

The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Commitment: New Underlying Processes

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INTRODUCTION

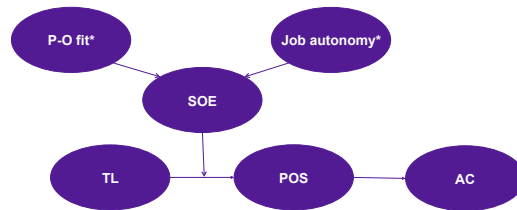
Theoretical framework

Despite the impressive support on the transformational leadership (TL)-followers' attitudes and behaviors relationships, relatively little is known about the processes by which transformational leaders influence their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bono & Judge, 2003; Yukl, 2006).

The present study aims to gain a better understanding of the reasons why followers of transformational leaders exhibit increased affective organizational commitment (AC). AC is defined as "an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Although research has shown that followers' attitudes (e.g., trust) toward leaders (e.g., Pillai, Schreishem, & Williams, 1999), followers' appraisals of themselves (e.g., self-efficacy) or their colleagues (e.g., team-efficacy) (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003; Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler, & Shi, 2004), or mechanisms rooted in the job (e.g., Korek, Felfe, & Zaepfernick-Rothe, 2010) mediate the relationship between TL and AC, no study has investigated mechanisms related to the organization as a whole.

Filling this gap, the present research examines two mechanisms focusing on the organization as a whole. First, we investigate how the TL-AC association vary with employees' consideration of supervisors as embodying the organization (supervisor's organizational embodiment or SOE, Eisenberger et al., 2010). Indeed, based on the degree of perceived similarity between supervisor's characteristics and those of the organization, employees would see their supervisors more as organizational agents or more as individuals in their own right, and this perception would influence the extent to which employees generalize the favorableness of their exchange relationship from the supervisor to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010). Second, we examine the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS) in the relationship between the TLxSOE interaction and AC. Indeed, numerous studies have shown that POS is strongly related to AC (e.g., Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and the treatment received from the supervisor has been found to exert a considerable influence over POS (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). Finally, based on Eisenberger et al.' (2010) proposition, we argue that when supervisors share the organizational goals and values (P-O fit) and have job autonomy, they are more likely to be perceived by their subordinates as embodying the organization (high SOE).

Hypotheses



Note. TL = transformational leadership; POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective organizational commitment; SOE = supervisor's organizational embodiment; P-O fit = person-organization fit.* Assessed from supervisor.

H1: The relationship between TL and AC is moderated by SOE

H2: POS mediates the relationship between the TLxSOE interaction and AC

H3a: The greater the degree to which the supervisor shares the organization's values, the greater will be the SOE among his/her subordinates

H3b: The greater the degree to which the supervisor has job autonomy in the organization, the greater will be the SOE among his/her subordinates

METHOD

Sample

We surveyed 287 subordinates and 83 supervisors of one of Belgium's leading water producers (response rate= 37%).
Note: This sample size was reduced to 249 subordinates and 75 supervisors for testing Hypotheses 3a and 3b

Procedure

A cross-sectional study (Web-based survey)

Measures

TL: 20 items (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, MLQ-Form 5x, Bass & Avolio, 2004) ($\alpha = .97$)

POS: 8 items (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) ($\alpha = .90$)

AC: 6 items (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) ($\alpha = .87$)

SOE: 5 items (4 items from Eisenberger et al., 2010; 1 item created for the study) ($\alpha = .93$)

P-O fit (assessed from supervisor): 3 items (Cable & DeRue, 2002) ($\alpha = .92$)

Job autonomy (assessed from supervisor): 3 items (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006) ($\alpha = .94$)

RESULTS

Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results for Hypotheses 1 and 2

