“Leadership? No, Thanks!” A New Construct: Worries About Leadership

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Leadership is considered a key career aspiration. However, in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, is such a goal indisputably desirable? Tapping the emotion domain, we propose a new construct, worries about leadership (WAL), defined as the worries people have about the possible negative consequences of assuming a leadership role. Four studies investigated discriminant, convergent and predictive validities of WAL scale using diverse methodologies: survey, lab experiment and naturalistic field study. Findings confirmed theoretically proposed dimensions of WAL: worries about failure, work-life imbalance, and harm. WAL was found orthogonal to Motivation to Lead (MTL; Chan & Drasgow, 2001) and correlated with neuroticism and prevention focus. Correlation of WAL scores with physiological indices of emotions was insignificant, albeit in the expected direction. WAL predicted leader emergence above and beyond MTL. These findings have significant theoretical and practical implications contributing to more nuanced understanding of leader emergence.

Keywords: leadership emergence; worries; emotions; motivation to lead; scale development

Introduction

“Leadership is a choice, not a position.” Stephen Covey

If leadership is indeed a choice, whose choice is it and how is a decision made? Becoming a leader has not been viewed as the decision of an individual from an agency perspective (Bandura, 1989). Fortunately, a new line of research has emerged that places the decision in the hands of leaders-to-be. In 2001, Chan and Drasgow coined the term “motivation to lead” (MTL), defining it as an individual-difference construct “... that affects a leader or leader-to-be’s decision to assume leadership training, roles, and responsibilities, and that affects his or her intensity of effort at leading and persistence as a leader” (p. 482).

While intention to become a leader can intuitively be implied in the leader emergence process, MTL is so far the only construct that explicitly links leadership emergence to an agentic process. Taking the line of research initiated by Chan and Drasgow (2001) a step further, we assert that emotion, together with motivation, plays a role in an individual’s decision to become a leader.

The specific emotion we focus on is worry. This paper proposes a new construct called “worries about leadership” (WAL), defined as the worries people have about the possible negative consequences of assuming a leadership role. In this manuscript we attempt to address the question of whether WAL as an emotion-based individual difference variable indeed impacts leader emergence.

Leadership evokes worries especially in today’s so-called VUCA environment—conditions of vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Johansen, 2012). The young workforce of today is less interested in vertical career moves within organizational hierarchies, and more interested in horizontal and lateral moves within and across organizations, compared to previous generations (e.g., Chudzikowski, 2012). The Leadership Identity Construction framework of DeRue and Ashford (2010) asserts that individuals actively assess the level of risk involved in a role when deciding whether to claim leader identity. A nationwide survey conducted by the Harvard Business School with 3,625 full-time employees of various organizations revealed that only 34% aspired to leadership positions and only 7% to C-level positions (Torres, 2014). The respondents who did not aspire to such positions expressed worries about the possible negative consequences of assuming leadership, such as failing to fulfill requirements of the role or jeopardizing their work-family balance. These findings signal the need

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for a research focus on emotions associated with the decision to become a leader, an area that has been overlooked in the literature up to now. As Turner and Mavin (2008) point out, "... seldom does mainstream research reveal the internal angst, emotions, self-questioning, self-doubt or the thoughts and feeling associated with different experiences of *becoming a leader*" (p. 378, emphasis added).

The WAL construct can offer valuable insights into why some people, including those with high leadership potential, avoid leadership roles when the opportunity presents itself. Such insights are particularly important in today's work organizations, where leadership is encouraged at all levels (e.g., Pearce, Manz, & Sims, 2008). Employees who are qualified for leadership positions may not appear on the radar of the organization, perhaps because their worries prevent them from engaging in activities that would prepare them for the role (e.g., training, self-promoting activities). The cost of missing the right candidate for the position can be high for organizations: "... in some instances, the wrong person might emerge as a leader of a group or the right person may fail to emerge as a leader" (Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2015: 1477).

WAL may also provide insights into why underrepresented groups (e.g., women, ethnic minorities, disabled) often do not assert themselves for leadership positions. In the US, only 29% of women, 35% of Hispanics, and 32% of employees with disabilities expressed willingness to be promoted to a leadership position (Torres, 2014). Identifying the root causes of worries about leadership for different group of employees may improve the effectiveness of leadership development and diversity promotion programs. For example, if women and minorities shy away from leadership roles primarily because of their worries about failing in that role, leadership development and diversity promotion programs for these groups may focus on the stereotype threat and the ways to reduce it (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). WAL may be used as a "need assessment tool" to design programs that address specific needs of underrepresented groups of employees. In the remaining part of this Introduction, we first present an in-depth description of the new construct, its theoretical underpinnings and its dimensions. This is followed by the presentation of a new measure for assessing WAL and four studies to validate it.

Worries about leadership: The construct domain

Introduction of WAL acknowledges that leadership role occupancy requires a decision that can be influenced by emotions. In the conceptualization of WAL, leadership denotes *formal* role occupancy at any level in the hierarchy of any type of organization. It does not include informal leadership roles or behaviors.

WAL is grounded in three theoretical frameworks: Lazarus's (1991) Appraisal Theory of Emotions, Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, and Jones and Berglas's (1978) Self-Handicapping Theory of Regulation. Lazarus (1991) asserts that anxiety is rooted in the anticipation of threatening outcomes, which, in the case of leadership, may include failure to deliver results, loss of trust of stakeholders, work-life imbalance, or causing harm to others. Drawing on the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), we propose that these outcomes pose a threat to the satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy that are critical for optimum functioning and growth. Anticipating threats to the satisfaction of these needs is likely to be associated with self-handicapping behavior (Elliot & Church, 2003) that manifests itself as avoidance of or withdrawal from activities related to a specific role, which, in our case, is leadership (Jones & Berglas, 1978).

In line with the Self-Determination Theory, we propose that WAL's construct domain consists of three dimensions: worries about failure, worries about work-life imbalance, and worries about harming others. These dimensions correspond partially to the perceived threat to the satisfaction of needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, respectively. The dimension of worries about failure reflects the fact that most leaders experience failures from time to time and have to deal with them (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008). The possibility of failure involves a threat to the fulfillment of the need for competence. WAL may capture certain aspects of a dated construct called "fear of failure" (e.g., Birney, Burdick & Teevan, 1969). WAL is domain-specific, however. Even a person with a low generalized fear of failure can have high fear in leadership situations.

