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Transformational leadership and follower creativity: The mediating role of follower relational identification and the moderating role of leader creativity expectations[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We examined follower relational identification with the leader as a mediator and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations as a moderator in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity. Using a sample of 420 leader–follower dyads from an energy company in mainland China, we found that follower relational identification with the leader mediates the transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship, and this mediating relationship is conditional on the moderator variable of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations for the path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. These results contribute to the literature by clarifying why (through relational identification) and when (high creativity expectations set by the leader) transformational leadership is positively related to follower creativity.

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Introduction

Recent research has connected transformational leadership with the emergence of follower creativity in organizations (e.g., Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Wang & Rode, 2010; Zhou & Shalley, 2008). Transformational leadership refers to charismatic, visionary, and inspirational actions that influence followers to broaden their goals and perform beyond the expectations specified in their formal work roles and job descriptions (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Howell & Avolio, 1993). Followers perform creatively when they generate new and potentially useful ideas for products, services, procedures, or processes (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Such ideas provide the raw material for further development and implementation through which individual employees, work groups, or the whole organization can adapt to problems, opportunities, and unusual situations (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993).

Although transformational leadership is supposed to be positively related to follower creativity, the prior studies have yielded inconsistent results and meta-analytic findings showed a high variation in the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity (Hammond, Neff, Farr, Schwall, & Zhao, 2011; Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011; Vessey, Barrett, Mumford, Johnson, & Litwiller, 2014). Given these inconclusive findings, creativity researchers question the simplistic

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transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship in order to consider through what explanatory mechanisms (via what mediators) and under what boundary conditions (in the presence of what moderators) transformational leaders might promote followers to engage in creative courses of action (Gong et al., 2009; Rosing et al., 2011; Shin & Zhou, 2003). The goal of the present study was to contribute to addressing this important yet relatively unclear issue.

Recent research has largely used an intrinsic motivational perspective to clarify why transformational leadership brings forth follower creativity. That is, while Shin and Zhou (2003) proposed and found intrinsic task motivation as a mediator in the transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship, Gong et al. (2009) identified creative self-efficacy as the explanatory intervening mechanism. As stated by Gong et al. (2009), efficacy beliefs enhance perceptions of self-competence (Ng & Feldman, 2013) that intrinsically motivate employees to engage in creative courses of action. This recent research has capitalized on an intrinsic motivational perspective to clarify the underlying influence process through which transformational leadership promotes follower creativity, and thus overlooked process mechanisms that are inherently embedded in the role relationship between the leader and follower. Transformational leadership tends to exert influence on followers by the creation of relational identification with the leader (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Though such relational identification is no new concept, it is only recently that research has begun to examine how followers' identification with the leader impacts on their performance (e.g., Miao, Newman, & Lamb, 2012; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011; Wang & Howell, 2012). To advance understanding of this mediational process, in the present research we examined follower relational identification with the leader as a psychological mechanism through which transformational leadership may exercise its influence on follower creativity. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) developed a theoretical framework that takes a relational perspective on role relationships in organizations and delineate how relational identification flowing from role relationships may shape how individuals think, feel, and act in the workplace. We used this theory on relational identification to argue that transformational leadership may encourage followers to internalize the role relationship with their leader as part of their self-concept (i.e., relational identification).

However, the extent to which relational identification with the leader fosters follower creativity may depend on creativity expectations that the leader sets for the individual follower. As creativity may not be the typical job for all followers (Ford, 1996), leaders are likely to set creativity expectations that vary for followers. Consequently, the extent to which transformational leadership enhances follower engagement in creativity may be contingent upon the role expectations for creativity that leaders set for individual followers. Based on core features from role expectation theory (e.g., Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007; Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991), we proposed that the extent to which relational identification with the leader fosters follower creativity may depend on creativity expectations that the leader sets for the individual follower. Followers' identification with the leader is likely to encourage their creativity the more they perceive that leader creativity expectations form a core feature of the role relationship they have with the leader. Thus, the goal of the current study was to advance understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity by integrating insights from relational identification theory (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) with theoretical notions on transformational leadership, role expectations (e.g., Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007; Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991), and employee creativity (e.g., Ford, 1996; Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011). For this purpose, we examined a moderated mediation model proposing that follower relational identification with the leader operates as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity, while follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations were proposed to moderate the second path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. Fig. 1 presents this model.

We aimed to make several contributions through our study. First, identifying follower relational identification as a mediating process may advance scientific understanding of the influence of transformational leadership on follower creativity, and help practitioners to develop and use effective leadership interventions. Empirical research on the role of identity and identification in organizations has primarily been focused on examining how individuals identify with collective entities, such as groups, departments, or organizations, while largely ignoring the emergence and effects of the relational level of self (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Second, we proposed that transformational leaders may differ in their creativity expectations to followers, and tested whether follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations operate as a boundary condition for the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification with the leader. Researchers have only very recently begun to investigate how relational identification processes may link leadership to follower performance, and have reported inconclusive findings. Some researchers found follower identification with the leader to operate as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower job performance (Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011; Wang & Howell, 2012), whereas others found no evidence for such a mediational effect (Miao et al., 2012). In the current study, we extend this recent empirical work by focusing on creativity as a particular type of follower performance, and by identifying follower perceptions of role expectations for creativity set by the leader as a boundary condition that moderates the mediated relationship between transformational leadership, follower relational identification, and follower creativity.

Fig. 1. Research model in which follower relational identification mediates and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity.

