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The Influence of Follower Personality and Affect on Their
Perceptions of Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

The concept of leadership implies an interactive process between a leader and her followers. Historically, scholarly efforts in the field of leadership have focused primarily on the leader. Recent calls to explicate the influence mechanisms used by leaders and suggestions of reciprocity of influence between leaders and followers only adds to the importance of a greater understanding regarding follower perceptions and behaviors. However, researchers have only begun to explore followers' perspectives in regards to this relationship. Therefore, this study examined the role of two sets of follower characteristics on perceptions of leadership behavior; personality and dispositional affect. Utilizing a sample of approximately 150 NROTC Midshipmen, this study found that elements of both individual personality and affect predicted followers' perceptions of transformational leadership behavior. Both theoretical and practical implications are discussed, and suggestions for future research are provided.

Predicting Follower Perceptions of Transformational Leadership

The study of leadership is one of the most heavily researched areas of organizational behavior and management. Effective leadership is commonly believed to be an essential element to organizational success. Among the list of positive outcomes, effective leadership has been linked to higher levels of performance, commitment, effort, motivation, and organizational citizenship behaviors, to name a few (e.g. Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Masi, 2000). Consequently, leadership is often the focus of a significant amount of organizational resources with respect to attracting, retaining, and developing this important resource at all levels of the organization. This premium on the value of leadership exists in organizational contexts ranging from businesses to government to the military and across many, if not all cultural boundaries.

Historically, the study of leadership has focused on the leader (Felfe & Schyns, 2006). While the field has moved away from the “great man” theories of its origins (Yukl, 2006), the leader has largely remained the center of attention for both scholars and practitioners. Researchers have examined how a variety of factors such as cognitive ability (e.g. Judge, Ilies, & Colbert, 2004), emotion and mood (e.g. Bono & Ilies, 2006; George, 2000; Sosik & Megerian, 1999), personality (e.g. Bono & Judge, 2004; de Hoogh, den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005; Judge, Ilies, Bono, & Gerhardt, 2002), and values (e.g. Burkgren, 2004; Lord & Brown, 2001; Sosik, 2005) relate to leadership behaviors.

While this interest in the leader is understandable, the concept of leadership implies that someone is actually following the leader. Though theories such as leader-member exchange (Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1973; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) have focused on the leader-follower relationship, emphasizing this dynamic within other leadership paradigms such as

transformational leadership is a more recent development. For example, transformational leadership scholars have only recently begun to explore how constructs such as self-concordance (Bono & Judge, 2003), personal and social identification (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003), psychological empowerment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004), collective efficacy (Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler, & Kan, 2004), leader-member exchange (Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005), value congruence (Brown & Trevino, 2006), and job characteristics (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006) might begin to explain the mechanisms through which leaders affect followers.

Still, attention explicitly directed towards understanding the nature and disposition of followers and their unique perspective in the leader-follower relationship has remained a rare occurrence (Conger, 1999). Nevertheless, a nascent stream of empirical research suggests that follower characteristics such as values (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001), personality (Felfe & Schyns, 2006), and affect (Brown & Keeping, 2005) influence their individual perceptions of leaders and leader behaviors. The purpose of this study is to extend this initial research by examining the relationships among follower personality, affect, and perceptions of transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Despite decades of research, leadership remains a controversial topic. Over the past 50 years alone, the field has produced, on average, more than one new leadership classification framework or typology per year (Fleishman et al., 1991). Of the numerous leadership theories that have been developed, transformational leadership has arguably attracted the greatest amount of attention in recent years (Avolio & Bass, 1999) and is currently the most widely accepted leadership paradigm (Tejeda, 2001). This theory stems from Burns' (1978) seminal work

attempting to better understand the linkages between leaders and followers, and to integrate some of the more promising elements of prior leadership theories.

Essentially, transformational leadership focuses on how a leader influences and motivates followers and is similarly motivated in return. It involves a form of influence that motivates followers to achieve more than what is expected of them. This type of leadership “transforms” both the leader and the follower by motivating each to achieve his or her full potential. Thus, the reciprocal nature of this relationship necessitates an understanding of how both leader *and* follower characteristics influence this dynamic.