Reporting worries about work-life imbalance, we assert that work-life imbalance poses a degree of threat to the fulfillment of the need for autonomy. The need for autonomy refers to the desire to be the causal agent of one's own life (Deci & Ryan, 1985). While a leadership role may enhance autonomy in the work domain, it may limit autonomy in one's social life. Indeed, one of the major challenges leaders face is work-life imbalance: "... reading autobiographies of recognized business leaders, it becomes clear that the issue of properly balancing work, family, and personal life is an important experience they wished they had managed better and much earlier" (Muna & Mansour, 2009: 122). Individuals who perceive a threat to the satisfaction of the need for autonomy may refrain from accepting leadership roles.

Worries about harm dimension alludes to worries about possibly harming others as a result of having to make decisions that could hurt them (e.g., layoff decisions). The possibility of harming others may be

considered a threat to the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. There is increasing awareness of the prevalence of abusive and destructive leaders (e.g., 11% in Netherlands and 13.6% in the US reported to be destructive) (e.g., Tepper et al., 2006). Costs associated with such leadership include absenteeism, turnover, burnout and stress (e.g., Schyns & Schilling, 2013). As more news about abusive and destructive leaders surfaces, worries about becoming a leader who inflicts harm on others may also increase.

In WAL, worries are emotions evoked by anticipating negative personal consequences related to accepting a leadership role. Emotions play a pivotal role in decision-making (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015). The Affect Infusion Model (AIM) (Forgas, 1995) suggests that judgment and decision-making are influenced by four distinct but related features of the decision maker: cognitive capacity, personal relevance of the decision, motivational states, and emotions. The implication of the AIM for WAL is that individuals who have the cognitive capacity, motivation, and personal relevance for a leadership role may still shy away from accepting it if they have negative emotions about the possible negative consequences of the role. Thus, while MTL taps into the motivational domain of a decision to become a leader, WAL taps into the emotional domain. These domains are distinct but complementary in decision-making—hence, the constructs of MTL and WAL.

Resonating with Zaccaro's (2007) model of leadership, WAL represents a factor at the junction of personality and context. Individuals may experience WAL at different levels, depending on the extent to which a leadership role signals threatening cues for the fulfillment of needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. For example, a person may experience a high level of WAL when a leadership role involves long hours of work, frequent travel, performance pressure, multiple risks, or a complex and ambiguous work environment. The same person may experience a lower level of WAL in a leadership role that allows risk taking, flexibility, and tolerance for failure.

Overview of the studies

Reported in this manuscript are four studies aimed at developing and validating a self-reported measure of WAL. These studies assessed different types of validity using different methodologies. Using survey methodology, the purpose of Study 1 was to develop items for the new measure, establish its factorial structure and test the construct validity against several individual differences variables. Study 2 tested the convergent validity of WAL measure from the perspective of physiology of emotions in the lab context. The expectation was that changes in participants' physiology

while responding to WAL items would converge with their self-reported levels of WAL. Studies 3 and 4 examined the predictive validity of the WAL measure for two different outcome variables: self-nomination and nomination by others for leadership roles, respectively. Specifically, in Study 3 the predictive validity of the WAL measure was tested through a lab experiment. After making individual investment decisions, participants were asked whether they would assume a leadership role and decide on how to allocate money on behalf of their groups. We examined whether WAL predicted individuals' willingness to assume a leadership role. Study 4 was a naturalistic field study where nominees for the student council in a university were asked to complete the WAL and MTL measures prior to the elections. We investigated whether these two constructs predicted actual election results.

Study 1

Overview

This study aimed to develop a self-report measure of WAL and to test its construct validity. Two strategies were adopted to develop items for WAL. First, practitioner-oriented writings were carefully reviewed to identify common worries that actual leaders report (e.g., Lee & Elliot-Lee, 2006; Lohrenz, 2014). In-depth interviews were then conducted with 32 full-time employees (18 females, 14 males) in several private sector organizations. The age of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 43 ($M = 27.16$, $SD = 1.67$). The majority were non-managers (72%), and the rest were mid-level managers. Interviewees were asked two questions, the first of which was whether they would aspire to a leadership position in their current organization, if they were given an opportunity for promotion in the near future. Two-thirds (66%) responded negatively to this question. The second question aimed to elicit their notion of the possible negative consequences of taking on such a leadership role. The answers were recorded and grouped into three categories (worries about failure, work-life imbalance, and harm). Grouping was done independently by two researchers, with agreement on 89% of the statements. The researchers were unable to categorize five statements, four of which were discarded because they reflected lack of interest in a leadership position due to specific conditions of individual respondents (e.g., planning to leave the organization or moving to another country). The fifth one was retained in the item pool; because it was related to a worry about harm *to themselves* in the leadership role (i.e., developing health problems due to stress), it was included in the "worries about harm" category.

The above procedures yielded 54 items for the initial pool. These were tested for clarity and non-redundancy in a study with 88 white-collar non-managerial employees aged between 20 and 56 years ($M = 25.22$, $SD = 1.88$). Females comprised 43% of this sample. The respondents were asked to rate each item for clarity and redundancy. Twenty items with a low score on clarity and a high score on redundancy were eliminated from the item pool.

The remaining 34 items were subjected to item analysis and an exploratory factor analysis using a group of 206 employees and college students (see the next section for the characteristics of this sample), resulting in further elimination of 18 items. The final set of 16 items were retained and subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis using employee samples from the US ($N = 299$) and a European country ($N = 389$) (see the next section for the characteristics of these samples). The US and European employee samples were also used to investigate the relationship of WAL with MTL, neuroticism, and regulatory focus.

The construct validity of the measure of WAL was tested against three individual difference variables: MTL, neuroticism, and regulatory focus. MTL was an important breakthrough in the leadership emergence literature and has spurred considerable research interest (e.g., Felfe & Schyns, 2014; Luria & Berson, 2012; Oh, 2012). Although the leadership emergence literature gained ground with the introduction of MTL, high motivation may not be a sufficient condition for undertaking a leadership role. As discussed earlier, the Affect Infusion Model (AIM) (Forgas, 1995) considers motivations and emotions distinct and complementary components of a decision. In addition to referring to the AIM, we drew on the literature on approach-avoidance conflict (having a goal that is both appealing and unappealing; Lewin, 1935) and competition neurosis (having an intense need to win, coupled with a fear of negative consequences of winning; Horney, 1937) to suggest that one could have both MTL and WAL. Therefore, we expected WAL (emotion) to be an orthogonal construct to MTL (motivation).

Hypothesis 1. WAL and MTL are orthogonal constructs.