Theory and hypotheses

Transformational leadership and follower creativity

Leadership has been highlighted as a key factor in the work context that can facilitate and motivate followers to engage in creative courses of action (e.g., Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Research has in particular been focused on connecting transformational leadership (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985) with the emergence of follower creativity (e.g., Gong et al., 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Wang & Rode, 2010; Zhou & Shalley, 2008). Typical leader behaviors identified as transformational are articulating an inspirational vision, exercising idealized influence, and providing individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation to followers (Bass, 1985). Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) suggest that these transformational leadership behaviors are likely to act as “creativity enhancing forces.” Specifically, intellectual stimulation may promote creativity by encouraging followers to question critical assumptions underlying the established framework of thoughts and routines and to look at old problems and situations in new ways (Jung, 2001; Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1998). Likewise, when leaders provide individualized consideration, they model empathy and support for individual concerns and openness to new suggestions and approaches (Shin & Zhou, 2003). In such a leadership environment, followers may feel free to think in new ways, go beyond standard practices, and proceed with creativity without fear of penalties (Frese, Teng, & Wijnen, 1999; Shin & Zhou, 2007). Additionally, through serving as charismatic role models (idealized influence) and articulating an inspirational and compelling vision, leaders energize followers to perform beyond expectations and exert extra effort to generate creative solutions for problems emerging in their tasks (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993).

In line with these theoretical deliberations, the findings of a handful of empirical studies show positive relationships between transformational leadership and follower creativity. In these studies, experimental designs were used with students in the U.S. (Jung, 2001; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2003; Sosik et al., 1998; Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1999), or surveys were used with workers in an organizational context in South Korea (Shin & Zhou, 2003), Turkey (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), and Taiwan (Gong et al., 2009). Based on this empirical evidence and the above reasoning, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1. Transformational leadership is positively related to follower creativity.

The mediating role of follower relational identification

We used insights from relational identification theory (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) to further advance understanding of the psychological processes by which transformational leadership promotes follower creativity. The essence of leadership is influence on followers (e.g., Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Yukl, 2010). A leader can have profound influence on followers by bringing about changes in the way they perceive themselves, and thus changing their self-concept or identity (Howell & Shamir, 2005; Kark et al., 2003; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Shamir et al., 1993; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). An important subset of the self-concept is identities that are tied and relevant to relationships in work life. These identities can be defined at the personal level, relational level, and collective level, with each level having a distinct focus, motivation, and source of self-esteem (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2000; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). When individuals define themselves at the personal level (personal identity), they focus on their unique individual attributes (traits, abilities, aspirations), are motivated by self-interest, and derive their self-esteem from interpersonal comparisons with others. Relational identity involves a focus on one's role relationships with significant others (e.g., leader, co-worker, customer), motivation to benefit the dyadic relationship, and self-esteem derived from meeting the relational role expectations and requirements. At the collective level, individuals seek to be a prototypical member of a particular group (e.g., work team, department, or organization), are motivated to serve the interests of that group, and derive self-esteem from comparisons with other groups.

As the self is highly dynamic, individuals can move between and adapt to these levels of identity according to their situational relevance and subjective importance (e.g., Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). We assume that the dyadic role relationship a follower has with his or her leader will be highly salient for most areas of work. Leaders exercise profound influence on followers via task assignments, monitoring, and performance feedback (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). Moreover, leaders have the power to control and influence organizational resources such as information, rewards, benefits, and career opportunities that are highly important to subordinates, whereas subordinates are relatively powerless and dependent on their leaders. Due to this asymmetrical power relationship, subordinates tend to turn their attention to their leaders in an effort to predict their own fate (Fiske, 1993). Thus, as noted by Lord et al. (1999), “the relationship with one's supervisor is a lens through which the entire work experience is viewed” (pp. 169–170); it is, therefore, highly salient for a follower in many work situations.

In their theory on the relational level of self, Sluss and Ashforth (2007) differentiate the terms relational identity and relational identification. Relational identity reflects the nature of one's role relationship, such as subordinate–leader, and how role occupants enact their respective roles vis-à-vis each other; it involves the goals, values, responsibilities, and behaviors that are relevant to the role relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Relational identification refers to the extent to which an individual defines himself or herself in terms of the leader–subordinate role relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Thus, although an employee may clearly understand what it means to be a subordinate vis-à-vis his or her leader (high relational identity), he or she can resist internalizing that relational identity as a partial part of the self (low relational identification).

The extent to which a follower will identify with the role relationship with the leader depends on the attractiveness or desirability of this role relationship. The more positive the evaluation of the role relationship with the leader, the more likely the employee will

identify with it by including this relationship in his or her definition of self. We argued that transformational leadership is a leadership style that can enhance a follower's relational identification with the leader by making the perceived desirability and attractiveness of the role relationship greater for the follower. Specifically, when providing inspirational motivation in interactions with a follower, a leader presents a vision of the future that is appealing and inspirational to a follower and sets task-related goals and expectations to make clear how this desired future state can be achieved (Bass, 1985, 1990). This inspirational motivation makes a follower believe that the leader's mission, goals, values, and expectations are consistent with his or her own personal goals, values, and interests (Bass, 1985, 1990).

Additionally, a transformational leader provides a role model for followers by exerting great effort to facilitate goal attainment, making sacrifices for the benefit of followers, and exhibiting a high level of ethical norms and moral conduct. Such leading by example influences a follower to attribute exceptionally strong positive qualities to the leader, thereby leading him or her to admire the leader and internalize his or her goals, values, and beliefs (e.g., Bass, 1985; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005; Yukl, 2010). Likewise, by showing individualized consideration, a transformational leader treats followers individually and differently on the basis of their talents and knowledge (Shin & Zhou, 2003), pays attention to their individual concerns and needs, and acts as a mentor to encourage their personal growth and development. This individual consideration makes the role relationship less uncertain and more attractive for a follower, thereby engendering his or her relational identification with the leader. Finally, by providing intellectual stimulation, a leader promotes critical thinking and problem solving in the follower (e.g., Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). Such transformational leadership behavior facilitates a follower to become influential and important in the role relationship with the leader, which encourages the follower to include this relationship in his or her self-concept.

