Transformational leadership and employee voice: a model of proactive motivation

Guilin Zhang
Department of Management and HR, Troy University,
Troy, Alabama, USA, and
Michelle Inness
Department of Strategic Management and Organization,
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the model of proactive motivation, the purpose of this paper is to examine how transformational leadership influences followers’ voice behavior through three proactive motivation states, namely, “reason to,” “can do” and “energized to.” It also examines the moderating role of followers’ proactive personality in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice.

Design/methodology/approach – The online survey was distributed through Qualtrics using a two-wave design. In total, 1,454 participants completed the survey at Time 1, of those 447 also completed the survey at Time 2.

Findings – Transformational leadership influences employee voice via followers’ promotion focus, role-breadth self-efficacy and affective commitment. Followers’ proactive personality attenuates the impact of transformational leadership on voice, supporting the substitute for leadership hypothesis.

Research limitations/implications – Self-reported data are the main limitation of the present study. Other limitations include treating employee voice as a unidimensional construct and oversimplifying the impact of positive affect on voice.

Practical implications – The present study suggests that training managers to demonstrate more transformational leadership behavior, enhancing employees’ proactive motivation and hiring proactive individuals are strategies to facilitate employee voice.

Originality/value – The present study contributes to a better understanding of employee voice from a proactive motivation perspective. It also demonstrates that followers’ proactive personality is important “boundary condition” to transformational leadership.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Proactive personality, Employee voice, Proactive motivation

Received 14 January 2019
Revised 9 July 2019
Accepted 26 August 2019

Over the past few decades, much research focus has been placed on understanding employee voice because it is related to positive outcomes for the organization (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Employee voice refers to the discretionary communication of ideas and suggestions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning (Morrison, 2011). However, engaging voice can be risky for employees because people who make suggestions to change are confronting the status quo (Burris, 2012; Milliken et al., 2003). Since leaders are the major target of employee voice, research has highlighted the role of transformational leadership, which inspires subordinates to work for the good of the organization by motivating them through communication of the vision and addressing their higher-order needs (Bass, 1985).

Despite the positive link between transformational leadership and employee voice being well documented (Wang et al., 2011), there are two gaps in this line of literature. First, most studies have relied on social exchange theory or a cost-benefit analysis perspective, which suggests that employees are more likely to engage in voice when they have high-quality relationships with the organization and when they feel it is safe to do so.
Little is known about the underlying psychological mechanisms of this process and scholars have called for more research to examine the transformational leadership–employee voice link from a motivational perspective (Duan et al., 2017; Morrison, 2014). To address this gap, we draw on the model of proactive motivation to explore individuals’ proactive motivational states as mediating pathways (Parker et al., 2010). Second, most existing research has overlooked the role of followers’ person factors in the impact of transformational leadership. Followers’ characteristics are important but relatively underexplored “contingencies” in understanding transformational leadership (Klein and House, 1995). The few studies that examined follower characteristics have been challenged for lacking a relevant theory to guide and to make sense of the selection of moderators (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). To address this gap, we draw on the substitute for leadership theory (Kerr and Jermier, 1978) to explicate how followers’ proactive personality can moderate the influence of transformational leadership on employee voice behavior.

**Literature review and hypotheses development**

Parker and her colleagues (2010) developed the model of proactive motivation to conceptualize the joint effects of situational and dispositional factors on individual proactive outcomes. They have identified three motivational states as mediating pathways (i.e. “reason to,” “can do” and “energized to”) that prompt self-initiated effort to bring about change. In the following section, we will discuss how transformational leadership facilitates employee voice through each motivational state.

“Reason to” and promotion focus as a mediator

“Reason to” addresses why employees engage in voice behavior. Employee voice is autonomous rather than externally regulated. Therefore, individuals engage in voice out of intrinsic motivation, when they identify with the value of change and have a strong internal force to bring about change (Fuller et al., 2006; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Drawing on regulatory focus theory, we propose that promotion focus captures individuals’ intrinsic motivation to engage in voice. Regulatory focus theory suggests that people vary in how they approach pleasure and avoid pain (Higgins, 1997, 1998). Such variance is reflected by the regulatory focus, which distinguishes promotion focus from prevention focus. Promotion focus is aspirational and associated with strategy to achieve an ideal state. Prevention focus, on the other hand, is concerned with responsibility and associated with strategy to avoid punishment. Prior studies indicate that people with promotion focus tend to make “riskier” decisions and are more open to change, creativity and advancement. To the contrary, people with prevention focus are prone to making conservative decisions that enhance the status quo (Boldero and Higgins, 2011; Friedman and Förster, 2001; Liberman et al., 1999; Spanjol and Tam, 2010). Indeed, people with a promotion focus are more likely to engage citizenship behavior that changes the status quo (e.g. voice), while those with a prevention focus are more likely to engage in affiliative citizenship behaviors that maintain the status quo (e.g. helping behavior) (Dewett and Denisi, 2007; Shin et al., 2017).

