

A GUIDE TO TRAIT THEORY OF LEADERSHIP {WITH EXAMPLES}



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A Guide to Trait Theory of Leadership

What Is Trait Theory of Leadership?

Leadership is often left in the hands of a few select individuals. They are often courageous, decisive and willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of their decisions.

Trait theory of leadership is an idea that certain individuals are born with the innate characteristics to make them great leaders.

Not everyone has the **personality** or natural abilities to make a good leader, and those who do not fall into the leader category can be described as followers.

According to the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, the leader is the character that defines history and the creation of historically significant events.

In the text *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, Carlyle explores this theory deeper, identifying the trait theory of **leadership** in historical figures such as Napoleon and Oliver Cromwell.

Carlyle states that these characters have heroic traits that have allowed them to shape their own, and the universal, history of the world they inhabit.

Today, leaders emerge from a variety of backgrounds and are not limited to Carlyle's observations.

This article will explore what the key characteristics of the trait theory of leadership are and how the theory can be harnessed to bring success to a place of work.

We will also outline some of the questions that arise when we discuss the trait theory of leadership.

Which Traits Are Associated With Leadership?

If we base leadership qualities solely on Carlyle's observations and studies, we would be restricted to a few select traits.

Under his definition of the great man, the major traits associated with a leader are:

- **Intelligence**
- **Vision**
- **Ability to come to the fore**

These three traits are still relevant. A great leader is often educated or at least possesses the knowledge of how to direct their business or operations.

They are also aware of where they are going with their project, and they are willing to sacrifice other areas of their life to make it succeed.

However, a great leader has many more qualities. The individuals that run corporations are more rounded than Carlyle would have thought.

Here is a breakdown of the traits that make a great modern leader:

Creativity

Good leaders are often full of ideas and direction. They know how to communicate the plans they have to their team members.

A sign of intelligence is strong creativity. If you are the member at work who is always contributing with new ways to improve the business, then you may have the traits to become a leader.

They are also not afraid of **communicating** their creative plans.

Strong leaders need to be confident in the ideas they are putting forward to the rest of the team.

Creativity is hard to come across, and it is not as common as you would think. Truly creative individuals think in ways that can be considered to be outside of the box.

For example, if you have been put in a team to complete an eight-week project, the creative individual within that team will have already figured out the end product before the work has started.

Communication

A strong team leader ensures that their instructions are heard clearly. **Communication skills** are essential for getting a team to co-operate.

Good leaders can provide clear knowledge and direct. They do not fluff their words when it comes to work.

This can come across as being impolite, but a good leader needs to avoid the use of emotion in their language.

If anything needs to be explained, then you would be able to get clarity from your team leader.

Good leaders are also masters at breaking tasks down to make them simple.

Communicating the aims and how a team is to achieve these can be challenging, but a strong leader should make their team feel confident that they can reach their targets.

Teamwork

Competent leaders know which roles suit certain team members and will delegate the work accordingly.

They know who the specialists are in their team, and they put them on the right tasks to achieve the best results.

Good leaders are also not afraid to get involved with the work themselves. The direction of projects and the communication of the aims are essential, but a team leader needs to set a strong working example.

They will be there if there are any difficult tasks that demand collaboration. In addition, they will also have an idea of who **needs to improve** and who needs extra support.

If your team leader is lazy and reluctant to do any work, then it is unlikely that they will be inspiring to the other team members. A good leader motivates others through their willingness.

Resolution Skills

Sometimes a project does not go to plan, and sometimes, there are disagreements within a team.

The best leaders are the first ones to deal with this. They will be willing to take

accountability for any mistakes and will be supportive of other team members.

They also look towards the rectification of any problems. Good leaders do not shift the blame elsewhere.

We all know of individuals in the workplace who struggle with **responsibility**. These people make poor leaders because they are unwilling to accept accountability.

A good leader should recognize the need to accept accountability. The quicker they identify the problem and reconcile with it, the faster they can look towards finding a solution.

If there is an argument or a **disagreement** on a project, a good leader should not take sides. They should try to remain diplomatic so that they can hear both sides of the discussion.

They should encourage cohesion and collaboration between the team, as their ultimate goals of success will be prioritized over friendships or taking sides.

Competency

Results speak for themselves, and a good leader knows this over anything else. They should want to succeed to build a strong resume.

A leader is measured by how successful their projects have been and the amount of profit they bring to a company or corporation.

Poor leaders are not found at the top of organizations because their track record speaks for itself. Incompetency does not result in a person becoming a leader.

A good leader will prioritize the success of a working project over everything else, and they will be willing to go the extra length to achieve this.



A Guide to Trait Theory of Leadership: Definition and Examples

How to Use the Trait Theory of Leadership

Trait theory of leadership is not without its problem. In fact, it is considered to be quite a controversial theory.

For those who believe that good leaders are created, the trait theory of leadership is the antithesis of what they believe.

However, whether you believe that individuals are born with trait characteristics that make good leaders or if they are instead taught and cultivated, the trait theory of leadership is certainly a useful tool.

For people who want to **climb and succeed** in the workplace or even in sport, they must be willing to identify themselves as a potential leader.

Using the trait theory of leadership can help someone understand what traits they need to be successful.

It is also essential for productivity, even for those who do not intend on becoming leaders.

Thomas Carlyle's identification of intelligence and vision are needed in people who have creative pursuits in mind.

Being able to measure the abundance of these in yourself can help you understand how likely you are to achieve something like a creative pursuit.

Understanding what leadership traits you have can also be beneficial to your career trajectory.

For example, if you recognize that you possess strong communication skills and good teamworking abilities, you can use these in most career paths.

Identifying these traits will enable you to acknowledge where your strengths are and will therefore help you pick the right career path.

Even if you do not intend on becoming a leader, the skills mentioned above will help you succeed in most corporate working positions.

The ways in which you can use the trait theory of leadership can be broken down into three categories.

Personal Development

Trait theory is also good at highlighting where you need to improve.

After self-assessment, you may recognize that you are not great at working in team-related environments.

You can create scenarios or put yourself in situations which will help your **skill set grow**.

This is an essential part of becoming a well-rounded employee. You have to know your weaknesses to improve them.

Role Requirements

If you are applying for a new job or a new position within work, you need to understand what is required of you.

Using the trait theory of leadership can help you analyze how your skills match up with a position of work.

For example, you might have identified your strengths in creativity, competency, and intelligence, but you may have also identified weaknesses in **teamwork** and communication.

In this case, you would prioritize positions where you can use your best skills. Customer service roles may not be suited to this skill set, but more artistic and independent roles will be.

Some of these include illustration, photography, writing and animation.

Self-Assessment

The most important use of trait theory is self-assessment. You will be asked in all of your **interviews** and in the workplace **what your strengths are**.

Trait theory will allow you to identify these quickly. The better you know your skill set, the quicker you can use it to build yourself into a leader.

Final Thoughts

You do not have to take every trait of leadership as the only measurement of what makes a good leader.

It is more important to use the trait theory of leadership to judge which skills you have and what you need to work on.

All individuals have **different strengths**, and it is very rare that you come across one person that has all the innate traits that make a good leader.

It is best to accept that you will need to develop yourself. In time you will make yourself suitable for leadership if you dedicate yourself to it.