In sum, a transformational leader not only provides a follower with a clear sense of the importance and meaningfulness of their role relationship, but also succeeds in making this relationship attractive and desirable to the follower by connecting it with his or her personal needs and ideals (Bass, 1985, 1990). The greater the perceived attractiveness of the role relationship with the leader, the more a follower will include it in his or her self-concept and define himself or herself in terms of this relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Consistent with this reasoning, field studies found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and follower identification with the leader (e.g., Kark et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2010). Accordingly, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership is positively related to follower relational identification with the leader.

As articulated by relational identification theory (Kark et al., 2003; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, 2008), the extent to which followers define themselves in terms of the role relationship with their leader may importantly influence their motivation and performance. The main reason for this influence is that the process of identification with the role relationship with the leader elicits followers to take the leader's perspective and link their self-interest with the leader's interest, thereby producing a strong motivation to contribute to the leader's goals and successes (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). As such, one could argue that relational identification with a transformational leader should be positively related to follower creative performance. The argumentation would be that relational identification with a transformational leader may imply that a follower's self is expanded to include creativity expectations that bear on this role relationship, and this self-expansion is likely to drive follower creativity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 19). Although this rationale seems to provide grounding for proposing an indirect linkage between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification, the nature of creativity, however, may suggest a more complex, conditional linkage.

The moderating role of leader creativity expectations

Despite transformational leadership being strongly suggested to enhance follower creativity, the empirical research literature is, in fact, equivocal (Vessey et al., 2014). Besides the positive relationships reported in the empirical studies described above, other studies found null relationships of transformational leadership with follower creativity (Jaussi & Dionne, 2003) or innovative work behavior (Basu & Green, 1997; Lee, 2008). Moreover, meta-analytic research revealed a high degree of variation in the strength of the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creative and innovative behaviors, suggesting that this relationship is contingent on other variables such as type of tasks, role expectations, and characteristics of followers (Hammond et al., 2011; Rosing et al., 2011). Thus, this literature review indicates that transformational leadership is not necessarily related to employee creativity under all circumstances, and that further research is needed to identify the boundary conditions that moderate this relationship (Rosing et al., 2011). We respond to this research call by examining follower perception of leader expectations for creativity as a potential moderator.

To explain the heterogeneity in the transformational leadership–creativity relationship, Rosing et al. (2011) suggest that transformational leadership may have different foci or goals that might or might not expect followers to engage in creativity behaviors. That is, transformational leadership behaviors may increase followers' creativity if they motivate them to think independently and in new directions and to engage in exploratory and creative behaviors. However, transformational leadership may inhibit followers from creativity if it articulates explicit goals (e.g., safety, productivity) that motivate conformity behaviors, efficiency, and conscientiousness. Thus, transformational leadership in itself might be too broad in nature to specifically promote creativity under all circumstances (Rosing et al., 2011). This notion suggests that complementary role expectations for creativity are necessary to motivate followers to engage in creative courses of action.

Moreover, follower characteristics and aspects of the leadership situation can cause leaders to vary their role expectations for creativity from follower to follower. Leader–member exchange theory (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987) articulates

that leaders and followers tend to develop and establish their role relationships through role-making and social exchanges, suggesting that leaders and followers actively interact and negotiate about role expectations. Role expectations are beliefs about what a role entails and are purported to shape role behaviors (e.g., [Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007](#); [Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991](#)). If followers have low capacities for performing creatively, or if they perform jobs that do not include creativity requirements, then leaders may refrain from conveying expectations for such followers to engage in creativity. Likewise, due to strategic and operational contingencies, leaders can deliberately set role expectations for subordinates that are directed at attaining efficiency or safety goals rather than creativity goals. Thus, leaders are likely to vary their creativity expectations for different followers. This notion is in line with several theoretical perspectives suggesting that role expectations differ across employees, situations, and time ([Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008](#)). Psychological contracts theory ([Robinson & Morrison, 1995](#)) and social information processing theory ([Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978](#)) contend that employees often differ in their role perceptions because they rely on different social cues – such as different role expectations set by leaders – in their work environment.

Based on the reasoning that creativity is not the typical job for all followers and that leaders vary in their expectations for creativity from follower to follower, we proposed that leader–follower role relationships will vary in the extent to which they include expectations for follower creativity. Consequently, whether or not relational identification with the leader does promote follower engagement in creativity will be contingent upon whether or not the leader sets creativity expectations for the follower. Relational identification by followers is likely to drive their creativity when they perceive that creativity expectations form a core feature of the role relationship with the leader. If this is the case, and relational identification grows, the follower becomes motivated to engage in creative courses of action in order to meet the creativity expectations that are included in the role relationship. However, when a leader sets no expectations for follower creativity, relational identification by the follower cannot be expected to promote his or her creativity because this particular role behavior is not seen as important or relevant to the role relationship with the leader. This reasoning suggests that follower perceptions of leader expectations for creativity may operate as a moderator in the relationship between relational identification and creative performance. Specifically, follower relational identification with the leader will be positively related to follower creative performance if the follower perceives that the role relationship with the leader includes creativity expectations. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3. Follower perceptions of creativity expectations set by the leader moderate the relationship between follower relational identification with the leader and follower creativity such that this relationship is more positive when creativity expectations are high rather than low.