The behavior of leaders can shape followers' regulatory focus. People-oriented leadership that focuses on satisfying subordinates’ needs and attaining ideals will prime followers’ promotion focus, while task-oriented leadership that highlights directions and responsibilities is associated with subordinates’ prevention focus (Neubert et al., 2008). Transformational leaders can enhance followers’ promotion focus through inspirational communication, which focuses on an ideal state to be achieved and highlights the potential positive impact of employees’ actions (Johnson et al., 2017; Kark and Van Dijk, 2007; Moss, 2009). Indeed, transformational leadership is positively related to followers’ creativity
and learning through priming their promotion focus (Kark et al., 2018; Liu and Xiang, 2018). Based on this evidence, we propose:

**H1.** The relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice is mediated by followers’ promotion focus.

“Can do” and *role-breadth self-efficacy (RBSE) as a mediator*

The “can do” motivation focuses on the impact of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Given employee voice is discretionary, in the present study we look at RBSE, which refers to employees’ perceived capability of carrying out a broader range of work behavior that extends beyond their formal job requirements (Parker, 1998). RBSE is positively related to various proactive outcomes such as taking charge and personal initiative (Frese et al., 2007; McAllister et al., 2007). Previous studies have shown that transformational leadership is positively associated with followers’ change-oriented citizenship behavior and proactivity via their RBSE (López-Domínguez et al., 2013; Strauss et al., 2009). According to Bandura (1997), leaders can influence on followers self-efficacy in different ways. Transformational leaders can strengthen subordinates’ RBSE by role modeling proactive behavior for their followers (Deluga, 1998). When employees observe leaders behaving proactively, they may be more likely to perceive they can do the same. In addition, leaders can reinforce employees’ RBSE by delivering high-performance expectations and expressing confidence in employees’ abilities to perform beyond expectations (Shamir et al., 1993). Based on these empirical evidence, we hypothesize that:

**H2.** The relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice is mediated by followers’ RBSE.

“Energize to” and *affective commitment as a mediator*

The “energized to” captures the activation of positive affect. According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive affect broadens people’s flexible thinking, which allows them to explore new ways of doing things (Fredrickson, 2001; Kaplan et al., 2009). We select affective commitment as an indicator for the activated positive state for two reasons. First, affective commitment refers to employees’ emotional attachment to the organization, which is characterized by positive affects such as pride and enthusiasm to be an organizational member (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Second, compared to more discrete positive emotions (e.g. happiness), affective commitment represents a strong pro-organization mindset, driving employees to help the organization (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Transformational leaders provide meaning toward the strategic vision through the use of positive words and emphasize the connection between subordinate effort and goal achievement of the organization. Therefore, they are able to make subordinates to feel that they are part of a group and foster affective commitment among their followers (Shamir et al., 1993). It is also shown that transformational leaders can increase employee voice (Svendsen and Joensson, 2016) and proactivity (Strauss et al., 2009) by enhancing employees’ affective commitment to the organization. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H3.** The relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice is mediated by followers’ affective commitment.

**Moderating role of followers’ proactive personality**

Whereas transformational leadership can facilitate employee voice behavior through three mechanisms as discussed, we believe its influence also depends on the characteristics of followers. The substitute for leadership theory recognizes that certain positive subordinate
characteristics can serve as “substitutes” for the influence of transformational leaders and therefore moderate of the leadership behavior–subordinate outcome relationships (Kerr and Jermier, 1978; Podsakoff et al., 1996). In other words, transformational leaders can compensate for the lack of desirable traits on behalf of followers in relation to positive work attitude and behaviors. The selection of “substitutes” depends on the criteria to be examined (Dionne et al., 2005). For instance, previous studies have found that followers’ emotional stability, extraversion (Guay and Choi, 2015), group identification (Li et al., 2013) and mindfulness (Kroon et al., 2017) are substitutes for transformational leadership in enhancing organizational citizenship behavior. Followers’ positive affect (Gilmore et al., 2013) and self-esteem (Rank et al., 2009) can substitute for transformational leadership in relation to creative performance. Followers’ core self-evaluation (Nübold et al., 2013) and self-efficacy (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012) are substitutes for transformational behavior in enhancing task performance. Drawing the substitute for leadership theory, we believe that followers’ proactive personality weakens the impact of transformational leadership on employee voice. Proactive personality refers to the dispositional tendency to make changes to one’s environment (Bateman and Crant, 1993). Proactive individuals seek out opportunities and persevere in their efforts to bring about meaningful change. Results from previous meta-analysis showed that individuals with high proactive personality would naturally seek out opportunities to improve the situations and bring about meaningful changes across situations (Fuller and Marler, 2009; Marinova et al., 2015), without the presence of transformational leaders. Therefore, they receive relatively little incremental benefit from the influence of transformational leadership compared to less proactive peers. To the contrary, having a transformational leader will make a big difference for individuals with low proactive personality since they not prone to initiate change by nature (full). Transformational leaders can empower these employees to voice through “reason to,” “can do” and “energized to” motivation states discussed:

