



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Leadership Quarterly

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



Are transformational leaders fair? A multi-level study of transformational leadership, justice perceptions, and organizational citizenship behaviors[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Transformational leadership
Interpersonal justice
Procedural justice climate
Organizational citizenship behaviors
Multi-level

ABSTRACT

This study examined the psychological processes that might underlie the relationship between transformational leadership (i.e., individualized consideration and charisma) and individual- and group-level multifocal organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). In doing so, we focused on the potential mediating role of individual- and group-level justice perceptions of a follower(s) in transformational leadership processes. Specifically, we hypothesized that at the individual level, a leader's individualized consideration relates to leader-directed OCBs through interpersonal justice, whereas at the group level, a leader's charisma relates to group-directed OCBs through procedural justice climate. The individual- and group-level models as well as the various alternative models were tested using a sample of 159 employees (including 40 supervisors and their immediate subordinates) embedded in 40 groups from 25 branches of a large, multinational bank in Korea. The results supported our hypothesized relationships, suggesting that individual- and group-level justice perceptions play important roles in the linkage between transformational leadership behaviors and OCBs at both the individual and the group levels.

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1. Introduction

Since Bass's (1985) pioneering works on transformational leadership, numerous studies have made a great effort to examine the behavioral characteristics of transformational leaders and their positive relationships on work outcomes in organizations [see Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau's (2005) review on transformational leadership]. Previous studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between transformational leadership and effectiveness. However, despite the findings about *what* transformational leaders perform, at least one fundamental issue deserves further examination—specifically, how do transformational leaders influence an individual follower as well as a group as a whole, and why do followers react to their leaders' leadership behaviors? As pointed out by several researchers (Bass, 1999; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Yukl, 2006), these questions have not been fully addressed. In an effort to respond to the research questions above, this study considers a portion of the issues with a multi-level focus on the psychological processes that underlie transformational leadership.

Specifically, the primary purpose of this study is two fold. First, this study focuses on a theoretical integration of the transformational leadership and organizational justice literatures in a way that employees' justice perceptions may serve as important underlying psychological mechanisms in transformational leadership processes. As Knippenberg, Knippenberg, De Cremer, and Hogg (2004) indicated, although leaders are viewed as influential entities affecting followers' justice perceptions, little is known about the role of followers' justice perceptions in the leadership field. By examining this gap, the present study extends our

[☆] An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2008 annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Anaheim, California.

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knowledge on the extant literature of organizational behavior by integrating two important domains—transformational leadership and organizational justice—into one angle. To date, this perspective has gone largely unexplored.

Second, in doing such integration, the present study investigates the theoretical assumption that *the level-of-analysis* and *multi-level approach* plays a crucial role in clarifying the hypothesized relationships. Transformational leadership phenomena need to be examined with a multi-level perspective in order to give us a better understanding of their impacts in contemporary organizations. For example, in current business practices, more and more individuals work in team- or group-based structures (Konovsky, 2000). As group-based structures gain momentum, the need to identify the effect of transformational leadership at the group level of analysis also increases. This is because transformational leaders not only inspire each follower to perform better but also motivate their followers as a collective to achieve positive group outcomes, such as group performance (Jung & Sosik, 2002). However, research on transformational leadership related to *levels-of-analysis issues* and *multi-level approaches* is still scarce, regardless of the fact that levels issues have been crucial in building theory, measurement, and statistical analyses (Yammarino et al., 2005).

In examining psychological processes in transformational leadership, we focus on two components of leadership whose conceptual natures fit our multi-level perspective: *individualized consideration* and *charisma*. Individualized consideration is based on the theoretical notion that leaders focus on concerns for each individual follower (Bass & Riggio, 2006), whereas charismatic leaders tend to focus more on collective goals and performance through collective efforts (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Therefore, such emphasis for the two components in this study rests on their theoretical notions in relation to our level assumption. In addition, the existence of clear theoretical foundations for levels issues merits special attention: Individualized consideration and charisma have been theorized and empirically tested in prior research in conjunction with clearer assumptions on levels issues than the other component (i.e., intellectual stimulation) in transformational leadership (see Avolio & Bass, 1998; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Yammarino, Spangler, & Dubinsky, 1998). Furthermore, in previous research these two behavioral components of transformational leadership have revealed high predictability for leadership effectiveness. According to Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam's (1996) meta-analysis, charisma and individualized consideration were the two strongest components in predicting leadership effectiveness.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to explore the individual- and group-level psychological processes that underlie the relationship between transformational leadership and multi-foci organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) via justice perceptions with a multi-level approach. Specifically, we investigate whether a transformational leader's individualized consideration may relate to a follower's leader-directed OCBs via interpersonal justice, while a transformational leader's charisma may relate to followers' group-directed OCBs via procedural justice climate. The theory underlying this approach is presented in Fig. 1.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Individualized consideration model

2.1.1. Transformational leader's individualized consideration and a follower's leader-directed OCBs

According to Bass (1985), an individually considerate leader recognizes individual differences in terms of a follower's particular needs and expectations and provides individualized support for the development of the follower. This type of leader, acting as a coach or mentor, guides his or her follower using empowering behaviors that correspond with the follower's particular needs. In addition, such supporting behaviors are delivered to the follower in a friendly, close, and equal manner (Bass, 1985). As the concept of individualized consideration implies, it is highly likely that a leader's support will vary among different followers depending on their differing capabilities and needs. Also, each follower could have different perceptions of the leader's behaviors (Avolio & Bass, 1998), based on individual personality differences (Yammarino, Dansereau, & Kennedy, 2001). As a consequence, a transformational leader's individualized consideration within this study is conceptualized at the individual level.

Prior studies have produced some evidence supporting the existence of a positive relationship between individualized consideration, as one dimension of transformational leadership, and OCBs (Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005). Given that individually considerate leaders care about the different needs and development of each individual follower, this behavior encourages the follower to engage in extra-role

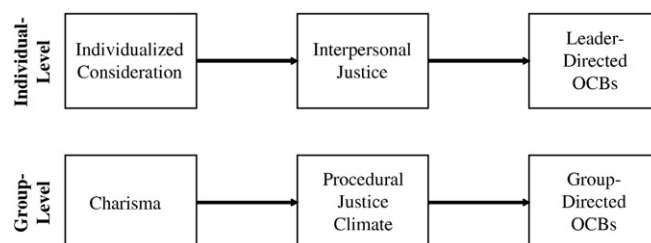


Fig. 1. Multi-level models of this study.

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