



Leadership vulnerability: a grounded theory approach to conceptualize, instrumentation, and its content validity assessment

Geeta Sidharth¹ · Angel Josy Lakra²

Accepted: 2 April 2025 / Published online: 10 April 2025

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2025

Abstract

Leadership Vulnerability has garnered increasing attention in recent years from scholars and practitioners. However, the research in this field is still in its infancy and requires attention from academicians and researchers. The studies exploring vulnerability are mostly general without giving much consideration to the conceptualization of leadership vulnerability and only a few have attempted to include it in empirical studies. To fill this research gap, we have used the grounded theory approach to get an in-depth understanding of the concept of leadership vulnerability and to develop the content validity of the instrument that is deeply rooted in the data. Subsequently, the concepts emerging from grounded theory were positioned in the literature and then finally were assessed for content validity through a panel of experts using CVR, I-CVI, S-CVI, and Kappa statistics. The findings of the paper provide a valuable addition to the theory and practice on leadership by conceptualizing leadership vulnerability and suggesting an instrument for its measurement for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords Leadership vulnerability · Grounded theory · Leadership vulnerability instrument · Content validity assessment · Content validity index · Kappa coefficient

Introduction

The construct of vulnerability has widely populated the landscape of psychology and medical sciences. In recent years, the construct has started taking its ground among organizational researchers due to the significant implications it can have on organization and its people. Lately, vulnerability has emerged as desirable in leaders. Brown (2018) dedicated her work to highlight the brighter side of embracing vulnerability, and the daring leadership, by virtue of it by mentioning “Vulnerability is not winning or losing. It’s having the courage to show up when you can’t control the outcome.” (pp. 20). Courage, the necessity for an individual

who desires to perform exceedingly well and be creative, for it is impossible to be creative without encountering any form of risk (Brown, 2015). Based on this notion, it can be proposed that manifesting vulnerability by individuals is the basic requirement for organizations to emerge as a creative and innovative organization since there is a profound association between leadership vulnerability and drive performance (Morgan, 2023). The uncertain and tumultuous characteristics of the environment in which organizations operate, in one or another way impact employees, and especially, the leaders. Such situations naturally trigger leaders to do all in their capacity to fabricate this picture of complete control and reject the tumult that the organization is facing. Though wearing such masks of perfectionism causes employees to lose their trust in the leaders and as a result, often leaders struggle in building healthy relationships with the employees. In contrast, a leader’s behavioral manifestation of openness and transparency allows employees to connect with their leader on a human level; accept changes willingly; and build trust. Different definitions of trust can be cited in the literature, although all share one commonality that is “willingness to be vulnerable” (e.g., Schoorman et al., 2015). These definitions have highlighted the intention

✉ Angel Josy Lakra
angel@svc.ac.in

Geeta Sidharth
geeta.siddharth@gargi.du.ac.in

¹ Department of Commerce, Gargi College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

² Department of Commerce, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India