In research contexts, transformational leadership is often operationalized using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, also known simply as the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The most recent and frequently used version of this questionnaire (MLQ-5x short form) characterizes transformational leadership as having five dimensions; idealized influence-attributes, idealized influence-behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. *Idealized influence* or charisma refers to leaders who are admired, respected, and trusted by their followers and inspire them to embrace the leader’s vision and to identify with the leader. Being able to articulate an appealing vision and to motivate followers to higher levels of performance through optimism, confidence, and enthusiasm are some of the behaviors assessed by the *inspirational motivation* dimension of the MLQ. *Intellectual stimulation* is the degree to which a leader engages followers, challenging their assumptions and approaches to tasks in order to encourage innovation and creative problem solving. Finally, *individualized consideration* refers to the leader’s ability to listen and appropriately respond to each follower’s unique needs for growth and achievement.

Follower Characteristics

Understanding how follower characteristics might influence perceptions of leadership is important for several reasons. From a research perspective, this understanding might help to narrow the efforts of those in the field who are trying to identify key elements in the leader-follower relationship. Also, considering that the majority of research on transformational leadership is based upon subordinates' ratings of their leader, understanding the factors that influence these ratings is critical to a thorough understanding and interpretation of any empirical findings. Moreover, such characteristics might be moderators or partial mediators of the leader-follower relationship (Felfe & Schyns, 2006).

From a practitioner perspective, follower ratings of leadership behaviors play an important role in leadership identification, assessment, and development programs within many organizations. Corporate investments in such leadership development efforts have been estimated to be \$50 billion a year (Lockwood, 2006). These programs increasingly utilize multi-rater or "360 degree" feedback instruments to assess subordinate (as well as peer, supervisory, and other) perceptions of a leader (Conger & Toegel, 2003). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence follower ratings is important in developing accurate leader assessments and in properly interpreting follower perceptions of leader performance.

One of the few studies examining the influence of follower disposition on leader perceptions focused on the role of select values and personality elements of followers (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). This research found that follower values and personality were moderately useful in predicting follower preferences among three types of leadership style; charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented. Though these leadership types share similarities with the concept of transformational leadership, it is unclear how closely each is related to the construct as measured by the MLQ. Further, the follower characteristics selected were specifically chosen by the

researchers for their presumed likelihood of a hypothesized relationship with charismatic leadership. By not utilizing an established value or personality model from the psychology literature, Ehrhart and Klein have limited the degree to which these results can be compared to future research. As a specific example, the researchers could have employed an established measure of personality such as one based on the so called Big Five personality characteristics (Costa & McCrae, 1992). To their credit, the authors acknowledged this limitation and called for the use of the five factor personality model in future research (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001).

Fundamental to Ehrhart and Klein's (2001) study was the assumption that preferences for and reactions to certain types of leaders are at least partially driven by a follower's attraction to the perceived similarity of characteristics inferred from leader behavior. This potential for similarity attraction seems particularly salient in regards to dimensions of personality and dispositional affect. Thus, one of the reasons behind this study is to explore the influence of these follower characteristics and respond to Ehrhart and Klein's (2001) call for research in these areas.

Follower personality. Exploring the link between personality and leadership is not new to the field (Bono & Judge, 2004). However, the growing body of research regarding transformational leadership and the increasing consensus around the five factor model of personality by psychology researchers has renewed interest in this link over the past decade (de Hoogh, den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). This growing consensus in the psychology literature contends that personality consists of five broad factors that encompass several related but distinct sub-dimensions. Supporters of this personality model contend that the five factors of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness tend to be relatively stable over time (Costa & McCrae, 1992). A discussion of each of these dimensions is presented

below, including the hypothesized relationship with follower perceptions of transformational leadership.

Neuroticism is the antithesis of emotional stability and represents the degree to which individuals are likely to be emotionally insecure, anxious, or otherwise emotionally unstable. Those individuals that score low on this dimension tend to be calm, relaxed, and even tempered (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Neuroticism is also typically associated with a lack of self-confidence. In regards to leadership, self-confidence is thought to be a central characteristic of transformational leaders (Bass, 1990; Ross & Offermann, 1991) and therefore suggests a negative relationship with neuroticism. However, meta-analyses examining this link have failed to find conclusive evidence to support this claim (Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge & Bono, 2000).

