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Toward the Measurement of Perceived Leader Integrity: Introducing a Multidimensional Approach

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ABSTRACT Even though books and articles in the popular business press consider leader integrity an essential quality of effective leaders, business research has yet to establish firmly the nature of leader integrity and its causes and effects. One reason why integrity research may still be in its early stages is the failure of the literature to describe leader integrity fully and to use such descriptions to develop construct valid measures. Drawing on implicit leadership theory, which states that followers categorize leaders based on multiple traits, attributes and past experiences, this article argues for a multidimensional approach to a leader integrity definition and measurement. The article offers two proof-of-concept tests of how followers may make attributions of leader integrity. Results support two hypotheses suggesting that when making attributions of leader integrity followers use complex information that comes from diverse sources and the information may include judgements of both the moral values of leaders and whether the leader espouses and enacts these values consistently.

KEY WORDS: Leader integrity, measurement, leadership, attributions, ethics

Introduction

If simply relying on dramatic quotations was enough, there would be little question about the importance of leader integrity. US President Dwight Eisenhower stated that ‘The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity.'
Without it, no real success is possible.’ Investor Warren Buffett once said, ‘In looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don’t have the first, the other two will kill you.’ Simple searches for quotes yield many more pithy statements about the certain contributions of leader integrity. However, even though quotes about leader integrity are plentiful, empirical research on its causes and effects are few (Davis and Rothstein, 2006; Palanski and Yammarino, 2007, 2009). This article examines why the study of leader integrity has lagged behind its acceptance as an important leadership construct and whether a different interpretation of how it is defined and measured may provide helpful direction for future leader integrity research. The intent is to argue and support the case that current measures of leader integrity are limited and incomplete. It is proposed that new, construct valid measures of integrity that capture how followers may actually develop leader integrity attributions are necessary to advance understanding of this important construct.

Leader Integrity in the Business Literature

With their identification of integrity as a foundational characteristic of effective leaders, Buffett and Eisenhower are hardly stating positions out of line with the popular business press and business practitioners. Business practitioners have a long history of advising students of leadership that integrity is of central importance to effective leadership (Gostick and Telford, 2003). For example, Simons (2008) in The Integrity Dividend argues that integrity is the predominant characteristic that ‘touches every aspect of your business’ (p. 20) and, when practised properly, enhances both the value of the business and yields a significant financial dividend. Lennick and Kiel (2007) suggest that integrity is ‘the hallmark of the morally intelligent person’ and one of ‘four principles that are vital for sustained personal and organizational success’ (p. 7). In True North, George and Sims (2007) emphasize the importance of leader integrity by discussing how it is the foundation of all efforts of leaders to lead in the best fashions.

Similarly, researchers have offered justifications for why integrity is an important characteristic of leaders. Burns (1978) first proposed integrity as a central component in transformational leadership and many studies have supported links between transformational leadership and positive organizational outcomes (Bass, 1985). Leader integrity, along with benevolence and competence, is posited as a determinant of trust in the leader (Mayer et al., 1995). Further, Becker (1998) suggests that leader integrity is ‘an essential trait of effective business leaders’ (p. 154) and cites the work of Bass (1990), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) and Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) as supporting evidence.

However, the vigour with which research has called for the value of leader integrity has far outpaced the efforts of empirical researchers to support such claims. Tellingly, a 2006 meta-analysis on the relationship between perceived behavioural integrity and employee attitudes was able to include only 12 empirical studies (Davis and Rothstein, 2006), even though the initial electronic search of all uses of integrity in the business literature yielded 932 references. Mayer et al. (2009) conclude that research in this area is in ‘its infancy’ (p. 1).
Based on its treatment in both the practitioner and academic literature, leader integrity appears to be a construct of interest mostly because it is intuitively appealing as a foundation of leader character. As a way to explain the lack of connection between the popularity of leader integrity in the practitioner literature and the relative paucity of empirical research on leader integrity, Palanski and Yammarino (2009) label leader integrity as a normative ideal worthy of consideration by all would-be leaders. However, the study of leader integrity has not benefited from an adherence to theory and proper measurement development that could aid its study. This concern is similar to the one posited by Brown and Treviño (2006) in their study of ethical leadership. They wrote that ‘a more descriptive and predictive social scientific approach to ethics and leadership has remained underdeveloped and fragmented, leaving scholars and practitioners with few answers to even the more fundamental questions’ (p. 595).

