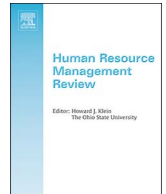




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## Managing people in organizations: Integrating the study of HRM and leadership

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### ABSTRACT

The studies of Leadership and HR-Management share a common goal: Developing a better understanding of how to effectively manage people in organizations. Despite this shared goal, these fields of research remain largely independent, with few studies considering how HRM and Leadership co-determine employee motivation and performance. This state of the literature is deplorable as Leadership and HRM have the potential to counterbalance each other; in theory as well as in research design. In this overview article to this special issue, we first highlight similarities and differences in approaches to people management by mapping key approaches to Leadership and HRM on a value framework. Next, we integrate theory on person-environment fit and strategic HR alignment to map seven possible ways in which Leadership and HRM may interact: Independent, Enactment, Supplementary Fit, Synergistic Fit, Complementary Fit, Perceptual Filter, and Dynamic Fit. We discuss the implications of this theoretical framework for future research that studies the intersection of Leadership and HRM.

### 1. Introduction

A frequently cited idea, both in practice as well as in academia, is that *people are an organization's greatest asset* (e.g., Bradley and McDonald, 2011). Beyond the humanistic and moral ideal that places the value of individuals above the institutes that are supposed to serve them, this idea reflects the hypothesis – subject to empirical testing – that investing in human beings is important in creating welfare (for organizations and individuals alike). For the past decades, social scientists have strived to lend credence to the importance of investing in human beings in the workplace, with mixed success. Specifically, in this special issue, we highlight two well-developed streams of research: HRM and Leadership. Whereas Leadership is typically focused on understanding the personal and interpersonal dynamics of how individuals influence each other towards collective goals (Northouse, 2015), HRM looks at the systems and processes in an organization that attempt to influence people in a systematic way, usually on a larger scale (Lievens, 2015). In essence, both Leadership and HRM are engaged in what we can broadly term *people management*, albeit from different angles.<sup>1</sup>

Despite clear overlap in goals, the fields of Leadership and HRM have developed largely separately, each taking important strides in developing the knowledge on how to effectively manage or influence people in an organizational context. At the same time, both are also not without limitations or critique, and we discuss some of their strengths and weaknesses here.

On the one hand, a strength of the leadership literature is that across several reviews of the literature it has demonstrated clear links between leader behaviors and relevant outcomes, most notably follower motivation and performance (DeRue and Myers, 2014; Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, and Lord, 2017). In other words, leadership matters in organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Some scholars would argue that management is uniquely distinct from leadership, suggesting that management is about “things” and leadership is about “people” (Kotter, 1999; Zalesnik, 1977). In using the term people management, we seek overcome this dichotomy. This is important as many have a romantic, idealistic view of the importance of leadership (Meindl, 1990) and thereby - at the very least indirectly - placing lower value on (HR) management. In this paper, we align with others (Mintzberg, 2015) in the idea that while leadership and HR-management are distinct from each other, one should not be valued above the other. To the contrary, as we seek to show here, we believe that both are necessary elements that need to work together for the optimal management of people in organization.

At the same time, the leadership literature has been critiqued for its plethora of similar constructs (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, and Guler, 2016; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Yukl, 2012). While these different constructs reflect important conceptual distinctions in leadership, the overreliance on subjective measurement diffuses distinctions to a general liking of the leader. Beyond this bias in measurement, the link of leadership to performance is often explained through very similar theoretical processes across leadership styles (Fischer, Dietz, and Antonakis, 2017; Meuser et al., 2016). Despite these similarities, the work focusing on these styles tends to be value-infused or normative in advocating for one optimal way of leading (Mumford and Fried, 2014; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), with less research revealing contingencies that suggest important boundary conditions to any construct (Fiedler and Chemers, 1967). Accordingly, there has been a call for less emphasis on demonstrating the performance outcomes and mediating mechanisms and more on how follower characteristics (Shamir, 2007) and contextual factors (Den Hartog and Koopman, 2001) co-determine leadership. While recently more research has shown moderators, few studies look at contextual contingency factors, for instance in terms of HR approach. Corresponding with the normative approach that these leadership styles work in all circumstances, research often seems to forget the larger organizational context in which leaders operate as another important source of influence for employees. In sum, although there have been many calls for a multi-level study of leadership, the state of the science predominantly looks at leadership as an individual phenomenon (Batistic, Cerne, and Vogel, 2017).