While the literature is somewhat mixed about the relationship between neuroticism and perceptions of transformational leadership, there are several logical reasons why such a relationship might exist. First, individuals low in neuroticism are more emotionally secure and spend relatively less time focused on their own anxiety and fear. This frees up cognitive resources allowing them to more readily identify transformational leadership. Second, followers low in neuroticism tend to be more similar to transformational leaders, thereby increasing the probability of recognition. Finally, highly neurotic followers are typically more difficult to lead which could contribute to a contentious relationship with their leaders. This decreases the likelihood that they would identify their leaders as transformational.

Hypothesis 1: Follower neuroticism will be negatively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Extraversion is a dimension of personality that assesses an individual's tendency to be outgoing, social, assertive, active, energetic, optimistic, and bold (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Individuals with low extraversion should not be seen as having the opposite of these characteristics (e.g. unhappy, pessimistic), but rather as simply less exuberant than extroverts. Introverts also tend to be more independent in nature and prefer to be alone rather than be in a group. As might be expected, extroversion is often cited as a trait of transformational leaders. In fact, extraversion was found to have a strong, consistent, and positive relationship with leadership in Bono and Judge's (2004) meta-analysis of the topic. It is also reasonable to expect that extraverted followers are more likely to perceive and respond to a transformational leadership style, while introverts are less likely to do so due to their independent nature. The likelihood of perceived trait similarity between extroverted transformational leaders and extroverted followers also suggests a positive relationship between these constructs.

Hypothesis 2: Follower extraversion will be positively related to perceived transformational leadership.

The degree to which an individual is imaginative, artistically sensitive, reflective, curious, and unconventional in nature is measured by the *openness* to experience dimension of the five factor model. These characteristics have been associated with divergent thinking and creativity in individuals (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which has been cited as a valued skill for effective leadership (Yukl, 2006). Likewise, followers with a high degree of openness are more likely to be receptive to the behaviors of transformational leaders. In particular, it is likely that followers with a high degree of openness will positively respond to the intellectual stimulation and individual consideration dimension of this leadership style.

Hypothesis 3: Follower openness will be positively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Like extraversion, *agreeableness* in an individual is emblematic of interpersonal tendencies and preferences. Fundamentally altruistic and cooperative, agreeable individuals are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviors and arouse similar feelings in others (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This concern with others' interests is another core characteristic of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990) which helps leaders attend to the individual needs of followers. Consistent with these assumptions, evidence supports a positive relationship between agreeableness and transformational leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004; de Hoogh, den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005; Judge & Bono, 2000). It is further assumed that follower agreeableness will be positively associated with transformational leadership through a preference for cooperation and in response to supportive and inspirational behaviors exhibited by the leader.

Hypothesis 4: Follower agreeableness will be positively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Lastly, conscientiousness is a measure of self-control, purposefulness, and determination. Highly conscientious individuals work hard to achieve their goals and are deliberate, organized and disciplined (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These traits are strongly related to leader performance as well as overall job performance (Judge & Bono, 2000). As conscientious leaders are more likely to follow through on their commitments, this is likely to bolster follower faith in their leadership. Similarly, conscientious followers may be able to identify with these leader behaviors and be compelled to follow their example. It is therefore expected that conscientious followers will positively respond to the goal-orientation and persistence exhibited by transformational leaders.

Hypothesis 5: Follower conscientiousness will be positively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Follower affect. Affect is measured using two distinctive dimensions--positive affect and negative affect—that have been established in factor analytic studies of the construct (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). In order to measure an individual's affective state, an assessment of both their positive and negative sub-dimensions is required. Individuals with high positive affect (PA) tend to feel enthusiastic, energetic, and excited and possess an overall sense of well-being. Those with low PA tend to have a lack of these positive emotions, a lack of energy or drive, and even sadness. So, it seems plausible that the expressive and optimistic tendencies of high PA followers would be attracted to the inspirational motivation and idealized influence of transformational leaders. Furthermore, the general positive outlook of followers with high PA may actually have a more positive and optimistic impression of people and subsequently provide more affirmative ratings of leadership perceptions.

Negative affect (NA) is a general tendency to experience negative feelings of anxiety, stress, anger, guilt, fear, and nervousness. Those with low NA tend not to exhibit such feelings, but rather a state of calmness or serenity. Though a specific relationship is difficult to predict among these constructs, it is hypothesized that the negative feelings associated with followers having high NA will have either no response or a negative response to transformational leadership.