In terms of other individual difference variables, we expected WAL to be associated with neuroticism and regulatory focus. Individuals at the high end of the neuroticism spectrum experience feelings of anxiety, guilt, and depressed mood, and they respond poorly to stressors and interpret ordinary situations as threatening (McCrae & Costa, 1987). We expected that those with high neuroticism would score high on WAL. However, we did not expect neuroticism to fully account for variance in WAL because neuroticism is conceptualized

as a relatively stable trait, whereas WAL is domain-specific and can change depending on situational cues (see Tamir, 2005). The Regulatory Focus Theory proposes two modes of self-regulation: promotion and prevention (Higgins, 1997). Promotion-focused individuals concentrate on receiving positive outcomes, whereas prevention-focused individuals concentrate on avoiding negative outcomes of a future action. Prevention-focused are motivated by the absence of failures, punishment and losses. We expected that prevention-focused individuals would be high on WAL, as they avoided leadership positions to prevent possible negative consequences. WAL would not necessarily inhibit attention to ideals and gains: one can worry about losses associated with leadership and still aspire to achieve gains. In other words, promotion-focused individuals can have either high or low WAL, suggesting a non-significant association between WAL and promotion-focus.

Hypothesis 2. WAL positively correlates with neuroticism.

Hypothesis 3. WAL positively correlates with prevention focus.

Samples

The characteristics of the samples used for item development and testing of the initial item pool are described in the Overview section, above. The sample used for *item analysis and exploratory factor analysis* comprised 206 participants, the majority of whom (83%) were students in a mid-size European university; the rest were employees in various organizations. The students, sourced from the university subject pool, completed an online survey in exchange for course credit. Students were asked to record their ID number on a separate link to get course credit. Employees too completed the same online survey, whose link was shared through the social media accounts of the university. All participants completed the survey anonymously. Females comprised 62.3% of the overall sample, with a mean age of 21.37 years ($SD = 3.01$). The mean number of years of education completed was 14.62 ($SD = 2.26$). Work experience in this sample was 2.23 years on average ($SD = 0.92$).

The sample used for *construct validation* comprised a total of 688 employees in a wide range of organizations in the US ($N = 299$) and a European country ($N = 389$). The European participants were recruited from the roster of the national association for personnel management. Those who responded could opt to be entered a drawing where two-thirds of the

entrants would receive a 16 USD gift check. Surveys were completed anonymously; those who wished to register for the drawing were asked to provide their name and e-mail address on a form available through a separate link. As for the US, data were collected using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). A total of 329 respondents completed the survey, but 30 of them were eliminated due to poor data quality. The US participants, like the ones in Europe, completed the survey anonymously; payment to US participants was 1 USD.

Females comprised 56.9% of the European sample and 44.6% of the US sample. The age range in the European sample was between 21 and 56 ($M = 31.98$, $SD = 9.48$), and between 19 and 59 ($M = 36.05$, $SD = 10.21$) in the US sample. The mean number of years of education completed was 15.12 ($SD = 2.05$) for the European sample and 14.55 ($SD = 1.96$) for the US. Work experience was 5.46 years on average ($SD = 2.03$) for the European sample and 4.49 years ($SD = 1.99$) on average for the US sample.

Measures

Worries about leadership. We used the final set of 16 items to measure WAL. Employee respondents were instructed to imagine they were being offered a leadership position in the organization they worked for. The student respondents were instructed to imagine being offered a leadership position in one of the popular student clubs in their university. Both employees and students were asked the extent to which each of the WAL items (e.g., spending less time with family, being exposed to more criticism) would worry them, if they accepted this role. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (*to a very little extent*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*) (see Appendix for the WAL scale).

Motivation to lead. Chan and Drasgow's (2001) scale was used to measure motivation to lead. Affective (liking to lead), socio-normative (feeling a sense of duty to lead), and non-calculative (disregarding benefits of leading) dimensions of MTL were captured by 9 items each. Data from the US employees revealed that non-calculative MTL dimension had low reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$). Furthermore, items of this dimension did not translate well into the European language. The subject-matter-experts who conducted translation and back-translation observed that the translated version of the non-calculative MTL items (e.g., "I would want to know 'what's in it for me' if I am going to agree to lead a group") would evoke social desirability, and therefore weaken reliability and validity. Similar concerns were raised by researchers who reported a high correlation between non-calculative MTL and social desirability

(e.g., $r = .77$) (Bobbio & Ratazzi-Manganelli, 2006). Following the footsteps of earlier studies (e.g., Dimitros, 2014; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007; Krauss & Hamid, 2013; Waldman, Galvin, & Walumbwa, 2012), we decided to use items pertaining to affective and socio-normative dimensions of MTL.

Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item was "Most of the time, I prefer being a leader rather than a follower." Higher scores indicated higher motivation to lead. The same measure was used in Studies 1, 3 and 4; Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates ranged between .85 and .89.

Regulatory focus. Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda's (2002) measure was used to assess promotion and prevention focus, captured by 5 items, each. Items included such questions as, "In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life" (promotion focus), "In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life" (prevention focus). Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores on the promotion subscale indicated promotion focus; higher scores in the prevention subscale indicated prevention focus. Cronbach's alphas for promotion and prevention focus were .78 and .80, respectively.

Neuroticism. Two measures were used to assess neuroticism. For the US sample, Goldberg's (1992) measure was used, while for the European sample, Somer and Goldberg's (1999) measure was used—adapted and standardized for this sample. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate). High scores indicated high neuroticism. The internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alphas) were .77 and .79, respectively.

Measurement translations and invariance. MTL and regulatory focus were used in the original language (i.e., English) for the US sample. These measures were translated for the European sample. WAL, on the other hand, was originally developed in the European language and was therefore translated into English. Back translation procedures were employed for all measures (Brislin, 1976). Measurement invariance for the translated measures was tested through multi-group CFAs (AMOS Version 19.0.0; Arbuckle, 2010) (see Table 1 for MTL and regulatory focus).

Demographics. Participants were asked to record their age, years of completed education and work experience in years, and their gender. Past leadership experience was established through a single question ("Please indicate the extent to which you have engaged in

Table 1 Measurement Invariance Estimates of Scales Responded by European and the US Samples

	χ^2	df	GFI	SRMR	RMSEA	NNFI	CFI
Motivation to Lead							
Factor loadings freely estimated across samples	696.18	232	.91	.04	.03	.94	.92
Factor loadings invariant across samples	749.11	247	.91	.05	.04	.94	.92
Regulatory Focus							
Factor loadings freely estimated across samples	200.12	64	.94	.03	.04	.95	.94
Factor loadings invariant across samples	230.85	72	.94	.04	.04	.95	.93

leadership roles in the past.”) answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (no extent) to 5 (great extent).

Results and discussion

Item analysis and factor structure of WAL. As explained in the overview of Study 1, the initial pool of 54 items were reduced to 34 based on the ratings for clarity and non-redundancy. The pool of 34 WAL items was first examined for normality of distribution and item discrimination (i.e., how well each item discriminates between individuals with high and low worry). Eleven items were eliminated on the basis of high skewness-kurtosis statistics (indicating non-normality) or point-biserial values below .20 (indicating low item discrimination) (Hinkin, 1995). The remaining 23 items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using oblimin rotation. Items loaded on 3 factors, explaining 67% of the variance. Seven items loaded on more than one factor or had factor loadings below .40, so these items too were eliminated from further analysis (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986; Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

The final set of 16 items were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the employee samples from both the US and the European country. Drawing on the employee samples (both European and US), a comparison was made between the 3-factor and single-factor structure of WAL, using classical measurement theory (i.e., CFA). Difference tests revealed that the 3-factor structure was superior to the single-factor structure (Table 2). Additional analyses of item quality and dimensionality were conducted using the multidimensional confirmatory item response theory (mIRT). Specifically, Samejima's Graded Response Model (GRM; Samejima, 1997) and the multidimensional generalization (see Muraki & Carlson,

1995) using the mIRT package in R (Chalmers, 2012) were utilized. The GRM chosen for the response scale was a standard Likert-type ordinal response; the GRM has been shown to be an adequate fit for these types of response scales. Analysis of model-data fit of the mIRT GRM for a 1- and 3-dimensional solution were conducted using the M2 statistic (Maydeu-Olivares & Joe, 2006). Fit statistics and nested model difference tests suggested the 3-factor model was a better fit to the data than a single-factor model (Table 2). Analysis of item characteristic curves and item information curves in the one dimensional GRM lend support to the findings of the classical test theory diagnostics. Finally, item-level fit statistics (χ^2 and S-X2; Kang & Chen, 2008; Orlando & Thissen, 2000) confirmed the findings of the classical test diagnostic. ICCs, IRFs, item parameters, and item level fit statistics are available from the first author upon request.

Factorial invariance of the 3-factor model of WAL was initially tested through separate CFAs for each country (Table 3). We then followed the procedure recommended by Cheung & Rensvold (2002). First, we constrained the model by equating the factor loadings between the two country groups (metric invariance model). Next, we ran another model with the loadings and intercepts constrained to be equal between the two country groups (scalar invariance model). To establish partial measurement invariance, we compared the χ^2 statistics of metric and scalar invariance models. The $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 8.12$ was insignificant, suggesting that there was factorial group invariance between the two countries. Furthermore, IRT analyses revealed that item properties were invariant across samples. The first factor, called “Worries about failure” comprised 5 items indicating worries about the consequences of failing in the leadership role. The second factor, “Worries about work-life

Table 2 Fit Estimates of Single-Factor and Three-Factor Solutions of the Worries About Leadership Measure

	Single-factor solution	Three-factor solution
CFA results – European employees		
χ^2 (df), AGFI, CFI, NFI, RMSEA	412.09 (120), .76, .78, .76, .10	194.50 (95), .96, .98, .96, .04
CFA results – the US employees		
χ^2 (df), AGFI, CFI, NFI, RMSEA	438.44 (120), .73, .74, .75, .11	142.06 (95), .97, .98, .97, .03
IRT results – European employees		
M2 (df), CFI, TLI, RMSEA	556.02 (56), .40, .23, .15	66.85 (27), .95, .88, .06
IRT results – the US employees		
M2 (df), CFI, TLI, RMSEA	428.50 (56), .55, .42, .15	45.23 (27), .98, .94, .05

imbalance” included 6 items on worries about losing work-life balance resulting from engagement in the leadership role. The third factor, “Worries about harm” consisted of 5 items on worries about harm that might be inflicted on the self and others in professional relationships as the result of the leadership role.

WAL’s nomological net. Pearson’s zero-order correlations among study variables were computed for the US and European employee samples (Table 4). WAL and MTL were expected to be orthogonal constructs (*Hypothesis 1*). Zero-order correlation analysis revealed weak negative correlations ($-.16$ and $-.14$ for the US and European samples, respectively). Because both WAL and MTL were multidimensional constructs, we examined the relationships between hierarchical second-order factors through a stringent multivariate test using a path model including both the measurement (items associated with their respective factors of WAL and MTL) and structural estimates (see also, Beson & Bandalos, 2010 for a similar procedure). For both the US and the European samples, the data fit well with the measurement and structural models ($\chi^2/df = 2.08$ and 2.11 ; AGFI = $.93$ and $.91$; CFI = $.95$ and $.94$; RMSEA = $.046$ and $.044$ for the US and European employee samples, respectively). The relationship between the constructs of WAL and MTL were near zero: 0.07 and 0.03 for the US and European employee samples, respectively. This multivariate test

results using the path analysis confirmed that MTL and WAL were orthogonal, lending support to *Hypothesis 1*. It should also be noted that the path model revealed non-significant relationships among the two dimensions of MTL and three dimensions of WAL in the US and European samples (path coefficients ranging from $.02$ to $.08$).

As predicted (*Hypothesis 2*), neuroticism was positively correlated with WAL in both the US and European samples ($.24$ and $.23$, respectively). Also found (*Hypothesis 3*) was WAL’s positive and significant correlation with prevention focus: $.35$ and $.36$ for the US and European samples, respectively.

