



Personality and transformational leadership: The moderating effect of organizational context



Julie-Élaine Phaneuf^a, Jean-Sébastien Boudrias^{a,*}, Vincent Rousseau^b, Éric Brunelle^c

^a Department of Psychology, University of Montreal, P.O. Box. 6128, Downtown Station, Montreal H3C 3J7, Canada

^b School of Industrial Relations, University of Montreal, P.O. Box. 6128, Downtown Station, Montreal H3C 3J7, Canada

^c Department of Management, HEC Montréal, 3000, chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine, Montreal H3T 2A7, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 February 2016

Received in revised form 18 June 2016

Accepted 21 June 2016

Available online 1 July 2016

Keywords:

Transformational leadership

Personality

Organizational characteristics

Interaction analysis

ABSTRACT

Understanding the antecedents of transformational leadership is an important issue, given the potential benefits of this leadership style. Based on the trait activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), this study aimed at testing the moderating role of the organizational context on the relationship between personality and transformational leadership. Results from regression analyses on a sample of 89 leaders and their 643 followers show that leaders who have relationship-oriented personalities emerge as transformational leaders only when they evolve in a supportive organizational context. These results support the relevance of considering the effect of individual factors and contextual factors together to better understand the conditions that are conducive to the adoption of transformational leadership.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Transformational leadership (TL) has been the object of an impressive number of studies (see the literature review of Dinh et al. (2014)). This style of leadership is associated with important organizational benefits (Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). Although the effects of TL are well documented, its antecedents are less so.

Existing research has shown that the personality traits most strongly associated with TL (Bono & Judge, 2004; Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel, & Gutermann, 2015) overlap with those strongly associated with the emergence of other forms of leadership (e.g.: extroversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience; Ensari, Riggio, Christian, & Carlsaw, 2011; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Despite these tendencies, variations in the strength and direction of the relationships suggest moderator variables (Judge et al., 2002). In this respect, many authors recommend studying the interactions between contextual factors and personality to better understand the emergence of leadership (Bommer, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2004; Zaccaro, 2012).

Two theoretical models are used in this study to develop a contextualized comprehension of antecedents of TL behaviours. First, we rely on trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003), which proposes that some situations may enhance the effect of certain personality traits on leadership or enable the expression of personality traits favourable to leadership that emerges only when the context allows it. Second, we rely on

Bartram's personality model (Bartram, 2005) proposing personality variables that could be matched with TL dimensions, providing a specific framework helping the prediction of TL behaviours and facilitating the identification of relevant contextual moderators. Relying on these two models, the objective of this study is to examine how personality and context interact to foster the adoption of TL.

1.1. Transformational leadership

TL is a style of leadership geared towards change and towards improving individual and collective performance (Bass & Bass, 2008). This style of leadership is manifested through four leadership behaviours. *Individualized consideration* implies that leaders pay attention to, respect and care about their employees and their development. *Intellectual stimulation* underlies leaders' tendencies to innovate, to challenge the status quo, as well as to be open to change and new ideas. *Inspirational motivation* refers to leaders' ability to motivate their employees to perform by raising their expectations using an attractive vision of the future. *Idealized influence* corresponds to leaders' charisma and attitudes that make them role models who motivate and influence their employees.

Although TL was conceptualized in four dimensions, the empirical results highlight that the inspirational motivation dimension is not a factor that is independent from the idealized influence dimension (Bass & Bass, 2008; Judge & Bono, 2000). Following some authors (Bono & Judge, 2004), we chose to combine these two dimensions under the designation "charisma."

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jean-sebastien.boudrias@umontreal.ca (J.-S. Boudrias).

1.2. Personality and trait activation theory

According to trait activation theory, for behavioural predictions to be optimized, traits should be considered as a latent potential that is contextually activated. It is thus important to understand the triggers and the contextual characteristics associated with traits being expressed as sought-after behaviours.

Past research indicates that when personality is modeled with the five-factor model, it allows us to predict TL in a mitigated manner (Bono & Judge, 2004; Deinert et al., 2015). This is why authors recommend using models that differ from the ones that have been used thus far (Bartram, 2005; Bono & Judge, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007). Relying on a criterion-oriented approach using compound variables to evaluate personality would help to better predict target behaviours than broad personality factors (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2005).

The present study therefore uses Bartram's (2005) model, which provides personality compounds created to predict performance and the leadership behaviours in use. Four of the compound variables proposed by Bartram (2005) are conceptually aligned with the TL behavioural dimensions (Table 1). Consequently, these were selected in this study as potential personality predictors of TL.

