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Managing people in organizations: Integrating the study of HRM and leadership

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ABSTRACT

The studies of Leadership and HR-Management share a common goal: Developing a better understanding of how to effectively manage people in organizations. Despite this shared goal, these fields of research remain largely independent, with few studies considering how HRM and Leadership co-determine employee motivation and performance. This state of the literature is deplorable as Leadership and HRM have the potential to counterbalance each other; in theory as well as in research design. In this overview article to this special issue, we first highlight similarities and differences in approaches to people management by mapping key approaches to Leadership and HRM on a value framework. Next, we integrate theory on person-environment fit and strategic HR alignment to map seven possible ways in which Leadership and HRM may interact: Independent, Enactment, Supplementary Fit, Synergistic Fit, Complementary Fit, Perceptual Filter, and Dynamic Fit. We discuss the implications of this theoretical framework for future research that studies the intersection of Leadership and HRM.

1. Introduction

A frequently cited idea, both in practice as well as in academia, is that *people are an organization's greatest asset* (e.g., [Bradley and McDonald, 2011](#)). Beyond the humanistic and moral ideal that places the value of individuals above the institutes that are supposed to serve them, this idea reflects the hypothesis – subject to empirical testing – that investing in human beings is important in creating welfare (for organizations and individuals alike). For the past decades, social scientists have strived to lend credence to the importance of investing in human beings in the workplace, with mixed success. Specifically, in this special issue, we highlight two well-developed streams of research: HRM and Leadership. Whereas Leadership is typically focused on understanding the personal and interpersonal dynamics of how individuals influence each other towards collective goals ([Northouse, 2015](#)), HRM looks at the systems and processes in an organization that attempt to influence people in a systematic way, usually on a larger scale ([Lievens, 2015](#)). In essence, both Leadership and HRM are engaged in what we can broadly term *people management*, albeit from different angles.¹

Despite clear overlap in goals, the fields of Leadership and HRM have developed largely separately, each taking important strides in developing the knowledge on how to effectively manage or influence people in an organizational context. At the same time, both are also not without limitations or critique, and we discuss some of their strengths and weaknesses here.

On the one hand, a strength of the leadership literature is that across several reviews of the literature it has demonstrated clear links between leader behaviors and relevant outcomes, most notably follower motivation and performance ([DeRue and Myers, 2014](#); [Epitropaki, Kark, Mainemelis, and Lord, 2017](#)). In other words, leadership matters in organizations.

¹ Some scholars would argue that management is uniquely distinct from leadership, suggesting that management is about “things” and leadership is about “people” ([Kotter, 1999](#); [Zalesnik, 1977](#)). In using the term people management, we seek overcome this dichotomy. This is important as many have a romantic, idealistic view of the importance of leadership ([Meindl, 1990](#)) and thereby - at the very least indirectly - placing lower value on (HR) management. In this paper, we align with others ([Mintzberg, 2015](#)) in the idea that while leadership and HR-management are distinct from each other, one should not be valued above the other. To the contrary, as we seek to show here, we believe that both are necessary elements that need to work together for the optimal management of people in organization.

At the same time, the leadership literature has been critiqued for its plethora of similar constructs (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, and Guler, 2016; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Yukl, 2012). While these different constructs reflect important conceptual distinctions in leadership, the overreliance on subjective measurement diffuses distinctions to a general liking of the leader. Beyond this bias in measurement, the link of leadership to performance is often explained through very similar theoretical processes across leadership styles (Fischer, Dietz, and Antonakis, 2017; Meuser et al., 2016). Despite these similarities, the work focusing on these styles tends to be value-infused or normative in advocating for one optimal way of leading (Mumford and Fried, 2014; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), with less research revealing contingencies that suggest important boundary conditions to any construct (Fiedler and Chemers, 1967). Accordingly, there has been a call for less emphasis on demonstrating the performance outcomes and mediating mechanisms and more on how follower characteristics (Shamir, 2007) and contextual factors (Den Hartog and Koopman, 2001) co-determine leadership. While recently more research has shown moderators, few studies look at contextual contingency factors, for instance in terms of HR approach. Corresponding with the normative approach that these leadership styles work in all circumstances, research often seems to forget the larger organizational context in which leaders operate as another important source of influence for employees. In sum, although there have been many calls for a multi-level study of leadership, the state of the science predominantly looks at leadership as an individual phenomenon (Batistic, Cerne, and Vogel, 2017).