According to Palanski and Yammarino (2009), standing in the way of productive empirical studies are two barriers – a lack of agreement over what leader integrity really means and the lack of theory describing its antecedents and consequences. Thus, this article will review recent efforts to define and measure leader integrity to determine if past efforts rely too much on narrowly framed and limited definitions of integrity. Specifically, implicit leadership theory states that followers use a wide array of their past experiences and current encounters with leader traits and attributes to form judgements about leadership (Shondrick et al., 2010). It is then suggested that perceptions about integrity entail more dimensions than previously captured in the literature. The validity of the use of multidimensional definitions is tested in two preliminary studies of how follower perceptions of leader integrity may develop.

The Limits of Integrity Definitions and Measures

The definition and measurement of leader integrity in the business literature follow two general approaches. The first approach considers integrity as consistency, where integrity is defined not by the nature of one’s values or morals, but by the perception that the values are applied consistently. Said differently, those with integrity ‘practice what they preach’ and ‘do what they say they will do’ (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). The second approach considers moral values as the basis of integrity. Thus, those with integrity are judged based on the values they hold and not just on whether they behave consistently with them.

Integrity as consistency. An example of the ‘integrity as consistency’ approach is Palanski and Yammarino’s (2007) definition of leader integrity as the ‘consistency of an acting entity’s words and actions’ (p. 178). This definition is similar to other definitions that are based on a consistent link either between words and deeds (i.e. Kalshoven et al.’s 2011 definition that integrity means keeping promises and acting consistently) or behaviours and values (i.e. Yukl and Van Fleet’s 1992 belief that ‘integrity means that a person’s behavior is consistent with espoused values’, p. 151). A concern with this definition of integrity is that by only referring to consistency, integrity may be defined too narrowly, which allows it to be attributed to those who may act consistently, but immorally. For example, Furrow
(2005) notes this troubling consequence of thinking of integrity only as consistency when he discusses how integrity considers the ‘coherence of a viewpoint, not its content’ (p. 139). He writes, ‘a person deeply devoted to his skill as an assassin might have integrity since his commitments may be consistent and his actions in conformity with them’ (p. 139).

Palanski and Yammarino’s definition is similar to Simons’ (2002) definition of behavioural integrity, which is ‘the perceived pattern of alignment between an actor’s words and deeds’ (p. 19). However, Simons (1999) acknowledges that behavioural integrity ‘does not consider the morality of principles [themselves], but rather focuses on the extent to which stated principles are seen as aligning with actions’ (p. 19). By way of illustrating this point, he notes ‘a colleague who openly advocates self-interest, rather than the common good, as a basis for personal actions might be despised if one does not share his values ... such a colleague might [nonetheless] be seen as having high behavioral integrity if one can see clear alignment between word and deed’ (p. 19).

For this reason, Simons believes that behavioural integrity may be best considered as a subset of wider integrity definitions. Simons suggests that his behavioural integrity definition refers to a ‘secondary definition of integrity that describes elements fitting together into a seamless whole’ rather than a more primary definition that defines integrity as an ‘adherence to moral and ethical principles’ (quoted in Simons, 1999, p. 19). Simons concludes that behavioural integrity contributes to, but does not completely substitute for more general integrity judgements.

