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Uncovering Mechanisms of Theory Development in an Academic Field:
Lessons from Leadership Research

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Abstract

A long-standing debate in organization studies has centered on the tension between paradigmatic consensus and theoretical pluralism in an academic field, but little attention has been paid to the underlying processes of field development that account for this. Using a mechanisms-based approach, we examined the field of leadership over the last 50 years (1957–2007) focusing on: scholarly consensus on theory and methods; models and variables; and examinations of the state of the field. In spite of considerable advances in research, we find a general lack of commensuration or standards by which theories can be compared or synthesized; an emphasis on leaders' effects on performance rather than meaning-making or value infusion; and sparse instances of taking stock of the overall field. We conclude by proposing three research strategies

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for the future—theoretical compartmentalization, theoretical integration, and theoretical novelty—and advocating greater methodological variety.

Introduction

In the evolution of thought that shaped the field of organization studies, leadership has been an important touchstone (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Bogardus, 1920; Brown, 1936; Weber, 1947). Selznick (1957, p. 2) contended that "an understanding of leadership in both public and private organizations must have a high place on the agenda of social inquiry." And yet, more than 50 years later, leadership scholars question whether it has attained this "high place" within the field. Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985, p. 78) are blunt in their assessment:

> [T]he social construction of organizational realities has elevated the concept of leadership to a lofty status and level of significance. Such realities emphasize leadership, and the concept has thereby gained a brilliance that exceeds the limits of normal scientific inquiry.

Bass (1981, p. 26) asserts that "Sometimes leadership theory becomes a way of obscuring fact." Others have observed a lack of consensus among researchers on the definition or theorization of leadership (e.g., Bass, 1981; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002). Podolny, Khurana and Hill-Popper (2005) decry that organizational research on leadership has lost its way, and Don Hambrick (2008) sums up the state of the field in a colorful metaphor: "the academic field of leadership is the Rodney Dangerfield of the administrative sciences."

How could an academic field, like leadership research, so important in the emergence of organization studies, be viewed a half-century later as having "a hard time gaining intellectual traction" (Hambrick, 2008)? That is the question we take up, seeking to understand not only the field's trajectory over time, but also those mechanisms that serve as the motors of theory development (Stinchcombe, 2002). We chose to examine this question in the context of leadership research, primarily as it appears in the organization studies literature, for several reasons. First, leadership has been a long-standing construct of interest in organization studies (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Bogardus, 1920; Brown, 1936; Weber, 1947) and thus affords an extended time horizon for examining evolution and development. Second, the theoretical pluralism that characterizes the field (e.g., Bass & Bass, 2008) allows us to examine variations in scholarship and its relationship to field development. Finally, understanding the mechanisms underlying theory development in leadership research probably has broader application to other fields. By focusing on the mechanisms underlying the advancement of intellectual thought, we hope to discover ways to more generally develop the kinds of robust theory that "explains, predicts, and delights" (Weick, 1995, cited in Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 378).

A useful starting-point for this inquiry is Stinchcombe's (2002) framework describing the mechanisms of theory development in the social sciences. He focuses on three mechanisms—commensuration, evangelism, and truth-telling—and shows how they can function as drivers of theoretical development in a field. Moreover, we can use the mechanisms themselves as guideposts to gauge field advancement in our efforts to take stock of extant research, "an activity that is often a complex mixture of appreciation, wariness, anticipation, regret, and pride, all fused into thoughts of renewal" (Weick, 1996, p. 301).

Our objective is to address a fundamental question of interest in understanding the development of academic fields, particularly those characterized by different theoretical perspectives: *How* does the process of theory development unfold in an academic field characterized by theoretical pluralism? We chose to understand the role of pluralism because it is important, an increasingly characteristic of organization studies, and "there has been a growing theoretical pluralism in the organizational literature" (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983, p. 245). Pluralism can pose a "problem of variety" (Glynn, Barr, & Dacin, 2000, p. 726) because it "demands an additional dimension of active involvement with the phenomena of the researchers' analysis" (Spender, 1998, p. 235). Thus, theoretical pluralism in a field carries benefits and challenges to the development of an academic field, as Astley and Van de Ven (1983, p. 245) explain:

> On the one hand, this theoretical pluralism should be encouraged so that researchers will uncover novel aspects of organizational life and sharpen their critical inquiry. But on the other hand, this pluralism encourages excessive theoretical compartmentalization, and it becomes easy to lose sight of the ways in which various schools of thought are related to each other.

In sum, theoretical pluralism raises issues for the *process* of theoretical development in a field. And, while others have debated the advantages and disadvantages about the degree of theoretical pluralism and consensus on paradigms (see, for instance, Pfeffer, 1993; Van Maanen, 1995), we are agnostic in this debate. Instead, we seek to account for the degree of paradigm development in a pluralistic field by examining the mechanisms driving the process of theoretical development. To date, there has been little work attempting to uncover these mechanisms of field development or mechanism-based theorizing more generally (see Davis & Marquis, 2005, for a thorough discussion). We see our contribution as making an initial foray into articulating the mechanisms that potentially account for theoretical or paradigm development in an academic field.

We use leadership research, primarily within the organization studies literature, to explore these mechanisms. Within the context of attempting to understand the process of how theory development unfolds in a field, we draw on extant work for potential markers of this process and focus on addressing a sub-question related more specifically to leadership: *How* can we account for the theoretical development of the field of leadership research, particularly with regard to: (1) scholarly consensus on theories and methods (Cole, 1983, p. 112, cited in Pfeffer, 1993, p. 599); (2) modeling of leadership, in terms of agency, context, and effects variables (Seo & Creed, 2002), and (3) the state of the field of leadership research (Stinchcombe, 2002). Our contribution is to take stock of the leadership research literature, identifying perspectives that might be shared or consensual and contrast these with those that are less so. Our intent is to portray the landscape of the field of leadership research in ways that are useful at the macro level for taking stock of the past and present and guiding research in the future, and, at the micro level for enabling a leadership scholar to navigate this field.

We review in depth the leadership studies published over the last 50 years in four prominent journals in the field: three of these are organization studies journals with a broad mandate of organizational study, i.e., *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and *Organization Science*, and one specialty journal devoted to our focal topic, *Leadership Quarterly.*

We organize our review of the field of leadership research by using Stinchcombe's (2002) framework because it outlines a process theory of research development in an academic field and a set of mechanisms that drive its progress. Next, we describe this framework and then present our stocktaking of leadership research, outlining our data collection procedures, analytic strategies, and our findings. Finally, we discuss what we discovered and draw implications for the future of leadership research.

Stinchcombe's Mechanisms of Theory Development

Stinchcombe (2002) explicates the socially constructed mechanisms that underlie theoretical development in the social sciences, focusing on the processes of theory construction. He departs from other scholars in his treatment of paradigm development by focusing on the developmental *process*, while others (e.g., Kuhn, 1970; Pfeffer, 1993; Van Maanen, 1995) focus on the *outcomes* of this process, and the resulting *degree* (high versus low) of paradigm consensus in a field. High paradigm fields refer to those in which there is "shared theoretical structures and methodological approaches about which there is a high level of consensus" (Cole, 1983, p. 112, cited in Pfeffer, 1993, p. 599); low paradigm fields lack such consensus and, instead, proliferate varieties of theories and methods about which there is little agreement among scholars. We are interested not only in *what* may be the extent of paradigm development, but also *why* it has occurred. Thus, we chose to use Stinchcombe's (2002) framework of mechanism-based theorizing (Davis & Marquis, 2005) to detect the micro-motors that advance (or retard) paradigm development.

Stinchcombe's (2002) framework allows us to identify, label and evaluate such mechanisms. He accounts for theory development with three mechanisms that generally occur in the following sequence: (1) commensuration, or the standardization of theoretical constructs, definitions or processes that enable comparison across theorizations; (2) evangelism, or the zealous conversion of adherents to a particular theoretical or methodological stance; and (3) truth-telling, or critical tests that can detect the most veridical theories in a pluralistic field. Other organizational scholars have applied (or recommended) Stinchcombe's framework in a number of different fields, including social movement theory (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003), institutional theory (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), culture (Breiger, 2005), and the financial industry (Davis & Marquis, 2005). Here, we extend it to the field of leadership research; a description of each of Stinchcombe's (2002) three mechanisms follows.

Commensuration

In order for fields to flourish, there needs to be some level of standardization (or agreed-upon principles) in practices, norms, conventions, or cognitive templates in order to enable communication, comparability—and even competition—among ideas and theories. Kuhn (1970, p. 10) notes how this is the very basis on which "normal science" progresses:

> Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, i.e., for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition.

Stinchcombe (2002) describes commensuration as the sociology of standardization, where convergence among participants establishes consensual standards that can then be used to assess similarities and differences in theories. He argues (p. 417) that two social practices must take place in order for commensuration to occur:

> First, the qualities of the products of firms have to be standardized before transactions, so that sellers know what they are selling and buyers what they are buying. Second these standardized goods have to be compared in terms of money (or some other metric) by buyers and sellers, so that those standardized use values have prices that can be compared.

Thinking about an academic field as a marketplace for ideas makes the relevance of commensuration apparent: "qualities of products" are the qualities of ideas, theories, concepts or models; and "inputs" are the definitions or assumptions that scholars make. Thus, if there is an established common standard, two (or more) theories can be compared and judged. The standard enables one theory to be framed and understood in the language, variables, or processes of another theory; thus, commensuration allows scholars to build on, integrate, modify, elaborate, contest, rebuke, disprove, winnow out, or otherwise evaluate extant theories. Conversely, when theories are incommensurable, they lack a common standard; as a result, there is little, if any, cross-communication or cross-fertilization of ideas. For instance, because of their different levels of analysis, theoretical perspectives, explanatory variables, and methodological tendencies, organizational theories of leadership and of population ecology can be viewed as fairly incommensurate.

