



The influence of leader core self-evaluation on follower reports of transformational leadership

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ABSTRACT

The role of leader core self-evaluations (CSE) was investigated for its influence on follower perceptions of transformational leadership (TFL) dimensions in a sample of 464 employees and 150 leaders from three Chinese organizations. As hypothesized, after controlling for leaders' and followers' demographic variables and modeling fixed-effects to account for the potential impact of omitted variables, we found that leader CSE was significantly and positively related to follower perception of leader TFL. The result enhances the understanding of TFL antecedents.

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1. Introduction

Transformational leadership (TFL) is considered one of the most influential contemporary leadership theories (Judge & Bono, 2000). Transformational leaders are theorized to enhance followers' motivation and performance by engaging in a class of behaviors: intellectual stimulation (i.e., challenging the status quo); inspirational motivation (i.e., articulating a compelling vision of the future); charisma or idealized influence (i.e., engaging in behaviors that build followers' trust in and identification with their leaders); and individualized consideration (i.e., attending to followers' needs and listening to their concerns) (Bass, 1985). Indeed, a large body of empirical research has demonstrated the positive value of TFL on follower attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction, supervisory satisfaction, motivation, and behavioral outcomes such as job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (see Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011 for meta-analytic reviews).

Given the critical role of TFL in building employee effectiveness, an important question naturally follows: Why are some leaders more likely to engage in TFL behaviors than others? Recently, a handful of studies has begun to explore several underlying personality bases for answers to this question (Bass & Bass, 2008; Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge & Long, 2012; Khoo & Burch, 2008; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005). Among many relevant personality variables, core self-evaluation (CSE), a fundamental evaluation of one's own effectiveness and worthiness (Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998), appears to be particularly salient to leadership effectiveness (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). Based on assessors' judgments of archival information gleaned from historical sources of chief executive officers (CEOs) from 1903 to 2002, Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, and Hiller (2009) suggested that CEOs with high CSE showed more TFL behaviors than those low in CSE. These historical findings concerning the leadership behavior of major league baseball CEOs suggest the possible relevance of CSE to contemporary leaders, including those at non-executive levels of the organization. This is important to examine given that although CEOs play a crucial role in making the strategic decisions for the organizations (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005), lower-level managers have a more direct influence on how employees feel and act through their daily interactions with employees. It is also important to consider that

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only when leaders' TFL behaviors are perceived, recognized, and appreciated by their followers, do those behaviors have positive value for organizational effectiveness (Bass, 1990). As Yammarino and Dubinsky (1994, p. 792) noted, TFL involves the extraordinariness seen “in the eyes of the beholder” and follower attribution of TFL is the key for understanding the importance of TFL. Thus, a primary focus of the current study was to further this area of inquiry by theorizing and investigating leader CSE as an antecedent of TFL as perceived by their followers.

We sought to make at least two contributions to the literature, illustrated in Fig. 1. First, we extend the growing but still limited body of research on the antecedents of TFL (Bommer, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2004; Judge & Bono, 2000; Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Peterson, Walumbwa, Byron, & Myrowitz, 2009; Rubin et al., 2005). Specifically, we attempted to assess the purported dispositional foundation of TFL by examining leaders' CSE as a potential driver. Second, the leadership (Elkins & Keller, 2003) and CSE (Piccolo, Judge, Takahashi, Watanabe, & Locke, 2005) literatures have both called for more studies involving non-Western samples to explore whether leadership and personality theories developed in the United States generalize to other cultures. Our investigation of three Chinese companies represents a response to these calls.

