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THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

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9 The Nature of Relational Leadership

A Multitheoretical Lens on Leadership Relationships and Processes

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> *Virtually every study of human happiness reveals that satisfying close relationships constitute the very best thing in life; there is nothing people consider more meaningful and essential to their mental and physical well-being than their close relationships with other people.*

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> *The suspicion is growing that our understanding of many social phenomena not only is incomplete but actually may be misleading in terms of its generalizability to behavior in the very situations to which we wish to predict: to naturalistic situations where people are almost always enmeshed in a web of ongoing relationships with others. The suspicion . . . is that the omnipresent relationship context of human behavior makes a difference—that the properties of individuals do not exert simple and sovereign effects independent of context and that, in fact, the influence of the relationship context on behavior is often so powerful that it overturns what we think we know about behavior.*

The opening quotes are from Ellen Berscheid's (1999) article in *American Psychologist* based on her acceptance speech for the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association. Berscheid, who spent her career studying interpersonal relationships, reflects her sense of excitement regarding the significance and meaning of relationships in human life—combined with a sense of dismay that research on relationships is largely missing the mark in terms of generalizability. This dismay comes from the individualistic orientation that has pervaded the fields of psychology and social psychology. As she describes, the "individualistic soul of our discipline" has generated a body of work that tells us little about how relationships operate in context (p. 265).

She is not alone in this sentiment. In her book *Organizing Relationships,* Patricia Sias (2009) describes the study of work relationships as limited by its uni-theoretical positioning in a postpositivist paradigm. As described by Sias (2009), postpositivism is an approach to research in which assumptions are rooted in the scientific method; it is primarily concerned with the search for causal relationships among variables in ways that assume ability to predict and control our environments. In relational research, the effect of postpositivist approaches is that they have primarily focused on identifying relationships among variables to predict effectiveness in specific contexts, rather than adopting lenses that allow for consideration of relational dynamics, contexts, and processes (Sias, 2009). "Relying on a single theoretical lens and conceptualization of a subject narrows our vision . . . much like using only a zoom lens on a camera limits our view . . . by focusing on only one aspect of [a] subject" (p. 2). To begin to redress this problem, in her treatment of workplace relationships, she considers not only postpositivism but also perspectives from social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), critical theory (Deetz, 2005), and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Dian Marie Hosking, in her calls for paradigm diversity and a "*post-modern discourse of leadership as a process*" (2007, p. 243), and Gail Fairhurst (2007), who renounced the overriding concern in leadership for the individual and the psychological at the expense of the social and cultural. As described by Fairhurst, "both sets of concerns [individual/psychological and social/cultural] must be entertained in equal strengths in order to understand a socially constructed world" (p. viii). Fairhurst offers discursive leadership—the study of the social, linguistic, and cultural aspects of leadership—as a way to help shed light on what leadership psychologists see as the "elusive, unwieldy, mutable, and maddening error variance in leadership" (2007, p. ix).

The issue can be summarized as follows: We are fascinated by relationships because they are central to social and organizational life. However, studying them requires multiple and interconnected frameworks that can together provide a rich and complex context for understanding relational reality. By restricting the study of relationships to individualistic ontologies and epistemologies, we are limiting our ability to advance understanding of the interactional and relational contexts, processes, and collective practices through which relationships operate. As a result, the leadership and workplace relationship literature is comparatively underdeveloped (Sias, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006). It can be enriched by adopting theoretical lenses and methodologies that acknowledge relationality—the interrelated, interdependent, and intersubjective nature of social/organizational phenomena (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000).

This is not to say that we do not have an extensive body of evidence. Manager–subordinate relationships are one of the most studied phenomena in the organizational literature (Sias, 2009). We know a lot about them from the standpoint of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, more specifically, and leadership theory more broadly. What we know from this literature is that when managers and subordinates have good, trusting, open, and supportive relationships, they report more positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, and workplace and leadership dynamics are more effective. In other words, when people report "feeling good" about one another, they also report more satisfaction and productivity in the workplace.

What we know less about are the intricacies of these relationships and relational processes. The vast majority of research on leader–member exchange is cross-sectional and survey based. Most LMX research is based on a 7- or 12-item measure (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998) that predefines the topics to be addressed, restricting people's ability to tell us more about the nature of the exchanges. These measures assess individual perceptions and cognitions, "tunnel[ing] into the minds of individuals" (Berscheid, 1999, p. 262), rather than informing us about the relational interaction patterns in which relationships and leadership are constructed (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Moreover, this work has missed discussion of the local-cultural-historical contexts and processes in which leadership relationships function (Berscheid, 1999; Hosking, 2007). In sum, although we know a lot about how people respond to a measure of LMX quality, we know much less about relational leadership processes and practices in the workplace.

The differences can be described as the distinction between positivistic, or *postpositive* (Sias, 2009), and *constructionist* orientations in research. Postpositive approaches assume there is a reality (i.e., a "realist" view) of which people are conscious, and that people act on this reality as self-contained individuals. Postpositivists believe individuals develop accurate mental images and understandings of the world, and by studying these understandings, we can identify the "laws" of human behavior (Cunliffe, 2008). Accordingly, good knowledge is that which "accurately and objectively captures and represents the processes, systems and laws underlying the way the world works, which, when theorized and/or modeled, can be used to improve the way things are done" (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 123). Therefore, these approaches focus on "entities"—individuals and their traits, roles, identities, individual communication abilities—using primarily survey research and psychometrically established measures of variables that they test in statistical (e.g., regression) modeling.

Constructionism assumes that social reality is not separate from individuals but that both are intimately interwoven and shaped by each other in everyday interactions (Cunliffe, 2008). From this perspective, knowledge is socially constructed: Social reality, identities, and knowledge are culturally, socially, historically, and linguistically influenced. As a result, these approaches focus on intersubjective social reality. They use methods such as narrative inquiry (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Ospina & Su, 2009), semiotics, discourse analysis, conversation analysis (Fairhurst, 2007), documentary and oral history (Gronn, 1999), social poetics, autoethnography, and ethnography (Tierney, 1987, 1988).

Each has its strengths and weaknesses (Fairhurst, 2007; Sias, 2009), and neither can claim superiority. What can be claimed, however, is that effective study of relational leadership requires *both* lenses (Fairhurst, 2007; Hosking, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Postpositive perspectives help us learn about the "what" of relational leadership; constructionism helps us learn about the "how."

In this spirit, this chapter adopts a multiple-theory lens to relational leadership. We draw from findings regarding relationships across a variety of literature and perspectives to provide a review of relational leadership from the standpoint of leader–follower relationships (e.g., leader–follower relationship quality) and leadership relationality (e.g., relational leadership processes and practices). The former represents the postpositivist perspective, and the latter the constructionist view.

We begin by discussing relational leadership at the dyadic level and from a postpositivist perspective, addressing leader–member exchange (LMX) and Hollander's relational leadership research (Hollander, 2009). LMX focuses primarily on leadership in manager–subordinate dyads, though it has implications and applications for other relational dyads (e.g., coworker exchange, or CWX, Sherony & Green, 2002; LMX social comparison, Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010) and networks (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). Hollander's relational research began with the idiosyncrasy credit model (Hollander, 1958, 1960), and has more recently evolved into a framework for "inclusive leadership" (Hollander, 2009). Because much has been written about both of these approaches, and excellent and detailed reviews are available elsewhere (Anand, Hu, Liden, & Vidyarthi, 2011; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hollander, 2009; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Stone & Cooper, 2009), our focus here is on the antecedents of leader–follower relationships and stages of relationship development to identify what they can tell us about relational processes and contexts. In our discussion, we pay attention to views from both sides of the dyad—leader and follower—and consider relationships that develop both well (high-quality relationships) and poorly (low-quality relationships).

We then address leadership relationships from a constructionist perspective. Social construction approaches focus on *relationality,* or leadership as it is constructed "in relation." From this perspective, leadership relationships are emergent and co-constructed in interactive dynamics. They get at what Berscheid (1999) describes as the *dynamic oscillating rhythm of influence and interaction patterns observed in the interactions of people.* In this section, we focus on leadership processes and practices at dyadic and collective levels and discuss how these approaches differ from postpositivist orientations. We describe how constructionist approaches are theorized and operationalized and what we can learn from research using this approach. Given that this area of relational leadership research is emerging compared to the postpositivist paradigm, this portion of the chapter is less a review and more a discussion of how these perspectives can enrich relational leadership research.

We conclude by providing a suggested research agenda that adopts a multitheoretical perspective. This agenda recognizes the value that multiple perspectives can bring to the study of relational leadership. It challenges researchers to move beyond studies showing the benefits of high-quality relationships to begin exploring in earnest how relationships emerge and function in organizations and how they engage the processes of relational organizing in the workplace.