In sum, Study 1 provided evidence for the construct validity of the 16-item measure of WAL. Data from employees of two countries fit the theoretically-driven dimensions of WAL. These dimensions—worries about failure, work-life imbalance, and harm partially reflected the threat to the satisfaction of needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness as proposed by the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Worries about harming others in a leadership role was conceptualized as a threat to one’s need for relatedness. However, it was not only causing harm in the leadership role that emerged as an important worry; receiving harm was a concern as well. With the addition of an item alluding to the possibility of harming oneself, the “worries about harm” dimension on our measure included a

Table 3 Factor Loadings Based on CFA for the US and European Employee Samples

	Factor loadings based on CFA	
	US employees	European employees
Factor 1. Worries about failure		
Mistakes I make being noticed more than before.	.68	.76
Losing my self-esteem in case of failure.	.82 (.11)	.81 (.11)
Losing face or feeling embarrassed in case of failure.	.76 (.11)	.76 (.11)
Always having to prove myself.	.76 (.10)	.71 (.10)
Being exposed to more criticism.	.69 (.10)	.68 (.10)
Cronbach’s alpha	.88	.85
Latent factor intercorrelation with Factor 2.	.25	.28
Latent factor intercorrelation with Factor 3.	.37	.41
Factor 2. Worries about work-life imbalance		
Spending less time with my family.	.77	.75
Being unable to fulfill my responsibilities to my family.	.83 (.09)	.81 (.09)
Having no private space or personal life.	.73 (.08)	.79 (.09)
Being unable to balance work and family.	.79 (.06)	.75 (.07)
Having less time for myself (e.g. hobbies).	.59 (.09)	.66 (.08)
Not having enough time for my friends.	.67 (.07)	.64 (.07)
Cronbach’s alpha	.87	.87
Latent factor intercorrelation with Factor 3.	.45	.38
Factor 3. Worries about harm		
Becoming a hard-hearted and callous person.	.72	.69
Experiencing problems in my relationship with my spouse/partner.	.71 (.11)	.77 (.09)
Developing stress-related health problems.	.72 (.11)	.68 (.10)
Hurting the feelings of others in the work context by the decisions I make.	.63 (.09)	.66 (.09)
Treating employees unfairly.	.63 (.08)	.63 (.08)
Cronbach’s alpha	.82	.82

Table 4 Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables ^a

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. WAL ^b - total		.78**	.85**	.88**	-.14**	.23**	-.04	.36**	-.25**	-.06	-.24**	-.15*
2. WAL – Factor 1 ^c	.79**		.45**	.54**	-.14**	.30**	-.06	.44**	-.23**	-.03	-.24**	-.16**
3. WAL – Factor 2 ^d	.87**	.50**	-	.66**	-.12*	.11*	-.03	.22**	-.21**	-.01	-.21**	-.11*
4. WAL – Factor 3 ^e	.88**	.57**	.70**	-	-.08	.18**	-.01	.26**	-.18**	-.11*	-.17**	-.11*
5. MTL ^f	-.16**	-.22**	-.11*	-.07	-	.04	.42**	-.10*	-.01	-.01	.01	-.28**
6. Neuroticism	.24**	.31**	.09	.11	-.18**	-	.04	.29**	-.21**	-.00	-.26**	-.09
7. Promotion focus	-.06	-.16**	.04	-.05	.31**	-.40**	-	.14**	-.23**	-.12*	-.17**	-.09
8. Prevention focus	.36**	.52**	.18**	.23**	-.41**	.63**	-.30**	-	-.26**	-.11*	-.27**	-.17**
9. Age	-.11	-.16**	-.09	-.04	-.02	-.10	-.07	-.15*	-	.06	.79**	.11
10. Education	-.01	-.05	-.01	-.01	.14*	-.10	-.09	-.13*	-.02	-	.08	.06
11. Work experience (in years)	-.11	-.15*	-.05	-.08	-.08	-.07	-.03	-.14*	.82**	.02	-	.09
12. Past leadership experience	-.14*	-.12*	-.11	-.13*	.25**	-.09	.18**	-.08	.06	.12*	.06	-

Notes.

* $p < .05$;** $p < .01$ ^a . Correlations above the diagonal were based on the European employees; those below the diagonal were based on the US employees.^b . WAL: Worries about leadership.^c . WAL-Factor 1: Worries about failure.^d . WAL-Factor 2: Worries about work-life imbalance.^e . WAL-Factor 3: Worries about harm.^f . MTL: Motivation to lead.

perceived threat to the individual's well-being as well as to the well-being of others. Evidence for construct validity was also found for the relationship of WAL to MTL, neuroticism and regulatory focus. As expected, WAL correlated positively with neuroticism and with prevention focus. Based on the multivariate analysis, we also concluded that WAL was orthogonal to MTL.

Study 2

Overview

This study explored the physiological correlates of responding to WAL as a way of testing the convergent validity of the measure. Thinking about possible future negative outcomes of personal importance can cause individuals to experience emotions such as anxiety (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001). Similarly, anticipating worries in the context of responding to the WAL survey could feasibly elicit emotions and therefore physiological reactions. Akin to a polygraph test procedure, physiological signals were recorded while participants were completing the WAL measure, with the scale serving as an emotion-inducing stimulus. Recognizing the multidimensional and complex nature of emotions, we hypothesized that while WAL scale completion prompted participants to think about future negative consequences, it would lead to the experience of anxiety (Lerner, Ye, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015) and associated bodily reactions such as increased arousal and changing heart rate.

We built our research on the traditions of psychophysiological laboratory studies of electrodermal and cardiovascular activities as concomitants of emotional responding (Dawson, Schell, & Filion, 2007). Electrodermal activity (EDA) measures the electrical conductivity of the skin and changes due to sweating on certain locations on our body (e.g. the palms of our hands) (Boucsein et al., 2012). It has been shown to index physiological arousal associated with emotions (Boucsein, 2012). Heart rate variability (HRV) is a measure of the variability of intervals between heartbeats (Thayer, Åhs, Fredrikson, Sollers, & Wager, 2012) and has been linked to psychological coping and emotion regulation processes (Thayer et al., 2012). Although individuals differ in their ability to cope with demanding situations in terms of their HRV responses, research has shown that when people experience negative emotions such as fear, anxiety or anger, HRV tends to decrease (Kreibig, 2010).

Taking WAL scores as an index of self-reported level of worry, we expected higher scores to be associated with increased levels of arousal (i.e., increased skin conductance) and decreased heart-rate variability. In this study, we used *skin conductance level* (SCL) to measure EDA (Dawson et al., 2007) and *root mean square of differences between successive inter-beat intervals* (RMSSD) to measure heart-rate variability (Berntson et al., 2007).

Hypothesis 4. WAL scores are correlated positively with electrodermal activity and negatively correlated with heart-rate variability.

Methodology

Sample. Twenty-one university students participated in this study in exchange for course credit. Fifteen participants were females and six were males. The mean age was 21 years, ranging from 19 to 30 years ($SD = 2.76$). They were asked not to consume alcohol, drink caffeinated beverages, smoke cigarettes or do physical exercise during the 2 hours preceding the appointment time. In the announcement of the study, participants were informed about eligibility criteria: they should have no cardiological, neurological or psychiatric condition and should not be taking antidepressant medications.

