

# PRINCIPLED LEADER BEHAVIORS: AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK AND EXTENSION OF WHY LEADERS ARE FAIR, ETHICAL, AND NONABUSIVE

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Research to date on leader behaviors such as justice rule adherence, abusive supervision, and ethical leadership has found a clear linkage between such behaviors and employees' work attitudes and performance. Historically, and surprisingly, understanding of what initiates these impactful leader behaviors is much more limited, and only recently have scholars begun to examine their antecedents. Thus, the goal of our integrative review is to advance cumulative knowledge of why leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive—which we refer to collectively as *principled leader behaviors*. Our review is structured around a framework of four theoretical lenses that elucidate what initiates and perpetuates such behaviors: *interpersonal motives*, focused on relational explanations; *instrumental motives*, centered on these behaviors as a means to some end goal; *moral motives*, which characterize these leader behaviors as an end in themselves; and *self-regulation and disposition*, focused on leaders' automatic inclinations and capacity to enact these behaviors. We not only synthesize previously fragmented findings of what shapes principled leader behaviors, but also highlight areas of overlap and distinction across them. Extending our framework, we highlight the interplay of lenses and critical research avenues to better understand why leaders treat followers in beneficial and not harmful ways.

In his book *Good boss, bad boss*, Sutton (2012: 21) argued that “most bosses want to be great and most employees want wonderful bosses.” For decades, scholars and practitioners have asked what it means to be a “good” or “bad” leader and how this treatment affects employees. Broadly, “good” leaders adhere to standards and responsibilities expected of individuals in their role—that is, they behave in a principled way, which Merriam-Webster (2019) defines as following “a rule or code of conduct.” In the organizational sciences, the notion that leaders adhere to or violate rules of conduct has been studied in three key traditions or literatures—supervisor justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and abusive supervision—which converge around principled treatment of followers

(i.e., fair, ethical, and not abusive [Folger & Bies, 1989]). Conclusions from meta-analyses and prior reviews indicate that employees who perceive their leader (i.e., supervisor or manager) to be “good” or principled, in terms of being fair, just, ethical, and nonabusive, experience higher-quality social exchanges, demonstrate greater task performance and organizational citizenship behavior, and engage less in counterproductive work behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013; Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Rupp, Shao, Jones, & Liao, 2014; Rupp, Shapiro, Folger, Skarlicki, & Shao, 2017). This substantial body of research tells us a great deal about how employees react to leaders' principled behaviors.

What is far less understood, however, is how leaders become “good,” or why they are principled in the first place. As a result of disproportionately focusing on employee outcomes, much more is known about the receiver of these behaviors (i.e., the employee or follower) than the individual enacting them (i.e., the leader). Yet, how can organizations

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effectively develop principled leaders without first understanding *why* leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive? Recently, scholars have begun to recognize the importance of investigating what initiates and perpetuates these leader behaviors (e.g., Den Hartog, 2015; Graso, Camps, Strah, & Brebels, 2020; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). For example, Ambrose and Schminke (2009) and Scott, Colquitt, and Paddock (2009) developed theoretical models explicating motives of fairness and justice. Similarly, Greenbaum, Quade, and Bonner (2015: 26) proposed “impediments to ethical leadership” and processes that encourage leaders to be amoral. In addition, Tepper et al. (2017: 136–137) argued that “antecedents of abusive supervision deserve special attention. . . it is from such research that we are likely to derive insights that can inform the work of practitioners who aim to eliminate or manage the effects of supervisory abuse.” Overall, it is clear that scholars are increasingly drawn to studying antecedents of fair, ethical, and nonabusive behaviors, given the practical and theoretical impact of such findings. However, since their inception, antecedent-focused research streams in these literatures have developed in parallel with one another, with very little sharing of common findings.

This is surprising, considering the conceptual similarities between supervisor justice rule adherence, nonabusive supervision, and ethical leadership (e.g., Cropanzano & Stein, 2009; Koopman, Scott, Matta, Conlon, & Dennerlein, 2019; Mackey et al., 2017; Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2016). Supervisor justice rule adherence refers to “managerial actions that act in accordance with the standards” or rules corresponding to each justice dimension (Scott et al., 2009: 758; see also Barclay, Bashshur, & Fortin, 2017). Justice dimensions and their associated rules include distributive (fairness of outcomes; i.e., adhering to an equity principle), procedural (fairness of decision-making processes; e.g., voice, consistency, ethicality), informational (adequate explanations and honesty), and interpersonal (respect and propriety) (Colquitt, 2001; Scott et al., 2009). Ethical leadership also relates to complying with standards (Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, 2019) and has been defined as “normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions” and promoting such conduct in followers (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005: 120). Abusive supervision refers to subordinates’ perceptions of supervisors’ “sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000: 178); examples of this behavior include anger, rudeness, and lying

(Tepper, 2000), which connect to violations of interpersonal and informational justice rules (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993). Although these three literature streams and the theories and assumptions underlying them have key distinctions, they also have notable similarities. For example, abusive leaders fail to display interpersonal justice and leaders who enact procedural justice are likely to be considered ethical; unethical leaders may be both abusive and in violation of justice rules. Additionally, Koopman and colleagues (2019) found that ethical leadership can operate as a substitute for justice enactment. Collectively, supervisor justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and nonabusive supervision can be described as various forms of principled leader behavior, as suggested above.

As a result of fragmentation across the literature streams, the field lacks consensus and an overarching understanding of why leaders follow or violate such principles. Specifically, what has been missing to date is a synthesis of predominant antecedents of supervisor justice, ethical leadership, and nonabusive supervision. A synthesis is important to develop because prior research has tended to focus only on one or a small subset of antecedents, ignoring the interplay of multiple independent variables within a larger system of principled leader behaviors (i.e., the three forms of principled leader behavior outlined above). For instance, separate studies have examined instrumental explanations for why leaders are abusive (Watkins, Fehr, & He, 2019) and unfair (Qin, Ren, Zhang, & Johnson, 2018), and relational explanations for why leaders are ethical (Hansen, Dunford, Alge, & Jackson, 2016) and fair (Zapata, Olsen, & Martins, 2013; Zhao, Chen, & Brockner, 2015). While these and other studies have been essential to growing our understanding of why leaders are principled, they point to a variety of dispersed perspectives and antecedents (e.g., instrumental, relational). Without synthesis, it is unclear why leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive, and whether these antecedents differ across the three forms of principled leader behaviors.

To address this shortcoming, the goal of our review is to synthesize and advance research on the antecedents of principled leader behaviors. By integrating these related yet fragmented literatures under the umbrella of “principled leader behaviors,” we illuminate the core explanations for why leaders behave (or fail to behave) in principled ways. In turn, we reveal areas of overlap as well as distinctions regarding antecedents of supervisor justice, ethical leadership, and nonabusive supervision. As Appendix A

indicates, nearly 87% of the articles in our review have been published since 2010, and many were in press at the time of this manuscript's submission. This suggests that findings regarding antecedents of principled leader behaviors are rapidly accumulating and that this growing body of research is ready for an integrative review to guide future research.

Our review is organized around a framework of four theoretical lenses that we subsequently develop. This framework, which allows us to identify areas of overlap as well as uniqueness across antecedent- or leader-focused justice, ethical leadership, and abusive supervision studies, reveals insights that would not be evident from prior reviews or meta-analyses in these literatures individually. Specifically, we consider whether supervisor justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and abusive supervision operate similarly with respect to the four lenses, or whether critical differences emerge between them. Extending from this framework, we develop a road map for future theory and research on antecedents of principled leader behaviors and identify critical ways in which research in this area should advance.

## Our Framework

Our review revealed several theoretical lenses through which the antecedents of principled leadership

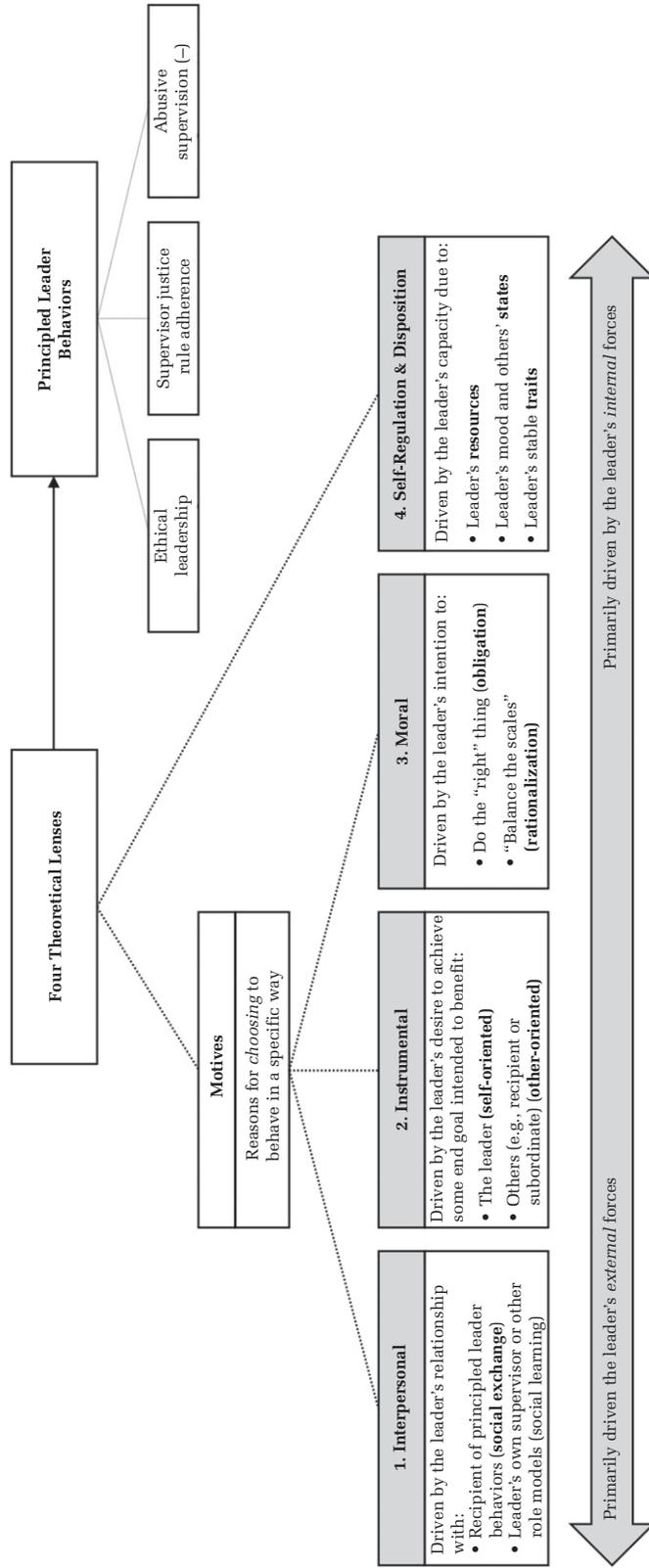
have been studied. We refer to a lens as a cluster of theoretical foundations that offers a distinct explanation for why leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive. The first three lenses—interpersonal, instrumental, and moral—are grounded in Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, and Schminke's (2001) "three roads," which summarize the theoretical underpinnings of individuals' (i.e., recipients') reactions to justice. Although Cropanzano et al. (2001) focused on the recipient of justice and we focus on the actor of principled leadership more broadly, the distinctions they drew between lenses offer a starting point to organize findings on antecedents of all three forms of principled leadership. Our review also uncovered an additional lens beyond the "roads" from Cropanzano and colleagues (2001): self-regulation and disposition. Our review is structured around an integrative framework of these four theoretical lenses, which is highlighted in Table 1. We briefly develop the framework below and in the following sections elaborate on each lens in turn.