PREDICTORS	DEPENDENT VARIABLES					
	POS			AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT		
	Coefficient	SE	t ratio	Coefficient	SE	t ratio
Intercept (β_0)						
Intercept (γ_{00})	3.04	.03	92.80***	3.47 / 3.47	.04 / .03	90.41*** / 107.89***
Transformational leadership (β_1)						
Intercept (γ_{10})	-.29	.03	9.29***	.21 / .02	.04 / .04	5.75*** / .37
SOE (β_2)						
Intercept (γ_{20})	.06	.05	1.14	.07 / .03	.05 / .04	1.33 / .77
Transformational leadership x SOE (β_3)						
Intercept (γ_{30})	.32	.05	6.68***	.24 / .02	.05 / .04	4.53*** / .48
POS (β_4)						
Intercept (γ_{40})	---	---	---	---	---	---
Intercept (γ_{41})	---	---	---	---	---	---

Note. Level-1 N = 287, Level-2 N = 83. SOE = supervisor's organizational embodiment; POS = perceived organizational support.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling results for Hypotheses 3a and 3b

PREDICTORS	DEPENDENT VARIABLE		
	SOE		
	Coefficient	SE	t ratio
Intercept (β_0)			
Intercept (γ_{00})	2.88	.05	58.75***
Supervisor's person-organization fit (β_1)	.17	.07	2.46*
Supervisor's job autonomy (β_2)	.14	.06	2.29*

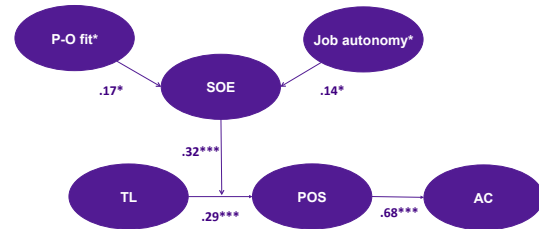
Note. Level-1 N = 249, Level-2 N = 75. SOE = supervisor's organizational embodiment.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hypotheses 1 and 2

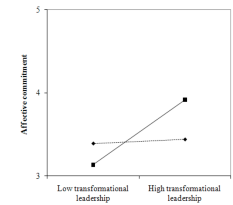
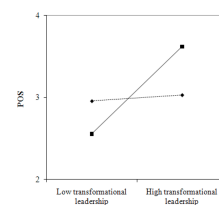
- The relationship between TL and AC is moderated by SOE \rightarrow H1 is supported
- POS mediates the relationship between the TLxSOE interaction and AC ($z = 5.57; p < .001$) \rightarrow H2 is supported
- The indirect effect of TL on AC through POS is significant when SOE is high ($z = 8.54; p < .001$) and not significant when SOE is low ($z = 0.78; ns$)

Hypotheses 3a and 3b

- Supervisor's person-organization fit is positively related to SOE \rightarrow H3a is supported
- Supervisor's job autonomy is positively related to SOE \rightarrow H3b is supported



Note. TL = transformational leadership; POS = perceived organizational support; AC = affective organizational commitment; SOE = supervisor's organizational embodiment; P-O fit = person-organization fit.* Assessed from supervisor.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.



DISCUSSION

Summary

- The relationship between TL and AC increases as a function of SOE \rightarrow consistent with (a) the idea that supervisors may be viewed as acting more on their own behalf or more as organizational agents, depending on the extent to which subordinates identify them with the organization, and (b) Eisenberger et al.' (2010) research in which SOE was found to moderate the relationship between leader-member exchange and AC.
- The moderating influence of SOE on the relationship between TL and AC is mediated by POS \rightarrow consistent with studies in which the favorable treatment from supervisors was found to be a determinant of POS (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2002).
- Supervisor's P-O fit and job autonomy enhance subordinates' SOE \rightarrow consistent with Eisenberger et al.'s (2010) assumption that the extent to which subordinates perceive their supervisor as embodying the organization depends on the supervisor's shared values and beliefs with the organization and the supervisor's gratitude for the power and influence accorded by the organization.
- Limitations and future research:** (a) cross-sectional design \rightarrow longitudinal studies with repeated measures are needed to confirm the causality of the relationships, (b) common method bias, (c) overall measure of TL \rightarrow replication in other settings where the five sub-dimensions are less intercorrelated, and (d) generalizability of our results to other followers' attitudes and behaviors.

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