

Changing attitudes about change: longitudinal effects of transformational leader behavior on employee cynicism about organizational change

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Summary

Using longitudinal data collected in two waves, nine months apart, from 372 employees, this research is an empirical assessment of individual-level change within an organizational setting. Specifically, strategies used by change implementers were operationalized as six transformational leader behaviors, and then hypothesized to influence employees' cynicism about organizational change (CAOC). A combination of social learning theory, and communication research served as the theoretical rationale to explain transformational leadership's hypothesized effects. As posited, transformational leader behaviors (TLB) generally were associated with lower employee CAOC. Further, the direction of causality was consistent in suggesting that the TLB reduced employee CAOC. A discussion concerning the ethical use of TLBs and recommendations for future research are provided. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

The topic of organizational change has been an active area in management research for decades. Despite its consistent attention, the change literature has seemingly little empirical data to advance research and inform practitioners in the area of *process* change, or actions undertaken to enact change (Armenakis & Bedian, 1999). That is not to say that it has been completely ignored; however, the general focus has been on conceptual change models, the context of change (i.e., factors underlying successful change efforts; e.g., see Baer & Frese, 2003) and factors relating to organizational effectiveness (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). This rings particularly true for the leadership literature in which studies typically show a single 'snap-shot' of leaders' influence on followers and conclude that leadership is effective or not. Given the difficulty of collecting valid data that demonstrates utility of leadership over time, the gap in the literature is accordingly understandable. Nonetheless, evidence regarding the

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influence of leadership behavior over time is seminal to evaluating the overall utility of any particular leadership style. Thus, we see a strong need for empirical evidence from longitudinal research testing the efficacy of leader behavior on employee attitudes over time. Although we are expressly interested in leadership, we think it is important to link leadership to the larger context of organizational change since leadership influence on followers represents organizational change at the individual level.

Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) provide an organizing framework for examining the consequences of strategies used by *change implementers* on the outcomes experienced by *change recipients*. In the current study, these two categories are operationalized by transformational leader behavior (i.e., strategies used by implementers) impacting the cynicism about organizational change of employees (CAOC; i.e., attitudes of the change recipients toward change). Further, so that the relationships can be better understood, we used a longitudinal research design (i.e., cross-lagged panel) that allows for the exploration of change across time, as well as the direction of those relationships.

Through Kanter et al.'s (1992) framework, we examine whether or not change implementers' strategies have the influential positive effects upon change recipients hypothesized by leadership researchers. Put simply, we are interested in understanding whether transformational leader behavior reduces employee CAOC.

Organizational Change Roles

The three action roles delineated by Kanter et al. (1992) include change strategists, change implementers, and change recipients. Although top leadership normally fills the change strategist role, it is often an activity distant in place and time from the lower-level change implementation strategies and is best addressed by the top management team decision-making and governance literatures (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The influence of the change implementers upon change recipients, however, is an issue of primary importance to all organizations trying to create organizational cultures and practices capable of change or bringing about shifts in organizationally-relevant behaviors (Pfeffer, 1994).

Several approaches to studying change implementers exist, but a particularly promising approach has come from transformational leadership. Though often implied by previous leadership theories, transformational leadership has been *explicitly* defined around the concept of change. For example, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990, p. 108) summarized the similarities among the various concepts of transformational leadership by noting that all of them 'share the common perspective that effective leaders transform or change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers.' In other words, transformational leadership 'transforms' individual employees to make them more receptive to, and build capacity for, bringing about organizational change.

Bass (1985) asserted that transformational leadership behavior (TLB) operates by the higher-order needs of employees and inducing them to transcend self-interests for the organization's sake. Indeed, there exists a substantial body of research linking TLB to positive outcomes (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). Previous research including meta-analyses (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996) have shown that TLB is associated with increased employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g., Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Podsakoff et al., 1990), satisfaction with supervision (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1990), extra effort (e.g., Seltzer & Bass, 1990), turnover intention (e.g., Bycio et al., 1995), organizational citizenship (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) and overall employee performance (e.g., Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, 1993). Thus it would seem that TLB strongly represents positive change-oriented behavior by change implementers.

With respect to change recipients and their role in change, the literature is replete with studies of their attitudes, performance and citizenship behavior. One attitude that has not received extensive study is that of employee CAOC. Kanter and Mirvis (1989, p. 2) commented that ‘their [cynics] distrust of management, their readiness to disparage fellow workers . . . and in many cases their ingrained resistance to change. These workers are hard to reach and harder still to enlist. They mistrust the motives of those in charge and look out for number one when called to action.’ Since most change strategies (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1985; Kotter, 2002) discuss overcoming resistance to change as a critical step toward change, CAOC may be an important construct representing a form of change resistance by recipients that change implementers must overcome.

Negative employee attitudes toward organizational change are often attributed to employee obstinacy or some irrational resistance to change. It should be noted, however, that resistance to change by people who have been positively reinforced for engaging in the ‘old’ behaviors is a predictable outcome. What is less clear is why employees would ‘want’ to change unless a clear, compelling case to do so had been presented to them and a state of felt-need (Dalton, 1970) was experienced. TLB may offer such a compelling case.

Transformational Leadership Behavior

The current study draws from the work of Podsakoff and colleagues (1990) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996), who identified six dimensions of TLB—defined in terms of the actual behaviors. These behaviors were drawn from the commonalities existing among a number of TLB conceptualizations (e.g., Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). These six TLB dimensions include *articulating a vision of the future, fostering the acceptance of group goals, communicating high performance expectations, providing intellectual stimulation, modeling appropriate behavior, and displaying supportive leader behavior*. Consistent with Bryman’s (1992) recommendations, Podsakoff and colleagues’ (1990, 1996) behavioral typology allows for an empirical analysis of the effects of these behaviors on employee views toward change.

