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Effects of leadership style, anonymity, and rewards on creativity-relevant processes and outcomes in an electronic meeting system context

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Abstract

Thirty-nine student groups participated in a laboratory experiment conducted to study the effects of leadership style (transactional vs. transformational), anonymity (identified vs. anonymous interaction), and rewards (individual vs. group) on creativity-relevant group processes and outcomes in two decision-making tasks supported by an electronic meeting system (EMS). Evidence for social loafing was observed, i.e., anonymity led to lower participation and cooperation in the group rewards condition *relative* to the individual rewards condition. Further analysis revealed that social loafing was confined to the transactional leadership condition. Corresponding to the social loafing effect, anonymity led to lower group efficacy and satisfaction with the task and higher originality of solutions in the group rewards condition *relative* to the individual rewards condition. Transactional leadership was associated with greater group efficacy and solution originality than transformational leadership. Anonymity moderated the effects of leadership on group efficacy and satisfaction with the task; transactional leadership was associated with higher group efficacy and satisfaction with the task in the identified condition only.

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1. Introduction

Organizational leaders are under pressure to find ways to increase creativity in their organizations due to increasing globalization, competition, and pace of technological change. Leaders have at their disposal various means to influence creativity in their organizations (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Leaders could influence their followers' creativity by altering their leadership style (Jung & Avolio, 1999; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 1997; Sosik, Avolio, & Kahai, 1997, 1998; Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1998). However, in spite of the potential for a leader's behavior to influence creativity in organizations, studies examining the effects of a leader's behavior on followers' creativity have not been very common (Mumford et al., 2002).

A leader may also employ collaborative group technology such as electronic meeting systems (EMS) to increase their followers' creativity (Nunamaker, Briggs, Mittleman, Vogel, & Balthazard, 1997). EMS provide features such as anonymity and parallel communication to overcome communication barriers such as evaluation apprehension and domination by a few that typically affect the generation of creative ideas in unsupported groups. They may also provide features that help the generation of creative ideas by providing support for structuring the group process. These features include agenda setting and suggest a "normative" process to the group. Several studies that examined the effects of leadership behaviors on followers' creative processes and outcomes have been conducted with EMS-supported groups (e.g., Kahai et al., 1997; Sosik et al., 1997, 1998; Sosik, Kahai, et al., 1998). These preliminary studies suggest that leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, participative, and directive, may interact with EMS features, such as anonymity, to influence creativity-relevant processes and outcomes.

To influence a group's creativity-relevant processes and outcomes, a leader may also provide rewards to group members depending on their contributions (Mumford et al., 2002). Group members may be rewarded for their individual contributions, their group's contribution, or for both an individual and group's contributions (Wageman, 1995). The distribution of rewards may play an important role in determining a group's creativity-relevant processes and outcomes through its interaction with other factors defining the group, its task, or its operating conditions (Slavin, 1991). These factors include the ability of group members to identify each other's contributions—a condition determined by the configuration of the EMS that the group may be employing. For instance, group members may be more likely to loaf when their contributions are anonymous *and* the whole group's contribution is evaluated instead of individual contributions. Social loafing represents a process loss, which may reduce a group's level of creativity (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989).

The three factors identified above as being under a leader's control, i.e., leadership style, use of an EMS, and rewards, may interact with each other to influence creativity-relevant group processes and outcomes (Nunamaker et al., 1997). For example, transformational leaders are likely to be more effective than transactional leaders at inspiring followers to identify with a mission while rallying them to work together to achieve higher performance (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Thus, relative to transactional leaders, transformational leaders may activate intrinsic motivation mechanisms in group members to encourage their

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