Commensuration, then, is an important step in paradigm development. With commensuration, scholars can understand and appreciate the differences among theoretical perspectives; and, in turn, advocate—or evangelize—for those they favor.

Evangelism

Stinchcombe's (2002) second mechanism in theory development is evangelism—the zealous spread of ideas and beliefs to convert others to one's way of thinking. By using the term "evangelism," Stinchcombe clearly draws a parallel with the formation of early churches, where social movements built culture, beliefs and organizations (p. 420). Evangelism requires missionary work and missionaries willing to enthusiastically spread the word.

Scientists are evangelists, in Stinchcombe's view, "trying to convert each other to our own views, to organize the conversation of the next generation" (2002, p. 423). Evangelists create missions, churches or temples that house and sanction their particular set of beliefs. Interestingly, the notion of evangelism redounds to Jim March's metaphor of the university as a temple, i.e., "a temple dedicated to knowledge and a human spirit of inquiry" (2003, p. 206) that should be shielded against the market which may corrupt it. With the proliferation of possible approaches by evangelists, there needs to be field-level mechanisms for sorting through the ideas and discerning those that are the most valid, appropriate, or, as Stinchcombe (2002) puts it, truthful.

Truth-telling

The final mechanism that Stinchcombe (2002) identifies is "truth-telling." With the evangelical proliferation of ideas, independent third parties are needed as arbiters to adjudicate among them and ensure that the truth be told. In other fields, this is evident. For example, home inspectors evaluate houses for potential home buyers, bond ratings are used to value the credit quality of the corporation, and emission certifications are placed on cars to validate their environmental impact.

Stinchcombe (2002) suggests that truth-telling occurs for scholars during the journal review process or through referees' recommendation letters for candidates. An example can be found in the medical field. Dr. Frank Davidoff (Davidoff, 1996), writing as editor of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, described the debate on cholesterol screening as one of ideological differences between "evangelists" (who advocated for massive screening programs) and "snails" (who advocated caution and additional scientific analyses). As an arbiter, Davidoff urged "to bring the issues out into the open… where they can be soberly examined and better understood" (1996, p. 514). Stinchcombe would probably applaud the editor's action as one of truth-telling; as he explains, "debate, trials, presentation of evidence, open public processes, and the like are required for legitimacy" (2002, p. 426).

"Critical tests"—where the "best theory" wins—are generally in short supply in organizational scholarship (Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 334). Davis and Marquis note how the theory proliferation of the mid-1970s might have generated a "winnowing process… to select out the weak theories and allow the strong to survive." However, that winnowing did not occur (Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 334):

> One might have hoped to see another grand synthesis at the end of the 1980s that selected judiciously from the competing paradigms, drawing on meta-analyses of the cumulative bodies of findings in each approach… Based on this synthesis, new work could proceed to cumulate knowledge in ever-greater territories of organizational life. Yet nothing of the sort has happened. Instead, with the notable exception of population ecologists, macro-organizational scholars since 1990 have largely abandoned the idea of cumulative work within a particular paradigm in favor of problem-driven work that is theoretically agnostic.

In leadership research, evidence of "critical tests," the winnowing down of theoretical plurality, or a "grand synthesis" of theories, can enable the development of robust and general theories of leadership and shared paradigms. We explore the extent to which any of these processes have occurred in leadership research, using Stinchcombe's (2002) framework as a guideline.

Taking Stock of the Field of Leadership Research

Our stocktaking effort focuses on the *level of the field,* rather than on a particular theoretical or methodological perspective within the field. By focusing on the field level in leadership research, we try to understand the aggregate patterns among the various theoretical perspectives, research methodologies, models, variables, and claims about the state of the field. To identify a suitable sample for closer inspection, we collected and analyzed the leadership articles published in four prominent journals, and supplemented this with reviews in other important and related journals.

Sample and Data

Leadership publications in organization studies journals. We examined all the empirical studies on leadership published in three prominent organization studies journals: *Journal of the Academy of Management*, which later became the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ), and *Organization Science* (OS). Our sample extends over 50 years, from the journal's founding to 2007.

We chose these three journals for several reasons. First, we were guided by Selznick's (1957, p. 23) observation that "a theory of leadership is dependent on a theory of social organization." Thus, we selected journals that published not only theories of leadership but also theories of organizations (e.g., Palmer, 2007) intended to reach a broad audience of management scholars (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005). Second, these journals "span the space between theory testing and theory building" (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 379), an interface that allowed us not only to take stock of theory development but also to detect critical tests of theories (Stinchcombe, 2002). Moreover, paradigms are defined in terms of both theory and methods (see Cole's [1983] definition, cited earlier) and so we felt it important to include both of these. Third, all three journals are important in the organization studies field. Using citation counts, Podsakoff and colleagues (2005, p. 487) found that in the 1980s, ASQ was "by far the most prominent journal" and by 1999, AMJ "had joined ASQ at the top"; in the next rung, they placed the *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ), the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (JAP), and *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (OBHDP), describing the last two as "more narrowly focused" (Podsakoff et al., 2005, p. 487). An examination of their editorial statements of purpose at the time of founding affirms this; AMJ and ASQ explicitly identify leadership as an important topic, as does *The Leadership Quarterly* (LQ). The other journals are less so: see Table 1 for these founding statements. Finally, our focal journals afforded a long time frame for reviewing leadership research, more than 50 years in the aggregate: ASQ began publishing in 1957; AMJ in 1958; and OS in 1990.

In total, AMJ, ASQ and OS (which we collectively refer to as the "organization studies journals") published 4107 articles over the 50 years from 1957 to 2007. Our data consists of every empirical article published in these journals whose title or abstract made reference to the terms "leader," "leaders," or "leadership"; these were 152 in total. These articles are the same as those used by Glynn and DeJordy (2010, p. 616); however, there is only minimal overlap empirically and theoretically. Empirically, we used only two of their 31 codes, which coded theory and methods for each individual article. We added and analyzed six additional categories that are unique to this inquiry. In addition, we added 102 articles from an additional source, a specialty journal in leadership (described below). Theoretically, we extended their finding of a prototype design in leadership research to examine the underlying mechanisms that may account for it.

Leadership publications in the specialty journal. We sampled articles from a journal dedicated to the study of leadership, *The Leadership Quarterly* (LQ). We chose LQ because "it is the most prominent specialty journal in this subdiscipline" (Podsakoff et al., 2005, p. 475) and because it would offer a point of comparison to the organization studies journals (described above).

The idea of LQ originated in a friendly dinner conversation that occurred among Bernie Bass, Bob House, and Henry Tosi, following a Canadian leadership conference in 1988. At this gathering, each suggested that the leadership

Table 1 Organization Journals' Founding Statements

Journal	Year of First Publication	Purpose of Journal as Outlined by its Founding Editor(s)
Academy of Management Journal (Journal of the Academy of Management)	1958	"To foster a philosophy of management that will make possible an accomplishment of the economic and social objectives of an industrial society with increasing economy and effectiveness. To foster greater understanding by **executive leadership** of the requirements for a sound application of the scientific method to the solution of managerial problems."
Academy of Management Review	1976	"To establish a journal that is primarily dedicated to theory, concept, and review type articles."
Administrative Science Quarterly	1957	"Focus on the **conception of administration**, placing special emphasis on 'reappraisal' as a mechanism for adjustment in practical operations. In the same vein, accepted understanding of administrative processes must be subject to continuous reappraisal and reformulation."
Journal of Applied Psychology	1917	"The editors hope that the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (a) may bring together the now widely scattered data in this and other countries; (b) may gather from the various industries and from other practical fields data which shall be of real value for pure psychology; (c) may indicate new applications of psychology to the arts and to the occupations of human life, to which psychologists have hitherto make but little contribution."
Leadership Quarterly	1990	"To publish manuscripts from a wide variety of disciplines with an interest in **leadership** and to serve as an international outlet for **leadership theory** and research."
Organization Science	1990	"The journal will play a role in enhancing research relevance, weaken the barriers to fresh methods and topics about organizations, incorporate ideas and methods from other disciplines, help loosen the buckles on the normal science straitjacket in which we believe the field of organization studies finds itself…, create a new image for the field, attract new scholars, and refocus the values of those already on board."
Strategic Management Journal	1980	"From the theoretical point of view SMJ will concern itself with strategic behavior and strategic actions, in addition to the historical preoccupation with strategic decisions."

Note: Bold formatting highlights explicit references to the concept of leadership.

field needed an outlet dedicated to high-quality research in leadership; by the end of their meal, they agreed to create that journal. Its purpose was to "advance the field by being multi-disciplinary, open to multiple methods, and innovative" (see Lowe & Gardner, 2000, for a recount of the founding story).

From its founding in 1990–2007, LQ published a total of 438 articles. Of these, we selected every fourth article, in chronological order, resulting in a sample of 102. We did this to balance the number of articles across sources (152 from the organization studies journals; 102 from LQ), and to identify a representative sample of articles from LQ. We included theoretical as well as empirical articles from LQ to give a broader sense of leadership research in an outlet dedicated to its advancement.

From the four combined journals, our total data set consisted of 254 articles, distributed as follows: AMJ, n=113/2231 (5.1%) empirical articles; ASQ, n=34/1202 (2.8%) empirical articles; OS, n=5/674 (0.8%) empirical articles; LQ, n=102/438 (23.3%) theoretical and empirical articles.[1] Table 2 offers a breakdown of these by journal. In addition, we acknowledged and briefly examined some of the relevant work on leadership published in other journals, including the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Strategic Management Journal*, and the *Academy of Management Review*. As important as these last three journals have been in the field, conducing an in-depth analysis of all seven journals is beyond the scope of this work.