Although TLB seems to be a good fit for examining change implementers, there is some question about the level at which transformational leadership should be conceptualized and operationalized. At a conceptual level, Beyer (1999) asserts that transformational leadership tames the original conception of charisma advanced by Weber (1947), and in the process, dilutes its ‘richness and distinctiveness’ (p. 308). Thus, some researchers (e.g., Beyer, 1999; Weber, 1947) have conceptualized transformational leadership as being ‘transformational’ on a large scale (e.g., changing countries, political movements, or at least organizations). On the other hand, other researchers (e.g., Bass, 1985; House & Shamir, 1993) have primarily focused upon a more micro-level conceptualization of transformation where ‘transformation’ occurs mainly at the individual level of analysis. While both sets of researchers have clearly made important contributions to the literature and to the understanding of transformational leadership, the current research is rooted firmly in the individual-level tradition.

In addition to different conceptualizations of targets, operational differences also exist. The most common practice is for researchers to view transformational leadership as a set of separate behaviors—yet debate exists on this (Carless, 1998). Another possibility is that the behaviors are so highly interrelated that it is inappropriate to consider them as distinct, and thus TLB should be conceptualized as a single factor—or at least, as a single higher-order construct explained by multiple independent behaviors. Consistent with this viewpoint, Bycio et al. (1995) empirically illustrated the high degree of correlation among transformational leader behaviors operationalized by Bass’ (1985) Multifactor

Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Beyond the possible statistical intercorrelation, there are theoretical reasons for studying TLB a single, higher-order factor.

Consistent with Law, Wong, and Mobley (1998), TLB can be viewed as a multidimensional construct represented as a latent model in their taxonomy. Thus, TLB exists at a deeper level than the six behaviors indicating TLB. This conceptualization is consistent with the overall roots of TLB theory that sought out the behaviors exhibited by charismatics and successful leaders across situations. In fact, the Podsakoff et al. (1990) typology is explicitly a collection of behaviors used by other theories to capture the behaviors expressed by 'transformational' leaders. To provide systematic rationale for the TLB hypothesized effects on employee CAOC, an argument supporting the relationship between an overall transformational leadership construct and employee CAOC will be presented. Then, specific research focusing upon the role played by individual transformational leader behaviors will also be presented.

Organizational Cynicism

Researchers have begun to study cynicism as an employee attitude detrimental to organizations (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000). Kanter and Mirvis (1989) suggested that cynicism is a common employee characteristic and categorized 43 per cent of the American workforce as 'cynics.' Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997) classified 48 per cent of the employees in their sample as being 'high' in cynicism. According to Andersson and Bateman (1997), the high levels of employee cynicism toward the organization are results of a number of factors, including the prevalence of organizational layoffs in recent years, struggling economy, as well as an increasing wage differential between top executives and low-level workers. Given the recent series of corporate scandals that have taken place in the United States it is likely that worker cynicism has only increased in recent years.

Organizational cynicism is a complex attitude that includes cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects resulting in increased beliefs of unfairness, feelings of distrust, and related actions about and against organizations. Organizational cynicism is generally conceptualized as a state variable, distinct from trait-based dispositions such as negative affectivity and trait cynicism (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). As such, many scholars believe that cynicism is a malleable attitude, shaped greatly by the work context (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Wanous et al., 2000). Although other conceptualizations of cynicism exist (e.g., trait cynicism, e.g., Smith & Pope, 1990), we used Reichers et al. (1997) cynicism about organizational change since it is theoretically aligned with the intent of this study. That is, it represents a relatively malleable form of cynicism (i.e., attitude versus trait) and may be more likely to respond to leader driven change interventions. Reichers et al. (1997) define CAOC as an attitude consisting of the futility of change along with a loss of faith in those who are responsible for the changes. Even though research on CAOC is relatively new, researchers have begun to identify its antecedents and consequences.

Employee cynicism can have wide ranging effects in the workplace. Wanous and his colleagues (2000) found CAOC was associated with a variety of negative behavioral outcomes including being more likely to be absent from work, to file grievances, perform at lower levels, and to quit. Further, they showed that negative affect, feeling uninformed, and a lack of participation in the decision making process were all associated with employee CAOC. In addition, they reported that cynical employees are likely to have low levels of organizational commitment, and thus are more likely to be absent from work, to file grievances, and to quit. They are also likely to be less motivated toward work, and tend to perform at lower levels. Wanous and his colleagues (2000) showed that pay-for-performance

instrumentality perceptions for hourly, incentive pay and salaried employees who were cynical were significantly lower than for those who were not cynical.

Goldfarb (1991) asserts that cynicism can undermine leaders and institutions and the practices they support. Recent research by Bommer, Rubin and Baldwin (2004) demonstrates this link. For example, Bommer and colleagues demonstrated that leaders who possessed a high degree of CAOC were less likely to engage in TLB. Similarly, Atwater, Waldman, Atwater, and Cartier (2000) showed that supervisors who rated themselves as highly cynical were less likely to pay attention to feedback provided. Thus, even leaders who are supposed to be heavily invested in organizational system improvements seem less inclined to engage in change-oriented behaviors when they hold cynical attitudes about change.

Given the above research, it is not surprising that Reichers et al. (1997) reported cynical employees being less likely to participate in organizational change efforts. Even though overcoming CAOC is not an explicit step in all behaviorally-focused organizational change models (e.g., Beckhard & Harris, 1987), it is hard to imagine how these models can lead to change when the individual is cynical about the effectiveness of the change. Kotter (2002) explicitly addresses overcoming cynics by arguing that if leaders are to change their organizations, they will need to reduce employee cynicism surrounding organizational change. The overcoming of cynicism toward change is particularly important because when employees' cynicism toward a proposed change leads to failed implementation, the failure reinforces the cynical beliefs. Consequently, subsequent change initiatives are even less likely to succeed, and thus CAOC becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Reichers et al. (1997) provided multiple strategies for 'managing and minimizing' CAOC. These strategies include involving people in making decisions that affect them, keeping people informed of ongoing changes, keeping surprises to a minimum, publicizing successful changes, and providing opportunities for employees to express feelings, receive validation and reassurance. We propose that TLB provides a coherent template for enacting these types of strategies. In other words, TLB should be an effective means by which change implementers can reduce change recipients' CAOC.