\[ H4. \text{ The relationship between transformational leadership and employee voice is stronger when the followers’ proactive personality is lower.} \]

Method

Data and sample
Data were obtained through “Qualtrics,” an online data-collection agency that allows us to obtain participants from a wide range of professions and positions. We requested the participation of full-time employees who have a direct supervisor. To eliminate potential problems associated with common method bias, data were collected in two waves: transformational leadership, proactive personality, promotion focus, role-breadth self-efficacy and affective commitment were collected at Time 1, employee voice was collected at Time 2 (about one month later). In total, 1,454 participants completed the survey at Time 1, of those 447 also completed the survey at Time 2 with a retention rate of 31 percent.

Measures
Each of the following scales was measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Transformational leadership. The 22-item transformational leadership inventory was used to assess transformational leadership (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Example items include “my supervisor has stimulated me to think about old problems in new ways” \((\alpha = 0.96)\).

RBSE. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they are comfortable engaging in a variety of discretionary behaviors at work (Parker, 1998), such as “making suggestions to management to improve the working of your section” \((\alpha = 0.94)\).
Affective commitment was measured through Meyer and Allen's (1991) scale. Example items include “I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization” ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Work promotion focus was measured through a nine-item scale developed by Neubert et al. (2008). Sample items include “I take chances at work to maximize my goals for advancement” ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Proactive personality was assessed by the ten-item scale (Seibert et al., 1999). Sample items include “If I see something I do not like, I fix it” ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Employee voice. The six-item scale developed by Van Dyne and Le Pine (1998; $\alpha = 0.90$) was used. A sample item is “I give constructive suggestions to improve my work” ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Control variables. We controlled for employees’ age and gender. We also controlled employees’ job satisfaction with one single item “overall I am satisfied with my job” because recent meta-analysis results revealed a negative relationship between job dissatisfaction and employee voice (Ng and Feldman, 2012).

Results

Descriptive statistics and measurement model

Table I shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the key study variables. To examine the construct validity and the factorial structure of our measure, we performed confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus. As shown in Table II, the hypothesized model has the best fit to the data compared to alternative models (Figure 1). We performed a set of independent sample t-tests comparing the two groups (participants who completed both times one and time two survey and those who only completed on Time 1) on the control variables: age, gender and job satisfaction. None of the differences were significant, suggesting no meaningful differences between the two groups.

Hypothesis test

We used the SPSS “PROCESS” macro (Hayes and Preacher, 2013) to test the hypotheses. It generates bootstrapped confidence internals and provides the possibility to test the significance of conditional direct effects and different values of the moderator variable. Table III presents the results of mediators in the conceptual model. Transformational leadership was significantly related to promotion focus ($b = 0.39, p < 0.001$), RBSE ($b = 0.21, p < 0.001$) and affective commitment ($b = 0.21, p < 0.001$). Promotion focus ($b = 0.12, p < 0.05$), RBSE ($b = 0.52, p < 0.001$) and affective commitment ($b = 0.11, p < 0.05$) were positively related to employee voice. When the mediators were added to the regression, transformational leadership was not significantly related to voice ($b = 0.07, ns$). Table IV shows that the indirect effects of transformational leadership on employee voice via promotion focus ($0.05, 95\% CI = [0.005, 0.10]$), RBSE ($0.11, 95\% CI = [0.06, 0.17]$) and affective commitment ($0.02, 95\% CI = [0.001, 0.05]$) are significant, supporting $H1-H3$ (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

