The Leadership Quarterly xxx (2016) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Leadership Quarterly

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua

Leading Under Adversity: Interactive Effects of Acute Stressors and Upper-Level Supportive Leadership Climate on Lower-Level Supportive Leadership Climate

Payal Nangia SharmaVisiting Assistant Professor [a,*], Matthew J. PearsallAssistant Professor [b]

[a] Steinberg Hall-Dietrich Hall 3014, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, United States
[b] McColl Building, CB #3490, Kenan-Flagler Business School, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 November 2015
Received in revised form 21 August 2016
Accepted 26 August 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
acute stressors
supportive leadership climate
social cohesion
leadership teams

ABSTRACT

While supportive leadership has been shown to help employees cope with stressful circumstances, little is known about how stressors impact leaders *themselves* and their ability to offer support to those they lead. Drawing on the transactional model of stress and stress rigidity theory, we thus examine linkages between acute stressors and upper- and lower-level supportive leadership climates for teams of leaders. Employing survey data collected by the U.S. Army from military leaders and their subordinate soldiers in combat, we found support for a negative relationship between acute stressors and lower-level supportive leadership climate. Additionally, upper-level supportive leadership climate moderated the stressors-supportive leadership linkage, such that when upper-level supportive leadership climate was low, there was a more negative relationship between acute stressors and leaders providing supportive leadership to followers. In turn, this lower-level supportive leadership climate resulting from the acute stressors and upper-level supportive leadership climate interaction promoted followers' social cohesion.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In extreme contexts such as emergency medical teams, military units, and first responders, teams of leaders must provide effective leadership in the face of *acute* stressors, characterized as "sudden, novel, intense, and of relatively short duration which disrupt goal oriented behavior and require a proximate response" (Salas, Driskell, & Hughes, 1996, p. 6). Such stressors are known to impair followers' ability to interact and work together – both individually and in teams (Driskell, Salas, & Johnston, 1999; Ellis, 2006; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009). It is therefore critical that leaders in these settings offer care and concern for their followers' health and well-being, and create a friendly and psychologically supportive work environment that facilitates their followers' positive relationships with one another – behaviors that are termed "supportive leadership" (Greene & Schriesheim, 1980; House, 1996; Rooney & Gottlieb, 2007; Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, & Popper, 1998; Yammarino, Mumford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010). Support from leaders has been positively linked with higher levels of well-being, retention and performance for followers, and with lower levels of psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (see Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, & Schwartz, 2002; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cummins, 1990; Ng & Sorensen, 2008).

While the benefits of supportive leadership are well-established, very little is known about how stressors impact leaders *themselves* and their ability to offer support, however. Therefore, our two-fold purpose is to investigate how supportive leadership is

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: payals@wharton.upenn.edu (P.N. Sharma), matthew_pearsall@kenan-flagler.unc.edu (M.J. Pearsall).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.08.003
1048-9843/© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Sharma, P.N., & Pearsall, M.J., Leading Under Adversity: Interactive Effects of Acute Stressors and Upper-Level Supportive Leadership Climate on Lower-Level..., *The Leadership Quarterly* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.08.003

affected when front-line leaders are facing acute stressors, and how support from the organization may relieve a potentially negative impact of these stressors on the leaders. Based on the transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and stress rigidity theory (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981), we argue that acute stressors will hinder the ability of front-line leaders to engage in supportive leadership – at the very time it is most needed for their followers (Hannah et al., 2009; Yammarino et al., 2010). Leaders facing the demanding nature of acute stressors are less likely to be able to focus on their followers' needs, and instead, will tend to react in less adaptive ways such as by withdrawing from their role responsibilities.

The transactional model of stress also suggests that the amount and nature of resources available to individuals influences their responses to stressors. Thus, just as leaders can help their followers deal productively with stressful demands, so too can leaders find help from the organizational context in which *they* are embedded (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Accordingly, our second purpose is to examine the moderating role of senior leaders' supportive behaviors, such as offering care and concern about front-line leaders' well-being and valuing their contributions, on the acute stressors—supportive leadership relationship. We propose that this "upper-level supportive leadership climate" will act as a buffer and help reduce the negative effects of acute stressors on supportive leadership provided by front-line leaders (which we heretofore refer to as "lower-level supportive leadership climate," to distinguish this supportive leadership from that provided by senior leaders).