Procedure and measures. The study was carried out in the lab in winter; the temperature was regulated by the university-wide centralized system. Participants were tested one at a time. Each session took approximately 30 minutes. After signing the consent form and filling out health check forms, participants were instructed to wash their hands with water only. Upon returning to the lab, the experimenter attached Biopac Nomadix® wireless recording equipment (Biopac Systems, Inc. CA) to the body of the participants. This was followed by the presentation of the instructions for the experiment, which allowed sufficient time for the electrodes to adhere to the skin. The participant was comfortably seated in front of the stimulus presentation monitor. The participant's left hand (used for the EDA recording) rested comfortably on a specially provided side table. The participant was explicitly asked to try to minimally move during the study.

We recorded 5 minutes of baseline data, during which time the participant sat still and watched a relaxing presentation (e.g. Bachkurov, 2015). After the baseline recording was over, the presentation automatically proceeded to the 16-item WAL scale. The items were presented on the screen one by one, without any time constraint.

To assess the skin conductance response, we fixed Biopac EL507 Ag–AgCl electrodes (Biopac Systems, Inc. CA) to the palmar side of the medial phalanges of the index and the ring fingers. Applying a constant voltage of 0.5 V, we recorded data at 1000 Hz in standard units of microSiemens (μS). We assessed heart activity by electrocardiogram (ECG). Ag–AgCl electrodes (Biopac Systems, Inc. CA) were attached in Lead II configuration, under the shoulder edge of the right clavicle and the lower left rib cage. ECG activity was also recorded at a sampling rate of 1000 Hz. The electrode placement sites were preliminarily prepared with 70% ethanol alcohol. The bio-signals were continuously recorded using Wireless BioNomadix® devices and the MP150 data acquisition system (Biopac Systems, Inc. CA).

Analysis. Of the 21 participants, data from 10 were excluded from the EDA analysis due to bad quality of the recorded EDA signal. In the end, we had data from 11 participants for EDA and data from 21 participants for HRV analysis. The recorded data were processed, and mean SCL and RMSSD values for the baseline and WAL scale completion periods were assessed using AcqKnowledge 4.4 software (Biopac Systems, Inc.). Based on the normality test results of the variables, we decided to perform a logarithmic transformation of RMSSD values to normalize the distribution (Goedhart, Van Der Sluis, Houtveen, Willemsen, & De Geus, 2007). For the baseline measure of either signal, the last 60 seconds of the 5-minute rest period was used. The change scores (hereafter referred to as $\Delta \lg RMSSD$ and ΔSCL) were calculated by deducting the mean SCL and $\lg RMSSD$ values during the baseline period from the respective mean values during the WAL scale completion period (Dawson et al., 2007).

Results and discussion

The descriptive statistics were computed for the WAL measure ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.58$), $\Delta \lg RMSSD$ ($M = 0.05$, $SD = 0.27$) and ΔSCL ($M = 1.12$, $SD = 1.78$). Pearson's correlations of WAL were in the expected directions—alas, non-significant, with $\Delta \lg RMSSD$ ($r = -0.26$, $p = 0.26$) and with ΔSCL ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.42$). Data did not support *Hypothesis 4*.

Participants were asked to imagine being offered a leadership position. We measured their anticipated emotions in response to a hypothetical scenario where they had to assume a leadership role with no real concern to them. The little personal relevance of the stimulus may have contributed to the low intensity of elicited emotions (Frijda, 1988; Lench et al., 2011) and associated physiological responses. Other factors may also account for the results. For example, it is possible that self-reporting that requires reflective reasoning attenuated the affective process (Kassam & Mendes, 2013; Lieberman, Inagaki, Tabibnia, & Crockett, 2011). Second, as suggested by Levenson (2014), mild emotion elicitors (i.e., the WAL scale in our study) might activate concomitant emotion regulation processes and decrease the intensity of a physiological response.

This study suggests that the WAL scale, as a self-reported measure of emotions, may involve physiological aspects - changes in EDA and HRV in particular. Future research should address the limitations of the current study by targeting larger samples of different populations in more ecologically valid contexts. Testing WAL-induced physiological changes in real decision-making situations with actual candidates for promotion would provide important insights into the construct and its utility. The findings can also contribute to the effort of leader

development interventions using biofeedback techniques (Waldman, Balthazard, & Peterson, 2011).

Study 3 and study 4

Overview

The overarching purpose of the two studies reported in this section was to test the predictive validity of the WAL measure for self-nomination and nomination by others for a leadership role. Study 3 was a lab experiment in which students were asked to assume a leadership role that would require them to make a decision about an investment allocation on behalf of their assigned group. We examined whether WAL predicted accepting a leadership role above and beyond MTL.

Hypothesis 5. Compared to high WAL, low WAL predicts self-nomination for a leadership position above and beyond MTL.

Study 4 was a naturalistic field study; nominees for positions on the student council responded to the WAL and MTL measures two weeks prior to the election date. We then investigated whether WAL predicted actual election results above and beyond MTL. Those with high MTL may also fail to be nominated for the leadership role by others if their embodied worries are perceived by others as a barrier to leadership effectiveness (e.g., Melina, Burgess, Lid-Falkman, & Marturano, 2013;). WAL was introduced as a construct to explain self-nomination for a leadership position, but it is possible that WAL can be used to explain nomination by others for the same position. Bligh, Kohlesb, and Meindl (2004) revealed that boldness and courage were associated with perceived charisma in a leader. High WAL individuals may experience some physiological arousal (similar to the physiological patterns observed in Study 2) and may show nervousness in their speech or conversations with others. Those who have worries about accepting the leadership role may also spend less effort and fewer resources to engage in activities that promote their candidacy, unlike those who have no worries. Therefore, we expected WAL to predict also nomination by others for leadership positions.

Hypothesis 6. Compared to high WAL, low WAL predicts nomination by others for a leadership position above and beyond MTL.

Sample and procedure in study 3

The sample comprised 157 students at a mid-size university who participated in a decision-making experiment in the lab. Participants were recruited through

the subject pool of the university and participated in exchange for course credits. The mean age was 19.68 years ($SD = 1.31$). Female participants were in the majority (60.7%). The sample had an average work experience of 0.86 years ($SD = 0.22$).

Participants first completed an online survey that included the measures of WAL and MTL. One week later they came to the lab for a group experiment, where each participant was assigned to a group of five randomly selected members (including themselves), seated face-to-face in a circle. We confirmed that participants in each group had no prior acquaintance with each other.