On the other hand, the HRM field takes a more macro-level approach to managing people. Traditionally, research in the field of HRM focused less on subjective phenomena and instead relied on more objective measurement of the various methods available to influence people in a systematic way (e.g., selection, performance management, rewards). These methods are somewhat less dependent on the idiosyncratic personality or skills of the individual leader such that any manager or organization can use these to systematically influence followers.

Despite these strengths, the HR literature is not without critique. For instance, in terms of research design, especially in terms of measurement models, HR research is often (practically) constrained in design (e.g., Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, and Snell, 2000). This practical focus is also translated in less theoretical grounding (Keegan and Boselie, 2006). Furthermore, despite initial positive evidence (Becker, Huselid, Pickus, and Spratt, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Wright, Gardner, and Moynihan, 2003), reviews suggest that the relationship between HRM and performance is not as strong as typically assumed (Den Hartog, Boselie, and Paauwe, 2004; Shin and Konrad, 2017; Tzabbar, Tzafir, and Baruch, 2017). If anything, this suggests that additional mediators are necessary to better understand how HRM (fails to) influence performance, unveiling the black box (Becker and Huselid, 2006) and the subjective processes by which HR practices get enacted, perceived, and ultimately interpreted (Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider, 2008). Often highlighted as an important factor in this - but less so studied- is the role of front-line managers or leaders in implementing HR (Nishii, Khattab, Shemla, and Paluch, 2017; Nishii and Wright, 2007; Piening, Baluch, and Ridder, 2014; Sikora, Ferris, and Van Iddekinge, 2015). Initial studies suggest this implementation process is not without problems. For example, the HRM practices managers indicate they implement often differs strongly from perceptions of employees of these HR practices (e.g., Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, and Croon, 2013; Liao, Toya, Lepak, and Hong, 2009).

The previous overview suggests that many of the strengths and challenges of each domain (HRM and Leadership) could be counterbalanced by theoretical insights and empirical research findings from the other domain. For example, insights from the work on leadership could help better understand how HRM is implemented in organizations and work on HRM could provide knowledge on contextual influences in the leadership field. Not only are there interesting avenues for cross-fertilization, we believe that a more mutual understanding and influence between these domains is necessary to come to a better understanding of effective people management in organizations. In that sense, an integration of the HR and Leadership literature is not only a fruitful avenue for academic study, but equally necessary to ensure that people management receives the legitimacy and power to affect strategic organizational decisions (De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris, 2012; Woodrow and Guest, 2014).

To start addressing this issue, we invited submissions for a special issue to start “Bridging the gap between HRM and Leadership” resulting in six articles (including this overview article and an introductory article). In the rest of this introductory article, rather than just reiterating what was done in each of these articles, we try to organize and integrate the relevant perspectives introduced in this special issue into a bigger whole, thus generating new insights beyond what is presented in the articles. We do this in the following manner: In a first section, we lay the groundwork by attempting to organize the various different ways of influencing others (both in terms of leadership styles and HR-systems) using a lens of value-based influence. In a second section, we then focus on the different ways in which Leadership and HRM can interact with each other. Building on the value-lens of section one, we predominantly use reasoning around value fit to highlight how HR and Leadership might interact. In a third and final section, we highlight the implications of the previous two sections.

2. Leadership and HRM: value-based influence

Over the past years, many “positive” leadership styles have been proposed to capture the different ways by which leaders influence followers. Amongst others, authors have discussed constructs like transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, authentic, shared and inclusive leadership and LMX. While we argued earlier that these styles have been critiqued to show overlap in measurement and outcomes studied, there are nevertheless marked differences in theoretical and philosophical underpinnings: different styles build on diverse belief systems of how people are motivated and thus how leaders can motivate them.