In Figure 1, we illustrate the four lenses and how they connect to principled leadership. The lenses are arranged on a spectrum from primarily externally driven (e.g., other individuals such as followers), somewhat externally driven (e.g., leader's intention to improve employee performance), somewhat internally driven (e.g., leader's belief in a just world), to primarily internally driven (e.g., leader's personality

**TABLE 1**  
**What Precipitates Principled Leader Behaviors? A Framework of Four Theoretical Lenses**

Theoretical lens	Description: Leaders enact these behaviors. . .	Key theoretical foundations in prior research
Interpersonal motives	. . . as a response to followers (social exchange motive) or by modeling others' (e.g., their own supervisor's) behavior (social learning motive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964)</li> <li>• Victim precipitation theory (Curtis, 1974)</li> <li>• Belongingness theory (Baumeister &amp; Leary, 1995)</li> <li>• Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986)</li> <li>• Social information processing theory (Salancik &amp; Pfeffer, 1978)</li> </ul>
Instrumental Motives	. . . as a means to some end goal that may be primarily self-oriented (i.e., self-interest) or other-oriented (i.e., to benefit an employee or the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social interaction theory of aggression (Tedeschi &amp; Felson, 1994)</li> <li>• Attitude functions theory (Katz, 1960)</li> <li>• Altruistic versus egoistic motivation (Batson, 1987)</li> </ul>
Moral motives	. . . as an end in itself because it's "the right thing to do" (moral obligation motive) or is justified or deserved (moral rationalization motive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deontological ethics (Kant, 1996)</li> <li>• Moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969)</li> <li>• Moral self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1991)</li> <li>• Moral exclusion theory (Opotow, 1990, 1995)</li> <li>• Moral licensing theory (Miller &amp; Effron, 2010)</li> <li>• Justice motive theory (Lerner, 1980)</li> <li>• Moral relativism (e.g., Fletcher, 1966)</li> </ul>
Self-regulation and disposition	. . . due to their inclination and capacity based on resources, states, or traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 1998)</li> <li>• Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989)</li> <li>• Affective events theory (Weiss &amp; Cropanzano, 1996)</li> <li>• Transactional theory of stress (Lazarus &amp; Folkman, 1984)</li> <li>• Trait activation theory (Tett &amp; Burnett, 2003)</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1**  
**Integrative Framework of Four Theoretical Lenses Explaining Principled Leader Behaviors**



**Note:** Bolded text within parentheses indicates key trends identified from extant literature.

or states). Our review uncovered several types of principled leadership antecedents, a subset of which include motives. Consistent with prior research, we define motive as “a reason or cause for *choosing* [emphasis added] one action over another” (Scott et al., 2009: 758). The underlying assumption of motive-focused research is that the actor, or leader in our case, is deliberate and intentional in deciding whether to be fair, ethical, and nonabusive toward followers. Research adopting interpersonal, instrumental, and moral lenses has comprised motive-related approaches to studying antecedents of principled leadership.

Research on another type of antecedent, revealed by our review, has recognized that leaders “may not be deliberate when engaging in abusive supervision” (Mawritz, Greenbaum, Butts, & Graham, 2017: 1483) or may be predisposed to “do so automatically” (Scott et al., 2009: 761). That is, scholars have also recognized that antecedents of principled leadership (or lack thereof) include factors other than motives. For example, leaders might not always have the capacity to be principled, due to depleted resources, and those who are highly agreeable may be predisposed to be principled. We view this subset of antecedents through a self-regulation and disposition lens. Whereas motive-related antecedents tend to be purposeful and intentional, antecedents that are related to self-regulation and disposition suggest that although motives to enact principled behavior are important, they might not always be sufficient.

Our review proceeds as follows. Next, we outline our review methodology, including literature search and coding procedures. In the subsequent sections we unpack theoretical assumptions and synthesize prior findings for each lens, including key trends (shown in bold text within parentheses of Figure 1). We then integrate the four lenses to reveal ways to advance research on principled leadership, including studying the overarching system of lenses, revealing areas of distinction versus overlap between the three principled behaviors, and using our framework to advance nascent research streams on variability and agreement regarding these behaviors.

## METHODOLOGY OF OUR REVIEW

### Literature Search Procedure

The basis of our review includes empirical articles that have examined antecedents of three constructs: supervisor justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and abusive supervision (i.e., principled leader

behaviors, or lack thereof, in regard to abusive supervision). To gather literature for this review, we (a) examined references of meta-analyses and conceptual reviews of these constructs (i.e., backward snowball method) and articles citing meta-analyses and reviews (i.e., forward snowball method), (b) conducted a broad search in the database PsycINFO, and (c) conducted manual searches in peer-reviewed journals that publish empirical research on these topics (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Leadership Quarterly*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Personnel Psychology*). The search term used in (b) and (c) can be summarized as {[abusive AND (leader\* OR supervis\*)] OR (ethical AND (leader\* OR supervis\*)) OR (“organizational justice”)] AND [actor OR antecedent\* OR motive\* OR enactment OR adhere\*]}, such that “\*” indicates a wildcard to capture terms related to the stem before the asterisk.

### Inclusion Criteria

To be included, articles were required to empirically examine antecedents of supervisor justice rule adherence or violation, ethical leadership, or abusive supervision. Numerous theoretical or conceptual articles have been published in these literatures (e.g., Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Brockner, Wiesenfeld, Siegel, Bobocel, & Liu, 2015; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Den Hartog, 2015; Scott et al., 2009; Tepper et al., 2017). However, what is currently needed is an integrative understanding of the *empirical* findings across these research streams. To determine whether inclusion criteria were met, we examined article titles and abstracts. This resulted in a total of 130 empirical articles in our review.

### Coding Scheme

After determining whether an article would be included, we used a coding scheme to extract key information: the behavior (i.e., supervisor justice, abusive supervision, or ethical leadership), study methodology and sample, rater of the behavior (e.g., leader self-rated, recipient-rated), theoretical foundation, and antecedents of the behavior. We then categorized antecedents into the four lenses of our framework and extracted core themes from each lens. Some degree of overlap in theoretical perspectives and findings exists (e.g., a theory may relate to

interpersonal, moral, and instrumental lenses); however, studies were categorized into the lens with the closest theoretical fit and in several cases were included in more than one lens—a point we return to when we discuss the interplay between lenses. The first and third authors iteratively conferred and reached agreement on studies viewed through each lens. Article attributes are summarized in the Appendix. Conclusions from this process underpin the critical issues, new insights, and future research implications discussed in the sections that follow.

### INTERPERSONAL LENS OF PRINCIPLED LEADER BEHAVIORS

The interpersonal lens captures *relational* explanations for why leaders are fair, ethical, and non-abusive, and emphasizes the role of others in these behaviors. A key assumption of this lens is that principled leader behavior stems from “a social process. . . understood vis-à-vis our relationships to other people” (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 40). Thus, motives comprising this lens primarily originate from forces external to the leader. This is the most popular lens that emerged, as 60% of studies in our review examined interpersonal antecedents to principled leadership. The two types of interpersonal relationships that are arguably most salient and influential for leaders are the ones they hold with their employees or followers (often the recipients of these behaviors) and their own supervisors or superiors in the organization. Indeed, our review suggests that these relationships play a critical role in whether leaders are principled toward followers, and reflect two distinct interpersonal motives: *social exchange* and *social learning*.

#### Social Exchange Motives

Employees can also provide supervisors with valued benefits that may obligate them to reciprocate with justice rule adherence. (Zapata et al., 2013: 3)

Social exchange motives include antecedents capturing how the context of the leader–employee relationship, including the leader’s feelings toward employees, as well as employees’ characteristics and behaviors, influence principled leadership. Our review indicates that nearly two thirds of studies that adopted an interpersonal lens examined social exchange motives. The logic behind these motives is grounded in social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960), which suggests that

leaders are compelled to reciprocate to followers by enacting principled behavior, based on prior interpersonal interactions with them. Our review also revealed additional theoretical perspectives that highlight different exchange-related reasons why leaders are principled, including victim precipitation theory (e.g., Curtis, 1974) and belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Below, we highlight these theoretical origins and elaborate on the key themes that emerged from research on social exchange motives.

**Theoretical foundations.** First, according to Cropanzano et al. (2001), social exchange theory is one of the key perspectives undergirding the interpersonal “road.” One of the central tenets of social exchange theory is the notion of reciprocity in interpersonal interactions, which Gouldner (1960: 172) described as the norm for equivalence in the “return of benefits” or “return of injuries” between two individuals in an exchange. In a similar vein, Blau (1964: 93) described how social exchange “involves favors that create diffuse future obligations. . . and the nature of the return. . . must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it.” In other words, social exchange revolves around the idea that individuals feel obligated to repay others in-kind. Our review suggests that both sides of the social exchange coin (i.e., exchange of help and harm [Lyons & Scott, 2012]) motivate leaders to be principled (or not). For example, Zapata et al. (2013) found that employee trustworthiness was associated with interpersonal and informational justice via the leader’s felt obligation and trust toward the employee. Another study found a positive linkage between employees’ hostile behavior toward the leader and abusive supervision (Camps, Stouten, Euwema, & De Cremer, 2020).

Second, victim precipitation theory (Curtis, 1974; Elias, 1986) has been used to make similar arguments, yet focuses more on how *unprincipled* behavior arises. The fundamental idea behind victim precipitation is that “some individuals may become at risk of being victimized by provoking the hostility of potential perpetrators” (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006: 104). Aquino and Lamertz (2004: 1026) proposed that victims typically adopt one of two roles that make them a target of others’ harm: (a) provocative victim, who initiates aggression toward others, or (b) submissive victim, who demonstrates self-deprecation or low social status, which “signals to others that the person is highly vulnerable to attack or exploitation because he or she lacks allies who may afford protection. . . and [is] unlikely to retaliate.” As an example of the former role,

time-lagged studies have suggested that employee deviance predicts abusive supervision (Lian, Ferris, Morrison, & Brown, 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Simon, Hurst, Kelley, & Judge, 2015). In support of the latter role, other studies have found positive relationships between employee neuroticism, negative affect, fear, and abusive supervision (Henle & Gross, 2014; Kiewitz, Restubog, Shoss, Raymond, Garcia, & Tang, 2016; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015). Victim precipitation theory has mainly been invoked to understand antecedents of abusive supervision, but its logic also explains which employees are more likely to become targets of justice rule violation or unethical behavior. For example, an employee who is ingratiating (Koopman, Matta, Scott, & Conlon, 2015) or has high status in the organization (Pucic, 2015) will likely avoid adopting the two victim roles and thus be less likely to receive injustice or unethicality.

Third, belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) also explains why leaders are principled toward specific employees. Belongingness theory suggests that “a need to belong... to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 499). More recent research has suggested that individuals vary in their intensity of this need (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013). Nonetheless, the need to belong is expected to motivate individuals to seek out ways to satisfy it, including pursuing social bonds characterized by “stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 500). These ideas connect to the relational model of justice (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988), which Cropanzano et al. (2001) highlighted as one of the core theories forming the interpersonal “road.” The relational model suggests justice “signals” that individuals “have standing and dignity within a collective,” whereas injustice indicates that they “are not fully included as group members” (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 63). Supporting this notion, studies in our review have suggested that both employees’ and leaders’ need to belong are associated with principled behaviors (Cornelis, Van Hiel, & De Cremer, 2012; Cornelis, Van Hiel, De Cremer, & Mayer, 2013; Hoogervorst, De Cremer, & van Dijke, 2013; Zhao et al., 2015).

**Research trends.** First, several features of the leader–employee relationship emerged as important social exchange motives of principled leadership. Multiple studies in our review found that high

leader–member exchange (LMX), which refers to leader–employee relationships that are “characterized by a high degree of mutual trust, respect, and obligation” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995: 227), is associated with greater adherence to justice rules (Koopman et al., 2015) and less abusive supervision (Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011). This appears to be the case when LMX is rated by leaders or employees. Relatedly, leaders’ desire to attain mutual trust is also linked with justice (Seppälä, Lipponen, Pirttilä-Backman, & Lipsanen, 2012; Zapata et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2015). Other research has found that leaders’ concern with developing positive relationships with employees is associated with greater moral leadership and propriety (Long, 2016a) as well as decision-making surrounding fairness issues (Meindl, 1989). Given that leaders are more principled toward employees with whom they have a positive relationship, it is not surprising that conflict in these relationships is associated with less principled behavior, such as less distributive fairness (Long, 2016b) and more abusive supervision (Graham, Mawritz, Dust, Greenbaum, & Ziegert, 2019; Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). Further, the leader’s dependence on the employee has been found to be associated with greater ethical leadership (Zhang, Zhong, & Ozer, 2020).

In addition, leaders’ feelings or sentiments toward employees are linked to principled behavior. Employees that leaders like, or feel positive sentiments, empathy, or compassion toward, are more likely to experience justice (Huang, Cropanzano, Li, Shao, Zhang, & Li, 2017; Scott, Colquitt, & Zapata-Phelan, 2007), interpersonally sensitive treatment (Molinsky, Grant, & Margolis, 2012), preferential treatment (Blader & Chen, 2012), and less abusive supervision (Walter, Lam, van der Vegt, Huang, & Miao, 2015) from the leader. Likewise, leaders are less likely to be ethical and just and more likely to be abusive to employees toward whom they feel negatively (Qin, Huang, Hu, Schminke, & Ju, 2018; Scott et al., 2007) and feel envy and hostility (Liang, Lian, Brown, Ferris, Hanig, & Keeping, 2016; Yu, Duffy, & Tepper, 2018).

