Reviewer’s report

Title: Leading for the long haul: a mixed-method evaluation of the sustainment leadership scale (SLS)

Version: 0 Date: 20 Mar 2017

Reviewer: Bryan Weiner

Reviewer’s report:

In this study, the authors propose the sustainment leadership scale (SLS) as an extension of the implementation leadership scale (ILS) and assess its reliability and structural validity. Using mixed methods, the authors also corroborate the four dimensions of the SLS and identify a possible fifth dimension: available leadership. The authors find that the SLS has promising psychometric properties and seems to capture aspects of sustainment leadership that are salient to front line providers. The use of CFA and the mixing of methods are key strengths of the study. The authors make an important contribution by highlighting the importance of leadership in the sustainment phase, offering a promising measure for capturing sustainment leadership, and surfacing a previously hidden aspect of sustainment leadership.

My concerns with the study have to do with the meaning of sustainment leadership. It is not clear from the manuscript what the authors mean by "leadership" or how "leadership" differs from management or supervision. Likewise, it is not clear what organizational level of leadership the authors have in mind with the SLS. You do not find out until page 9 that the referent for the SLS is supervisors' leadership for sustainment. In addition, there is a brief note that leadership for sustainment is a lot like leadership for implementation, but this idea is not really developed; it is offered as a plausible basis for retaining the four-dimensional structure of the ILS for the measure of SLS but it is not really examined critically. Finally, it is not clear how leadership for sustainment "works" (that is, which outcomes it affects or how it affects them). Some of these issues are discussed in the Discussion section, but they should be addressed earlier since the frame/situate the psychometric assessment and exploration process.

Knowing, for example, that supervisory leadership is the focus, at least in this study, of the construct of sustainment leadership would have helped me accept/make sense of the four dimensions the authors identified. These are not the first four dimensions of leadership that come to mind, for example, when I think of sustainment leadership at the top management level. [On a related note, the referent for sustainment leadership in the qualitative component is not specific to supervisors. Study participants' comments about the sustainment leadership of agency directors and other higher-ups are reported as corroborating evidence for the SLS dimensions. This analytic strategy implies that the concept of sustainment leadership is homologous at various organizational levels. This might be true, or it might not. In either case, it would be nice to see the authors address this question conceptually earlier in the manuscript.]

A related concern has to do with the measurement of sustainment leadership. As I understand it, the authors wish to characterize the behavior of supervisors that contribute to sustained use of an
EBP. The authors are not interested in individual perceptions (or individual differences in perceptions) of the supervisor's behavior per se; they are interested in the supervisor's behavior itself. However, the authors derive data about supervisors' leadership behavior from the multiple employees that report to a supervisor. Like climate, culture, readiness, and other constructs, what we have here, it seems, is a composition variable. In other words, sustainment leadership is a construct that emerges from the responses of individuals within groups. This looks like a referent-shift variable since all members of the team are asked to describe the leadership behavior of the same referent (i.e., their supervisor). If this is correct, then the authors should not be addressing the nesting of providers within team by removing the effect of clustering; instead, they should be measuring the sustainment leadership construct as a group-level construct.

Suggested Major Revisions:

Add a Conceptual Framework to the manuscript in which you (a) define the concept of leadership, (b) note that leadership is a multi-level construct, (c) delineate the organizational level of leadership of interest in this study, (d) define the dimensions of leadership captured in the SLS, (e) ground/justify these dimensions in the broader literature on leadership, (f) sketch out a nomological network that identifies the antecedents and consequences of sustainment leadership, even if only briefly.

If the construct refers to attributes or behaviors of the leader, rather than employees' perceptions of the leader, consider conducting a multi-level confirmatory factor analysis so that the level of the measurement model matches the level of the construct (or what Klein and Kozlowski, 2000, refer to as the level of theory). See Dyer et al (2005) for an example of multi-level confirmatory factor analysis in the leadership literature. Dyer NG, Hanges PJ, Hall RJ. Applying multilevel confirmatory factor analysis techniques to the study of leadership. Leadership Quarterly 16 (2005):149-167.

Suggested Minor Revisions:

Describe the amount of missing data and indicate whether any pattern of missing data existed.

Indicate whether any multivariate outliers were identified and addressed. CFA is sensitive to multivariate outliers. Please check and report.

Revise the abstract for clarity. Some of the sentences are awkwardly constructed (e.g., first sentence the Background and the Methods).

Page 5, line 29: what does "both" refer to here?

Page 10, line 29: replace "less" with "fewer."

Page 12, line 39: "strong" is probably too strong a word to describe the fit, given the fit statistics presented.
Page 13, line 30: how was "salience" operationally defined?

Page 15, line 5: remove extra period.

Page 16, line 7: replace "describe" with "described."

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests'

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments
which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal