Debate Formatting and Sample Proposal

Title Page

- See Title Page Template for instructions

Body of the Proposal Document

- A summary with a minimum of 900 words to a maximum of 3,000 words (excluding references) that describes the session in enough detail so reviewers can evaluate it effectively.
- Please provide a description of the topic to be debated, the participant composition and format of the debate, the major points likely to be argued by each side or the questions that will be posed to them, and the debaters' expertise related to the focal topic.
- Please indicate how much time you are requesting and how the time will be used during the session. Sessions may be 50 or 80 minutes long.
- Should not be prepared for blind review.

SUBMISSION TYPE
Debate

TITLE
Do Leadership Questionnaires Say More About Followers Than Leaders?

SHORTENED TITLE
Ldrshp Questionnaires More About Followers?

ABSTRACT
Although follower reports of leadership are widely used both to inform theory and practice, their use remains controversial with respect to their validity as a measurement of leaders' behavior. This debate will highlight different points of view, examine each side's assumptions, and seek common ground to foster potential solutions.

CITATION
Lord, R. G. (Moderator), Hansbrough, T. (Presenter), Schyns, B. (Presenter), & Riggio, R. R. (Presenter) (2024). Do leadership questionnaires say more about followers than leaders? [Debate]. Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, United States.

WORD COUNT
1333

Session Summary

Debaters:
Ron Riggio, Claremont McKenna College

Tiffany Keller Hansbrough, Fairleigh Dickinson University

Birgit Schyns, Durham University

Moderator:
Robert Lord, University of Akron

In this 50 minute debate, the debaters will address the question: Do leadership questionnaires say more about follower than leaders? During the first round (15 minutes) each side will present an opening response to this question, providing evidence and a rationale for their positions. Next each side will have five minutes for rebuttal. During the remainder of the session the moderator will encourage audience participation and offer additional perspectives on the debate.

Ronald Riggio, Claremont McKenna College and Associate Editor of *The Leadership Quarterly*, will make the case that follower leadership ratings can provide useful feedback to inform future leadership development. Ron is a well-known researcher who has extensively published in the area of transformational leadership as well as leadership skills.

Tiffany Keller Hansbrough, Fairleigh Dickinson University, and Birgit Schyns, Durham University, will make the case that follower characteristics such as liking and implicit leadership theories bias leadership ratings. Both Tiffany and Birgit have contributed extensively to the implicit leadership theory as well as leadership perception literature.

Robert Lord, University of Akron, will serve as the moderator for the debate. Bob is a SIOP Fellow who has been recognized for his unusual and outstanding contributions to the field. Further, he is a skilled facilitator in encouraging audience participation.

Each initial perspective is summarized below.

Follower Characteristics Bias Leadership Ratings

Over 30 years ago leadership researchers raised a revolutionary idea that follower perceptions of leadership are not objective but instead socially constructed. As noted by Eden and Leviatan (1975), leadership is in the mind of the respondent; it remains to be established if it is anything more than that (p.741). Since leadership may reside in the eye of the beholder, Lord and Emrich (2001) argue it is imperative to understand how follower perceptions are shaped. Ratings of leadership are biased by follower characteristics including liking and implicit leadership theories. First, liking has been shown to be an important precursor of leadership ratings. For example, liking has been linked to ratings of LMX (Engle & Lord, 1997; Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993) as well as ratings of transformational leadership (Brown & Keeping, 2005; Lewter & Lord, 1992). Zajonc (1980) suggests that affect precedes cognition rather than vice versa. He argues that affective reactions are basic, inescapable, irrevocable, difficult to verbalize, and implicate the self. In terms of person perception, initial impressions, such as affect or liking, are formed online at the time of the encounter (e.g. Bargh & Thein, 1985; Hastie & Park, 1986). Likewise, impression formative models (e.g. Srull & Wrer, 1989) suggest that person impressions follow a series of stages that begin with an initial overall "general evaluative concept of the person" (e.g. likable or dislikable). This evaluative concept then serves as an interpretative schema that biases subsequent perceptions (Schwarz, 1990; Srull & Wyer, 1989), so that, observers selectively attend to information that confirms their initial impressions.

