**LEADERS ARE BORN, NOT MADE**

**INTRODUCTION**

Bruce Fairchild Barton quoted “It is said that great leaders are born, not made. The saying is true to this degree, that no man can persuade people to do what he wants them to do, unless he genuinely likes people, and believes that what he wants them to do is to their own advantage.”

This statement suggests that specific types of personalities inherently qualify for characteristics that make up a good leader. There are some inborn characteristics that supply people with the ingredients for flawless leadership. For instance, traits like empathy, intelligence, physical capabilities, charisma etc are.

Leadership has a tremendous importance in today’s competitive corporate world. With the aid of leadership, a company achieves high expectations and smoothly navigates through various challenges in the world of business. Being a leader is about leading a group/organisation with wilful passion to achieve great successes, being a role model with qualities like courage, knowledge, confidence etc.

We have often heard statements like a certain person is ‘gifted’ or ‘born with’ talents. Born leaders are different to made or artificial leaders. Just like some people, since birth are inclined towards art, music, or are analytical-minded, similarly, some are leaders since birth. This does not mean that leaders aren’t made. Situations and ways of upbringings shape up people.

Traits a person possesses since childhood are a bedrock to whatever subsequent influences, he/she faces and absorbs. Situations subtly change a person temporarily. This is called “phases”. For example, an extraverted person might become reserved for a while in their life because of some circumstances but turns back to being social after that phase passes.

**OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH**

1. To study the importance of leadership in the present world
2. To examine whether leaders are born or made

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For the purpose of understanding leadership, both nature (genetics) and nurture (environmental influences) should be considered.

**DEFINING LEADERSHIP**

“There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.” [[1]](#footnote-1) One simple description of leadership is- “the act of instructing and guiding individuals in a work setting” (Nelson & Quick, 2015). Leadership is not only restricted to the workplace, guiding a team of colleagues, it is utilised everywhere in life like giving people guidance and direction, navigating through life, getting out of problems, making decisions etc.

Leadership as a practice developed when the first civilisations came up. Back then, the one who was physically the strongest would be the leader of a tribal group since he could provide for the group as well as protect it. Physical strength and tolerance was something that they were born with and hence are the best example to illustrate our research objective. There have been many great leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Mao Zedong, Nelson Mandela etc. and their characteristics have been studied over the years.

Leadership can be considered as a main asset a company must have. It enables an institution to approach expectations in an organised manner. A good leader not only leads their team mates, but also encourages them to move ahead with stability. Hence leadership requires quantitative and qualitative skills which they are either born with or are acquired throughout the journey of education and experience. Many believe that leadership traits are present in a person since birth and are developed and perfected over time.

**LEADERSHIP THEORIES DEVELOPED**

The “Great Man Theory” and later known as “Trait theory”, which came up in the 1840s by Thomas Carlyle, said that leadership traits are intrinsic, meaning that great leaders are born and these people will emerge in the appropriate situations. [[2]](#footnote-2) These individuals possess certain qualities and talents, such as deep honesty, moral vision, compassion and care, that make them well-suited for leadership[[3]](#footnote-3).

The trait theory in its simplest terms talks about leadership as an inherited skill. It says that some people have the exact innate traits and are destined to become leaders in the course of their life. These include, achievement, influence, responsibility (Stogdill 1974), drive, motivation, (Kirkpatrick et al.1991), self-confidence (Stogdill 1948), cognitive ability, honesty and integrity, (Zaccaro et al. 2004), and interpersonal skills (McCall 1983).[[4]](#footnote-4)

In the modern world, leadership as an institution developed in the twentieth century. James MacGregor Burns is credited with his tremendous work in leadership studies around 1978 and is widely recognised as the father of leadership studies. He was followed by many other theorists and researchers who augmented the materials on leadership studies.