Coding and Analytical Procedures

Our codes were designed to address the three components (or mechanisms) of theory development in the field: (1) scholarly consensus on theories and meth-

Table 2 Description of Data, Sources, and Samples

Data Samples	Journal Start Date	# Articles Published Through 2007	# of Articles with Leadership Focus	# of Articles Coded
Sample 1: Organizational Studies Journals (empirical articles only)				
AMJ	1958	2231	113	113
ASQ	1957	1202	34	34
OS	1990	674	5	5
Total		*4107*	*152*	*152*
Sample 2: Specialty Journal (empirical and theoretical articles)				
LQ	1990	438	438	102
Population: Title Analysis (all articles in all four journals)				
Sample 1		4107	152	152
Sample 2		438	438	438
Total		*4545*	*590*	*590*

ods; (2) leadership models, including agency, context, and effects variables; and (3) examinations (or reflections) on the state of the field. We developed a set of codes to assess each of these three components.

To assess consensus (1), we used two codes: "Methods" and "Theoretical Focus." To assess leadership variables and models (2), we coded for leader, organization context, and effects. These three variables capture the agency–structure duality (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992) and extend this to its effects or outcomes, variables that have occupied the attention of leadership researchers (e.g., Podolny et al., 2005; Sewell, 1992). First, the "Leader as Actor" code captured the modeling of a leader's orientation to action within a setting. We made distinctions between researcher's conceptualization of leaders as either *abstracted actors*, such that the concept of the leader is not associated with a particular role or position, or *agentic actors*, where agency is "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). In conceptualizing actors as agentic, researchers position them in a particular role, position or structure that explicitly presupposes human agency (e.g., Sewell, 1992) and orients them towards taking action of some kind. Within this agentic category, we also differentiated between study subjects considered to be "managerial elites," i.e., "those who occupy formally defined positions of authority, those at the head of, or who could be said to be in strategic positions in private and public organizations of various sizes" and thus organizationally powerful (Pettigrew, 1992, p. 163), and those leaders who were non-elite, such as low- to mid-level organizational managers and employees.

Second, the "Organizational Context" code examined whether scholars studied the construct of leadership within a specific context of an organizational setting. In this regard, we coded for explicit instances where the research was situated in an organization, workgroup, or work-related context, providing a means to examine the relationship between structure (organizational context) and agency (leader).

Third, in order to analyze the outcomes of agency–structure duality, we developed two codes to evaluate effects: "Performance" and "Values, Beliefs, Meaning." Our selection of effects codes was influenced by recent work suggesting that leadership research has lost its original focus on meaning and values in favor of performance (Podolny et al., 2005). Performance was coded for explicit mentions of leadership as a means to an end, effectiveness, or the achievement of a goal. In contrast, we coded for instances where values, beliefs and meaning-making were seen as unique effects related to leadership.

To assess stocktaking examinations of the state of the field (3), we used a single code, "State of the Field," and applied this to any articles that reviewed or reflected on the field overall or engaged any of Stinchcombe's (2002) three stages, i.e., commensuration, evangelism or truth-telling. In sum, our codebook consisted of 19 codes organized into seven categories. Table 3 describes each of these in detail, with definitions, examples, and representative theorists.

Table 3 Codebook

Article	Code	Description	Examples
Identifiers	Id	Unique identifier.	
	Idsample	Every fourth article in LQ published between 1990 and 2007.	
	Idglynndej	Unique identifiers for articles in Glynn & DeJordy (2010).	
Type of Article	Empirtheory	0 = Theory / Conceptual 1 = Empirical	
Methods	Method	0 = Cannot determine 1 = Quantitative 2 = Qualitative 3 = Meta (must state "meta" explicitly) 4 = Mixed	*Quantitative:* "Sampling three industries to enhance generalizability, we found that board vigilance was positively associated with CEO duality." *Qualitative:* "The article discusses the managerial style and effective communication of Sir Winston Spencer Churchill … particularly on the language used by Churchill in his speeches." *Meta:* "A meta-analysis of 37 studies of teams in natural contexts suggests that…" *Mixed:* "Observation, interviews, group elicitations, and a literature search were used… a self-management leadership questionnaire was developed."

Article	Code	Description	Examples
Theoretical Focus	Behavioral	Employed a behavioral theory of leadership. Includes references to the "leadership grid" concerns for production and people, initiating and consideration structures, transactional or transformational actions, action, or leadership style (e.g., Kahn & Katz, 1960; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).	"…investigated how the leadership behavior of a large number of supervisors, as measured by consideration and initiating structure scales, was related to their subordinates reported burnout."
	Contingency	Employed a contingency theory of leadership. "Context matters" of leadership. References to path-goal theory, Fiedler's contingency model or its components, the situated model of leadership, etc. (e.g., nationality, geography, industry comparisons) (e.g., Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).	"…careers of successful military leaders were analyzed to determine if successful military leadership could be predicted by Fiedler's contingency model."
	Dyadic	Employed a dyadic theory of leadership. Primarily used for LMX, but also any explicit reference to "leader-follower", although supervisor/subordinate without reference to leadership was not included. Includes an implied relationship/interaction between leader-follower. Should focus on a relationship (e.g., Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982).	"We developed a model in which leader–member exchange mediated between perceived transformational leadership behaviors and followers' task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors."

Table 3 Codebook (Continued)

Article	Code	Description	Examples
	Trait	Employed a trait-based theory of leadership. Major traits that affected leadership or responses to leadership included self-confidence, charisma, genre, race. Also includes any mention of "skills" (e.g., Stogdill, 1948).	"This study on the exercise of influence examines selected relationships among leader characteristics"
	Meaning	Theorized about the meaning of leadership (e.g., Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).	"The article discusses the concepts of leadership in Greek literature prior to the 4th century B.C., including the Homeric tradition and the tradition of the fifth century Athens."
Organizational Context	Org	Investigated the relationships between leadership and organizations. Explicitly mentioned organizations, work groups, employees or job-related reference, work context, and/or impact. Applied to a workplace and or organizational setting. Can include management (i.e., TMT). Included if the organization's name was cited. Did not include references to managers, employees, or subordinates without specific reference to other organizational factors listed.	"…tests significance of the organizational contextual factors in crafting a vision."

Article	Code	Description	Examples
Effects: ***Performance***	Performance	Investigated the relationships between leadership and performance (of individual, group, organization, or leadership effectiveness). Explicitly mentioned "performance" or "outcome." Leadership was used as a means to an end. Included team or group effectiveness. Included outcomes (e.g., a decision, plan, strategy, or goal made). Did not include processes (e.g., decision-making, planning, strategizing, goal-making).	"This paper evaluates research on the impact of chief executive officers on corporate performance, taking Lieberson and O'Connor's path-breaking study as its starting point."
Values, Beliefs, or Meaning	Valbelmean	Investigated the relationship between leadership and values, believes, and meaning. Explicitly mentioned values, beliefs, or meaning (e.g.., ethics, symbols, symbolic qualities, values, trust, inspiration/inspiring, sense-making/sense-giving).	"We show how initial claims about leadership values and style tend to break down when managers are asked to expand on how they perceive their leadership…"
Leader As Actor: ***Abstracted***	Leadertype	Indicated the type of leader studied. 0 = Abstracted: leadership is not associated with a particular person, role, or position.	Abstracted: "The framework focuses on the process of leadership and its role within the more inclusive process of strategy formation."
Agentic (non-elite, elite)		1 = Agentic (non-elites): included references to "executives" not specifically associated with the top management team (mid-managers, group leaders, supervisors, student groups, undergraduates, MBA groups)	Agentic (non-elites): "Empirical data gathered from a sample of practicing managers concerning their preferences and reactions to standardized allocation problems…"

Table 3 Codebook (Continued)

Article	Code	Description	Examples
		2 = Agentic (elites): if within the context of a business/nonprofit, must have been a C-level executive (e.g., CEO, CFO, COO, CIO). Must have made a specific reference to the elite leader (CEOs, top management teams, presidents, prime ministers, military generals). Did not include references to role plays (i.e., undergraduate in a lab who played the role of a CEO was not considered elite).	Agentic (elites): "…reports the results of a study examining the relationships among strategic charismatic leadership, organizational performance… with primary data from a sample of 128 CEOs."
State of the Field	Stinchcombe	Made references related to Stinchcombe's three stages of theory development (commensuration, evangelism, truth telling/legitimation). The article questioned the state of leadership field, mentioned field or paradigm development, suggested previous theories were incomplete, argued against another established theory, or introduced a method to analyze leadership differently.	"…we examined the attention and interest in leadership as reflected in a variety of publications, in conjunction with national, industry, and firm variations in performance."

CEO: Chief Executive Officer; CFO: Chief Financial Officer; CIO: Chief Information Officer; COO: Chief Operating Officer; LMX: Leader–member exchange; LQ: *Leadership Quarterly*; MBA: Master of Business Administration; TMT: Top management team;

We conducted our coding from the article abstracts. An illustrative example of a coded abstract is shown in the Appendix. However, to insure that our coding was complete and accurate, we randomly selected and examined the full text of articles for coding consistencies; furthermore, if the abstract was unclear or ambiguous, if information was missing, or if coders disagreed, we coded from the full text of the article.

Using an iterative process, we conducted three pilot rounds of practice coding on unique sets of 30 articles randomly generated from the entire population of 533 LQ articles published from 1990 to mid-2009; these are excluded from our analyses. Across the three rounds, we coded a total of 90 articles and reached a confidence level of approximately 95% across all codes. The remaining 5% of coding discrepancies were due to human error, which we corrected. When we were satisfied that we had refined the codebook and had accurate and consensual coding strategies, the two authors and a research assistant conducted five rounds of coding for all 254 articles, analyzing approximately 40–50 abstracts in each round. We met to discuss our results after completing each round to review any coding discrepancies and came to consensus on the codes for each article. In total, we spent approximately 170 combined hours hand-coding and in meetings where we verified our codes with each other.