**Integrity as moral behaviour.** A second approach to defining and measuring leader integrity aligns integrity with moral behaviour. This approach is less concerned with the consistent application of words or values, but is instead concerned about the moral nature of the values themselves. For example, Becker (1998) defined integrity as the ‘commitment in action to a morally justified set of principles and values’ (pp. 157–158). This definition of integrity focuses on what the leader practises and not merely on whether the practice is consistently applied. Although both Becker (1998) and Mayer et al. (1995) include reference to moral behaviours in their treatments of integrity, one clear difference is that Becker says that integrity comes from the commitment to an objective set of principles, whereas Mayer *et al.* allow for a more subjective definition of what is moral – namely, that deemed as acceptable by the trustor. One example of aligning integrity with moral behaviour is the development of the Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLIS) by Craig and Gustafson (1998). Although there is no mention of ethical behaviour in the title of the scale, the PLIS is designed to measure ‘leaders’ ethical integrity’ (p. 127) and the authors discuss how the need for their scale emerges from the need to understand leader ethics. The PLIS consists only of items that assess a leader’s practice of specific leader behaviours that the authors deem as unethical.

Of concern is that the PLIS may not represent a complete definition of integrity because it includes no items that directly address word/deed consistency. Much like the authors’ concern that definitions and measures that focus only on consistency may be limited, definitions and measures that focus only on moral behaviours may be limited because they beg the question, what is the difference between...
someone who is moral and someone who has integrity? In the eyes of followers, if being moral and having integrity are the same, are attributions of integrity redundant?

A more comprehensive treatment of leader integrity that strives to include both integrity approaches is provided by Mayer et al. (1995). Mayer et al. first suggest that integrity is based on a set of moral values, as subjectively determined by the follower. They define integrity as ‘the trustor’s perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable’ (p. 719). However, Mayer et al. also acknowledge the importance of the consistent practise of those values. After their definition, they commented that ‘the party’s past actions, credible communications about the trustee from other parties, belief that the trustee has a strong sense of justice, and the extent to which the party’s actions are congruent with his or her words all affect the degree to which the party is judged to have integrity’ (p. 719). Thus, Mayer et al. reference both integrity as consistency and integrity as moral values.

Do Followers Use More Complex Definitions?

The use of definitions and measures that either describe integrity as consistency alone or the practice of moral behaviours alone raises the question of whether these definitions are too narrow to adequately address how followers attribute integrity. While tight definitions are helpful (and perhaps necessary) for crisp arguments about constructs, perceivers may attribute integrity using more than the most straightforward and clear conceptions.

Implicit leadership theory (Lord et al., 1984) can be invoked to demonstrate that followers may not employ narrow and conceptually pure definitions when determining leader attributes. According to the literature, forming judgements about a leader and his or her effectiveness is an extensive cognitive process followers go through. Specifically, individuals develop judgements about a leader through past experiences and interactions with others (e.g. role models, caregivers or leaders). Furthermore, they hold expectations about leaders regarding certain traits and attributes people deem admirable and important for leaders to have (Shondrick et al., 2010). The theory further states that followers go through a categorization and sense-making process in which they examine the leader’s traits and attributes and match the displayed characteristics to cognitive schemas which followers gained from past experiences. Individuals possess a broad array of stored memories and cognitive schemas which will be invoked in the sense-making process in which past information is recalled and matched with the current attributes and traits a leader shows (Hall and Lord, 1995; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004). Overall, categorization and sense-making do not follow a standard process (Shondrick et al., 2010). Rather, followers possess multiple ideas about leader’s traits and attributes that are processed and applied when making judgements about a leader and his/her effectiveness. Hence, these stored memories and cognitive schemas provide the underlying framework of meaning and sense-making which followers activate when interacting with potential leaders.

Empirical research supports the notion that categorizing a leader and his/her attributes refers to a more complicated process. For example, Offermann et al.
(1994) showed that followers generally judge leaders based on eight distinct attributes and traits including charisma, intelligence and dedication. Building on Offermann et al.’s study, Epitropaki and Martin (2004) showed that followers focus on six of Offermann et al.’s dimensions to judge a business leader. Therefore, research on implicit leadership theory shows that followers examine many different leader characteristics and abilities before making decisions and judgements about leadership and its effectiveness. This suggests that narrow definitions of leadership or leader traits do not capture the breadth of information used by followers, because followers employ broader considerations when thinking about the notion of leadership.