Reichers et al. (1997) argued that 'managers or others who are announcing change will be more believable if they are generally well-liked, seen as knowledgeable about the subject matter, possessed of high power and status in the organization, and trustworthy' (p. 54). This assertion is consistent with Hovland, Janis, and Kelley's (1953) work on source credibility and its effects on attitude change. More specifically, the behaviors classified as transformational by Podsakoff et al. (1990) likely fill the role of providing cues to change recipients regarding the 'trustworthiness, intentions, and affiliations of the source' (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 13).

Hypotheses Development

It follows from the discussion above that a leader who articulates a vision of the organization's future will be seen as providing the types of behavioral cues that would confer being 'knowledgeable,' and that one who engages in role modeling and supportive leader behavior will be 'well-liked' and 'trustworthy.' In fact, Podsakoff et al. (1990) provided significant support indicating a strong relationship between TLBs and employee trust of their managers. Further, Andersson (1996) asserted that employee cynicism toward the organization is especially prevalent when '... managers are believed to be incompetent,' and when '... employee expectations of a capable and trustworthy model are unmet' (p. 1411). Surely, TLB generally describes a competent manager who meets or exceeds employee expectations.

Beyond the benefits associated with TLB's conveyance of competence, it is highly likely that TLB influences self-efficacy, a central component of social learning theory (Bandura, 1986; Zimbardo &

Leippe, 1991). In other words, when a leader conveys high performance expectations to a subordinate, there is an implicit communication of the leader's confidence in the employee's ability to meet this standard. These types of positive, confidence-instilling actions by a leader are generally associated with increased employee self-efficacy. Some recent research supports this link (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). For example, Kark et al. (2003) found that TLB predicted empowerment (i.e., self-efficacy, self-esteem and collective efficacy) through social identification. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), high self-efficacy results in employee expectations of success, increased work ethic, greater persistence, and the difficulties associated with completing tasks are experienced by everyone and that more effort is needed to accomplish the task. Alternatively, when self-efficacy is low, employees are more likely to attribute failures to external referents (e.g., corporate management) and less likely to persist at tasks that require significant effort (e.g., significant organizational change initiatives).

Leaders enacting TLB may be better able to overcome the resistance to change (perceived or otherwise) presented by CAOC. Leaders play a critical role in the system during organization change by managing relationships, coordinating mechanisms for change (e.g., budgeting), aligning operations with strategy, building structures and developing rewards (Weisbord, 1976). Yet, Werther (2003) argues that, 'Leaders often assume that resisters do not see the logic behind the change' (p. 35). This assumption directs leaders to present large amounts of data and rationale arguments for the change. For a number of reasons, their 'rational' approach rarely has the impact leaders expect. First, as Argyris (1994) purports, leaders are in effect taking the responsibility for the change upon themselves and then using defensive reasoning to deflect true inquiry about the change initiative. Second, recent theory regarding change suggests that affective influence tactics may be more successful than cognitive tactics (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001).

Empirical research also supports this notion. For example, Falbe and Yukl (1992) showed that influence tactics such as 'rational persuasion' (i.e., citing factual evidence) and 'legitimizing' (i.e., using rules and policies to legitimate claims) more often result in resistance than compliance or commitment. Somewhat counter intuitively, they found that influence tactics of 'inspirational appeals' (i.e., arousing enthusiasm based on values, ideals etc.) and 'consultation' (i.e., seeking participation and support) more often elicited commitment rather than compliance or resistance. Moreover, 'rational persuasion' is the most frequently used influence tactic. Leaders engaging in TLB utilize these 'softer' influence tactics to empower employees to take responsibility for the change and motivate them towards self-actualization rather than relying simply on letting the data 'speak for themselves.' For example, TLB involves inspiring others and creating enthusiasm through the articulation of a vision and increasing participation in the process through a focus on individuals' needs and by seeking new ideas via intellectual stimulation. Further, TLB capitalizes heavily on the use of affective appeals through optimism and the setting of expectations to be the best. Therefore, we contend that leaders utilizing TLB are more likely to gain true commitment from employees and overcome any resistance presented by employee CAOC.

Up to this point we have presented rationale for the transformational leadership, in general, to reduce employees' cynicism about organizational change. Much of the most relevant empirical research, however, has examined individual examples of transformational leader behavior. As a result, we felt it important to provide rationale as to why each manifestation of TLB should bring about the same result.

Identifying and articulating a vision

A transformational leader identifies viable new opportunities for his or her work group through a persistent, vigorous, and clear expression of a vision of the future. Though not specifically linked to an employee's cynicism regarding change, vision articulation has been associated with venture growth of

entrepreneurial firms (Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998) and effectiveness (Ensley, Pearson, & Pearce, 2003), quality and job attitudes (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). According to House and Shamir (1993, p. 97), a vision is 'an ideological goal that describes a better future for followers.' Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (1987) described vision as 'an ideal and unique image of the future' (p. 85). It is this expression of a 'better future' and 'an ideal and unique image of the future' that should impact an employee's perception that current conditions in the company will improve. Further, by articulating a vision, managers are providing information to employees that they are addressing future issues and that they are stewarding the company in a desirable manner. Thus, by identifying and articulating a vision, managers should be simultaneously managing the two components of employee cynicism about organizational change (i.e., improving the perceptions of future success and building faith in those responsible for the changes).

Consistent with social learning theory, employees are more likely to accept and commit to a proposed change that is clearly communicated to them as an exciting and viable opportunity from which they will benefit (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). From another theoretical perspective, employees need to experience a 'felt need' (Dalton, 1970) that is strong enough to create a state of dissonance between the current situation and what is required. Without this perceived need on the part of employees, change is viewed as unnecessary and disruptive and there is little chance of real change taking place. Vision articulating behavior on the part of the leader is one important means of bringing about a felt need.

Fostering the acceptance of group goals

Transformational leaders promote cooperation among followers and encourage them to work together toward a common goal, even at the expense of the followers' personal goals and aspirations. Under TLB, followers become 'team players', focusing less on what is good for them and more on what is good for their unit and/or organization. In this case, the use of goals is intended to challenge employees. Consistent with social learning theory, this challenge can serve to increase self-efficacy of employees. For example, Kark et al. (2003) found that TLB influences followers' collective efficacy to performance. In addition, Bass (1985, p. 72) suggests, 'extra effort can be achieved by a leader who continues to introduce new projects and new challenges in a highly flexible organization.'

