Leadership: Current Theories, Research, And Future Directions

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A b s t r a c t

This review examines recent theoretical and empirical developments in the leadership literature, beginning with topics that are currently receiving attention in terms of research, theory, and practice. We begin by examining authentic leadership and its development, followed by work that takes a cognitive science approach. We then examine new-genre leadership theories, complexity leadership, and leadership that is shared, collective, or distributed. We examine the role of relationships through our review of leader member exchange and the emerging work on followership. Finally, we examine work that has been done on substitutes for leadership, servant leadership, spirituality and leadership, cross-cultural leadership, and e-leadership. This structure has the benefit of creating a future focus as well as providing an interesting way to examine the development of the field. Each section ends with an identification of issues to be addressed in the future, in addition to the overall integration of the literature we provide at the end of the article.

Background to the Study

One of our goals for this integrative re-view is to examine the ways in which the field of leadership is evolving and the consequences of its evolutionary path for the models, methods, and populations examined. For example, at the outset of the field of leader-ship, the primary focus was on studying an individual leader, who was most likely a male working in some large private-sector organization in the United States. Today, the field of leadership focuses not only on the leader, but also on followers, peers, supervisors, work setting/context, and culture, including a much broader array of individuals representing the entire spectrum of diversity, public, private, and not-for-profit organizations, and increasingly over the past 20 years, samples of populations from nations around the globe. Leadership is no longer simply described as an individual characteristic or difference, but rather is depicted in various models as dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global, and a complex social dynamic (Avolio 2007, Yukl 2006).

We organize our examination of how leadership is evolving by discussing significant areas of inquiry that represent current pillars in leadership research, some understandable taller than others. We highlight the current state of each particular area of inquiry, and discuss what we know, what we don't know, and what remains interesting possibilities to pursue in future research. Given our space limitations, we focus more on the current state of these respective areas in terms of advances in theory, research, and practice, including the criticisms and boundaries of theories, models, and methods wherever appropriate. From this analysis, we offer some recommendations for future directions that the science of leadership could pursue, and we discuss the potential implications for leadership practice.

Looking back over the past 100 years, we cannot imagine a more opportune time for the field of leadership studies. Never before has so much attention been paid to leadership, and the fundamental question we must ask is, what do we know and what should we know about leaders and leader-ship? We begin addressing these questions not by going back to the earliest work in leadership, but rather by focusing on what is most current in the field. We then examine other areas from which the current work has emerged, rather than examining leadership material covered in recent reviews (Gelfand et al. 2007, Goethals 2005) or pro-viding a comprehensive historical review of the field that is better left to the *Handbook of Leadership* (Bass & Bass 2008; see also Yukl & Van Fleet 1992).

Overview of Authentic Leadership

One of the emerging pillars of interest in the field of leadership has been called authentic leadership development. As dis-cussed in a special issue [edited by Avolio & Gardner (2005)] of the *Leadership Quarterly* on this topic and in an earlier theoretical piece by Luthans & Avolio (2003), the advent of work on authentic leadership development came as a result of writings on transformational leadership, in which authors such as Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) suggest that there is pseudo versus authentic transformational leaders.

Luthans & Avolio (2003) also introduced the concept of authentic leadership development into the literature with the goal of integrating work on (Luthans 2002) positive organizational behavior with the life-span leadership development work of Avolio (1999). Their main purpose was to examine what constituted genuine leadership development including what worked and didn't work to develop leaders and leadership, as well as to bring to the foreground some of the recent work in positive psychology as a foundation for examining how one might accelerate the development. Luthans and Avolio reasoned that using some of the theoretical work in positive psychology such as Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, they could offer a more positive way for conceptualizing leadership development. According to Fredrickson, those individuals who have more positive psycho-logical resources are expected to grow more effectively or to broaden themselves and build out additional personal resources to perform. Luthans and Avolio report that to a large extent, the prior leadership development work was based on a deficit-reduction model strategy, where one discovered what was wrong with a leader and then worked to correct deficits in terms of focusing on the leader's development (also see Avolio & Luthans 2006).

Authentic Leadership Development
Up until very recently, one would be hard-pressed to find in the leadership literature a general model of leadership development (Luthans & Avolio 2003). Even more difficult to find is evidence-based leader-ship development. Specifically, what evidence is there to support whether leaders or leadership can be developed using one or more specific theories of leadership? This question led to a concerted effort to explore what was known about whether leaders are born or made, as well as the efficacy of leadership interventions.

Cognitive Psychology and Leadership
The cognitive science leadership literature is an area of research and theory containing a wide range of approaches that are united by their focus on explaining the way leaders and followers think and process information. This literature includes a broad range of topics such as self-concept theory, meta-cognitions, and implicit leadership theory (e.g., Lord & Emrich 2000), which are addressed in more detail below.

One of the more recent developments in the literature has been an attempt to develop models of leadership cognition. Lord & Hall (2005) developed a model of leadership development that emphasized the leader's cognitive attributes or abilities. A second model was developed by Mumford et al. (2003) and examined the way shared thinking contributed to leader creativity. These two approaches illustrate a funda-mental way in which views of leadership cognitions vary, with the former focusing on activities with the individual leader and the latter focusing on interactions that occur between individuals (Mumford et al. 2007). We examine several of the key emerging constructs within this literature, beginning with the self-concept.