Article Title Analysis

As an adjunct to the coding analyses, we explored an objective (and admittedly coarse-grained) indicator that might be suggestive of the degree of paradigm development in the field: the length of article titles. This indicator was suggested by the work of Pfeffer (1993), who argued that high-paradigm fields, because of their greater consensus, communicate more efficiently; as a result, high-paradigm fields would seemingly require fewer words to express their ideas (Salancik, Staw, & Pondy, 1980). We posit that this indicator is consistent with the concept of commensuration (Stinchcombe, 2002) and in the spirit of other scholars who have used length of communication measures as a proxy for paradigm development (e.g., Konrad & Pfeffer, 1990). Because the length of article abstracts is usually limited by the journals, we looked instead to the titles, reasoning that shorter lengths might be indicative of higher paradigm development, although we recognize that our analyses are exploratory and not definitive.

We pulled by hand all articles, empirical and theoretical, published in LQ from 1990 through 2007 (n=438) and to these added the titles from our sample from the organization studies journals (n=152); this resulted in a total of 590 titles. For each of these, we counted by hand the number of words in the title and tracked these annually over time. To give us a comparison, we also analyzed the title length of articles from another field of research, entrepreneurship. We hand-counted the length of all articles (n=472) published in the journal *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (ET&P), one of the core journals of the discipline (Ratnatunga & Romano, 1997). We chose entrepreneurship because it is considered a low-paradigm field, lacking a shared conceptual framework (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Thus, if the title lengths of leadership articles were comparable to those in entrepreneurship, it would be a suggestive indicator that leadership research is similarly low in paradigm development. We caution that this is just one measure and thus not conclusive or robust. We would also have liked to have contrasted title lengths across different theoretical domains, but prohibitive costs of collecting, counting, and analyzing the data by hand prevented this.

Evidence of Mechanisms in Theory Development

Over the past half-century, we found that articles on leadership appeared regularly in organization studies journals: approximately 4% of all articles in AMJ, ASQ and OS were empirical studies of leadership. Publications peaked in the 1970s (9.18% in 1976), then declined to remain fairly steady at about 6% (or lower); this is depicted in Figure 1. From Figure 1, it is evident that leadership research continued to be published in the organization studies journals, even after the launch of LQ in 1990. Prior to 1990, approximately 5% of ASQ and AMJ articles focused on leadership (OS was not founded until 1990, the same year as LQ). Post-1990, this percentage halved (to 2.5%) in organization studies overall. However, it seems that the publication of LQ may have sparked renewed interest in the topic. In 1986 (pre-LQ), neither AMJ nor ASQ

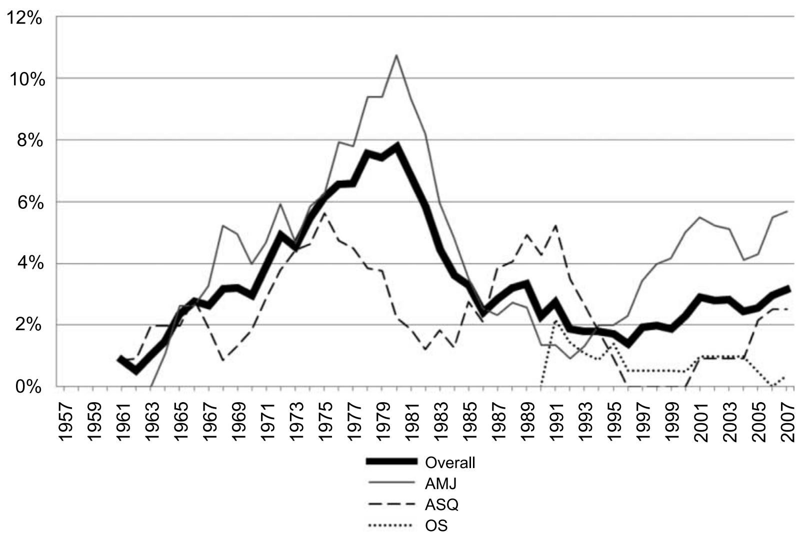

Figure 1 Empirical Articles on Leadership in Three Organizational Studies Journals (AMJ, ASQ, OS): 1957–2007, 5-Year Moving Average.

published a single article on leadership; in 2006, this increased to nearly 10%. In total, 590 articles on leadership have been published in all four journals over the last 50 years: 152 empirical articles in AMJ, ASQ, and OS (combined) and 438 empirical and theoretical articles in LQ. These trends are displayed in Figure 1, illustrated with 5-year moving averages.

We turn now to the evidence that addresses our question on the process of theory development in leadership research, accounting for: (1) consensus on theories and methods; (2) leadership models and variables; and (3) examinations of the state of the field.

(1) Consensus on Theories and Methods in Leadership Research

Leadership theories. In the organization studies journals, behavioral theories of leadership dominate, characterizing almost half (44.74%) the articles. Next in frequency were contingency theories, appearing in more than a quarter of studies (26.87%), followed by trait and dyadic theories, each accounting for about one-sixth (17.11% and 17.76%, respectively). Finally, theories on meaning-making were in short supply, found in about one-tenth (11.18%) of all studies, as Podolny and colleagues (2005) conjectured (see Table 4).

Similarly, the LQ articles emphasized behavioral theories, characterized by more than half the articles (55.88%). However, trait theories were far more prominent in LQ than in the organization studies journals, characterizing 40%

Table 4 Use of Theories in Leadership Studies by Article and Journal Types

Journals	Behavioral	Trait	Contingency	Dyadic	Meaning of Leadership
Organization Studies	44.74%	17.11%	26.97%	17.76%	11.18%
AMJ, ASQ, OS (*n*=152, empirical)	(68)	(26)	(41)	(27)	(17)
Specialty	55.88%	40.20%	35.29%	12.75%	4.90%
LQ (*n*=102, empirical & theory)	(57)	(41)	(36)	(13)	(5)
Specialty	59.57%	42.55%	40.43%	10.64%	4.26%
LQ (*n*=47, empirical)	(28)	(20)	(19)	(5)	(2)
Specialty	52.73%	38.18%	30.91%	14.55%	5.45%
LQ (*n*=55, theory)	(29)	(21)	(17)	(8)	(3)
All	48.24%	23.12%	30.15%	16.08%	9.55%
AMJ, ASQ, OS, LQ (*n*=199, empirical)	(96)	(46)	(60)	(32)	(19)

Note: Article counts in parenthesis. Rows do not total 100% because some articles were coded with more than one theory.

AMJ: *Academy of Management Journal*; ASQ: *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*; LQ: *Leadership Quarterly*; OS: *Organization Science.*

of the LQ articles. Trait theory, often thought to be a relic of the previous century (Chemers, 2000; Kanter, 1977), was still a very visible part of leadership research. This finding seems to contradict the narrative of theoretical evolution often used to describe leadership research, i.e., an advancement through trait, behavioral, contingency and other perspectives (see Glynn & DeJordy, 2010, for a discussion). We found no evidence that later generations of theories eclipsed or displaced earlier ones. Instead, each theoretical perspective persisted over time, with little evidence of a winnowing process that might select out weaker theories, allowing the stronger to survive (Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 334).

We also checked for the co-occurrence of multiple theories in a particular article as a way of detecting comparisons or integration across theories that might be enabled by commensuration. We found that multiple theoretical perspectives were a fairly infrequent occurrence, appearing in only 20% of articles. Further evidence of a lack of co-occurrence is provided by the pair-wise correlations between theories: across all articles, pair-wise correlations were negative (all rs $\geq -.11$), with most (6/10 pairs) significant at $p<.05$. Notably, trait theories were significantly and negatively related to both behavioral and contingency theories, indicating little, if any, synthesis of the major perspectives in leadership research. These are shown in Figure 2.

Empirical methods in leadership research. Within the organization studies journals, quantitative methods dominated leadership research, appearing in 82.43% of articles, with a heavy emphasis on survey, archival, and laboratory designs. Meta-analyses, as a subset of quantitative methods, were of particular interest because the methodology affords a standard by which

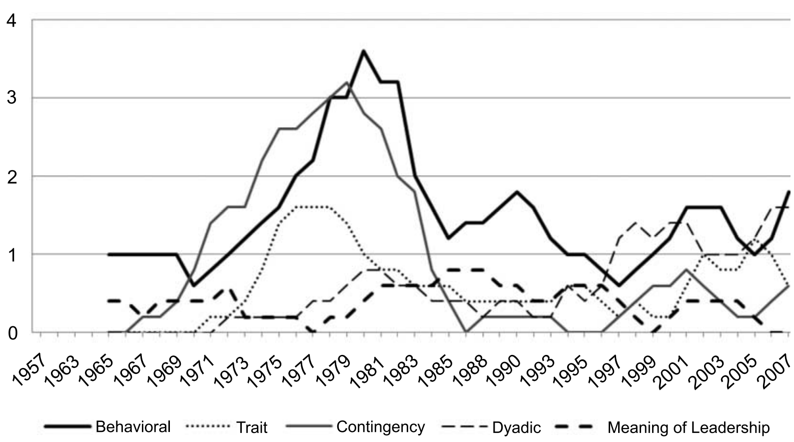

Figure 2 Theoretical Focus in Empirical Leadership Studies (AMJ, ASQ, OS): 1957–2007, 5-Year Moving Average.