Leader–Follower Relationships: Postpositive View

For decades, the study of leadership relationships and relationship development in organizations has focused on the nature of exchanges between formal leaders (i.e., managers) and their followers (i.e., subordinates), with leader–member exchange being one of the most studied relationship-oriented theories. Initially proposed in the mid-1970s (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975), LMX draws from role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as explanatory mechanisms for the development and maintenance of dyadic leader–follower relationships. Research has shown extensive support for the basic premise that leaders differentiate in the quality and nature of their relationships with immediate followers and that such differentiation is associated with numerous important outcomes for both members of the relationship dyad and their organizations (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

Relational leadership at the dyadic level has also been extensively studied by Hollander, first with the idiosyncrasy credit model (1958, 1960, 2006) and more recently with his work on inclusive leadership (2009). Inclusive leadership advocates the importance of departing from the long-standing focus on the leader to recognize the relational context in which leadership occurs (Hollander, 2009). It is an interpersonal process in which leaders provide resources in terms of "adequate role behavior" directed toward group goal attainment, and followers determine whether leaders are accorded legitimacy to lead through their provision to the leader of status, recognition, and esteem (Hollander & Julian, 1969). As such, followers are vital in this process—"an active role of followers is essential for attaining group, organizational, and societal goals" (Hollander, 2009, p. 4)—and leaders engage inclusive process by building and bolstering leadership practices through climates that encourage loyalty and trust.

Relationship Quality

The primary interest of both approaches is in high-quality relationships, where high-quality relationships are characterized by mutual trust and support. Factors associated with high-quality LMX relationships are increased communication between members, higher levels of dyadic loyalty and trust, higher levels of subordinate in-role and extra-role behavior, and more positive job attitudes (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997). Dimensions associated with effective relational processes in Hollander's model are respect, recognition, responsiveness, and responsibility (Hollander, 2009). Extensive research has confirmed the value of such relationships in the workplace, with the positive benefits of high LMX and inclusive leadership one of the most robust findings in leadership research.

Both approaches also recognize the limits and problems of low-quality relational exchanges. In LMX, lower quality relationships are characterized by more traditional supervision, lower levels of interaction, and reduced trust and support (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Ilies et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000). In Hollander's approach, low-quality (ineffective) leadership occurs when followers withhold attributions of leadership (e.g., status, esteem, recognition), thereby inhibiting leaders' ability to accomplish goals. Although research on low-quality exchanges lags behind investigation of the positive aspects of relationships, recent LMX research suggests that lower quality relationships have important consequences for both managers and their followers (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003; Vidyarthi et al., 2010).

For example, in their study of forms of reciprocity, Uhl-Bien and Maslyn (2003) found that negative reciprocity by followers was associated with lower performance ratings from managers. Bolino and Turnley (2009) argued that employees with lower quality LMX exchange relationships experience feelings of relative deprivation in comparison to their higher quality relationship colleagues, with attendant negative reactions such as stress and counterproductive work behavior. Consistent with this, Henderson et al. (2008) coined the term RLMX (relative leader–member exchange) to describe and test the importance of relationship quality in relative terms, and Vidyarthi et al. (2010) similarly examined LMX as a social comparison (LMXSC). Each of these studies found negative outcomes of poor relationship quality, even when low quality was defined only in relation to others in the work group.

Relationship Development

Although discussed and examined since the inception of the theory, research has been less successful in enhancing the details in our understanding of how these high- and low-quality relationships develop; the majority of research on antecedents has been cross-sectional, providing valuable but limited insight into the development process. One reason for this is the relative difficulty in capturing relationships as they develop, as it requires both longitudinal research and the availability of newly formed dyad pairs.

However, we can glean some insight regarding the nature of factors that contribute to relationship development from the few longitudinal studies that have investigated developing relationships. Liden, Wayne and Stilwell (1993) found that supervisors' and subordinates' expectations of the other's work competence and the degree of similarity between leader and member were significant predictors of LMX at both the initial stages of the relationship and in subsequent weeks. Additionally, liking and perceived similarity predicted LMX, although demographic similarity did not. Just as noteworthy, Liden et al. (1993) concluded that relationships tend to form relatively quickly (within a few days) and remain stable over time.

Similarly, Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies (2009) focused on the development and maintenance of high-quality relationships. They proposed a two-phase process: (1) initial development based on personality that impacts initiation and interaction (exchange) and (2) performance as an outgrowth and extension of initial phases of development. A key finding of their study is that after the initial interaction, performance is a key predictor of quality. In other words, they found support for an approach consistent with the prior models of LMX development: Certain characteristics promote initiation, followed by actions that enable and reinforce development.

Below we examine more closely the recent research on antecedents and development of dyadic leadership relationships with an eye toward identifying patterns in the literature relative to the basic processes outlined by the theory. We do not intend our discussion to be an exhaustive review, but a basis for areas for future study—the "what's missing"—to develop a broader understanding of the processes of relational leadership. We begin with discussion of the stage models of relationship development and then review research on antecedents to leader–follower relationship quality.

Stage models of relationship development. Based on role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978), LMX relationships are proposed to develop through a process of role-making, role-taking, and role routinization behaviors exhibited by both supervisor and subordinate in the early stages of their relationship (Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). Specifically, roles are established through a process that involves the interaction and performance of leaders and their subordinates. During role clarification episodes, leaders provide subordinates with an opportunity to perform an assigned task. The leader evaluates each subordinate's performance on these tasks and determines whether or not future opportunities will be offered. Subordinates whose performance impresses the leader begin to develop an exchange with the leader that is of higher "quality" than subordinates who have either resisted or not performed as well according to the leader. The exchange is developed and maintained over time through a process of reciprocal reinforcement, inasmuch as each rewarding contribution by one member (e.g., good performance) tends to result in a positive contribution (e.g., favorable task assignment) by the other (Graen & Cashman, 1975).

In an expansion of this model, Liden and colleagues (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden et al., 1997) describe leader–member relationship development as a series of steps that begins with the initial interaction between the members of the dyad, followed by a series of exchanges in which individuals determine the extent to which a positive or beneficial relationship may develop. These exchanges are not limited to job task and performance but may include socially based currencies of exchange as well. If receipt of one member's offer or opportunity is positive and the party initiating the exchange is satisfied with the response, the individuals continue to exchange. If the response to an exchange is not positive (e.g., not reciprocated, or fails to meet the expectations of the member), or if exchanges never occur, opportunities to develop high-quality exchanges are limited, and relationships will likely remain at lower levels of LMX development (Blau, 1964; Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

To facilitate the exchange, members must have valued resources to offer one another. If a leader's resources for exchange are limited, including the amount of time available to develop and maintain high-quality relationships, high levels of exchange tend to be focused on a limited number of supervisor-subordinate dyads (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen, 1976). Additionally, dyad members must perceive effort exerted toward relationship development on the part of the potential partner, either in terms of initiation (i.e., a first step) or reciprocation (i.e., response to offers) for relationship development to proceed (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

The initiation/reciprocation of valued currencies of exchange process continues to serve as the foundation of LMX development research. In their multidimensional model of work relationships, Ferris et al. (2009) provide an updated description of the relationship development process. Though not all members will proceed through all stages, these authors identify a four-step process: initial interaction, development and expansion of roles, expansion and commitment, and increased interpersonal commitment. They further note that factors such as prior history between the parties, other information or reputation, as well as the personal characteristics, backgrounds, experiences, and styles of each member has the potential to impact relationship development. Although recent literature on LMX development has not been as broad as described in the Ferris et al. model, it has generally supported this process while drawing heavily from the early theoretical work (e.g., Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987). For example, Nahrgang et al. (2009) classified factors associated with relationship development into two broad categories: variables such as personality characteristics that affect initial interaction and behavioral influences such as testing processes that follow initial interaction.

From an alternative theoretical perspective, Hollander (2009) describes leadership relationship development from the standpoint of inclusive leadership (Hollander, 2009). Consistent with LMX approaches, an inclusive leadership process is one in which both dyad members are truly involved, acting as partners making inputs to the process based on persuasion rather than coercion. The paramount values of inclusive leadership are respecting and involving others, with listening. The process starts with respect for others, recognition of their input, and responsiveness to the other. Central to this process is responsibility in both directions, which acts as an enduring basis for leader–follower relations and which engenders approval among dyad partners (Hollander, 2009).

Effort and reciprocity. As identified in the LMX literature, a key element of relationship development testing processes is assessments of both effort and reciprocity (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). The assumption is that exchanges are based on effort exerted by the parties to the relationship (e.g., individuals exert effort to initiate exchanges, reciprocate exchanges). In support of this, Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) found that when each member of an LMX dyad perceived that the potential dyad partner was making an effort, higher quality relationship resulted.