Drawing on implicit leadership theory, it is argued here that individuals use a wide array of notions and ideas when determining whether leaders have integrity. Through past experiences, people possess cognitive schemas and expectations about leader attributes when judging integrity. When considering the perspective of the follower, it is likely they use multiple dimensions to define and measure integrity.

Another theory that suggests that followers may make more complicated judgements about a leader’s integrity is attribution theory. For example, in Kelley’s (1967) attribution model, attributions emerge not merely from assessments of consistency (whether the person behaves consistently in a given situation) but also from more complex assessments of consensus and distinctiveness. That is, individuals assess whether people exhibit the same behaviour when presented with the same situation (consensus) and whether people act differently in other situations, implying that actions regarding this situations are unique (distinctiveness). Kelley’s model suggests that in order to make an attribution, additional information is used to put consistency information into context.

This attribution process is analogous to how researchers address the construct validity of a measure by evaluating a relatively broad array of consistencies (Campbell, 1960; Schwab, 1980). Researchers examine the internal consistency of a measure by investigating how items cluster together and indeed assess the same construct (Cronbach, 1951). Further, convergent and discriminant validity show that a certain measure or scale is consistent with similar concepts as well as distinct from others (Cook and Campbell, 1979). In terms of leader integrity, the word/deed consistency may act as an internal consistency indicator, like Cronbach’s alpha, but an acceptable alpha value alone is not sufficient to prove the validity of the construct. Also required are measures of discriminant and convergent validity that indicate whether the internally consistent measure is appropriately placed within the construct’s nomologic net. It seems reasonable then to suggest that followers making attributions about leader integrity would seek additional information to augment and give context to their appraisals of word/deed consistency.

Overall, drawing on implicit leadership theory and the way individuals make attributions, it is suggested that followers make multidimensional judgements about integrity which are not addressed in definitions that limit integrity either to consistency or moral behaviour alone. Thus,

Hypothesis 1: When asked about the information they use to render judgements of leader integrity, followers will report that they use information drawn from diverse judgements of the leader.
Dimensions Used to Attribute Integrity

Accepting that followers tap varied categories of information before making attributions of integrity, the next question is what dimensions might they consider? Consistent with our argument that definitions based on consistency or moral behaviour alone may be limited, there are reasons to believe that followers combine these dimensions in some way to represent leader integrity. Here this judgement is grounded in Dunn’s (2009) recent effort to define integrity.

Drawing from an effort to frame integrity research within a normatively justified understanding of the construct supported by a more robust framework of moral philosophy, Dunn argues that integrity is a multidimensional construct emerging from judgements of the morality of a leader’s values and the degree these values are applied consistently over various settings, roles and time. Dunn (2009) began by recognizing that ‘integrity is connected in an important way to acting morally, in other words, there are some substantive or normative constraints on what it is to act with integrity’ (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001). Or, as Harcourt (1998) notes in citing Bernard Williams – and hearkening back to the philosophy of Aristotle (Puka, 2005) – integrity can be ‘understood as upholding in one’s actions what one considers ethically worthwhile’ (p. 189).

Dunn (2009) emphasizes the essential normative feature of integrity – the requirement that integrity be connected with a concept of ‘good’. However, merely acting ‘good’ is not enough to warrant a judgement of integrity. What separates integrity from moral behaviour is that integrity is based on a very high standard of consistency present across time and circumstances. What separates an attribution of integrity from an attribution that someone is ‘good’ is the remarkably consistent way in which the goodness is professed and enacted. In sum, Dunn argues that integrity is a holistic construct that must be anchored first in the practice of moral behaviour, but must also represent an extraordinary articulation of that moral behaviour. He defined integrity as ‘coherence among a set of moral values, with this set of moral values having consistency with a set of social values, and that integrity further requires congruence between an agent’s behavior and this set of moral/social values over time and across social context(s)’ (p. 104). This definition is integrative in at least two critical ways, simultaneously demanding coherence across a comprehensive set of concepts of morality while also emphasizing clear consistencies across words, deeds and values across a variety of contexts and over time.

