LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TYPES

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of an examination of the relationship between two basic leadership styles and three forms of organizational commitment for a sample of 246 non-managerial employees. The research question examined in this study asked if a "people friendly" (consideration) leadership style was positively related to increased levels of desirable forms of organizational commitment. The patterns of results from this analysis suggest that contrary to the popular myth, consideration type leader behaviors are not more strongly correlated with moral commitment than are initiating structure type behaviors. However, the difference is relatively small.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of an examination of the relationship between basic leadership styles and organizational commitment for a sample of 246 non-managerial employees. Over the past several decades, public interest and a stream of management literature focused on quality of work life programs, team work and team building, along with high commitment human resource management practices. Society generally holds the belief that more "people friendly" leadership is required to maximize not only organizational commitment but also other job attitudes as well. The question for researchers is whether or not the social perceptions are accurate. In this study, we examine relationships between two leadership styles-- initiating structure leadership and consideration leadership and three forms of organizational commitment-- moral commitment, alienative commitment, and calculative commitment. The research question addressed in this research project is whether the leadership style makes a difference in organizational commitment. Does a "people friendly" leadership style result in subordinates who are more committed to the organization?

BACKGROUND

Leadership Styles

One definition of leadership is the exercise of influence by one member over other members to help in the accomplishment of group or organizational goals. There is a commonly held belief that leaders "make a difference" and that they can have an effect on individuals, groups, or entire organizations. When things go right, the leader gets the credit; when things go wrong, the leader gets the blame. Leader effectiveness is measurement of the extent to which a leader helps the group or organization achieve its goals.

Researchers have tried to answer the question of why some leaders are more effective than others. The leader behavior approach focuses on what leaders actually do; that is, the specific behaviors performed by effective leaders as opposed to ineffective leaders. The behavior approach sought to identify the leader behaviors that aid individuals, groups, or organizations in the achievement of their goals. From multiple research studies, two categories of the leader behaviors were identified-- consideration and initiating structure. Consideration behaviors show that the leader trusts, respects, and values good relationships

with the subordinates. Examples of a leader's consideration behavior include being friendly, treating subordinates as equals, and providing an explanation for his or her actions. Initiating structure behavior are those behaviors done to make sure the work gets performed and that subordinates do their jobs adequately. Setting goals, determining a strategy to reach those goals, delegating tasks to subordinates, and urging subordinates to do those tasks would be initiating structure behavior. Consideration behaviors and initiating structure behaviors are not mutually exclusive, but rather are complementary because leaders engage in both types and are also independent of each other. Consideration behaviors would be the "people friendly" style of leadership; whereas initiating structure leadership would be more concerned with getting the job done.

Organizational Commitment

Most researchers accept that organizational commitment represents both an attitude that describes an individual's linkage to the organization and a set of behaviors by which individuals manifest that link. Several studies have used the model of commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) that identifies three components of commitment – affective, continuance, and normative.

According to Meyer and Allen, affective commitment "…refers to the employee's attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization." Continuance commitment "…refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization." Normative commitment "…reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment (p. 11)." "Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with an organization because they want to do so. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organization (p. 11)."

The model of commitment chosen for this study was developed by Penley and Gould (1988) and takes a slightly different approach from the Meyer and Allen model. Based on Etzioni's (1961) multiform conceptualization of organizational involvement, Penley and Gould endorse that an individual's commitment to an organization exists in both affective and instrumental forms. One can be morally committed, calculatively committed, or alienatively committed to an organization.

Moral commitment is described as a highly positive affective form characterized by acceptance of and identification with organizational goals. Calculative commitment is an instrumental form essentially focused on one's satisfaction with the exchange relationship. Calculative commitment may best be described as "supporting the organization to the extent that it supports you" (Hatton, C., Rivers, M., Mason, H., Mason, L., Emerson, E., Kiernan, C., Reeves, D. & Alborz, A., 1999). Alienative commitment is described as a highly negative affective form that is a consequence of a lack of control over the internal organizational environment and of a perceived absence of alternatives. Employees who express alienative commitment continue to engage in work behaviors that indicate a desire to continue their membership in the organization. In essence, they ensure their work performance meets at least the minimal standards, and their interaction with managers and co-workers communicates that they do not want to leave.