To help capture this diversity in belief systems, we combine the value-framework of Schwartz (1999) with the corresponding idea of value-based leadership (House, 1996) into an overall organizing framework. In reflecting desired-end goals, values provide insight into how individuals are differentially motivated, how those motives influence their behaviors, and how leaders end up motivating followers (Schwartz, 1999). More specifically, Schwartz's value model maps four core dimensions on two axes: self-enhancement (the

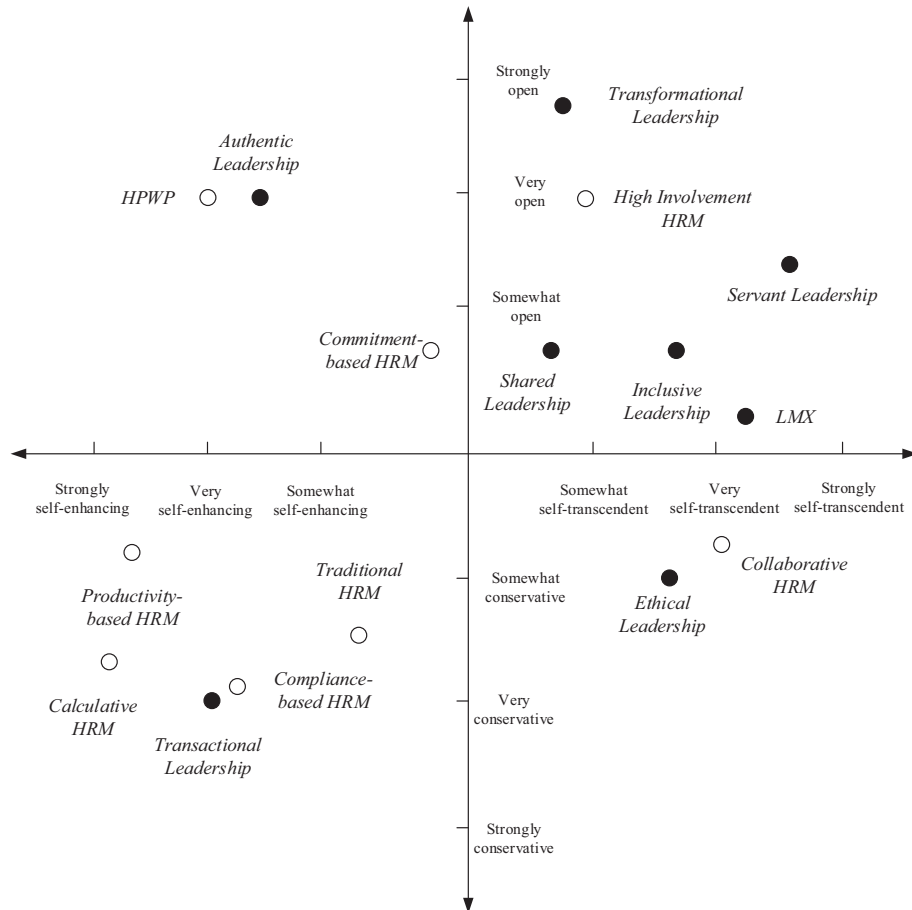


Fig. 1. Mapping of leadership styles on value-framework

Leadership styles or approaches: EL = Ethical Leadership, SeL = Servant Leadership, Tfl = Transformational Leadership, Shl = Shared Leadership, AL = Authentic Leadership, Tal = Transactional Leadership, IL = Inclusive Leadership, Mgt = Management.

HR-systems: Com = Commitment-based HR, Prd = Productivity-Based HR, CmplHR = Compliance-based HR, HPWP = High Performance Work Practices, Trdt = Traditional HR, Inv = High Involvement HR, Calc = Calculative HR, Coll = Collaborative HR.

pursuit of personal status and success) versus self-transcendence (concern with the well-being of others) and conservation (preservation of the past and resistance to change) versus openness to change (independence and readiness to change). To understand the differences and potential tension between these broad values, we ask the reader to consider how one's societal ideal ideas can be mapped on this framework. Whether one is more liberal, conservative, or social; there is an underlying belief system of how society should be structured and how individuals are motivated to contribute to its larger effectiveness. Furthermore, political leaders will use these values, manifested in different behaviors, to influence and motivate individuals towards the collective good.

