



To whom does transformational leadership matter more? An examination of neurotic and introverted followers and their organizational citizenship behavior

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 September 2014

Received in revised form 19 June 2015

Accepted 25 June 2015

Available online 16 July 2015

Handling Editor: Shelly Dionne

Keywords:

Transformational leadership

Neuroticism

Extraversion

Organizational citizenship behavior

Substitutes for leadership

ABSTRACT

Despite the massive amount of transformational leadership research, the role of followers has not been well-examined in the transformational leadership literature. To understand how leader–follower interactions influence follower organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), we examined the cross-level interactions between transformational leadership and two follower personality traits (neuroticism and extraversion). Using a sample of 215 leaders and 1284 followers, results showed that follower neuroticism moderated the relationships between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior directed toward other individuals (OCB-I) and toward the organization (OCB-O), such that relationships were stronger for those high in neuroticism. Further, follower extraversion moderated the relationships between transformational leadership and OCB-I and OCB-O, such that relationships were stronger for those low in extraversion. Therefore, the inspirational and developmental nature of transformational leaders can offset follower neuroticism and introversion and guide these employees to perform more OCB despite their tendencies to worry, lack confidence, and be shy and withdrawn.

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Transformational leaders encourage employee commitment to the mission and values of the organization and inspire motivation by building collective aspirations and beliefs and a sense of community that is based on relationships, shared values, and common goals. The four dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) emphasize areas such as trust and values, providing meaning and challenge to follower tasks while inspiring followers to go beyond what they think is possible, challenging old assumptions and beliefs while encouraging new ways of thinking, as well as coaching and mentoring while considering the needs, abilities, interests, and goals of followers (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Given this “change-oriented” and “challenging status quo” nature of transformational leadership, it is not surprising that transformational leaders can lead their followers to perform above and beyond what is required, thereby leading them to engage in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

Although this positive association between transformational leadership and follower OCB has been empirically supported (Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011), some researchers have argued that transformational leaders do not impact all followers equally (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). This implies that the positive influence of transformational leadership is likely to depend on follower differences such as personality. However, very few follower differences have been examined as moderators that impact the underlying processes whereby leaders influence followers.

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The current study takes an interactionist approach (Gilmore, Hu, Wei, Tetrick, & Zaccaro, 2013; Li, Chiaburu, Kirkman, & Xie, 2013) to further explore the relationships between transformational leadership and OCB. The interactionist approach enhances our understanding by suggesting that “the influence of transformational leadership on employee behaviors is most accurately understood by examining how transformational leadership interacts with employee characteristics” (Gilmore et al., 2013, p. 1062). Specifically, we examine the interactions between follower neuroticism and extraversion and transformational leadership in explaining follower OCB. Examining the role of neuroticism and introversion (opposite of extraversion) is interesting because although these traits have been consistently found to be negatively related to OCB (see Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011 for meta-analytic evidence), little is known yet about whether transformational leaders can engage neurotics or introverts to perform above and beyond job requirements.

Specifically, we expect that a transformational leader may have even more positive influence on neurotic or introverted followers because their tendencies (being worried, nervous, and lacking confidence for neurotics; being shy, withdrawn and solitary for introverts) can at least partially be overcome by a leader who engages in idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. By examining neuroticism and extraversion—two of the Five-Factor Model (FFM; Barrick & Mount, 1991) personality traits—as moderators, we make contributions to the transformational leadership and personality literatures.

Our primary contribution is examining the moderating role of follower personality in the transformational leadership–OCB relationship. This is important because we develop theoretical rationale that helps explain the leader–follower interactions and their impact on follower behaviors, thereby answering calls to examine the follower’s role more closely (e.g., Antonakis & House, 2013; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Klein & House, 1995; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Yukl, 1999). Relatedly, Felfe, Tartler, & Liepmann (2004) emphasized the role of follower personality traits in understanding how followers perceive and are influenced by transformational leadership behaviors. The current study therefore extends both the personality and leadership lines of research by addressing an important omission in the literature, providing a more complete picture of the transformational leadership process.

More specifically, we make a contribution to the transformational leadership and personality literatures by examining two broad FFM traits (neuroticism and extraversion). Although neuroticism and extraversion are consistently included in most models of personality and therefore well-examined in the literatures, most transformational leadership research has examined narrow traits as moderators, such as need for autonomy and growth need strength (Wofford, Whittington, & Goodwin, 2001; Yun, Cox, & Sims, 2006), collective efficacy and self-efficacy (Walumbwa, Lawler, Avolio, Wang, & Shi, 2005), allocentrism/idiocentrism (Nahum-Shani & Somech, 2011), and internal locus of control (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2009). One exception is De Hoogh & Den Hartog’s (2009) study that also examined follower neuroticism as a potential moderator in the relationship between two types of leadership (charismatic and autocratic). However, their results are inconsistent across two small Dutch samples; their finding that the negative relationship between charismatic leadership and burnout was stronger for those with lower levels of neuroticism was supported only in their smaller sample ($N = 91$). As a result, empirical evidence seems equivocal regarding the role of follower neuroticism in the complex leadership process between leaders and followers.

Furthermore, our theoretical framework of two broad FFM traits and transformational leadership is noteworthy. According to the compatibility principle (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), the concepts at the same level of specificity can maximize their predictive power. Given that transformational leadership has been examined at a broader level (e.g., Bono & Anderson, 2005; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), we expect that neuroticism and extraversion, the two broad FFM traits, will increase the predictive power of their interactions with transformational leadership in explaining variance in OCBs.

To summarize, we examine follower neuroticism and extraversion as moderators in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower OCBs in multi-level contexts. We provide theoretical rationale and empirical evidence linking the transformational leadership, personality, and OCB literatures. Our theoretical framework also has important practical implications. This is not only because employee OCBs are closely related with numerous individual, team, and organizational outcomes (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009), but also because we can broaden our understanding of how to overcome the weakness of neurotics and introverts in organizations.

Hypotheses development

While we are primarily interested in the potential moderating effect of follower personality, we first consider the direct effects of transformational leadership on follower OCBs.

The direct influence of transformational leadership

Transformational leaders encourage their followers to accept and internalize the organization’s mission, visions, and goals, thereby leading to feelings of belonging and identification and to enhanced follower OCB (Shamir et al., 1993), whether directed toward other individuals (OCB-I) or toward the organization itself (OCB-O). Because of the motivating abilities of transformational leaders to inspire followers to perform beyond expectations in a selfless manner and challenge the status quo (Bass & Avolio, 1990), these leaders increase follower effort beyond the requirements of the job description and thus perform more OCB (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). For this reason, transformational leadership has been found to be more strongly related to OCB than in-role performance or task

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