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Construct redundancy in leader behaviors: A review and agenda for the future^{☆, ☆ ☆}

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ABSTRACT

Leadership remains a popular and heavily researched area in the social sciences. Such popularity has led to a proliferation of new constructs within the leadership domain. Here, we argue that such construct proliferation without pruning is unhealthy and violates the principle of parsimony. Our purpose was to examine construct redundancy via a comprehensive review of task-oriented, relational, passive, and inspirational leader behaviors as well as values-based and moral leadership behaviors. Our findings, as indexed via meta-analytic correlations, reveal that construct redundancy remains problematic for the leadership literature. In addition, many of the values-based and moral behavior models correlated heavily with constructs traditionally examined as outcome variables (e.g., trust, LMX, justice). Implications for future research are discussed in regards to construct redundancy and how to avoid endogeneity bias in primary studies in the leadership literature.

The popularity and size of the leadership literature continues to expand rapidly in both the academic (Banks et al., 2017; Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2016; Montano, Reeske, Franke, & Hüffmeier, 2016) and the popular press (Covey, 2014; George, 2015; Rath & Conchie, 2008). As a by-product of this interest in leadership, the number of leadership constructs (i.e., leader traits, behaviors, and styles) has also grown voluminously. The lack of a parsimonious nomological network is not unique to the leadership literature. Nevertheless, the creation of new constructs seems more typical to leadership research than perhaps any other topic studied in organizational behavior. Such a proliferation of constructs draws concerns regarding the potential for redundancy in the accumulated literature (Banks et al., 2016; DeRue, Nahrang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Rowold, Borgmann, & Diebig, 2015; Shaffer, DeGeest, & Li, 2016). We argue below that such a focus on breadth rather than depth achieved through rigorous tests of existing theoretical frameworks causes inefficiency in accumulated knowledge in the study of leadership (Leavitt, Mitchell, & Peterson, 2010; Schmidt, 2010).

Specifically, our purpose in this review is to examine the potential for construct redundancy amongst the most frequently studied *leader behavior* frameworks, with regard to important individual and organizational correlates (see Fig. 1). The breadth of leadership literature

precludes a full examination of all leadership constructs (e.g., traits, behaviors, attributes, styles, and motives) in one review. We concentrate only on leader behaviors for this reason. We build on House and Aditya's (1997) review of leadership behaviors (see Traditional Leader Behaviors in Fig. 1) by incorporating a wider range of leadership behaviors (i.e., Values-Based Leader Behaviors in Fig. 1). Our review focuses on approaches to leadership behavior that emerged in the last two decades, including moral components. Interestingly, the field seems to have shifted from an inspirational focus (or what DeRue et al. 2011, term change focus) to a moral focus in studying leader behaviors. The four behavioral frameworks listed in the bottom half of Fig. 1 in the Values-based or Moral leader behaviors category reflect the domain of leader behaviors that are tied together via an underlying common core in morality, values, or a sense of empathy for others and their positions.¹ Despite extensive amounts of empirical work in these newer domains, we know little yet regarding their precision in predicting outcomes or associations with correlates beyond each other as well as the older well-established behavior constructs listed in the traditional category of Fig. 1.

Such a review is important for several reasons. First, the sheer volume of similar and overlapping leader behavior constructs is problematic because it violates the principle of parsimony. Seen as a

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¹ Admittedly, servant leadership is not new but has seen resurgence in the last few decades. Servant leadership was initially cast as an antidote to the lack of moral boundaries in transformational and charismatic leadership as originally conceptualized in the seventies (Graham, 1991).

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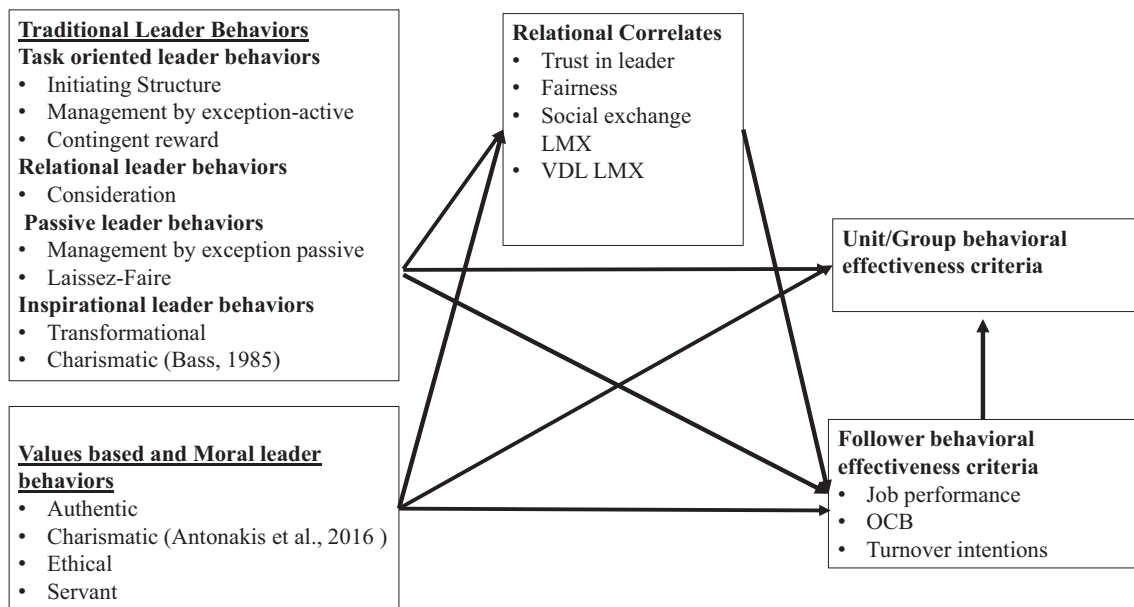