Much as we can map societal values, we can also map the leadership styles commonly used in organization science. Specifically, using seminal theoretical papers for each approach, we asked each editor of this special issue to rate eight leadership approaches (transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, authentic, shared, inclusive and LMX) on two value dimensions (ranging from high self-enhancement to high self-transcendence and from highly conservative to highly open to change). We received good interrater reliability ($ICC(2) = 0.93$) for the first and second dimension ($ICC(2) = 0.94$). Considering the high interrater reliability (Bliese, 2000), we proceeded to aggregate these scores across raters. Using those scores, we then plotted each construct on a two-dimensional graph. The results can be found in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 indicates that according to the editors some leadership styles are clearly more oriented towards openness to change and self-enhancement. For instance, theories like authentic leadership put emphasis on things like self-direction. This style is based on principles of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), that emphasize individual freedom to achieve one's own objectives. Transformational leadership share similar groundings but is more oriented towards others and self-transcendence. Transformational leaders supersede individuals' needs to also align individuals with the needs of the group/collective. Within that same theory, transactional leadership is more on the self-enhancement and conservation side: through a rational exchange relationship, individuals do what is expected of them. Ethical leadership is also focused on conservation as it emphasizes alignment with basic principles of what is right and wrong, focused on creating social welfare and social justice. Servant leadership is also concerned with social welfare and social justice, but does this with more of an emphasis on self-transcendence.

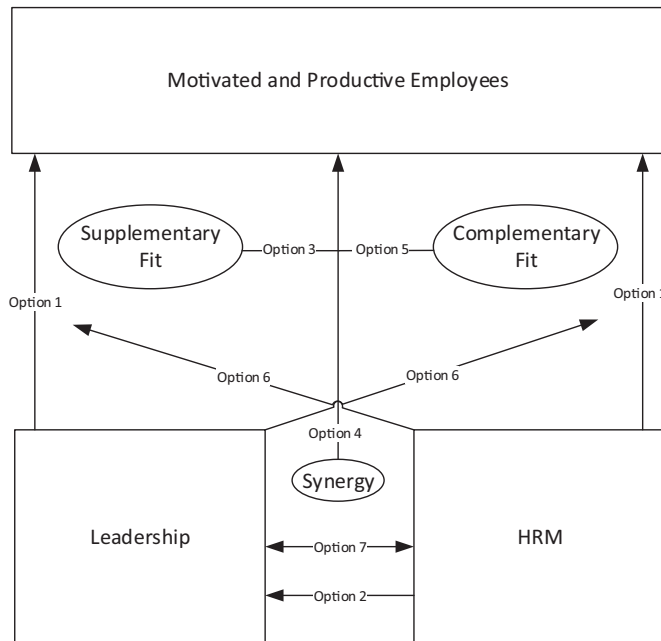


Fig. 2. Systems of leadership and HRM interaction.

Beyond leadership styles or approaches, Fig. 1 plots different views on HR-systems. Over the years various approaches to HR-management have been proposed (Commitment-based HR, Compliance-based HR, Productivity-based HR, Collaborative HR, High Performance Work Practices, High Involvement HR, Calculative HR, Traditional HR) with –similar to the various leadership styles– different assumptions about how human beings are and should be motivated in the workplace. We equally plotted these dimensions on the value-framework in Fig. 1. The combination of leadership styles and HR profiles in Fig. 1 suggest that some leadership styles and HR approaches are more similar than others. As one example, take transformational-transactional leadership, one of the most popular leadership styles (Bass, 1984; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). The underlying ideas of these leadership style are also recognizable in the HR-systems described as commitment versus compliance-based HRM, HPWP and high involvement HR and even transformational versus transactional approaches to HRM (Lepak, Bartol, and Erhardt, 2005). Similarly, the focus of other leadership styles (e.g., inclusive leadership) aligns more with approaches to HR related to a diversity climate (e.g., climate for inclusion) (Nishii et al., 2017).

It is beyond the scope of this introductory article to discuss all the possible combinations of leadership styles and HRM, however from the overview in Fig. 1 it should be clear that (1) different HRM systems and leadership styles use different values as the basic mechanism for influence and (2) that there is quite some diversity in these approaches, including differences between leadership styles and between leadership styles and HR approaches. We will use the idea of fit between HR and leadership approaches in the next section to elaborate on how HR and leadership interact with each other.

3. Leadership-HRM fit: interactions between leadership and HRM

In Fig. 2 we have visualized different ways in which HRM and Leadership could interact. As indicated at the outset, we operate from the assumption that both HRM and Leadership contribute to making sure that employees are an organization's most important asset. In other words, investing in people management through leadership and/or HR should enable more motivated and productive employees. There are various ways however in which HR and Leadership interact to reach that end goal (with varying degrees of success). Fig. 2 lists out seven possibilities, increasing in novelty and complexity. We discuss these different options at an abstract level - it is beyond the scope of this article to go into detail. For excellent, in-depth examples of some of these options we refer to the articles in this issue.