Each participant was asked to propose an allocation of investment funds (\$10). They were informed that their investment proposal would be implemented if they were chosen as decision maker for the group. They had to decide how much of the \$10 to allocate to a safe option and how much to a risky option (Ertac & Gurdal, 2012). The amount invested in the safe option would be maintained, but the amount invested in the risky option had a 50% chance of a payoff equal to the invested amount multiplied by a factor of 2.5 and a 50% chance of losing the entire amount. Participants were informed that all group members would get the same payoff (i.e., one fifth of the group payoff), and that this payoff would be determined by a single group member (i.e., the decision maker).

Having completed the allocation task, they were presented with two questions to determine who the decision maker would be. The first was a simple yes-no question: "Do you want to be the decision-maker?" A random draw among those who replied "yes" determined whose decision would be implemented. In the event no one in a given group self-nominated for a leadership role, the decision-maker was selected randomly from the group members. The second question asked participants to indicate their degree of willingness to take the leadership role in the group for the same task; they responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". The answer to this second question was used as the dependent variable. Once the group's decision-maker was determined (as explained above), a coin was tossed to determine the group's payoff. The amount was paid to members before they left the lab.

Study 3 results

Participants' willingness to lead was regressed on the WAL and MTL scores obtained from the questionnaire they had responded to the week prior to the experiment. A hierarchical regression analysis revealed that MTL was a significant predictor of willingness to lead in step 1 ($B = .64$, $SE(B) = .10$, $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). WAL, which was entered in step 2, explained additional variance in willingness to lead ($B = -.43$, $SE(B) = .12$, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$). The R^2 change was significant, improving from

.19 to .25 ($F(1, 150) = 11.51, p < .001$). The results provided support for *Hypothesis 5*, indicating that lower levels of WAL predicted self-nomination for the leadership position above and beyond MTL.

Sample and procedure in study 4

This naturalistic field study capitalized on the occasion of an upcoming student council election in a mid-size university. The student council is the only body of students represented at the highest administrative board of the university, the senate. All students are eligible to vote in the council election, which takes place every two years. At the time of data collection, there were 32 candidates, 28 of whom agreed to fill out the online WAL and MTL measures two weeks prior to the election. To match the survey results with the actual election outcomes, students were informed that their names would be recorded in the survey but that their personal data would be kept strictly confidential. The mean age in this sample was 20.50 years ($SD = 0.92$). Females comprised 32.1% of the sample. The work experience of the sample was 0.85 years on average ($SD = 0.66$).

Study 4 results

Among the 28 students who responded to the WAL survey, 14 were elected to the student council and 14 were not. To predict the election results, a logistic regression analysis was conducted using MTL in the first step and WAL in the second. When only MTL was included in the model, the chi-square was not significant ($\chi^2(1) = .02, p = .89$), indicating that no predictive information was available based on MTL scores over and above random allocation (log likelihood estimate = 38.79, $R^2 = .00$). When WAL was entered in the second step, the chi-square statistics of the model became significant, indicating a significant association between the observed and the predicted outcome (i.e., election results); $\chi^2(1) = 4.5, p = .03$. The log likelihood estimate was 34.28 and $R^2 = .20$. The following was the equation for log odds.

$$\log(p/1-p) = \beta_0 + .25 \beta_{\text{MTL}} - 1.26 \beta_{\text{WAL}} + \varepsilon.$$

WAL produced an Exp(B) value of .28 implying that a 1-unit increase in WAL diminished the odds of winning by 72%. The results confirmed *Hypothesis 6*, that is, WAL has incremental validity above and beyond MTL to predict someone's nomination by others for a leadership position.

The findings of Studies 3 and 4 indicate that MTL and WAL are complementary constructs. While MTL alludes to the motivation for leadership in general, WAL alludes to the worries about the leadership role in specific

situations. WAL provides additional variance to MTL to predict both self-nomination and the nomination of a person by others for a leadership position. Although WAL was proposed only to predict self-nomination, the findings of Study 4 show that it can also be used to predict the extent to which others perceive an individual's suitability for a leadership role. This is in line with the findings of Chan and Drasgow (2001), who also showed that MTL was associated with others' nomination of the person for this role.

General discussion

"Being a No.1 is something he preferred *to want*, rather than *to be*." (Tony Blair's view of Gordon Brown, cited in Hytner, 2014: 15)

Leadership is considered a key aspiration in one's career. Organizations and individuals make significant investments in leadership development programs. In such a *zeitgeist*, the suggestion that some people do not have such aspirations because of worries about possible negative consequences goes against the grain. However, evidence is slowly cumulating to suggest that a non-negligible portion of the workforce (e.g., two-thirds of US employees in a nationwide poll, Torres, 2014) avoids leadership roles in their organizations. Chan and Drasgow (2001) were the first to acknowledge that leadership is a decision of an individual that stimulates motivated steps towards this role. We took this agentic view further and highlighted another key component of this decision: emotions. The proposed new construct referred to as WAL focuses on the worries individuals may experience while considering an offer to take on a formal leadership role in a work organization.

We proposed that WAL has 3 dimensions: worries about possibly failing in the leadership role, about losing work-life balance, and about harming others or oneself in fulfilling role requirements. WAL dimensions were theoretically driven and empirically verified. Future research should investigate whether there are additional worries experienced by specific groups of individuals (e.g., women, disabled individuals, entrepreneurs, ethnic or cultural minorities) or in specific positions (e.g., political leadership, leadership in academia). For example, some employee groups who enjoy core responsibilities associated with the current role (e.g., teaching and research for academicians) may shy away from leadership roles. For them, worries about changing job content maybe part of the construct domain of WAL. Future research could not only identify additional WAL dimensions for specific groups, but also investigate how the various dimensions of WAL interact and function in the leadership emergence process.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. First, whereas employee samples were used in Study 1 for developing the item pool and testing the construct validity of the WAL measure in two countries, student samples were used in the rest of the studies. Generalizability of findings obtained from student samples to employees may raise concerns. However, using student samples in this study may be less of a concern for three reasons. First, a recent meta-analysis comparing findings of organizational research with and without student samples concluded that there were minor meaningful differences in relationships between student and non-student samples (e.g., smaller effect sizes obtained in the former case) (Wheeler, Shanine, Leon, & Whitman, 2013, p. 10). Second, students may be a target population for WAL, rather than a proxy sample to represent employees. Research shows that prior leadership roles in family and school contexts predict leadership role occupancy in professional life (e.g., Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, & Krueger, 2007). Curricular and co-curricular activities are designed to develop leadership competencies of college students (e.g., Buschlen & Guthrie, 2014). WAL may play a role in students' willingness to participate in these activities. Finally, although some items under Factor 2 concerning work-family balance may be considered as less relevant for students than for employees, we believe they are relevant because students also worry about not spending enough time with their parents and family members due to school work (e.g., Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998).