GE**NOMIC STUDIES**

Over the years, numerous studies, examining twins, adopted children, have been conducted to find the possibility of the role of genetics in leadership. Some studies show strong evidence for heredity of human personality from family, twins, and adoption studies[[5]](#footnote-5). One study, the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart, studied 350 pairs of twins between 1979 and 1999. Participants included both identical and fraternal twins who were either raised together or apart. Results revealed that personalities of identical twins were similar whether they were raised in the same household or apart, suggesting that some aspects of personality are influenced by genetics.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Human personality is 30-60% heritable ruled some twin and adoption studies. More than hundreds of genetic variants influence personality traits but only a few have been identified.

Despite recent advances in genomics and phenomics, the architecture of human personality has remained uncertain.

The DAT1 gene, which is the focus of the study of y Prof. Li Wendong, Assistant Professor from the Department of Management at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School showcases a specific genetic marker related to human dopamine systems which play a significant role in influencing human behaviours, such as motivation, self-control, and reward systems. According to the study, these traits are found to be necessary in a leader. Prof. Li Wendong quoted “In our study, we found that DAT1 was positively related to moderate rule breaking, which was positively associated with leadership role occupancy. In other words, having this gene seems a mixed blessing for one’s becoming a leader, through two distinctive paths”.

“Children are born with some early signs of their personality, called temperament,” explains Dr. Jessica Myszak, a Glenville, Illinois-based child psychologist and the director of The Help and Healing Center. “These are usually evident in the first few days to weeks of life. It’s estimated that 20-60% of temperament is due to genetics. There are three types of temperament: easy, difficult, or slow-to-warm-up.”

In a study by DeNeve and colleagues evaluating the traits that determine leadership role occupancy, the shared environment of the twins was not significant with only a 10% correlation. However, the genetic component was found to be 24%/. [[7]](#footnote-7)

A recent study (Hannah 2013, p 393) from Wake University found that there are neurological differences in the brains of people who are leaders.

**CONCLUSION**

As long as there are leaders, the debate whether they are born or made will continue.

Personality is a multifactorial subject- it is influenced by many factors- both genetic and environmental. The debate between nature v nurture or genes v environmental causes has confused scientists, biologists, researchers etc from old times. Both nature and nurture play an indispensable role in building up a personality suitable for leadership.

Ruling that heroes are born and not made challenges the $366 billion industry that trains employees for leadership development and coaching. Companies and organisations spend massive amounts of money to build leaders, training them in skills like self-discipline, commitment, team-spiritedness. But the traits that fuel these qualities like passion, extravertedness, willingness, dominance etc are inborn and the people who do not possess these are less likely to become a leader. Leadership is rather an art- it is a set of inherited traits that are perfected and refined over the course of life, aided by education, training, ultimately, leading to a product of a successful leader.

After the consideration of all the aforementioned points, the answer to the question- “Are leaders born or made” is both. There are various types of leaders in the society which has also given rise to many differing views on whether leaders are born or made. Hence, fuelling the old debate of nature vs. nurture.

1. Stogdill RM. Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research. New York, NY: The Free Press; 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Carlyle T. On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History. Project Gutenberg; 2012. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1091/1091-h/1091-h.htm. Accessed November 4, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gini A, Green RM. 10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders: Leadership & Character. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Inc; 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Justin Di Giulio, Are leaders born or made, PSM310 Leadership and Business Acumen, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Justin-Di-Giulio/publication/270684591\_Are\_leaders\_born\_or\_made/links/54b2798e0cf28ebe92e234b7/Are-leaders-born-or-made.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bouchard TJ Jr, McGue M. Genetic and environmental influences on human psychological differences. J Neurobiol. 2003;54:4–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thomas J. Bouchard Jr, David T. Lykken, Matthew McGue, Nancy L. Segal and Auke Tellegen" “Sources of Human Psychological Differences: The Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart” (1990) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. DeNeve J-E, Mikhaylov S, Dawes CT, Christakis NA, Fowler JH. Born to lead? A twin design and genetic association study of leadership role occupancy. Leaders Q. 2013;24(1):45-60 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)