2. Leader core self-evaluation and transformational leadership

CSE is a broad and general concept that represents the fundamental appraisal that people make about themselves (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). According to Judge et al. (1997), CSE is a higher-order latent construct that captures four core personality traits: *self-esteem*, or the overall evaluation of one's own worth; *generalized self-efficacy*, or beliefs about one's own capabilities of performing well across situations; *neuroticism*, or tendency to focus on negative aspects of the self; and *locus of control*, or beliefs events in life are determined either by internal or external factors. These four traits, although distinct, are highly related and comprise the construct of CSE (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000; Judge et al., 1998). In general, people who are high on CSE possess positive self-image as demonstrated by high levels of self-esteem, emotional stability, general self-efficacy, and internal locus of control, whereas people with low CSE tend to have a generally negative self-regard (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). As Judge et al. (1997) indicated, the overarching CSE construct provides the dispositional basis to guide individuals' actions in specific situations and affect their motivation to consistently display these actions and behaviors (Bono & Colbert, 2005; Bono & Judge, 2003; Judge et al., 1998). Applied to leadership positions, CSE is commonly seen as a socially desirable trait for leadership effectiveness (Judge, Piccolo et al., 2009).

The positive self-view demonstrated in CSE is consistent with the four behavioral patterns that are displayed by a transformational leader (Bass, 1985, 1990). First, to be a transformational leader, a leader needs to provide intellectual stimulation, encourage followers to challenge assumptions, reframe problems, and be willing to take risks, which are bonded with leaders' cultivation of high levels of confidence in followers. From a social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1986, 1997), high levels of generalized self-efficacy, a central component of CSE, enable people to focus on their jobs, be persistent in the face of risks and difficulties, and be confident in their work capabilities across situations. In addition, research has found that leaders' internal locus of control, another key component of CSE, is significantly related to their intellectual stimulation behaviors (Howell & Avolio, 1993). In general, high CSE leaders view themselves as competent, capable, and in control of their work (Judge, van Vianen, & de Pater, 2004). This motivates them to actively seek new challenges and to discover unconventional ways to conduct work (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Hurst, 2007; Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006), which acts to shape their intellectual stimulation behaviors. Second, TFL requires leaders to serve as role models, to communicate compelling visions to followers, and to engage in inspirational motivation behaviors. Leaders with high CSE tend to have an overall positive evaluation of their self-worth in every sphere of life, including their jobs (Locke, McClellan, & Knight, 1996) and perceived future potential in the workplace, which in turn makes them more likely than low CSE leaders to transmit positivity and enthusiasm to their followers. Third, TFL consists of a pattern of charismatic and inspiring behaviors that serve to encourage followers to trust, admire, and identify with their leaders (Bass, 1985). Leaders with positive self-regard are less likely to be influenced by external pressures and difficulties (Rotter, 1966) and are more likely to focus on pursuing their goals (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). In effect, CSE was shown to positively relate to goal attainment (Judge et al., 2005). As such, followers with leaders high on CSE

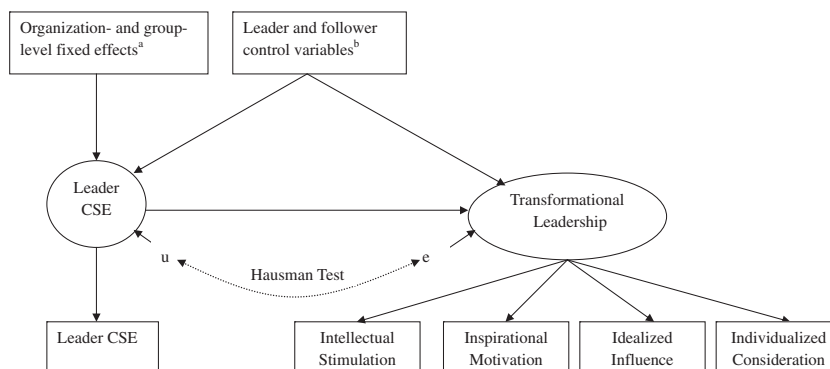


Fig. 1. The hypothesized model. ^aOrganization- and group-level fixed effects include the cluster mean of follower-level control variables and organizational membership. ^bLeader and follower control variables include sex, age, and education of leaders and followers, and follower organizational tenure and dyadic tenure.

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