Dienesch and Liden (1986) describe the process of reciprocation as contingent on attributions regarding the responses to offers made by the other member of the dyad. Recent study in this area has laid the groundwork for research into motivation for or the enabling of reciprocity. The accuracy of one's attributions and the perceived intentions of the actors have been shown to impact the exchange process (Harvey, Martinko, & Douglas, 2006; Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007). For example, as discussed above, certain behaviors or subordinate characteristics can reflect expected value or competence, thus contributing to the desire to engage in relationship development. Feedback seeking by subordinates is one of these behaviors (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). However, attributions regarding the intentions behind feedback seeking have been shown to moderate the relationship between feedback seeking behavior and LMX quality, such that if managers interpreted the subordinate's feedback-seeking as a step toward subordinate performance enhancement rather than impression management, LMX quality was higher (Lam et al., 2007).

Attribution processes also play a central role in the idiosyncrasy credit model of relational leadership (Hollander, 1958, 1960, 2006). This model describes a dynamic process of interpersonal evaluation in which followers, not leaders, determine the effects of leader authority (Hollander, 2009). This process is based on attributions made by individuals about the influence source (i.e., leader). It begins by followers attributing credits to leaders based on perceptions of important characteristics, such as competence (e.g., a needed knowledge or skill), conformity to group norms, favorable reputation, or high status (e.g., group status, socioeconomic status). Leaders can then draw on these credits to take innovative actions (e.g., lead change) in accordance with their leader role. Leaders continue to have authority and influence as long as they do not "bankrupt" their account. If credits are low, leaders must work to rebuild them before they can begin expending again. Hence, in the idiosyncrasy credit model, relationships operate through the building and expending of "credits" that come from attributions of leaders by followers (cf. reciprocity processes in social exchange, Blau, 1964).

Once attributions of leadership are made, a number of factors have been found to enable or facilitate the process of exchange. In many cases, the same variables that lead to initiation of exchange serve also in the facilitating function. For example, similarity builds affect, eases communication, and increases interaction between the parties (Bhal, Ansari, & Aafaqi, 2007; Goodwin, Bowler, & Whittington, 2009; Liden et al., 1993). Personality characteristics such as the subordinate's agreeableness are helpful in making subordinates easy to approach by managers (Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2008). Goal interdependence and congruence, particularly cooperative goals, also positively influence interaction and resulting LMX quality (Hui, Law, Chen, & Tjosvold, 2008).

Uhl-Bien (2003) notes that some relationships are easier to develop than others (i.e., the conditions are favorable), saying people sometimes just "hit it off" with others. From this perspective, the higher the relationship favorability the easier it is for a high-quality relationship. Factors such as dissimilarity between manager and subordinate can be overcome, but it will require extra effort. The skills needed to do this include an understanding of the testing/reciprocity process, self-presentation, and communication.

Factors that enable the reciprocity process, even in light of possible barriers to initiation or interaction, have also been the subject of recent study. Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor (2000) studied judgments of fairness as a mechanism that helps engage the norm of reciprocity and found that LMX mediated the effects of interactional justice on subordinate outcomes. Drawing from social exchange theory explicitly, Murphy, Wayne, Liden, and Erdogan (2003) proposed and found that perceptions of the manager's interactional justice were positively associated with subordinate reported LMX quality, whereas LMX was negatively associated with social loafing.

Antecedents to Relationship Quality

In addition to the stage models of relationship development, which describe the process of relationship development, research has investigated variables that act as antecedents to LMX quality. These antecedents include factors such as personality of dyad members, political skill, and similarity, or congruence, variables.

Personality. The personality of the members of the exchange has been found to contribute to both the willingness or ability to engage in LMX relationship development generally and the likelihood that effort will be made to establish positive relationships. Early work in this area found support for a positive association between LMX and subordinates' internal locus of control (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994) and extraversion (Phillips & Bedeian, 1994). Phillips and Bedeian concluded that extraversion might enable subordinates to engage in actions that make their skills obvious to leaders. This is consistent with previous findings showing that higher quality LMX relationships are characterized by more frequent interaction than low-quality relationships (e.g., Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Liden & Graen, 1980).

More recently, certain personality characteristics have been proposed to play a role in motivating LMX development because they are expected to affect interaction between managers and subordinates (Bono & Judge, 2004). That is, some researchers suggest that individuals may have a predisposition to engage in relationship development.

For example, recent research on attachment style, where individuals have a preferred style in the degree and manner in which they develop interpersonal relationships, has been proposed to affect leader–follower relationships (Keller & Cacioppe, 2001; Manning, 2003; Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). According to Hazan and Shaver (1990), some individuals have an avoidant attachment style and do not look for relationships but rather try to avoid establishing relationships, preferring to work alone. In the workplace, managers with this style are likely to be inattentive, manipulative, and provide little interpersonal support to subordinates (Keller & Cacioppe, 2001). Therefore, managers with this attachment style would not be expected to be willing or able to initiate and maintain high-quality relationships. Conversely, leaders with a secure attachment style feel comfortable about interdependence with others and have been shown to recognize and balance the needs of the parties to the relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Past research has linked a secure attachment style to relational competence (Manning, 2003) and to transformational leadership behavior, such as individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation (Popper & Mayseless, 2003; Popper et al. 2000).

Ng, Koh, and Goh (2008) proposed that leader propensity toward serving others may also act as an antecedent of LMX. Drawing from social exchange theory, these authors propose that the supportive and developmental behavior associated with a service orientation by leaders will result in higher LMX because attributions of leader's motives are other-serving instead of self-serving, leading subordinates to reciprocate. They developed a construct of leader's motivation to serve, and found it to be positively related to LMX quality. Similar proposals were made by Henderson, Liden, Glibkowski, and Chaudhry (2009) who suggest that transformational and servant leadership approaches will lead managers to engage larger numbers of subordinates in attempts to develop high-quality relationships.

Several other personality characteristics have been found to relate to relationship development. In their review, Liden et al. (1997) related the influence of affectivity, locus of control, and extraversion. This earlier work has been supplemented by research on the Big Five, proposing that higher levels of certain characteristics will be associated with LMX quality. Nahrgang et al. (2009) found support for the agreeableness of the leader and the extraversion of the follower as predictors of interaction and initial judgments. Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, and Walker (2007) proposed that each of the Big Five were associated with initiation, attractiveness of the other member, or reciprocity. The mechanism for each dimension was unique. For example, conscientiousness by subordinates is valuable to managers, leading to reciprocation; a manager's conscientiousness will show concern and result in effort put forth toward relationship development; and a subordinate's openness or intellect and curiosity will please managers and yield greater acceptance of various currencies of exchange from the dyad partner. The same mechanism holds for managers.

As noted, Bernerth et al.'s (2007) study includes the personality of the dyad partner as an indicator of potential value of that partner. In Harris, Harris, and Eplion (2007), personality characteristics of locus of control, need for power, and self-esteem were proposed to lead to subordinate behavior valued by managers, thus activating an exchange between parties. Specifically, subordinates with these characteristics are expected to show higher initiative, be more competent and confident, and be more motivated and desirable partners to managers. These propositions were supported (Harris et al., 2007).

Huang, Wright, Chiu, and Wang (2008) followed this line of thinking in their examination of managers' and subordinates' relational schemas about the roles of dyad partners. Their basic premise is that leaders and followers have different schemas that result in expectancies of relationship quality. Usually leaders look for competence (team player, reliability, self-directedness, and commitment to work), and subordinates look for interpersonal elements (mutual understanding, development, friendly attitudes, and manager's ability to influence or inspire the subordinate). Greater matches between the expectancy and the behavior of the partner (e.g., leaders' expectation that the follower will be proactive combined with proactive behavior by follower) were found to facilitate relationship development. The authors suggested that perceptions of matches lead to greater liking (cf. Wayne & Ferris, 1990) and positive evaluation of the dyad partner as elements of initiation and reciprocation. Similar to the mechanisms discussed by Liden et al. (1993) regarding expectations of competence, the personality match and associated need satisfaction are proposed to be the drivers behind LMX development.

Perceptions of relational match are also an important part of the idiosyncrasy credit model (Hollander, 2009). As described earlier, Hollander's model is based on a perceptual process. Evaluations are made based on followers' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the leader with respect to competence, conformity to group norms, and loyalty (Hollander, 1964). When there is a match, leaders earn credit; when there is a gap, leaders lose credit (Hollander, 2009). In a series of studies examining this process using critical incident techniques, Hollander and colleagues found that respondents were found to distinguish good from bad leaders mostly by relational qualities. The four relational qualities that most frequently differentiated good from bad leadership were perceptiveness, involvement, trustworthiness, and rewardingness (Hollander, 2007).

Finally, although personality is a useful predictor of LMX relationship quality, the perceived value of the relationship has been found to moderate effects of personality. Goodwin et al. (2009) found that LMX quality as reported by managers was based on personality and competence similarity with followers, but only when followers had high advice centrality, meaning they were individuals others go to often for advice. This suggests that similarity is not a straightforward predictor, but its role in relationship development is contingent on other variables.