Taken together, we proposed that transformational leadership can have an indirect relationship with follower creativity through the mediational process of follower relational identification. This indirect relationship is, however, conditional on the moderator variable of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations for the path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. To be clear and specific about the level of analysis, we seek to enhance understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity based on individual-level effects. That is, as leaders differ in their transformational behaviors toward individual employees, and individual employees have differential perceptions and attributions of leadership behaviors ([Yammarino, Spangler, & Dubinsky, 1998](#)), followers perceive their leader individually and identify with the leader differentially. We therefore examined how followers' individual perceptions of transformational leadership are related to their individual creativity through the process of relational identification with the leader. Moreover, we argued that leaders vary their expectations for creativity from follower to follower and examined how followers' individual perceptions of leader creativity expectations moderate the mediational relationship between follower perceptions of transformational leadership, follower relational identification with the leader, and follower creativity. As such, the second-stage moderated mediation model clarifies why (through relational identification) and when (inclusion of creativity expectations in role relationship with leader) transformational leadership is positively related to follower creativity. To test this moderated mediation model, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. The indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity is mediated by follower relational identification with the leader and moderated by follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations for the path from relational identification to creativity.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were collected in organizations in mainland China. Respondents in the present study were white-collar employees from a large company in the energy industry. The employees carried out a broad variety of tasks across all functional areas in the company, including engineering, research and development, manufacturing, marketing, finance, and administration.

Two sets of questionnaires were used: one set for the employees and another set for their immediate team leaders. The first author and associates spoke to all of the respondents in person (leaders and groups of employees separately) to brief them about the purposes of the study, to explain the procedures for implementing the survey, and to provide the respondents with the questionnaire and a return envelope. Each questionnaire was coded with a researcher-assigned identification number in order to match each

employee's responses with the immediate leader's evaluations. To ensure confidentiality, the respondents sealed the completed questionnaires in the envelopes and returned them directly to the researchers.

The survey participants consisted of 456 employees and 102 leaders. Data for 36 respondents were eliminated because of incomplete questionnaires. The final sample consisted of 420 employees who were supervised by 102 leaders, yielding an effective response rate of 92%. For the employee sample, 80% of participants were male; all had received at least high school level education. The mean ages of the employees and leaders were 37.67 ($SD = 9.28$) and 43.26 ($SD = 6.53$) years, respectively. The mean tenure of employees with their leaders was 4.41 ($SD = 5.30$) years.

Measures

Employees provided ratings for the independent variable of transformational leadership, the mediating variable of follower relational identification with the leader, and the moderating variable of perceived leader creativity expectations. The dependent variable of follower creativity was rated by the respondents' immediate leader. All measures used in the current analysis were developed originally in English and back-translated by bilingual experts. The back-translated English version was compared with the original English version for equivalency and agreement (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973).

Transformational leadership

We used 16 items from the transformational leadership scale of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5X–Short (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to assess follower perception of transformational leadership behaviors of inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Following Kark et al. (2003), we did not include the items measuring attributed charisma because they have been criticized to represent leadership impact rather than leadership behavior (e.g., Yukl, 1998). Using a 7-point scale ranging from “not at all” (1) to “frequently, if not always” (7), respondents indicated the frequency each of the behaviors fitted their immediate supervisors. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Shin & Zhou, 2003), we found the four behavioral dimensions to be highly intercorrelated (r 's = .79–.82). We therefore conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test whether a higher-order model could capture the variance in the four leadership dimensions. This higher-order model indicated a satisfactory fit ($CFI = .91$, $TLI = .89$, $IFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .09$, $\chi^2 = 441.1$, $df = 100$), with all four dimensions loading significantly at the .001 level on the latent variable of transformational leadership, and with errors not being allowed to covary. The fit of this higher-order model was comparable with the fit of a four-factor first-order model ($CFI = .91$, $TLI = .89$, $IFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .09$, $\chi^2 = 422.2$, $df = 98$). Because the higher-order model indicated a satisfactory fit, and because we focused on examining how the whole construct of transformational leadership was related to follower creativity rather than examining differential relationships for the different dimensions, we followed previous research (e.g., Gong et al., 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2003) and created a single index using the average of the sixteen items ($\alpha = .94$).

Follower relational identification with the leader

Follower relational identification with the leader was measured using the 10-item measurement of identification with the leader developed and validated by Kark et al. (2003). The participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the ten statements about relational identification with the leader, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .89.

Follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations

Leader creativity expectations as perceived by followers were measured using a 4-item scale developed by Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007). The participants indicated to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the four statements about leader expectations for creativity, using a 7-point scale ranging from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree”. After deletion of the reversed item “My supervisor would probably be disappointed in me if I was not creative,” Cronbach's alpha was .72.

Follower creativity

The extent to which participants performed creatively was assessed using leader ratings of thirteen items taken from George and Zhou's (2001) creativity scale. The response format was a 7-point scale ranging from 1, “not at all characteristic,” to 7, “very characteristic”. Cronbach's alpha was .96.

Control variables

On the demographic page of the questionnaire, the follower and leader participants provided information about their sex (0, “male,” 1, “female”), age (in years), and the number of years the followers have been working together with their leader. We controlled for these variables because sex was included in recent creativity research (e.g., Gong et al., 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2013), age was found to play a role in innovation-related behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2013), and the duration of a follower–leader relationship might affect follower relational identification with the leader and leader ratings of follower creativity (Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994; Shin & Zhou, 2003). Furthermore, as the sample employed in the present study carried out a broad variety of tasks across different functional areas in the company, employees from various areas may have different creativity requirements. Thus, we also involved job creativity requirement as another control variable. Using the four-item scale proposed by Gilson and Shalley (2004), participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the four statements about their job creativity requirement, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”. Sample items included “In my work, I am required to be creative”, and “In my job, I

am required to come up with novel ways of doing things.” Cronbach’s alpha was .86. Finally, we involved follower creative self-efficacy as a control variable to strengthen our argument that follower relational identification with the leader is a unique process mechanism that can further clarify the underlying influence process through which transformational leadership promotes follower creativity above and beyond intrinsic motivational processes such as creative self-efficacy beliefs. We used Carmeli and Schaubroeck’s (2007) creative self-efficacy scale to measure the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with eight statements about their creative self-efficacy (1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree”). The coefficient alpha was .93.

