



A leadership self-efficacy taxonomy and its relation to effective leadership [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This research involved the development of a taxonomic structure of leadership self-efficacy (LSE) and an examination of its relations with leadership effectiveness. In Phase 1, 88 key leadership behaviors were derived from interviews with 44 senior executives and served as the basis for creating measures of LSE and leadership effectiveness, respectively. In Phase 2, a principal components analysis based on managers' self-efficacy ratings of the 88 behaviors ($N=227$) yielded 18 LSE dimensions. Also in Phase 2, a principal components analysis based on multi-source effectiveness ratings (2070 raters rated 251 managers) of the 88 leader behaviors yielded nine leadership effectiveness dimensions. In Phase 3, canonical analyses ($N=227$) yielded significant and highly interpretable relations between the taxonomic structures of LSE and leadership effectiveness. These results indicated distinct taxonomic structures of LSE and leadership effectiveness, and underscored the potential utility of LSE as a means to predict, understand, and develop effective leadership.

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1. Introduction

Pervasive findings in the literature suggest that people with strong self-efficacy beliefs are likely to be more motivated to pursue action, contribute more effort towards those actions, and persevere to a greater degree in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Applying these findings to the domain of leadership, we propose that leaders with higher self-efficacy to enact key leadership skills will engage those activities more often and with greater effectiveness than those lower in self-efficacy. This proposition is supported by past meta-analytic work connecting self-efficacy to general work performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), and by more recent work that specifically links self-efficacy to effective leadership (e.g., Paglis & Green, 2002; Prussia, Anderson, & Manz, 1998). Despite the fact that leadership self-efficacy (LSE) has the potential to greatly aid in the understanding and prediction of effective leadership in organizations, the extant literature has failed to specify a comprehensive, empirically derived taxonomic structure of LSE to aid in hypothesis formation and guide subsequent theory development. Therefore, a primary aim of this study was to empirically derive a taxonomic structure of LSE beliefs that was relevant to leadership effectiveness.

In our estimation, research investigating the taxonomic structure of the leadership effectiveness domain (see Fleishman et al., 1991; Tett, Guterman, Bleier, & Murphy, 2000; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992), though broad, also has some limitations. Specifically, this research has for the most part failed to take advantage of multi-source (i.e., subordinate, peer, superior) leadership ratings. As discussed in more detail below, multi-source ratings have the potential to increase the validity and

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reliability of the data collected. Thus, a second focus of this study was to empirically derive a taxonomic structure of leadership effectiveness based on multi-source feedback.

Finally, we know of no existing study that has attempted to undertake an empirical investigation of the relations between the components of LSE and the components of effective leadership effectiveness (assessed via multi-source ratings). Thus, the third and final aim of this study was to investigate the nature of the relation between the taxonomic structures of LSE and leadership effectiveness. As explained by Bandura (1997) and Murphy (2002), exploring the linkage between LSE and leader effectiveness may be critical to finding new ways of selecting and developing leadership in organizations.

We next review the literature on LSE, followed by a review of leadership effectiveness research. Finally, the introduction culminates with an explication of our specific research objectives.

1.1. Past research on leadership self-efficacy beliefs

Interestingly, little research has been conducted on the relation between LSE and leadership performance. Although research by Stajkovic & Luthans (1998) showed a moderate relation between self-efficacy and work-related performance (a weighted average correlation of .38), and provided some of the impetus for the current research, LSE was not directly addressed in that study. Other research has investigated the relation between self-efficacy and leadership, but has been conducted in university (e.g., Hoyt, Murphy, Halverson, & Watson, 2003; Prussia et al., 1998) or other non-business environments (e.g., Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000); did not use leaders' job performance as the criterion (e.g., Hoyt et al., 2003; Wood & Bandura, 1989); or did not assess self-efficacy dimensions specific to the leadership domain (e.g., Prussia et al., 1998). Given the relatively sparse and fragmented research base investigating the linkage between LSE and effective leadership, it is imperative that more rigorous and externally valid research be conducted.

One method of providing more cohesiveness and parsimony to the existing LSE literature is to create a comprehensive LSE taxonomy that can specifically target beliefs related to leadership activities. One notable attempt at forming such a taxonomy was undertaken by Paglis & Green (2002). In their study, Paglis and Green began by conceptually defining LSE as:

“A person's judgment that he or she can successfully exert leadership by setting a direction for the work group, building relationships with followers in order to gain commitment to change goals, and working with them to overcome obstacles to change” (p. 217).

They then went on to create 4-item measures of each the three main components of the above definition: setting direction, gaining commitment, overcoming obstacles to change. Positive relations were proposed between an aggregate of the preceding three dimensions of LSE and a newly constructed, 8-item measure of leadership attempts (e.g., pushing change, continuous improvement attempts, etc.; see Paglis & Green, 2002). Results showed a significant relation ($r = .21$, $p < .05$) between the LSE aggregate and the leadership attempts measure.

Though laudable as one of the first externally valid studies to propose a LSE structure, and relate that structure to leadership activity, Paglis & Green's (2002) work can be improved and/or built upon in three related areas. First, their LSE taxonomy was constrained primarily to self-efficacy for performing change-related behaviors. Paglis and Green's effort must be expanded upon in order to comprehensively define a set of belief structures applicable to a leader's full range of activities and directly relevant attributes. Specification of such a comprehensive LSE taxonomy can provide much needed clarity to the construct domain of LSE, a basis for more detailed hypothesis testing, and a framework within which subsequent theory-building in the domain of leader effectiveness can take place.

The second area for improvement around Paglis & Green's (2002) work concerns the fact that their taxonomy was rationally derived. Though deriving a set of constructs and corresponding items from theory is an effective and valid way of proceeding with taxonomic research of this kind (Hinkin, 1998; Spector, 1992), this approach assumes the researcher has established on a sufficiently broad and inclusive definition of the construct of interest (i.e., LSE). Given the scarcity of research and theoretical development in the LSE area, it is unclear whether a broad and inclusive definition yet exists. Research that empirically derives a LSE taxonomy based on a large sample of critical incidences may provide the basis for a more comprehensive and complete definition of the LSE domain. Such an empirically derived structure can also provide the impetus for future theory-development work in this area by identifying individual facets or factors that must be included in a taxonomic construction of the LSE domain.

The third and final area for potential improvement in Paglis & Green's (2002) work concerns the narrow definition of leadership effectiveness they employed to represent their criterion measure. Similar to their definition of LSE, Paglis and Green's operationalization of leadership effectiveness included only a short list of behaviors related to stimulating changes in workplace processes. A more comprehensive approach would have been to examine the relation of a comprehensive structure of LSE beliefs with a similarly comprehensive structure of effective leadership. With a view to making such a comprehensive comparison between structures of LSE and leadership effectiveness in the present study, we now turn to an examination of past attempts at deriving a broad, and integrative, leadership effectiveness taxonomy.

1.2. Past research on leadership effectiveness taxonomies

There exist various examples of previous research that has tried to establish a comprehensive taxonomy of leadership effectiveness (e.g., Borman & Brush, 1993; Flanagan, 1951; Fleishman et al., 1991; Hemphill, 1959; Katzell, Barrett, Vann, & Hogan, 1968; Luthans & Lockwood, 1984; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992; see Tett et al., 2000 for a review). However, such research has suffered

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