

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ON ORGANIZATIONAL HUMANNESS AND ITS RELATION TO LEADERSHIP: A SCOPING REVIEW

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The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the available body of knowledge on organizational humanness, and its relation with leadership behavior. We discuss three related concepts that were found in this review: organizational *dehumanization*, objectification, and organizational humanization, and present how they have been measured. The results of this review show that most studies concern the absence of humanness in organization, that is, organizational *dehumanization* or objectification, and measures therefore have a corresponding focus on the absence of humanness as well. Accordingly, the available literature on the relation between leadership and (de)humanization seems mostly focused on the absence of humanness. We emphasize the necessity of studying experienced humanness in organizations and the importance of clarifying the leadership behavior that can support and increase experienced humanness.¹

Keywords: Humanness; Organizational dehumanization; Organizational humanization; Objectification; Leadership behavior.

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In the past decade there has been a growing academic interest into the topic of organizational dehumanization, that is, the experience of being treated as not fully human at work. Dehumanizing attitudes and behaviors are unfortunately common phenomena in organizational settings (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Christoff, 2014), and dehumanizing experiences have negative consequences for employees' well-being as well as for organizations (Bell & Khoury, 2016; Caesens et al., 2017). Lagios et al. (2021) show that one of the underlying mechanisms of these negative consequences of organizational dehumanization relates to the thwarting of basic psychological needs, that is, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Conversely, organizational humanization, that is, "The experience of having one's experiences, desires and feelings recognized by the organization and the opportunity for personal agency and self-actualization through creative and instrumental participation in organizational processes" (Bell & Khoury, 2011, p. 4), is likely to contribute to satisfying these basic needs, leading to high-quality motivation and well-being of employees (Deci & Ryan, 2013). This makes a case for leaders to deepen their knowledge and skills regarding what they can do to enhance humanness in their organizations.

However, many of the studies in this field of research are focused on the absence of humanness at work, elaborating on concepts such as organizational dehumanization and objectification, that is, perceiving and/or treating others as objects or tools (Valtorta et al., 2019). This focus suggests that organizational humanness can

be equated to the absence of organizational dehumanization and/or objectification. However, just as health is more than the absence of disease, we suggest that humanness is more than the absence of dehumanization. Therefore we focus in this review specifically on understanding this concept of humanness in organizations.

Consequently, the objective of this study is to give an overview of the available literature that gives insight in (a) the concept of humanness within the context of organizations, and (b) the actual leadership behaviors that may contribute to humanness. With this study we aim to summarize the current body of knowledge on these topics, and to identify important gaps in the scientific literature. For this purpose we performed a scoping review. This method is a helpful tool to determine the scope or coverage of a body of literature. It can be used to identify knowledge gaps, as well as clarifying concepts and definitions (Munn et al., 2018). Scoping reviews are similar to systematic reviews in that they follow a structured process. However, they serve a different purpose. Where systematic reviews focus more on identifying evidence and confirming or identifying new or best practices, a scoping review is a tool to determine the coverage of the literature on a given subject. As such the latter specifically aims to clarify concepts and identify knowledge gaps. Since we wanted to map the existing literature on the topic of humanness in organizations, related to leadership, the scoping review was the most appropriate tool.

The first aim of this review is to determine the theoretical perspectives on humanness in organizations (i.e., how is humanness conceptualized; RQ1) and to map how the concept is assessed in research (i.e., the measures that have been developed and applied to measure humanness/(de)humanization in organizations; RQ2). In it, we will delineate findings regarding the various concepts that were found to be strongly related to the concept of humanness, that is, (organizational) dehumanization, objectification and (organizational) humanization, and elaborate on the differences and possible overlap between the concepts, more specifically between organizational dehumanization and objectification. The second aim of this study is to give an overview of the current knowledge about the relation between leadership behavior and organizational humanness and organizational (de)humanization from a theoretical perspective (RQ3) and from empirical research findings (RQ4).

In the following, we will first describe the methodological steps we took for the purpose of investigating the research questions and then elaborate on the findings. We will conclude with a summary of our main findings and provide suggestions for future research.

METHOD

To investigate the research questions, we followed the guidelines for scoping reviews from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI guidelines) as described by Peters et al. (2020). We developed an Open Software Foundation (OSF)-preregistered protocol (registered as osf.io/3zdmc) and a subsequent screening manual for selecting and screening relevant literature. This process started with a search, followed by screening the search results, followed by an assessment of the content of the selected results.

Search Strategy

Following the guidelines for scoping reviews we applied a three-step search strategy, described in detail in the search and screening manual (osf.io/3zdmc, Appendix A). In Step 1, we conducted an initial limited search on organizational (de)humanization to determine relevant keywords and index terms to be used in a full search.

In Step 2, we performed a full search across all databases using the identified keywords and index terms. We were assisted in this step by a research librarian. We conducted one search for both research aims simultaneously across all databases using a combination of the string of keywords for the two aims of the search. For searched databases and the full string of keywords, please refer to: osf.io/3zdmc, Appendix A. The search included theoretical as well as empirical studies. The first search for relevant references was done in April 2021, resulting in a total of 946 records. In January 2022, an additional search was done in Web of Science for any additionally published articles, which resulted in an additional 84 titles.