Political skill. Another factor that helps enable relationship development may be political skill: the ability to understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives (Ahern, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). Ferris et al. (2005) identified four key dimensions to political skill: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. In an application of political skill to the development of LMX, Treadway, Breland, Williams, Wang, and Yang (2008) posited that possessing political skill allows dyad members to accurately understand their partners and thus be able to determine if the formation of an LMX relationship is appropriate. Further, leaders with higher political skill will be more likely to instill feelings of affect in followers, which then leads the follower to be motivated and able to engage in LMX development.

Similarly, Brouer, Duke, Treadway, and Ferris (2009) argue that political skill (social astuteness, in particular) increases understanding of the workplace and a need to develop effective work relationships. It increases the ability of potential partners to properly participate in the testing process, including recognition of when supervisors are initiating testing, and the ability to use influence effectively and to adjust behavior accordingly. As such, Brouer et al. (2009) proposed that political skill would help moderate the negative impact of demographic dissimilarity between potential dyad partners. Their study found that subordinates with high political skill established comparable quality relationships regardless of demographic similarity/dissimilarity, although this was not true for those with lower levels of political skill. However, political skill was not important to LMX quality if manager and subordinate were similar. This finding suggests the importance of awareness of the process of development in light of contextual factors that might inhibit initiation of relationship development.

In addition to the elements that help drive the initiation and the reciprocity process, most approaches to LMX development rely on the continued exchange of valued currencies to firmly establish and maintain high-quality relationships. Although often assessed as tangible currencies, such as subordinate work performance (Nahrgang et al., 2009), Ferris et al. (2009) also discussed exchanges in established relationships in terms of less-economic forms of exchange such as trust, respect, affect, and support between parties (expansion of roles). This represents a new view of the relationship as an end in itself, and the willingness to be flexible in one's interactions (expansion and commitment) along with the willing expression of loyalty and commitment and accountability (increased interpersonal commitment). This is consistent with findings from Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) regarding expectations of future effort in relationship development on the part of subordinates. Their findings showed that employees in higher quality relationships report a higher degree of intended future effort to keep up the relationship, whereas those who were less successful in establishing a positive relationship report lower intentions of applying future effort into relationship development.

Congruence. Goodwin et al. (2009) illustrated the important role of similarity or congruence between dyad members, examined in many studies as predictors of LMX. Based on Byrne's (1971) attraction-similarity hypothesis, Liden et al. (1993) showed the importance of perceived similarity between manager and subordinate in LMX development. Subsequent research has worked to identify the extent to which similarity manifests itself in higher quality LMX. Phillips and Bedeian (1994) also tested attitude similarity, along with introversion/extraversion, locus of control, growth need strength, performance, and various demographic measures as predictors of LMX. Results indicated the greatest support for attitude similarity.

Bernerth et al. (2008) extended their previous work with the Big 5 and proposed that congruence of personality dimensions between dyad members will result in higher LMX because compatible members can and will communicate better and be more motivated to work together. They found that the greater the difference between leader and member on the dimensions, the lower the quality of LMX. This was true for each of the Big Five dimensions, except for extraversion. The authors explained that extraverts could engage in relationships with anyone; congruence was not necessary to facilitate the process.

Leader–follower agreement. Despite the depth of study on the process of development, and the consistencies in attributions and behavior proposed to be exhibited by both leader and follower, actual agreement between leaders and followers regarding the quality of their relationship remains generally low (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998; Zhou & Schriesheim, 2009). Gerstner and Day (1997) reported a meta-analytic average correlation of .29, although ranges of .16 to .50 have been reported (Schriesheim et al., 1998).

In this regard, Zhou and Schriesheim (2009) note that "according to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) the exchange relationship is a separate entity from the individuals involved in the relationship, and it is objective, not perceptive. Based on these arguments, SLMX and LMX should be seen as two measures of the same construct and one would expect that both reports should converge at least moderately well" (p. 921). Zhou and Schriesheim offer several explanations for the low convergence. These include a lack of measurement invariance or equivalence, different expectations and assumptions regarding effective relationships on the part of leaders and followers, different foci between leaders (task-based) and followers (relationship-based), frequency of interaction, task interdependence between leader and member, and relationship tenure.

Summary

In sum, the groundwork established by Graen and Scandura (1987) and Dienesch and Liden (1986) has served as the template for research into the antecedents and development of LMX relationships. To this day, a process whereby initial offers are made, responses generated, and new relational roles established drives our study of the development of LMX. We have theories about the basis for offers to engage in relationship development, the importance of perceived or expected value in exchanges, and how attributions and reciprocity contribute to development and maintenance of high-quality relationships. We have details about what impacts each of these (e.g., personality, skills) and ways process can overcome barriers to initiation of relationship development.

We also see strong convergence in findings between the LMX and Hollander's idiosyncrasy credit models. These two streams of research developed separately across the same time period, and each has demonstrated the nature and importance of relational exchanges in leadership processes.

Together, they confirm the validity and robustness of a relational approach to leadership. They also lead to the same conclusions: Effective leadership is that in which leaders and followers have strong, partnership relationships. The role of leaders in these processes is to provide environments that are inclusive, trusting, and supportive to followers; the role of the followers is to be active partners in the leadership process.

Relationality in Leadership: Constructionist Views

Although LMX and idiosyncrasy credit theorists (Hollander, 2009) have considerably advanced a perspective of leader–follower relationships as the focal point of leadership research, other scholars are calling for a different kind of understanding—a *relational* understanding—of leadership (Hosking, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, in press). A relational understanding focuses on the rich interconnections among people acting in contexts that allow leadership to be "co-produced" in "the space between" (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). Applying such an understanding to the study of relational leadership is consistent with Sias's (2009) call to broaden our theoretical lenses by incorporating perspectives not traditionally considered in relationship research (cf. Fairhurst, 2007).

This view differs from that of LMX in several ways. First, it uses a different theory of knowledge, social constructionism, to consider the meaning of leadership relationships. Constructionist approaches challenge the privileging of a researcher-imposed view of leadership in favor of participants' constructions of the concept (Cunliffe, 2008; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Rather than starting with predefined theoretical models and variables, they use methodologies that allow the data to drive the findings. This means they often use approaches that are more qualitative and inductive (Fairhurst, 2007; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006), gathering data that are not variable-based but language-based (e.g., narratives, text, stories, interviews) or observational.

Second, they offer an alternative to the individual and cognitive lens of most psychological approaches to leadership, opting instead for a lens that is more social and cultural. As described by Fairhurst and Grant (2010), constructionism sees leadership as "co-constructed, a product of socio-historical and collective meaning making, and negotiated on an ongoing basis through a complex interplay among leadership actors, be they designated or emergent leaders, managers, and/or followers" (p. 172). Thus, rather than examining the perceptions, cognitions, behavioral intentions, and personality traits of leaders and followers, they investigate the patterns of interaction and communicative processes associated with the creation of leadership (Drath et al., 2008; Hosking, 2007). In this view, understandings and practices of leadership are constructed over time, as individuals interact with one another (Drath, 2001; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006), rather than being embodied in leaders and followers, or being something they "possess."

Third, they use different methodologies, with the biggest difference being their movement away from objectivist scientific inquiry methods of proposition testing. With some exceptions (e.g., Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999, who use content analysis), these studies tend to use qualitative methodologies (Ospina, 2004), such as narrative inquiry (Fairhurst, 2007; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Ospina & Su, 2009), ethnography (Tierney, 1987, 1988), documentary and oral history (Gronn, 1999), or a combined approach (e.g., phenomenology, grounded theory, and action research in the case of Huxham & Vangen, 2000; narrative, ethnography, and action research in the case of Schall, Ospina, Godsoe, & Dodge, 2004). These methodologies generate data that are more sensitive to context and capture meaning from the inside-out (Evered & Louis, 1981), that is, considering the perspective of the individuals involved and seeing how they relate to the whole (Bryman, Stephens, & à Campo, 1996; Tierney, 1996). Qualitative research addresses questions that cannot be answered by way of quantification and are better off explored with research that is "interpretive, historical, language sensitive, local, open and non-authoritative" (Alvesson 1996, p. 468), so as to capture the multiple levels at which leadership happens, its character dynamic, and its symbolic components (Conger, 1998; Parry, 1998).