Analysis

As the data of the current study has a hierarchical structure with followers nested within supervisor (i.e., supervisors rated creativity for multiple followers), we used multilevel modeling by employing linear mixed models in SPSS with fixed and random effects to test hypotheses. As anticipated, when we compared the one-level intercept-only model with the two-level intercept-only model to examine the variance in the dependent variable of follower creativity, the two-level model (-2 restricted log likelihood = 1036.48) yielded a significantly better fit ($\Delta -2$ log likelihood = 121.80, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$) than the one-level model (-2 log likelihood = 1158.28). These results indicated the need for multilevel analysis in order to meet the independence requirement for the group-level data (Hofmann, 1997).

We used random intercepts models (Bickel, 2007) to examine the hypothesized relationships. To test Hypothesis 1, we examined the relationship between transformational leadership behavior and follower creativity (see Table 2). To test Hypotheses 2–4, we used Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) approach toward moderated mediation testing. Specifically, to test Hypothesis 2, we specified a mediator variable model that examined the relationship between transformational leadership and follower relational identification (see Table 3). To test Hypothesis 3, we specified a dependent variable model to examine the second-stage moderation where the second path in the mediated relationship between transformational leadership, follower relational identification, and follower creativity is moderated by follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations (see Table 3). To test Hypothesis 4, we examined the conditional indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification at low (-1 SD) and high ($+1$ SD) values of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations. We used the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982, 1986) to test the significance of this conditional indirect relationship (see Table 3). As the Sobel test has been criticized for assuming normal sampling distribution, bootstrapping methods for evaluating conditional indirect relationships were recommended (Preacher et al., 2007). So, we also used Selig and Preacher’s (2008) Monte Carlo procedure and accompanying interactive tool (available at <http://quantpsy.org/>) to derive percentile confidence intervals (CI) for assessing mediation to supplement the Sobel test. The indirect relationship is assumed to be significant when the 95 percent bias-corrected confidence interval effect excludes zero (see Table 3). We standardized all predictors prior to the analyses.

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses

Prior to testing our hypotheses, using AMOS 17.0, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to check the measures’ convergent and discriminant validity of transformational leadership, follower relational identification with the leader, follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations, and follower creativity. We submitted the four dimensions of transformational leadership (inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), the ten items of follower relational identification with the leader, the three items of leader creativity expectations, and the thirteen items of follower creativity to a CFA using the maximum likelihood method.

We tested chi-square differences between a four-factor (containing transformational leadership, follower relational identification, leader creativity expectations, and follower creativity), a two-factor (containing a composite scale of predictor variables collapsing transformational leadership, follower relational identification, leader creativity expectations), and a single-factor model to see which model provided the better fit to the data. All items were set to load on their intended latent factors, and errors were not allowed to covary. The expected four-factor model (CFI = .92, TLI = .91, IFI = .92, RMSEA = .07, $\chi^2 = 1183.2$, $df = 399$) yielded a significantly better fit than the two-factor model (CFI = .84, TLI = .83, IFI = .84, RMSEA = .10; $\Delta\chi^2 = 748.4$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .001$), or the single-factor model (CFI = .49, TLI = .45, IFI = .49, RMSEA = .17; $\Delta\chi^2 = 4167.0$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the four-factor model was justified.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order Pearson correlations between the variables in this study are presented in Table 1. As can be expected, transformational leadership was positively correlated with follower relational identification and follower creativity. Both follower relational identification and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations were also positively associated with follower creativity. Regarding the control variables, as compared to male followers, the females reported lower levels of relational identification with the leader, leader creativity expectations, creative job requirements, and creative self-efficacy. Additionally, younger followers identified more strongly with their leader and reported higher levels of creative job requirements. Besides, followers reported higher levels of relational identification with the leader in response to male rather than female leaders. Follower tenure with the leader correlated negatively with both relational identification and leader creativity expectations. Perceived job

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between study variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Transformational leadership	4.75	1.05										
2. Relational identification	4.99	1.10	.65***									
3. Leader creativity expectations	5.57	.91	.64***	.55***								
4. Follower creativity	5.32	.96	.23***	.23***	.15**							
<i>Control variables</i>												
5. Follower sex	.20	.40	-.11*	-.13**	-.17***	-.07						
6. Follower age	37.67	9.28	-.19***	-.10*	-.12*	.02	-.07					
7. Leader sex	.08	.28	-.08	-.15**	-.08	-.02	.22***	.05				
8. Leader age	43.26	6.53	-.01	.01	.02	-.09	-.05	.11*	-.03			
9. Tenure with leader	4.41	5.30	-.17***	-.14**	-.10*	-.08	.00	.42***	.09	.13**		
10. Job creativity requirement	5.57	.88	.24***	.27***	.36***	.11*	-.24***	.02	-.04	-.04	-.01	
11. Creative self-efficacy	5.42	.86	.30***	.30***	.41***	.16**	-.19***	.09	.03	-.05	.04	.66***

N = 420.

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

creativity requirement and creative self-efficacy were found to be positively related to leader ratings of follower creativity. Leader creativity expectations, perceived job creativity requirement, and creative self-efficacy were mutually and positively correlated.