In the final and third step, backward and forward snowballing of the eligible articles from the first search, led to respectively 11 and 30 new references. Together with the 946 original records and the 84 records from the additional search, this led to a total of 1071 records. We removed 13 duplicate articles, resulting in 1058 references that were screened. A flow diagram of the search process is available on osf.io/3zdmc.

Grey literature ($n = 16$), defined as non-peer-reviewed journal articles, including book chapters, dissertations, non-published studies, and meeting abstracts, was read for inspiration, background information and bias check. Because these references did not yield any additional relevant information for the purpose of answering our research questions, we will not discuss this literature further.

Screening

The screening was done independently by two reviewers (the first author and a research assistant), starting with a pilot test and then performed in three subsequent phases described in detail in the screening manual (see osf.io/3zdmc, Appendix A). In Phase 1, screening based on the eligibility criteria (see osf.io/3zdmc, Appendix A) was limited to the title and abstract. Screening on title and abstract led to 166 titles to be included in Phase 2, that included screening on full texts. These 166 full-text articles were screened again based on the set of eligibility criteria through a blind procedure by both reviewers, leading to 67 included references in the present review. Another 19 articles came from the screened records that were found through snowballing and the additional search, resulting in a total of 86 articles.

In Phase 3, all 86 eligible references were entered in the predesigned Excel sheet to record relevant data and information. These articles were again screened by one reviewer (the first author) for the relevance of the article for the aims and research questions of this scoping review. On closer inspection, 40 articles proved not to be relevant for this review, because there were no definitions, operationalizations, and measures mentioned, or the articles did not contribute to either the conceptual knowledge, definitions, and/or the measures.

This searching and screening process resulted into 46 relevant titles that were included in the scoping review, all of which were relevant for Aim 1 (conceptualizations and measures for organizational humanness and (de)humanization) and 11 articles for Aim 2 (the relationship between leadership behavior and organizational humanness and (de)humanization).

RESULTS

Concepts: Definitions and Operationalizations

The reviewed literature showed two definitions of humanness (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Waytz & Schroeder, 2014). Moreover, it appeared that three distinct concepts related to humanness could be identified: (organizational) *dehumanization*, that is, the experience of being treated as not fully human (32

articles); objectification, that is, perceiving and/or treating others as objects or tools (12 articles); and (organizational) humanization, having one's experiences, desires, and feelings recognized by the organization and the opportunity for personal agency and self-actualization (three articles).² In the following we will elaborate on each of these concepts separately.

General Definitions of Humanness

Only 10 articles specified a definition of humanness. Two main definitions were found in these articles. The first definition, by Haslam and Loughnan (2014; mentioned in six articles), is as follows: humanness involves “the attributes that define what it means to be human” (p. 401), which can be understood from two different perspectives. One perspective is to distinguish what the key elements of *human nature* (HN) are. These elements include emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality, and depth. Another quite different perspective points to what separates humankind from other species, more specifically animals. The characteristics that refer to *human uniqueness* (HU) include civility, refinement, moral sensibility, logic/rationality, and maturity. Together, these two perspectives give a whole and broad perspective on what humanness could mean.

The second definition of humanness (mentioned in four articles) is defined by Waytz and Schroeder (2014) as: “having a mind with high capacity for agency (e.g., intentionality and free will) and experience (e.g., feeling and emotion)” (p. 6). Waytz and colleagues (2010) elaborate and define “mind perception” as how people tend to attribute minds to other entities, like another human, a machine, an animal, God, or even an abstract idea like an organization. Their theorizing is based on the research by Gray et al. (2007) who describe agency as distinguishing humans from animals, and experience as distinguishing humans from machines. Dehumanization, consequently, is operationalized as perceiving the other (group) as having a less intense, deep, and complex mind than those of the self or the ingroup (Waytz et al., 2010).

(Organizational) Dehumanization

The large majority of articles ($n = 32$) addressed the concept of *dehumanization*. Dehumanization is often defined as the denial of full humanness (Haslam, 2006). Following the two aspects of humanness, dehumanization can be distinguished in animalistic dehumanization (the denial of uniquely human attributes) and mechanistic dehumanization (the denial of human nature attributes). Animalistic dehumanization occurs when people are seen and treated as childlike or savage. Mechanistic dehumanization is the case when people are seen and treated as being fungible, a machine or a robot.

The most frequently found definition of *organizational* dehumanization is the definition by Bell and Khoury (2011), who describe it as: “[...] the experience of an employee who feels objectified by his/her organization, denied personal subjectivity, and made to feel like a tool or an instrument for the organization's ends” (p. 4). This definition was mentioned in 11 of the articles on dehumanization. The relation between the concepts of humanness, dehumanization, and organizational dehumanization as found in most articles is shown in Figure 1.

Although Bell and Khoury (2011) suggest that both forms of dehumanization, that is, animalistic and mechanistic, exist in the context of work, most of the reviewed literature on organizational dehumanization concentrates on mechanistic dehumanization only (24 out of 32). In line with this view, Christoff (2014) later proposed that mechanistic dehumanization is more likely to occur in organizational contexts than animalistic dehumanization.