Second, stable employee characteristics emerged as another predominant factor triggering the social exchange motive. Facets of employee personality, including agreeableness (Huang et al., 2017; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015), conscientiousness (Henle & Gross, 2014; Huang et al., 2017; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015), emotional stability (Henle & Gross, 2014), and core self-evaluations (Neves, 2014; Wu & Hu, 2009) are linked to principled leader behavior enactment. Other employee characteristics that

foster principled leadership include trust propensity (Hansen et al., 2016), the need to belong (Cornelis et al., 2012; Cornelis et al., 2013; Hoogervorst et al., 2013), high status in the organization (Pucic, 2015), and lower psychological entitlement (Harvey, Harris, Gillis, & Martinko, 2014). More dynamic employee characteristics, such as positive emotions (Liu, Song, Li, & Liao, 2017), negative emotions such as “anger, anxiety, boredom, and depression” (Henle & Gross, 2014: 466) and fear (Kiewitz et al., 2016) also play a role, such that leaders are more principled toward employees who have higher positive and lower negative affect.

Relatedly, a growing number of studies have examined how employee characteristics—relative to leader characteristics—influence principled leadership, by testing similarity or congruence between the leader and employee. For example, perceived deep-level dissimilarity (i.e., in personality, attitudes, or values) is positively related to abusive supervision (via increased relationship conflict) (Tepper et al., 2011) and race similarity is positively related to ethical leadership (Marquardt, Brown, & Casper, 2018). Another study indicated that abusive supervision is minimized (via reduced relationship conflict) when the leader and employee are equally low on dominance orientation (Graham et al., 2019).

Third, employee behaviors also emerged as a contributor to the social exchange motive. Several studies in our review found that poor employee performance makes it *more* likely that they will become a target of unprincipled behavior (Khan, Quratulain, & Crawshaw, 2017; Liang et al., 2016; Tepper et al., 2011; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015), whereas other research has indicated that this instead makes them *less* likely (Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2018), following logic that leaders experience status threat from high employee performance and respond by enacting abuse. This suggests that moderators—such as those viewed through other lenses—may be at play, as we will discuss below. Employees who demonstrate deviant or counterproductive behavior are also more likely to become targets of leader abuse (Camps et al., 2020; Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2015). Other employee behaviors associated with principled leadership include charisma, which entails behaviors that “create a sense of admiration and respect” (Scott et al., 2007: 1602), assertiveness (Korsgaard et al., 1998), ingratiation (Koopman et al., 2015), and cooperation with the leader (Seppälä et al., 2012), all of which conceptually connect to the idea that leaders are more principled toward employees they like.

## Social Learning Motives

Supervisors look to higher levels in the organization for the appropriate way to behave. (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009: 3)

Social learning motives center on how leaders enact principled behavior by modeling this behavior from others, including the leader’s manager, top leadership or management team in the organization, the organizational climate or culture, and authority figures in the leader’s upbringing. Approximately one third of the studies in our review that adopted an interpersonal lens focused on social learning motives. The reasoning behind social learning motives largely stems from social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), which predicts that individuals learn how to behave based on observing others. Another key approach relevant to social learning motives is social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). The core argument of this theory is that individuals adapt their behaviors to norms in the social environment, following cues from others. Overall, social learning and information processing theories highlight how leaders may behave fairly, ethically, or abusively from mimicking others.

**Theoretical foundations.** First, social learning theory, which emerged as the predominant theoretical foundation for this set of motives, posits that individuals find role models in their environment and imitate the behavior thereof (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Individuals choose as role models those to whom they are attracted in some way, such as based on role models’ competence, credibility, status, or power (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Brown & Treviño, 2014; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012). For social learning to occur, individuals must pay attention to the role models’ behaviors and consequences thereof, and also retain or remember these behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Our review points to numerous studies that have drawn from social learning theory to explain how leaders become principled (or not) by modeling the behavior of others, particularly their own managers or other superiors, such as top management. Such studies argue that leaders view their superiors as role models, as they likely look up to superiors due to superiors’ professional expertise and status in the organization, and in turn imitate superiors’ justice, ethical leadership, or abuse (e.g., Ambrose, Schminke, & Mayer, 2013; Mawritz et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2009; Wo, Ambrose, & Schminke, 2015). Ethical leadership is heavily rooted in social learning theory (e.g., Lemoine et al., 2019), as illustrated in the scale item, “sets an

example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics” (Brown et al., 2005).

Second, social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) helps elucidate how the social environment more broadly shapes principled leader behaviors. This perspective relies on the assumption that a multitude of sources in the social environment “provides norms and expectations” about which behaviors and attitudes are appropriate (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978: 227). Consequently, it can shed light on how social influences beyond the leader’s superior, such as organizational culture and climate (e.g., Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014) and the leader’s upbringing (e.g., Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014), affect principled behaviors. For example, building from social information processing theory, Mawritz, Dust, and Resick (2014: 739) reasoned that “organizations characterized by pervasive feelings of envy, mistrust, and aggression signal to members that . . . abusive behaviors are accepted.”

**Research trends.** First, the linkage between leaders’ perceptions of their direct managers’ justice (Ambrose et al., 2013; Rafferty, Restubog, & Jimmieson, 2010; van Houwelingen, van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2017; Wo et al., 2015) and abusive supervision (Gabler, Nagy, & Hill, 2014; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012; Tepper et al., 2006; Tu, Bono, Shum, & LaMontagne, 2018) and leaders’ own enactment of these behaviors is well-established and grounded in social learning arguments. In addition, leaders’ perceptions of their managers’ interpersonal justice (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Hoobler & Hu, 2013) and procedural justice (Tepper et al., 2006) are negatively related to the leader’s abusive supervision toward employees, in line with one of our core assumptions that these constructs are conceptually similar. What may be more interesting and novel in this stream of research is the idea that leaders might also learn from their managers what *not* to do. For example, Taylor, Griffith, Vadera, Folger, and Letwin (2019) found that leaders’ experienced abusive supervision from their own manager is positively related to leaders’ relational disidentification from the manager (i.e., the manager becomes a countermodel), which in turn fosters ethical leadership from leaders themselves.

Second, another cluster of studies in our review focused on how others at work, beyond the leader’s manager, represent principled role models. Multiple studies have indicated a positive relationship between ethical leadership of top management and the leader’s own enactment thereof (Byun, Karau, Dai, & Lee, 2018; Mayer et al., 2009; Wang, Xu, & Liu, 2018). Moreover, Brown and Treviño (2014) found that

leaders’ role models at work, including top management and career mentors, are associated with ethical leadership. Similarly, Frisch and Huppenbauer (2014) found that leaders are inspired to be ethical by their previous managers, as well as by prominent political, business, or religious role models (e.g., Gandhi).

Third, organizational culture and climate also influence whether leaders enact (or fail to enact) principled behavior. Prior research has indicated that transformational culture, which emphasizes trust and belonging, is positively associated with ethical leadership (Toor & Ofori, 2009), whereas hostile organizational climates encourage abusive supervision (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014). Another study found that organizational cultures affect the allocation rules (i.e., principles of distributing resources to employees) leaders decide to use, such that those in economically-oriented, relationship-oriented, and personal development-oriented cultures are most likely to report enacting equity, equality, and need distributive rules, respectively (Mannix, Neale, & Northcraft, 1995). Moreover, leaders who are primed to think about a manager they associate with being unfair are more likely to enact interactional unfairness (Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2013).

Lastly, leaders’ social environment in their childhood also influences their principled behavior. Specifically, our review suggests that abuse or aggression in the leader’s family growing up increases their likelihood of becoming an abusive supervisor (Garcia, Restubog, Kiewitz, Scott, & Tang, 2014; Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Scott, Garcia, & Tang, 2012), similar to how ethical role models in childhood, such as parents, are related to ethical leadership for young leaders (Brown & Treviño, 2014; Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). The leader’s degree of experienced maternal influence also appears to play a role in ethical leadership (Rowe, 2014).

### INSTRUMENTAL LENS OF PRINCIPLED LEADER BEHAVIORS

The instrumental lens characterizes principled leadership “as a means to an end” (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 11); for example, “abusive supervision can have a strategic, instrumental side” (Walter et al., 2015: 1057). That is, leaders enact such behaviors in order to achieve some end goal, such as to maximize their own rewards or improve employee performance (e.g., Long, 2016a; Qin, Ren, et al., 2018; Watkins et al., 2019). An instrumental perspective is

often assumed to involve selfish (i.e., *self-oriented*) or undesirable (e.g., leaders' personal gain) motives, but the notion of *other-oriented* motives or benefits also emerged from our review. This challenges the notion that instrumental motives are always undesirable or inherently self-focused. Additionally, the distinction between self- and other-orientation is consistent with De Dreu and Nauta's (2009) conclusion that these orientations independently influence behavior. Other-oriented motives that help explain the instrumental lens of principled leader behaviors are externally driven, similar to the interpersonal lens in the previous section; however, self-oriented motives are more internally driven (e.g., by the leader's own benefits). Together, these motives offer a somewhat balanced perspective through this lens, compared to what prior research has assumed. That said, the instrumental lens is one of the least popular approaches, as only 15% of the studies in our review adopted the instrumental lens.

### Self-Oriented Motives

Exhibiting fair behavior...helps supervisors attain valued personal outcomes and enhance their welfare. (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018: 228)

The most well-studied perspective via the instrumental lens involves leaders' self-oriented motives. Specifically, 75% of studies adopting this lens focused on self-oriented motives, which center on the notion that leaders are motivated by personal gain to engage in fair, ethical, or nonabusive behavior toward followers. That is, leaders enact such behaviors to ultimately maximize their own interests (e.g., motivation based on "what's in it for me"). The key theoretical foundations relevant to this lens include the social interaction theory of aggression (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) and attitude functions theory (Katz, 1960).

**Theoretical foundations.** The social interaction theory of aggression explicates three goals that motivate behavior. The first two goals align with the instrumental lens (while the third connects to the moral lens and will be discussed below). These include goals to effect compliance in others and to create and maintain desired identities (Scott et al., 2009). This theory suggests that principled leadership is guided by the expectation of obtaining desired outcomes (e.g., compliance and identity). The instrumental goal of creating and maintaining desired identities is important when considering self-oriented motives. The goal of identity maintenance

connects to impression management, defined as "the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990: 34). Within our context, this may include leaders engaging in principled behaviors to display "identity-relevant characteristics" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990: 38). That is, they enact principled leadership to be "seen" by others as a leader—and one who is fair (Greenberg, Bies, & Eskew, 1991), ethical, and not abusive. Scott, Garza, Conlon, and Kim (2014) drew from the social interaction theory of aggression and found that identity maintenance motives are associated with daily justice rule adherence.

Second, attitude functions theory (Katz, 1960) describes key motivational bases of attitudes, and one of these, the instrumental function, is particularly relevant to this lens. This function suggests "that people strive to maximize the rewards in their external environment and to minimize the penalties" (Katz, 1960: 170). Specifically, favorable attitudes are held toward targets that facilitate satisfaction of needs (desired goal or reward) and unfavorable attitudes are held toward targets that thwart one's goals (undesirable outcome or punishment). Qin, Ren, and colleagues (2018: 229) drew from attitude functions theory to investigate supervisors' justice enactment and argued that behaving fairly or unfairly "can lead to desirable personal outcomes (e.g., greater group productivity and career development opportunities)" and that the instrumental function of justice "motivates supervisors to act fairly only when doing so is aligned with self-interests." In other words, principled leader behaviors may not always be the easiest path for the leader's own outcomes.

**Research trends.** Studies examining self-oriented instrumental motives such as identity maintenance have found that leaders' individual identity (i.e., self-interest) drives abusive supervision—an effect compounded by weak collective identity (Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012). One study argued that managers who make procedurally unfair decisions attempt to protect their professional image through refusals (self-oriented strategies that minimize time spent explaining decisions to layoff victims) and distancing from the unfairness (Lavelle, Folger, & Manegold, 2016). In addition, identity maintenance has been found to be the dominant predictor of leaders' procedural justice rule adherence (Scott et al., 2014).

Other research has examined leaders' motivation to maximize their rewards and minimize punishments. Qin, Ren, et al. (2018) investigated how

instrumental motives contribute to leaders' justice enactment, and developed a scale that includes items such as, "Treating my subordinates fairly. . ." "is advantageous to my rewards and benefits. . ." or "helps me minimize my punishments and losses" (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018). This is consistent with the finding that leaders who expect unethical behavior to be punished in their organization are more likely to be ethical (Wang et al., 2018). Related research has found that justice enactment is less likely when leaders have a high workload and few rewards for enacting justice (Sherf, Venkataramani, & Gajendran, 2019). Finally, Molinsky, Grant and Margolis (2012) found that when participants are primed with economic schema, which emphasize rationality, efficiency, and self-interest, they are less interpersonally just and compassionate toward others in need.