Complexity Leadership
Many previous models of leadership have been designed to accommodate more

traditional hierarchical structures of organizations. To the degree that organizations are hierarchical, so too are leadership models (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Yet, there has been a growing sense of tension in the leadership literature that models of leadership that were designed for the past century may not fully capture the leadership dynamic of organizations operating in today's knowledge-driven economy (Lichtenstein et al. 2007). Applying the concepts of complexity theory to the study of leadership has resulted in what has been referred to as complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien & Marion 2008). Based on this framework, leadership is viewed as an interactive system of dynamic, unpredictable agents that interact with each other in complex feedback networks, which can then produce adaptive outcomes such as knowledge dissemination, learning, innovation, and further adaptation to change (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). According to complex systems leadership theory, "leadership can be enacted through *any interaction* in an organization, leadership is an *emergent* phenomenon within complex systems" (Hazy et al. 2007, p. 2). In line with leadership fitting the needs of the situation or challenges in which it operates, complexity leadership posits that to achieve optimal performance, organizations cannot be designed with simple, rationalized structures that underestimate the complexity of the context in which the organization must function and adapt (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). Simply viewing the leader and follower in a simple exchange process won't fly in terms of explaining the full dynamics of leadership.

Shared, Collective, or Distributed Leadership
Similar to our discussion above about complexity leadership, we see more evidence for shared or collective leadership in organizations as hierarchical levels are deleted and team-based structures are inserted. In describing shared and team leadership, it is important to point out that these forms of leadership are typically viewed as different streams of research. For example, team leadership research has typically focused on the role of an individual leading the team. In contrast, those authors examining shared leadership generally view it as a process versus a person engaging multiple members of the team. In this section, we re-fer to the terms "shared leadership," "dis-tributed leadership," and "collective leadership" interchangeably, paralleling their usage in the leadership literature.

Spirituality and Leadership
One might ask leaders the question, do you feel there is something missing in the work that you do and the way you lead others? Many authors have referred to that void and have attempted to examine how a greater sense of spirituality in the workplace may be fostered. The research on workplace spirituality also now includes a focus on spiritual leadership defined as "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (Fry 2003, p. 711).

Dent et al. (2005) examined how spirituality and leadership was defined in the literature and concluded, "The field of study is marked by all of the typical characteristics of paradigm development including a lack of consensus about a definition of work-place

spirituality" (p. 626). Fry (2003) con-tends that spiritual leadership adds to the existing leadership literature components that have been explicitly missing, such as a sense of calling on the part of leaders and followers as well as the creation of organizational cultures characterized by altruistic love whereby leaders and followers express genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. Fry (2003) states, "The ultimate effect of spiritual leadership is to bring together or create a sense of fusion among the four fundamental forces of human existence (body, mind, heart, and spirit) so that people are motivated for high performance, have increased organizational commitment, and personally experience joy, peace, and serenity".

E-Leadership
Leading virtually involves leading people from different departments, organizations, countries, and sometimes even competitor companies (Avolio et al. 2001). In virtual teams, "challenges are more likely to occur when distributed work occurs in different time zones, when local communication and human infrastructures fail, when team members' hardware and software platforms are different, or when local work demands require the immediate attention of collocated managers and workers, thereby creating pressure to pursue local priorities over the objectives of distant collaborators" (A. Weisband 2008).

Zigurs (2003) suggested that traditional leadership models built on a foundation of face-to-face interactions may not fully ex-plain how virtual leadership and team's work. Specifically, how one provides feed-back, encouragement, rewards, and motivation needs to be re-examined where leadership is mediated through technology. Zigurs (2003) suggests that the continuing development in technology such as increased band-width, wireless networks, integrated hand-held devices, voice input, built-in video, video walls, and automatic translation will no doubt have a significant impact on how virtual teams communicate and how leadership is manifested in such teams. To date, a great deal of the work on e-leadership focuses on either leadership in virtual work teams or groups interacting in what are called "group decision support systems." For example, Zaccaro & Bader (2003) pro-vided an overview of the similarities and differences between face-to-face teams and e-teams. They specifically focused on the impact of leadership functions such as communication building, role clarification, team development, and effective task execution and how they differed when mediated through technology. Other authors have focused on the effects of structural factors such as distance and multiple locations on e-leadership and virtual team effectiveness (e.g., Cascio & Shurygailo 2003).

Closing Comments and Integration
The evolution of this literature points to several important trends. The first trend in-volves the field of leadership taking a more holistic view of leadership. Specifically, re-searchers are now examining all angles of leadership and including in their models and studies the leader, the follower, the context, the levels, and their dynamic inter-action. The second trend involves examining how the process of leadership actually takes place by, for example, integrating the work of cognitive psychology with strategic leadership. In this regard, we are witnessing greater interest in how the leader processes information as well

as how the follower does so, and how each affects the other, the group, and organization. More work is expected on examining the various mediators and moderators that help to ex-plain how leadership influences intended outcomes. A third trend involves deriving alternative ways to examine leadership. We expect to see a greater use of mixed-methods designs in future research. The quantitative strategies for studying leadership have dominated the literature over the past 100 years, but increasing attention is being paid to cases and qualitative research that should now be integrated with quantitative approaches.

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