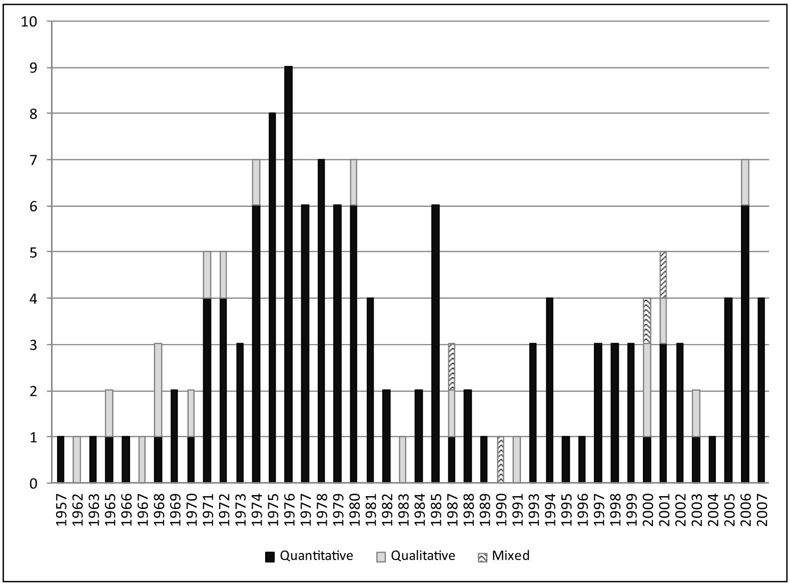

Figure 3 Annual Counts of Methods Used in Leadership Studies by Year in AMJ, ASQ, OS, 1957–2007.

research evidence can be compared and aggregated; however, we found that this method accounted for less than 3% of all studies. Compared to quantitative methods, only a small number (12.16%) of articles used qualitative methods. This is depicted in Figure 3.

Perhaps the field's emphasis on quantitative methods can be partly explained by Bryman's (2004, p. 762) observation that even qualitative designs use quantitative methods; he notes "a tendency for some qualitative research on leadership to look like quantitative research on leadership but without numbers, a tendency that appears to have increased as the distinctive case study or multiple case study design has tended to give way to the cross-sectional design that characterizes much quantitative research."

Within LQ, we found that quantitative methods continued to dominate the field, used in 74.47% of the empirical articles. However, qualitative methods were used more often in LQ, but still were infrequent (21.28%). Mixed methods were used even less frequently (4.26%) and we found no meta-analyses in LQ. Overall, our analysis reveals that leadership research published in all four journals seems to rely heavily on quantitative methodology, with relatively less use of qualitative methods.

Taken together, our analyses of the theories and methods used in leadership research revealed strong and robust tendencies, across time and across different types of journals. We found a heavy reliance on behavioral theories and quantitative methodology; as well, there was persistent application of trait and contingency theories. And, although Porter (2010) speculated that specialty journals might have a different pattern, we found little to support this.

This evidence suggests that leadership research may have low consensus on theoretical perspectives but high consensus on methods. We found little comparison or integration across theoretical perspectives on leadership; rather, there was strong evidence that scholars generally adopted a single theoretical perspective and rarely engaged in framing their work using multiple theories. Granted, such a singular perspective might reflect not only scholarly preferences but also editorial proclivities at the prominent journals we studied. Regardless of the genesis, however, these sensibilities shape the field as a whole, which is our focus. Moreover, the fact that all theories persist over time, even early-generation ones, suggests that there is, at best, minimal comparison, contestation, cross-fertilization or winnowing down of theoretical perspectives over time. We suspect that commensuration, when it does occur, may be occurring not across theoretical perspectives but within them, accounting for the persistence of theories over time.

In contrast, we saw considerable consensus in methodology, evidenced by the dominance of quantitative approaches. It seems that, while theories may be pluralistic, methods are less so. Instead, quantitative methods are applied across the spectrum of theories that characterize leadership research. Perhaps because of this, leadership research, regardless of its theoretical moorings, tends to emphasize (and often predict) the outcomes of leadership, casting these largely in terms of performance outcomes, to the detriment of alternative conceptualizations of leadership (Podolny et al., 2005).

(2) Leadership Models and Variables

Leaders as actors. We found that leaders tended to be modeled as abstract actors in approximately one-sixth (17.11%) of the organization studies journals and over one-third (36.27%) in LQ. By comparison, leaders were far more likely to be modeled as agentic actors, consisting of well over three-quarters (82.89%) of the organization studies articles and almost two-thirds (63.73%) of those articles in LQ. Within the category of agentic actors, we found a significant bias towards the use of non-elite leaders; these were often low to middle managers, employees, as well as undergraduates who participated in laboratory experiments. In the organization studies journals, non-elites were subjects in the vast majority of agentic actor studies (87.30%); a similar pattern characterized LQ articles (73.68%). These seem to echo a trend observed by Pfeffer more than 30 years ago (1977, p. 108), i.e., that leadership studies mostly deal with "first line supervisors or leaders with relatively low organizational status." When elites were studied, we found an astonishing array of leaders, including Ronald McDonald (Boje & Rhodes, 2006), the Apostle Paul (Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005), Rumpelstiltskin

(Smith & Simmons, 1983), Mahatma Gandhi (House & Howell, 1992), Adolph Hitler (Graham, 1991), Rev. Jim Jones (House & Howell, 1992), Machiavelli (Siegel, 1973), Ulysses S. Grant (Goethals, 2008), Alan Greenspan (Bligh & Hess, 2007), senior army officers, university presidents, country presidents, prime ministers, and CEOs.

Organizational context. In the organization studies journals, more than three-quarters (78.29%) of the articles on leadership made explicit reference to an organizational or workplace context. Given that AMJ, ASQ, and OS are focused on the organizational context, this may not be surprising. What is surprising, however, is that almost a quarter (21.71%) of the articles made no reference to an organizational context. This same pattern also characterized the empirical articles in our LQ sample (65.95%).

Effects: Performance and values. We found that approximately half (49.34%) the articles in the organization studies journals focused on performance, while less than one-tenth (9.87%) were focused on values, beliefs, or meaning. The remaining 40% of articles focused on various concepts, such as political language and rhetoric (Bligh & Hess, 2007), the needs of leaders (Helmich & Erzen, 1975), and leader stereotypes (Osborn & Vicars, 1976). As the number of overall leadership articles published in the journals increased, the focus on performance mirrored this increase. This trend also characterized the LQ studies, where nearly half (42.55%) focused on performance and only 10% focused on values, beliefs, or meaning.

With such a large number of articles focused on performance, we investigated the link to theoretical explanations. In general, articles focused on performance had a pattern of theoretical usage similar to that overall: behavioral theories dominated (characterizing 24.32% of articles), followed by contingency (15.13%), dyadic (11.18%) and trait perspectives (6.58%), while theories on meaning dropped (4.61%). Our findings suggest that when performance is studied, researchers tended to focus primarily on leaders' behavioral actions, and secondarily, on contextualizing these actions within situational contingencies; performance and values were typically not part of the same leadership study.

Performance studies also showed an affinity for quantitative analysis across all the journals. These studies included, for example, top management team cultural heterogeneity and performance (Elron, 1997), shared leadership and team performance (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007), CEO charisma and performance, and humor and performance (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999). In addition, studies of performance were far more likely to be contextualized in organizations or workplace settings (84%).

In contrast, studies focused on values and meaning were as likely to be qualitative (40.00%) as quantitative (46.67%). These studies included, for example, the process of organizational death (Sutton, 1987), dilemmas of women leading women (Bartunek, Walsh, & Lacey, 2000), and the construction of leadership images in the popular press (Chen & Meindl, 1991). We found that leadership studies addressing both performance and values were in rare supply (n=7, 2.85%). Taken together, our findings indicate that typically, leadership studies focus on performance effects, and, in particular, on non-elites in organizational contexts. Values and meaning are less studied, but when they are, tend to use elite samples.

Because our findings pointed to a complex web of associations among the leader, organizational context, and effects variables, we conducted a path analysis for additional insight into these relationships. Path analysis is useful "for decomposing correlations among variables, thereby enhancing the interpretation of relations" (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973, p. 314). We sought to induce the conceptual framework that leadership researchers used in their studies.

Drawing on classic formulations of agency and structure (e.g., Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992), we examined the association between leader (agency) and organizational context (structure) and related these to effects variables (performance and values). This created a map of the associations researchers made among agency, context, and effects. We converted all variables to standardized regression coefficients and used path coefficients (betas) generated with the pathreg command in Stata. Our analyses are exploratory and not intended either as the development or test of a causal model.

The path analysis results, reported in Figure 4, showed two significant paths. One was a positive path between the leader and performance effects, indicating that researchers model agentic leaders as directly affecting performance. A second path was indirect, associating the agentic leader with the organizational context to affect performance effects, indicating that researchers model the agentic leader as working through the organizational context to indirectly affect performance. There were no paths, either direct or indirect, whereby agentic leaders were modeled as affecting values. Furthermore, there was a significantly negative and direct path between performance and values, indicating that researchers who focus on one of these effects tend not to focus on the other. An important caveat is that the observed linkages are correlational and not necessarily causal. These results are, of course, consistent with those presented earlier, but the path analysis allows us a more holistic view of the set of relationships among the constructs that characterize leadership research. As such, it approaches what might be called a "general theory of leadership" in that it captures generally how researchers theorize the role of leaders in organizational contexts and leaders' associations with outcomes.