### Other-Oriented Motives

The motive to serve others. . . may contribute to becoming a more ethical leader. (Den Hartog, 2015: 415)

Our review also uncovered other-oriented instrumental motives, which comprised half of the studies invoking this lens. However, theoretical development for these motives remains sparse, suggesting that more conceptual development is needed to draw strong conclusions. That said, this motive focuses on the end goal of benefiting, influencing, or serving others, which may also ultimately benefit the leader (i.e., affect the leader's self-interests).

**Theoretical foundations.** The goal of effecting compliance in others, specified by the social interaction theory of aggression (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994), relates to leaders' need to influence or control employees (e.g., Zhao et al., 2015). This also connects to Tedeschi and Felson's (1994: 351) notion that "people who possess greater relative power than others may be encouraged to use coercion because they expect to be successful and to incur little cost." For example, Scott and colleagues (2009: 759) proposed that fairness "may be used instrumentally by managers to elicit desired levels of motivation and performance from their subordinates," while Long (2016a: 764) stated that fairness is viewed by managers "as a way to prevent productivity losses and promote productivity gains" from employees. This is consistent with the argument that "leaders use abuse as a means to an end and are instead motivated by more pro-organizational goals," such as "improving employee performance" (Watkins et al., 2019: 262).

Additional conceptual support to advance research on other-oriented instrumental motives can be borrowed from literature on altruistic and egoistic forms of motivation (Batson, 1987; Batson, Van Lange, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2003). Altruistic and egoistic motivation are distinguished by whether the "ultimate goal" is to "increase another's welfare" or "increase one's own welfare," respectively (Batson, 1987: 67). These goals are not mutually exclusive, as individuals may help others (altruistic goal) to also benefit themselves (egoistic goals, such as garnering rewards, praise, esteem and improved self-image, or avoid punishments and uncomfortable situations [Batson et al., 2003]). Integrating these ideas with other-oriented instrumental motives in our framework points to both egoistic and altruistic goals. As an example, principled behavior to aid followers' development (Long, 2016a) is egoistic, in that the goal is to influence others, but also altruistic, in that the goal is to help others. In addition, effecting compliance through principled behavior (Scott et al., 2014) is egoistic, in that the behavior is intended to benefit oneself (by getting followers to do what the leader wants), but also other-oriented, in that it relates to controlling others' behaviors.

**Research trends.** Studies examining other-oriented instrumental motives have revealed various beneficiaries of principled leadership beyond the leader. Specifically, Frisch and Huppenbauer (2014) found that ethical leaders consider multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers, shareholders) in addition to employees. Other studies have found that leaders enact procedural fairness with a goal of satisfying followers' needs (e.g., need for control [Hoogervorst et al., 2013]; other-oriented, altruistic goal) and enact moral leadership with a goal of employee development and work effort (Long, 2016a) (other-oriented, with both egoistic and altruistic goals in that leaders and followers may both benefit). Interestingly, leaders' other-oriented intentions, such as improving follower performance, can motivate both unprincipled (i.e., abusive supervision) (Watkins et al., 2019) and principled behavior (Long, 2016a). Altogether, our conclusions paint a more complex picture of instrumental motives than prior research has assumed, such that leaders are (un) principled as a means to both self- and other-oriented goals. Future research adopting instrumental approaches should explicitly examine the interaction between motives that are self- and other-oriented (e.g., Scott et al., 2014), and the ways in which they "involve both concern for others and concern for

oneself" (Bolino & Grant, 2016: 603). For example, when might leaders prioritize versus sacrifice their own welfare to influence followers using principled leadership?

### MORAL LENS OF PRINCIPLED LEADER BEHAVIORS

The moral lens revolves around leaders' *internal drive* to be principled. Specifically, Cropanzano et al. (2001: 83) highlighted how principled leadership "goes beyond economic or relational calculus" to also include moral codes, such that principled behavior "transcend[s] concrete gains and losses of a particular situation." Broadly, the moral lens centers on the idea that leaders enact principled behavior as "an end in itself" (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 88; Scott et al., 2009: 760). Of the studies in our review, 18% adopted a moral lens. Within this set of studies, most research has focused on how leaders act in a principled way out of *moral obligation*. An emerging research stream has suggested that leaders *morally rationalize* their unprincipled acts—that is, believe these acts are justified. Prior research has assumed that moral motives unilaterally lead to principled behavior, yet our review shows that such motives may also precipitate *unprincipled* behavior. This highlights the importance of separating leaders' motives from their behavior and exploring the assumptions behind both moral obligation and rationalization motives.

#### Moral Obligation Motives

People are fair simply because it is the right thing to do. (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 87)

The key assumption of moral obligation motives is that leaders are principled because they believe they "ought to" (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 86)<sup>1</sup>—an idea developed by deontological ethical scholars (Folger, 1998, 2001). Indeed, the term "deontology" stems from the Greek word for obligation or responsibility, *deon* (Cropanzano et al., 2001). In our review, nearly 80% of studies using a moral lens focused on moral obligation motives. Prior research has not tended to explicitly draw from deontological ethics to explain moral obligation motives, yet the logic and

assumptions behind this lens originate from deontological principles. Kohlberg's (1969) model of cognitive moral development, which theoretically grounds several studies in our review, connects to deontological ethics, such that at the highest stage of moral reasoning, leaders are thought to be motivated by internalized principles rather than by self-interest or social expectations (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Kohlberg, 1969). More thoroughly integrating these approaches reveals new insights surrounding how leaders become morally compelled to enact principled behaviors, which we elaborate on below.

**Theoretical foundations.** The idea that leaders act morally simply because it is the right thing to do originates from work of the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. He developed the "categorical imperative," suggesting that the morality of actions is based on universal moral principles including honesty and respect for others (Kant, 1996)—an idea that later evolved into what is known as deontological ethics (Folger, 1998, 2001). That is, individuals internalize normative moral principles and behave how they believe they "ought to." Several studies in our review implicitly drew from deontological reasoning. For example, one study found that the relationship between moral identity and granting of voice to followers is strengthened by a prevention focus, which refers to the motivation to bring oneself in line with their "ought" self (Brebels, De Cremer, van Dijke, & Van Hiel, 2011; Higgins, 1997). Additionally, Qin, Ren, and colleagues' (2018: 226) logic that "supervisors *ought* [emphasis added] to treat their subordinates fairly" connects to deontological ethics.

The second theoretical foundation underpinning moral obligation motives is Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), which outlines three moral reasoning stages that occur during human development. The first stage is the pre-conventional level, in which individuals act morally to gain rewards and avoid punishments, which connects to the instrumental lens (Cropanzano et al., 2001). The second stage is the conventional level, when individuals behave morally to attain social approval (Patient & Skarlicki, 2010), which relates to the interpersonal lens. The third and final stage is post-conventional, characterized by individuals behaving "in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency" (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977: 55)—that is, internal obligation to be moral. Individuals in this stage are the most likely to be attentive to moral issues (Cropanzano et al., 2001). For

<sup>1</sup> Moral obligation differs from obligation that may arise from social exchanges, as moral obligation is internally driven and obligation from social exchanges is more externally driven (i.e., by other individuals).

example, drawing from Kohlberg (1969), Patient and Skarlicki (2010) found that an empathic induction is more effective in increasing leader attention to justice issues when the leader operates at a higher level of moral reasoning.

**Research trends.** First, our review indicates that moral identity, defined as “a commitment to one’s sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others” (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998: 515), is among the most prevalent moral obligation motives. Leaders high in moral identity have an intrinsic desire to pursue moral actions even in the absence of external pressures (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity has been directly linked to ethical leadership (Giessner, Van Quaquebeke, van Gils, van Knippenberg, & Kollée, 2015; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Zhu, Treviño, & Zheng, 2016) and supervisor justice enactment (Brebels et al., 2011). Additionally, research has shown that leader moral identity interacts with leader pride (Sanders, Wisse, Van Yperen, & Rus, 2018) and follower moral identity (Giessner et al., 2015) to predict ethical leadership. Moreover, moral identity plays a role in motivating leaders to prevent perpetuating patterns of abuse (Taylor et al., 2019).

Relatedly, moral development and internal obligation also emerged as key antecedents to principled leader behaviors. Not only is leader moral development associated with principled leadership (Patient & Skarlicki, 2010), but the relationship between leader and employee moral development is also important, such that leaders at higher levels of moral development than their employees are more likely to be principled (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2013). Leader internal obligation, defined as the intrinsic desire to do what is right, is associated with ethical leadership (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) and overall justice (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018).

Moral ideologies also compel leaders to be principled. For example, leaders’ deontological views are linked to ethical leadership (Letwin et al., 2016). One study found that leaders high in idealism (the belief that moral standards ought to be consistently applied across situations) and low in relativism (the extent to which an individual believes morality is situational) are more likely to be ethical (Waldman, Wang, Hannah, & Balthazard, 2017). In a study of reward allocation decisions, Meindl (1989) found a positive effect of the leader’s justice values on enacting equity, a distribution logic based on employees’ relative contributions.

Lastly, research has suggested that moral attentiveness relates to ethical leadership (Babalola,

Bligh, Ogunfowora, Guo, & Garba, 2019; Zhu et al., 2016). Moral attentiveness is defined as “the extent to which an individual chronically perceives and considers morality and moral elements in his or her experiences” (Reynolds, 2008: 1028), and is comprised of two dimensions: perceptual and reflective. Perceptual moral attentiveness is the extent to which one views the world through a moral lens, while reflective moral attentiveness is the extent to which one thinks about their moral experiences. Zhu and colleagues (2016) found that both of these dimensions relate to ethical leadership. However, Babalola and colleagues (2019) found that leader moral reflectiveness is associated with ethical leadership only when the leader’s decision-making autonomy is high. These conflicting results suggest the presence of moderators and a need to explore whether moral attentiveness and its dimensions also influence justice and nonabusive supervision.

### Moral Rationalization Motives

Engaging in ethical leader behavior can... license people to exhibit subsequent abusive behavior. (Lin, Ma, & Johnson, 2016: 818)

Whereas moral obligation motives focus on why leaders feel compelled to enact principled standards, *moral rationalization* motives relate to how leaders reframe or bend these standards (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Overall, such motives allow leaders to “comfortably rationalize their unethical and unjust behaviors” (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016: 732). Despite the small proportion of studies focusing on these ideas—about a quarter of studies that take a moral lens—a rich cluster of several interrelated theories explain how leaders rationalize unprincipled behavior. Interestingly, rationalization motives suggest that leaders are unprincipled because of a belief in their own virtue (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Bandura, 1991).

**Theoretical foundations.** Theoretical approaches that support rationalization motives have originated from a variety of disciplines, including moral relativism from ethics and philosophy literatures (Fletcher, 1966; Forsyth, 1980; Harman, 1975); moral self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1991) and moral licensing theory (e.g., Miller & Effron, 2010) from social psychology; as well as moral exclusion theory (e.g., Opatow, 1990) and justice motive theory (Lerner, 1980). Studies in our review that focused on rationalization motives for principled leadership drew from these theories to make related arguments.

Despite the overlap in assumptions and underlying logic in these approaches, progress in this area has remained fragmented. In distilling commonalities across these theories, our review revealed three fundamental theoretical explanations for moral rationalization motives: cognitive reconstrual, cognitive distinctions among followers, and cognitive balance.

The cognitive reconstrual explanation captures how leaders frame their unprincipled behavior in a more positive light. According to moral self-regulation theory, leaders morally justify harmful acts, such that “detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of valued social or moral purposes” (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Carprara, & Pastorelli, 1996: 365). That is, leaders enact “bad” behaviors for reasons they believe to be “good” or moral. Moral self-regulation theory also suggests that leaders minimize harmful acts via “euphemistic language” or by comparing their behaviors to those that are more malignant, such that “injurious conduct can be rendered benign” (Bandura et al., 1996: 365). For example, leaders who violate informational justice rules may think, “I might not be totally transparent with my employee, but at least I am not going to outright lie to them.” Moral licensing theory posits that leaders with moral credentials (i.e., moral self-regard) view their “morally questionable deeds as not transgressions at all” (Miller & Effron, 2010: 126). Lastly, leaders who espouse morally relativistic values believe that what is considered to be moral depends on the situation (Forsyth, 1992). Because morally relativistic leaders perceive flexibility around moral standards, they might view their unprincipled behavior as principled when dealing with certain situations or followers.