It should be noted that trait PA has been shown to have similarities to the construct of extraversion, while NA is believed to correspond to neuroticism (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Although the existing findings are inconclusive, consideration of this possibility will be further discussed in the analysis and discussion of the data. However, it is useful to mention the

similarity among these constructs here, since the arguments for the relationship between follower PA and NA and perceptions of transformational leadership are analogous to those given for extraversion and neuroticism, respectively.

Hypothesis 6: Follower positive affect will be positively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 7: Follower negative affect will be negatively related to perceived transformational leadership.

Methods

Participants & Setting

Participants in this study were members of a Naval Reserve Officer Training Candidates (NROTC) battalion drawing students from five mid-Atlantic universities. Participants varied in age from 18 to 24 years of age, with nearly three quarters of the participants being male. Distribution of the participants across NROTC enrollment classifications were 84% Midshipmen, 9% Officer Cadets, and 7% Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program enrollees. By class rank the participants were 16% freshmen, 26% sophomores, 22% juniors, and 36% seniors. Of the 151 members of the battalion, 104 volunteered to take part in the study (69% of the total).

It is important to understand the organizational structure of this sample population. An NROTC unit/battalion consists of approximately 120 to 250 individuals from one or more area universities or colleges. NROTC Battalions are organized into two companies. Each company is divided into three platoons. Each platoon is designated by its company letter, and platoon number (e.g., B-1, A-3, etc.). Each platoon is further divided into three squads. Members of the battalion are assigned to a new squad each year so that they see as many leadership styles as

possible. The battalion chain of command is structured much like any traditional military command structure. The battalion leader is the Battalion Commander (BNCO). The BNCO has a Battalion Executive Officer (BNXO) who is responsible for overseeing the administrative aspects of the command. The BNCO leads a team of staff officers to assist in the smooth operation of the unit. Each company also has a Company Commander and a Company Executive Officer as well. Within each platoon there is a Platoon Commander (PC), each of which has a Platoon Sergeant. The Platoon Sergeant is responsible for the conduct of the platoon and for organizing and conducting drill practice. Each squad within the platoon is assigned a Squad Leader (SL) who is the first link in a Midshipman's chain of command. Because of this structure, it was possible for an individual to have at least one and as many as three direct supervisors.

Procedures

The researchers provided a brief presentation of the study during one of the regular meetings of the battalion to explain the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their requested participation. Based on their position within the battalion hierarchy, the NROTC Midshipmen were asked to complete one of three surveys (assigned by the researchers) regarding their personality, affect, and the transformational leadership behaviors of their immediate supervisors. Other measures were included in these surveys, but are not relevant to the current study. Consent forms and surveys were sent via electronic mail to all participants. Participants were given approximately one month to complete the surveys on their own time and could complete the surveys in multiple sessions. The surveys were not anonymous due to the necessity of matching leader and follower data, but strict confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the

study were repeatedly expressed to students both verbally and in writing throughout the data collection period.

Measures

Transformational leadership. Follower perceptions of a superior's transformational leadership behaviors were measured using the 45-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) form 5x-Short (Bass & Avolio, 1995). While this instrument contains measures of transformational and transactional leadership as well as leadership effectiveness, only the transformational leadership items were used for this study. As noted previously, the MLQ has five subscales with four items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). The five transformational leadership subscales include (item samples are given in parentheses after each scale): idealized influence-attributed (e.g., "Displays a sense of power and confidence"), idealized influence-behavior (e.g., "Talks to us about his/her most important values and beliefs"), inspirational motivation (e.g., "Articulates a compelling vision of the future"), intellectual stimulation (e.g., "Re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate"), and individualized consideration (e.g., "Spends time teaching and coaching me").

Personality. The five factor personality model used in this study was measured by the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI contains 12 items for each of the five personality dimensions for a total of 60 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree").

Affect. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was used to assess positive and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS lists 20 different emotions (e.g. "enthusiastic", "interested" for positive; "afraid", "distressed" for negative) to which

participants are asked to express the degree to which they are currently experiencing each on a scale from 1 (“Very slightly or not at all”) to 5 (“Extremely”).

Control variables. Information regarding gender (female, male) and class rank (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) were collected as control variables and were converted to dummy variables prior to the regression analyses.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables included in the study are presented in Table 1. Consistent with prior research (Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005), the five sub-dimensions of transformational leadership were combined to a single measure since the hypotheses in this study are principally concerned with perceptions of overall transformational leadership behavior and not its specific manifestations. This approach was empirically justified based on the intercorrelations among dimensions (i.e. the average correlation was .78).

