Incorporating temporality into implicit leadership and followership theories: Exploring inconsistencies between time-based expectations and actual behaviors

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Given that time is such a critical contextual variable in organizations and effectiveness indicators rarely exclude timeliness, we argue that temporal individual differences are an unfortunate omission from implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and implicit followership theories (IFTs). *Both* implicit theories and time-based individual differences are commonly undiscussed, but their subtle effects can manifest explicitly in behaviors and consequences that have real implications for leaders and followers in organizations. Therefore, in this conceptual paper, we draw attention to time patience (the extent to which individuals are unconcerned with or unfocused on deadlines and the passage of time), time perspective (the relative importance of past, present, and future events in ongoing thought processes and decision-making), polychronicity (the preference for multitasking), and pacing style (the manner in which individuals distribute their effort over time in working toward deadlines) as neglected, but research-worthy components of followers' ILTs and leaders' IFTs. By infusing time-related characteristics into leadership research, we not only consider the content and structure of temporal ILTs and IFTs, but also draw attention to potential inconsistency in leaders' temporal IFTs and followers' actual behaviors, as well as followers' temporal ILTs and leaders' actual behaviors. Further, we offer propositions that have prescriptive value in specifying the conditions under which temporal ILT and IFT inconsistency will be more or less detrimental to leader-follower coordination.

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Introduction

Followers hold personal theories specifying the traits and behaviors that characterize leaders (Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013). Likewise, leaders hold their own assumptions about the traits and behaviors that characterize followers (Sy, 2010). The literature on implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and implicit followership theories (IFTs) documents that these subjective perceptions of leadership and followership often operate preconsciously, but wield significant effects on leader-follower social interactions, job attitudes, and task performance (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2013; Junker & van Dick, 2014). Highly relevant to research on implicit theories of leaders and followers, but largely ignored, is an emerging literature demonstrating that time-based dispositional characteristics substantively influence work-related outcomes (e.g., Conte & Gintoft, 2005; Conte, Mathieu, & Landy, 1998; Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011, 2014). Integrating these two literatures, we propose that leaders and followers

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hold implicit assumptions about each other's ideal temporal orientations, which can exert influential effects on leader-follower coordination. Interestingly, *both* implicit theories (e.g., Epitropaki et al., 2013) and time-based characteristics (Mohammed & Harrison, 2013) may function beneath the radar of conscious awareness, and often remain undiscussed. Yet, their subtle effects may manifest explicitly in behaviors and consequences that have real implications for leaders and followers in organizations. Thus, although previously unexplored, we argue that *the combination* of implicit theories and temporal characteristics is a uniquely intriguing and potentially powerful merger that is worthy of investigation.

The purposes and contributions of our paper are threefold. First, we draw attention to the temporal aspect of ideal prototypes as a neglected, but research-worthy component of the implicit theories held by followers about their leaders and leaders about their followers. The list of characteristics emphasized in the ILT literature has been remarkably comparable across studies (Epitropaki et al., 2013), including dynamism, motivation, honesty, and intelligence (e.g., Dorfman, Hanges, & Brodbeck, 2004; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Gerstner & Day, 1994; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). IFTs, in contrast, have received much less research attention, with very little work examining their content and factor structure. However, traits such as citizenship, enthusiasm, industry, conformity, incompetence, and insubordination have been identified (Sy, 2010). Conspicuously absent from these lists are temporal characteristics, including time patience (the extent to which individuals are unconcerned with or unfocused on deadlines and the passage of time), time perspective (temporal bias toward being past, present, or future focused), polychronicity (preference for multitasking), and pacing style (pattern of effort distribution toward meeting deadlines). This omission is unfortunate, because time is a potent contextual variable in organizational life, and the management of this scarce resource is a key factor in determining business success and failure (Clemens & Dalrymple, 2005). Although short-term and long-term deadlines strongly affect expectations and behavioral patterns, ILT and IFT research has ignored time-based characteristics of leaders and followers, which are likely to influence implicit theories of leaders and followers, as well as dyadic outcomes. We label these temporal implicit leadership theories and temporal implicit followership theories as *TILTs* and *TIFTs,* respectively. By developing propositions that specify the content and structure of TILTs and TIFTs, we infuse temporal characteristics into ILT and IFT research, and address Bluedorn and Jaussi's (2008) criticism that "the formal use of temporal variables in leadership research has been scarce and scattered," even though "it is difficult, if not impossible, to consider leadership without time playing a role (p. 657)."

Second, we focus on the consequences of time-related inconsistency between the follower's ideal leader prototype and the leader's actual behaviors. Similarly, we consider time-related inconsistency between the leader's ideal follower prototype and the follower's actual behaviors. Specifically, the current paper considers situations in which leaders' temporal behaviors do not match followers' expectations and when followers' temporal behaviors do not match leaders' expectations. ILT research has been faulted for giving insufficient attention to implicit-explicit profile congruence (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2005), and we additionally incorporate temporality. Furthermore, although prior research has mainly focused on *either* ILTs or IFTs, we answer the call for research that considers the "joint impact of ILT and IFT fit on the leader-follower dyad" (Junker & van Dick, 2014, p. 1170). In doing so, we follow the recommendation of a recent review on ILTs and IFTs suggesting that researchers may gain "important insights on leader-follower processes" by examining dyadic-level outcomes (Epitropaki et al., 2013, p. 874).

Third, we consider several contingency factors to help identify the conditions under which TILT and TIFT inconsistency will be more and less detrimental to leader-follower coordination. Of four proposed moderators, two are expected to exacerbate the harmful effects of TILT and TIFT inconsistency on leader-follower coordination: Leaders' and followers' past experience with each other's temporal orientation, and leaders' and followers' past experience with each other's national temporal culture. In addition, the interaction of high TILT inconsistency and high TIFT inconsistency is expected to be detrimental to leader-follower coordination. A fourth moderator, temporal leadership, is predicted to attenuate the deleterious effects of TILT and TIFT inconsistency on leader-follower coordination. *Temporal leadership* refers to the degree to which a leader sets deadlines, allocates temporal resources, and synchronizes follower behaviors (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011). Notably, leaders who display high levels of temporal leadership may provide the awareness, communication, and interaction needed to align temporal expectations and regulate workflow for the leader-follower dyad (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011).

Implicit theories

The categorization process and implicit leadership theories (ILTs)

Leadership categorization theory (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984), which has its roots in social cognitive theory, suggests that followers have a mental representation of the ideal leader, or an ideal leader prototype. Followers implicitly compare actual leaders to this prototype to assess their match, with better matches being associated with more favorable perceptions toward the leader (Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 1984; Shondrick & Lord, 2010). The power afforded to the leader is suggested to be determined by the extent to which there is a match perceived between the leader's actual characteristics and the characteristics considered to represent the leader prototype (Maurer & Lord, 1991). Offermann et al. (1994) conducted a study that investigated the content of ILTs and found that attractiveness, charisma, dedication, intelligence, sensitivity, strength, masculinity, and tyranny were consistently identified by male and female perceivers. Epitropaki and Martin (2004) discovered six factors (i.e., dedication, dynamism, intelligence, sensitivity, masculinity, and tyranny) in organizational settings. Moreover, ideal prototypes or cognitive representations can be used to recognize, understand, and respond to the behavior of others in a manner that limits the expenditure of valuable cognitive resources. In other words, the categorization process is not only utilized as a "sensemaking" (Weick, 1995) function that aids in forming expectations of individuals, but it is also used to simplify cognitive