In a theoretically pluralistic field like leadership, we found a proliferation of theoretical perspectives but little evidence of a "grand synthesis" (Davis &

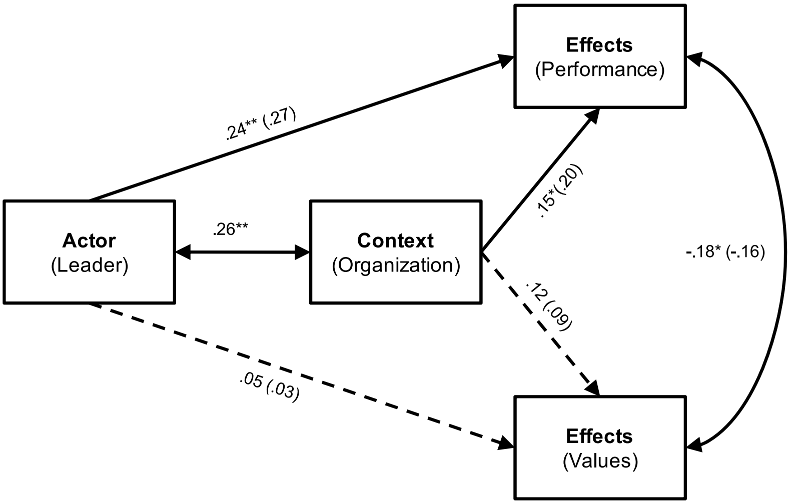

Figure 4 Path Analysis of Agency, Organizational Context, and Effects in Leadership Studies. Path analysis results. Path coefficients shown are standardized betas. Zero-order correlations are in parenthesis. Solid lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. *p<.01. **p<.001.

Marquis, 2005, p. 334). Although there are clear advantages to theoretical pluralism, there are also clear drawbacks, particularly "excessive theoretical compartmentalization" and a neglect of other perspectives (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983, p. 245). The founders of ASQ "advocated the development of general theory, by which they meant theory that was applicable to multiple types of organizations and presumably in multiple times and places" (Palmer, Biggart, & Dick, 2008, p. 746). Although we are not arguing for a less pluralistic field per se, our analyses suggest that some synthesis—or, minimally, more comparative theoretical work—could be useful in advancing future research on leadership.

(3) Examinations of the State of the Field of Leadership Research

Taking stock. We found stocktaking publications to be in short supply overall. Of the 152 articles in the organization studies journals, only six (4%) could be categorized as stocktaking. Surprising, we found that in the last 30 years in the three organization studies journals we studied, only one article explicitly questioned the field (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995) and only one meta-analysis was published (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006). Our LQ sample fared only slightly better: three empirical articles and 19 theoretical articles questioned the field, but no meta-analyses were published. Combined, these 22 LQ studies accounted for 5% of the articles in our sample. We note that our findings are limited to the four journals in our sample, which did not include other noteworthy journals, especially those focused on psychology (e.g., *Journal of Applied Psychology*; *Psychological Bulletin*) that have published stocktaking or meta-analyses on leadership (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Peters, Hartke, & Pohlmann, 1985). However, we were nonetheless intrigued by the lack of stocktaking that took place in the organization studies journals and the specialty journal in our sample.

The articles that did take stock were varied in their focus and scope. One of the early ASQ articles (Sarachek, 1968) provided a Greek historical account of leadership, reminding scholars of the foundational roots of leadership philosophy and attributes. Meindl, Ehrich and Dukerich's (1985) seminal work on the romance of leadership challenged attributional perspectives of leadership. Most of the remaining stocktaking articles focused specifically on questioning the assumptions of a particular theory within the field, such as contingency theory (Jago & Vroom, 1980), leader–member exchange (Vecchio, 1985), and the behavioral complexities that explain managerial leadership (Denison et al., 1995). Finally, Misumi and Peterson (1985) called attention to the need to re-examine leadership theory in light of the cultural differences that exist in countries outside the United States.

Title length. Our analysis revealed that, over the last 50 years, there was a significant increase in the number of words per title in leadership articles. In 1957, article titles averaged eight words; by 2007, this increased to 11.41. In between these benchmarks, we observe a peak of 14 words in 1982. When we compare the title length of LQ articles to those in ETP, we find a very similar pattern: ANOVA analyses revealed that there were no significant differences between the two ($F[1,34]=0.40$, $p=.53$). Figure 5 graphs the two patterns. Although our findings are merely suggestive, title length for leadership articles appears to be not significantly different from those in entrepreneurship, a low-paradigm field (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), perhaps reflecting the lack of consensus in theory observed among leadership researchers as a field (e.g., Bass, 1981; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl et al., 2002).

In summary, our analysis revealed few explicit stocktaking articles in the journals we coded and analyzed; furthermore, there was a paucity of articles that reviewed multiple theoretical perspectives or meta-analyses that attempt to aggregate findings across articles. Additionally, we found a significant lengthening of article titles over time, evoking some comparability to a low-paradigm field. This evidence, taken together with a number of our other findings, suggests that theoretical pluralism describes the field of leadership research. As a whole, the field seems to consist of a number of theoretical orientations that exist independently of each other, with little cross-comparison or cross-fertilization; stocktaking reviews are rare events.

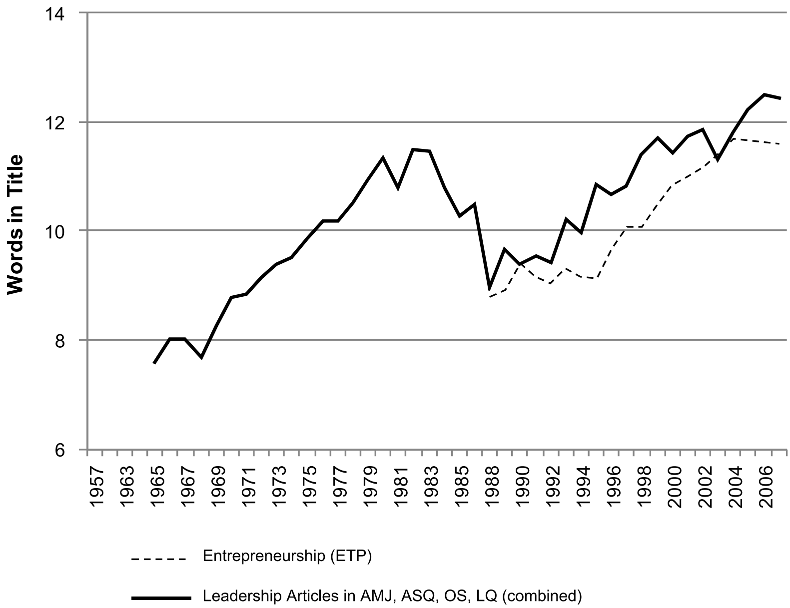

Figure 5 Number of Words in Title: Leadership (*AMJ, ASQ, OS, LQ*, combined) and Entrepreneurship (*Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*), 1957–2007, 5-Year Moving Average.

Discussion

A provocative question in organization studies has centered on the issue of paradigm development and the benefits of more (e.g., Pfeffer, 1993) or less (e.g., Van Maanen, 1995) consensus within an academic field. We do not take sides in this debate; instead, we investigate the phenomenon of paradigm development. We believe that a major contribution of our research is to examine not only the level of paradigm development in a field but also the processes of its advance over time. In examining this process, we also take into account theoretical pluralism; this is important not only because of its increasing prominence in organization theory (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983) but also because it sets up the inherent tension between paradigmatic consensus and theoretical variety (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983; Pfeffer, 1993). We tried to unpack this tension by using Stinchcombe's (2002) framework on the progression of theory development, which pivots on three mechanisms: commensuration, evangelism, and truth-telling. Thus, we set out to address the question: How does the process of theory development unfold in an academic field characterized by theoretical pluralism?

Our setting was the field of leadership research, particularly in terms of its relevance to organization studies. We collected, coded and analyzed 254 leadership articles from four different journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, and *Leadership Quarterly*) and focused on the following three elements: (1) scholarly consensus on theory and methods, (2) leadership models and variables, and (3) examinations of the state of the field.

(1) Scholarly Consensus on Theory and Methods

Our findings suggest that, although there seems to be consensus about research methods, there was little consensus about theory. Theoretically, we found that a multiplicity of perspectives characterized the field and that these persisted over time, with little commensuration, "critical tests" (Davis & Marquis, 2005) or truth-telling (Stinchcombe, 2002) that might winnow down their numbers. Rather, once a theory took root, it tended to endure over time; the theoretical vestiges of the past were very much part of the present. Over time, there was a robust pattern of theoretical pluralism.

Interestingly, the enduring vitality of pluralism stands in contradiction to the generally told narrative of field development in leadership research, which presumes a progression from more simple theorizations to more complex ones. Kanter (1977, p. 167) describes this:

> After an early emphasis on "traits," stemming from characteristics of individuals, a more social perspective took hold, one that saw leadership as consisting of transactions between leaders and followers. …Attention shifted away from the cataloguing of individual attributes to the cataloging of behaviors and resources: a series of functions needed by a group that could be called "leadership," a series of resources useful in interpersonal exchanges.

Although each of these different theorizations of leadership penetrated the literature, as Kanter suggests, a linear trend was not in evidence, nor was there a paring down of theories. Rather, the motor of theory development seemed additive rather than commensurate or almost Darwinian, where the strongest survive (Davis & Marquis, 2005). At the level of the field, theoretical pluralism only seemed to increase over time.

A closer look within a theoretical perspective might illuminate the process. The dominant perspective, behavioral theories of leadership, offers some insight into the problem of commensuration (Stinchcombe, 2002) within a single theoretical thread:

> A major problem in research and theory on effective leadership has been the lack of agreement about which behavior categories are relevant and meaningful for leaders. It is very difficult to compare and integrate the results from studies that use different sets of behavioral categories. (Yukl et al., 2002, p. 15)

That commensuration is problematic within a particular theoretical perspective only compounds matter at the level of the field. If behavioral theorists of leadership cannot agree on core categories or standards, then it is nearly impossible to compare or evaluate behavioral theories against others, such as trait or contingency. The lack of commensuration is perhaps one explanation for the enduring pluralism in leadership research; without comparability, there can't be critical tests, truth-telling or winnowing down. Thus, commensuration at multiple levels, both within theories and across theories, seems to be an important mechanism in the theoretical advancement of a field.

