership was developed from the methods used in dealing with people who are emotionally disturbed coupled with theories of personality development. The theory has most of its roots in the work of Freud, while the likes of Maslow and Rogers also contributed through their works on the psychological theory of personality development (81, 82, 83). One of the leading proponents of the theory is Zelenick, while the best known expert in this field is Manfred Kets de Vries (84, 85). A branch of the theory is psychohistory, which tends to explain the behaviour of famous personalities. According to (86), leadership is about human behaviour, what we do, how we do it and why we do it. The psychodynamic theory assumes that leaders not only know their personality types, but that they also know their followers and they utilize this knowledge together with the relationship with their followers to achieve the desired goals (87, 88). The theory believes that leader are self-aware, and seek to gain insight into subordinates psychological makeup (i.e. why do followers behave/act the way they do; what motivates them) in order to influence them to take actions that will lead to the desired goals. The theory assumes that leaders must obtain insights into their own personality characteristics and on the basis of this, understands the responses of subordinates. Leaders are also to encourage work group members to gain insights into their own personalities to they could understand their reactions to the leader and each other. There are several fundamental propositions underlying this approach. Firstly, leaders are more effective when they have an insight into their own psychological makeup. Secondly, leaders are more effective when they understand the psychological makeup of their subordinates, in order to influence

them to take actions that will lead to achieving the desired goals. Furthermore, this approach makes no assumptions about personality characteristics or styles. It emphasizes that a leader should have an insight into his or her emotional responses and habitual patterns of behavior. An authoritarian leader, as an example, can be effective if he or she understands that her own behaviors arise from influences in the past. It is also better if the leader also has an understanding of how their behaviors result in different responses. An important assumption is that the personality characteristics of individuals are deeply ingrained and virtually impossible to change. The key is acceptance of one's own personality feature and quirks and the understanding and acceptance of features and quirks of others.

Supporting this theory is (89) who posited that organizations who intend to develop reflective leaders, must incorporate into leadership development programs a clinical or psychodynamic orientation, because it could help business executives to have deeper insights into non-rational patterns and undercurrent interpersonal ties that may influence behaviour of individuals in the organization, the dyads and groups. However, the most prevalent criticism against the psychodynamic approach to leadership is that the early works on the theory were based on clinical observations of the treatment of persons with serious mental issues. The approach is based on dysfunctional and abnormal behaviour rather than typical behaviour. In addition, many of the concept used in the Freud's works are subjective and difficult to validate through scientific means. The theory is not particular about training in the conventional sense, because the focus is to help individuals become more aware in order to have better behaviour and relate well with other people (86).

**Authentic Leadership Theory.** George release of his book Authentic Leadership in 2003 led to the development of the authentic theory of leadership (90). Authentic leadership is an approach that suggest leaders achieve legitimacy by building honest and genuine relationship with followers, as a result of knowing oneself, as well as one's weaknesses, strength and understanding one's life experience (91). The theory says leaders and followers should focus on positive traits as opposed to negative traits. According to (22), authentic leadership behaviour focuses on positive values. The theory is based on the moral or ethical aspects of being a leader. Authentic leaders know who they are, know what they believe in, and act on those values and beliefs openly and candidly (92). The theory emphasizes the consistent values

and behaviour of leaders, which include honesty, altruism, compassion, optimism and resilience (93). According to (94), authentic leadership is transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while incorporating followers' inputs. According to the theory, authentic leaders have an internalized moral perspective, they have strong values to guide them in their endeavours and they are self-disciplined. Leaders, according to the theory are believed to have relational transparency; they maintain trusting relationship with others, and undertake balanced processing of information. Avolio and his colleagues suggested there is general agreement that the key components of authentic leadership include balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency and self-awareness (94). Balanced processing means to objectively evaluate relevant information before deciding on the course of action. Internalized moral perspective refers to being guided by the internal moral standards, which are used for self-regulation of the leaders' behaviour. Relational transparency means presenting one's authentic self by openly sharing information as deemed fit with the prevailing context. Self-awareness refers to one's mastery of his or her weakness and strength, and how the he or she sees the world. According to (95), authentic leadership requires and necessitates a highly structured organization.

Furthermore, (96) posited that there is empirical support to show that authentic leadership is conceptually distinct from other types of leadership approaches. They posited that authentic leadership can provide basis for differences in leadership performance over other approaches like transformational leadership. According to (96, 97, 98), authentic leadership behaviour is positively related to job performance, follower's behaviour and work engagement. Also, (99) found that authentic leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment of employees. However, some criticisms about the theoretical basis of the authentic leadership construct have been pushed forward (100). Also, there is a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of authentic leadership and how it is related to positive organizational outcomes (9). Therefore, the need for more research to provide more clarity on the nature of the process, the assumptions and the principles that the approach tends to represent, as it is believed that the approach is still at the early developmental stage (9). This study however believe that this approach to leadership may suitable for the developing economies, where

honest and accountable leaders are required because of glaring cases of leadership failure.

