Michigan Leadership Studies (Behaviourist theory/Behavioural School of Leadership)

The behaviour categories which emerged from University of Michigan were similar to the consideration and initiating structure behaviours identified in the Ohio State studies (Seyranian, pp.1). Formed a group known as the Institute for Social Research (ISR) and studies were conducted under the leadership of organizational psychologist, Rensis Likert in the 1950s. Other members of note include: Kahn, Katz, and Mann. Theory directly opposed to the trait or single continuum approach. Identifies 2 dimensions of leadership behaviour:

1) *Task oriented behaviour* – stresses getting work done, followers are like tools which can be used to complete work and achieve goals.
2) *Relation-oriented behaviour* – focus placed on the personal aspect of work wherein leader looks at worker individuality and attends to each subordinate's personal needs.

These two dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Found that rarely is a leader able to achieve/exhibit both behaviours simultaneously. The emphasis is placed on observed leader behaviour. No assumptions made that leader behaviour which a leader exhibits in one situation will be shown in other group situations – leader behaviour focused on the description of the behaviour (Johns & Moser, pp.116).
The ISR conducted research studies in laboratories, in which behaviours (of students) were observed. They also conducted research in field settings through interviews, which asked subordinates to rate people in authority, usually their direct supervisors. These data sets were then related to various criteria of leader effectiveness.

Theorists

Likert (1961): He was a proponent of participative leadership theory and spent most of his life studying leadership organisations. The objective of his research was to determine the organisation structure, principles, and methods of leadership which result in the best performance (Johns & Moser, pp. 117). His general design in most of these studies has been to examine kinds of leadership and related variables employed by the best units in organisations in contrast to those employed in the poorest. His seminal work, which focuses on the research program conducted by the ISR at the University of Michigan Studies is entailed within his book: *New Patterns of Management*. The basic question the book addresses is: which characteristics of leadership and related variable differentiate between better and poorer departments of an organisation?
Likert, R. (1961). New Patterns of Management. New York: McGrawHill.

Kahn & Katz (1978): The work of Katz and Kahn (1978) described leadership in the manner of behaviours complimenting organizations on a supervisory level. The whole idea of strategic objectives in guiding organizations was that leadership is necessary to ensure the coordinated functioning of the organization as it interacts with a dynamic external environment (Day & Antonakis, 2012). The

organizational levels of leadership studied were through the lower levels such as managers and supervisors and not the entire functioning of the organization (House and Aditya, 1997). Originally, Katz and Kahn (1966) indicated leadership behaviours as "any act of influence on the matter of an organizational institute" (Johns and Moser, 2001, p. 334). Katz and Kahn (1978) were a part of creating the *open systems model* (Van Seters & Field, 1990), which was to understand human organizations. With the understanding that the primary mission of an organization is to provide a set of distinct clues about mission of organization, thus it takes time to discover who is leading or apart of this social system.

Limitations

Research was largely inductive, and lacked theoretical orientation because basic theoretical concepts had not been well developed at the time (House & Adiyta, pp.420). Guiding assumption had been that there are some universally effective leadership behaviours and these could be unearthed via observing leaders in action, or by asking subordinates about the behaviour of their immediate superiors. Little thought was given to the specific role demands of leaders/the context in which they functioned/the differences in dispositions of leaders and followers – these failures lead to researcher's inability to identify leader behaviours that had universal effectiveness (House & Adiyta, pp.421). Moreover, their observations targeted individuals who worked at lower organisational levels rather than observing higher level leaders who were responsible for the functioning of entire organisations (House & Adiyta, pp.420). Additionally, although research supported the dichotomy between task and relations leadership behaviour, there is minimal evidence to suggest that these leadership behaviours were related to an increase in leadership effectiveness in group performance (Seyranian, pp.1). Further research in this area pointed to inconsistent findings which lead to a shift in focus on leadership behaviours, from which emerged the contingency theory of leadership approach.

References

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