The second explanation arising from moral rationalization theories is the idea that leaders cognitively distinguish between followers to determine who “deserves” principled treatment. This notion grew out of moral exclusion theory, which argues that followers who are useful for the leader’s goals are considered to be worthy of principled treatment (e.g., Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015), whereas those outside of the leader’s “scope of justice” are considered to be morally excluded, making them vulnerable to unprincipled treatment (Opatow, 1995: 347). That is, leaders who are unfair, unethical, or abusive toward specific followers may see their behavior as unprincipled yet not problematic. Relatedly, moral self-regulation theory predicts that “it is...difficult to mistreat humanized persons without risking personal distress and self-censure” (Bandura et al., 1996: 366). To reduce

the discomfort of treating others harmfully, individuals are thought to dehumanize them, which entails “framing of the victims of one’s actions as undeserving of basic human consideration...fostered by defining others as members of an outgroup” (Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012: 5).

Third, the balance explanation focuses on how leaders maintain a cognitive ledger (Ashforth & Anand, 2003) of their own or others’ moral behavior. Moral licensing theory suggests that leaders offset their own unprincipled behavior with principled behavior, and vice versa, using moral credits (e.g., Lin et al., 2016). Moral credits are generated by prior moral behavior, which in turn can “license” individuals to enact immoral behavior, without necessarily reframing the immoral behavior itself (Miller & Effron, 2010). Other perspectives have argued that leaders violate principles to punish others’ counter-normative behavior (Scott et al., 2009). Justice motive theory (Lerner, 1980) suggests that leaders “keep the scales of justice in balance to preserve a belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (Scott et al., 2009: 760). That is, leaders’ just world belief allows them to reinstate equilibrium, even if this means being unprincipled. This connects to the notion from moral self-regulation theory that leaders morally disengage by blaming the victim, based on the belief that some individuals earn poor treatment (i.e., the idiom “you reap what you sow”) (Bandura, 2002). Although these ideas are functionally similar to social exchange motives, they theoretically focus on leaders’ moral logic as the primary behavioral driver.

**Research trends.** Findings on moral rationalization motives of principled leadership have largely supported themes offered by the theoretical foundations outlined above. Regarding cognitive reconstrual, leaders’ justification for unjust treatment is negatively associated with both level and consistency of overall justice (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018). Blader and Rothman (2014) found that those with greater empathy toward justice recipients are more likely to construe preferential treatment as fair, which is attenuated by felt accountability or the “expectation that one may be called on to justify one’s beliefs, feelings, and actions to others” (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999: 66). This suggests that leaders’ internal justification may increase unprincipled behavior, yet the possibility of external justification to others may inhibit it. Another study revealed that leaders who are high in moral relativism and low in moral idealism are the least likely to be ethical (Waldman et al., 2017). Regarding balance, prior ethical leadership is

positively related to abusive supervision via moral credits and moral credentials (Lin et al., 2016). A motive to establish fairness is positively associated with informational justice (Scott et al., 2014) but does not significantly predict the other three justice dimensions as they are predominantly used by managers as an instrumental means to some end (e.g., to effect compliance), as opposed to an end itself. Lastly, leaders' moral disengagement more broadly is negatively associated with ethical leadership (Bonner et al., 2016).

Our review indicates that theoretical development and richness surrounding moral rationalization motives exceeds current empirical progress. For example, moral disengagement has been linked to reduced ethical leadership (Bonner et al., 2016), yet it is unclear which mechanism(s) (e.g., attribution of blame, justification, dehumanization [Bandura et al., 1996]) are responsible for these effects, and whether moral disengagement mechanisms differentially influence the three forms of principled leadership (e.g., whether attribution of blame more strongly predicts justice rule violations than abusive supervision or failure to demonstrate ethical leadership). While justification of unjust behaviors (i.e., enacting "bad" behaviors for "good" reasons) is negatively related to overall justice (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018), the specific grounds that leaders use to justify unprincipled behavior are poorly understood.

### SELF-REGULATION AND DISPOSITION LENS OF PRINCIPLED LEADER BEHAVIORS

The self-regulation and disposition lens for understanding principled leadership recognizes that, in some cases, engaging in ethical leadership, justice rule adherence, or nonabusive supervision is the result of more internal forces within the supervisor. These forces include proximal, transient factors such as resources, moods, and emotions that can immediately prompt leaders to engage in more or less principled leader behaviors, as well as more distal, stable traits that predispose leaders to behave in a particular way. External forces are still important, insofar as they serve as sources of depletion and affective states, as well as cues regarding whether the expression of a given trait is appropriate or inappropriate. Ultimately, however, this lens assumes that behaving in principled ways rests on processes within the leader. Although such internal forces are not among the "roads" proposed by Cropanzano et al. (2001), this set of antecedents emerged as the second most common lens in our review (44% of studies),

suggesting that they are an equally important theoretical consideration in understanding why leaders are principled. As we elaborate below, this lens encompasses internal forces including whether leaders possess the *resources* to be principled, their momentary *affective states*, and their more enduring *personality traits*, which can influence principled leader behaviors in both direct and interactive ways.

### Resources

Fairness also requires time, effort, and mental energy. (Brockner et al., 2015: 118)

The first explanation found within work that has adopted the self-regulation and disposition lens focuses on leaders' *capacity* to be principled, based on their resources. Resources are defined as "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies" (Hobfoll, 1989: 516), and studies in our review focused on resources as energies that enable leaders to enact principled behavior. Of the studies adopting the self-regulation and disposition lens, 16% focused on resources. A major assumption of the resources explanation is that "deficits in self-control can lead to a breakdown in productive and healthy functioning" (Maranges & Baumeister, 2016: 44). That is, leaders' motivation to be principled may not be sufficient if they lack the necessary self-control to enact these behaviors.

**Theoretical foundations.** First, ego depletion theory emerged as the main theoretical foundation to explain resources as antecedents of principled leader behaviors. The key tenet of ego depletion theory is that self-control, defined as the exertion of effort to override one's urges, inclinations, or desires (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000), "draws on some limited resource, akin to strength or energy" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998: 1252). That is, using self-control in any context draws from one "pool" of resources, causing exertion in one situation to impair self-control in the next. For example, surface acting, an effortful behavior used to override one's true emotions, has been linked to subsequent abusive supervision via reduction in self-control resources (Yam, Fehr, Keng-Highberger, Klotz, & Reynolds, 2016). Second, conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has also been used to explain the effect of resource depletion on principled behaviors. The main idea of COR theory is that individuals are motivated to maintain and gain resources, and that the threat of losing resources is stressful (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014).

**Research trends.** Broadly, studies in our review have found that leaders are less likely to be principled when their resources are depleted, such as by states and ill-being, for example, poor sleep quality (Barnes, Lucianetti, Bhave, & Christian, 2015), negative emotions (Collins & Jackson, 2015), and family-to-work conflict (Courtright, Gardner, Smith, McCormick, & Colbert, 2016); by prior behaviors including ethical leadership (Lin et al., 2016) and surface acting (Yam et al., 2016); or by follower deviance (Mawritz et al., 2017). Across such studies, resource depletion acts as a mechanism linking various distal variables and unprincipled behavior. Further, neural synchrony in executive control parts of the brain, which govern inhibition of impulses, is negatively related to abusive supervision (Waldman, Wang, Hannah, Owens, & Balthazard, 2018). The majority of resource-related studies in our review used a self-report measure of depletion; however, it has also been operationalized as depression (Byrne et al., 2014) and high error rates on a math test (Collins & Jackson, 2015). Resource depletion has primarily been tested as an antecedent of abusive supervision, but it is also linked to justice enactment and leaders' ability to accurately appraise their justice behavior (Whiteside & Barclay, 2018).

## States

Justice rule adherence may also be driven by "hot" affective states (i.e., short-term moods or emotions). (Scott et al., 2014: 1574)

A second explanation found in studies adopting the self-regulation and disposition lens focuses on leaders' momentary feelings as proximal drivers of principled behavior enactment. Specifically, this stream of research has highlighted the importance of moods, emotions, and affective states (an umbrella term encompassing moods and emotions) for principled behavior. A key assumption of the affective states explanation is that moods and emotions "are important causal variables that can motivate and direct behavior" (Watson, 2000: 25). They do so by taking what is referred to as *control precedence* (Frijda, 2007) relative to other concerns. Control precedence captures the involuntary nature of affective impulse and describes the sovereignty of affective states over attention and behavior. Affective states take control precedence because they divert memory, awareness, and thought to the affective state being felt (e.g., Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994). In this way, affective states serve as "cognitive impenetrable modules" (Frijda, 2007: 16), closing

off information that is incompatible with the individuals' aims and leading individuals to act in accordance with their current feelings. Accordingly, the affective states explanation is well-suited to describe why a given leader may behave in a principled way at one moment but in an unprincipled way at the next.

**Theoretical foundations.** Several perspectives have emerged to explain the impact of affective states on principled leadership. According to affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996: 31), events, which have been described as "a change in what one is currently experiencing," serve as proximal causes of affective states at work. Affective states can elicit behaviors directly, or they can do so indirectly via their influence on work attitudes such as job satisfaction. Given the theory's emphasis on events, research using AET as a conceptual lens has tended to treat affective states as mediators linking some critical work event or occurrence to principled leadership. For example, Eissa and Lester (2017) found that perceptions of role overload are associated with frustration, which in turn is associated with abusive supervision.

Relatedly, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress describes the process by which individuals appraise and react to events that happen to them. Primary appraising is concerned with whether there is anything at stake. If events are perceived as relevant to one's goals (i.e., there is something at stake), then individuals appraise the situation with respect to whether it is harmful and threatening or challenging and beneficial. Secondary appraising is concerned with what can be done about the situation, in terms of coping. When goal incongruence exists, and individuals perceive that the situation taxes or exceeds their resources, the psychological response of stress occurs, which includes negative affective states (Lazarus, 1999). Similar to COR and resource depletion, the key idea is that feelings of stress can cause leaders to be less principled.

Finally, theory on displaced aggression (e.g., Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985) has been used to link affective states to principled leader behaviors. When stressed and unable to either confront or identify the source, supervisors turn toward less powerful individuals (i.e., their subordinates) and engage in less principled behaviors to vent their frustrations. Accordingly, displaced aggression has been utilized to explain the relationship between supervisors' stress and their engagement in abusive supervision (Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012).

**Research trends.** Almost without exception, the studies in our review have found that negative affective states are associated with leaders behaving in less principled ways. In addition, most studies have focused on abusive supervision rather than justice rule adherence or ethical leadership. However, justice (received by supervisors from their leaders or the organization) has frequently been examined as an affective event or stressor that elicits negative states and subsequent less principled behavior. For example, Hoobler and Hu (2013) found that interactional injustice received by managers elicit feelings of negative affect, which is then displaced to subordinates in the form of abusive supervision. Similarly, Tepper and colleagues (2006) found that supervisors' depression mediates the relationship between their receipt of procedural injustice from the organization and their own abusive supervision enactment. By focusing on depression, Tepper et al. (2006) showed that negative states low in activation can also lead to abuse, implying that valence is the more critical factor. Finally, Wo et al. (2015) revealed that displaced aggression (operationalized as anger) explains the relationship between supervisors' received and enacted interpersonal injustice. However, social exchange (operationalized as perceived organizational support) explains the relationship between supervisors' received and enacted informational injustice. Together, these findings are in line with our earlier assertion about the conceptual similarities between abusive supervision and interpersonal injustice. They also suggest that the provision of informational justice is based less on affect and more on cognition. On this point, Scott and colleagues (2007) found that supervisors' positive and negative feelings toward subordinates are associated with interpersonal justice, but not informational justice.

In addition to the receipt of injustice, negative affective states arising from other events or stressors have been linked to unprincipled leadership in the form of abusive supervision. Although these include circumstances at work, such as frustration arising from role overload (Eissa & Lester, 2017) and anger and anxiety arising from difficult goals (Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014), they also include circumstances outside of work, such as hostility arising from family-to-work conflict (Courtright et al., 2016) and history of family aggression (Garcia et al., 2014).

Finally, there is some evidence that negative affective states can elicit *more* principled leader behaviors. In their study of antecedents of supervisor

justice rule adherence, Scott et al. (2014) showed that although negative affect is associated with less distributive, procedural, and interpersonal justice, it is associated with more informational justice. As the authors noted: "It may be that when key decisions create burdens or inconveniences for employees, managers may experience frustration and irritation at being placed in the role of the 'bearer of bad news'" (Scott et al., 2014: 1585). Furthermore, affective states are stronger drivers of justice dimensions affording managers greater discretion in their execution (i.e., interpersonal justice and informational justice), while more cognitive motives are stronger drivers of justice dimensions affording managers less discretion (i.e., distributive and procedural justice). This suggests that for affective states to take control precedence and influence principled leader behaviors, managers must have the freedom to act on their current feelings.