Tests of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted a multilevel regression analysis. When the socio-demographic variables and job creativity requirement and creative self-efficacy were controlled for, transformational leadership was found to be significantly and positively related to follower creativity ($\gamma = .12, p < .01$, see Table 2). This result provided support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2

To test Hypothesis 2, we specified a mediator variable model that examined the relationship between transformational leadership and follower relational identification (see Table 3). Controlled for the socio-demographic variables, job creativity requirement, and creative self-efficacy, transformational leadership was found to be significantly and positively related to follower relational identification ($\gamma = .65, p < .001$; Table 3). This result supported Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3

To test Hypothesis 3, we specified a dependent variable model to examine the moderating role of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations in the second-stage relationship between follower relational identification and follower creativity (see Table 3). After the effects of the control variables and the main effects of transformational leadership, follower relational identification, and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations were accounted for, the cross product between follower relational identification and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations was included, yielding a significant interaction effect in relation to follower creativity ($\gamma = .07, p < .05$, see Table 3). To further clarify this interactive effect, we rearranged the total equation in simple

Table 2

Results of linear mixed models analyses testing Hypothesis 1.

Predictor	Follower creativity			
	γ	s.e.	t	p
Intercept	5.32	.07	72.81	.000
Follower sex	-.03	.05	-.68	.496
Follower age	.05	.04	1.27	.207
Leader sex	.01	.07	.10	.923
Leader age	-.06	.07	-.88	.381
Tenure with leader	-.08	.04	-1.79	.074
Job creativity requirement	.04	.05	.81	.421
Creative self-efficacy	.04	.05	.74	.460
Transformational leadership (TFL)	.12	.04	2.93	.004
- 2 restricted log likelihood	1047.53			
Pseudo R^2	.04			

Table 3Results of linear mixed models analyses testing [Hypotheses 2–4](#).

Predictor	Follower relational identification				
	γ	s.e.	t	p	
Intercept	4.99	.04	117.09	.000	
Follower sex	−.01	.04	−.14	.886	
Follower age	.03	.05	.56	.579	
Leader sex	−.11	.04	−2.43	.017	
Leader age	.02	.04	.57	.571	
Tenure with leader	−.04	.05	−.85	.399	
Job creativity requirement	.07	.05	1.37	.173	
Creative self-efficacy	.08	.06	1.46	.146	
Transformational leadership	.65	.04	14.83	.000	
− 2 restricted log likelihood	1057.05				
Pseudo R^2	.44				
Follower creativity					
Predictor	γ	s.e.	t	p	
Intercept	5.28	.07	70.38	.000	
Follower sex	−.03	.04	−.63	.530	
Follower age	.05	.04	1.27	.205	
Leader sex	.02	.07	.29	.772	
Leader age	−.07	.07	−.96	.339	
Tenure with leader	−.08	.04	−1.81	.071	
Job creativity requirement	.03	.04	.54	.591	
Creative self-efficacy	.02	.05	.48	.635	
Transformational leadership	.06	.05	1.12	.263	
Relational identification (RI)	.14	.05	2.81	.005	
Leader creativity expectations (LCE)	.02	.05	.40	.689	
RI * LCE	.07	.03	2.35	.019	
− 2 restricted log likelihood	1049.48				
Pseudo R^2	.05				
Conditional indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification at low and high values of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations					
Leader creativity expectations	Indirect effect	Sobel test		95% confidence interval ^a	
		z	p	Lower limit	Upper limit
Low (− 1 SD)	.05	1.30	.192	−.023	.118
High (+ 1 SD)	.14	3.31	.001	.057	.225

^a Based on the 20,000 Monte Carlo samples.

main effects of follower relational identification on follower creativity for high and low values of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations. As [Fig. 2](#) illustrates, follower relational identification was positively related to follower creativity when followers perceived high leader creativity expectations (simple slope at + 1 SD: $\gamma = .21$, $p < .001$), whereas this relationship did not reach a significant level in case followers perceived low leader creativity expectations (simple slope at − 1 SD: $\gamma = .07$, $p > .05$). These results lend support to [Hypothesis 3](#).

[Hypothesis 4](#)

The final hypothesis predicted that the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification would be conditional on the moderator variable of follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations for the path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. Using the Sobel test and the Monte Carlo method with percentile confidence intervals (CI) for assessing mediation, we found that the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification was significant for followers who perceived high leader creativity expectations (*indirect effect* = .14; Sobel $z = 3.31$, $p < .001$; 95% CI = .057 to .225). For followers low on perceived leader creativity expectations, the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity was not significantly different from zero (*indirect effect* = .05; Sobel $z = 1.30$, $p > .05$; 95% CI = −.023 to .118). [Hypothesis 4](#) was, therefore, supported.

Supplementary analyses

Although we had a priori no theoretical reasons to suggest that leader creativity expectations would necessarily heighten follower relational identification with the leader, we conducted additional moderation analyses to examine whether follower perceptions of leader creativity expectation would also have operated as a first-stage moderator in the path from transformational leadership to follower relational identification. Specifically, we regressed follower relational identification on transformational leadership, follower

Fig. 2. Follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations as a moderator in the relationship between follower relational identification and follower creativity.

perception of leader creativity expectations, and their interaction, together with the control variables. We found the interaction term to be significant and negative ($\gamma = -.10$, $s.e. = .03$, $t = -3.08$, $p < .01$), indicating that the simple relationship between transformational leadership and follower relational identification with the leader was somewhat more pronounced when leader creativity expectations were lower (simple slope at -1 SD: $\gamma = .63$, $s.e. = .06$, $t = 10.50$, $p < .001$) rather than higher (simple slope at $+1$ SD: $\gamma = .42$, $s.e. = .06$, $t = 6.67$, $p < .001$), albeit that the simple relationship remained highly significant under the condition of high leader creativity expectations. This first-stage moderation seems to indicate that leader expectations for creativity partly operate as a substitute for transformational leadership behaviors in making the role relationship with the leader more desirable and attractive for followers.