Conceptually, Penley and Gould's (1988) moral and calculative commitment appear similar to affective and continuance commitment as defined by Meyer and Allen (1997). However, alienative commitment does not appear to be conceptually similar to any of the forms of commitment described by Meyer and Allen. As defined by Penley and Gould, alienative commitment suggests an external locus of control, a sense of powerlessness on the part of the employee, and a lower level of engagement in the work role. The Penley and Gould model seems to measure both positive and negative forms of affective organizational commitment that does not appear possible with other models. This allowance for

variability in the nature (positive or negative) of a person's commitment could provide a richer understanding of organizational commitment.

Alienative commitment could be considered similar to work alienation. Kanungo (1992) defined work alienation as "a cognitive separation from one's job and other related contexts, a sense of frustration and the accompanying negative affect, resulting from the perceived failure to achieve one's objectives through job and organization related behaviors, and a manifest state of apathy (p. 2)." Kanungo (1992) reports that work alienation "is associated with job dissatisfaction, job stress, anxiety, and depression . . . and is manifested by low productivity, low morale, high absenteeism, and turnover (p. 2)." Hirschfeld, Feild, and Bedeian (2000) provide support for the value of considering work alienation as an individual difference construct worthy of testing. These authors report that work alienation explained a relatively small but significant additional variance in job involvement, affective organizational commitment, affective occupational commitment, overall job satisfaction, and volitional absence. This result is in line with the suggestion by Aube, Rousseau, and Morin (2007) that continuance (alienative) commitment is less desirable from a manager's standpoint that affective (moral) and normative commitment (p. 481).

Organizational commitment may be considered one of the most critical of employee workplace attitudes. Commitment has been linked to several important organizational outcomes including performance, absenteeism, turnover, and satisfaction, as well other outcomes such as felt job stress, and perceptions of management's commitment to safety (e.g., Hunter & Thatcher, 2007). Organizational commitment has been found to be positively related to effort (DeClercq & Ruis, 2007). Moss, McFarland, Ngu, and Kijowska (2007) report that openness to experience reduced perceived obligation to remain loyal (moral commitment), but the association was reduced as resources became more accessible.

Leadership and commitment have been linked in the research literature previously. Hulpia and Devos (2010) found that secondary school teachers "reported being more strongly committed to the school if the leaders were highly accessible, tackled problems efficiently or empowered teachers to participate, and frequently monitored teachers' daily practices." Leach's study (2005) of nurse executives, nurse managers, and staff nurses found an inverse relationship between nurse executive transformational and transactional leadership and alienative commitment.

METHOD

The sample for this study consisted of employees working in a large southern city. Respondents included the following groups: employees of the headquarters staff of a division of a multinational company, employees of regional production plants from two national consumer products corporations, employees of a multinational chemical firm, and employees of a regional financial services company. Questionnaires along with cover letters and addressed, postage-paid return envelopes were distributed through company mail to 640 potential study participants. Completed questionnaires were mailed directly to the researchers. Usable responses were received from 354 individuals for a response rate of 55 percent. The mean age for the sample was 36 years, with 66 percent being male, 77 percent being white, and 22 percent being non-white. The education levels were as follows: (40 percent) college graduates, (11 percent) graduate degrees, (29 percent) completed some college, and (19 percent) high school graduates or less. The mean tenure with the current employer was 8 years, in the current job was 4.5 years, and with the supervisor was 2.3 years. For this study, only the 246 non-managerial respondents were included in the analysis.

Leadership style was measured using a short form of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire XII (LBDQ XII) Stogdill, 1963 (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr 1981). Two subscales were selected for measurement: Initiating Structure (10 items), and Consideration (10 items). The original scale used a five-point response format. For this study, a seven-point scale (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree)

was used. A sample initiating structure item is: "Maintains definite standards of performance." A sample consideration item is: "Looks out for the personal welfare of group members."