### Traits

Based on their individual differences, different supervisors would experience unequal impulses to be abusive. (Waldman et al., 2018: 400)

A final explanation in studies that have adopted the self-regulation and disposition lens focuses on leaders' dispositions or traits as more distal influences on principled behavior enactment, relative to resources and traits. This has been a popular area of inquiry, as 63% of studies adopting the self-regulation and disposition lens focused on leaders' traits. In particular, the five-factor model of personality, or the Big Five (Goldberg, 1990), has been frequently examined in conjunction with principled leader behaviors, as we describe below. As a result of its focus on differences between leaders, the traits explanation is well-suited to describe why some leaders are more principled than others, on average. However, traits have also been used as moderators of the relationships between resources, states, and principled leadership.

**Theoretical foundations.** Compared to research on resources and states, research on traits has relied less on prominent, specific theoretical frameworks (e.g., COR, AET), instead describing how the characteristics of a particular trait (e.g., the dutifulness and detail-orientation of conscientious individuals) share conceptual similarities with principled leadership (e.g., the dutiful and detailed application of procedures to foster procedural justice) (e.g., Mayer, Nishii, Schneider, & Goldstein, 2007). In

cases where researchers have utilized the five-factor model of personality to postulate direct effects on principled leader behaviors, they have used that model as a “theoretical framework” (e.g., de Vries, 2012; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011).

However, scholars have drawn from other frameworks to ground either the direct or moderating effects of traits. For example, in terms of direct effects, Babalola et al. (2019) utilized social cognitive theory’s premise that personality shapes behavior through reflective mechanisms (Bandura, 1991). They argued and found that because conscientiousness influences morally oriented thoughts and behaviors, it should stimulate leaders to be morally reflective, leading to higher levels of ethical leadership. In terms of moderating effects, Eissa and Lester (2017) applied AET’s tenet that personality influences how reactive people are to affective events (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). They predicted and showed that agreeable supervisors are less likely to act out on frustration (by abusing subordinates) stemming from role overload. Finally, trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) has been mentioned as a potential lens through which to understand the effects of traits and dispositions (Babalola et al., 2019). According to this theory, traits become activated (and thus influence behavior) when they match or are appropriate for the situation. That is, when a situation matches a given trait’s characteristics, the influence of that trait on subsequent behavior is stronger.

**Research trends.** In terms of direct effects, conscientiousness has frequently been linked to higher levels of principled leadership—especially ethical leadership (Babalola et al., 2019; de Vries, 2012; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Xu, Yu, & Shi, 2011). As noted above, one of the reasons for this relationship is that conscientious supervisors contemplate moral matters more than those low in conscientiousness (Babalola et al., 2019). Conscientiousness has also been associated with higher levels of procedural justice, although that relationship is not significant when accounting for the remaining Big Five (Mayer et al., 2007). Regarding the remaining Big Five, leaders high in agreeableness, emotional stability, and extraversion have been found to engage in higher levels of ethical leadership (de Vries, 2012; Xu et al., 2011). Agreeableness and emotional stability have also been linked to higher levels of procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, but extraversion is not significantly associated with those justice dimensions (Mayer et al., 2007).

Beyond the Big Five, traits including empathy, mindfulness, narcissism, and pride have been associated with principled leadership. Specifically, empathic leaders, ostensibly through their ability to take the perspective of others and to have high moral regard for others, engage in higher levels of interpersonal and informational justice (Patient & Skarlicki, 2010; see also Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). Empathy also mitigates the perception that abusive supervision can be instrumental in improving subordinates’ performance (Watkins et al., 2019). Procedural justice enactment is higher for mindful leaders—presumably because of their tendency to have an open mindset, and a willingness to perceive and to collect unbiased information (Schuh, Zheng, Xin, & Fernandez, 2019). Narcissistic leaders are more likely to be abusive toward subordinates, unless they also possess self-control (Waldman et al., 2018). Finally, authentic pride (feeling accomplished and successful, as opposed to hubristic and conceited) has been linked to higher levels of ethical leadership (Sanders et al., 2018) and lower levels of abusive supervision (Yeung & Shen, 2019).

Regarding moderating effects, research has shown that certain individuals are less likely to engage in unprincipled leader behaviors as a result of stressful, depleting, or otherwise negative circumstances. For example, the relationship between frustration and abusive supervision is weaker for agreeable supervisors (Eissa & Lester, 2017), and the relationship between hostile climate and abusive supervision is weaker for conscientious supervisors (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014). Agreeableness also mitigates the relationship between psychological power and abusive supervision (Foulek, Lanaj, Tu, Erez, & Archambeau, 2018). An underlying reason for these trait effects may be self-control, as agreeableness and conscientiousness subsume aspects of self-control “because they involve the ability to adapt one’s behavior to the wishes and feelings of others and to task demands, respectively” (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009: 73). Indeed, studies measuring supervisors’ self-control directly have found that it weakens the relationship between stressful events (e.g., family undermining, surface acting) and abusive supervision (Kiewitz et al., 2012; Yam et al., 2016). Self-control has also been linked to lower variability (and more consistency) in interpersonally just treatment over time, which creates a less stressful environment for subordinates (Matta, Scott, Colquitt, Koopman, & Passantino, 2017).

Going beyond self-control, modeling of abusive behavior is less likely when concern for others is

high, breaking the cycle of trickle-down effects (Tu et al., 2018). Additionally, when supervisors do not hold negative reciprocity beliefs (i.e., they do not believe that negative treatment should be reciprocated in kind), they are less likely to engage in abusive supervision as a result of perceiving psychological contract breach (Wei & Si, 2013). Finally, supervisors low in authoritarianism are less likely to abuse their subordinates when these supervisors are treated unfairly by their organization (Aryee et al., 2007). Overall, this area of research on the moderating role of traits reveals the dynamic interplay between traits and states in predicting principled leader behaviors (see Mischel & Shoda, 1995).

### TOWARD AN INTEGRATION AND EXTENSION OF OUR FRAMEWORK

Up until this point, we have discussed the four theoretical lenses of principled leader behavior independently in turn to reveal their distinct assumptions, theoretical roots, and findings. The preceding four sections underscore the importance of separating antecedents, including motives, from each leader behavior—an assumption that has not always been clear in prior research. Specifically, our review indicates that leaders may be driven by negative or undesirable reasons to enact principled behavior (e.g., self-oriented instrumental motives) or driven by potentially positive or well-intentioned reasons to violate principled standards (e.g., moral rationalization motives). In reality, “motives underlying behavior may be mixed” (Den Hartog, 2015: 412). Indeed, our review suggests that antecedents from multiple lenses concurrently influence principled leader behavior: nearly one third of studies adopted two or more lenses. Focusing on multiple lenses is more common in justice (40%) than in abusive supervision (30%) or ethical leadership (22%) studies. Most studies adopting moral and self-regulation lenses invoked at least one other lens—often the interpersonal lens.

In this section, we integrate the four theoretical lenses into a unified framework to highlight how research on antecedents of principled leadership needs to advance theoretically and empirically. Recent growth in this area has shaped our understanding of why leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive, yet it has also raised several critical issues that are important to resolve in order for this literature to progress. These issues include: How should the interplay or system of four lenses be

studied? Do the three forms of principled leadership operate similarly with respect to the four lenses or do distinctions emerge between them? What role do situational or contextual factors play, and how might they activate or suppress constellations of lenses? How does the framework change our understanding of nascent streams of research on antecedents of variability and agreement regarding principled leadership? Below, we synthesize and extend the lenses to reveal new insights and advance research.

### Interplay Among Lenses

Prior research on antecedents of principled leader behavior has been criticized for not fully exploring the interplay between different antecedents. Specifically, studies have often drawn “from multiple perspectives. . .to support the same argument rather than testing whether or how they relate to one another” (Barclay et al., 2017: 870). Scholars have argued that “examining a single motive or the independent effects of multiple motives. . .overlooks the possibility that one motive may influence the effect of the other motive” (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018: 227). These observations point to the notion that the four lenses concurrently influence principled behavior and may counteract or amplify effects of one on the others. As such, examining only one type of antecedent (i.e., invoking only one lens) is deficient and tells only a fraction of the story. Our review revealed linkages and overlap across the various antecedents of principled leadership that can help illuminate the interplay between them. Below, we elaborate on ways in which such interplay has been empirically operationalized in prior research, and propose a path forward to theoretically integrate the overarching lenses; this informs our conclusions about how principled leadership scholarship should shift going forward.

**Empirical operationalizations of interplay among lenses.** Studies in our review operationalized the interplay of lenses as one lens moderating the effect of another (51% of multilens studies), the direct effect of one lens on another (37%), lenses as multiple independent variables (10%), and lenses as multiple mediators (5%). In terms of one lens moderating the effect of another, studies have most commonly found that self-regulation and instrumental variables moderate interpersonal effects on principled behavior (e.g., Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014; Qin, Ren, et al., 2018). Regarding direct effects of one lens on another, the most popular combination found in our review is the effect of interpersonal

motives on self-regulation (e.g., Hoobler & Hu, 2013; Scott et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2006); that is, forces that are more external to the leader influence internal processes. When the lenses have been examined as multiple independent variables or mediators, self-regulation, instrumental, and moral lenses have typically been tested together (e.g., Long, 2016a; Meindl, 1989; Scott et al., 2014), whereas other studies have tested multiple interpersonal motives, rather than integrating them with antecedents from the other lenses.

**Theoretical integration of the lenses.** Although uncovering how the interplay of antecedents has been examined in prior research offers important empirical guidance, what is currently needed is greater theoretical integration to understand the linkages between lenses. Principled leadership antecedents have previously been conceptualized as different “roads” (Cropanzano et al., 2001), suggesting distinct pathways that work in isolation from one another—yet the above empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Illuminating how the lenses work together or against one another as an interconnected system requires moving beyond prior theoretical frameworks. Given the strong emphasis on motives in prior research on principled leadership antecedents, it is surprising that motivation theories have largely been ignored. Theory on motivation may shed light on how to study the lenses as a system by accounting for both internal and external forces, similar to our framework in Figure 1. Broadly, work motivation has been defined as the “set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration” (Latham & Pinder, 2005: 486). Elements of this definition align with our framework: whether the form is ethical leadership, justice, or nonabusive supervision and the degree to which these behaviors are enacted (or not).

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that offers guidance on integrating the lenses because it accounts for the role of social interactions, instrumentality, internally driven interest, and self-regulation in motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The core forms of motivation outlined by SDT include intrinsic motivation and several forms of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified), which range from external to internal (Ryan & Deci, 2000), similar to our framework (see Figure 1). External motivation is fostered by rewards and punishment, which relates to the instrumental lens, as well as obligation from others, which ties to

the interpersonal lens. Introjected motivation occurs when a behavior is enacted to avoid negative states such as shame, anxiety, or guilt, or to induce positive states such as pride. This connects to theory linking leaders’ justice rule violation and adherence to pride and guilt (Scott et al., 2009), and relates to the self-regulation lens (i.e., emotions and self-regulation as motivating forces). Identified motivation is initiated by personal values regarding the behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which ties to the moral lens in our framework.

In contrast to forms of external motivation, intrinsic motivation stems from interest in the behavior itself and is fostered by fulfillment of needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The need for relatedness is satisfied by feeling connected to others, to care about and be cared about by others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Cheng, & Rosen, 2016), which ties to both social learning and social exchange motives examined through the interpersonal lens (i.e., leaders’ own leaders and their followers may be sources that fulfill relatedness needs). The need for competence refers to feeling a sense of mastery over challenges and skills (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van den Broeck et al., 2016), and relates to the identity maintenance motive viewed through the instrumental lens (e.g., Scott et al., 2014) (e.g., fostering a professional image as a competent leader). Lastly, the need for autonomy captures the idea that individuals have volition and freedom over their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and ties to situational antecedents of principled leadership, such as discretion and control, as discussed below.

**Future research directions to examine interplay among lenses.** Integrating theoretical insights from SDT with our framework suggests a complex interplay between the lenses and offers several promising ways to examine them as a system. According to SDT, “employees can possess multiple motivation forms for engaging in a given behavior” (Van Den Broeck et al., 2016: 1197). Research on SDT has suggested that external rewards—a form of external motivation—can undercut the benefits of intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Although identified and intrinsic motivation are generally considered to be beneficial for self-regulation, and external and introjected motivation are thought to be harmful for self-regulation, some work has suggested that these forms of motivation do not always work against each other, but can substitute for one another in certain situations (e.g., controlled and introjected motivation help sustain a behavior when intrinsic motivation is low [da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016]).