Further examination of the correlation matrix suggests that while some relationships were significantly related as expected, evidence of other hypothesized relationships were not evident. Specifically, follower perceptions of transformational leadership were significantly correlated with extroversion ($r = .21, p < .01$), agreeableness ($r = .19, p < .05$), and positive affect ($r = .35, p < .01$). However, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, and negative affect were not significantly related to transformational leadership.

The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression (Aiken & West, 1991). Prior to beginning these analyses, all data were examined with respect to the underlying assumptions of this technique. The decision to use hierarchical regression was based on the desire to assess the change in the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable as additional independent variables were added to the model. More specifically, this technique

enabled detection of any changes resulting from the addition of positive affect and negative affect to the model after testing for the relationship between follower personality dimensions and perceptions of transformational leadership behavior in supervisors.

Given the correlations reported above, the control variables for gender and class rank were loaded in the first step of the model, after being dummy coded to address the categorical nature of these data. In the second step, the five personality dimensions were added as a block. Finally, both positive and negative affect were added in the third step of the model to assess the potential measurement overlap between neuroticism/negative affect and extraversion/positive affect. The significance of the change in R^2 was examined after each step to test whether the inclusion of the additional variable sets predicted incremental variance in perceptions of transformational leadership behavior beyond the control variables. The results of this analysis, including the standardized beta coefficients, R^2 , and change in R^2 are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between follower neuroticism and perceptions of transformational leadership. This hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 2 contended that a positive relationship would exist between follower extraversion and transformational leadership perceptions. Again, evidence to support this hypothesis was not identified in the analysis. The third hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between openness and the dependent variable which was not supported. A positive relationship between follower agreeableness and transformational leadership perceptions was postulated in Hypothesis 4. This hypothesis was supported by the analysis ($\beta = .19, p < .05$). Lastly, a positive relationship between conscientiousness and transformational leadership was expected in the fifth and final personality hypothesis, but it lacked sufficient evidence to support it. In summary, only

the follower personality dimension of agreeableness was found to have a significant relationship with perceptions of transformational leadership behavior.

The remaining hypotheses concerned the relationship between the two affect dimensions (PA and NA) and transformational leadership. While a significant, positive relationship was found between positive affect (PA) and the dependent variable ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), evidence of a negative relationship involving negative affect (NA) and the dependent variable was not found. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported but Hypothesis 7 was not. This is not surprising since the possibility of not finding a relationship between NA and perceived transformational leadership was suggested in the presentation of the hypotheses. Also, the weakening of the follower extraversion relationship from step 2 to step 3 suggests that there is considerable overlap in the measure of extraversion and positive affect. Similar overlap was not apparent in the data regarding neuroticism and negative affect. A discussion of these results, their implications and limitations, and suggestions for future research follows.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of followers' personality and dispositional affect on their perceptions of transformational leadership. Given the relative scarcity of published research regarding this topic, this study was largely exploratory in nature. However, some initial evidence regarding the relationship between follower characteristics and leadership perceptions does exist and the current study builds on this foundation. Most notably, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) found that follower characteristics (e.g. achievement orientation, self-esteem) and values (e.g. extrinsic rewards, security, need for structure) predicted followers' leader preferences. As noted earlier, this research did not utilize a typical model or measure of personality such as the five-factor model used in the present study. Further, this study measured

participants' preferences for descriptions of charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented leadership styles. While it might be argued that a charismatic or relationship-oriented style has many similarities to transformational leadership, comparison in findings between the two studies are limited since different measures were utilized in each. Nevertheless, their study found that respondents preferred relationship-oriented leaders over charismatic and task-oriented leaders. Additionally they found that the follower values of "worker participation" (i.e. having influence at work and working for mutual benefit), "extrinsic rewards" (i.e. quality of pay, benefits, and work hours), and "security" (i.e. job security and stability) tended to be the most useful in predicting leader preference.