In turn, we expect that lower-level supportive leadership climate will promote social cohesion for followers – or friendship, liking, caring, and emotional closeness amongst team members, enjoying each other's company, and wishing to spend time together (Griffith, 2007). Our examination of social cohesion suggests that leaders' own experiences with stressors can determine the relationships and interactions their followers share. Notably, while the supportive leadership-cohesion relationship has been explored by prior research (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Greene & Schriesheim, 1980), our study broadens conceptual understanding of this relationship by exploring the precursor role of acute stressors for leaders.

We hope to make several contributions from this study. First, we extend leadership and stress theories by explaining the impact of acute stressors on teams of leaders themselves and their collective ability to provide support to their subordinates (House, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wageman, Gardner, & Mortensen, 2012). While research has typically examined the role leaders can play in helping their employees cope with stress (Cummins, 1990; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001), it is less clear how stressors affect leaders' fulfilling these role responsibilities.

Second, we incorporate the organizational context as a resource by considering how behaviors by senior leaders moderate the negative impact of acute stressors on supportive leadership. The practical value of understanding the role of this upper-level supportive leadership climate is underscored by how leaders in contemporary organizations operate in demanding work contexts that can overtax and impede their capabilities to support followers (Lovelace, Manz, & Alves, 2007). To this end, scholars have called for research integrating leadership and context to more fully account for the environment in which leaders are embedded, rather than assuming that leadership occurs in a conceptual vacuum (Johns, 2006; Osborn et al., 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006).

Finally, our focus on teams of leaders extends research beyond the traditional leader-centric perspective to account for structures in which today's leaders work (Day & Harrison, 2007). Increasingly, in modern work settings, leaders are often arrayed in teams, whereby the leaders "are collectively responsible for leading a social system and each of whom is himself or herself a significant organizational leader" (Wageman et al., 2012, p. 310). These teams engage in typical leadership functions for their followers such as establishing direction and creating structures and systems (Wageman & Hackman, 2010). In addition, leader teams are known to face acute stressors together and are often perceived by followers as having to cope collectively with stressors – especially when leaders share a common direction or work goals. Fig. 1 illustrates our research model.

Theory and Hypotheses

Supportive Leadership

Supportive actions include a leader being approachable, considerate, and sensitive towards followers' needs, and promoting harmonious working relations amongst group members (Greene & Schriesheim, 1980; House & Dessler, 1974). These and related behaviors have been positively linked with higher levels of follower safety behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational

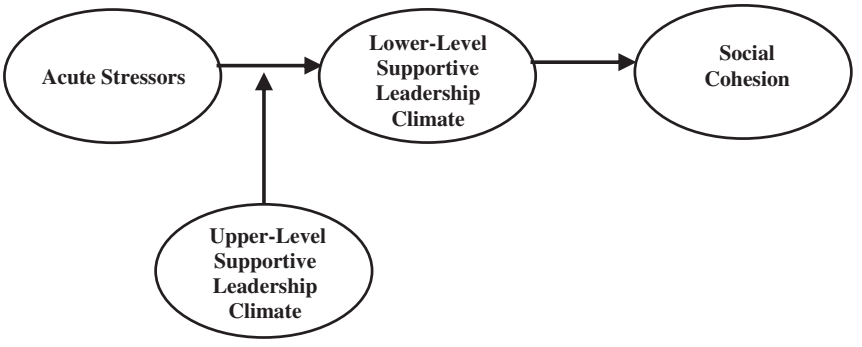

Fig. 1. Proposed Theoretical Model

Please cite this article as: Sharma, P.N., & Pearsall, M.J., Leading Under Adversity: Interactive Effects of Acute Stressors and Upper-Level Supportive Leadership Climate on Lower-Level..., *The Leadership Quarterly* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.08.003

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5035271

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/5035271

Daneshyari.com