Trait activation theory emphasizes that personality traits guide the emission of behaviours, but situations enhance or reduce the impact of traits on the behaviour by sending relevant or restrictive indicators or signals (Tett & Burnett, 2003). A situation may thus send signals that are either favourable or unfavourable to the expression of certain personality traits. It is therefore expected that leaders who perceive contextual indicators that are consistent with their natural tendencies will find their well-being and feelings of satisfaction enhanced (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), which will enable them to evolve within their comfort zone and to exhibit all their leadership potential (Phaneuf et al., 2005). Moreover, it is known that the link between personality traits and relevant situations that allow them to be activated increases the explanatory contribution of traits to the behaviours studied (Haaland & Christiansen, 2002). This link based on content similarity between personality compounds and situations thus guided the moderation hypotheses described below.

1.2.1. Relational tendency of leaders and organizational consideration

The relational tendency, represented by the “supporting and cooperating” compound, should be related to the individualized consideration dimension of TL. This tendency can be associated with such traits as agreeability, emotional intelligence or concern for others (Harms & Credé, 2010). Caring, altruism, agreeableness and warmth traits, as well as emotional intelligence, are specifically associated with TL (Deinert et al., 2015; Hetland & Sandal, 2003; Ross & Offermann, 1997; Singh & Krishnan, 2008). That said, the correlations found are generally of limited range, and previous studies showed different forms of relationship between agreeability factor and TL, namely positive (Deinert et al., 2015; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005), negative (Lim & Ployhart, 2004) or non-significant (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). The variability observed in the results suggests that

the traits associated with the relational tendency could be influenced by the characteristics of the work context. According to trait activation theory, an organizational context oriented towards consideration for the employees could activate leaders' relational tendencies and foster the expression of individualized consideration by sending a relevant signal to individuals who have this tendency. Judge and Cable (1997) found agreeability to be associated with a preference for supportive organizational cultures in comparison with performance-oriented cultures. Therefore, if leaders perceive that their organization values this tendency, they will feel that they can continue in the same manner, openly listening to their employees and being more proactive in supporting them.

Hypothesis 1. *The relationship between the “supporting and cooperating” compound and individualized consideration behaviours is enhanced by the perception of organizational consideration.*

1.2.2. Innovative tendency of leaders and innovative climate

Leaders' innovative tendencies, represented by the “creating and conceptualizing” compound, are closely related conceptually to intellectual stimulation (Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008). However, the correlations between TL and similar personal tendencies towards creativity, openness to change and critical thinking vary by study, from positive (Deinert et al., 2015; de vries, 2008; Hetland & Sandal, 2003), to negative (Ross & Offermann, 1997), to non-significant (Piel, 2008). These results suggest that the way leaders' orientation towards creativity and innovation relates to TL depends on the organizational context and on the signals perceived with regards to intellectual stimulation. Following the trait activation theory, an improvement-oriented work environment could enhance the relationship between the innovative tendency of leaders and intellectual stimulation. Since a leader's openness to experience is associated with a preference for an innovation-oriented culture (Judge & Cable, 1997), the presence of such a context should activate this trait and increase intellectual stimulation behaviours. Indeed, De Hoogh et al. (2005) study suggests that openness to experience becomes a positive predictor of TL only when the organizational context is perceived as dynamic and change-oriented.

Hypothesis 2. *The relationship between the “creating and conceptualizing” compound and intellectual stimulation behaviours is enhanced by the perception of an innovative climate.*

1.2.3. Expressive capacity of leaders and clarity of organizational objectives

Conveying a vision is central to TL. The “interacting and presenting” compound is likely to foster TL through the charisma dimension, which operates through a personification and development of the organizational vision (Bass & Bass, 2008). This enhancement of the organizational vision requires leaders to have the ability to communicate messages effectively for them to be perceived as transformational leaders. Leaders who are extroverted, who gravitate naturally towards people and who communicate confidently would be more likely to be perceived as charismatic or transformational by their collaborators (Deinert et al., 2015; Ensari et al., 2011). That said, once again, the environment can influence leaders' traits and behaviours involved in the attribution of charisma. In this regard, the credibility of leaders and of their communications depends on the broader organizational context in which the leaders evolve (Dickson, Resick, & Hanges, 2006). Therefore, a context marked by clear objectives could constitute an organizational signal favourable to the organizational vision being personified by the leader and to charisma being attributed by the employees. Additionally, leaders' perceptions of the clarity and coherence of the organizational vision could enable them to activate or enhance their propensity to interact confidently and to present a compelling vision of the future (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001).

Table 1
Traits constituting Bartram's (2005) compound variables.

Compound variable	Traits included in the compound variable	TL dimension associated with the compound variable
Supporting & Cooperating	Caring; Democratic; Affiliative	Individualized consideration
Creating & Conceptualizing	Innovative; Independent; Conventional (reverse)	Intellectual stimulation
Interacting & Presenting	Socially confident; Outgoing; Modest (reverse)	Charisma
Leading & Deciding	Need for power; Persuasive; Decisive	TL-Global Score

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889649>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889649>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)