



## Exploring the link between integrated leadership and public sector performance

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### ABSTRACT

This study develops the concept of integrated leadership in the public sector. Integrated leadership is conceived as the combination of five leadership roles that are performed collectively by employees and managers at different levels of the hierarchy. The leadership roles are task-, relations-, change-, diversity-, and integrity-oriented leadership. Using data from the Federal Human Capital Survey and Program Assessment Rating Tool, we analyze the relationship between integrated leadership and federal program performance. The findings from the empirical analysis indicate that integrated leadership has a positive and sizeable effect on the performance of federal sub-agencies. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings and limitations of the study.

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For nearly a century, scholars have labored to understand leadership and its influence on subordinates and organizations. Despite the proliferation of leadership theories and empirical studies, scholars continue to lament our weak understanding of leadership effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Van Wart, 2005; Yukl, 2002). The need for rigorous empirical research on leadership is particularly acute in public administration, where little research on the topic is reported in the journals (Van Wart, 2003; notable exceptions include Fernandez, 2005, 2008; Moynihan & Ingraham, 2004; Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008). The dearth of research is more startling given the investments public organizations make in leadership development and the emphasis placed on performance management and improvement, including the federal Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

Throughout most of its history, the study of leadership has been characterized by disparate clusters of theories, approaches and models, each focusing on different pieces of the leadership puzzle, with few efforts at synthesis and integration. More recently, however, leadership scholars have begun to develop and test integrated leadership models that synthesize existing knowledge regarding leadership effectiveness (e.g., Fernandez, 2005; Hunt, 1991; Van Wart, 2005; Yukl, 2002). These models incorporate leadership skills, traits, behaviors and styles along with situational and moderating variables in unified theoretical models to explain leadership effectiveness.

The recent emergence of shared leadership theory represents another effort by leadership scholars to seek integration, but one of a different kind. Challenging the traditional paradigm in leadership theory that favors top-down influence and views leadership as a role performed by an individual, these scholars have argued for the need to treat leadership as a shared endeavor broadly distributed among members of organizations, networks or communities (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006; Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006; Meindl, 1990; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2000, 2002). As Fletcher and Käufer (2003) explain, “New models conceptualize leadership as a more relational process, a shared or distributed phenomenon occurring at different levels and dependent on social interactions and networks of influence” (p. 21).

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This study makes two contributions to the emerging research on integrated and shared leadership. First, the concept of integrated leadership in the public sector is developed inductively from the leadership, generic management and public administration literatures. Integrated leadership in the public sector, as conceived in this study, involves the integration of five leadership roles performed collectively by team leaders, supervisors, managers, and senior executives in public organizations. Second, the relationship between integrated leadership and performance in the public sector is explored by capitalizing on two recent initiatives in the U.S. federal government—the Federal Human Capital Surveys and the Program Assessment Rating Tool, or PART, scores—to understand and improve the management and performance of federal agencies. The findings from the empirical analysis indicate that integrated leadership has a positive and sizeable effect on the performance of federal agencies. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings and limitations of the study.

## 1. Management and leadership

Much has been written about the distinction between management and leadership. Mintzberg's (1972) well-known classification of managerial roles lists "leading" employees as one of only ten roles played by managers. Bennis and Nanus (1985) stated, "Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (p. 21). Writing in a similar vein, Kotter (1982) asserted that management is about coping with complexity, particularly by setting goals and plans, organizing and staffing, and solving problems and monitoring results, while leadership involves coping with organizational change by developing a vision and strategy for change, communicating the vision, and motivating employees to attain it. Notwithstanding these conceptual distinctions, we often find in practice that the distinction between management and leadership becomes blurred. Not all managers are leaders, but many of them are. Mintzberg's other managerial roles such as the spokesperson and entrepreneur are often played by leaders performing the boundary spanning role. Additionally, the Ohio State University and University of Michigan leadership studies indicated that leadership in part entails the task-oriented behavior ascribed to managers by Kotter.

The distinction between leadership and management is blurred even further when we examine and compare the leadership and management literatures. Much like the former, the latter focuses on how the behavior and strategies of top managers and leaders enable employees to achieve goals at the individual, group, and/or organizational level (see Boyne, 2003). Meier and O'Toole (2001, 2002), for example, found that managerial quality and networking efforts of public school superintendents improved performance. Recent research on managerial strategy in the public sector (e.g., Andrews, Boyne, & Walker, 2006; Meier et al., 2007) has found that aggressive strategies aimed at exploiting opportunities in the external environment can be as effective as change-oriented leadership behavior when it comes to improving organizational effectiveness (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991; Fernandez, 2008). Various other aspects of management that have been linked to organizational effectiveness in the public sector—including goal setting, motivating employees, and shaping organizational culture (see Brewer & Selden, 2000; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999)—also have their counterparts in leadership behavior research (see Bass, 1990). In short, the distinction between management and leadership remains a conceptual knot that is difficult to untangle.

## 2. Trends in leadership research

Several trends in the evolution of leadership research are discussed as a way to illuminate key ideas shaping our analysis of integrated leadership in the public sector. The three trends are simultaneous growth and balkanization of leadership research; efforts to integrate independent strands of leadership theory; and re-conceptualizing leadership as a shared or collective process.

### 2.1. Growth and balkanization

The earliest attempt to systematically study leadership focused on the search for personal attributes and traits of successful leaders (see Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland, 1965, 1985; Stogdill, 1948). Failure to identify a common set of attributes and traits linked to leadership effectiveness led researchers at Ohio State University (Fleishman, 1953; Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hemphill & Coons, 1957) and the University of Michigan (Katz, Macoby, & Morse, 1950; Katz & Katz, 1960) during the 1950s and 1960s to shift the focus of research from leadership traits to the behavior of effective leaders. These efforts resulted in the identification of two broad categories of leadership behavior: task-oriented and relations-oriented behavior. Numerous empirical studies produced weak and inconsistent findings (Bass, 1990; Fisher & Edwards, 1988; Yukl, 2002), the most consistent ones being that relations-oriented and task-oriented behavior are positively correlated with job satisfaction and performance, respectively.

Leadership research branched off in many directions during the latter part of the twentieth century. Among the most prominent approaches emerging during that period were contingency theories of leadership, dyadic theories of leadership, and charismatic and transformational leadership. Various situational and contingency theories were developed to explain how situational variables moderate the influence of leadership attributes and behavior on performance. These contingency theories, which have often received mixed or weak empirical support (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002), include Fiedler's (1967) least preferred co-worker (LPC) contingency model; the path-goal theory of leadership (House, 1971); cognitive resources theory (Fiedler, 1986; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987); the multiple linkage model (Yukl, 1989); leadership substitute theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978), and Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2000).

Dyadic theories of leadership, including leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, have focused on the vertical relationship that develops between a leader and a follower (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Researchers have found that high-exchange relationships

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