While the study by Felfe and Schyns (2006) used the five-factor personality dimensions of neuroticism and extraversion, they did not assess the impact of the other three dimensions on follower perceptions of leadership. Thus, a measure of agreeableness was not included in their research. Of note, their study found a weak positive relationship between follower extraversion and perceived transformational leadership. Considering this finding, it is not clear why a link between extraversion and transformational leadership was not detected in the present study. One explanation noted by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) is that trait positive affect is roughly analogous to extroversion as typically measured in personality models. Thus, it may be the case that the measures used in the current study assess the same underlying construct. Future research should explore both the theoretical underpinnings of these constructs as well as the psychometric efficacy and redundancy of the measures used to assess them. Perhaps a more detailed comparison designed to explicitly examine the sub-dimensions of these constructs would provide greater insight as to the nature of this relationship.

Another possible explanation for the differences in the personality dimensions that emerged in these studies is that specific follower traits must be activated by the leadership context in order for the trait to influence perceptions of leadership. This explanation is based on a similar suggestion regarding trait activation in leaders that is dependent on the degree to which the situation allows for a viable, trait-relevant response (de Hoogh, den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). The possibility of context having such a role should be the subject of future study.

The current study extends the extant literature by providing evidence of the influence of follower agreeableness on perceptions of transformational leadership. This is not surprising since agreeableness is often second only to extraversion in studies examining personality correlates of transformational leadership behavior (Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge, Ilies, Bono, & Gerhardt, 2002). Given the cooperative, trusting, and conflict-avoidant nature of individuals with a high degree of agreeableness, it is not surprising that followers with this trait respond to the inspirational and supportive nature of transformational leaders. Alternatively, it could be that agreeable individuals tend to positively bias their perceptions of leaders with little behavioral evidence to warrant their assessment. Researchers should pursue this question in future research.

Another contribution of this study is the positive relationship between follower positive affect and perceptions of transformational leadership. As discussed earlier, the premise that the enthusiasm, optimism, and overall energy of followers with high positive affect (PA) tend to be attracted to the inspirational motivation and idealized influence of transformational leaders seems logical. However, the exact nature of this relationship warrants further investigation. As with the personality dimension of agreeableness, it is unclear whether high PA influences the

leader-follower relationship in a meaningful way or merely creates a positive bias of leadership perceptions.

In summary, the evidence provided by this study adds to the nascent literature focusing on the role of follower characteristics on the perceptions of and relationship with transformational leaders. However, based on the collective evidence so far, it appears that the explanatory power of follower characteristics in regards to leadership preferences is relatively limited. Nevertheless, these modest relationships may lead to more important findings relative to the interpersonal mechanisms that constitute the leader-follower dynamic.

Limitations

While the findings and implications of this research are compelling, they must be considered in light of several limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study has obvious shortcomings. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to both identify any evidence of causality among the variables and to minimize the common method and same source bias concerns of the current study. However, concerns with same source bias are somewhat mitigated in that the constructs of follower characteristics and follower perceptions of transformational leadership appear to be conceptually distinct. Furthermore, while methodological and statistical remedies for common method bias have been suggested (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon, & Podsakoff, 2003), consensus on the magnitude of the problem and its solution has yet to be achieved.

Second, the military context of this study may limit the generalizability of these findings to other organizational settings. However, based on the results of previous studies (Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco, & Lau, 1999), transformational leadership scores from this study

are comparable to those in business and other organizational contexts. Nevertheless, addressing the issue of context is an important consideration for future research.

Third, this study was limited to perceptions of transformational leadership behavior. It does not consider the impact of follower characteristics on transactional leadership dimensions or laissez faire (i.e. no leadership) which are the remaining elements of the full range model of leadership conceptualized by Bass and Avolio (1995). Future research should consider including these measures as well as consider the relationship with other leadership models.

A fourth limitation of this study is that it did not consider the implicit leadership theories of followers and the effect that these preconceived notions might have on perceptions of transformational leadership. The implication of this issue is that differences among followers in their stereotypes or preconceived expectations of leaders might have a significant impact on their perceptions of actual leader behaviors. There is a growing body of work in this regard (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005) and future research should consider how such beliefs or expectations might influence the perspectives of followers.

Lastly, the somewhat modest amount of variance in transformational leadership behavior perceptions explained by these factors should not dissuade researchers from thoroughly examining this area. While the direct influence of these characteristics may be limited, their true importance may lie in informing our eventual understanding of the influence processes and interpersonal mechanisms that exist between leaders and followers. Accordingly, future research should continue to explore follower characteristics examined to date, expand this research to include other psychological factors such as cognitive ability, emotional competencies, self-concept, and self-efficacy, and eventually examine the likely interaction effects among these additional variables.