Fig. 1. Integrative theoretical framework of leader behaviors, correlates, and outcomes.

fundamental principle of a well-developed scientific paradigm, parsimony is necessary for good and rigorous research to take place. The concept is also known as Occam's razor, which posits that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity" (Tornay, 1938). New constructs should not be added unless they contribute value over existing constructs (Blumer, Ehrenfeucht, Haussler, & Warmuth, 1987). This principle is a fundamental building block in many other mature disciplines from physics to biology to medicine wherein parsimony has been favored for centuries. It is a key guiding principle in the works of Newton's laws of motion, Heisenberg's development of the uncertainty principle, and quantum mechanics. In the leadership literature, perplexingly enough, available theoretical and empirical evidence does not indicate any focus on parsimony (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2016).

However, previous research demonstrates opportunities for a more parsimonious understanding of leadership. For example, a meta-analytic review by Banks et al. (2016) found that authentic leadership might not add much incremental validity beyond transformational leadership when predicting follower satisfaction, performance, and leader effectiveness. Yet, authentic leadership proved superior to the earlier established transformational leadership in predicting organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and unit performance. Similarly, Hoch et al. (2016) examined the incremental validity of ethical and moral leadership constructs, such as ethical, servant, and authentic leadership, over and above the older and established transformational leadership in predicting a variety of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. Overall, ethical and authentic leadership also did not add utility over transformational leadership in predicting performance outcomes, whereas, servant leadership did. The findings were mixed when it came to predicting moral outcomes such as deviance and citizenship, with the ethical leadership constructs all significantly predicting more variance than transformational leadership. In sum, the leadership literature appears to be both in need of and ready for parsimony.

Second, the prior reviews of leader behavior leave several unanswered questions suggesting the need for a more comprehensive review. First, previous reviews on leadership behavior reveal mixed or inconclusive findings. DeRue et al. (2011) suggest that traditional leader behaviors are rather important for explaining variance (e.g., 20–70%) in outcomes such as leader effectiveness, follower job satisfaction, and group/unit performance. Yet, from the Banks et al. (2016) and Hoch et al. (2016) reviews, the correlations between older

constructs, especially transformational leadership, and newer ones, such as authentic or ethical leadership are alarmingly high (greater than 0.70), suggesting empirical construct redundancy. Second, the utility of these new constructs previously seemed to rest on the outcome of interest. The current literature does not offer a comprehensive evaluation of the vast array of leader behaviors in one study as we do presently. To be precise, we offer a comparison of leader behavior frameworks from the traditional years, with more recent behavioral approaches, thus offering perhaps the most comprehensive review of leader behaviors to date (see Table 1 and Fig. 1 for a full list). Furthermore, we provide estimates of the extent of their overlap with attitudinal and perceptual correlates (e.g. trust in leader, leader-member exchange (LMX), organizational commitment, justice perceptions, and empowerment).

It is worth noting that as a meta-analytic review, our conclusions are limited by characteristics of the primary studies available. Given that many leadership studies fail to adequately meet the conditions necessary to establish causality (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010), our results are also limited in this way. Further, following guidance from Antonakis (2017) we do not conduct additional meta-analytic regression because of concerns regarding endogeneity bias in the primary studies. It is almost impossible to conclude causal effects based on the accumulated primary studies in leader behaviors due to severe concerns surrounding research design and endogeneity.

On a broader scope, we believe our work offers a primer on traditional and contemporary leadership constructs, their measurement (e.g., scales), and associations with outcomes in their nomological network. The remainder of our paper is as follows: We begin by briefly reviewing the theoretical and methodological causes of empirical construct redundancy. We then discuss common approaches for detecting empirical construct redundancy, which include considerations of content, convergent, and discriminant validity. Specifically, content validity is evaluated by a team of raters by comparing each scale's items with its definitional space (Colquitt, Baer, Long, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2014; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Convergent and discriminant validity of leadership constructs are assessed via consideration of the factor loadings and estimates (e.g., average variance extracted) from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA; Fornell & Larcker, 1981) in addition to our review of meta-analytic estimates. Our review sheds light on which leader behaviors may be redundant (and perhaps should be discontinued or re-focused in the field). Further, we highlight those

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