Modeling Within-Person Reciprocal Effects of Leadership and Wellbeing During COVID-19

Cort W. Rudolph [1]
Kimberley Breevaart [2]
Hannes Zacher [3]

Acknowledgements

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• Co-PI Dr. Hannes Zacher (Leipzig University)
Study Background

• During times of crisis, followers increasingly look to their leaders for guidance (Antonakis, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2020; Rudolph et al. 2021)

• We explore two research questions regarding perceived leadership and follower wellbeing *in situ* (i.e., during COVID-19):
  1. What are the within- and between-person relations between perceived leadership and follower wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis?
  2. Are these relations between perceived leadership and follower wellbeing mutually reinforcing (i.e., does leadership promote wellbeing, and *vice versa*)?
Key Variables

We focus on two forms of perceived leadership behaviors:

- **Directive Leadership**: e.g., Followers’ perception that their leader sets clear performance standards and offers feedback for their performance (House & Mitchell, 1974; Martin et al., 2013).
- **Empowering leadership**: e.g., Followers’ perception that their leader promotes self-management and autonomous decision making (Manz & Sims, 1987; Martin et al., 2013).

We focus on two forms of follower wellbeing:

- **Emotional Engagement**: A component of job engagement; refers to the investment of followers’ emotional energy into their work roles (Bakker et al., 2008; Rich et al., 2010).
- **Emotional Fatigue**: A dimension of burnout, refers to the state of feeling “...overwhelmed, drained, and used up...” by the emotional demands imposed by others (Maslach, 1982, p. 3).
Theoretical Basis

• Two Competing Perspectives:

1. Leadership influences follower wellbeing (e.g., Harms et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2020).
   • Top-down explanation: Through their enactment of various role-prescribed behaviors, leaders influence follower wellbeing.

2. Follower wellbeing influences leadership (e.g., Lang et al., 2011).
   a) Perceptual explanation: Follower’s experiencing lower wellbeing may perceive their leaders’ behaviors differently than those with higher wellbeing.
   b) Leader reaction explanation: Followers express their reduced wellbeing to their leader and may be treated differently by their leader as a result.
Methods

• A three-wave, fully crossed and lagged panel survey design across 6 months (time lags of 3 months) was used.
  • T1 = December 2019; T2 = March 2020; T3 = June 2020
• Full-time employees from various organizations and occupations were recruited via an online panel management company.
• A panel of $n = 1,610$ respondents were considered in our focal analyses (48.41% female; $M_{age} = 44.15$, $SD_{age} = 11.68$ at Time 1).
  • $n = 2,439$ provided at least partial responses at T1
  • $n = 1,610$ provided at least partial responses at T1, T2, & T3
  • $n = 958$ provided complete responses at T1, T2, & T3
Measures

**Directive and empowering leadership.** Six items from Martin et al. (2013) were used to assess directive leadership (3 items, $\alpha_{\text{range}} = .846$ to .849) and empowering leadership (3 items, $\alpha_{\text{range}} = .857$ to .884). The 7-point response scales ranged from 1 [never] to 7 [always].

**Emotional engagement.** Three items from Rich et al. (2010) were used to assess emotional engagement ($\alpha_{\text{range}} = .904$ to .922; 7-point response scale ranging from 1 [strongly disagree] to 7 [strongly agree]).

**Emotional fatigue.** Three items from Frone and Tidwell (2015) were used to assess emotional fatigue ($\alpha_{\text{range}} = .902$ to .935; 7-point response scale ranging from 1 [never] to 7 [always]).
Analyses

All analyses were conducted in a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework using the `lavaan` package (Rosseel, 2012) for R.

Confirmatory factor analyses were initially run to support measurement model fits and measurement invariance, both of which were upheld.

In specifying all models, a maximum likelihood estimator was used; full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was used to account for missingness.

All hypotheses were tested simultaneously using a random intercepts cross-lagged panel model (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015).
Analyses

- $L_{T1}$–$L_{T3}$ represents measurement of leadership (i.e., directive and empowering) over time.
- $W_{T1}$–$W_{T3}$ represents measurement of wellbeing (i.e., emotional engagement and exhaustion) over time.
- $L_i$ and $W_i$ represent random intercepts (i.e., between-person effects) for leadership and wellbeing, respectively.
- Solid (dashed) arrows represent within-person (between-person) parameter estimates.

$\chi^2 = 53.35$, $df = 32$, $p < .01$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .02$, $SRM = .02$
## Results: Between-Person

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(all \(p < .05\)).
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(all p < .05).
Results: Within-Person

- Positive cross-lagged effect of followers’ emotional engagement on empowering leadership \((B = .14)\).
  - More engaged followers \((\text{time}_{k-1})\) are likely to perceive their leader to be more empowering \((\text{time}_k)\) across time.

\* \(p < .05\).
• Positive cross-lagged effect of directive leadership on followers' emotional engagement \((B = .10)\).
  - Followers who perceive their leader as more directive \((\text{time}_{k-1})\) have subsequently higher levels of engagement \((\text{time}_k)\) across time.

• Positive cross-lagged effect of followers' emotional engagement on directive leadership \((B = .13)\)
  - More engaged followers \((\text{time}_{k-1})\) are likely to perceive their leader to be more directive \((\text{time}_k)\) across time.

\(* p < .05.\)
Results – Robustness Checks
Frank et al. (2013)

• To invalidate the results of the smallest observed cross-lagged effect, > 250 cases for which the effect is zero would have to be added to our data.
Discussion

• The early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a very ambiguous situation for leaders and followers.
  • We found some support for the idea that follower perceptions of leadership and follower wellbeing have mutually reinforcing cross-lagged effects at the within-person level of analysis.
  • Follower perceptions of directive leadership not only positively predicted follower emotional engagement, but emotional engagement also positively predicted follower perceptions of both directive and empowering leadership.
  • In contrast to results at the between-person level, at the within-person level we did not find effects of directive leadership on emotional fatigue or of empowering leadership on emotional engagement and fatigue.
  • Moreover, followers’ emotional fatigue did not predict their perceptions of leadership.
Discussion

Limitations

- Studies conducted during the pandemic vs. studies conducted about the pandemic.
- Follower-reports of (perceived) leadership
- Focus on the early stages of the pandemic

Future Directions

- Incorporate variables more directly relevant to the pandemic (e.g., crisis leadership)
- Follower and leader reports
- Long(er) term effects?
Thank you!