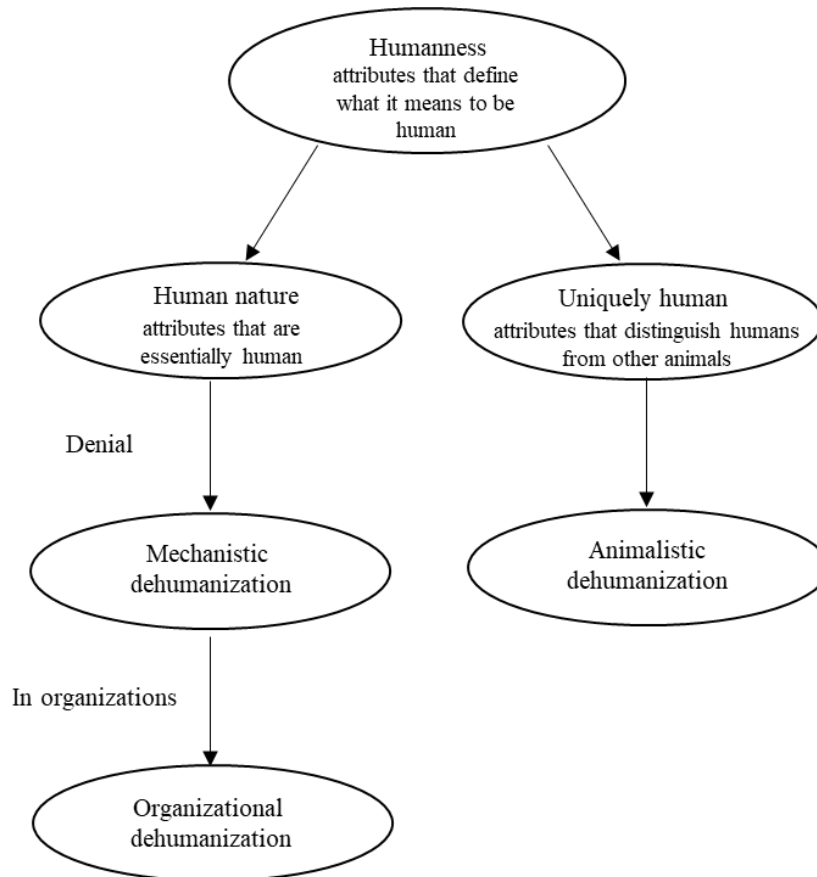


FIGURE 1
Humanness, dehumanization (according to Haslam, 2006), and organizational dehumanization

Interesting, however, is that many authors (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Gwinn et al., 2013; Nguyen, Besson, et al., 2021; Nguyen, Dao, et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021), while suggesting that mechanistic dehumanization occurs more frequently in organizations, also note that dehumanization in organizational contexts can be mechanistic *and* animalistic. This means that organizational dehumanization is often defined and operationalized in the mechanistic understanding of dehumanization and that some of the research might have a blind spot for animalistic dehumanization in organizations.

Animalistic dehumanization does seem likely to occur in contexts with power differences, as appeared in research on the relation between power and dehumanization by Gwinn et al. (2013). In two experiments, it was observed that participants with higher power saw relatively less uniquely human attributes (e.g., ambitious, analytic, broadminded, conscientious) in the participants with low power than vice versa. This finding can be considered as an expression of animalistic dehumanization. As power differences are inherent to organizational life, a broader definition of organizational dehumanization, that includes both mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization, seems warranted.

A final finding regarding conceptualization is that articles on organizational dehumanization describe almost exclusively dehumanization of employees by their supervisors. Only one study (De Clercq & Pereira, 2021) investigated dehumanization of supervisors by their subordinates. It was suggested that dehumanization of leaders by their employees may occur when leaders communicate that they do not care much

about their employees' well-being. They also found that employees who suffer from sleep deprivation due to work situations, are more likely to regard and treat their organizational leaders as objects.

In summary, organizational dehumanization has mostly been conceptualized as mechanistic dehumanization, and did not take animalistic dehumanization into consideration. In addition, regarding the experience of dehumanization, the scientific attention is mainly on employees and not on their supervisors.

Objectification

In our search for definitions and operationalizations of organizational humanness/organizational (de)humanization (RQ1) we came across a relation between dehumanization and objectification. Although there are distinct definitions and operationalizations of both concepts, we found that the concepts also seem to be somewhat diffuse and may at times overlap, as we will elaborate on in the following.

We found 13 studies that addressed the concept of objectification. Studies that use the term objectification often refer to objectification theory by Nussbaum (1995) building on a philosophical background, whereas studies that use the term dehumanization tend to be psychological, building on moral psychology (Bar-Tal, 1990) and social learning theory by Bandura (1990). Some authors (Baldissarri et al., 2021; Bell & Khoury, 2016; Moriano et al., 2021; Sainz et al., 2021) seem to mix the terms (organizational) dehumanization and (working) objectification, suggesting that they are conceptually similar. Others define dehumanization as an element of the process of objectification (Martínez et al., 2017), or rather the other way around, objectification as an element or a form of dehumanization (Auzoult, 2019; Baldissarri et al., 2014). Valtorta et al. (2019), for instance, define three ways of dehumanization, that is, biologization (perceiving others as infectious), animalization (perceiving others as similar to animals), and objectification (perceiving others as similar to things or objects).