Fourth, relational leadership scholars are beginning to shift attention from a single dyad as the point of interest to *fields* of relationships, or structures of relationships within which individuals and groups reside (Hosking, 1997; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006). This moves the focus from the individual to the collective (e.g., the study of leadership practices, shared leadership processes). Leadership is seen as a collective achievement, the result of generative processes of interaction among participants working jointly for a given purpose that requires organizing (Drath, 2001; Drath & Palus, 1994; Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995; Ospina & Sorenson 2006; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Scholars are adopting this shift, in part, because the individual dimension has been extensively studied while the collective processes have been ignored. However, they also recognize that any type of leadership relationship among individuals cannot be understood in isolation from the organizational and social forces that help to shape it (Fairhurst, 2007; Fletcher, 2004; Hosking, 1997; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

To illustrate the value of constructionist approaches for the study of relational leadership, in the section below we provide additional background on social constructionism and examples of how these approaches are and can be studied in leadership.

Social Construction Approaches to Leadership

As described by Fairhurst and Grant (2010) and Ospina and Sorenson (2006), social constructionism has roots in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1970), though its acknowledged origin is

Berger and Luckmann's influential book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966; Cunliffe, 2008). Its basic tenet is that people make their cultural and social worlds at the same time as the worlds make them. In social constructionist terms, "taken-for-granted realities are produced from interactions between and among social agents" (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 174). Reality is not an objectifiable truth waiting to be uncovered through positivistic scientific inquiry; rather, multiple realities compete for the truth, and this is played out as meanings are negotiated, consensus formed, and contestations occur.

Although there are many approaches to studying the social construction of leadership, and the field has grown dramatically during the past 15 years (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ospina & Sorenson, 2006), one distinction that has relevance for our discussion here is the difference in approaches that stress the *construction of social reality* from those approaches that stress the *social construction of reality:*

> The former drives theorizing around the cognitive products of social interaction—constructions of social reality involving categories, implicit theories, attributions, and sense-making accounts—whereas the latter emphasizes sociality or the interactions themselves, be they implicitly, explicitly, or sociohistorically interactional. At a more basic level, the theorizing of cognitive products emphasizes leadership actors' inner motors, whereas the theorizing of sociality focuses on actors as cultural products, among other things (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 196).

This is a useful distinction in that we can see evidence of each in our literature. The focus on cognitive products from a construction of social reality orientation is seen in the work of Meindl (1993, 1995; Meindl, Erlich, & Dukerich, 1985), Lord's implicit theories (Engle & Lord, 1997; Lord & Brown, 2004), and more recently, in Carsten and colleagues work on the social construction of followership (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & MacGregor, 2010). We also see attributions and sensemaking in Calder (1977) and Weick (1995). The theorizing on sociality (social construction of reality) can be seen in work of Drath and colleagues (Drath, 2001; Drath et al., 2008), Hosking (Hosking et al., 1995; Hosking & Morley, 1988) and Ospina and colleagues (Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2010).

The two differ, however, in their treatment of relationality. The former, with a focus on the individual and perception and cognition, remains more in the "entity" perspective of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Although it recognizes social reality, it approaches it from the standpoint of how individuals see and interact with that reality. The latter, with its focus on the interaction patterns of social dynamics, brings to the foreground "sociality." In this way, it captures the intersubjective experiences of relationality, as described next.

Relationality in leadership research. Relationality addresses the "space between" people—It assumes that the self and other are not separable but are coevolving in ways that need to be accounted for in organizational research (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). Consistent with this, in a constructionist theory of knowledge, relationships are not formed from individual minds coming together but the reverse: Individual functioning results from being in relation (Gergen, 2009). Rather than placing primacy on the individual, constructionist theories begin with the social. Constructionist scholars approach leadership not as a phenomenon embodied in persons but as an organizing process grounded in task accomplishment (Fairhurst, 2007). They consider the actual behaviors and interactions of individuals as part of this broader organizing process, where patterned interactions and networks of relationships contribute to define the outcomes. They are interested in illuminating the mechanisms through which leadership emerges or happens within this broader social context. To study this, they use more qualitative (e.g., in-depth interview, participant and unobtrusive observation) or narrative techniques (examination of language, text, or stories) rather than surveys. Moreover, instead of individual perception and cognition, they focus on ontological units that are more consistent with their interest in "sociality," such as intersubjectivity, identities, relationships, cultures and linguistic communities, and organizations as macro-actors (Fairhurst, 2007). For these scholars, the leader–follower relationship is not just (or primarily) an interpersonal relationship, but a *social* relationship, that is, something that carries within it understandings that both parties take for granted and use to inform their interaction and make sense of it.

Through this focus on relationality, constructionism offers to relational leadership a more dynamic view of relational processes and contexts. For example, constructionism offers an alternative to the strict stage models of relationship development processes previously suggested in LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000):

> The LMX literature assumes that successful relationships progress on a path that is unidirectional and cumulative, moving toward increasing levels of closeness or fusion, and transformation beyond self-interests (Fairhurst, 2001). The three stage process of the leadership-making model (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995 . . .) is a case in point. . . . In the leadership-making model, participants progress through an initial "stranger" stage of role-finding, which is formal and contractual. If both want to improve the relationship, they progress to a second, "acquaintance" stage of role-making where there is a lot of secret testing and feeling out of one another. If test results are mutually satisfactory, a select few make it to the "mature partnership" stage where there is an in-kind exchange of resources. . . . Thus, in successful relationships, there is a putatively simple progression to an increasingly close, stable, and mutually satisfying relationship (Fairhurst, 2007, pp. 121–122).

Constructionist approaches do not see relational processes as stable and linear. They view relationships as sensemaking processes involving tension, dynamism, contradiction, and flux. Fairhurst and Hamlett (2004), drawing from work on dialectical communication, discuss how most relationships, even healthy ones, possess tension in the form of dialectical oppositions. These oppositions create simultaneous pulls to fuse with and differentiate from the other: "Relational bonding not only implies fusion, closeness and interdependence, but also separation, distance and independence" (Fairhurst & Hamlett, 2004, p. 123). Similarly, work from team relationships literature shows that relationships are full of paradox that can alternately paralyze and energize those within them (Smith & Berg, 1987).

Constructionist approaches consider relationships as dynamic and interactive contexts and processes of meaning making. In a constructionist view of leadership, meaning is something constructed from the world, not something discovered in the world. Meaning is not simply created in the mind of an individual acting absent context. Instead, it emerges—is constructed—when human beings engage with objects and with other humans in the world. Because people draw from prior agreed-on meanings in their culture, and because culture in turn is historically bounded, constructing meaning can be understood as a social process as much as an individual mental operation (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006).

Thus, rather than viewing relationship as the consequence of independent beings coming together and examining the antecedents that help understand LMX exchanges and relationship quality, constructionist relational researchers focus on relationships as the generative source of leadership. Leadership relationships are not an outcome to be explained or an antecedent of performance (another outcome to be explained; Fairhurst, 2007; Sias, 2009), but they constitute the leadership process itself. Constructionist relational leadership researchers (Hosking, 2007; Ospina & Su, 2009) are interested in understanding the means by which relationships produce a particular type of social experience—that of leadership.

Here the interest falls on the processes that constitute leadership as the outcome of particular types of social relationships and interactions (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This distinction helps to illuminate the shift in interest from explaining the who (leader or follower) to the how (the processes and practices). It focuses on *how* leadership is developed in and emerges from relationships oriented toward organizing purposes. It also shifts the meaning of the "what" of leadership from the leader–follower relationship to the patterns of relations and interactions that produce leadership in a given context.

Constructionist approaches are therefore contextual theories of leadership (Osborn et al., 2002). They shift attention in leadership research from the leader–follower dyadic relationship to the constructs of people in relationship (Gergen, 2009; Ospina & Foldy, 2010), communities of practice (Drath, 2001; Drath & Palus, 1994), and fields or networks of relationships (Fletcher, 2004; Mayo & Pastor, 2007). By focusing on social mechanisms (Davis &

Marquis, 2005; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998), constructionism is interested in finding out the interpretive meaning of patterns (that is, what patterns say about how people understand each other and their lives in relational contexts). They consider that social interactions emerge from repeated contacts among participants engaged in other-regarded behaviors with meaning, purpose, and the expectation of a response by another—and that these social interactions operate in contexts regulated by law, custom, or tradition over time (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006). This perspective, therefore, highlights the collective dimensions of personal experience, without necessarily disregarding its individual dimensions. Because these scholars are more interested in exploring collective rather than individual aspects of leadership, attention shifts from the *interpersonal* nature of dyadic relationships, and the associated behaviors, to the *social* nature of relations, and the associated patterns of interaction and the coproduction of shared assumptions and agreements that support them. This social nature can manifest at the dyadic, group, or collective levels of action.

Collective leadership. This does not dismiss the dyadic dimension of leadership as a relational phenomenon, but it places it within a broader structure of relationships organized for collective purposes. Raelin (2003) clarifies this distinction when he uses the term community to define the "unit that receives or conducts leadership" (p. 11), and defines it as any setting where a group of participants assemble to accomplish joint work, allowing for a variety of settings, from group to organization to system and from private to public sectors. He argues: "The community is a unit in which members already have or may establish human contact with others. In this sense, it is a social structure that extends beyond the self, that links people together for some common purpose" (p. 12). This social structure cannot be ignored when understanding leadership as a collective process.

