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Leadership Development in a Virtual Work Environment

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Leadership Development for Telecommuting Employees

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Abstract

Leadership development (LD) in virtual work environments (VWE) has been explored from the leader perspective, with much of the existing research focusing on the leader's behaviors, skills, and interactions with the virtual employee workforce. This "top down" research approach minimizes the **importance and value of the follower/telecommuting employee's experience**. My meta-analytic research examines Leadership and Communication theories to advance an understanding of leadership development in the virtual work environment through the lens of the telecommuter.

Study Questions

- How can leadership styles and manager-employee **relationships** positively influence leadership development in a virtual work environment?
- What **computer-mediated-communication practices** lead to successful leadership development for virtual work environment employees?
- In what ways can organizations overcome **electronic propinquity** obstacles to reduce telecommuter professional and physical isolation?
- How can follower identity positively reinforce and influence a telecommuter's **organizational identity**?

Leadership Development Variables

- **Organization Culture**- penalties, rewards, perceptions, social and technical commitment often unclear
- **Leader Training**- leadership style, manager best practices not well defined for out-of-office workforce
- **Telecommuter Isolation**- physical and professional isolation, interpersonal interactions and connectedness limited

Importance of Further Investigation

- ...at the same time virtual offices have helped companies reduce costs and increase customer contact effectiveness, they have also led to **employee perceptions of isolation** from their own organizations (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007, p. 213)
- Professional isolation "occurs when telecommuters, because they are off-site and out-of-sight, miss important **organizational awards**" (Cooper & Kurland, 2002, p. 512).
- In the years ahead, we would expect greater organizational efforts to **prepare future leaders** of virtual teams (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007, p. 68).
- The positive linking between FWP [flexible work practices] use and performance suggests that FWPs facilitate **career success** (Leslie, Park, & Mehng, 2012, p. 1408)

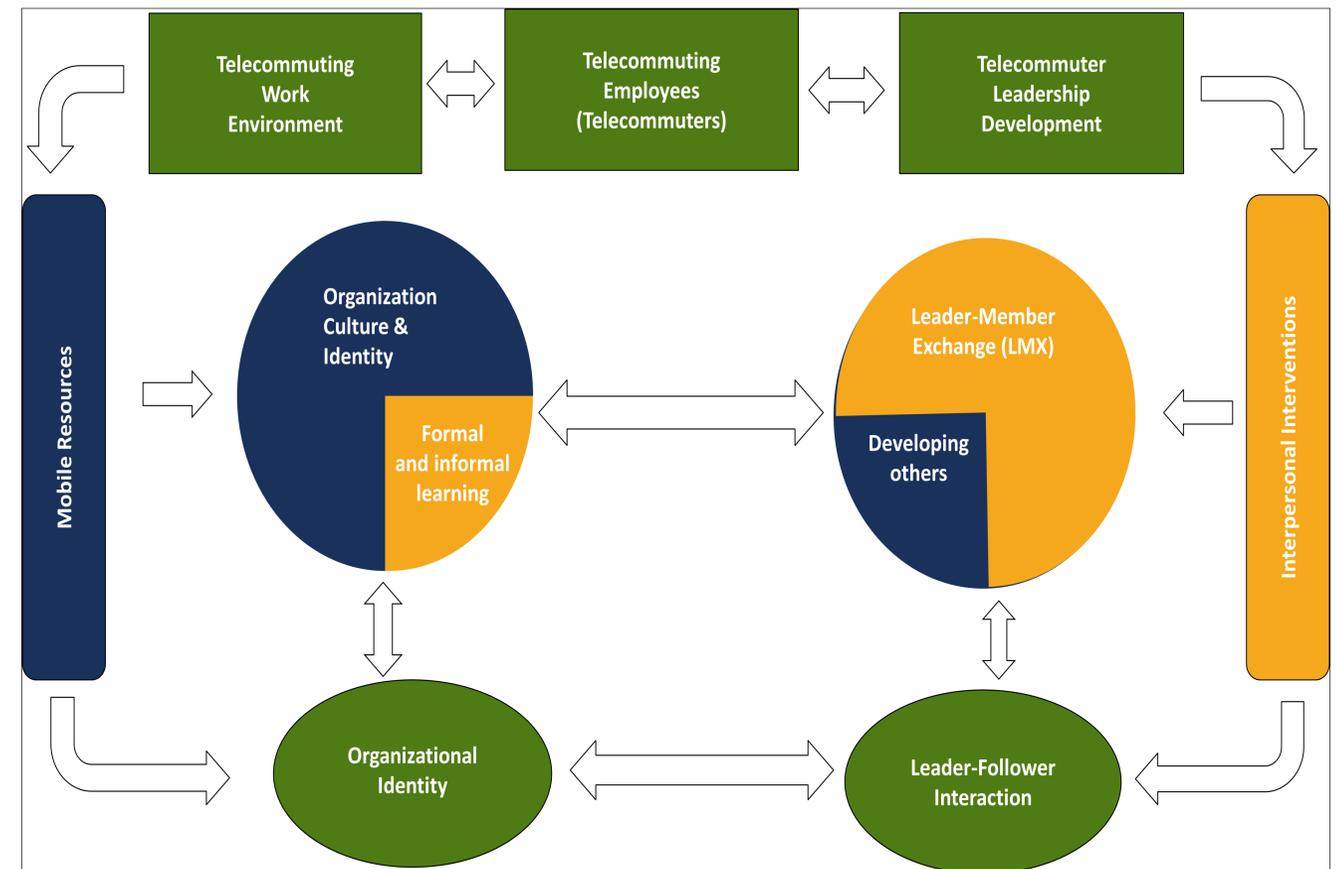


Figure 1. Virtual Work Environment Leadership Development Concept Map

Next Steps

The needs of the individual and the needs of an organization must be integrated for success (Shedletsky, 2004, p. 191).

Leadership scholars need to

- Redefine **E-Leadership**: consider how virtual work environment expands definitions *leadership* and *followership*
- Address **Digital LMX**- recommend new leader-member engagement techniques
- Identify alignments between **Leadership and Communication** theories: advance knowledge of communicating and coaching across electronic platforms Explore informal **digital leadership and online coaching**