The most specific definition and operationalization of objectification in relation to dehumanization is given by Martínez et al. (2017). Following Nussbaum (1995), they describe objectification as a form of dehumanization whereby people are seen and treated as mere objects, with four elements: (1) instrumentality (the person is seen as useful), (2) the denial of autonomy (the person is perceived as lacking agency), (3) the denial of subjectivity (the person is treated as if their feelings must not be taken into consideration), and (4) fungibility (the person is perceived as interchangeable with similar others). This operationalization can be related to the elements of Haslam's (2006) mechanistic dehumanization which is operationalized as denial of (1) interpersonal warmth, (2) emotional responsiveness, (3) agency, (4) individuality, and (5) cognitive openness. Baldissarri et al. (2021) propose the concept of *working objectification*, defining this concept as a psychological (motivational and cognitive) process involving the view of workers as instruments (instrumentality) and as lacking human features (denial of humanness). They further state that working objectification is not only mechanistic dehumanization, but also the combination of mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization. They propose that working objectification is quite similar to organizational dehumanization but differs in the perspective taken. Where organizational dehumanization refers to the workers' perception, working objectification focuses on the process of treating employees.

When focusing on these difference in perspectives, it is clear that the definition of objectification uses the same perspective as dehumanization. Both concepts are operationalized in the perspective of the actor. The perspective of the actor in objectification is clear in definitions like: "when we treat or perceive other people as objects" (Martínez et al., 2017, p. 467), or "a process of subjugation whereby people, like objects, are treated as means to an end (...)" (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016, p. 271), or "a form of dehumanization that involves the perception of others as mere objects" (Baldissari et al., 2014, p. 1). The perspective of the actor in dehumanization

is manifest in definitions like: “perceiving others as lacking qualities that are considered to be characteristically human” (Christoff, 2014, p. 1), or representing others as “lacking a fully human mind” (Waytz & Schroeder, 2014, p. 251), or “denial of one’s membership to humanness” (Stinglhamber et al., 2021, p. 746).

Organizational dehumanization, however, seems to have the perspective of the receiver. The perspective of the receiver in organizational dehumanization appears in definitions like: “employees’ perception that their organization rejects their human integrity, treats them as a tool, an object and an instrument useful for organizational goals” (Caesens et al., 2019, p. 6), or “how a worker feels when objectified by their organization or denied personal subjectivity (...)” (Arriagada-Venegas et al., 2021, p. 90), or “perceived experience of an employee resulting from the feeling to be used as a tool or instrument for the organization’s end” (Stinglhamber et al., 2021, p. 746). Only three of 19 studies that give a clear definition (Bell & Khoury, 2016; De Clerq & Pereira, 2021; Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020) describe organizational dehumanization in terms of the perspective of the actor, like: “a maltreatment arising from interpersonal interactions resulting from perceptions and beliefs that the organization considers an employee as a tool or instrument” (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2020, p. 4).

In short, the research on objectification reveals three important results. First, the definitions and operationalizations that authors use of (working) objectification and organizational dehumanization tend to overlap, since both concepts focus on the usage of employees as a tool. Organizational dehumanization definitions center more on the perception by the employee and sometimes add elements like “rejecting human integrity” or “denied personal subjectivity.” Second, definitions that are used to describe working objectification include both mechanistic *and* animalistic dehumanization, which makes it a broader concept of dehumanization than organizational dehumanization. Third, the perspective of (working) objectification (from the actor’s view) contrasts with the perspective of organizational dehumanization (from the receiver’s view).

Organizational Humanization

The concept of humanness *within the context of organizations* was only defined in three articles. Taghavinia et al. (2021) describe humanness (in their article also labeled as humanity) as a personality characteristic that reveals “respect for the personnel, good morals, the ability of intimate criticism and caring about the personnel’s problem” (p. 5). Quintelier et al. (2021) describe humanization as “the attribution of more (or less) human-like qualities” (p. 2), following the mind-perception theory of Gray. Organizational humanization is defined by Bell and Khoury (2011) as the opposite of organizational *dehumanization*: “The experience of having one’s experiences, desires and feelings recognized by the organization and the opportunity for personal agency and self-actualization through creative and instrumental participation in organizational processes” (p. 4). It is striking that in contrast to the definition of organizational *dehumanization*, the definition of organizational humanization has received little attention in theoretical and empirical publications. Only two studies have aimed to clarify elements that predict or promote organizational humanization (Quintelier et al., 2021; Taghavinia et al., 2021). In short, it is clear that the concepts of humanness and organizational humanization have drawn much less attention of researchers than the absence of humanness and the occurrence of organizational *dehumanization*.