Group goals can also be connected to Reichers et al.'s (1997) strategies for managing CAOC. Goals serve to keep people involved and participating in important activities. By becoming part of a larger effort, employees should see change as possible and the results of change as more positive. Also, the use of group goals serves as indicators of future organizational events and provides feedback opportunities to publicize successful changes. In addition, the increased involvement should influence employee perceptions that management is competent and is going about making the changes in the correct manner.

High performance expectations

Transformational leaders communicate their expectations to followers regarding excellence, quality, and/or high performance. Implicitly, this instills confidence in followers that they can achieve those goals, and thus they are more likely to accept and pursue the lofty goals—and less likely to express cynicism about initiatives. The effectiveness of high performance expectations is explainable through multiple theoretical lenses. First, as used in an earlier example, these expectations should convey confidence that translates into increased employee self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and ultimately an increased belief that proposed changes will be successful. Similarly, Locke (1991, p. 78) argues that by creating challenge "leaders convey to their followers that 'the sky is the limit'—that anything can be

accomplished—and the followers then feel confident that they are capable of performing the necessary acts for achieving the organization's vision." Second, consistent with Hovland et al.'s (1953) research on communication source characteristics, high standards represent a statement of competence on the part of the leader. This statement of competence is important in the employees' determination of whether or not the company's management possesses the skills needed to successfully implement proposed changes. Therefore, the leader who communicates specific, challenging standards is assumed to be a more deserving recipient of employee effort than someone who 'doesn't know what they are looking for.'

Providing intellectual stimulation

Transformational leaders encourage followers to re-examine some of their assumptions about their work and encourage them to find creative ways of improving their performance. According to Bass (1985), such intellectual stimulation is a behavior that is especially effective when organizations are in crisis situations stemming from ill-structured problems. Thus, organizations in need of transformation should encourage employees to contribute their own ideas about what should be done to solve the problems. With this type of bottom-up process, employees are more empowered and involved, and thus less cynical toward change. The reduced cynicism should occur because increased involvement enhances employee perceptions that change is possible. Further, when management takes an active role in encouraging employees to become more involved in the change process, they should simultaneously benefit from increased source credibility (Hovland et al., 1953) and trust which both enhance employee perceptions of competence.

Role modeling

Transformational leaders provide a behavioral example for subordinates to emulate that is consistent with both the values the leader espouses and the organization's goals. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory utilizes behavioral modeling as an important means of teaching new behaviors and modifying attitudes. In addition, role modeling is consistent with the broader concept of exemplification, which has received substantial attention in the leadership literature (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998). More specifically, Gardner and Avolio (1998) suggest that exemplifiers portray themselves as 'exceptionally trustworthy and morally responsible individuals' who 'stress their similarity to followers ... in order to establish themselves as trusted representatives of their followers' interests' (p. 44). Thus, exemplification is an important means by which employees are able to judge whether or not a manager is competent in their position and capable of delivering on the promised changes.

Hovland et al.'s (1953) research on source credibility can provide more relevant research regarding why role modeling should reduce employee CAOC. Consistent with Hovland et al.'s (1953) work, Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 12) wrote that 'managers may speak eloquently about vision and values, but if their behavior is not consistent with their stated beliefs, people ultimately will lose respect for them.' Similarly, Andersson (1996) argues that a manager's failure to serve as an appropriate model will lead to cynical employee views toward the manager and the organization. In other words, employees will be more committed to the change initiatives of leaders who lead by example and personally demonstrate what needs to be done.

Providing individualized support

Finally, transformational leaders respect followers and oversee their development with concern for their personal feelings and needs. Employees are more likely to respond to the initiatives of leaders

who care about them as individuals. According to House and Mitchell (1974), this is especially true when work conditions are stressful, frustrating, or dissatisfying—which is typically the case as employees undergo change. By receiving personal support from their leaders, employees are more likely to accept the change message. This acceptance is a key step in influencing whether or not employees believe that the proposed changes will be successful. From a social learning perspective, employees are much more likely to persevere when they perceive their environment to be supportive (Bandura, 1986). Since leaders play an important role in the environment of an employee, supportive leader behavior should serve to mitigate feelings of futility regarding change. Further, supportive leader behavior signals the employee that he/she is valued as an individual. From the arguments put forth above, we believe that:

Hypothesis 1: TLB will reduce employee CAOC

In addition to the hypothesis presented above, we also intend to explore the potential issue of a ‘reverse causality’. Using cross-sectional data, it would be impossible to rule out the possibility that reduced employee CAOC improves employee perceptions of TLB. In other words, it could be that employees experience encouraging conditions in the company at large (i.e., new policies, increased sales, new product lines, etc.) that give them more hope for the future. These positive experiences would serve to increase optimism about the future and to potentially reduce internal attributions of futility - thereby, reducing employee CAOC.

There are a numerous reasons to believe that reverse causality may be a significant issue when TLB is being studied in general, and with the relationship between CAOC and TLB in particular. Attributed charisma is a specific example of how reverse causality may be an issue when studying TLB. Many people in leadership roles are perceived to have heroic qualities after they have attained success (e.g., Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, Al Dunlap, Jeff Bezos), but often these attributions fade quickly if the success fades or was found to be ill-gained (e.g., Al Dunlap). In these cases, it would appear that people are enacting implicit leadership theories (Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Rush, Thomas, & Lord, 1977) to describe the behavior of their leader. In other words, employees may believe that ‘if things are getting better around here, it is because of what the management is doing’ in the same way that employees may assign blame to management when things are not going well. This phenomenon has been recognized in the scape-goating literature for years (Boeker, 1992; Gamson & Scotch, 1964). To test whether or not reverse causality is present, we will test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The longitudinal effect of TLB upon CAOC will be statistically stronger than the effect of CAOC upon TLB suggesting that TLB is associated with reduced employee cynicism about organizational change.