Contrary to theory, in our evaluation of methods we observed an almost singularity in approach. Quantitative methods were employed in nearly 85% of leadership studies, dominated by survey, archival and experimental designs. We can speculate that the shared consensus around quantitative methods, which could provide a common metric across theoretical perspectives, might, ironically, contribute to the problem of commensuration. Quantitative methods, particularly the surveys and lab experiments often used in leadership research, tend to be designed for testing or refining existing theories; in turn, this may increase commitment to a particular perspective and contribute to its perpetuation.

Although used relatively infrequently, qualitative methods were deployed to explore less well-established phenomena, and particularly, for examining the value infusion or sensemaking activities of leadership. More generally, qualitative work can broaden or develop theory (Daft & Lewin, 1990) by "highlighting the human interactions and meanings that underlie phenomena and relationships among variables that are often addressed in the field" (Gephart, 2004, p. 455). A generation of new theories can, of course, be a double-edged sword—on the one hand, increasing theoretical proliferation and pluralism (particularly in the absence of commensuration), but on the other hand, opening up needed or neglected perspectives (e.g., Podolny et al., 2005).

More generally, it seems that leadership research lacks full-cycle research that can promote interdisciplinary integration (Chatman & Flynn, 2005, p. 434) and enable "researchers to tackle more encompassing phenomena" (2005, p. 445). Because it encourages the use of multiple methods, full cycle research can "offset the inevitable weaknesses of any single methodological approach" (Chatman & Flynn, 2005, p. 444). The result is to advance an academic field in a way:

> ….that has less to do with the evolutionary state of the field and more to do with its structure and content domain. On the one hand, studies of organizations can be highly phenomenological, yielding insights that strongly favor realism over internal validity… On the other hand, research that attempts to bolster existing paradigms by focusing on subtle conceptual refinements, methodological issues, and identifying

> boundary conditions for well-established theories often loses sight of the organizational context… (Chatman & Flynn, 2005, p. 434)

Consistent with their observation are our findings, as well as in the work of Stinchcombe's (2002) "evangelists." Although we found evidence of evangelism, missionaries were largely speaking to the converted; few outside their particular theoretical perspective were listening, much less converting. Each article we reviewed evangelized its contribution as being novel (as do most journal articles), but evangelism in leadership research seemed to center on slight variations to an established prototype, a "uniqueness paradox" as it were (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). Mone and McKinley (1993) describe this as a "uniqueness value" that is claimed by most authors in the field of organization studies. Although there are several positive outcomes, such as innovativeness in theorization, the prevalence of the "uniqueness value" tends to discourage "cumulative, integrative studies" that can advance organizational knowledge (1993, p. 287).

(2) Leadership Models and Variables

Our induced conceptual map of researchers' models of leadership centered on the actor–context–effect linkages. We found the agentic leadership–performance link to be positive and significant, suggesting more generally, a variant on the "prototype" described by Glynn & DeJordy (2010, p. 116). Although such a robust model or prototype simplifies and focuses researchers, it has some drawbacks: "Vague definitions of leader 'types' have long been popular in the literature, but they are often simplistic stereotypes with limited utility for increasing our understanding of effective leadership" (Yukl, 1999, p. 302). Moreover, such models or prototypes seem to have become taken-for-granted, making alternatives literally unthinkable.

The model of leadership most frequently found in the research focuses on leaders' effects on performance; this was clearly evident in the results of our path analysis and the conceptual map it revealed (see Figure 4). Clearly, understanding the consequences of leadership is important; and yet, as Walsh, Weber & Margolis (2003, p. 867) explain, it does come at some cost:

> The attention paid to economic performance is vital to any conception of organization studies. It does bear a potential threat to our scholarship, however, when it eclipses its companion focus on social objectives. The problem confronting organization and management scholarship is not that economic performance has received increasing attention. Indeed, economic performance and the material welfare it secures are essential concerns of society. The problem rather, is that other worthy concerns seem to be receding or perhaps even commandeered by this abiding focus on performance.

In leadership research, among the "other worthy concerns" that seem to be receding is that of leadership as meaning-making or vale infusion (Selznick, 1957). Selznick argued that leadership should extend beyond performance and efficiency, to creating a "social organism capable of fulfilling that mission" (1957, p. 136)—a call echoed more recently by Podonly and colleagues (2005). Recall the negative and significant correlation we found between values and performance (see Figure 4 path analysis); the focus on economic performance may well have eclipsed attention to values. And yet, the infusion of values in an organizational can be important to the firm's long term survival and effectiveness (Selznick, 1957). Enriching the conceptualization of "performance" beyond economics to values, creativity, innovation, or change, as well as their inter-relationships, would enrich the leadership literature.

(3) Examinations of the State of the Field

Overall, we found that stocktaking reviews and analyses were rarely published in the four major journals we studied. We found that these constituted only 4% of the leadership articles published in the three organization studies journals in our sample (ASQ, AMJ, OS); and in the last three decades, only one stocktaking article (Denison et al., 1995) and one meta-analysis (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006) were published in these particular outlets. We acknowledge, however, that our sample was limited to four journals; meta-analyses on leadership research have been published in other journals, notably in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Psychological Bulletin*. Although our analysis is merely suggestive, our finding that the length of article titles in leadership research was statistically indistinct from the low-paradigm field of entrepreneurship reinforces the possibility that theoretical pluralism may be an issue.

Navigating between paradigmatic consensus and pluralistic diversity is tricky for any field: "The question… is whether the field can strike an appropriate balance between theoretical tyranny and an anything-goes attitude" (Pfeffer, 1993, p. 616). To find some equilibrium, Weick (1996, p. 311) suggests that we "select paradigms that enable us to see with richness." Based on our analyses, the field of leadership seems to be stronger on pluralistic tendencies than paradigm convergence. We have observed the durability of leadership theories over time and the emergence of associated theoretical camps; we have also shown how the field exhibits a strong and enduring reliance on a narrow set of methodological tools, particularly those that are quantitative.

Leadership scholars may be working with the same set of research tools available in the field since its formation; over time, these may have become what Weick (1996) calls "heavy tools." Weick (1996, p. 311) argues that heavy tools weigh researchers down, causing them to "move more slowly and with less agility and make them more susceptible to being overrun." The heaviest of these may be our own identities as researchers. The fusion of theory and method, i.e., behaviorism and quantitative tools, we have observed, as well as its persistence over the last half-century, may be a heavy burden to carry. Weick explains (1996, p. 312):

> As dualities within organization studies (e.g., macro/micro) harden into positions with which people identify and that in turn identify them, the tools associated with these positions take on excess weight, which ironically makes it harder for them to be dropped. The result is that attention is deflected from ideas to people. And as attention is drawn towards the field's internal issues, people lost the struggle that remains against outside threats.

And yet, there may be potential ways of lightening the heaviness of our tools; after all, "tools can be multi-purpose, and some settings are rife with multiple logics" (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 277). These logics, or taken-for-granted understandings that guide activity, can be used to reinforce existing conventions or reframe or alter them (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). We believe that the next steps in the program of leadership research could include such redefinition and redirection. Following, we suggest some of the paths for future research that we see ahead.

Implications for Future Research on Leadership

As much as we have pointed to some of the challenges confronting leadership research, we would be remiss to overlook some of its real achievements. A significant body of important work on leadership has been done over the past half-century; the field of organizational studies seems never to have lost interest in the topic. Such observations give us optimism for the course ahead in leadership research. Here, we offer a few suggestions for charting this course. We organize our recommendations around three possible alternatives for leadership research going forward: Theoretical Compartmentalization, Theoretical Integration, and Theoretical Novelty. We believe that these research strategies could be useful not only to leadership but also to other academic fields.

Theoretical compartmentalization as a research strategy. A research strategy of theoretical compartmentalization treats different theoretical perspectives within an academic field as fairly independent of one other, more as stand-alone silos of thought. Essentially, compartmentalization reflects incommensuration across theoretical boundaries (Stinchcombe, 2002), or the absence of a commonly shared standard for theoretical evaluation or integration. The result is that different theoretical perspectives are neither compared nor combined in meaningful ways. When theories are compartmentalized, scholarly focus is narrowly fixed on a particular perspective; the objective is to fine-tune existing models and assumptions, teasing out nuance or refining methodological tools that tend to fortify existing theory, with innovation being largely incremental. There tends to be an emphasis on internal validity over external generalizability (Chatman & Flynn, 2005) and the development of finer and finer gradients of distinction.

Like all research strategies, theoretical compartmentalization has both advantages and disadvantages. Compartmentalization can succeed on several planes: the development of a deep and specialized body of knowledge, the possibility of usefully exploiting existing or historical insights to accumulate knowledge, and the potential for scholars to continually build and fine-tune their research. As Palmer, Biggart and Dick (2008, p. 754) explain:

> A theory that is cumulative is one that grows better with additional studies that expend its scope, strengthen its powers, and reveal and diminish its limitations. For the theory to grow, researchers must self-consciously tackle the theory as an object of study, growing and pruning it as evidence and argument support.

The risk in compartmentalization, however, is that theorists can lose sight of the broader landscape; refinement often yields increasingly levels of abstraction in concepts that can become divorced from situational contingencies, complexities or realities of a phenomenon like leadership (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Palmer et al., 2008). Moreover, theoretical compartmentalization does not avoid problems of commensuration. As Yukl and colleagues (2002, p. 15) have pointed out, there is significant disagreement among behaviorists about the appropriate, meaningful and relevant categories of behavior that has thwarted theoretical advancement.