Measures

The second part of the first aim was to determine which measures have been developed to determine humanness and organizational (de)humanization. In this section we will elaborate on the measures we found

for the three concepts that we discussed before: organizational dehumanization, (working) objectification, and organizational humanization. Some of the studies were qualitative ($n = 3$) and used more open-ended questions instead of a specific measure. The majority ($n = 34$) of the empirical studies were quantitative studies. In this section, we will provide an overview and some insights on the measures that scholars use. For the purpose of this review, we will elaborate specifically on measures applying to organizational contexts. Table 1 gives an overview of all the measures that we found in this review. All measures can be found in: osf.io/3zdmc (Appendix B).

TABLE 1
 Measures of organizational dehumanization, objectification, humanization

Name	Author	Year of publication	Intend to measure	Context in which the measure was constructed	# subscales	# items	Exemple item
Measure for (de)humanizing treatment	Bell & Khoury	2011	Experience of (de)humanizing treatment	Organizations		8	Does the organization treat you like a person or just another part of a big machine?
Scale for Organizational Dehumanization	Caesens et al.	2017	Experience of organizational dehumanization	Organizations		11	My organization makes me feel that one worker is easily as good as any other
Dehumanization traits	Gwinn et al.	2013	Experience of dehumanization	General	8	40	
Dehumanization scale	Valtorta et al.	2019	Objectification or dehumanization	General	4	16	
Measure of agency and experience	Baldissarri et al.	2017	Objectification	General	2	18	
Perception of Objectification in the Workplace-Short Scale (POWS)	Crone et al.	2021	Objectification	Organizations		10	At work, my boss and/or my colleagues give me the impression that my work could be replaced by that of a machine
Scale for instrumentality and humanness	Andrighetto et al.	2017	Humanness	General	2	10	
Humanization scale	Quintelier et al.	2021	Humanization	General	2	5	To what extent do the stakeholders experience emotions?

Measures of Dehumanization

Most of the measures we found focus on (organizational) dehumanization or (working) objectification. Some of these measures have not been specifically constructed for organizations but are designed for more general contexts. Several authors slightly adapted the measures to better match the organizational context.

We found only one measure that is designed for reporting on both organizational humanization as well as organizational dehumanization. Bell and Khoury (2011) developed a balanced measure that consists of eight items ranging from a *dehumanizing treatment* (-3) to a *humanizing treatment* (+3) with 0 = *neutral*.

An item from this measure is “Does the organization treat you like a person or just another part of a big machine?” The responses are reverse scored so that a higher score indicates dehumanization.

Interestingly, this measure by Bell and Khoury (2011) is not very widely used. In fact, only one study applied this scale (Ahmed & Khalid Khan, 2016). The measure was however input for the later designed 11-item Scale for Organizational Dehumanization by Caesens et al. (2017), the most widely used measure in studies that address organizational dehumanization, that was applied in 18 of the studies in this review. The items in this scale indicate that organizational dehumanization is operationalized in terms of the more narrow definition of mechanistic dehumanization. An example item of this measure is: “My organization makes me feel that one worker is easily as good as any other.”

Gwinn et al. (2013) applied a more general approach in a study on power differences and organizational dehumanization, following their definition of organizational dehumanization as both mechanistic and animalistic in nature. Consequently, they assessed dehumanization with Haslam and Bain’s (2007) dehumanization traits. With this measure, participants are asked to rate other individuals on 40 traits, that orthogonally vary in whether they are *uniquely human* traits or not, whether their valence is positive or negative, and whether they are *human nature* traits or not. These traits are based on Haslam’s (2006) two dimensions of humanness and dehumanization: uniquely human attributes (e.g., ambitious and conscientious) and human nature attributes (e.g., friendly and curious). Next to positive attributes the scale incorporates negative attributes as well (e.g., impatient, nervous, unemotional), emphasizing that human attributes are not all positive in valence.

To summarize this section, it appears that the most widely used measure for organizational dehumanization is the 11-item Scale for Organizational Dehumanization by Caesens et al. (2017). This scale is constructed on the narrow definition of organizational dehumanization, that is, mechanistic dehumanization only, and focuses on the absence of humanness in organizations.

Measures of Objectification

Studies on objectification generally apply other measures than the ones described above. Valtorta et al. (2019a) developed the Dehumanization Scale which asks participants to rate the extent to which another person is associated with four different sets of words, associated with: (1) virus (e.g., contamination), (2) animal (e.g., savage), (3) object (e.g., instrument), or (4) human being (e.g., person).

Baldissarri et al. (2017) constructed a measure of agency and experience, where participants are asked to rate the extent to which another person has different mental abilities. These abilities capture the two dimensions of mind, that is, agency and experience, by Waytz et al. (2013). Of these items, seven are related to agency (e.g., self-control, planning, thought) and 11 are related to experience (e.g., feeling fear, having a personality, having consciousness). A low score on the two components (agency and experience) relates to the perception of a person as an object, which involves two elements, that is, instrumentality and denial of humanness.