By considering multiple forms of motivation and needs, SDT points to a variety of ways in which the lenses in our framework may interact. On one hand, the lenses may suppress or undercut one another: self-interested motives, which map onto external motivation from SDT, could undermine moral obligation motives, which tie to intrinsic motivation or interest in the principled behavior itself. Moreover, self-interested motives to attain rewards or avoid punishments (i.e., external motivation) may cause leaders to feel “forced” to demonstrate the behavior (i.e., lack discretion) and this may thwart autonomy needs. On the other hand, the lenses may compensate for one another. For example, when more desirable drivers, such as moral obligation motives, are lacking, perhaps self-interested motives can substitute for them—and this may be preferable to a failure to demonstrate principled leadership (i.e., principled behavior for the “wrong” reasons may be better than a lack of it entirely).

Fulfillment of relatedness needs may foster leaders’ social exchange and social learning motives (i.e., maintaining positive, mutually beneficial relationships with followers and superiors is expected to foster interpersonal motives to be principled). It might also contribute to self-regulatory drivers, such as greater well-being and positive affect as well as less burnout and negative affect (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). When their competence and relatedness needs are not fulfilled, leaders’ motivation to be principled may be more likely to stem from a goal to maintain or create an identity and self-image (self-oriented instrumental motive), in order to enhance their ego and feel respected by others (introjected motivation). Yet, instrumental motives may require leaders to surface act more so than other motives. This may be more emotionally draining (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011), and may impair self-regulation and subsequent principled behavior (Lam, Walter, & Huang, 2017). When faced with unfulfilled needs (for competence, relatedness, or autonomy), leaders may try to self-regulate negative states, such as hostile or distressed moods, to avoid behaving in an unprincipled way. How they approach this could have implications for whether they are successful in enacting principled behavior: for example, surface acting may become exhausting and further thwart competence needs, but deep acting may allow leaders to be more successful in changing their underlying negative state and subsequently help them avoid behaving in an unprincipled way, which may help fulfill competence needs that contribute to future principled behavior.

Given the above insights revealed by our integration, we recommend that future research on the antecedents of principled leadership operationalize variables from each lens and either control for alternative explanations or pathways (e.g., Mawritz et al., 2017), or formally include operationalizations from the four lenses in hypothesis development and test the relative size of their relationships with principled leadership (e.g., using dominance analysis [Scott et al., 2014]). Altogether, these recommendations, grounded in integrative insights from our review, shift the way principled leadership antecedents should be investigated as a system going forward.

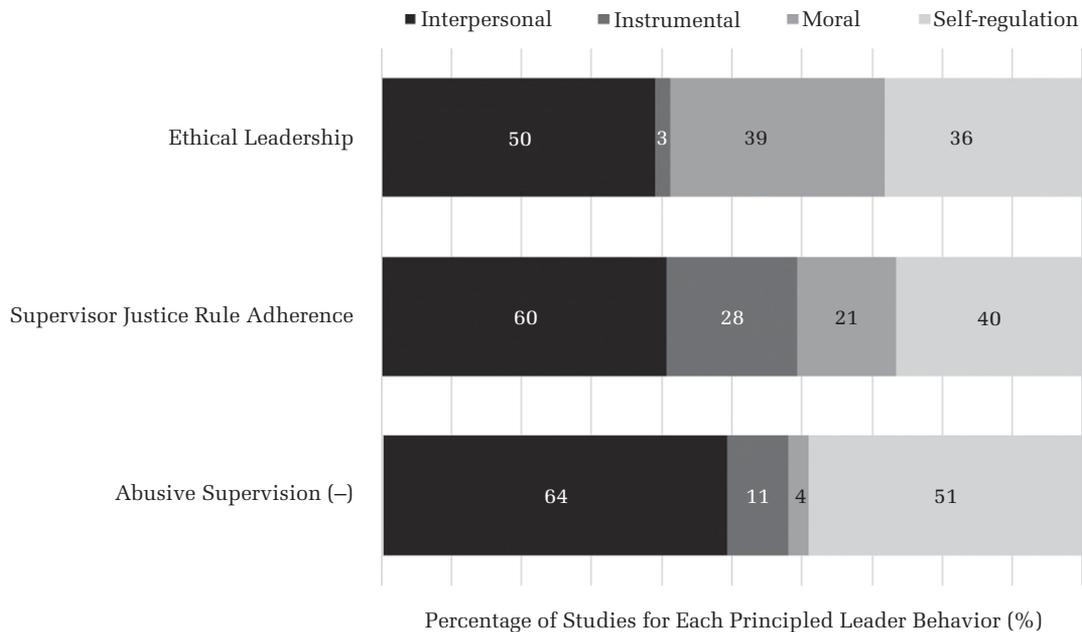
### **Distinctions in the Lenses Across Forms of Principled Leader Behaviors**

While justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and nonabusive supervision all revolve around principled conduct, these three literatures developed from different research traditions. To assume that the lenses hold identical implications for each form of principled leadership would ignore the distinct assumptions and findings in these literatures. Thus, we explore whether distinctions emerged between the three forms of principled leadership, in terms of their antecedents.<sup>2</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of studies corresponding to each lens across the three forms.

According to Figure 2, the interpersonal lens was most popular across all three forms of principled leadership. Social exchange motives were more frequently tested than were social learning motives for each form, but a higher proportion of justice studies (than ethical leadership or abusive supervision studies) focused on these motives. Social learning motives were more commonly tested in ethical leadership studies. However, only justice and abusive supervision studies reported that the leader’s perceived principled behavior from his or her own manager was related to the leader’s own principled behavior (e.g., Ambrose et al., 2013; Gabler et al., 2014), whereas top management and the leader’s childhood appear to be more influential for ethical leadership (e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2014; Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014). That is, for justice, leaders’ relationships with their followers and their own

<sup>2</sup> Overall, our conclusions regarding differences in the antecedents across the three forms of principled behaviors are based on frequency counts in our review. We encourage future research to test the distinctions we identified.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Distinctions in the Four Theoretical Lenses Across Forms of Principled Leadership**



**Note:** The percentages shown exceed 100%, given that many articles invoked multiple lenses.

leaders may be strong drivers, but more distal role models may be more influential for ethical leadership. This suggests that intervening in poor-quality leader–follower social exchanges (e.g., characterized by low leader-member exchange [LMX] or high relationship conflict) is one approach to improve principled leadership, especially justice enactment. Moreover, prior to being promoted into a leadership role, employees could be assigned an ethical role model in the organization, who would share the ethical quandaries they have faced and resolved as a leader, in order to encourage social learning of ethical leadership.

Next, a greater proportion of justice studies focused on instrumental motives than did abusive supervision and ethical leadership studies. Of studies adopting an instrumental lens, self-oriented motives were more popular than other-oriented motives for all three forms of principled leadership. A greater proportion (albeit small number) of justice studies, compared to ethical leadership or abusive supervision studies, focused on other-oriented motives. This suggests that leaders may be more inclined to behave fairly (vs. ethically or abusively) in order to influence others. Given these

insights, future interventions and training should seek to alter flawed beliefs leaders may have about using abuse or injustice as tools to improve employee performance (e.g., Watkins et al., 2019) or compliance, and instead offer more productive and less harmful ways to influence employees.

Not surprisingly, moral motives were more commonly found in ethical leadership studies, compared to justice and abusive supervision. Overall, moral obligation motives emerged as more common than moral rationalization motives. A slightly higher proportion of ethical leadership studies tested these motives and primarily focused on moral identity, reflectiveness, and attentiveness (e.g., Babalola et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2016). This suggests that morality and ethics training may be most helpful for increasing ethical leadership enactment. For example, future research should integrate these insights with leader self-reflection interventions (Lanaj, Foulk, & Erez, 2019) to examine whether moral reflectiveness training improves ethical leader behavior. Moral rationalization motives appear to be more influential for justice than for the other two forms of behavior, which is consistent with the theoretical focus of this

motive on balance and deservingness (e.g., Lerner, 1980). Given this, we recommend that future research examine the specific “excuses” or justifications leaders make for their injustice behavior and their felt responsibility (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005; Scott et al., 2009) for its impact on employees.

Lastly, self-regulation and dispositional antecedents were found more frequently in abusive supervision than in justice and ethical leadership studies. Our review revealed that ethical leadership appears to be more driven by traits (than states or resources) such as conscientiousness, compared to justice and abusive supervision. Thus, it may be that conscientious leaders are consistently ethical, regardless of the situation. This could also be due, however, to stronger conceptual overlap between ethical leadership and personality, as the trait descriptor “moral” lies at the intersection of high conscientiousness and high agreeableness (Hofstee, de Radd, & Goldberg, 1992). In contrast, abusive supervision appears to be more influenced by resource depletion and states, which may shape leaders’ abuse variability—a possibility we return to below. Self-awareness and mindfulness were more frequently found in justice studies. In future intervention studies, self-awareness and mindfulness training hold the most promise for promoting justice, whereas stress management training may be more effective in curtailing abuse. Overall, given these distinctions, efforts that improve justice and ethicality might not necessarily curtail abuse, and vice versa.

### **Other Critical Ways to Advance Research on Antecedents of Principled Leader Behavior**

The majority of studies in our review focused on antecedents of the level of principled leader behavior and antecedents that were largely within the leader’s control. However, understanding why leaders are principled (or not) does not explain whether leaders are aware of their behavior or whether they are consistent across time, situations, and followers. Indeed, our review indicates that leaders and their followers (i.e., recipients of the behavior) do not always agree that the leader was principled (e.g., Zapata et al., 2013) and that principled behavior varies within-leader (e.g., Foulk et al., 2018). Moreover, a growing number of studies have suggested that elements of the leader’s situation interact with the lenses we uncovered. These findings have suggested that prior approaches to research on principled leadership antecedents, including focusing only on level—ignoring variability as well as agreement—and failing

to consider the role of the leader’s situation, is insufficient.

**Role of situation in the interplay between lenses.** Situational influences refer to systemic elements of the leader’s environment. Although situational factors do not formally comprise a lens in our framework, they are nevertheless important to consider and were examined in 9% of studies in our review. The primary situational element that emerged is the leader’s degree of control over enacting principled behavior, operationalized in prior research as perceived discretion, autonomy, and situational control (Babalola et al., 2019; Courtright et al., 2016; Gilliland & Schepers, 2003; Scott et al., 2014). Another situational facet, which may hold implications for the self-regulation and disposition lens, is the leader’s job demands, such as task and goal difficulty (Collins & Jackson, 2015; Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014), workload (Sherf et al., 2019), and span of control (Bormann, Poethke, Cohrs, & Rowold, 2018). Other situational variables, such as job insecurity, and shift or contract work, may also influence multiple lenses, such as by depleting resources, fostering burnout and negative affective states, and activating self-oriented instrumental motives. These situational factors connect to the need for autonomy from SDT. When leaders have little choice to enact principled behavior (Scott et al., 2014), or are rewarded for prioritizing other responsibilities (Sherf et al., 2019), their need for autonomy may be thwarted, which may impede principled behavior. Additionally, principled leadership training (González-Morales, Kernan, Becker, & Eisenberger, 2018; Richter, König, Koppermann, & Schilling, 2016) may activate moral obligation and self-regulation resources (i.e., by improving the capability to be principled) and suppress moral rationalization and self-oriented motives. Training on principled leadership may also satisfy leaders’ competence needs by helping leaders master skills for being fair, ethical, and nonabusive.

Additionally, situational elements may differentially predict the forms of principled leadership—for example, discretion may be more influential for justice, whereas job demands may be more influential for abusive supervision. Moreover, integrating our framework with prior research on discretion suggests differences between the leader’s ability to easily make excuses or justify their behavior (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005; Scott et al., 2009). For instance, principled leader behaviors that are more discretionary—abuse and interpersonal justice—may be more difficult for leaders to justify (that is,

they cannot point the finger at someone else). In contrast, unprincipled behavior driven by other-oriented instrumental motives may be easier for leaders to justify (suggesting a connection with moral rationalization motives), such as framing their behavior as achieving some greater good for their employees or organization.

A theoretical perspective not previously considered by prior research that can illuminate how the situation interacts with the system of four lenses is the person–situation interaction approach (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Treviño, 1986). This perspective centers on the idea that behavior is the result of the individual, their situation, and the interaction between these aspects (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Situational features are thought to activate or inhibit individuals' affect, goals, expectancies, self-regulation, interpretation of the social world, and the interaction between these processes, which influence behavior (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Treviño (1986) drew from these ideas to propose that leaders' ego strength or depletion and moral development interact with situational elements (e.g., time pressure, competition, and organizational cultures emphasizing awareness of consequences and personal responsibility) to affect leaders' ethical behavior.