#### **Transactional Leadership Theory.**

Transactional leadership theory was first discussed by sociologist Max Weber in 1947, and later improved upon by Bernard M. Bass, who also played a major role in the development of transformational leadership (101). According to the theory, individual perform best when the chain of command is clear and clearly spelt out, rewards and punishment can act as motivators, obeying instructions and commands is the primary goal for the group members, and that employees require careful monitoring to ensure that expectations are meet. Also, Lamb (2013) cited in (14) posited that the theory emphasize the need for leaders to provide the followers what is clearly expected of them and the consequences of failure and reward for good performance. The theory is based on the idea that managers give to employees what they want in order to get what the leaders want. The theory posit that employees are not self-motivated and require organizational structure, instructions and monitoring in order to complete tasks successfully and at the right time. Transactional leadership is also referred to as managerial leadership because it emphasizes the management activities of supervision, organizing and group performance (14). A transactional leader therefore, is someone who loves order and structure, and is responsible for maintaining routine by ensuring individual performance and facilitating group performance. This in turn inform his love to always resist change and keep to status quo (102). A transactional leader basically consider the relationship between employee and the leader as a mere exchange. According to (94), transactional leadership theory looks at exchange of wants between followers and leaders, with a focus on the exchange of rewards based on performance. Transactional leaders therefore, focus on gaining compliance through the manipulations of rewards and benefits, which is contrast to transformational leadership that focuses on transforming other people to support each other group members and the entire organization.

The theory however has received some criticisms. The leadership model proposed by the theory seems to cause short-term relationship between leaders and subordinates. According to critics, the use of rewards motivate only at a base level and produce poor results when there is need to meet higher level needs (60). It has also been observed to rob subordinates of their creative abilities, and reducing leader-subordinates relation

to just transactional is limiting. In addition, one of the prominent critique of the theory came from (103). Transactional leadership has been defined as a process of leader-subordinate exchange, but according to (103) the theory failed to provide a valid link between this process and the identified transactional behaviours. He posited that transactional leadership is made up of diverse collection of ineffective leader behaviours without common denominator. Furthermore, Burns argued that transactional leadership cannot increase the idea of followers (Nusari, Al Falasi, Khalifa& Isaac, 2018 cited in 104).

### **Transformational Leadership Theory.**

The transformational theory was developed by Burns (105). The theory originated from leader-member exchange theory (106). There are views that followers are affected by the leader's attitude and that the followers reciprocate a high-quality relationship. The transformational theory assumes that leadership is a process by which an individual engages with others and creates an emotional connection that results in increased motivation and morality in both the leader and the followers (14). The focus is the connections formed between the leader and the subordinates. James MacGregor Burns first introduced the concepts of transformational leadership when studying political leader. Burns described two leadership styles namely transactional and transformational (107). While transactional leaders focus on gaining compliance by giving and withholding rewards and benefits, the transformational leaders focus on "transforming" others to support each other and the organization as a whole. Followers of a transformational leader respond by feeling trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader and are more willing to work harder than originally expected. The core principle of transformational leadership is transforming or changing the lives of individual or organizations, by redesigning their value system, and changing the aspirations and expectations towards a desired outcome. Transformational leaders are believed to help achieve the goals of individuals, team and organizations. Transformation theory focuses on the connections or the relationships between leaders and their followers. The theory posits that leadership is the process by which a person engages with others and is able to create connection that results in increased motivation and morality in both the followers and leaders. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire subordinates by helping them to see the importance and higher good of a task (14). While the leaders focus on the performance of

group members, leaders pay more attention on each member fulfilling his or her potential. The leaders have high ethical and moral standards.

Another researcher, Bernard M. Bass, added to the work of Burns by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transformational and transactional leadership. Bass' work established that transformational leaders demonstrate four factors: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation (charismatic leadership), and idealized influence (107). Idealized influence describes the charismatic behaviours and attitudes that followers identify as associated with leaders. A leader who has these features presents a vision and acts as a powerful role model for followers. Inspirational motivation is the degree to which a leader articulates a vision that inspires followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation do share their vision and get followers committed to achieving it. Intellectual stimulation is the degree to which leader's actions challenge followers to think creatively and take risks. It therefore becomes imperative that our remaining healthcare practitioners need a leader who can inspire them and motivate them enough to keep them here. Individualized consideration is the degree to which leaders attend to the needs and concerns of the individual follower and then help them to develop themselves in a supportive environment (Gellis, 2001 cited in 108). According to Northouse (2001) cited (108), transformational leadership is a leadership behaviour that influences followers to look beyond their individual self-interests for the greater good of all, and helping to the followers to reach their full potentials.

