LEADERSHIP THEORY AND RESEARCH IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: CURRENT THEORETICAL TRENDS AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

The question “what is leadership?” has occupied human intellectual inquiry since the beginning of recorded history. Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli struggled to define successful leadership. Organizational scholars have struggled with this question for over 100 years. In an effort to take stock of recent progress in the area of leadership research, this study catalogued all leadership research (752 articles) in 10 top organizational journals from 2000 - 2012. The goal of this study was to assess trends in leadership research.

Jeremy Meuser and Dr. Robert Liden, participating in a team with four scholars from other universities, Dr. Jessica Dinh, Dr. Robert Lord, Dr. William Gardner, and Jinyu Hu, published a review of 13 years of leadership research finding

- The quantity of leadership research has dramatically increased in the present millennium.
- While “classic” leadership theories, such as transformational (an inspirational, visionary approach), trait (who you are makes you a good leader), and leader-member exchange (the quality of relationship between leader and follower drives important work outcomes), occupied a great deal of scholarly attention...
- Strategic leadership (leadership at the highest organizational levels) and ethical/moral based leadership theories are gaining more attention.
- Leadership training, development, and emergence is a topic of growing interest.
- Destructive and abusive leadership is gaining more attention. This stream of research acknowledges negative implications of “bad” leaders.
- Follower based leadership research (e.g., how leader and follower emotions interact) is an area of increasing interest.

Implications of the Results:

Leadership is one of the most ubiquitous features of organizational life, impacting nearly every facet of an employee’s organizational experience. Leadership researchers are increasing their attention to modern leadership challenges, augmenting “classic” theories, such as transformational leadership and trait theory, with newer approaches that have promise to provide meaningful guidance to organizations and their leaders. Scholars are investigating who, under what conditions, and with what training will make a good leader. Scholars are also beginning to investigate the follower side of the leader-follower relationship, a heretofore underappreciated and under researched area. These trends promise dividends in even better, more holistic advice to organizations for improving leader-follower relationships.