Subsequently, we examined a two-stage moderated mediation model in which leader creativity expectations operated as both a first-stage moderator in the path from transformational leadership to follower relational identification and as a second-stage moderator in the path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. The results confirmed that the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification was still significant under the condition of high leader creativity expectations (*indirect effect* = .09; Sobel $z = 3.02$, $p < .01$; 95% CI = .035 to .156), even though the high expectations for creativity set by the leader had slightly suppressed the first-path relationship between transformational leadership and follower relational identification. Under the condition of low leader creativity expectations, however, the mediated relationship between transformational leadership, follower relational identification, and follower creativity remained insignificant (*indirect effect* = .05; Sobel $z = 1.30$, $p > .05$; 95% CI = $-.021$ to .115). Thus, as hypothesized, the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification did only emerge if followers perceive that creativity expectations form a core feature of the role relationship with the leader. In addition, we also explored the possibility that leader creativity expectations had moderated the direct relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity, but we did not find any evidence for such direct effect moderation.

Moreover, we do not find any empirical evidence for moderation of the direct effect of transformational leadership on follower creativity. Testing the interaction of transformational leadership and leader creativity expectations does not yield a significant effect in predicting follower creativity, and including the direct effect moderation (moderation of $X \rightarrow Y$ path) in addition to indirect effect moderation only yields significant results for the indirect effect moderation and not for the direct effect moderation.

Finally, as the cross-sectional design of our study made the results vulnerable to opposite or bi-directional relationships, it might be possible that followers who were better able to meet leader creativity expectations by performing creatively would more strongly identify with their leader. To test this alternative model, we regressed follower relational identification on follower creativity, follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations, and their interaction, together with the control variables. The results provided no evidence for this alternative model; the interaction effect between follower creativity and follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations was not significant in relation to follower relational identification with the leader ($\gamma = .01$, $p > .05$).

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to advance understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity. We examined how followers' individual perceptions of transformational leadership are related to their individual creativity through the process of relational identification with the leader. Moreover, we proposed that leaders vary their expectations for creativity from follower to follower and examined how followers' individual perceptions of leader creativity expectations moderate the mediational relationship between transformational leadership, follower relational identification with the leader, and follower

creativity. As expected, our survey results showed that the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity was mediated by follower relational identification with the leader and moderated by follower perceptions of expectations for creativity set by the leader. Specifically, the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through follower relational identification was found to be significant if, and only if, leaders set high creativity expectations for followers. Thus, these findings suggest that transformational leadership can have some effect on follower creativity when transformational leaders call for, or expect, creativity and followers identify with their leader.

Theoretical implications

The current study has several theoretical implications. We integrated transformational leadership theory with core features from [Sluss and Ashforth's \(2007\)](#) theory on relational identification in organizations to identify follower relational identification with the leader as an intervening process mechanism that can link transformational leadership to follower creativity. Recent research has capitalized on an intrinsic motivational perspective to clarify the underlying influence process through which transformational leadership promotes follower creativity (e.g., [Gong et al., 2009](#); [Shin & Zhou, 2003](#)). We contribute to this research literature by identifying that transformational leadership can exert influence on followers by the creation of follower identification with the leader. As such, rather than focusing on task-related motivation, we articulate the importance of an identification process mechanism that is inherently embedded in the role relationship between leaders and followers. We found empirical evidence for the mediating role of follower relational identification in the transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship above and beyond the influence of the intrinsic motivational construct of self-efficacy which we controlled for in the analyses.

Furthermore, we answered the call originating from inconsistent results reported in meta-analytic research ([Hammond et al., 2011](#); [Rosing et al., 2011](#)) to question the simplistic transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship in order to consider under what boundary conditions transformational leaders might promote followers to engage in creative courses of action. By integrating insights from theories on transformational leadership ([Avolio, 1999](#); [Bass, 1985](#); [Dvir et al., 2002](#)) and role expectations (e.g., [Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007](#); [Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991](#)), we proposed and found the mediated relationship between transformational leadership, follower relational relationship, and follower engagement in creativity to be contingent upon the role expectations that leaders set for individual followers. As creativity may not be the typical job for all followers ([Ford, 1996](#)), leaders are likely to set creativity expectations that vary from follower to follower. Thus, the present results suggest that the positive effect of transformational leadership for follower creativity through follower relational identification is more likely to emerge when leaders complement transformational leadership behaviors with setting clear creativity expectations for followers, whereas this transformational leadership effect will be limited if followers perceive no clear leader expectations for creativity.

The present results also indicated how follower perceptions of leader creativity expectations moderate the mediating process mechanism of relational identification in the transformational leadership–follower creativity relationship. The finding that follower relational identification induced by transformational leadership resulted in less creativity when leader creativity expectations were absent accentuates the importance of the leadership context as a boundary condition. More specifically, due to follower or situational contingencies, transformational leaders may set low creativity expectations for particular followers. In such situation of low role expectations for creativity, followers will not feel an urge to engage in creative courses of action, even though they may strongly identify with their transformational leader. However, follower relational identification seems to drive their creativity when they perceive high leader creativity expectations. Future research might explore and identify additional boundary conditions in the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through relational identification. Follower characteristics such as motivational need structures (e.g., need for affiliation, achievement, and power, [McClelland, 1987](#)), independent vs. interdependent self-construal (e.g., [Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000](#); [Markus & Kitayama, 1991](#)), or self-esteem (e.g., [Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995](#)) may moderate the extent to which followers respond to transformational leadership with relational identification with the leader. In addition, self-views of creativity, or creative self-identity ([Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003](#)) may moderate the extent to which follower relational identification with transformational leaders finds expression in creativity. Examining the influence of such follower characteristics and situational factors can significantly advance the understanding of boundary conditions under which relational identification can link transformational leadership to follower creativity.

