

A test of leadership categorization theory:
Internal structure, information processing,
and leadership perceptions.

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Robert G. Lord ... Christy L. De Vader

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Abstract

This paper reports results from a series of studies designed to directly test a categorization-based model of leadership perceptions in three areas: specifying the internal structure of leadership categories, investigating the accessibility and importance of various individual behaviors in making leadership judgments, and explaining leadership perception in terms of categorization. In Study 1, data provided by 263 subjects were used to calculate three measures of category representativeness: family resemblance scores, cue validity scores, and prototypicality ratings. Results showed that leader family resemblance, cue validity, and prototypicality were all strongly correlated. In Study 2, accessibility was investigated by administering to 64 subjects a specially constructed questionnaire containing leader behaviors which varied in prototypicality and then measuring the reaction time to rate the behavior as prototypical of a leader. Results

showed that there was a significant negative correlation between prototypicality and reaction time to behavioral items, suggesting that more prototypical items were more easily accessed. Study 3 manipulated prototypicality of leadership behaviors for an experimental group where leadership had been primed extensively and for a group of subjects who had been given no primes. The results showed the prototypicality manipulation strongly affected leadership ratings, behavioral expectations, and causal ascriptions to the target person, but the priming factor had no significant effects on dependent variables. Suggestions for future research and practical implications are also discussed.



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