To help clarify Fig. 2, we build on theory of person-environment fit (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, and Shipp, 2006; Kristof, 1996). Originally developed at the individual level, PE-fit describes the different ways in which individuals (do not) fit in their environment and the consequences of a lack of fit for motivation and performance. Theory on fit is not uncommon to Leadership studies (e.g., Lord and Brown, 2001) in helping to explain how leaders motivate followers. Furthermore, notions of fit or alignment are also present in strategic HR literature to explain how HR practices (mis)align (horizontal fit) and how HR aligns with the broader organization (vertical fit) (e.g., Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Delery and Doty, 1996). We believe these ideas on fit are further transferable to the interaction between Leadership and HRM. Leadership and HRM can (mis)fit on various aspects (for instance on values, see Fig. 1). Beyond values, Leadership and HRM may align or differ in skills, in particular the mode of influence, they bring to the table: whereas leadership influences more through the person of the leader at the individual or group level, HRM influences more

through systems and processes.

3.1. Option 1 – independence

In the first option outlined in Fig. 2 Leadership and HRM operate mostly in isolation from each other. Analytically this would translate into HRM and leadership having two independent main effects on follower outcomes. This perspective operates from the assumption that leadership and HRM can operate completely separate from each other. Such independent effects may be based on mutually exclusive agendas for HRM and Leadership. For instance, leaders might have complete leeway in whether and how they hire and fire but have no impact on the general salary system used by the organization. While such explicit distancing may be theoretically possible or possible for certain subdomains, overall for employees the independence between both parties is likely to be less clear. Employees look to both parties (Leaders and HRM) for guidance on what type of behavior is appropriate in this organization (e.g., Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Den Hartog et al., 2013). Also as noted, for many HR practices, leaders are the people who implement them (see the introductory article by Nishii & Paluch). As such, both parties likely interact and if independence of one party is sought explicitly then that can also often be at the expense of the “other” party. For instance, in some cases leaders may create an us versus them atmosphere by ridiculing the performance evaluation system.

3.2. Option 2 – enactment

Another option that is typically described in the HR literature is that leaders play a crucial role in enacting the practices suggested by HRM (Gilbert, De Winne, and Sels, 2011; Nishii et al., 2008; Piening et al., 2014; Sikora et al., 2015). Analytically speaking, this option looks at Leadership as a mediator between HR systems and employee motivation and performance. While an interesting theoretical ideal, this ignores some of the power and politics in the reality of many organizations where the HRM department seldom has the power to motivate or force leaders in the desired direction (Hammonds, 2005). As such, we explore alternative modes of how Leadership and HRM could interact.

3.3. Option 3 – supplementary fit

The idea of supplementary fit recognizes that HR and Leadership are independent players but that their interaction co-determines employee behaviors. Within the idea of supplementary fit, Leaders and HR need to be aligned in their underlying values for effects to be optimal. In other words, referring back to Fig. 1, the further that HR and Leadership are removed from each other, the more likely they will be sending different messages and the less likely that employees will receive strong and clear signals of what is expected of them. This idea builds on notions of strong HR systems and horizontal and vertical alignment (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff and Bowen, 2016). When everyone shares the same perspective, there is a higher likelihood that HRM and Leadership send a similar signal. In contrast, if HRM and Leadership contradict each other then followers get confused about what is expected of them (Kerr, 1975) and thus HRM and Leadership undermine each other's efforts. The idea of supplementary fit is not that different from the enactment model that attempts to get Leaders and HRM on the same page. However, it more explicitly recognizes that Leaders and HRM are independent parties and sources of influence and that tensions between them may exist.

3.4. Option 4 - synergistic fit

Building on the previous, Leadership and HR can do more than just combine together to do the same thing or undermine each other. A synergistic perspective suggests Leadership and HRM mutually reinforce each other to send stronger signals together than they do separately. Synergistic fit suggests that Leadership and HRM (when operating from the same value set) could reinforce each other to send more clear messages to followers (Argyris, 1990, 1998). Because Leaders and HRM mode of influence operates in different ways and at different levels (e.g., individual communication by leaders versus systems and processes), here the two parties mutually reinforce each other.