However, while there are numerous studies supporting the transformational leadership approach, its veracity has been challenged. Nadeem posited that looking at popular or successful leadership as transformational leadership can be misleading (109). He argued that popular or successful leaders are not necessarily transformational. In addition, (110) stated that transformational leadership has a potential immoral and unethical dimension that could be capitalized upon by crooked leaders to exploit unsuspecting and naive followers like Adolf Hitler. Therefore, this is major challenge because despite being conceived as morally positive, it is difficult to guarantee the intentions of transformational leaders, which in turn led to research into authentic leadership (94). Another argument against the theory is what has been considered as the ambiguity of its four aforementioned components, which seem to be overlapping, and according to (111), transformational leadership can better be

considered as set of personality characteristics rather than special requirements. However, despite the criticisms, this study believes the theory is more beneficial than otherwise. In contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leadership has more humane approach to dealing with the followers.

**Servant Leadership Theory.** Robert K. Greenleaf coined the phrase “servant leader” in “The Servant as Leader”, first published in 1970. Servant leadership theory argues that the most effective leaders are servants of their people (107), and that servant leaders get results for their organization through serving whole heartedly giving utmost priority to the followers and their needs. Servant leadership emphasizes collaboration, trust, empathy and ethics. The assumption is that when leaders pay attention to their followers and what the desire, the employee will pay back by being good team player, deeper engagement and delivering of better performance (107). While the traditional leadership involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one person at the top hierarchy of the organization, servant leadership shares power with the followers, puts their needs first, and also help them to attain their best performance level. The servant leadership theory is based on concepts taken from religious faith (112). According to the theory, a servant leader is a servant to his followers first and foremost, while he also make sure that the followers are well-equipped for their roles and responsibilities (113). The servant leader is a servant first as a result of natural feeling that one wants to serve first rather than lead (114). In addition, the servant leader serves the followers with humility, listens, heals, empathize with the followers, he is self-aware, persuasive and serves with foresight (1). A servant leader sees to the growth and development of the followers, while also committed to community building. He or she helps the organization in the conceptualization of its vision. Ten characteristics of servant leaders were identified from the works of Greenleaf to include ability to listen, show empathy, being self-aware, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community (115). Similarly, (116) identified three key priorities, three principles and three practices that distinguish a servant leader from others in the workplace context. The priorities include developing people, building a trusting team, and achieving results. The three principles include serve first, persuasion and empowerment, while the three practices of servant leaders include

listening, delegating and connecting the followers to the organizational mission.

In promoting servant leadership, (117) argued that when individuals become grounded in servant leadership, trust grows between the leader and the led, and the bedrock for organizational excellent performance is established. However, there are still doubts about how effective the servant leadership approach is in organizations. The theory has also been criticized for solely focusing on the needs of the followers, to the extent of neglecting that of the organization. Furthermore, (118) posited that servant leadership is a contradiction of terms both in name and in description. By using the terms “servant” and “leader” in the phrase, (113) created a paradox of two conflicting concepts, which in turn causes dissonant feelings and gives rise to questioning what it mean to be a servant leader. In addition, there is a belief that many of the identified characteristics of servant leadership are leaning towards the feminine style of leadership, which in turn can make the men to be sceptical of the inherent language in servant leadership. The theory has also received criticism for lacking in modern day examples of servant leader in the mode of Jesus Christ, thereby making business and other leaders to challenge the positions of the theory as nothing more than a fad.

While the servant leadership theory seems to be the most ideal when compared with other leadership theories, it scarce to come by and takes time before it could be developed in an organizational setting, since the leader will need time to understand what motivates the followers as well as their needs.

**Spiritual Leadership Theory.** The spiritual leadership theory came from the works of (119), who proposed the concept of spiritual leadership. According to the theory, spiritual leadership is needed to ensure the transformation and continued success of learning organizations. In addition, theory also proposes that learning organizations can be an avenue for members to achieve spiritual survival, and that organizations must motivate workers intrinsically through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, task involvement, and goal identification (119). Spiritual leadership emphasizes intrinsically motivating one’s self and followers through one’s values, attitudes and behaviours (120). According to (121) and (112), spiritual leadership is mix of natural and spiritual qualities geared towards influencing other people to accomplish God’s purposes. The focus is not on the leadership but the engagement of all group

members to meet spiritual needs for enhancing organizational commitment and performance.