To test $H4$, the predictors were mean centered before the interaction term was calculated. Table III shows that the interaction term of “transformational leadership $\times$ proactive personality” was significantly related to employee voice ($b = -0.08, p < 0.05$). To examine the pattern of moderation, different regression lines (+1 SD, mean, $-1$ SD) were plotted (Cohen and Cohen, 1983) (see Figure 2). As $H4$ predicted, the impact of transformational leadership on employee voice is stronger among employees with low proactive personality. The results of the conditional effects of transformational leadership on employee voice at different values of the moderator were shown in Table V and Figure 2. The simple slope was significant for subordinates with low proactive personality ($-1$ SD, $b = 0.14, p < 0.05$), but not for those with moderate ($b = 0.07, ns$) or with high proactive personality ($+1$ SD, $b = 0.004, ns$).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Proactive personality</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Transformational leadership</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Promotion focus</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>0.4**</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Role-breadth self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.64**</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Affective commitment</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Employee voice</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.4**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.5**</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** **Significant at 0.01

**Table I.** Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations.
Model  | $\chi^2$  | df  | $\chi^2$/df | SRMR | RMSEA | CFI   | TLI   | Scaling correction factor
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
One-factor model | 10,560.24 | 1,325 | 7.97 | 0.16 | 0.13 | 0.47 | 0.44 | 1.27
Three-factor model | 4,078.2 | 1,073 | 3.8 | 0.11 | 0.1 | 0.80 | 0.80 | 1.28
Four-factor model$^a$ | 3,289.49 | 1,070 | 3.07 | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.86 | 0.85 | 1.28
Four-factor model$^b$ | 3,243.15 | 1,070 | 3.03 | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.86 | 0.85 | 1.28
Four-factor model$^c$ | 3,683.05 | 1,070 | 3.44 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.83 | 0.82 | 1.28
Five-factor model | 2,824.63 | 1,066 | 2.65 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 0.88 | 1.27

Notes: SRMR, standardized root means square residual; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index. One-factor model = items for transformational leadership, employee voice, promotion focus, role-breadth self-efficacy and affective commitment loading on one factor; three-factor model = promotion focus, role-breadth self-efficacy and affective commitment loading on one factor; four-factor model$^a$ = promotion focus and affective commitment loading on one factor; four-factor model$^b$ = role-breadth self-efficacy and affective commitment loading on one factor; four-factor model$^c$ = promotion focus and role-breadth self-efficacy loading on one factor; five-factor model = each variable loading on a separate model. All alternative models were compared with the hypothesized five-factor model.

### Table II.
Fit statistics for alternative measurement models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotion focus</th>
<th>Role-breadth self-efficacy</th>
<th>Affective commitment</th>
<th>Employee Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.21***</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion focus</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-breadth self-efficacy</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive personality</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership × Proactive personality</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $n = 447$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$
Discussion

Theoretical and practical contributions

The present study makes several theoretical contributions. First, previous research on the relationship between transformational leadership and voice has mostly focused on social exchange mechanisms (e.g. LMX) or perceived risks (e.g. psychological safety). We contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of employee voice using proactive motivation as an explanation for this relationship. Specifically, transformational leaders are able to foster employees’ openness to change and willingness to initiate improvement (i.e. “reason to”). They also strengthen followers’ perceived ability to take a broad role (i.e. “can do”) and elicit positive affect among subordinates (i.e. “energized to”), both of which facilitate employee voice. Among these three mechanisms, the significant indirect effects via “reason to” and “can do” highlight the role of willingness to take risks and self-efficacy in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table IV.</th>
<th>Results from indirect effects of transformational leadership on employee voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effects total</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion focus</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-breadth self-efficacy</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.
Conditional effect of transformational leadership on employee voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table V.</th>
<th>Results of conditional effects of transformational leadership on employee voice at different values of proactive personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−0.93 (−1 SD)</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.00 (Moderate)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.93 (+1 SD)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are reported. *p < 0.05
voice (Glaser et al., 2016; McAllister et al., 2007). This finding shows that OCB challenging the status quo is predicted by different antecedents from OCB reinforcing the status quo (Marinova et al., 2015; Van Dyne et al., 2008).

Second, even though transformational leadership has generally been associated with positive outcomes, scholars have called for more research to examine follower characteristics as “contingencies” that moderate the effects of transformational leadership (Li et al., 2013). Substitute for leadership perspective provides a useful theoretical lens to explain this relationship. Previous studies have found that positive follower characteristics can serve as “substitute” for transformational leadership and weaken the leadership–behavior outcome link. The present study advances this line of research by showing that followers’ proactive personality attenuates leaders’ transformational efforts directed toward generating employee voice. The simple slope analysis results suggest that transformational leaders have no influence on employee voice among subordinates with high proactive personality. Due to their nature to make changes, employees with high proactive personality are prone to engaging in voice, even without the transformational leader cues (Wang et al., 2011). To the contrary, subordinates lacking proactive personality benefit more from the influence of transformational leaders through enhanced “reason to,” “can do” and “energized to” motivation states. We further note that followers’ proactive personality yielded a positive main effect for employee voice, indicating that proactive personality serves as a substitute for transformational leadership in relation to employee voice (Podsakoff et al., 1996). Both proactive personality and transformational leadership are positively associated with employee voice. However, a different pattern emerges when considering their joint influence. This finding highlights the value of considering leader and follower aspects together rather than in isolation in studying transformational leadership effectiveness.