3.5. Option 5 – complementary fit

This perspective breaks with the previous perspective in that it argues that improved results can be achieved by having in some form oppositional perspectives from HR and Leadership. Several of the articles in this special issue suggest that sometimes it may be useful to have a complementary fit in terms of combining oppositional value perspectives. For instance, the article by Cerne et al. (this issue) suggests that because innovation includes two distinct processes (idea generation and idea implementation) that thrive under different values (openness to change versus conservation), HRM and Leadership may actually complement each other to produce greater innovation overall.

More generally speaking, organizations are wrought with inherent value-tensions and corresponding paradoxes (e.g., exploitation versus exploration, profit-orientation versus social orientation, agency versus communalism; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, and Lewis, 2017). Because of these tensions, a complementary fit perspective allows an organization to play at different fronts simultaneously. For instance, Buengeler et al. (this issue) argue for the benefits of divergence between HR and Leadership in terms of the value for diversity to foster more overall inclusion of people in the workplace. Because of the inherent tension between two values, it might be difficult for one person (the leader) or entity (the HR department) to combine both. Indeed,

when communicating both opposing values simultaneously, the follower may be confused and attribute a lack of authenticity to the leader. Dividing the source of influence may help the organization to maintain that strategic ambivalence and strive for the value of both values simultaneously. Similar ideas are present in theory on transformational leadership who suggested that ideally leaders combine transformational and transactional leadership simultaneously, however few studies find support for combining both by a single person (Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert, 2011).

3.6. Option 6 – perceptual filters

From this perspective, the interaction between Leadership and HRM is described through processes of attribution and perceptual biases. This perspective starts from the premise that both Leadership (Lord and Maher, 2002) and HRM (Nishii et al., 2008) are essentially in the eye of the beholder. Simply because certain leadership behaviors or HR practices are enacted, does not mean that they will also be perceived as they were intended. There are a variety of possible filters between how something was intended/enacted and how it is perceived (for example, individual differences in traits, preferences, or previous experience), but here we focus only on how Leadership and HR focus as a filter to each other. Specifically, in this option we argue that depending on the choice of either a similar or an opposing value-perspective, HR and leadership may be viewed differently. Although not explicitly discussed, the paper of Russell et al. (this issue) points in that direction. These authors suggest that depending on contextual factors the same behavior of the leader can be interpreted differently. For example, for leader enactment of HPWP, these authors argue that depending on whether or not the leader is able to carry the underlying, humanistic value of the HPWP to followers, these practices could be viewed as transformational or transactional.

3.7. Option 7 – dynamic fit

As a final option, the concept of fit is viewed more dynamically. Rather than viewing fit as something static that does not change over time, this perspective aligns with recent development in the fit literature that fit may evolve and change (Jansen and Shipp, 2013). From that perspective, repeated interactions between HR and Leadership may help create more alignment either in creating supplementary, synergistic, or complementary fit or in alleviating perceptual filters that may exist between parties. As an example of this, the paper by Gill et al. (this issue) argues that authentic leadership behaviors help create more system coherence and alignment in the overall system of influencing people.

4. Directions for future research

This special issue follows prior calls to bridge more micro and more macro views of managing people in organizations (Coff and Kryscynski, 2011; Huselid and Becker, 2011; Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011). In particular, this special issue is unique in focusing scholarly attention on integrating the study of Leadership and HRM. Integrating these is important to come to a better understanding of how HR and Leadership can work with or against each other in influencing work-related outcomes (e.g., employee motivation and performance). While we believe this special issue is an important step in the right direction, we hope and believe that this special issue is just a first step in further integrating the study of HRM and Leadership. Accordingly, below, we suggest several avenues for future research.

4.1. Interaction between HRM and leadership

Fig. 2 lists several potential models by which HRM and Leadership could interact. At this moment, the predominant focus of existing research has been on option 1–3. Building on theory related to person-organization fit, we list four other alternatives to be tested in future research. Not only do we encourage future researchers to consider these alternatives, but we also encourage future researchers to compare and contrast these alternatives to see which approach best describes the organizational reality. While some competition between these various options exists, we do not exclude that some of these options may co-exist within a single organizational system. While particular research designs (more on that later), only allow for a certain picture of reality, the inner workings of an organization are more dynamic and complex than one perspective allows to capture. As such, we expect that many organizational realities are likely to be described by a combination of these options. For instance, perceptual filters may further reinforce or undermine a perception of (a lack of) synergistic fit.