Organizational commitment was measured using the Organizational Commitment Scale developed by Penley and Gould (1988). The Penley and Gould scale is a 15-item seven-point scale (the anchors ranged from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree) that measures organizational commitment on three dimensions: moral, calculative, and alienative. All three dimensions of commitment are measured using subscales consisting of five items. Scores for moral, alienative, and calculative commitment are calculated as the average rating across the five items for each of the three dimensions of organizational commitment. An item for moral commitment is: "I feel it is my duty to support this organization." A calculative commitment item is: "I will give my best when I know it will be seen by the 'right' people in this organization." An alienative commitment item is: "I feel trapped here." Coefficient alphas for the three sub-scales were moral commitment, .85; alienative commitment, .84; and calculative commitment, .65. Penley and Gould (1988) reported coefficient alphas of .80 (moral), .82 (alienative), and .67 (calculative).

The research question asked by this study (Does a "people friendly" leadership style result in subordinates who are more committed to the organization?) was examined using correlation analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of our correlation analysis are reported in Table 1. To a large extent, the results are consistent with what one might expect given that leadership behaviors are not mutually exclusive, are complementary, and independent. Both initiating structure and consideration leadership behaviors are positively correlated with moral commitment ($r = .40$, $p = .000$ for initiating structure; and $r = .36$, $p = .000$ for consideration). Both types of leader behaviors were also negatively correlated with alienative commitment ($r = -.323$, $p = .000$ for initiating structure; and $r = -.337$, $p = .000$ for consideration). Neither initiating structure nor consideration was correlated with calculative commitment. However, calculative commitment was positively correlated with moral commitment ($r = .144$, $p = .024$). Finally for this sample, initiating structure and consideration leadership were positively correlated ($r = .619$, $p = .000$).

The patterns of results from this data analysis suggest some interesting possibilities. Contrary to the popular myth, consideration type leader behaviors are not more strongly correlated with moral commitment than are initiating structure type behaviors. However, the difference is relatively small (.04). It may be that non-managerial employees value leadership behavior that contributes to environmental certainty and clarity concerning standards and expectations more highly than the engagement which is the heart of consideration type leadership and is inherent in today's high commitment human resource practices.

The strong negative correlations between both types of leadership and alienative commitment are also interesting. The larger impact for consideration type leadership may be an indicator of the importance of leadership designed to encourage or enhance interpersonal engagement. Alienative commitment may indicate not only feelings of frustration and lack of control as suggested by Penley and Gould, but also a sense of emotional detachment on the part of the employee. By providing leadership intended to provide clarity of expectations and leadership intended to encourage interpersonal engagement, leaders may be filling gaps in expectations for alienatively committed followers.

The positive relationship between calculative commitment and moral commitment is an unexpected outcome. From a leadership perspective, this result may point to the importance of met expectations in developing and in sustaining positive emotional forms of commitment. Past research suggested that the

extent to which individual's expectations about the nature of their relationship with the organization were met were important precursors for affective forms of organizational commitment.

Taken as a whole, the results of this study support the importance of leadership in developing important employee attitudes. Our results point out the value of both broad types of leader behavior to the development of organizational commitment. To a small extent, our results raise a question regarding the primacy of consideration type leadership embodied by "high commitment" human resource practices. It may be that what rank and file employees are seeking is a good combination of both direction and clarity and the social-relationship components of leadership. Managers should recognize that more than one form of leadership may be required to achieve success.

Table 1
Correlations

		Initiating Structure	Consideration	Moral Commitment	Alienative Commitment	Calculative Commitment
LBDQ: Initiating Structure	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	243				
LBDQ: Consideration	Pearson Correlation	.619**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	239	245			
Moral Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.400**	.359**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	242	244	250		
Alienative Commitment	Pearson Correlation	-.323**	-.337**	-.581**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	239	241	246	247	
Calculative Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.112	.045	.144*	.014	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.085	.484	.024	.832	
	N	238	239	244	242	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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