Organizational Context

All three companies are functionally organized, privately-owned and operated by onsite management, and have been in existence for between thirty and fifty years.

The performance and financial health of the three companies have remained relatively strong and none of the facilities have had significant layoffs at any time during the past twenty years. The three companies are very conservatively run tend to compete through competitive pricing and long-term

customer relationships. The companies are all based in the Midwestern United States and tend to rely on aging equipment.

Work-Job Factors

Most of the people in this study were first-line associates of the company performing relatively routine jobs. Because all three of the companies handle a wide variety of custom orders with very short deadlines, 'helping out' is highly valued and necessary for the companies to perform well. All of the existing managers (including the owners) have spent a significant amount of time operating and repairing equipment and most of the middle management started as hourly workers. As a result, career paths are almost exclusively internal to the company and loyalty is highly valued. This internal career path is what facilitated the initial contact between the study's first author and these companies. Top management realized that supervisors were receiving very little in the way of formal training and, as a result, a long-term relationship between the companies and the first author developed. This long-term relationship provided the ability to gain the trust of both employees and management members and allowed the type of data collection that was necessary for this type of study.

Relations between the employees and management at all three companies would be classified as 'very good'. No location of the organization has ever been unionized and employee involvement is relatively high. The data for this study were collected in 1999 and 2000.

Method

Procedures

The study's first author administered an employee survey on-site at three privately owned manufacturing firms in the United States. Of the three companies, one was a textile manufacturer, the second was an electronics refurbisher, and the last was a manufacturer of machined metal products. Since all employees, across all organizational levels, participated in the study, the sample represents a wide variety of skills and levels of responsibility.

The data were collected in two distinct waves, with the second data collection occurring nine months after the initial collection. The procedures used for each data collection were identical. First, each company scheduled all of their employees to go to the firm's on-site training room for forty-five minutes of company paid time. At each session, employees received letters from both the company president and the researchers ensuring the confidentiality of their responses. Beyond the data collected for this research, additional data concerning company-specific issues were collected and later summarized for the participating companies.

Participants

Of the 877 employees in time 1 (89 per cent of the population of employees at the three companies) that returned usable surveys, 561 (64 per cent of the respondents in time 1) provided usable surveys for time 2. Response rates and the percentage of usable surveys were similar across the three companies.

Table 1. Demographics at Time 1

Demographic variable	Employees who stayed with supervisor ($N = 372$)	Employee who changed supervisors ($N = 189$)
Gender		
Female	55%	51%
Male	45%	49%
Education		
No high school diploma	10%	10%
High school diploma	40%	38%
Some college or technical degree	27%	26%
College degree and higher	23%	26%
Age	36.5 years	35.6 years
Job tenure	9.2 years	7.6 years
Job status		
Line employees	76%	73%
Professional and managerial	24%	27%

Three primary causes were responsible for the reduction of 316 employees: 1) employee turnover during the lag time, 2) absenteeism on the day of the surveying effort, and 3) a lack of employee identification (needed to match surveys).

Importantly, we were able to distinguish which employees had remained with their same supervisors over the nine-month time lag ($N = 372$) from those employees who had changed supervisors ($N = 189$). The employees who had changed supervisors were normally the result of movement among the supervisors, and not often associated with employee promotions, transfers, etc. The research question required testing the hypotheses using employees who remained with their supervisors through both time periods. We excluded the employees whose supervisors had changed because this would introduce outside influences (i.e., new work procedures, departmental realignments, etc.) that were beyond the scope of this research. As seen in Table 1, there were no important demographic differences between employees who remained with their time 1 supervisor versus those who did not (*t*-tests revealed that the two groups did not significantly differ on any demographic measure assessed).

During the data collection period, all of the companies were prospering and in the process of adding new employees. In the five years prior to the first data collection effort, there had been slow growth without a substantial layoff at many of the companies. The present changes facing the companies were those of growth. Numerous people were being hired, processes were being streamlined, and an increase in professionalism was being instituted throughout management. We felt that using companies that were not currently experiencing any dramatic negative changes was most appropriate for our research because we were interested in examining the effects of TLB on CAOC conceptualized as a generalizable construct. We were not specifically interested in assessing attitudes towards company-specific change initiatives. Also, using company-specific initiatives would have made the use of a multiple-organization data set problematic and we believed that generalizability of the results would be enhanced through the method we chose.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all measures used in both data collections utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Transformational leader behavior

Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) transformational leadership behavior inventory (TLI) was used to assess the TLB measured in this study. Since its inception, a few items have been modified to increase the degree to which observable behaviors are measured. Work by Podsakoff et al. (1996) found support for the factor structure of the TLI with each item possessing a completely standardized loading of 0.60 or above. In addition, the Podsakoff, et al. (1996) study found adequate discriminant validity between the measures, and reliabilities for the six dimensions ranging from 0.80 to 0.90.

Cynicism about organizational change

To best capture employee attitudes towards change, Reichers et al.'s (1997) cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) scale was used. This 8-item scale is designed to measure employee feelings of futility and the external attribution of blame for their futility. In their initial testing of the scale's properties, Wanous, Reichers, and Austin (1994) reported an alpha of 0.86 when using a sample of 757 manufacturing employees.

Dean et al. (1998) point out that CAOC specifically concerns organizational change efforts. Since TLB is theoretically linked to change, the use of Reichers et al.'s (1997) scale was more appropriate than the personality-focused hostility measures of Cook and Medley (1954) or Wrightsman (1991), the societal cynicism measure of Kanter and Mirvis (1989), or the occupationally-focused cynicism scale of Niederhoffer (1967). In addition, the Reichers et al. (1997) conceptualization offers a more direct link for managers to develop strategies for managing cynicism since attitudes are somewhat malleable (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, trait approaches to studying cynicism suggesting a level of permanence making those measures unsuitable for the goals of the current research.