The foundations for this view have a rich underpinning in leadership scholarship. For example, Burns's seminal work starts with the premise that leadership, like power, is "relational, collective and purposeful" (Burns, 1978, p. 18). Pastor (1998) defines leadership as "a collective social consciousness that emerges in the organization" as individuals interact with one another (p. 5). As this process of social construction goes on, as people develop a shared understanding of the work and the roles assigned to members in pursuing it, leadership takes on an independent life that continues to be enacted over time. In this sense, as it emerges, leadership becomes the property of the social system, rather than being just a shared idea in people's minds, or a quality located in a single individual, the leader.

Although fewer scholars in the organizational behavior and psychology-dominated leadership field have been drawn to the collective approach to relational leadership, scholars in other disciplines and fields have been more enthusiastic. For example, advocating the idea that leadership emerges from the constructions and actions of people in organizations, three decades ago sociologists Smircich and Morgan (1982) invited researchers to look deeper into the collective leadership phenomenon and to "focus on the way meaning in organized settings is created, sustained, and changed [to] provide a powerful means of understanding the fundamental nature of leadership as a social process" (p. 261). In education, Lambert et al. (1995) defined leadership as "the reciprocal process that enables participants in [a] community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose" (p. 32). More recently, in management, Fletcher and Kaeufer (2003) highlighted the micro-processes of shared leadership that occur in and through the relational interactions that make up networks of influence in the context of moving organizational agendas. Moreover, Gergen (2009) proposes to focus on the process of "relational leading," which he describes as "the ability of persons *in relationship* to move with engagement and efficacy into the future" (p. 333).

Following this line of thinking, sociological perspectives on constructionism have been helpful in beginning to identify dynamics of structured social relations among group participants engaged in action together (be it in a team, an organization, a network, or a larger system) and to ask in what ways these illuminate how collective leadership happens. Shifting the phenomena one step up the level of analysis, this work focuses analytical attention to enduring and relatively stable patterns of social actions and social interactions (Drath, 2001; Drath et al., 2008). The focus is on exploring the "arenas" where leadership participants interact and relate to pursue a collective purpose (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006).

The work of Ospina and colleagues (Foldy et al., 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Ospina & Su, 2009) offers an example. Their in-depth, multiyear study examined collective leadership practices in 92 nonprofit organizations working to advance an agenda of social change in the United States during the course of six years. Drawing from a relational constructionist approach, they captured the meaning-making process of social change leaders by engaging them and their constituents in sustained conversations around the work that brought them together (i.e., social change work). Using ethnographic, narrative, and action-based methodologies, they elicited individual and group stories where participants described the work when it was happening at its best. They then triangulated the data gathered with these three methodologies and analyzed the stories interpretively. They identified as the analytical unit the *practices* developed over time and in context. These represented embodiments of the collective understandings of what participants believed they ought to do to attain their social change agendas.

Through multiple iterations of data analysis, three key mechanisms were identified that illuminate how collective leadership happened in these organizations: reframing discourse (Foldy et al., 2008; Ospina & Su, 2009), bridging difference (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010), and unleashing human energies (El Hadidy, Ospina, & Hofmann-Pinilla, 2010). These mechanisms help us to understand how leadership emerged in these social change organizations to help participants leverage the power they needed to influence their external targets. In support of a constructionist orientation, the data collected in this research project reveal a worldview composed of implicit assumptions about the nature of power, knowledge, change, humans, and the world, anchored in core values of social justice, which guided decisions and actions. Moreover, the researchers uncovered articulations of the expected outcomes of change, mediated through levers of personal empowerment and organizational capacity development. The recurrent collective leadership practices through which this work was done were in alignment with the group's worldview and visions of the future. They also gave meaning and substance to the technologies of management (strategic planning, budget management, etc.) and to the core tasks of social change (organizing, advocacy, and service delivery) through which these nonprofit organizations became sustainable and resourceful.

Huxham and Vangen (2000) offer another example of research that explores the collective relational perspective based on the social construction of reality. They report that the notion of the "decentering of leadership" in their study of collaboration in service delivery networks was directly inspired by this perspective (in particular by Hosking's conception of leadership as the process in which flexible social order is negotiated, by research about self-managing work teams, and by studies based on cultural perspectives of leadership). Based on a 10-year program of action research with practitioners involved in a number of public and community partnerships in the United Kingdom, and following a phenomenological approach, their goal was to develop practice-oriented theory on the management of collaboration. Using a conception of collective leadership as involving mechanisms that "make things happen" in a collaboration, they identify three media through which agendas are created and driven forward, that is, through which collective leadership happened in these networks: structures (e.g., collaborative governance structures), processes (e.g., committees, workshops, seminars through which the collaboration's communication takes place), and participants (e.g., positional leading roles, such as a steering group, with a chair). They also identify a set of activities that participants used to carry out their collaborative agendas: finding ways to control the collaboration's agenda, representing and mobilizing member organizations, and creating enthusiasm and empowering those who could deliver the collaboration aims.

Summary

In sum, as a developing field, constructionist approaches to leadership offer a rich additional lens for relational leadership theory. They allow us to operationalize studies of leadership from the standpoint of relational and communicative processes in a manner that systematically considers the dynamic and collective dimensions of leadership. By shedding light on the co-constructed relational processes and practices of leadership, they can help add to our current body of knowledge and enrich our understanding of the interactive and interconnected nature of relational leadership.

In our discussion of constructionism, we identify two types of agendas for relational research (though there are clearly many more possibilities). The first is to adopt more constructionist approaches to the study of relationships. Consistent with Berscheid (1999), Fairhurst (2007), and Sias (2009), this means adopting methods and research designs that allow us to better capture the social reality of work relationships. The second is to focus on relational organizing and collective leadership. Consistent with the *social construction of reality*, these approaches emphasize the interactions themselves as well as the shared patterns of meaning-making, conjoint agency, and coordinated behavior through which collective leadership is enacted.

Relational Leadership: A Research Agenda

Using the two types of approaches identified above, in this section we focus on outlining an initial research program that addresses the study of relational leadership. Given that clear directions for LMX research are identified elsewhere in the literature, here we describe a research agenda for relational leadership more broadly: We view the study of relational leadership as not just LMX (and its more limited set of measures) but the wider examination of leadership relationships (dyadic and collective) and relational processes (and practices) in organizations that contribute to the generation of leadership. We believe these relationships and processes are so central to the establishment of healthy and effective workplace functioning that studying them warrants a broad, cross-disciplinary and multiple method research program. Moreover, contrary to the "paradigm wars" of the past, we believe relational leadership can be most effectively studied by both paradigms (and many varieties of methods), and that by dialoguing with one another, scholars can advance richer understandings of relational leadership.

We propose a different type of research agenda—one driven not by a measure or a method but by research questions that are pursued across multiple theoretical perspectives. These questions should build on what we have already learned. For example, we could explore questions such as: Do the attributes of effective (and ineffective) leadership relationships vary in the workplace, and how? What is the nature of interactive dynamics in these relationships? How do effective leadership relationships develop, and what inhibits effective leadership relationship development? What are the relational processes that comprise effective collective relational leadership practice? How and why can relational leadership help to address the challenges of organizing in contemporary contexts? Under what conditions, and how, do systems and networks of relations produce different forms of leadership? What leadership practices reflect collective aspirations, and how do they contribute to realize them? To more fully advance understanding, researchers across perspectives (e.g., psychology, management, communication, sociology, public policy) should engage in dialogue with one another about what they are uncovering and learning and use these findings to enrich their subsequent research efforts. In the sections below, we offer an initial outline for such an agenda.

Nature of Relationship

From the review above, we see that effective leadership is that in which leaders and followers have strong, partnership relationships with one another. What we know less about, however, is what constitutes these relationships and how they are developed. Fairhurst and Hamlett (2004), for example, question the use of a 7- (or 12-) item measure that predefines the components of a high-quality relationship because it restricts respondents' ability to comment on the nature of this relationship. This issue was also raised more than a decade ago by House and Aditya (1997), who pointed out that although LMX theory states that high-quality relationships are characterized by mutual trust, respect, and loyalty (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), it is not clear that these are universal attributes of high-quality relationships. "It may well be that what is considered a high-quality relationship varies among individuals" (House & Aditya, 1997, p. 431). As described by Liden (2007):

> It appears that researchers working within LMX have made the questionable assumption that all high (or low) LMX relationships can be characterized in the same way. However, I argue that substantial differences within each LMX status group may exist. Specifically, the same leader may form dramatically different high LMX relationships with a corresponding difference in the nature of communications. For example, the leader may simply empower and "set loose" one high LMX member, whereas with another high LMX member, the leader may provide substantial guidance and mentoring. Similarly, communication patterns within high LMX may vary considerably. Some may be characterized by polite, respectful interactions whereas others may involve off-color jokes and teasing. In sum, . . . the psychological approaches need to consider the many forms that good (or bad) relationships can take. (p. 179)

Addressing this is difficult if we stick with only survey methods that use established LMX measures. Given that the basis for this work was established more than three decades ago, it seems fitting that research should again examine the nature and variety of ways in which leadership relationships can be of higher and lower quality in the workplace. Constructionist scholars, and more qualitative and mixed methods approaches, can help in this regard.