Empirical research in the identity and identification domain has primarily been focused on examining the antecedents and consequences of how individuals identify with collective entities, such as groups, departments, or organizations, while largely ignoring the emergence and effects of relational identification ([Sluss & Ashforth, 2007](#)). We contribute to filling this gap by assuming that the dyadic role relationship of a follower with his or her leader will be highly salient for follower creativity, and examining whether, how, and when follower identification with this role relationship can link transformational leadership to follower creativity. More specifically, researchers have only recently begun to empirically examine follower relational identification with the leader as an intervening process through which transformational leaders influence follower performance, and have reported inconclusive findings. Specifically, whereas [Wang and Howell \(2012\)](#) found follower relational identification with the leader to operate as a mediator in the transformational leadership–follower performance relationship, [Miao et al. \(2012\)](#) found no evidence for such a mediation process. [Walumbwa and Hartnell \(2011\)](#) used a sequential mediational model and found that follower relational identification with the leader mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and follower self-efficacy, which was then positively related to follower performance. In the current study, we extend this recent empirical work by focusing on creativity as a particular type of follower performance, and by identifying role expectations for creativity set by the leader as a moderation mechanism in

the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity through relational identification. As such, we contribute to the literature by providing fine-grained knowledge on whether, why, and when the intervening process of follower relational identification with the leader links transformational leadership to follower creativity.

Potential limitations

Our findings need to be considered in light of the limitations associated with the design of our study. First, the cross-sectional design limits our ability to determine the direction of causality among the variables. The results are vulnerable to opposite or bi-directional relationships owing to the possibility that followers who are better able to meet their leader's creativity expectations might more strongly identify with their leader, and that this relational identification might subsequently have influenced transformational leadership behaviors. However, we have some arguments against this possibility of reversed causality. First, we conducted supplementary analyses and found no evidence for an interaction effect between follower creativity and leader creativity expectations in predicting relational identification. Furthermore, an emerging stream of research in the leadership domain persuasively presents follower self-concept as an intervening psychological process that can translate leader behaviors into follower action (Kark et al., 2003; Shamir et al., 1993; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

The present results are based on the responses of employees and their immediate leaders who worked in a specific industry in a single geographic area. One may therefore argue that our findings are contextually and culturally specific and thus cannot be generalized to other contexts. More specifically, as we conducted the present study among Chinese leader–follower dyads, the strong relational orientation of Chinese people might have made followers' relational self in response to leaders highly salient. The importance of dyadic relations is deeply seated in Chinese culture (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002), which is inferentially traceable to Confucianism (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Thus, cultural-specific sensitivity to relational roles and accompanying obligations might have promoted strong identification with the leader and engagement in creative behaviors in response to transformational leadership among the participants in our research sample. However, we would argue that the positive relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity found in the present study is in accordance with findings from prior research in different work contexts and cultures. Prior researchers have found this relationship in experimental settings with students in the U.S. (Jung, 2001; Kahai et al., 2003; Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1999; Sosik et al., 1998), as well as in surveys conducted with workers in South Korea (Shin & Zhou, 2003), Turkey (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), and Taiwan (Gong et al., 2009). Moreover, in field studies among Israeli (Kark et al., 2003) and Chinese employees (Liu et al., 2010) from various organizations in different industries, a pattern of relationships between transformational leadership and follower identification with the leader was found which is quite similar to that found in the present study. Notwithstanding the above, it is possible that industry type and cultural context shaped the magnitude of the mediating impact of follower relational identification and the moderating effect of leader creativity expectations in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower creativity. Therefore, generalization of the results reported in the present study to leader–follower dyads performing their duties in different cultural and occupational contexts awaits further empirical examination. Moreover, our sample consisted of 80% male employees. As gender differences might affect relational identification processes, future research needs to implicate more balanced samples.

Practical implications

Employee creativity has been claimed and found to facilitate organizations in adapting to changing demands in volatile and complex environments (Amabile et al., 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Shalley et al., 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Woodman et al., 1993). Indeed, employees who generate new and useful ideas for products, services, work methods, or administrative processes provide their organizations with “important raw material for subsequent development and possible implementation” (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Thus, in the current work environment, which stresses adaptation to change, leaders must consider how they can motivate staff to think and act creatively whether in the development of new products and services, in the design of new working processes and systems, or in solving novel problems.

Our results suggest that transformational leadership achieves positive influence on follower creativity through the creation of follower relational identification with the leader. Transformational leadership behaviors cause followers to internalize the leader's goals, values, and standards and exhibit similar qualities (Yukl, 2010). However, in order to secure high levels of follower creativity, leaders should complement their transformational leadership behaviors with setting and communicating bold expectations for creative role behaviors to their followers. The present results show that relational identification with the leader motivates followers to undertake creative activities only when they perceive that their leader sets high expectations for creativity. If this is the case, and relational identification grows, then followers become motivated to engage in creative courses of action in order to meet the creativity expectations that form a core feature of the role relationship with the leader.

Thus, it is through the process of relational identification by followers, and under the condition of setting and communicating bold creativity expectations, that transformational leadership can increase follower motivation to engage in creative acts. Because such leader behavior can be learned and developed (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996), specific training and development programs should facilitate supervisors to obtain skills and communication strategies that enable them to combine exhibiting typical transformational behaviors such as articulating a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration with setting clear creativity expectations to their subordinates.

Conclusion

In sum, to advance understanding of the influence of transformational leadership in the emergence of follower creativity, we examined the role of follower relational identification and leader creativity expectations in the influence process. The present findings show that transformational leadership promotes follower creativity by enhancing follower relational identification with the leader. However, we found this mediated relationship to be conditional on leader creativity expectations for the path from follower relational identification to follower creativity. Thus, the present study clarifies why (through follower relational identification with the leader) and when (inclusion of leader creativity expectations in role relationship with leader by followers) transformational leadership is positively related to follower creativity.

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