Implicit leadership theories are mental models, or schemas, that observers use to sort people into "leader" or "non-leader" categories (Lord et al., 1984). Implicit leadership theories consist of traits, such as sensitivity, dedication, charisma, and intelligence, typically associated

with the word “leader” (Offerman et al., 1994; Epitropaki& Martin, 2004). Once activated, the leadership schema acts a lens through which followers view and respond to leaders (Lord et al., 1984). As such, implicit leadership theories can bias information processing and leadership ratings, including selective perception, selective recall and recall of schema consistent information where it doesn’t exist (Rush, Thomas, & Lord, 1977, Lord et al., 1984; Lord & Maher, 1990). As Shondrick et al. (2010) observe, implicit leadership theories can interfere with an individual’s ability to distinguish between the observed and the prototypical. What is particularly intriguing about this perspective is that the meaning construction process occurs primarily at the preconscious, implicit level, and consequently individuals have little insight into this process (Lord, 2005).

Finally, from a level of analysis perspective, if it were the case that follower perceptions are unbiased, follower reports of leadership should demonstrate agreement with both leader reports (e.g. dyad level of analysis) as well as with peer reports (e.g. group level of analysis) Agreement is crucial to the notion of leadership; if agreement is not present then leaders and followers are merely independent actors rather being interdependent (Keller & Dansereau, 2001). In particular, while transformational leadership has emerged as the most frequently researched topic in leadership during the last two decades (Avolio, Sosik, &Berson, in press; Jung, Yammarino, & Lee, 2009), there is a growing consensus that ratings of transformational leadership reflect individual differences (Brown & Keeping, 2005; Bono, Hooper & Yoon, 2012; Yammarino, Spangler & Dubinsky, 1998; Jung et al., 2009). Moreover, previous research suggests that the vast majority of MLQ items measure leadership at the individual level of analysis (Schriesheim, Wu, &Scandura, 2009). This raises serious concerns about whether transformational leadership is “in the eye of the beholder” (Yammarino, Spangler & Dubinsky, 1998).

Follower Ratings of Leadership Provide Useful Information

Although follower ratings of leadership are affected by factors such as leader likability, and implicit leadership theories, follower ratings of leadership still have value. First, follower ratings of leadership are an important element of 360-degree feedback for leader assessment, but more importantly for leader development. Research has suggested that follower evaluations of leadership play an important role in leader development efforts, and may spur leader improvement (Atwater & Brett, 2006; Facteau, Facteau, Schoel, Russell, & Poteet, 1998). For example, over a five year period, feedback from direct reports served to improve managerial performance (Walker &Smither, 1999). Moreover, McEnvoy and Beatty (1989) report that follower upward appraisals were the best predictor of performance. Indeed, many organizations have incorporated follower appraisals of leaders as a part of 360-feedback development efforts, or as a form of leader performance appraisal.

Although research on LMX and transformational leadership show that ratings of leaders are correlated with leader likability (Engle & Lord, 1997; Lewter & Lord, 1992), it is likely that the leader's treatment of followers in these (primarily) dyadic relationships are driving the ratings of likability, rather than the other way around. For example, in a meta-analysis Gerstner and Day (1997) report a correlation of .34 between leader and follower reports of LMX. This type of agreement would be expected in a mutually dependent relationship. Moreover, it is important to note that likability does not predict emergent leadership as well as does esteem (Bass, 1960). As concluded by Bass (2008), while being liked and being visible may still be of some importance to one's influence, perceived competence and values are of much more importance to leadership. Therefore the relationship between liking and leadership ratings might be circular.

From a levels of analysis perspective, one can point to examples of agreement in the literature. For example, Yammarino and Dubinsky (1990) report that although some relationships are individually based (e.g. no agreement among followers), some relationships are relevant based on the work group as a whole (e.g. agreement among group members). Moreover, Schreisheim, Neider and Scandura (1998) report clear empirical evidence that supports the LMX model at its hypothesized level of analysis (e.g. agreement between groups). Finally, Dansereauet al. (1999) report agreement between leader and follower reports of support for self-worth. Taken together, these studies suggest that follower reports of leadership do not merely reflect error due to individual biases.

It seems likely that the crucial concern is not follower ratings of leadership per se but rather a measurement issue. Follower ratings of leadership are often structured in such a way as to maximize the potential for contamination from factors, such as likability, that are unassociated with effective leader performance. For example, items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass &Avolio, 1995), the most widely used measure of transformational leadership include "[my leader] acts in ways that builds my respect" "…instills pride in me," and "…heightens my desire to succeed." Such items are prone to halo bias based on likability. Alternative follower measures of leadership should be more behaviorally anchored – assessing followers' observation of effective leader behaviors – rather than assessing general impressions.

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