

Title: Is Leadership an Innate or Acquired Personality Trait?

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Leadership is a personality trait that has been studied for decades. It is also one of the few traits that get noticed immediately. A natural leader shines in any environment and acts assertively regardless of the circumstances. However, when it comes to leadership origins, many of us are at a loss. Are leaders born to parents who have assertive and agreeable qualities, proving the theory about leadership being a hereditary trait? Are true leaders born through observable behaviors and actions, no matter the origins, social class, or status? Knowing what makes a true leader can help managers and CEOs examine their own roles through the lens of this concept. In addition, it is important to understand what leadership means to different people to improve the overall view of leadership in society.

Before we reach a conclusion about leadership being innate or acquired, we have to look at two psychological factors that make the discussion about leadership so compelling. The first factor that we must consider is the innate leadership theory that suggests leaders can only be born. This theory, albeit having its flaws and imperfections, is nevertheless actively used to justify why some people have more effective leadership strategies than the others. According to this theory of innate leadership, some people are more inclined to demonstrate leadership characteristics from an early age. Psychology specialists even bring genetics into question, stating that the natural leadership traits such as assertiveness and confidence can be viewed as something that can be passed on on a biological level. Moreover, some psychologists believe that if you have a child that likes to take charge in group activities, they will most likely grow up to be an effective leader who knows how to preside over an organization or a company. Therefore, one can say they have a leader's personality from the beginning.

There is also an acquired behavior theory that states leaders are not born but made. This is the theory that suggests anyone can obtain a leadership position in life, as well as skills that accompany this position, including extrovertedness, which is a learned trait and not necessarily a genetic characteristic. The acquired behavior theory also speculates that our development is heavily influenced by our learning abilities and the environment that we grew up in. Therefore, anyone can “teach” themselves how to be confident, or a strong speaker, or a good manager. Someone who is shy can suddenly become a powerful presenter, and a person with a high IQ can overcome their stage fright and transform into a self-assured individual who is not afraid to speak up. Leadership skills, as a result, are viewed as something that can be developed through observable action. In that way, someone who was believed to be lacking the leadership gene (the innate theory) can suddenly become an effective leader.

When looking at leadership as a trait, one may be tempted to speculate that it indeed contains several factors that are interplaying with each other. On the one hand, someone who has a naturally strong presence and is intellectual and opinionated can easily become a good leader, as they do not have to practice those skills in order to be influential. Similarly, some people have to make an effort in order to be seen as determined, strong-willed, and authoritative (Kouzes, Pozner, 2006). They may not have these traits from birth but will cultivate them through observing others, learning from the leaders they know, and obtaining valuable experience to help them shape their personality in accordance with the classic leadership traits. In many situations, leadership becomes a combination of innate and acquired characteristics and cannot be attributed to one trait alone.

For instance, Martin Luther King Jr., who later became one of the most famous motivational speakers of all time, grew up in a supportive environment with a religious background, which helped him become a confident speaker capable of fascinating the crowd through words alone. Winston Churchill, on the other hand, had military experience and political exposure,

which might have made him into the leader whose wise declarations are still used as an example of being a successful leader presiding over a nation (Rumsey, 2012). In other words, leadership can be viewed as an effective combination of nature and nurture.

Another aspect that needs to be brought into view is how leadership is established in different cultures and among different mentalities. In some cultures, being a leader is equated to being loud, brash, brazen, assertive, and overconfident, borderline impudent. Strong leaders are even allowed to use populist, propagandistic slogans as long as they affect the crowd and allow the said leaders to influence the mind. In other cultures, being a leader does not always mean assertiveness without wisdom. On the contrary, it implies that a truly trusted leader must be calm, collected, and stoic in the face of challenges. Leadership is defined as the ability to motivate your followers and find an effective solution.

In conclusion, it must be said that leadership should be viewed as an emotional influence that combines several approaches {(acquired and innate)}.

References

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