Table 1 illustrates how Dunn’s definition includes and extends other definitions of leader integrity. Included are definitions that refer to the consistent application of words and values and definitions cited above that refer to the leader’s moral values. Based on a review of the business literature on integrity, it is believed that Dunn’s (2009) definition best captures how followers make attributions of leader integrity because it indicates that the leader practices moral values so consistently that there is no doubt they guide his or her leadership efforts. When asked to attribute integrity, followers will evaluate judgements of both the morality of a leader’s values and whether they are consistently applied to the standard needed to warrant a judgement of integrity. Thus, this study’s second hypothesis is stated as:
Hypothesis 2: Followers judge a leader’s integrity based on the combined evaluations both of the perceived morality of the leader’s values and of their consistent application.

Method and Results

To test these two hypotheses, two ‘proof-of-concept’ studies that employ admittedly simple data collection and analysis strategies were designed to provide...
preliminary support. It is important to note that the intent of these studies was simply to provide preliminary evidence for the multifaceted nature of perceived leader integrity.

In Study 1, 84 students were asked to respond to the following open-ended written question: ‘What kind of information do you use to make judgements about a leader’s integrity?’. Participants were asked to respond to this question at the conclusion of class and were given extra credit points in exchange for their participation. The student participants in Study 1 were taking an introductory management course and were in either their third or fourth year at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Although students were not asked about their level of work experience, instructor conversations with the students, the university's internship placement rates (90% of students complete at least one internship prior to their senior year) and student organization involvement rates (approximately 95%) suggest that participants likely had work experience and were involved in at least one student organization with a formal leadership structure. Further, nearly all students attending the university were involved in extracurricular activities where they would have been exposed to leadership prior to attending the university. As such, it is felt that they were capable of providing insight as to how people make judgements regarding a leader’s integrity.

In total 213 responses were collected and each response was entered into a spreadsheet to be coded into descriptive categories. A graduate student and the lead author sorted the statements into categories that were conceptually related and the second and third author reviewed the results. This content analysis suggested that the majority of student responses could be grouped into the eleven categories that are reported in Table 2. Moral values (e.g. honest character, has clear ideas about doing what is right) represents the most frequently described content, but word/deed consistency (e.g. leads by example and consistency between words and action) was also strongly represented in student responses. In addition, there is a sense that behaviour should align with moral beliefs (e.g. morality of observed behaviour, motivates self and others to do the right thing). Other responses that were referenced less frequently in the sample included: Speaks up when something is wrong, is genuine, helps others succeed, contributes more than all other people, good at working with others, professional and committed to finish what they start.

While certainly exploratory, these results suggest that judgements of integrity emerge from a variety of sources including appraisals of moral values, but also appraisals of consistency such as word/deed consistency and a consistency between behaviour and moral beliefs. As such, it can be concluded – supporting Hypothesis 1 – that, when making attributions of leader integrity, followers likely use information that references diverse judgements of the leader. The study found that neither word/deed consistency nor judgements about moral values alone represent how followers judge leader integrity. These data support a multidimensional approach to understanding follower’s perceptions of leader integrity.

In Study 2, additional support was sought for the utility of multidimensional conceptions of integrity by asking respondents to assess the degree certain statements about leaders would contribute to their judgements of leader integrity. Using Simons’ (2002), Palanski and Yammarino’s (2007) and Dunn’s (2009)
definitions as a start, items addressing values commonly deemed as moral and ethical (honesty, caring, fairness, openness, respect and inclusion; Burton et al., 2006) were generated along with items assessing forms of consistency (word/deed consistency and consistent enactment of values). The intent was not to develop a construct valid measure of perceived leader integrity per se, but to find preliminary support for a factor structure that features multiple dimensions along these lines.

A different sample of introduction to management students at the same university (n = 66; again, nearly all were in their third or fourth year) was asked to rate the degree to which each statement would matter in their decision as to whether a leader has integrity. They completed the survey at the end of class and were given extra credit in the course for their participation. A 1–7 scale was used in which 1 indicates the statement ‘does not matter’ and 7 indicates the statement ‘really matters.’ A rating of 4 on this scale indicates the statement ‘moderately matters’.