Implications

The findings of this study extend the limited prior research in this area which collectively suggests that follower characteristics do moderately influence follower perceptions of leadership. This proposition has implications for both theory and practice. As mentioned earlier, this evidence hints at reciprocal processes between leaders and followers. By identifying the follower characteristics likely to be involved, scholars may be able to focus their efforts in regards to these processes. For example, Dvir and Shamir (2003) looked at how follower developmental characteristics predicted the emergence of transformational behaviors in leaders. Thus, encountering certain types of followers, leaders may be more likely to employ transformational leadership behaviors.

The potential implications for practice are equally compelling. Given the role that follower ratings have on current leadership assessment methodologies, an understanding of how follower characteristics influence their perceptions or preferences of leadership could have a significant impact on leader selection, assessment, and training activities in organizations. These findings might also impact the creation of work teams and other organizational groups and inform leadership behaviors within various contexts and team compositions. However, guidance for practice in this regard requires the further exploration of this dynamic interplay between leader and follower and its influence on the relationship between the two.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

| | Mean | s.d. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|--------|------|
| 1. Transformational leadership | 13.12 | 3.33 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender | 0.77 | 0.42 | -.07 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Class rank-senior | 0.35 | 0.48 | -.19* | -.06 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Class rank-junior | 0.28 | 0.45 | .09 | -.03 | -.46** | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Class rank-sophomore | 0.26 | 0.44 | .12 | .05 | -.44** | -.37** | | | | | | | |
| 6. Neuroticism | 15.45 | 5.82 | -.02 | -.08 | -.06 | .07 | -.02 | | | | | | |
| 7. Extraversion | 33.55 | 6.45 | .21** | -.17* | -.15 | .12 | .00 | -.24** | | | | | |
| 8. Openness | 30.01 | 6.07 | .08 | -.12 | .01 | .06 | .04 | -.02 | .17* | | | | |
| 9. Agreeableness | 30.56 | 6.00 | .19* | -.32** | .22** | -.13 | -.02 | -.21** | .25** | .07 | | | |
| 10. Conscientiousness | 35.09 | 6.35 | .07 | -.25** | .05 | -.11 | .14 | -.30** | .03 | .01 | .18* | | |
| 11. Positive affect | 38.28 | 5.40 | .35** | -.10 | -.20* | .11 | .08 | -.38** | .38** | .16* | .18* | .30** | |
| 12. Negative affect | 18.25 | 5.80 | .02 | .22** | -.16* | .18* | -.11 | -.49** | -.03 | -.07 | -.36** | -.33** | -.05 |

n = 159, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Transformational Leadership Perceptions

| | B | s.e. | β |
|----------------------|----------|------|---------|
| Step 1 | | | |
| Constant | 13.69*** | .93 | |
| Gender | -.63 | .62 | -.08 |
| Class rank-senior | -.97 | .89 | -.14 |
| Class rank-junior | .36 | .92 | .05 |
| Class rank-sophomore | .59 | .93 | .08 |
| R^2 | .05 | | |
| Step 2 | | | |
| Constant | 4.12 | 3.51 | |
| Gender | .33 | .69 | .04 |
| Class rank-senior | -1.24 | .91 | -.18 |
| Class rank-junior | .22 | .91 | .03 |
| Class rank-sophomore | .30 | .93 | .04 |
| Neuroticism | .04 | .05 | .08 |
| Extraversion | .08 | .05 | .15 |
| Openness | .03 | .04 | .05 |
| Agreeableness | .12 | .05 | .21* |
| Conscientiousness | .04 | .05 | .08 |
| R^2 | .12* | | |
| ΔR^2 | .07* | | |
| Step 3 | | | |
| Constant | -.56 | 3.68 | |
| Gender | .30 | .68 | .04 |
| Class rank-senior | -.73 | .89 | -.11 |
| Class rank-junior | .24 | .88 | .03 |
| Class rank-sophomore | .47 | .91 | .06 |
| Neuroticism | .09 | .06 | .15 |
| Extraversion | .03 | .05 | .06 |
| Openness | .01 | .04 | .02 |
| Agreeableness | .11 | .05 | .19* |
| Conscientiousness | .00 | .05 | .00 |
| Positive affect | .20 | .06 | .32** |
| Negative affect | .01 | .06 | .01 |
| R^2 | .19** | | |
| ΔR^2 | .07** | | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$