Integrating this theoretical approach with our framework and SDT would suggest that situational features activate or deactivate the lenses and their interplay. For example, an organizational culture emphasizing accountability may influence social learning motives, as discussed above, but it might also satisfy leaders' autonomy needs by making them feel responsible for and in control of their principled behavior. Depending on how leaders interpret an accountability culture, it may either activate moral motives (e.g., obligation and intrinsic interest in enacting principled behavior) or self-interested instrumental motives (e.g., behave in a principled way to avoid negative consequences). In contrast, time pressure may thwart autonomy needs (e.g., leaders may feel they need to prioritize other aspects of their work above principled behavior [Sherf et al., 2019]), which could contribute to moral justification motives for unprincipled behavior, as well as depleting self-regulatory resources and fostering negative affective states, which in turn inhibits principled behavior. Overall, situational elements have been relatively neglected, yet are important to consider because pinpointing them can help organizations “redesign jobs and work contexts” (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018: 227) that encourage principled leadership.

### **Agreement regarding principled leader behavior.**

Most studies have examined principled leadership from the perspective of the behavior recipient (i.e., employee), which is not surprising. More surprising is the fact that so few studies (3%) simultaneously examined leader self-ratings and recipient ratings. Moreover, these two sets of ratings are moderately correlated ( $r$  between .26 and .46) (de Vries, 2012; Gabler et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2017; Kuenzi, Brown, Mayer, & Priesemuth, 2019; Zapata et al., 2013), suggesting disagreement to some extent. We define principled leadership agreement as the extent of perceptual consensus (i.e., dyadic shared perceptions) between leaders' and recipients' ratings of the leader's principled behavior. Understanding why leaders and followers agree on the leader's behavior is important because it connects to leaders' self-awareness of their behavior (e.g., Whiteside & Barclay, 2016, 2018). Given that “self-awareness is vital for effective self-regulation” (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005: 589), leaders who are aware of their ethical, nonabusive, or fair behaviors may have an improved ability to self-regulate these behaviors. Leader–follower agreement and self-awareness may differ based on the behavior, such that a disconnect may exist with abuse (i.e., leaders may be less apt to view themselves as abusive) but is less likely to arise with justice (i.e., leaders may more easily admit they did not share information or were inconsistent). Greater agreement would also be expected on specific justice rules versus broad appraisals of fairness, ethicality, and abuse (Scott et al., 2009).

Our framework can help shed new light on why leaders and followers agree on the leader's principled behavior. For example, regarding the interpersonal lens, perhaps relationship conflict between leaders and followers (Graham et al., 2019; Tepper et al., 2011) would impair agreement, whereas relationship quality (e.g., LMX [Koopman et al., 2015]) would facilitate it. Instrumental factors such as impression management and identity maintenance (Scott et al., 2014), and moral factors such as euphemistic labeling and moral credentials (Lin et al., 2016), may inhibit agreement, whereas moral reflection may increase it. Self-regulation and traits such as empathy, agreeableness, and mindfulness may make agreement more likely, whereas leaders who are depleted may be less apt to achieve agreement. Moreover, situational factors, such as training on principled leadership (González-Morales et al., 2018; Richter et al., 2016), may encourage leaders' self-awareness on these behaviors, which in turn may facilitate agreement. Building from recent

research examining followers' attribution of leaders' justice motives (Matta, Sabey, Scott, Lin, & Koopman, 2020) and the notion that justice recipients can perceive insincerity in the justice actor (Bies, 1987), it is also possible that leaders and followers may at times disagree about the leader's motives. For example, a leader may be motivated by moral obligation, but the follower instead may perceive this behavior to be driven by self-oriented instrumental motives, such as impression management (Greenberg et al., 1991). This disagreement may hinder the leader's future enactment of principled behavior, via reduced self-regulatory resources or negative affect, for instance.

**Variability in principled leader behaviors.** Our review indicates that leaders are not always consistent in their principled behavior over time (e.g., Barnes et al., 2015; Matta et al., 2017) or across followers (Bormann et al., 2018). Integrating prior conceptualizations, we define principled leadership variability as the degree of leaders' instability or inconsistency in justice, abuse, or ethical behavior. Given that 39–80% of variability in principled behaviors is within-leader (i.e., varies within rater—leader or follower) (Barnes et al., 2015; Foulk et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2017; Matta et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2014; Sherf et al., 2019) and 65% of variability is within-unit (i.e., across followers reporting to the same leader) (Bormann et al., 2018), it is critical to understand why leaders are consistently principled, particularly since the consistency of behavior appears to be as, if not more, important than the level of behavior (Matta et al., 2017; Matta, Scott, Guo, & Matusik, 2020). Of the studies in our review, 6% examined variability. These studies largely focused on variability's effects; studies examining its antecedents found that leader trait self-control (Matta et al., 2017) and justification for unjust behavior (Qin, Ren, et al., 2018) predict leaders' justice variability over time and leaders' span of control is related to greater inconsistency in ethical leadership across followers (Bormann et al., 2018). Moreover, nearly half of variability in attribution of the leader's justice motives varies within-follower (Matta, Sabey, et al., 2020), which points to the possibility that motives also vary within-leader.

Our framework offers insights on how the limited but growing stream of research on antecedents of principled leadership variability should progress. For example, the interpersonal lens would suggest that relationship quality or exchange with the follower reduces within-leader variability but increases within-unit variability. Viewed through the moral lens, moral credits, which fluctuate (Lin et al., 2016;

Miller & Effron, 2010), would be expected to increase variability, whereas moral credentials, values, and identity, which are believed to be more stable (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Miller & Effron, 2010), would be expected to inhibit variability. In terms of the self-regulation and disposition lens, because resource depletion impairs self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 1998) and neuroticism reflects emotional instability (Goldberg, 1992), they may encourage variability. Lenses within our framework may vary as well—for instance, leaders may be motivated by interpersonal forces one day and by self-regulation forces the next (e.g., due to fluctuating fulfillment of needs)—which may ultimately affect their general pattern or level of principled leadership over time. Taken together, by integrating the four lenses, our review extends beyond synthesis to highlight critical ways in which research on principled leadership antecedents should progress.

## DISCUSSION

Given findings showing beneficial outcomes of supervisor justice rule adherence, ethical leadership, and nonabusive supervision accumulated over decades of research (Colquitt et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2015), scholars are increasingly exploring why leaders are just, ethical, and nonabusive. However, research on antecedents of these leader behaviors has grown independently of their respective literatures, despite their commonalities. To advance this growing area of inquiry, we set out to synthesize reasons why leaders enact these behaviors. We integrated these acts under the overarching term “principled leader behaviors,” and extended Cropanzano and colleagues' (2001) “roads” to develop a framework of four theoretical lenses explaining why leaders are principled. Our framework revealed the following lenses and types of antecedents: interpersonal lens (encompassing social exchange and social learning motives), instrumental lens (including self- and other-oriented motives), moral lens (comprising moral obligation and rationalization motives), and the self-regulation and disposition lens (capturing leaders' resources, states, and traits).

After reviewing critical insights revealed by each lens, we integrated the lenses and extended our framework by highlighting the interplay between lenses and ways to theoretically and empirically study them as a system going forward, identifying distinctions between the three forms of principled leadership in terms of their antecedents, and

identifying ways our framework can inform several important emerging areas of research on principled leadership, including the role of situation, as well as agreement and variability. Overall, we pinpointed and addressed key assumptions in prior research to advance and shift our understanding of why leaders are principled.

### Theoretical Implications

Our framework, as well as the synthesis and extension we derived from it, makes several important contributions to research on principled leadership antecedents. First, we challenge the prevailing perspective that leaders are always intentional or deliberate in their enactment of principled behavior. Our review indicates that the majority of research to date has focused on specific motive-related antecedents driving principled leadership, which suggests that leaders intentionally decide whether to be principled. Although motives play a critical role, focusing exclusively on motives ignores the equally important role of other antecedents: leaders' capacity, personality, and ability to behave in a principled way. That is, leaders are also influenced to be principled by their resources, states, and traits—which we viewed as a set in our framework through the self-regulation and disposition lens. Developing this lens allowed us to uncover previously overlooked distinctions in self-regulation and dispositional antecedents of principled leader behaviors; for example, that abuse is more influenced by leaders' states and resources, whereas personality plays a larger role for ethical leadership.

Second, research focusing on motive-related antecedents has often implicitly assumed that some motives are more desirable than others. We explored these assumptions by unpacking motives revealed by each lens. For example, prior research centered on moral approaches has assumed that such motives always compel leaders to be principled. This assumption points only to moral obligation motives. While we found these motives to play an important role, our review also revealed that leaders may instead rely on moral logic to enact unprincipled behavior, driven by moral rationalization motives. This stands in contrast to prior assumptions that moral motives are unilaterally beneficial (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Additionally, studies adopting instrumental motives (e.g., Qin, Ren, et al., 2018) have implicitly assumed that such motives are harmful—that leaders

are principled for the “wrong” reasons (e.g., advancing their self-interests). By developing the instrumental lens, our review revealed that instrumental motives may at times have a more benevolent side, in terms of other-oriented motives—leaders can be principled as a means to the end of influencing or helping others. These insights were uncovered by synthesizing prior research from the vantage point of each lens individually, as well as collectively.

Third, while many studies in our review adopted only one lens, which implicitly assumes that the lenses operate independently, our framework instead advocates that the lenses be treated as a system. Specifically, our review revealed interplay between the lenses, such that they work together or against one another, or operate concurrently. To theoretically integrate the lenses and highlight how they can be studied together, we integrated our framework with SDT. For example, we mapped the lenses onto forms of motivation and needs specified by SDT to suggest ways in which the lenses may suppress or activate each other within an interconnected system. Illuminating this interplay also bridges our framework on antecedents with research on outcomes of principled leadership for leaders. Several studies have found that abusive supervision is associated with a longer-term negative impact on leaders' recovery (Qin, Huang, Johnson, Hu, & Ju, 2018), leaders' relaxation at home (Fouk et al., 2018), and followers' avoidance of their leader (Simon et al., 2015), all of which may play into a cycle of leaders' abuse. In contrast, interpersonal justice is associated with greater positive affect and well-being for leaders (Bernerth, Whitman, Walker, Mitchell, & Taylor, 2016; Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014), which may elicit future justice enactment. Moreover, aspects of ethical leadership are related to LMX with followers (Tumasjan, Strobels, & Welpe, 2011), and promotability (Letwin et al., 2016). In turn, leaders' promotions may offer greater discretion over their behavior or create job demands that impair principled leadership.

Fourth, research on antecedents of justice, ethical leadership, and abusive supervision has often adopted similar theoretical perspectives and tested similar antecedents, which may point to the assumption that the lenses also operate identically across these three behaviors. However, upon integrating the lenses into a unified framework, we found that distinctions emerged. For example, ethical leadership may be more driven by moral motives, nonabusive supervision may be more influenced by

self-regulation, and justice more affected by social exchange with followers. These and other distinctions in our review strengthen the theoretical richness of this literature and guide future research to focus on the most important and influential sets of antecedents for each form of principled leadership. This insight also suggests that different forms of principled leadership require distinct approaches for organizations to effectively manage and develop them.

## CONCLUSION

According to our review, nearly 90% of articles on antecedents of principled leadership have been published in the last decade and point to myriad reasons why leaders are fair, ethical, and nonabusive. However, this growth has also been accompanied by fragmentation and little overarching guidance across literatures on why leaders are principled, suggesting that a synthesis is needed. Toward that end, we developed an integrative framework of four theoretical lenses explaining why leaders behave in principled ways. By integrating these lenses, we uncovered cross-cutting critical insights and surfaced key approaches to advance research in this important area. Extending beyond synthesis, our review broadens and deepens how principled leadership antecedents are studied.

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## APPENDIX A

TABLE A1  
Counts of Articles Included in the Review Across Lenses

	Interpersonal lens	Instrumental lens	Moral lens	Self-regulation & disposition lens	Overall count
<b>Total number of articles</b>	77	20	23	57	130
<b>By literature</b>					
Supervisor justice rule adherence (and violation)	26	12	9	17	43
Ethical leadership	18	1	14	13	36
Abusive supervision	34	6	2	27	53
<b>By timeframe</b>					
1970–1979	0	0	0	1	1
1980–1989	1	1	1	0	1
1990–1999	4	0	0	0	4
2000–2009	7	1	1	6	11
2010–2020	65	17	21	50	113
<b>By methodology</b>					
Field study: single-source	20	7	7	11	31
Field study: multi-source	47	8	15	43	84
Experiment	24	11	7	17	42
Qualitative	3	2	2	3	7
<b>By rater (of the behavior)</b>					
Recipient of behavior	61	11	15	43	100
Leader (self-ratings)	20	12	7	19	39
Recipient and leader	3	0	0	1	4
Independent rater	9	2	3	9	18
Objectively measured	6	6	4	2	9

*Note.* As indicated under Coding Scheme, the sum of articles across the lens columns exceeds the overall count of articles in the top right cell because many articles in our review examined multiple lenses. González-Morales et al. (2018) and Richter et al. (2016) examined an antecedent (training) that did not cleanly fit into a lens.