Based on Dunn’s definition, a model was created in which integrity was comprised of two factors. Factor 1 – perceived morality – included items relating to perceptions of the morality of the leader’s values. These items were: ‘The leader is guided by a clear moral compass’, ‘The leader shows respect to others’, ‘The leader is fair’ and ‘The leader is honest’. Factor 2 – perceived consistency – contained items related to the consistency of the leader. These items were: ‘The leader says exactly what he or she means’, ‘The leader behaves consistently over time’, ‘The leader behaves consistently across situations’ and ‘When the leader promises something, you can be certain that it will happen’. A few items that were collected were not included in the model because they did not load cleanly on the expected factor. For example, it was found that ‘The leader practices what he/she preaches’ did not load cleanly on the consistency factor and that ‘Sound moral principles guide the leader’s behaviour’ did not load cleanly on the morality factor. Cronbach’s alpha for the perceived morality dimension was .73 and for the perceived consistency was .69, which are consistent with Nunnally’s (1978) recommendation that instruments used in basic research have reliability of about .70 or better.

Table 2. Content categories of open-ended responses to the question: ‘What kind of information do you use to make judgements about a leader’s integrity?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of times referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actions are guided by a clear moral compass or values</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest with self and others</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats others fairly and with respect</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivates self and others to do the right thing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear sense of right vs. wrong</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does things for the greater good</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads by example</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of observed behaviour</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a high level of trust</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency between words and actions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility for group’s actions and their own</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The proposed model’s fit to these data was tested using LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2006). Several statistics provide information on the fit of the model. The most widely used measure is the chi-square ($\chi^2$) statistic. Hu and Bentler (1999) further suggest that multiple indices be used for judging model fit, particularly a combination of standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMSR) less than .08 with a comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) greater than .95. Additionally, two other recommended (Mulaik et al., 1989; Medsker et al., 1994) fit statistics are reported. These are Bollen’s (1989) incremental fit index (IFI) and the non-normed fit index (NNFI). Finally, the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) is reported, along with its confidence intervals (90% CI; Browne and Cudeck, 1993).

The hypothesized model fit the data well [$\chi^2_{19} = 27.93$ ns; SRMSR = .08; RMSEA = .07 (90% CI = .00 to .14); CFI = .95; IFI = .95; NNFI = .92]. Table 3 provides the item loadings for the two-factor model. Each path between the observed and latent variables was statistically significant ($p < .01$). The proposed model was then compared with a one-factor model. The one-factor model did not represent the data well [$\chi^2_{20} = 42.2, p < .01$; SRMSR = .095; RMSEA = .13 (90% CI = .08 to .19); CFI = .87; IFI = .88; NNFI = .82]. Finally, a significant difference was found between the model $\chi^2$ statistics ($\Delta \chi^2_1 = 14.27, p < .01$). Accordingly, while exploratory, these data suggest that a two-factor model better represents the construct of integrity in these data than does a one-factor model. Thus, Hypothesis 2, which stated that leader integrity is based on evaluations of both the perceived morality of the leader’s values and enacts those values with a remarkably high degree of consistency. This case

### Table 3. CFA loadings for hypothesized model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived morality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader is guided by a clear moral compass</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader shows respect to others</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader is fair</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader is honest</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived consistency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader says exactly what he or she means</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader behaves consistently over time</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader behaves consistently across situations</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the leader promises something, you can be sure that it will happen</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All factor loadings are standardized. All loadings statistically significant at $p < .01$. 