For example, Fairhurst (2007) describes how narrative analysis has been, and can continue to be, helpful in informing such understanding. The use of interviews gives leadership actors a chance to discursively reflect on their relational leadership experiences (Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Sias, 1996). A form of this method was used in early research on LMX, in which stories (qualitative data) were gathered from managers and subordinates about what life was like in the in-group and out-group. It was these stories that then led to initial LMX scale development (Fairhurst, 2007).

A discursive approach can also be found in Prebles (2002), who used a mixed methods design of survey and interviews of leaders and members in a medium-sized manufacturing firm who were asked to report on their LMX relationship. Participants completed the LMX-7, and researchers then used the items as prompts in ensuing interviews to elicit narrative experiences behind the ratings judgment. Findings reveal a variety of ways in which LMX relationships are constructed. Similarly, Fairhurst (2001), examining narrative data, showed that LMX is not just relational but also significantly impacted by cultural forces (i.e., a contextual approach to leadership, Osborn et al., 2002). She suggests that discursive (narrative) approaches can allow us to further enhance understanding of the interactive input of both culture and dyad in relational leadership processes (Fairhurst, 2007).

Although these examples focus primarily on LMX, which has typically been associated with manager–subordinate relationships, leadership relationships do not have to be restricted to managerial dyads (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). For example, as in the case of informal or shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), leadership relationships can be with coworkers (Sherony & Green, 2002; Tse, Dasborough, & Ashkanasy, 2008). They can also be mentoring relationships (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994).

Given that the LMX measure is currently designed to assess a subordinate's view of the relationship, simply mirroring these items for other types of relationships is likely not appropriate. Strict adherence to LMX items as currently defined may lead to skewed understandings of the nature of these relationships (i.e., findings regarding what items ask about rather than what is primarily important in the relationship). When viewed from a manager's (and likely a coworker's) perspective, the characteristics that are important in the relationship are different (Huang et al., 2008; Maslyn, Uhl-Bien, & Mitchell, 2007; Zhou & Schriesheim, 2009). Hence, we need to adopt more thoughtful and open approaches in our studies of leadership relationships.

Relationship Development

Another key challenge in LMX research has been the study of relationship development. Compared to the amount of LMX research overall, the number of studies examining relationship development are extremely limited. Yet one could argue that after identifying the importance of effective relationships—which has by now been clearly established—the major need in relational leadership research is to understand how leadership relationships develop: why some relationships develop well and other relationships develop poorly.

Addressing this question can be accomplished in a variety of ways. This is an area that could benefit greatly from exploratory methods, including qualitative, inductive studies that allow respondents, rather than researchers, to identify the processes and patterns involved in relationship development. As mentioned earlier, relationships often involve dialectical tensions (Fairhurst & Hamlett, 2004), which lend themselves well to discursive techniques (Fairhurst, 2007). An example of a combination of qualitative methods that lend themselves to exploring these processes and patterns of relationship development include narrative analysis of journal entries over time from both participants of the supervisory relationship under study, combined with recurrent in-depth individual and paired interviews where stories associated with critical incidents identified in the journal entries at key developmental moments could be further explored jointly. This could then be complemented with what Gubrium and Holstein (2009) call ongoing "narrative ethnographies," where the researcher uses naturalistic observations as well as ethnomethodological and conversational analytical approaches to capture the everyday narrative activity that unfolds within the situated interaction defining and contextualizing the experience of the study participants.

Developing relationships could also be examined using more quantitative or mixed methods approaches. For example, longitudinal network analysis (Lubbers et al., 2010) offers a potentially rich way to understand individual perceptions of relationship development over time. With longitudinal network analysis, respondents could be given a set of "predictor" measures at Time 1, and then relationship quality measures could be collected during subsequent time periods to identify variables associated with higher and lower quality relationship development. This method could also be combined with experience sampling techniques (Bono, Foldes, Vinson, & Muros, 2007), which would allow respondents to provide narrative descriptors regarding the nature of the relationship as it is developing.

Another promising quantitative approach is growth curve analysis (Day & Sin, in press; Nagin, 1999), which allows for examination of developmental trajectories in relationship development. Rather than assuming that all relationships start at the same level and change in the same way, analyses that combine techniques of random coefficient modeling and growth mixture modeling of longitudinal relationship development data can help uncover differences in developmental paths of relationships over time and identify whether there are patterns among these different types of paths (Day & Sin, in press).

A method that is not so promising is attempts to model dynamic relationship development using longitudinal studies with very limited measures during a couple of time periods. As described by Shamir (in press):

> Such studies seldom tell us anything about reciprocal relational processes and dynamics. Even multiwave longitudinal studies are at best a series of time-spaced sequential snapshots, which don't tell us much about *how* the process of leadership unfolds. Similarly, qualitative

> studies of leadership which are carried out over lengthy periods often do not provide a better understanding of leadership processes because such an understanding is not an automatic result of spending a long time in the field and collecting many interviews and observations (e.g., Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). It requires deliberate attention to the dynamic, mutual and reciprocal aspects of leadership relations.

Investigation of relational leadership means taking seriously the need to study dynamic processes and identifying approaches to research that truly capture these processes.

Level of Analysis

In a special issue of *The Leadership Quarterly* on levels of analysis, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) identified the level of LMX as the dyad. This position has subsequently been criticized, as actual LMX research is primarily conducted at the individual level: LMX research is conducted by asking individuals to report on their perceptions regarding the relationship (i.e., an individual level approach; Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & Yammarino, 2001).

This issue of inconsistency between a dyadic theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and an individual level of analysis has been clearly and repeatedly identified in the literature (Dansereau, 1995; Krasikova & LeBreton, 2010; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999; Schriesheim et al., 2001; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2007). Seers and Chopin (in press) similarly identify the problem: "The entity of primary interest within the LMX approach has been the subordinate role, . . . with less attention to the relationship as an entity." The individual level of analysis can be seen in the lack of congruence between manager and subordinate measures of LMX (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Maslyn et al., 2007), as well as in the work on balance in leader and follower perceptions of LMX (Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009), which shows that individual perceptions of the relationship do not always agree (e.g., an individual, rather than dyadic, level of analysis).

Capturing a dyadic level of analysis is challenging when we consider traditional survey approaches to LMX study. The question is: How can we capture a dyad with a survey? The answer is, we probably cannot; what we capture with surveys is individual perceptions of the relationship. What we can do, however, is try to align our *analyses* with a dyad level (Krasikova & LeBreton, 2010; Schriesheim et al., 2001). For example, Krasikova and LeBreton (2010), drawing from work by Kenny, Kashy, Cook, and colleagues (e.g., Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) on dyadic analysis, offer a detailed and thorough explanation of how LMX can be more appropriately analyzed at a dyadic level.

The issue becomes more complicated when we consider that the levels-of-analysis literature has developed in the postpositivist paradigm, and according to Yammarino (2009, 2010), there is no level for dyadic "relationality"

(Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). In the levels literature, the dyad is a combination of individual perceptions; it does not lie *between* individuals, which is the essence of a dyadic phenomenon. As described by Berscheid (1999), however, a relationship does not reside in the individual; it lies in individuals' interactions with one another—in the influence that each person exerts on the other's behavior.

For relationship scholars, the "tissue of a relationship, and the object of study, is the oscillating rhythm of influence observed in the interactions of . . . people. . . . It is displayed . . . in their interaction pattern" (Berscheid, 1999, p. 261). Moreover, this rhythm is revealed only over time, and like other great forces of nature (e.g., gravity, wind, electricity), it is invisible; its existence can only be discerned by observing its effects (Berscheid, 1999). This type of relational thinking—about recurring interconnections between individuals rather than properties within individuals—is foreign to some psychologists, but according to Berscheid (1999), it doesn't have to be:

> Just one example of why it shouldn't is provided by subatomic physics, the exemplar of the study of matter, or of material "things." Physicists long ago were forced to recognize that the properties of isolated material particles are, as Niels Bohr observed, "definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems" (Bohr, 1934, p. 37). As one contemporary physicist elaborated, "Subatomic particles . . . are not 'things' but are interconnections between 'things,' and these 'things' in turn, are interconnections between other 'things,' and so on. In quantum theory you never end up with 'things'; you always deal with interconnections" (Capra, 1982, p. 80). Thus, the growing attempt by the social and behavioral sciences to transcend the study of individuals—our material "things"—to the study of interconnections between individuals, as exemplified by relationship science, is neither without precedent nor revolutionary. (p. 261)

This, again, is where constructionist approaches can be helpful in aligning a relational theory with a *relationality* level of analysis. When constructionists think about studying leadership, they are by the very nature of their ontological and epistemological assumptions thinking about leadership as a social phenomenon and thus will place their interest on its relational and collective (including dyadic) dimensions. Indeed, the comparative advantage of a constructionist approach lies in concentrating on exploring questions associated with relational organizing (e.g., exploring shared patterns of meaning making, conjoint agency, and coordinated behavior through which leadership is enacted). They direct attention to questions about the relational processes that comprise effective, collective, relational leadership practice, that link relational leadership to the challenges of organizing in contemporary contexts, and that illuminate the conditions and mechanisms by which systems and networks of relations produce different forms of leadership in different contexts.