4.2. Value-based leadership

Fig. 1 provided a high-level overview of how various leadership and HRM approaches are driven by a belief system of how individuals are motivated to excel in terms of performance. While it was beyond the scope of this article to develop all linkages in-depth, we encourage future research to unearth the value systems underpinning HRM and Leadership. We especially see the cross-fertilization between domains as fruitful. Leadership is often more explicitly value-driven and normative in specifying one optimal value above all. In contrast, HR is often less value-driven, thus potentially missing out on the motivational potential that leadership brings to the table, however not being so strictly tied to the pursuit of one specific value may allow more room for a diversity of perspectives on what values are appropriate to foster both performance and well-being. Indeed, an interesting perspective brought forward here is the potential to explore in more detail with a paradox lens how HR and Leadership might focus on (somewhat)

different, yet also complementary values.

In sum, we encourage future research to investigate how Leadership and HRM can work together to promote value-based people management. Using the potential interactions in Fig. 2, Leadership and HRM work together to have a stronger impact in motivating their employees. In doing so, we hope to respond to the critique that in many organizations values are a form of window-dressing (Kaptein and Schwartz, 2008; Raiborn and Payne, 1990). More specifically, we would argue that often either values are imposed by HR but not practiced by leaders or they are preached by leaders but not embedded in HR. Such decoupling (Bromley and Powell, 2012) between leaders and HR ends up hollowing out the idea of value-based leadership or management and the importance of values in directing individuals in organizations.

4.3. Human resource leadership

The papers in this special issue have started the process of translation of leadership to HRM and vice versa. For instance, what do styles like authentic, transformational, and inclusive leadership imply for these leaders when they enact certain HR practices (e.g., selection, recruitment, performance management)? Work on leadership styles is seldom specific about how a certain approach to leadership translates into the specific work practices related to HR. While there is promise in both directions, we see the translation from Leadership to HR enactment as especially relevant because it helps to solve the HR-performance link problem. We use the term “Human Resource Leadership” to describe that process of translation. For example, the paper by Gill et al. (this issue) provides several examples of how authentic leadership is translated in terms of specific HR practices. We encourage future leadership research to continue such translation, not only in terms of practical implications in discussion sections, but also theorized upfront in a consideration of how a certain leadership style might affect the enactment of HR practices.

4.4. Research designs

The previous suggests several methodological innovations for future research on the nexus between HRM and Leadership. First, we encourage more multi-level studies on HRM and Leadership. While the call for more multi-level research is not new, at this stage it is mostly limited to a call for cross-level model where HR is viewed at a different level than leaders. Traditionally, by nature of our way of analyzing, cross-level research is also top-down in that HR is viewed as the moderator to Leadership (e.g., Kalshoven and Boon, 2012). The various options in Fig. 2, suggest other multi-level designs. For instance, leadership could be leveraged beyond the group-level to be studied as an organizational level that interacts with HRM in determining firm performance (e.g., Mahesh, Segers, Chadwick, and Shyamsunder, 2018). Alternatively, HR-level could be brought down to the level of individual perceptions (e.g., D. N. Den Hartog et al., 2013).

Second, following our use of fit theory to specify the interactions between Leadership and HRM, we encourage future research to use polynomials to study the interaction (Edwards and Parry, 1993). Polynomials go beyond traditional models of interaction by considering curvi-linear effects of the different variables and the dynamics that occurs between two variables as one goes up or down. In other words, it is more than just a complex way of presenting an interaction effect but comes with a fundamentally different viewpoint of how two systems either work or against each other. For such polynomials to work, it is important that two systems are comparable – the value-framework offered in Fig. 1 offers a framework to look at how different systems are either aligned or misaligned with each other.

Third, we also encourage more qualitative designs to capture the complex interaction between Leadership and HRM. For example, case study designs have the potential to study the complex dynamic between HR and Leadership over time in a way that a quantitative method is often unable to capture. While quantitative snapshots are important for their precision and generalizability, we encourage qualitative work to continue the theory-building that will help us understand the larger whole as well as longitudinal studies to capture causal processes over time.

5. Conclusion

Effectively managing people in organizations is a multi-faceted (i.e., multiple modes of influence) and multi-level (i.e., influence across levels) phenomenon. To better understand this process, we need more research to integrate the study of HRM and Leadership. This special issue is a first step in that direction. Getting this right is important to put credence back in the statements that people are indeed an organization's greatest asset.

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