



Self–other agreement in empowering leadership: Relationships with leader effectiveness and subordinates' job satisfaction and turnover intention [☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 April 2013

Received in revised form 15 April 2014

Accepted 21 April 2014

Available online 10 May 2014

Handling Editor: Leanne Atwater

Keywords:

Empowering leadership

Self–other agreement

Leader effectiveness

Job satisfaction

Turnover intention

ABSTRACT

We investigated the effect of self–other agreement in empowering leadership on leader effectiveness, job satisfaction, and turnover intention using a sample of 50 Norwegian municipal leaders (46 for leader effectiveness) and 168 (158) of their subordinates. The findings indicated that considering both self and subordinate ratings of empowering leadership was useful in predicting the outcome variables. In particular, subordinates of over-estimators reported lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intention. Moreover, leaders who underestimated their leadership were perceived as more effective by their superiors. For agreement (i.e., leader's self-ratings were in agreement with subordinates' ratings) the relationship between empowering leadership and leader effectiveness was curvilinear with an inverted U shape. Agreement in ratings of empowering leadership was not found to be related to subordinates' job satisfaction and turnover intention. The implications of these findings are discussed.

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Introduction

Employee empowerment was actualized as a management concept in the 1980s (Wilkinson, 1998), and, at its core, involves enhanced individual motivation at work through the delegation of authority to the lowest organizational level where a competent decision can be made (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Two theoretical approaches to empowerment at work have gradually emerged in the literature (Spreitzer, 2008). The first of these is a socio-structural macro-perspective that includes interventions and practices by the organization, leaders, and managers who aim to empower employees (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Lawler, 1986). The second is a psychological micro-perspective based on employee perceptions of their work role, conceptualized as a motivational construct called psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The two perspectives are related in that empowerment initiatives at the organization and leader levels aspire to create work conditions that facilitate psychological empowerment at the individual level (Hechanova, Alampay, & Franco, 2006; Lee & Koh, 2001).

Leaders are proposed to have a central role in the empowerment process of employees (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003; Randolph & Kemery, 2011), but this role is somewhat different compared with those in more traditional work designs (Ahearne, Mathieu, &

[☆] We would like to thank the editor, Leanne Atwater and three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions on previous versions of the paper.

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Rapp, 2005). Empowering leadership (EL) differs from other related leadership theories (e.g., transformational leadership) in its specific focus on power sharing and the facilitation of self-leadership, autonomy, and independence among employees (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Manz & Sims, 2001). For example, Liu, Lepak, Takeuchi, and Sims (2003, p. 143) cited Sims and Manz (1996) who claimed that while transformational leaders provide a vision for the future, power still resides in the leader and employees are not allowed to participate in creating the vision itself. In line with this assertion, Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) found that transformational leadership was positively related to follower dependence as mediated by personal identification with the leader. The distinctiveness of EL compared with other leadership approaches has been investigated in a number of studies, including Amundsen and Martinsen (2014), Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, and Drasgow (2000), Pearce et al. (2003), and Tekleab, Sims, Yun, Tesluk, and Cox (2008). These studies indicated that EL is a distinct form of leadership from aversive, directive, transactional, and transformational leadership, and from leader–member exchange (LMX), consideration and initiating of structure.

Previous research has identified a positive association between EL and leader effectiveness (Tekleab et al., 2008) and favorable employee outcomes including performance (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010), self-leadership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014), psychological empowerment (Randolph & Kemery, 2011), job satisfaction (Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000), affective commitment (Dewettinck & van Ameijde, 2011), and creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). However, several contingencies may theoretically affect such relationships, and one of these is self–other agreement (SOA), typically defined as the degree of congruence between a leader's self-rating and the ratings they receive from others (Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). The ratings of others are usually provided by subordinates, peers, and/or superiors.

Meta-studies have demonstrated that self and others' ratings are only moderately related (Conway & Huffcutt, 1997; Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988), indicative of the fact that they represent different perspectives of the same phenomenon (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997) as well as being biased in different ways (Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010). When considering self and others' ratings simultaneously, however, we can potentially obtain a more nuanced and accurate picture beyond the evaluations each of the rating sources provide separately. For example, SOA is proposed as an indicator of leader self-awareness (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Wohlers & London, 1989), has been noted as being an important aspect of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and has demonstrated a relationship to outcomes such as leader effectiveness (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 1998) and leader influence tactics (Berson & Sosik, 2007), and to subordinates' self-leadership (Tekleab et al., 2008), job satisfaction, and performance (Moshavi, Brown, & Dodd, 2003). Despite a growing body of relevant literature, we still need to better understand whether the effects of SOA can be generalized across leadership models, criteria, and cultures.

In this respect, three issues motivate the present study. First, there appears to be a lack of studies that have specifically addressed SOA in EL ratings. To the best of our knowledge, the only exception is Tekleab et al. (2008), where the authors examined the effects of SOA of EL and transformational leadership on leader effectiveness, as well as on subordinates' self-leadership and satisfaction with supervision. They found that SOA of EL was related to self-leadership but not to satisfaction with supervision or leader effectiveness. One possible explanation of this is their use of a relatively narrow seven item measure of EL that mainly tapped into leaders' ability to coordinate and work in teams and to promote independent actions among subordinates. In line with Amundsen and Martinsen's (2014) conceptualization, we consider EL to include behaviors that promote subordinates' autonomy through the influence processes of power sharing, motivation support, and development support, and our study represents therefore an important attempt to investigate SOA of a broader EL construct than Tekleab et al. (2008) did. We also believe that SOA regarding the behavior of a leader whose primary purpose is to support autonomous subordinates may be of relevance in today's contemporary work settings, which are characterized, among other things, by highly skilled and educated "knowledge workers" (Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001). For example, if the leader thinks he/she is empowering while subordinates do not agree with this, it may result in little actual empowerment being provided, which may have implications for leader effectiveness and attitudes among subordinates. It is therefore important, from both a research perspective and a practitioner point of view, to gain more insight into how a leader's self-awareness of an autonomy and development supportive leadership style affects relevant outcome variables.

Second, previous research (e.g., Sosik, 2001; Tekleab et al., 2008) indicates that SOA in leader behavior ratings may have a somewhat different impact on outcome variables related to leaders and subordinates. Thus, in the present study we emphasize both leader effectiveness (rated by a leader's superior) and subordinates' self-reporting of job satisfaction and turnover intention. Third, in accordance with Atwater, Wang, Smither, and Fleenor (2009, p. 876) most prior leadership studies "that have examined self and others' ratings have taken place in the U.S. on American samples", and relatively consistent patterns have emerged. However, their study, including 21 countries, indicates that cultural characteristics may play a role in understanding relationships between self and others' ratings. Likewise, Atwater, Waldman, Ostroff, Robie, and Johnson (2005) found the effect of self and others' ratings in relation to the prediction of leader performance differed between U.S. and European leaders (the European countries studied were Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, and the U.K.). It is therefore important that more SOA research be carried out in countries other than those that have been previously studied in order to better understand potential cultural differences and their implications for SOA. The present study of Norwegian leaders is such a contribution. Compared with the countries studied by Atwater et al. (2005) Norway can roughly be categorized in the same group as Denmark and France; that is, relatively lower individualism and low masculinity. However, if we consider Hofstede's (1983) index values on cultural dimensions in more detail, Norway has the lowest value for these dimensions compared with both Denmark and France. As such, the present study investigates a country with a combination of cultural values different from those studied by Atwater et al. (2005), and may therefore be an important contribution to SOA research.

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