Crone et al. (2021) developed a Perception of Objectification in the Workplace-Short Scale (POWS), a measure that is specifically construed for application in organizations. The scale has 10 items; one example item is “At work, my boss and/or my colleagues give me the impression that my work could be replaced by that of a machine.” This measure, and the items in it, shares a lot of resemblance with the 11-item Scale for Organizational Dehumanization by Caesens et al. (2017) as both of the scales concentrate on instrumentality, fungibility, and the perception of being used as a tool, or instrument, or means to an end.

Interestingly, Crone's POWS does not display the difference in perspective that we observed earlier when synthesizing our findings regarding the definitions. Where organizational dehumanization was mainly defined from the experience of the receiver and objectification was mainly defined from the perspective of the actor, the measures of organizational dehumanization and the POWS are both in general aimed at the experience of the receiver. The other two objectification measures (Baldissarri et al., 2017; Valtorta et al., 2019a) however assess objectification from the perspective of the actor.

Measures of (Organizational) Humanization

As indicated before, Bell and Khoury (2011) developed a measure for both organizational humanization and organizational dehumanization. In our review, we found two other measures that operationalize humanness, that is, the Scale for Instrumentality and Humanness (Andrighetto et al., 2017) and the Humanization Scale (Quintelier et al., 2021). These two measures were only used in, respectively, four and one studies, which is quite logical as most studies measured the absence of humanness.

The first instrument is the Scale for Instrumentality and Humanness (Andrighetto et al., 2017; Baldissarri et al., 2017), which appears rather similar to the Dehumanization Scale of Valtorta (2019b). This measure allows participants to describe another individual as a human person using five words (human being, person, individual, subject, guy) or as an instrument (instrument, device, tool, thing, machine). The average of the first five items' scores is the subscale for humanness. The average of the second five items' scores is the subscale for instrumentality.

The second instrument is the Humanization Scale that Quintelier et al. (2021) constructed based on the mind attribution theory and the two aspects of humanness, that is, agency and experience, of Waytz et al. (2013). These aspects were adapted to fit in an organizational context. An example item is: "To what extent do the stakeholders experience emotions?" The stakeholders in this item point to different groups relevant for the organization. As far as we know, this scale has not been implemented in other studies regarding organizational (de)humanization.

Overall Summary Regarding Measures

Our first finding from reviewing measures that assess organizational (de)humanization is that most measures report the absence of humanness in organizations. In addition, of the three measures that do report humanness, that is, Bell and Khoury's (2011) balanced measure of organizational (de)humanization, Andrighetto's (2017) Scale for Instrumentality and Humanness, and Quintelier's (2021) Humanization Scale, only Bell and Khoury's (2011) measure was originally specifically construed for organizations. The other two measures were adapted to fit the organizational context. Secondly, the most widely used measure for organizational dehumanization (Scale for Organizational Dehumanization; Caesens et al., 2017) excludes *animalistic* dehumanization. Thirdly, the scales for (organizational) dehumanization were mostly based on Haslam's (2006) operationalization of humanness and dehumanization (i.e., mechanistic and/or animalistic dehumanization), whereas the measures for (working) objectification seem to be based on Waytz and Schroeder's (2014) operationalization of dehumanization (i.e., the denial of agency and/or mind). Fourth, the three scales that are construed specifically for organizational contexts (Bell and Khoury's, 2011, measure of organizational (de)humanization; Scale for Organizational Dehumanization by Caesens et al., 2017; and Crone

et al's, 2021, POWS) report from the perspective of the perceiver, whereas the more generally applicable measures vary in the perspectives of both actors and perceivers.

In the above, we have provided an overview of the conceptualizations and measures of organizational dehumanization, objectification, and organizational humanization. In the following section, we will address the second aim of our study, the relation between leadership and organizational (de)humanization.

Relation between Leadership and Organizational (De)humanization

In this section we will bring together the findings on the relation between organizational (de)humanization and leadership (RQ3 and RQ4 of our study). The 11 articles on this topic appeared only after the article by Bell and Khoury (2011) on organizational humanization was published. Leadership has been identified as one of the four categories that influence organizational dehumanization, via social interaction (Stinglhamber et al., 2021). As we aim here to clarify the relation between leadership and organizational (de)humanization, we will not address the other three categories, that is, work tasks, physical context, and procedural justice.

Just as the focus of the most commonly used measures has been solely on *dehumanization*, the attention of the research on leadership was also on how the behavior of leaders may lead to *dehumanization*. Until 2020, almost all studies aimed to explore the relation between negative forms of leadership and organizational *dehumanization*. It is only in very recent years that the relation between positive forms of leadership and organizational dehumanization has been the focus of investigation (Arriagada-Venegas et al., 2021; Moriano et al., 2021; Sainz et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). No studies so far have examined the relation between (positive forms of) leadership and organizational humanness or organizational humanization. In the following, we will give an overview of the five main findings of the body of knowledge retrieved from our review.

