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Teoh, Kevin (2017) Article review: The influence of leadership behaviour on employee work-family outcomes: A review and research agenda. [Book Review]

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Review/ Summary of Article

Li, A., McCauley, K.D., & Shaffer, J.A. (2017). The influence of leadership behaviour on employee work-family outcomes: A review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27, 3, pp. 458-472.

Readers of this bulletin will be well-versed with how the overlap between managing home and work responsibilities has become more complex. This is not only due to the changing nature of work, but as a result of the increase in workers with additional family responsibilities (e.g., caring for parents, working mothers). Recognising that this could lead to conflict and enrichment, particular attention needs to be paid to the role that leaders have in supporting their followers to manage a healthy balance between home and work life. However, the introduction of Li, McCauley and Shaffer's review argues that the research literature in this area is characterised by four limitations, that there is: (i) a limited insight into when and how leader behaviour effects work-family conflict; (ii) a failure to adequately examine work-family enrichment as an outcome; (iii) little examination on the subsequent impact of downstream effects that conflict and enrichment have; and, (iv) an overly strong focus on support as a the representation of leader behaviour. As a result, the article aimed to review the relevant literature in the area and to identify future research priorities.

A systematic search of the PsychINFO database between 1995 and 2015 found 172 studies that were included in the review. In terms of the direct effects of leader behaviour on work-family outcomes, there were almost no studies that tested whether leader task, change and ethical/unethical behaviour had any relationship with employee work-family conflict or enrichment. Instead, nearly all studies focused on the relational behaviours of leaders, which were significantly related to work-family conflict and enrichment. Where mediation was considered, studies reported that employees' perception of their working conditions or their affective experiences functioned as mediators in the leadership behaviour and employee work-family outcome relationship. However, attempts to test for leadership behaviours as a moderating variable yielded mixed results. This was attributed to the possibility of there being additional moderators, such as gender, that may influence whether leadership behaviour was a moderator or not. Alternatively, Li *et al.* speculate that the saliency of leadership behaviour as a resource is not evident unless there an acute need for such a resource.

Collectively, these findings indicate a number of research needs to further advance our understanding of the topic. First, the authors note a distinct lack of theory

that underpin studies in this area. Moreover, while Hobfoll's Conservation-of-Resources Model was the dominant model among studies that did utilise a theoretical framework, there remains a distinct ambiguity as to what in practice is a resource is. This results in an extremely broad perspective that makes empirical comparisons and practical implications difficult. Similarly, despite the focus on leadership behaviours, there is almost no acknowledgement of leadership theories. Doing so could allow researchers to make more specific predictions as to when and why leadership behaviours would influence work-family outcomes. Second, from a methodological perspective 84% of studies were cross-sectional while 86% relied on responses from a single-source. As the field matures researchers need to embrace stronger methodological designs that could provide more empirically meaningful results. Here, Li *et al.* further highlight that the reliance on middle or high income samples from white-collar environments undermines the generalisability of the findings, while the individual-level designs used fail to acknowledge that followers actually exist in a multilevel framework grouped according to their leader.

In summary, this review provides a brief overview of the relationships between leadership behaviours and work-family outcomes. At its core, it highlights the fragmented research field where little is known about work-family enrichment or non-relational forms of leadership behaviours. This extends further to encourage future researchers and practitioners to embrace a broader perspective to recognise theories from other areas and more complex methodological designs. Therefore, it is not just necessary that more research is needed. Instead, better research building on the shortcomings identified is required for us to really understand how and why leader behaviour plays a significant role in influencing employees' abilities to manage the work-family interface.

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