Finally, the present study advances the literature on regulatory focus. Most studies on promotion focus have examined its impact on creativity or taking risks (Boldero and Higgins, 2011; Friedman and Förster, 2001; Liberman et al., 1999). Our research is the first study that associated individual preference toward changes and taking risks, as reflected by promotion focus to employee voice. Second, majority of research in this stream manipulated individuals’ regulatory focus through experiments (Higgins, 1998; Liberman et al., 1999), we are among the first few studies that used validated scales to show the influence of transformational leaders on followers’ promotion focus (Johnson et al., 2017; Kark et al., 2018). We encourage future studies to explore the impact of regulatory focus in the leadership–follower dyads on employee proactive work behavior.

Our findings offer several important practical implications. First, managers play an important role in facilitating employee voice. Organizations that want to utilize employee input should train their managers to demonstrate transformational behaviors (Kelloway et al., 2000; Mason et al., 2014). In addition, organizations can enhance employee voice by strengthening employees’ promotion focus and RBSE. To prime a promotion focus, managers should frame tasks in terms of gain or non-gain situations rather than loss or non-loss situations, which allow employees to perceive their jobs as challenges and achievements (Kark and Van Dijk, 2007). To enhance people’s RBSE, organizations should grant employees autonomy and provide training on innovative problem-solving (Axtell and Parker, 2003). Finally, transformational leaders have a particular influence on less proactive subordinates. They should be encouraged to reach out to and help these employees to find their voice.

Limitations and future research
First, the influence of positive affect on employee behavior is more complicated than hypothesized. Affect-as-information perspective suggests that high positive affect signals that things are going in the right direction, a perception that would discourage employees...
from initiating changes (Schwarz and Clore, 1983, 2003). Accordingly, affectively committed employees may develop an allegiance to the status quo and become reluctant to make changes to current practices. Negative affect signals improvements are necessary and urge employees to make changes through proactive actions (Lebel, 2017). A recent study has found an inverted U-relationship between positive affect and proactive work behavior (Lam et al., 2014). We recommend future studies to examine these new nuances.

Another limitation is that in the present study, we have adopted a narrow conceptualization of employee voice as a type of organizational citizenship behavior that challenges the status quo (Maynes and Podsakoff, 2014). Recent research on voice has broadened its scope and suggested that based on individuals’ intention to speak up and how ideas are framed, different forms of employee voice are driven by distinctive antecedents (Liang et al., 2012). We encourage future studies to explore the unique pathways through which transformational leaders impact on different forms of employee voice.

Third, there are other possibilities regarding the moderating effect of followers’ characteristics. For instance, similarity–attraction advocates that followers with similar traits with the transformational leaders react more favorably than followers with different traits (Schneider et al., 2000; Zhang et al., 2012). Dominance–complementarity recognizes that employees’ performance suffers when both the leader and the follower act proactively in the leader–follower dyad (Graham et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2011). The mixed findings suggest that the moderating pattern of leadership × follower characteristics on employee outcomes might depend on a third variable. We suggest future studies consider such three-way interaction possibilities.

Finally, we used self-report data, which mean that common method variance may threaten the validity of our findings. However, we have collected predictors and outcome variables at two-time points to reduce the common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Also, measures that reflect individuals’ personality and motivational states are unlikely to be accurately accessed through sources other than self-report. Future studies can use other-rated measures for employee voice to strengthen the design.

References


Further reading


About the authors

Guilin Zhang received her PhD Degree in Strategic Management and Organization (concentration in organizational behavior) from the University of Alberta, Canada in 2015. She is Assistant Professor at Sorrell College of Business, Troy University. Her research interests lie in the areas of organizational behavior and human resource management. She is also interested in cross-cultural study where she can examine the impact of cultural factors on employees’ attitude and behavior. She has presented her research at Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Association for Psychological Science (APA) Annual Convention and International Convention of Psychological Science. Guilin Zhang is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: guilinzhang85@gmail.com

Michelle Inness is Associate Professor at the Department of Strategic Management and Organization, Alberta School of Business. Her research interests include work and well-being, occupational health and safety, employee thriving and resilience and workplace aggression. Her research has been published in journals such as Journal of Applied Psychology and Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com