Control variables

In addition to the primary variables of interest, we included three variables to control for possibly pertinent effects that were not represented by the hypothesized variables. More specifically, we wanted to control for relevant structural effects, other perceptions of leader behavior, and additional employee attitudes. We selected the structural variable of employee status in the organization. This was operationalized as a two-level variable with a '1' representing line employees while a '2' represented professional and managerial employees. This control was used because it was believed that employees of higher organizational status would have lower levels of CAOC than lower status employees would. This assertion is consistent with the empirical findings of Reichers et al. (1997) and Bommer et al. (2004).

To control for other leader behaviors relevant to employee cynicism, we assessed the supervisor-administered noncontingent punishment behavior reported by the employee. Cobb, Wooten and Folger (1995) asserted that leaders often come to personify the organization for many of their followers, and subordinates are likely to assess the fairness of change efforts by the treatment they receive from their supervisors. Noncontingent punishment was included then due to its likely links to increasing employee CAOC. Noncontingent punishment was measured using Podsakoff, Todor, and Skov's (1982) four-item scale.

Due to the findings of Reichers et al. (1997), we also controlled for employee perceptions of distributive justice. In this analysis, we used distributive justice as a control regarding the role of rewards and compensation upon CAOC. Distributive justice was thought to be associated with employee cynicism about change. More specifically, if employee perceptions of distributive justice are low, CAOC will likely be high. This is consistent with Cobb et al.'s (1995) assertion that 'when individuals believe

that they have been treated fairly . . . they trust their organization and their leaders more and are more loyal and committed to them—all of which are important to change efforts' (p. 244). To measure distributive justice, we used the five-item measure of Niehoff and Moorman (1993).

Analytic strategy

Two analyses were conducted before the hypotheses were tested. First, a random effects ANOVA variance composition was conducted for each of the transformational leader behaviors. This analysis allows for the appropriate level of analysis to be used in subsequent analyses. Then, the two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was followed and a confirmatory model was conducted using LISREL 8.30. The results of the confirmatory factor models were then used in the cross-lagged panel models needed to assess the hypothesized model.

Results

In examining the overall TLB factor, the results of the variance decomposition process revealed that 23 percent of the variance associated with the ratings of transformational leadership was associated with the supervisor, while 77 percent was associated with the individual raters (i.e., the employees). Thus, while the amount of variance associated with the leader was statistically and practically significant; it was relatively small compared to the amount of variance associated with the individual raters. This finding suggests that employees largely experience transformational leadership as a subjective individual experience, although aspects of it do appear to be shared. As a result, we treated the phenomenon at the individual level throughout the rest of the analysis process.

The confirmatory factor analysis found that one item warranted removal from the fostering group goals scale. After the removal of this item, we tested the overall fit of the confirmatory factor model. Consistent with the recommendations of Jaccard and Wan (1995), model fit was assessed by the CFI (CFI = 0.90) and RMSEA (RMSEA = 0.047). Thus, the overall confirmatory factor analysis fit the data adequately using these established guidelines.

Upon achieving a reasonable fit in the confirmatory factor model, the measures were retained for analysis. Further evidence for use of the measures shown was provided by the high completely standardized factor loadings where only six items loaded below 0.60 on their hypothesized factor. In addition, the reliabilities of the scales were all above Nunnally and Bernstein's (1993) recommended level for new scales (i.e., 0.70) ranging between 0.73 and 0.90 with an average of 0.84. The mean, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the variables used in the study are reported in Table 2.

The intercorrelations among the TLB dimensions within each time period were extremely high, exceeding 0.80 in a few instances. This high intercorrelation is not unusual in literature examining TLB since the behaviors are hypothesized dimensions of an underlying conceptual framework. These high intercorrelations were not problematic for the model test, but they did prevent us from examining whether or not the dimensions had differential effects. To represent the TLB factor, 2 testlets (Williams & Anderson, 1994) were constructed from each of the six TLBs. Items were randomly assigned to testlets (i.e., sub-scales) and then averaged for each testlet. By using testlets rather than individual items as manifest indicators of the latent constructs, we were able to maintain an adequate sample size to parameter ratio. This is consistent with Bollen's (1989) recommendation that models incorporate at least two indicators to measure latent constructs and empirical evidence that two indicators per latent

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations of study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Employee status (T1)	1.22	0.42	(-)																
2. Noncontingent punishment (T1)	2.53	1.35	-0.22	(0.75)															
3. Distributive justice (T1)	4.73	1.26	0.37	-0.36	(0.73)														
4. Articulating a vision (T1)	4.40	1.56	0.29	-0.31	0.35	(0.89)													
5. Fostering group goals (T1)	4.69	1.59	0.30	-0.39	0.34	0.74	(0.80)												
6. High performance expectations (T1)	4.99	1.23	0.19	-0.09	0.14	0.46	0.52	(0.75)											
7. Intellectual stimulation (T1)	4.43	1.45	0.37	-0.35	0.40	0.83	0.80	0.55	(0.86)										
8. Role modeling (T1)	4.36	1.71	0.32	-0.39	0.37	0.74	0.79	0.49	0.79	(0.86)									
9. Supportive leader behavior (T1)	5.01	1.73	0.32	-0.50	0.42	0.69	0.78	0.39	0.74	0.75	(0.90)								
10. Cynicism about org. change (T1)	3.83	1.35	-0.48	0.30	-0.53	-0.37	-0.37	-0.22	-0.42	-0.37	-0.35	(0.87)							
11. Articulating a vision (T2)	4.44	1.51	0.31	0.28	0.23	0.54	0.49	0.32	0.53	0.45	0.49	-0.30	(0.89)						
12. Fostering group goals (T2)	4.58	1.51	0.30	-0.29	0.22	0.44	0.52	0.31	0.45	0.45	0.47	-0.22	0.73	(0.76)					
13. High performance expectations (T2)	4.85	1.31	0.26	-0.13	0.12	0.31	0.36	0.55	0.34	0.35	0.29	-0.28	0.48	0.52	(0.79)				
14. Intellectual stimulation (T2)	4.49	1.41	0.33	-0.24	0.21	0.49	0.50	0.38	0.55	0.45	0.46	-0.32	0.76	0.78	0.62	(0.88)			
15. Role modeling (T2)	4.34	1.70	0.38	-0.37	0.25	0.46	0.50	0.25	0.51	0.57	0.53	-0.30	0.74	0.82	0.49	0.79	(0.89)		
16. Supportive leader behavior (T2)	4.91	1.64	0.35	-0.38	0.31	0.40	0.48	0.22	0.45	0.45	0.60	-0.30	0.69	0.76	0.40	0.69	0.79	(0.89)	
17. Cynicism about org. change (T2)	3.91	1.43	-0.36	0.27	-0.36	-0.31	-0.33	-0.15	-0.36	-0.31	-0.29	0.59	-0.27	-0.33	-0.26	-0.32	-0.34	-0.34	(0.90)

Notes: All correlations > 0.10 are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. $N = 372$. Coefficient alpha is presented on the diagonal.