The second limitation was to capture MTL using affective and socio-normative dimensions only. The non-calculative dimension was assessed in Study 1 for the US employees. However, data yielded low reliability estimates for this subscale. Furthermore, this subscale did not translate well into the European language (see, Bobbio & Ratazzi-Manganelli for a discussion on social desirability of the non-calculative MTL scale). Therefore, items of the non-calculative dimension were not included in the measurement of MTL (see also, Dimitros, 2014; Krauss & Hamit, 2013; Waldman et al., 2012 for a similar approach). Given that we had data for non-calculative dimension of MTL from the US employees, we computed zero-order correlations between the non-calculative dimension of MTL and all dimensions of WAL. The correlations were non-significant, ranging from $r = 0.07$ to $r = 0.09$. This suggested that orthogonality between WAL and MTL would have probably not been changed, had we included all 3 subscales of MTL.

The third limitation was the lack of a thorough investigation of the role of personality in the extent to which WAL is experienced. Included in this study was only one dimension of personality from the Big Five Personality theory perspective, namely neuroticism. However, other dimensions, especially openness to experience could also be relevant to WAL. Those who

are open to new experiences would welcome new leadership opportunities, despite the inherent ambiguities and complexities involved in the role. A recent framework conceptualizing personality, Cybernetic Big Five Theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2014), would be especially apt to study individual differences in WAL. CB5T describes how personality dimensions interact to capture the ways in which individuals pursue their goals. Among the cybernetic functions, detecting threats to goals (reflected in high neuroticism, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness) may be associated with high WAL.

Future research directions and implications

In our studies, we did not specifically investigate the effect of situational factors on WAL. In the conceptualization of WAL, we proposed that individuals may have different levels of worries, depending on the nature of leadership role they were considering. Whether WAL levels change according to the nature of the task and the composition of the work group needs to be investigated. The type of task and the demographic characteristics of followers may be important contingencies for leadership self-nomination, especially when the situation presents a stereotype threat for women or members of other underrepresented groups (see Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Also, future research can prime individuals with different leadership prototypes (e.g., abusive vs. humanistic) (Paris, Howell, Dorfman, & Hanges, 2009) to assess whether exposure to positive or negative leadership prototypes has any effect on the level of WAL.

Another intriguing question for future research is how WAL manifests itself or is embodied. In the naturalistic field study, our findings revealed that the WAL score differentiated those who were elected for a leadership position from those who were not. How does WAL manifest itself, so that those with high WAL did not receive sufficient votes despite their high level of MTL? Our finding in Study 2 suggested that there may be physiological changes (i.e., heart rate variability, skin conductance) when individuals contemplate their worries concerning leadership. Even though the correlations between the physiological changes and WAL score did not reach a level of significance in the lab environment, they were in the expected direction. It is possible that those with high WAL appeared nervous to the voters and/or did not make sufficient efforts to promote their candidacy (e.g., Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013).

A number of important questions about practical implications emerged from this research. First, from a talent management perspective, what is the optimum level of WAL for leadership effectiveness? On the one hand, low worries about failure or harm may lead to recklessness and corruption in the leadership role (e.g., Einarsen,

Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). On the other, high worries may lead to self-set barriers to leadership role occupancy, especially for those with high leadership potential. Lanaj and Hollenbeck (2015) defined leadership over-emergence as "... cases when an individual's leadership emergence is actually higher than the individual's leadership effectiveness" (p. 1476). Over-emergence may be a problem in the case of low WAL, whereas under-emergence may be a problem in the case of high WAL. Assigning or electing the wrong person to a leadership position or overlooking the right person for a job are equally undesirable mishaps in talent management.

Second, it is important for organizations to detect and examine the root causes of worries experienced by employees, especially those who otherwise have high leadership potential. Who experiences high WAL and why they experience it are important issues for organizations to address. Understanding how organizational cultures (e.g., organizational values, expectations, and politics) and work-related aspects of a leadership role (e.g., role ambiguity or overload) contribute to avoidance of this role could stimulate programs to improve organizational systems and culture.

Finally, leadership development programs should include modules to coach employees in techniques of coping with excessive worries about possible negative consequences of leadership. To determine the utility of these programs, research should first investigate the extent to which WAL is associated with traits (e.g., personality) and states (e.g., past leadership experiences, leadership role models, leadership context). The correlation of WAL with neuroticism was significant but not particularly strong ($r = .24$), suggesting that intervention programs to develop coping skills and resilience may be useful in reducing WAL. Indeed, both work experience and past leadership experience correlated negatively with WAL (see Table 4). This raises the possibility of WAL being sensitive to context or experiences. This also suggests that WAL may be attenuated by sufficient practice in leadership tasks and intervention programs that include guidance and coaching.

The worries about leadership construct appears to have potential to contribute to the leadership literature. Management consultants have already started writing about leadership fears and how to overcome them (e.g., Burnison, 2011). It is our hope that systematic research on WAL will open new avenues for leadership research and practice in the coming years. The top 10 issues in the agenda of the World Economic Forum (2015) include "lack of leadership," which ranked third. "Lack of leadership" implies both an increasing number of ineffective and corrupt leaders as well as an insufficient number of individuals with the right values and competencies coming forward to assume leadership roles. Constructs such as WAL may help us better identify the "right" individuals and prepare them for this challenging role.

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Appendix

Worries about leadership scale

Suppose that you have been offered a leadership position in your organization.* In considering this offer, to what extent does the possibility of each of the following worry you?

If I accept the leadership position, the POSSIBILITY of each of the following would worry me:	to a very little extent	to a little extent	to some extent	to a large extent	to a very large extent
1. Mistakes I make being noticed more than before.					
2. Spending less time with my family.					
3. Treating employees unfairly.					
4. Having less time for myself (e.g., hobbies).					
5. Being exposed to more criticism.					
6. Being unable to balance work and family.					
7. Hurting the feelings of others in the work context by the decisions I make.					
8. Not having enough time for my friends.					
9. Always having to prove myself.					
10. Experiencing problems in my relationship with my spouse/partner.					
11. Becoming a hard-hearted and callous person.					
12. Developing stress-related health problems.					
13. Losing my self-esteem in case of failure.					
14. Being unable to fulfill my responsibilities to my family.					
15. Losing face or feeling embarrassed in case of failure.					
16. Having no private space or personal life.					

Note:

*“In the students version of the questionnaire ... in your organization” was replaced with “... in one of the most popular student clubs”