First, it is clear from our review that abusive leadership leads to organizational dehumanization. Abusive leadership is defined by Tepper (2000) as “the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (p. 178). Caesens and Stinglhamber (2019) concluded based on experimental data that abusive supervision leads to organizational dehumanization perceptions, which in turn have negative consequences for employees and organizations, that is, decreased employees' job satisfaction, affective commitment, and increased turnover intentions. Väyrynen and Laari-Salmela (2018) furthermore showed how dehumanizing practices by the employer erode perceived trustworthiness of the management team and/or the organization. Baldissarri et al. (2014) described how workers' perception of being objectified by their foremen was related to increased exhaustion, which in turn heightened the levels of workers' cynicism. In a survey and in an experimental study, Sainz and Baldissarri (2021) found indications that abusive supervision has a greater influence on organizational dehumanization than performing objectifying tasks. They also concluded that treating employees as instruments undermines their self-perception, their engagement, and, ultimately, their performance. Consequently it was suggested that dehumanizing practices (e.g., instrumental treatment) are not a useful, nor ethical strategy for any given organization (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021).

Second, positive leadership may reduce organizational dehumanization. Only four, very recent, cross-sectional studies addressed positive leadership (Arriagada-Venegas et al., 2021; Moriano et al., 2021; Sainz et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021). Positive leadership was conceptualized as high-quality exchanges between employees and their supervisor (Leader-Member-Exchanges, LMX) by Stinglhamber et al.

(2021), as security-providing leadership (Moriano et al., 2021), and as authentic leadership (Arriagada et al., 2021, Sainz et al., 2021). High-quality LMX (Stinglhamber et al., 2021) is characterized by respect, support, and the provision of developmental opportunities and resources that lead to the employees' experience of feeling treated as a human by their organization. Security-providing leadership (Moriano et al., 2021) is operationalized by being available, sensitive, and responsive to the followers' needs. Arriagada-Venegas et al. (2021) and Sainz et al. (2021) operationalized authentic leadership into the following elements: (1) relational transparency, (2) internalized moral perspective, (3) balanced processing, and (4) self-awareness.

Stinglhamber et al. (2021) observed that employees who have more high-quality exchanges with their supervisor tend to report less experiences of being dehumanized by their organization. Moriano et al. (2021) indicate that a psychological safety climate and organizational dehumanization respectively positively and negatively mediate the relationship between security providing leadership and burnout. Arriagada-Venegas et al. (2021) concluded that authentic leadership correlates negatively with organizational dehumanization and positively with organizational citizenship behaviors. Sainz et al. (2021) demonstrated that higher authentic leadership predicts lower organizational dehumanization as well as lower stress levels at work.

Third, all four studies that addressed positive forms of leadership draw on the operationalization of organizational dehumanization in the mechanistic way and apply the Scale for Organizational Dehumanization by Caesens et al. (2017), which measures the specific mechanistic way of dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization is not part of this measure, which raises the question if this specific measure impacts the knowledge we have on the relation between leadership and organizational dehumanization and if the results would be the same for animalistic dehumanization as for mechanistic dehumanization. None of these four studies addressed the concept of objectification.

Fourth, we detected no studies on the relation between positive or abusive leadership and organizational humanness, possibly related to the minor interest for organizational humanization. This lack of interest may also be influenced by the fact that the *absence* of humanization is more easily identified than its *presence* or that the presence of dehumanization might be more easily measured than the presence of humanization.

To conclude this section, we can state that we found promising indications that positive leadership can reduce organizational dehumanization. However, still very little is known about the specific leadership behaviors that lead to organizational humanization.

DISCUSSION

In this review we aimed to provide an overview of the research on humanness in organizations and organizational (de)humanization, with a specific focus on its conceptualizations, measures, and the relation with leadership behavior.

First, we conclude that the research is almost always centered on the absence of humanness at work, that is, the negative experience instead of the positive. This finding seems to suggest that organizational humanness can be equated to absent organizational dehumanization. However, just as health is more than the absence of disease, we suggest that humanness is more than the absence of dehumanization and thus conclude that this approach hampers our understanding of humanness. The fact that definitions and operationalizations of humanization are not readily available makes it difficult, if not impossible, to understand what is needed to enhance humanness. We suggest that the definitions of organizational humanness and organizational humanization need more attention to fill the gap in our knowledge about these concepts and operationalizations. Specifically, we suggest researchers to investigate the process of organizational humanization and the attributes

of experienced organizational humanness. The only definition of organizational humanization that we found, put forward by Bell and Khoury (2011), was “the experience of having one’s experiences, desires and feelings recognized by the organization and the opportunity for personal agency and self-actualization through creative and instrumental participation in organizational processes” (p. 4). This definition provides an interesting perspective but at the same time empirical testing of this definition is not yet available. Investigating this perspective in empirical settings could be a fruitful avenue for future research.

Second, we conclude that the concepts of organizational dehumanization and working objectification need clarification. It is as yet unclear to what extent these are distinct concepts and how they relate to the broader concept of dehumanization and humanness, including the uniquely human attributes and human nature attributes, as described by Haslam (2006). The most used definition of organizational dehumanization mainly concentrates on mechanistic dehumanization and does not include animalistic dehumanization. Since researchers confirm that animalistic dehumanization occurs in organizations as well, this calls for a redefinition of organizational dehumanization and an operationalization which includes more than just mechanistic dehumanization. Likewise, although the concept of objectification is defined in a way that it does include animalistic dehumanization, the term objectification suggests an emphasis on mechanistic dehumanization and on employees as tools and instruments. We therefore suggest applying the term organizational dehumanization in future scientific research on this theme with the operationalization that is used for working objectification, which includes elements of both mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization.

