The Path-Goal Theory does recognize that under some circumstances both goals and paths to goals may be clear, and attempts by the leader to provide clarification will be redundant and unnecessary. Even in such instances, however, the theory predicts specific consequences for subordinate satisfaction, morale, motivation, and acceptance of the leader. While certain leader behaviors are therefore recognized by the theory to be redundant and unnecessary in particular situations, in no situation are they explicitly hypothesized to be irrelevant. However, data from numerous studies collectively demonstrate that in many instances leader behaviors (as operationalized) are irrelevant. A potentially useful area for research, then, concerns the identification of those individual, task, and organizational characteristics which may act as “substitutes for leadership” in their ability to negate the leader’s ability to influence subordinate performance, satisfaction, etc., regardless of the leadership style employed (Schriesheim & Kerr, 1977b, p. 44).

I have never found this argument compelling, but others, such as Jim Meindl, apparently do. In any event, by virtue of its being treated in this special section of Leadership Quarterly, as well as by its having been awarded a good-sized literature of its own (for reviews see Bass, 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Fetter, 1993a), substitutes theory must be recognized as one of the major approaches to leadership research today.

**SUBSTITUTES THEORY**

What, then, is “Substitutes-For-Leadership Theory”? Substitutes theory was first fully developed by Kerr and Jermier (1978), elaborating on earlier initial statements by Kerr (1976, 1977). Howell et al. (1986) subsequently extended the taxonomy underlying the theory and developed a set of statistical criteria for determining whether neutrals, enhancers, supplements, and/or substitutes for leadership are operative in a particular situation. Finally, Podsakoff et al. (1993a, pp. 26-29) provided a definitional and statistical clarification of the Howell et al. (1986) effects.

According to Howell et al. (1986), neutrals are variables which make it impossible for leaders to influence outcome criteria. Neutralizers do not directly correlate with criteria but serve to reduce, block, or cancel leadership-outcome relationships. Enhancers, in contrast, are variables which do directly correlate with outcomes but which augment or serve to strengthen leadership-criteria relationships. On the other hand, supplements have their own relationships with criteria and do not neutralize or enhance leadership effects. Finally, substitutes for leadership are variables that make leadership impossible and unnecessary. Substitutes are directly related to subordinate outcome criteria and they block or cancel leadership-outcome relationships; they are therefore like neutralizers but have criterion relationships of their own. In simplified form, Bass (1990) summarizes the theory in multiple regression terms as follows.

\[ y = ax + bz, \]  
\[ \text{when } x \text{ is leadership behavior, } z \text{ is the moderator, and } y \text{ is predicted subordinate performance, then:} \]

\[ z \text{ is a neutralizer if } b \text{ is negative and } z, \text{ although correlated with } x, \text{ does not correlate with } y; \]

\[ z \text{ is an enhancer if } b \text{ is positive and } z \text{ does not correlate with } y; \]

\[ z \text{ is a supplement if } b \text{ correlates with } y \text{ adding to the correlation of } x \text{ with } y; \]

\[ z \text{ is a substitute if } b \text{ correlates with } .9 \text{ while } x \text{ adjusted for } z \text{ reduces or negates leadership effects.} \]

All of the above different types of effects may be tested via multiple regression using the more detailed analytic procedures outlined by Howell et al. (1986) and Podsakoff et al. (1993a, pp. 26-29). Additionally, refined measures of hypothesized substitutes variables are now available for use in such research (e.g., Podsakoff...
...since there is not even one substitute variable that consistently moderates the effects of a leader behavior on a criterion variable across studies, questions must be raised about the adequacy of the substitutes model, even assuming that the model applies only to certain substitute-leader behavior interactions (p. 40).

However, Podsakoff et al. (1993a) also concluded that, "...we are not suggesting that the study of leadership substitutes should be abandoned, or that substitute variables are unimportant" but that "...the theoretical basis for the substitutes-for-leadership model needs additional refinement" (p. 40).

CONCLUSION

It thus seems clear that additional work on substitutes theory is needed. Additionally, future efforts might very well benefit from incorporating a level-of-analysis perspective into substitutes theory and research (e.g., Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1995), along with better construct definition and measurement (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1993a, 1993b). The substitutes-for-leadership idea seems to have considerable intuitive appeal for a broad segment of the field. It probably deserves better conceptualization and testing before a final verdict is reached about its scientific usefulness.

NOTES

1. Actually, in the original work, "Kerr (in press b)" is cited. However, this paper—originally entitled "Substitutes for Leadership"—was subsequently retitled "Discussant Comments" and published as Kerr (1974).

2. Jim Meindl, for example, credits substitutes theory with being one of the works responsible for breaking scholars' inherent "romantic" belief that leadership is always a powerful cause of important organizational outcomes (cf. Meindl, 1993, p. 96).

REFERENCES


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