Spiritual leadership is made up of three main components; vision, which signifies the leader's values, hope and faith, which is the leader's attitudes, and altruistic love, which is the leader's behaviour. The leader's vision creates a meaningful future, which in turn helps the employees or followers to feel intrinsic self-value and life-purpose. In the same vein, the leader's attitudes of hope and faith reveals the leader's confidence and belief in the feasibility of the vision. The attitudes of hope and faith inspire the subordinates to strive towards achieving the organizational mission. The altruistic behaviour of the leader signifies mutual care and respect for the subordinates, which in turn can help to create a favourable organizational culture for the achievement of organizational mission (120). Therefore, spiritual leadership incorporates vision, hope/faith and altruistic love to motivate oneself and others in order to help instil a sense of spiritual survival (Chen et al., 2013 cited in 120). Spiritual leadership digs deep into the fundamental need for spiritual survival of both the leader and the follower, in order to ensure a more organizationally committed and productive members. Therefore, while other theories of leadership have focused on the physical, mental and emotion aspects of human interaction, the spiritual leadership theory focuses on the spiritual component. The theory incorporates the religious, ethics and values-based approaches to leadership. According to (119), the ultimate goal of spiritual leadership is to create harmony among the four fundamental forces of human existence (the body, the mind, the heart and the spirit), to ensure that people are motivated, committed and highly productive, while experiencing personal joy, inner peace and serenity.

Supporting the line of thought of the spiritual leadership theory, (122) posited that employees have spiritual needs, the same way they have physical, emotional and cognitive needs, and that the needs don't get left at home when they go to work. They argued that spirituality enhances work unit performance. Also, (123) posited that organizations must create a link between work spirituality and the bottom line performance, in order to ensure they fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities to their shareholders and the moral responsibilities to their stakeholders. However, spiritual leadership is part of the larger paradigm of workplace spirituality and spiritual organization, which have been heavily criticized. According to (124), measuring individual and corporate spirituality is like rendering individual and

corporate spirit as mere statistics suitable for techno-calculative manipulations, which will in turn reinforce and perpetuate the unquestioned discourse of capitalist power and control. Sharing the same thought, (125) posited that it will be absurd to try to "factor analyse God", and that efforts directed at reducing spirituality to a set of hypotheses, measures and statistical relationship is not only trivializing the subject, but offensive to the sensibilities of those whose beliefs and values are being evaluated. Furthermore (124) argued that advocates of the spirituality-performance shift, trying to link spirituality with the bottom line are extending the ideals of capitalism and materialism, which in turn contradicts and a compromise of the more human-centered world view. In their critique of spirituality of work, (126) posited that the workplace is not the right place for expression of spirituality and finding deepest meaning in he lives, because business leaders are not spiritual engineers or secular priests charged with the responsibility for the human soul. However, this study believes that every man is a spiritual being, and that his spirituality cannot be separated from his work. It therefore becomes imperative that inasmuch man finds meaning and purpose in his works, organizational leaders must find a way to help him fulfil this fundamental part of him that has implications for his job performance.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

There are various definitions of leadership with no consensus in sight. However, it is observable that there are a lot of repetitions as well as similarities in the various definitions as provided by different scholars. There are general elements that seem to explain what the concept is all about. Leadership is seen as a process of influencing others in a group to achieve common goal, which this study believes should in turn lead to the greater good of the larger society. Leadership is not positional, while the leader-subordinate interaction is fluid and dynamic. In addition, while leadership is about influence, not all influence is good. The case of Adolf Hitler comes to mind. Therefore, leadership is an interaction process occurring in a group with a shared goal and objective, and driven by a member's influence, for the good of the members and greater good of the society. It is imperative that leadership in all its ramification is for the good of all. There are numerous theories of leadership, necessitating the continuous search for an all-inclusive theory. Theories are attempts to simplify what is happening in a set of observations, and they describe the reality that typically seem complex. However, the leadership theory that will

be most useful is the theory that works best with the prevailing situation. Therefore, while leadership theories are not emphatic and conclusive, their understanding will in no small measure help improve the practice of and research about leadership. While the history, development and research of the leadership concept have all failed to produce a consensus about its definitions and approaches, more research to unravel the nature of the concept is inevitable. Leadership is key to handling the challenges of today's world. The world is changing, therefore better understanding of leadership will in no small measure be beneficial to all. Leadership is required to foster purpose, give direction and motivate people to achieve shared goals, especially in the time of crisis, like we are currently witnessing; the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, understanding the various definitions and theories of leadership, will help practitioners to know when and how to utilize the knowledge provided.

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