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to use implicit leadership theory, attribution theory and a more philosophically grounded definition of integrity to argue that perceived leader integrity may be better defined and measured as a multidimensional construct capturing both perceptions that the leader holds moral values and professes and enacts those values with a remarkably high degree of consistency. This case
was made to justify further research on a more construct valid measure of perceived leader integrity. The results of two preliminary ‘proof-of-concept’ tests support the hypotheses. First, when followers make attributions of leader integrity, they use multiple sources of information and base their attributions on more than just behavioural integrity or just moral values. Second, a more complete model of how followers attribute integrity would likely contain items addressing dimensions of moral values and items addressing standards of consistency. The authors conclude that leader integrity is, as Aristotle proposed, connected to the idea that the leader is ‘good’ and moral, but that integrity attributions also require a very high standard of consistency that eradicates any questions followers may have about the leader’s moral virtue. As Dunn (2009) suggested, integrity is best thought of as emerging from the combination of judgements about morality and judgements about consistency. That word/deed consistency or judgements about the moral values of the leader are not sufficient to capture perceived leader integrity alone is not a surprise based on how followers develop implicit theories of leadership and make leadership attributions. As noted above, implicit leadership theory suggests that follower perceptions are formed through a complex process of categorization and sense-making that taps into both their current interactions with leaders and their past experiences. Further, attribution theories, like Kelley’s (1967) model, illustrate how attributions emerge from complex comparisons across contexts and people.

**Implications**

Although the results of this study are very preliminary, they do support recommendations on how leadership researchers should measure the construct of leader integrity. Current efforts to measure leader integrity do not adequately capture the breadth of the construct and often confound integrity with measures of behavioural integrity or ethical leadership.

First, it is recommended that care be taken not to confound leader integrity with behavioural integrity, because behavioural integrity is a more narrowly defined construct. Simons (1999) rightfully distinguishes behavioural integrity by recognizing that word/deed consistency represents a subcomponent of integrity itself. However, some studies that use either the term ‘behavioural integrity’ or behavioural integrity items have not followed Simons’ lead. For example, Kalshoven et al. (2011) cite integrity as a dimension of ethical behaviour, yet their four-item measure only includes behavioural integrity items such as ‘keeps his/her promises’, ‘can be trusted to do the things he/she says’ and ‘always keeps his/her words’. Perhaps more problematic, Prottas (2008) studied the effects of what he termed perceived behavioural integrity on employee attitudes, well-being and absenteeism, but defined perceived behavioural integrity as ‘a construct that captures employee perceptions of the ethical behavior of managers.’ Even though he reviewed Simons’ work as the basis for his treatment of the construct, he used the following two items: ‘I can trust what managers say in my organization’ and ‘Managers in my organization behave honestly and ethically when dealing with employees, clients or customers.’ These two items fail to assess word/deed consistency alone and instead confound perceptions of ethicality with assessments of behavioural integrity.
Second, it is recommended that care be taken not to confound leader integrity with ethical leadership. Brown et al. (2005) defined ethical leadership as ‘the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making’ (p. 120). The two-part structure of this definition reflects the authors’ interest in using social learning theory to describe not only what ethical leadership is, but also how leaders communicate and reinforce their ethics to their followers. Ethical leaders behave ethically, but they also communicate this behaviour in a way that promotes ethical practices in followers.

Germane to this examination of leader integrity is that the PLIS (Craig and Gustafson, 1998), which has been used to study integrity (Parry and Proctor-Thomson, 2002), only includes items that reflect ethical practices. It is believed that this scale better represents ethical leadership (which the authors acknowledge when they refer to the scale as measuring perceived ethical integrity) and that it should not be used as a way to measure leader integrity.

As noted above, one measure that approaches a more comprehensive view of leader integrity is the measure created by Mayer et al. (1995) to test their model of trust. Unlike the measures for behavioural integrity and ethical leadership, Mayer’s et al. treatment of integrity assesses both judgements that the trustee lives consistently by a certain set of principles and that these principles are acceptable to the trustor. Mayer and Davis (1999) created a single dimension measure that includes items assessing consistency (i.e. ‘I never have to wonder whether [the trustee] will stick to its word’ and ‘[The trustee’s] actions and behaviors are not very consistent’) and items assessing a subjective assessment of an ethical standard (‘I like [the trustee’s] values,’ ‘[The trustee] has a strong sense of justice’ and ‘[The trustee] tries to be fair in dealing with others.’ Two issues that limit the comprehensiveness of the Mayer and Davis scale is that: (1) the scale is only one dimension thus preventing any analyses of differential effects of either moral values or consistency, and (2) the scale includes a direct question about liking the trustee’s values and then two items about trustee fairness. Fairness thus represents the full range of values that followers may use to judge whether the leader espouses normatively appropriate conduct and does not reference values that may go beyond fairness to address other important principles (i.e. utilitarianism, care for others).