Relational Contexts

Leadership scholars have been concerned with the interconnections between the leadership relationship and the circumstances and conditions where it emerges (Biggart & Hamilton, 1987). Yet context continues to be marginalized or unsuccessfully integrated (Beyer, 1999; Bryman et al., 1996) in leadership studies and remains an "under-researched area" (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 573). Thinking of context in relational terms offers a novel view, and here, again, constructionism can make an important contribution: Rather than juxtaposing "leadership" and "organizational context" in a foreground-background manner, constructionists understand leadership as a process embedded in the organizational dynamics of which it is a part (Hosking, 1997; Ospina & Hittleman, in press). And these processes are, as Hosking (2007) suggests, always local-cultural and local-historical, "about what works in some 'here and now' performance" (p. 250).

The study of relational leadership means taking seriously the issue of relational context. Returning to the Berscheid (1999) quote at the beginning of the chapter, people are enmeshed in a web of ongoing relationships with others, such that the influence of the relationship context on behavior is often so powerful that it overturns what we think we know about behavior. Studying relational context means findings ways to shine light on the social milieu within which relationships, interactions, and processes are negotiated and constituted.

From a research perspective, these ideas point to the primacy of *local, situated contexts* as the adequate locus for illuminating how and why emergent dynamics and patterns of organizing, embedded in systems and networks of relations, are, or are not, transformed into leadership relationships, processes, and practices. Answering this query empirically is not an easy task and can take different forms, but all choices give primacy to the idea of the situated reality. Examples of constructionist strategies to address this include (a) the detailed investigation of the contextual organizing forces that create functional demands for leadership in an organization and from which leadership processes emerge as an organizational response (Drath, 2001; Drath et al., 2008; Hosking, 1997); (b) the search for leadership practices, that is, the patterned interactions and repeated activities developed over time, which reflect the shared, negotiated assumptions and understandings of what constitutes effective work in a given context, and exploring how these are used to generate collective achievements in that particular context (Foldy et al., 2008; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Ospina & Su, 2009); and (c) investigating the discursive and communicative patterns official leaders use with followers to negotiate and frame the situation (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010).

These research strategies have in common researchers' willingness to stop thinking of context as the background environment where leaders relate to followers, act, and make decisions. Constructionists challenge the notion that context exists prior to leadership or to the leadership relationship, because actions and interactions of social agents are both generative of situated social reality as much as they are influenced by it. People construct and name the emergent space that we call "context," drawing on and negotiating shared agreements as events unfold and as they define the situation to make sense and frame their experience. Precisely because people make sense of the world only through interactions with their environment and others in it, it is the emerging, mutually constituted relationships between leaders, followers, and situation that provide the conditions for leadership to happen. As Hosking has argued, "the study of leadership, properly conceived, is the study of the process in which flexible social order is negotiated and practiced so as to protect and promote the values and interests in which it is grounded" (Hosking, 1997, p. 315). In other words, it is the study of the context within which leadership contributes to negotiate social order in a given setting.

In sum, this conceptualization of relational contexts helps explain why constructionists tend to favor interpretive, narrative-oriented, and inductive studies, where the researcher's interpretations stem from the data, and where the data reflect the interpretations of the actors in relationship, which facilitate theorizing about these intertwined realities. It also points to the benefit of research designs and studies that allow researchers to consider multiple perspectives—perspectives from key organizational actors, in addition to formal leaders, and those whom they supervise—and to ensure multiple entries into the intersubjective experience of organizational life. This exploration can take multiple interpretive methodological pathways, depending on the researcher's interest, theoretical orientation, and specific research questions. Methods include, but are not limited to, narrative studies and discourse analysis; ethnography and its variations (e.g., narrative, critical, participatory ethnography); phenomenological studies; interpretive case studies; action research and its variations (e.g., participatory action research, cooperative inquiry, community-based participatory research); historical and hermeneutical studies; and so on (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). All of these allow the researcher to shift back and forth between the organizational gestalt and particular situations, and from intersubjective experiences to the broader patterns of interaction and networks of relationship that help shape and understand these experiences.

Conclusion

It is an exciting time to be in leadership research. As Hunt and Dodge (2000) predicted, the relational perspective—a view of leadership that goes beyond unidirectional or even reciprocal leader/follower relations to a focus on leadership wherever it occurs, that is not restricted to a single or even small set of formal or informal leaders, and that is a dynamic system embedding leadership, environmental, and organizational aspects—is now the zeitgeist of the times. We see in leadership a movement toward leadership approaches that are shared, distributed, complex, and relational (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson, & Uhl-Bien, 2011). These all comprise the relational perspective—the *relationality* movement in leadership.

The opportunities for research in this area have never been greater, but they come with challenges. To address these challenges, we need to focus less on why relationships are important and how they are associated with organizational variables (e.g., mediators and moderators), and more on how they emerge and function in organizational contexts. The issue of the importance and value of effective work relationships has been extensively and convincingly established (e.g., LMX, idiosyncrasy credit theory, transformational research, work on trust)—we *know* this. What practitioners want to understand, and what researchers need to investigate, is relational dynamics: relational processes, practices (collective leadership, patterns or social mechanisms of relational organizing), and contexts. These are issues of relationality more than of typologies and frameworks of relationships (e.g., high-, medium-, low-LMX).

If we look at recent writings from the pioneers of relational research (Graen's book series, *LMX Leadership: The Series;* Hollander's 2009 *Inclusive Leadership* book), we can see these issues are clearly recognized. Both Graen and Hollander advocate the need to focus on relational organizing. Hollander's work, as described in this chapter and in his book (2009), even sounds constructionist in its description of how leaders and followers interact with and intersubjectively interrelate with one another. What is holding this work back is the use of lenses that capture only the individual without capturing the relational. As Fairhust and Hamlett (2004) describe:

> Graen (personal communication) has consistently eschewed an individualistic focus calling the path of individualism "a failed paradigm" to draw attention to the inherently social nature of leadership. However, how can such a position be taken seriously when the social is *equated* with the study of individuals and their summary judgments of a relational history captured in seven point scales? (p. 119)

The challenge to relational scholars, as described by Berscheid (1999), is to broaden our paradigms and perspectives to capture relationality:

> The emergence of relationship science represents the flag of a higher truth that has now been planted in the individualistic soul of our discipline. Whether that flag will continue to stand or even someday wave over a new synthesis in psychology depends on whether future generations of scholars can conquer the daunting problems relationship science presents. (p. 265)

To meet these challenges, we are calling for a broad research agenda on relational leadership that is driven by research questions rather than methods. The intent is to stimulate a multitheoretical lens on relational leadership.

Meeting this agenda would engage dialogue among scholars from other fields—communication, social psychology, and sociology are obvious candidates—and multiple ontological traditions (e.g., colleagues from Europe and Australasia who have been rapidly advancing the field of social construction of leadership; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). We emphasize this must be in the form of relational dialogue—as Hosking (2007) says, "We need a 'thinking space' in which 'new kinds of questions can be asked' and 'new kinds of possible futures . . . articulated and debated'" (p. 245).

In sum, in this chapter, we have demonstrated the value both postpositive and constructionist perspectives bring to the study of relationships in organizations. We hope that by presenting a multitheoretical agenda for relational leadership, we have helped open up a "thinking space" that motivates new kinds of questions and raises new kinds of possible futures for relational leadership research.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of relational leadership research?
2. How well are researchers capturing issues of relationality, and why is this an issue in relational leadership research?
3. What are, in your view, shared areas and areas of difference between the postpositivist and constructionist approaches to relational leadership? Are there ways to reconcile the differences? How would you go about generating a dialogue across paradigms?
4. If you had to design the ideal study on dyadic leadership relationship development, what would it be? What factors influence your choice of research questions and methods?
5. What items would you add to the multiparadigmatic research agenda for the study of relational leadership? What do you see as the most important avenues for future research in this area?

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