And yet, in spite of its drawbacks, a research strategy of compartmentalization can be of benefit in advancing the frontier of leadership researcher. Researchers well steeped in a particular tradition are in positions to see new leadership phenomena and grasp its relevance theoretically. For instance, trait theorists could explore the different types of traits associated with leadership over time, particularly as organizational, societal and cultural conditions change. Theoretical compartmentalization promotes specialists who can appreciate subtle shifts in thinking that can be significant. Moreover, theorists working from a compartmentalized field typically have a rich theoretical legacy from which to draw new insights and may be well positioned to use historical or interpretive methods of analysis.

For instance, theorists interested in studying the relational or dyadic aspects of leadership seem to be growing in number and in knowledge base. Although there is a cadre of scholars interested in leader–member exchange (LMX), few have focused on leadership–followership more broadly. Some avenues of exploration might include a consideration of the cultural or social context in which followers sanction certain types of leaders over others (e.g., Mayo & Nohria, 2005) or examining followership as a construct of organizational change (e.g., Kellerman, 2008).

In many ways, the proliferation of theories that exists under compartmentalization resembles that of a field in an early stage of development; pluralism abounds without an intentional narrowing down to cohere the identity of a field. As Scott (1987, p. 510) once described institutional theory, fields at this stage can be a metaphoric "theoretical teenager," with "their awkwardness and their acne, but they also embody energy and promise. They require encouragement as well as criticism if they are to channel their energies in productive directions and achieve their promise." Channeling diverse theoretical perspectives into a concerted field is the hallmark of theoretical integration.

Theoretical integration as a research strategy. In contrast to a compartmentalized strategy, which allows (and often celebrates) variety, a research strategy of integration attempts to shape a common vision or perspective in the conduct of leadership research. Theoretical integration can result from commensuration (Stinchcombe, 2002), which enables comparison and consolidation across theories and, in this, can result in the kind of cumulative knowledge that grows in explanatory power over time (Palmer et al., 2008, p. 740). Integration can yield hybrid theories, which tend to be the "best" because they "draw on different types of theories in combinations where the strengths of one counterbalance the weaknesses of the others" (Palmer et al., 2008, p. 740).

And yet, with such coordination of thought, integration can be disadvantageous or even useless if it results in a set of abstract or vague categories, loosely coupled, and without a unifying conceptual framework. Moreover, the work of integrating several disparate theoretical streams can be burdensome for the leadership researcher, who has to be well equipped both theoretically and methodologically for this work.

Integration as a strategy may still carry the legacy—and perhaps the limitations—of its elemental theories. For instance, research on transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; House, 1976) has seen a revitalization in recent years and gained in influence, particularly as it has begun to build a stronger link with formulations of charismatic leadership (e.g., Weber, 1947). And while integration with other theories, including authentic leadership or moral leadership (e.g., Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Price, 2003) have strengthened transformational leadership's appeal and explanatory power, it seems not to have escaped the well-honed tendency of prototyping leaders (see Glynn & DeJordy, 2010), even as it attempted to explain the influence processes of leaders on followers. Yukl (1999, p. 301) asserts:

> It is evident that charismatic and transformational leadership theories provide important insights, but some serious conceptual weaknesses need to be corrected to make the theories more useful. They do not describe the underlying influence processes clearly, nor do they specify how the leader behaviors are related to these processes.

A strategy of theoretical integration can help to build a general theory of leadership, i.e., a "theory that was applicable to multiple types of organizations and presumably in multiple times and places" (Palmer et al., 2008, p. 746). Such general theory was advocated by the founders of ASQ and, more recently, evidenced in institutional theory, as "proponents of the new institutionalism self-consciously attempt[ed] to build on one another's work" (Palmer et al., 2008, p. 754). A starting-point for such a general theory of leadership might be in the conceptual map of researcher's theoretical formulation (see Figure 4 path analysis). Although its level of abstraction is quite high, it might provide the bones for fleshing out a more concrete general theory of leadership.

And, finally, a strategy of integration can serve as a theoretical gateway, linking leadership to other relevant intellectual domains in organizational theory or the social sciences. A simple thought experiment (Weick, 1979) for generating integration possibilities might be to consider the possibilities of "leadership and… [blank]." At this intersection are an abundance of options; to name but a few: Leadership and Social Identity (e.g., Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005); Leadership and Organizational Identity (e.g., Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Glynn & Dowd, 2008; Walsh & Glynn, 2008); Leadership and Sensemaking (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1993); Leadership and Attribution Theory (e.g., Meindl et al., 1985; Schyns & Bligh, 2007); and Leadership and Institutional Theory (e.g., Selznick, 1957; Washington, Boal, & Davis, 2008). Incorporating theoretical ideas from these perspectives can enrich leadership research; and, in turn, leadership research can make potential contributions to these theories. Not only do these suggest possibilities for integration, but they may be generative in breaking ground for new theorizations of leadership.

Theoretical novelty as a research strategy. A research strategy that pursues theoretical novelty, creativity, or radical breakthrough thinking is, like other new ventures, one of high risk and high reward. Scholars are less bound to existing theoretical strictures in their thinking or methodological tools in their application. Theoretical insights can emerge through compartmentalization or integration; however, here we focus on how methodologies may also enable theory-building.

Weick's (1996) admonition to "drop your tools" is relevant to new theory development; moving beyond a reliance on quantitative methods can open up new intellectual arenas. Multi-purposing (Powell & Colyvas, 2008) or re-purposing the uses of methodologies can enable creativity and inventiveness. Methodologically, there are clear opportunities for qualitative work that can serve as a catalyst for theory development. Expanding the methodological toolkit to include empirical analyses of the role of interpretations and sense-making, particularly through rhetoric, story-telling or narratives, would expand our understanding of *how* leaders can influence followers, articulate a vision, and inspire change. Selznick (1957, p. 151) observed that narratives are critical to the study of leadership and institutions:

> To create an institution we rely on many techniques for purpose. One of the most important of these techniques is the elaboration of socially integration myths. These are efforts to state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise.

More generally, paradigmatic development in leadership research can benefit from leveraging Stinchcombe's (2002) insights on those mechanisms that advance fields. We have observed how commensuration or standardization seems wanting at the field level in leadership research. Finding touchstones of theoretical comparability seems essential. As a start, perhaps reconsidering the very concept of leadership, and its composition across persons, situations, roles, and situations, would be a first step. For example, a fairly unexplored territory in leadership is that of international or cross-cultural theorization and methods. Although there have been some initial forays into this area, notably in the GLOBE Research Project on Leadership Worldwide (House et al., 2004; Selznick, 1957, p. 151), there are considerable possibilities for leveraging cultural dimensions to induce new theories of leadership.

New theory development requires evangelists to preach beyond their own choir, heeding Stinchcombe's lesson from social movements: "What was central to all of them is that members of one organization were eager to bring their beliefs and organizational practice to new fields of practice" (Stinchcombe, 2002, p. 420). Enabling such advances are truth-telling mechanisms that can enrich and evaluate current research. For instance, linking leadership studies to broader domains in organizational studies can not only widen information flows but also expose the field to "referees" who can question, challenge, and enable theory development. Naturally, this will require competence and disinterestedness on the part of such referees, who may well resist change: "Everyone agrees our theories should be stronger, so long as it does not require us to do anything differently" (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 378). It may also require journals to re-evaluate their criteria for publications: "Authors should be rewarded rather than punished for developing strong conceptual arguments that dig deeper and extend more broadly than the data will justify" (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 38).

Finally, we suggest that Stinchcombe's (2002) mechanisms of theory development might apply not only at the field level, but also at the individual level. To us, it seems, scholars need to become nimble in using all three activities, although this might happen at different points in their careers. An obvious progression through mechanism-based theorizing (Davis & Marquis,

2005) might advance in ways parallel to what Stinchcombe (2002) proposed, i.e., from commensuration, to evangelism, and ultimately truth-telling as one advances in a career.

Moreover, Chatman and Flynn (2005, p. 444) offer sage advice for doing so: "we strongly encourage researchers at all stages of their careers to 'dive in' and learn a methodological approach that they have not yet mastered or used." As scholars move through such phases, in their research and in their careers, they may gain more control over theory-building in ways that can ignite ideas in an academic field such as leadership studies .

Conclusions

To mark the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the editors of *Harvard Business Review* compiled a list of the 10 most influential management ideas of the past 10 years. When asked why there were no ideas related to leadership on the list, the editor-at-large stated, "I guess what we have found again and again is that new leadership thinking doesn't emerge often. And I think it is possible for a decade to go by without a huge new set of ideas about leadership" (Kirby, 2010). In spite of the grimness of this opinion, there is nonetheless a widening community of scholars who persist in studying leadership and exponential growth in publications on leadership over the past quarter-century (Figure 1). We take these as signs of optimism about the future of leadership research.

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Endnote

1. A complete list of all the articles we coded in this study is available upon request from the authors.

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Appendix

Coding Sample Abstract

To address present and future leadership needs, a model of authentic leader and follower development is proposed and examined with respect to its relationship to veritable, sustainable follower performance. The developmental processes of leader and follower self-awareness and self-regulation are emphasized. The influence of the leader's and followers' personal histories and trigger events are considered as antecedents of authentic leadership and followership, as well as the reciprocal effects with an inclusive, ethical, caring and strength-based organizational climate. Positive modeling is viewed as a primary means whereby leaders develop authentic followers. Posited outcomes of authentic leader–follower relationships include heightened levels of follower trust in the leader, engagement, workplace well-being, and veritable, sustainable performance. Testable propositions and directions for exploring them are presented and discussed (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

Codes

Type of Article: *theory*
Methods: *N/A*
Theoretical Focus: *behavioral, dyadic*
Organizational Context: *yes (1)*
Effects: Performance: *yes (1)*
Effects: Values, Beliefs, Meaning: *yes (1)*
Leader as Actor: *agentic: non-elite*
State of the Field (Stinchcombe): *no (0)*