In sum, it is argued and the current data support the conclusion that leader integrity, while a very important construct in the leadership literature, is not adequately measured by studies relying only on measures of behavioural integrity or only ethical leadership. Instead, it is suggested that more construct valid measures of integrity would emerge from more comprehensive definitions that recognize perceived integrity as the judgement of goodness, applied very consistently.

Limitations

The most basic limitation of this research is that, because the hypotheses are very general and the data provide only preliminary support for them, it is not possible to introduce a construct valid measure of leader integrity here. The intent here was to
seek preliminary support for the idea that current measures of leader integrity lack construct validity and that future measures should adopt a multidimensional structure. To support this point, the study surveyed university students, who may only hold a naïve impression of integrity, and asked them general questions about how they make integrity attributions and what items may be most useful. More research is needed to determine the complexity of leader integrity attributions and to test the correct multidimensional structure. For example, Dunn (2009) argues that the consistency germane to leader integrity includes not only word/deed consistency, but also the extent to which the consistency occurs across contexts (e.g. work and non-work settings) and across time. It was not possible to assess this more complex treatment of consistency in the current simple, ‘proof-of-concept’ measure and it is suggested that much more research is needed on what could be a very complex factor structure. More research is also needed to generate a comprehensive sample of possible leader integrity items, q-sort those items into theoretically defensible factors, and then use both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to arrive at a more construct valid measure.

Further, once a construct valid perceived leader integrity measure is developed, more research is needed on models of integrity antecedents and consequences. For example, Moorman and Grover (2009) use uncertainty management theory (van den Bos, 2003) to argue that perceived leader integrity is especially important to followers because it reduces the inherent uncertainty contained in the decision to follow a leader. Attributions of integrity matter because they offer a great deal of useful information that makes a follower’s decision to follow much less risky. If followers perceive the leader to have integrity, those followers can put more faith in the pronouncements and promises made by the leader and more faith that the leader will act in ways consistent with the followers’ conception of what is ‘good.’ One result of believing a leader has integrity may be that followers will be more willing to commit to the leader and actively engage in support of his or her leadership efforts.

Finally, one benefit of developing a measure that consists of separate dimensions is that this opens the exploration of how these different dimensions may develop and how they may differentially affect both integrity judgements and other outcomes. Simons’ (1999, 2002, 2008) work on behavioural integrity has started a useful examination of the causes and effects of word/deed consistency and Brown and Treviño’s (2006) work on ethical leadership pursues questions on perceived moral values. A multidimensional measure of leader integrity may allow us to understand how these two dimensions may combine to affect integrity judgements or if they might interact to affect both integrity judgements and other outcomes.

Conclusion

Perceptions of leader integrity are essential to followers as they decide whether and to what degree they will follow a leader. A perception that a leader has integrity signals to followers that it is reasonable and appropriate to base their decision to follow on what a leader currently promises and currently supports. When following a leader of integrity, followers can feel much more confident that what the leader now professes will determine his or her actions and what the leader now believes will inform his or her leadership.
Given the importance of perceived integrity to followers, this study argues for concerted efforts to develop measures that offer leadership researchers the tools to examine the construct appropriately. Past measures may have operationalized perceived integrity in an overly narrow fashion by either defining integrity only as word/deed consistency or moral behaviour. However, the current results support a definition of perceived leader integrity existing in two parts – a recognition that the leader holds high moral values and the judgement that the leader enacts those values with exceedingly high consistency. These results encourage researchers to develop a multidimensional measure of perceived leader integrity, which could then drive additional research on the many possible ways followers come to judge leader integrity and use those judgements to promote responsible followership.

References