On the other hand, the HRM field takes a more macro-level approach to managing people. Traditionally, research in the field of HRM focused less on subjective phenomena and instead relied on more objective measurement of the various methods available to influence people in a systematic way (e.g., selection, performance management, rewards). These methods are somewhat less dependent on the idiosyncratic personality or skills of the individual leader such that any manager or organization can use these to systematically influence followers.

Despite these strengths, the HR literature is not without critique. For instance, in terms of research design, especially in terms of measurement models, HR research is often (practically) constrained in design (e.g., Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, and Snell, 2000). This practical focus is also translated in less theoretical grounding (Keegan and Boselie, 2006). Furthermore, despite initial positive evidence (Becker, Huselid, Pickus, and Spratt, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Wright, Gardner, and Moynihan, 2003), reviews suggest that the relationship between HRM and performance is not as strong as typically assumed (Den Hartog, Boselie, and Paauwe, 2004; Shin and Konrad, 2017; Tzabbar, Tzafir, and Baruch, 2017). If anything, this suggests that additional mediators are necessary to better understand how HRM (fails to) influence performance, unveiling the black box (Becker and Huselid, 2006) and the subjective processes by which HR practices get enacted, perceived, and ultimately interpreted (Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider, 2008). Often highlighted as an important factor in this - but less so studied- is the role of front-line managers or leaders in implementing HR (Nishii, Khattab, Shemla, and Paluch, 2017; Nishii and Wright, 2007; Piening, Baluch, and Ridder, 2014; Sikora, Ferris, and Van Iddekinge, 2015). Initial studies suggest this implementation process is not without problems. For example, the HRM practices managers indicate they implement often differs strongly from perceptions of employees of these HR practices (e.g., Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, and Croon, 2013; Liao, Toya, Lepak, and Hong, 2009).

The previous overview suggests that many of the strengths and challenges of each domain (HRM and Leadership) could be counterbalanced by theoretical insights and empirical research findings from the other domain. For example, insights from the work on leadership could help better understand how HRM is implemented in organizations and work on HRM could provide knowledge on contextual influences in the leadership field. Not only are there interesting avenues for cross-fertilization, we believe that a more mutual understanding and influence between these domains is necessary to come to a better understanding of effective people management in organizations. In that sense, an integration of the HR and Leadership literature is not only a fruitful avenue for academic study, but equally necessary to ensure that people management receives the legitimacy and power to affect strategic organizational decisions (De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris, 2012; Woodrow and Guest, 2014).

To start addressing this issue, we invited submissions for a special issue to start "Bridging the gap between HRM and Leadership" resulting in six articles (including this overview article and an introductory article). In the rest of this introductory article, rather than just reiterating what was done in each of these articles, we try to organize and integrate the relevant perspectives introduced in this special issue into a bigger whole, thus generating new insights beyond what is presented in the articles. We do this in the following manner: In a first section, we lay the groundwork by attempting to organize the various different ways of influencing others (both in terms of leadership styles and HR-systems) using a lens of value-based influence. In a second section, we then focus on the different ways in which Leadership and HRM can interact with each other. Building on the value-lens of section one, we predominantly use reasoning around value fit to highlight how HR and Leadership might interact. In a third and final section, we highlight the implications of the previous two sections.

## 2. Leadership and HRM: value-based influence

Over the past years, many "positive" leadership styles have been proposed to capture the different ways by which leaders influence followers. Amongst others, authors have discussed constructs like transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, authentic, shared and inclusive leadership and LMX. While we argued earlier that these styles have been critiqued to show overlap in measurement and outcomes studied, there are nevertheless marked differences in theoretical and philosophical underpinnings: different styles build on diverse belief systems of how people are motivated and thus how leaders can motivate them.

To help capture this diversity in belief systems, we combine the value-framework of Schwartz (1999) with the corresponding idea of value-based leadership (House, 1996) into an overall organizing framework. In reflecting desired-end goals, values provide insight into how individuals are differentially motivated, how those motives influence their behaviors, and how leaders end up motivating followers (Schwartz, 1999). More specifically, Schwartz's value model maps four core dimensions on two axes: self-enhancement (the

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