T1 = Time 1 and T2 = Time 2

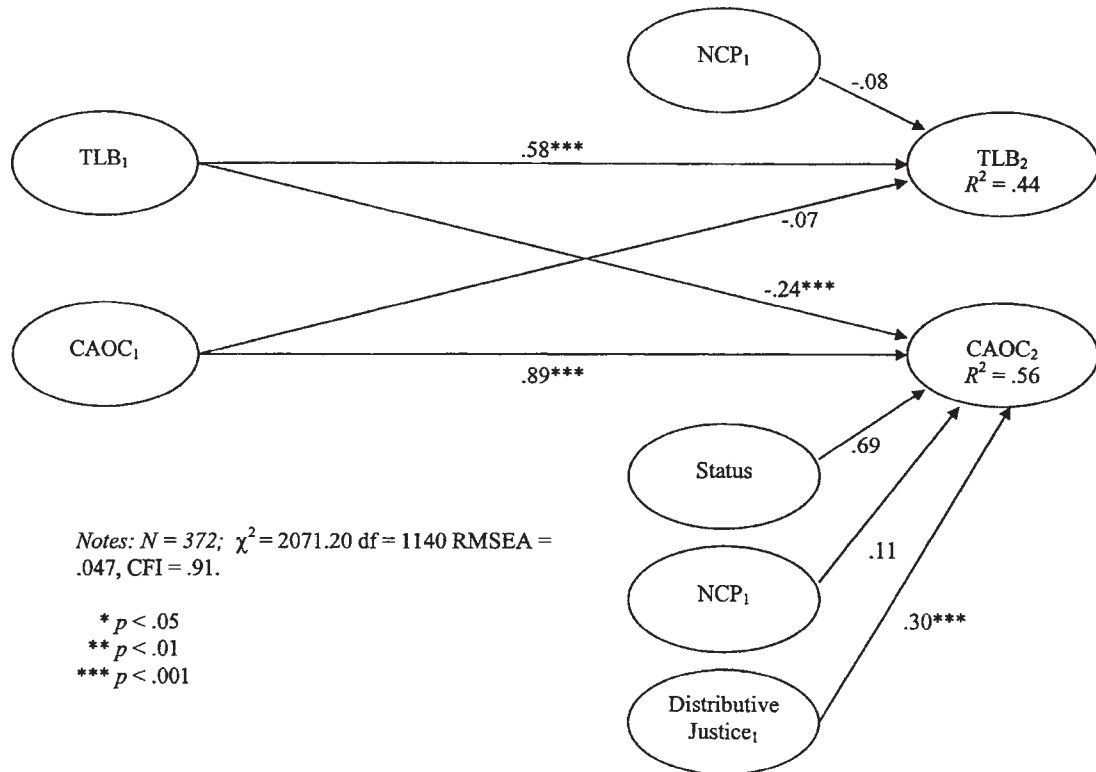


Figure 1. Cross-lagged relationships between TLB and CAOC

variable is appropriate for sample sizes over 200 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Further, testlets were used to reduce the number of indicators because, other things remaining constant, it is more difficult to achieve acceptable fit with large models (Bollen, 1989).

The results shown in Figure 1 provide support for the first hypothesis. The path coefficient between TLB in time 1 and CAOC in time 2 was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.24, p < 0.001$). Thus, TLB received at time 1 reduced employee CAOC at time 2 while controlling for employee CAOC in time 1. In other words, when employees received transformational treatment, their levels of CAOC were reduced.

To test the study's second hypothesis, further examination of Figure 1 is needed. More specifically, hypothesis 2 posited that the longitudinal effect of TLB upon CAOC would be statistically stronger than the effect of CAOC upon TLB suggesting that TLB is associated with reduced employee cynicism about organizational change. An examination of the coefficients appears to be consistent with the second hypothesis because the path from TLB in T1 to CAOC in T2 was significant ($\beta = -0.24, p < 0.001$) while the structural path representing reverse causality, CAOC in T1 to TLB in T2 was not ($\beta = -0.07, n.s.$). To test this hypothesis, we conducted a χ^2 difference test between the model presented in Figure 1, and a similar model that constrained the cross-lagged paths between TLB and CAOC (i.e., TLB T1 \rightarrow CAOC T2 and CAOC T1 and CAOC T2) to be equal (see Byrne, 1998 for a detailed explanation to this approach). The results of this test suggested that constraining the two cross-lagged paths to be equal led to an inferior fit when compared to allowing them to be freely estimated. Consequently, this suggests that the path from TLB to CAOC was larger in magnitude than the reverse (CAOC to TLB). This finding supports the second

hypothesis. That is, the longitudinal effect of TLB upon CAOC was statistically stronger than the effect of CAOC upon TLB suggesting that TLB is associated with reduced employee cynicism about organizational change.

Discussion

The key finding of this study is that change implementers who engage in TLB can effectively reduce their subordinates' cynicism about organizational change. This finding was further enhanced by the fact that our model supported findings which were consistent with TLB's directional influence on CAOC. These findings suggest that TLBs are effective tools for combating employee cynicism, which appears to be on the rise in American corporations, and has been shown to be detrimental to the effective functioning of organizations. Thus, organizations hoping to develop employees who are more open and committed to organizational change may use TLB as a tool to create such change.