Third, in this review we noticed that most measures point to the negative side, that is, organizational *dehumanization*. With the narrow definition of mechanistic dehumanization these measures report only on a part of dehumanization in organizations. Measures that include the positive side (i.e., humanness) are not widely construed nor used for organizational contexts. These results call for a measure that focuses on the positive side and that includes both elements of humanness (i.e., uniquely human attributes as well as human nature attributes) to make sure the emphasis is not only on *dehumanization* and even more narrowly on *mechanistic* dehumanization in organizations.

Fourth, when it comes to the perspectives of organizational (de)humanization and objectification, we found that there are two different ways of operationalization, from the actor’s point of view and from the receiver’s point of view. These different perspectives are evident in the measures, which are sometimes focused on the experience of the employee and at other times have an emphasis on how the organization’s representative perceives the employee. We suggest that future research focuses on: (a) the process of organizational humanization, (b) how this process is influenced by the perception the organization (or its representative) has of employees, and (c) what the experiences of the employees are as a result of this perception. This can help clarifying the relation between the perceptions of actor and perceiver. In addition, we observed that the subject of the studies on organizational dehumanization is almost exclusively the employees. As a result, we argue that it is highly interesting to know more about the mutual organizational dehumanization between employees and supervisors and to understand if and how these processes are alike.

Fifth, considering the growing body of evidence that we now have indicating that abusive leadership has a negative effect on humanness in organizations, there is an increasing need to learn more about what leaders can do to *enhance* humanness in organizations. From very recent studies (Moriani et al., 2021; Stinglhamber et al., 2021), we know that positive LMX interactions can be helpful as well as leadership behavior that provides a sense of security within organizations. Both studies elaborate on the diminishing effect of these leadership behaviors on organizational dehumanization. It would be interesting to investigate if these behaviors do indeed contribute to more experienced humanness, or whether they might be a so-called

“hygienic factor” in the motivation of employees, meaning that they contribute to the elimination of the negative, but do not substantially support a positive experience for employees.

Based on this review we can conclude that most studies have focused on the negative-negative relation (abusive leadership-organizational dehumanization). Recently some articles focusing on the positive-negative relation (positive leadership-organizational dehumanization) have been published, but no articles yet focus on the positive-positive relation (positive leadership-organizational humanization). We propose that future research should include a focus on the relation between leadership and (the underlying processes of) the perception of organizational (de)humanization, the relation between leadership and objectification, and how these relations may be similar or different in nature. This gap in knowledge on leadership and organizational humanization also has important theoretical and practical implications for those who are willing and aiming to contribute to (re)humanize work and organizations in our time.

Strengths and Limitations

Since humanness and related concepts like (de)humanization seem to be employed in a nonspecific way, it might be possible that there are studies on humanness that use different terminology and as a consequence were not included in the search. For example, in this review we found some indications that the concept of dignity might be related to the absence of dehumanization (Heleno et al., 2018; Lucas, 2015; Thomas & Lucas, 2019; Zawadzki, 2018), but since this term was not part of the search string the evidence was too weak to conclude on this matter. This might be the case for other concepts as well, for instance a (de)humanization-related concepts in the field of ergonomics and labor relations, derived from a more sociological perspective. We cannot rule out that there might be additional insights and knowledge available when using a wider range of search terms.

Also, while we analyzed more in-depth the objectification in the workplace experienced by employees, we did leave out articles on sexual objectification or objectification of domestic workers. We also focused specifically on (de)humanization of employees in organizations and did not include patients or clients, given the aim of this study to focus on leadership within organizations. Our findings are hence to be understood within the organizational context and within the relation between leaders and employees.

Finally, it may be the case that research on ethical leadership, diversity, inclusion, and belonging could also shed light on the relation between leadership and humanness. Such studies may have not been identified due to the search strings used for this review.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this review provides important insights into the conceptualizations and measurement of organizational (de)humanization and objectification. Moreover, it identifies some of the main, albeit scarce, findings on how leadership behavior may impact experienced humanness in organizations.

CONCLUSION

In this review we aimed to give an overview of the research that has been conducted on humanness in organizations and more specifically on organizational (de)humanization, with a specific focus on definitions, conceptualizations, measures, and its relation with leadership behavior. We identify a need for elaboration on the concept of humanness in organizations, as well as measures that report on the positive

(organizational humanization and/or perceived humanness) instead of merely on the negative (e.g., organizational dehumanization). Similarly, it appears necessary to gain insight in which leadership behaviors contribute to humanness in organizations.

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NOTES

1. Supplementary material to this article can be found on OSF through the link: osf.io/3zdmc.
2. The resulting number of articles is 47 because Bell and Khoury (2011) fell into two categories (organizational dehumanization and organizational humanization).

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