



Transformational leadership as a mediator between emotional intelligence and team outcomes[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Using leadership theory we examined whether transformational leadership mediates the link between the emotional intelligence of team leaders and three outcomes as perceived by followers: leader effectiveness, team effectiveness, and service climate. Data were collected from 859 employees, working in 55 teams in a South Korean public-sector organization and results were analyzed at the group level. All variables were modeled in a path diagram and tested using hierarchical regression analysis and structural equation modeling. Same-source bias in the findings was controlled for by randomly splitting the sample into three separate groups. The results show that transformational leadership mediates the relationships between emotional intelligence and leader effectiveness, as well as between emotional intelligence and service climate, although not between emotional intelligence and team effectiveness. Practical implications of the findings are discussed, together with limitations and ideas for future research.

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1. Introduction

The study of emotions in the context of leadership has become a key topic of interest among organizational behavioral researchers over the past decade. This is reflected for example in studies on the impact of leaders' emotional expression in the workplace (Bono & Ilies, 2006; George, 1995; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005), emotional contagion between leaders and followers (Barsade, 2002), as well as in how leadership styles influence the emotional states of employees and their job performance (Bono, Folds, Vinson, & Muros, 2007; McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002). Likewise, popular press and academic interest in the utility of emotional intelligence in the leadership process has not dissipated despite serious attempts to discredit the concept (e.g., Antonakis, 2004; Locke, 2005).

The scholarly study of emotional intelligence (EI) began in the early 1990's when Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) initially defined emotional intelligence as: "the sub-set of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." Being emotionally intelligent involves being able to actively identify, understand, process, and influence one's own emotions and those of others to guide feeling, thinking, and subsequent behaviors (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Of course, emotional intelligence is a broad construct and measures such as the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) were not developed expressly for the workplace. Yet various measures of emotional intelligence do appear to correlate with important leader and organizational outcomes. A growing body of literature has suggested that leaders' ability to understand and

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manage their own feelings, moods and emotions, as well as those of their followers contributes to effective leadership in a variety of organizations (Gardner & Stough, 2002; George, 2000; Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). Moreover, researchers have argued that the emotional intelligence of leaders is a critical component in leading a team effectively (e.g., Jordan & Lawrence, 2009; Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2003).

Amidst this work a key question remains: how do leaders with high emotional intelligence exert their influence in work related contexts? That is, how do leaders with a better awareness, assimilation, understanding, and managing of own emotions and those of others affect organizational outcomes? The purpose of the current study was to advance research on emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in the following ways: first, we argued that the effect of emotional intelligence on organizational outcomes is mediated by a transformational leadership. Second, we examined the influence of the emotional intelligence of a leader at the group-level of analysis. Third, we conducted our study in South Korea, rather than in the West where most studies on emotional intelligence have been conducted to date. And last, we obtained a sufficiently large database to statistically control for possible common-method bias. A path-analytic model is presented in which emotional intelligence affects transformational leadership; and in which transformational leadership is subsequently linked to three outcome variables, namely leadership effectiveness, team effectiveness, and service climate.

2. Theory and hypotheses development

2.1. Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership

A growing body of studies has shown that emotional intelligence is inherently associated with transformational leadership (e.g., Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000; Leban & Zulauf, 2004; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Palmer, Walls, Burgess, and Stough (2001) found significant correlations between emotional intelligence and several factors of the transformational leadership model. Specifically, the ability to monitor and manage emotions correlated with the inspirational, motivational and individualized consideration factors of transformational leadership. Similarly, Gardner and Stough (2002), and later Barbuto and Burbach (2006), showed that the emotional intelligence of leaders accounted for the majority of the variance in transformational leadership. Collectively, the findings of previous studies provide evidence that leaders who scored high on emotional intelligence were perceived by followers as exhibiting more transformational leadership behaviors.

Transformational leadership theory has also highlighted the importance of leaders' influence on followers' emotional states (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000) and several studies have provided emotion-type insights into the transformational leader–follower linkage. McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002), for example, showed that transformational leaders who suggested alternative solutions to problems and who showed individualized consideration to followers were able to redirect follower negative feelings of frustration and helplessness to more constructive ones, which, in turn, led to heightened followers' performance. Conversely, perceptions of minimal transformational leadership behaviors resulted in high levels of follower frustration and low performance levels. Recent studies have also shown that energetic, exciting, and emotionally appealing expressions of charisma created positive moods in followers (Bono & Ilies, 2006) and lessened the emotion-related phenomena of burnout and stress in the workplace (Bono et al., 2007). Such results imply that transformational leadership can be interpreted as a process in which leaders use emotions to: communicate a vision to, as well as elicit responses from, followers; and to ensure that followers are emotionally motivated to perform their tasks beyond their own expectations (Brown & Moshavi, 2005; Humphrey, 2002).

The qualities of empathy, motivation, self-awareness, trust, and emotional stability, all qualities of a transformational leader, are also considered to be important elements of emotional intelligence (Bar-on, 1997; Goleman, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). From the angle of individual and contextual antecedents of transformational leadership behavior, emotional intelligence can be seen as the bedrock for transformational leaders. Based on our review of the literature we propose a direct linkage between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership.

2.2. Transformational leadership and leader/team effectiveness

The positive effects of transformational leadership on leader effectiveness and performance have been found at the individual, group, and organizational level (see Burke et al., 2006; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders induce strong levels of satisfaction (Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008); citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005); and service performance (Liao & Chuang, 2007) in followers. Transformational leaders, who showed individual consideration toward individual followers' growth and development by spending time to teach and coach, raised followers' awareness of the significance and worth of specified work outcomes and how their jobs affected organizational performance (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005) (Table 1).

Moreover, transformational leaders can dramatically influence a team environment when they change the attitudes and values of their followers in the direction of collective goals (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). They then create team atmospheres in which employees become convinced that they can attain higher goals than they initially thought possible which, in turn, has led to positive team performance in both subjective (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007) and objective measures of performance (Koene, Vogelaar, & Soeters, 2002; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007). DeGroot, Kiker, and Cross (2000, p. 363) have noted that “an effect size of transformational leadership at the group-level of analysis is double in magnitude relative to the effect size at the individual level.” Over time, the positive influence of transformational leadership on team effectiveness/performance in various organizational settings, for example, in the military (e.g., Bass et al., 2003; Lim & Ployhart, 2004) and in corporate settings (Shin & Zhou, 2003) has

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