Consequently, attention to these behaviors in selection and and/or training may be fruitful. It is encouraging to note that research (e.g., Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996) has suggested that at least some of the behaviors that make up TLB are trainable. For example, the work of Awamleh and Gardner (1999) illustrates the ability for leaders to improve their ability to articulate a vision. Further, the exemplification and social learning literatures explicitly speak to the ability for leaders to become more effective role models. Finally, we argue, that training is likely to be a necessary but insufficient condition in promoting TLB in organizations. More importantly perhaps is the creation of a work context/culture that supports TLB. As previous research indicates (e.g., Baer & Frese, 2003), unsupportive contexts can undermine even the most well intended change initiatives.

Although the results of this study provide support for the role of TLB in reducing employee CAOC, the statistical results are not able to address broader questions of cynicism and organizational performance and ethics. As Stephens, D'Intino, and Victor (1995) aptly point out that 'what is being transformed is not the organization, but the values of the employees. Such transformations presume that employees' values, like employees' labor, are rightfully the property of the organization' (p. 125). Although consistent with a long tradition (including Mayo, Herzberg, and Bass among others) of viewing employee attitudes as appropriate targets for leader influence exists, the possibility to use TLB in a way that negatively impacts individuals and organizations exists (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

To complicate matters, while CAOC may be seen as detrimental to management efforts toward organizational change efforts, any perception that management is attempting to 'smoke out' the cynics may only serve to reinforce cynicism. Recent criticism of the mental models behind resistance to change may provide important insight into how managers can effectively deal with perceived resistance. Piderit (2000) argues that, 'researchers have largely overlooked the potentially positive intentions that may motivate negative responses to change' (p. 783). That is, like many managers, researchers have assumed that resistance is largely a product of pessimistic reactionary employees representing obstacles to positive organizational progress.

Yet, research suggests that cynics care deeply about their organization and may make careful and systematic recommendations of organizational problems (McClough, Rogelberg, Fisher, & Bachiochi, 1998). In addition, cynics may be less pollyannaish about organizational change providing important 'devils advocates' in decision-making and problem solving process. Thus, organizations viewing cynics as mere barriers to change are likely to overlook important 'meta-messages' being sent to management about system defects. In light of this research, our findings that TLB can reduce levels of CAOC may be indicative of a more complex understanding of resistance to change. Since attitudes

are considered to be multi-dimensional including cognitive, emotional and intentional components, it stands to reason that changing an attitude like CAOC would also require a multi-dimensional approach. Leaders who engage in TLB and quell CAOC may do so by influencing employees' emotional and cognitive states and may reduce intentions to behavior consistent with their attitude.

Although TLB appears effective in reducing employee CAOC, we do not propose that TLB should be applied recklessly across the board. On the contrary, we agree with Kanungo and Mendonca (1995) that TLB training should be accompanied by training on the ethics of influence and power. In addition, cynics may play an important role in determining the root causes of problems thereby greatly contributing to organizational change efforts. Perhaps then, transformational leaders' role in dealing with cynics is to 'convert' them to champions of change without compromising their integrity or attempting to suppress their voice in change efforts.

Limitations

Although this study has some encouraging results and methodological strengths (e.g., longitudinal data, multi-organization sample, multiple raters of behavior), a few limitations deserve mention. First, the study took place in a manufacturing context and these companies were not actively engaged in specific large-scale changes. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to non-manufacturing environments or to settings where specific large-scale change initiatives are underway. In fact, the effect of TLB may vary considerably with respect to the stability of the environment. Second, though the longitudinal design is a significant strength, it does not eliminate all common method variance concerns. Thus, while the data waves were collected nine months apart, the leader behaviors and the criterion measure (i.e., CAOC) were provided by the same source (i.e., the employee). Given the subject matter of this study, however, it would be relatively difficult to obtain measures from different sources. The results, however, suggest that the findings are not solely a function of common method variance. If the relationship between the variables was solely a function of common method variance, then it is unlikely that the strengths of the relationships would have varied based on the direction of the cross-lagged paths. Finally some research has shown that although common method variance does inflate variance, it is generally not robust enough such that it invalidates research findings (Doty & Glick, 1998).

Third, the model we examined may be mis-specified due to unmeasured intervening variables. More specifically, the processes by which TLB actually 'change' employee cynicism are not included in our empirical model. For instance, an employee's level of trust and their self-efficacy are both posited in the hypothesis development as process variables that may mediate between the leader's behavior and the employee's CAOC. Fourth, this study was unable to distinguish whether attributions of leader behavior, or real behavioral changes by the leader were responsible for these findings. It is conceivable that the behaviors of the leaders never changed, and that the only change occurring were shifts in employee perceptions of their leaders. This is an issue that would need to be explored by future research.

Future research

The findings of this study suggest several other interesting avenues for future investigation. At a basic level, more research needs to be conducted examining additional the influence process of TLB on CAOC. That is, to focus on the process through which TLB and CAOC combine to actually accomplish change, and/or lead to organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, and participation

in team-based activities. Thus, future research should examine whether CAOC mediates or moderates the relationships between TLB and the outcomes described above. Extending this research chain, it may also be interesting to understand whether TLB could ‘buffer’ the effects of employee CAOC on subsequent change performance and commitment. Following Azjen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior, it might be interesting to note whether or not TLB is able to moderate behavior intentions. That is, if TLB can lower CAOC, it stands to reason that employees’ intent to act in accordance with TLB may be diminished. This could have implications for employee performance and citizenship such that former cynics could morph into strong agents for change (Bommer, et al., 2004).

In addition to the research proposed above, a number of possible situational factors would appear to be relevant to the TLB—CAOC relationship. For example, it may be fruitful to explore whether or not CAOC is easier or more difficult to influence under in certain organizational contexts such as stability versus periods of crises. Another promising approach may include looking at the foci of CAOC as it quite possible that employees may be highly cynical about changes proposed by one group (e.g., manufacturing) but highly supportive of other changes being suggested (e.g., by marketing and sales). Overall, there appear to be numerous approaches open to exploring the relationships discussed here. Hopefully, future research can further illuminate the findings of this study to serve as practical aids for managers in their attempts to bring about important organizational changes.

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