

CONTEXTUAL LEADER BEHAVIOR: PROPOSAL OF A NEW CONSTRUCT

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Abstract

The construct of contextual leader behavior is proposed in order to understand the indirect effects of leader behavior through the social context, especially through group norms. Contextual leader behavior is defined as “a leader’s behavior that is not oriented to control group members directly and immediately, but is oriented for developing, maintaining, and changing the group context so that the context influences group members’ attitudes and behaviors for a long time.” Contextual leader behavior is conceptualized and its antecedents and consequences are examined using previous theories and research in related fields. Some methodological considerations are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

It is considered that a leader’s behavior influences group members’ attitudes and behaviors both directly and indirectly (e. g., Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). An example of the indirect effects of leader behavior is through the development of the social context such as culture and norms. That is, a leader may not only try to influence group members through direct supervising (e. g., directing, monitoring, rewarding, and punishing) but also try to establish effective culture and norms which in turn influence group members’ attitudes and behaviors. The direct effect of leader behavior on group members may emerge immediately but it may tend to be short-lived. On the other hand, it may sometimes take a longer time until a leader’s behavior results in the development of the effective group context that regulates group members’ attitudes and behaviors, but such an indirect effect would last longer. Once a certain type of social context is developed, it is relatively hard to change. Therefore, groups can become very effective without micro management if they can develop appropriate group norms (Mitchell, 1997). Sometimes this kind of indirect effects may continue even after the leader is gone. Metaphors that are similar to these arguments are “time telling” and “clock building” suggested by Collins and Pollas (1994). According to Collins and Pollas, time telling refers to having a great idea or being a charismatic or visionary leader while clock building refers to building a company that can prosper far beyond the presence of any single leader. Although the metaphors of “time telling” and “clock building” are originally introduced as top management activities at the corporate level, the similar distinction can also be made at the lower levels of organizations (e. g., divisional, group, or team level).

In spite of this important difference between direct and indirect effects of leader behavior on group members’ attitudes and behaviors, little research has carefully looked at leadership behavior from this perspective. Therefore, ambiguities still exist about what are the direct and indirect effects of leader behavior and what kind of leader behavior is linked to each one. For

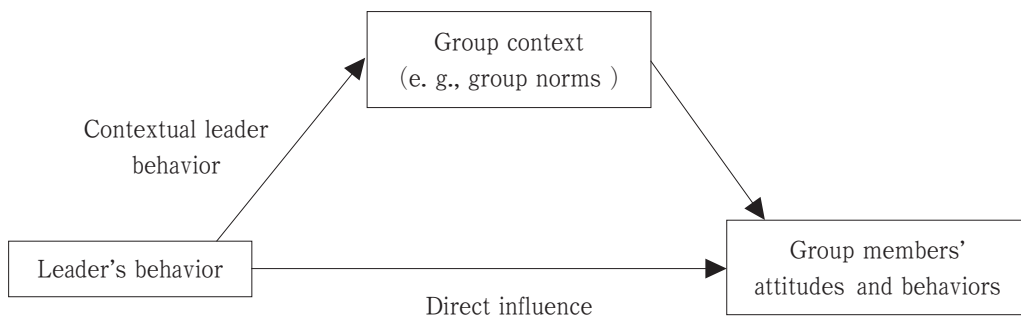
example, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) examine direct and indirect effects of three core components of charismatic leadership on member performance and attitudes. However, their focus is rather the individual-level cognitive variables (i. e., goals and self-efficacy) that are supposed to mediate the relationship between leadership behavior and group members' reactions. In order to explore the effects of leadership on group members' attitudes, behaviors and group effectiveness, the indirect effects of leader behavior through the social context should also be conceptualized. That is, a different way of categorizing leadership behavior is needed to understand the direct and indirect effects of leader behavior on group members' attitudes and behaviors more deeply.

In this paper, I focus on a leader's behavior that is directed to developing the group context such as group norms, which in turn regulates group members' attitudes and behaviors. I use the term "contextual leader behavior" to represent this type of leader behavior. I do not use the term such as "indirect leader behavior" because terms including "indirect" may possibly cause confusion between within-individual indirect effects (e. g., Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996) and context-based indirect effects on members' attitudes and behaviors, the latter of which is the primary focus of this paper. I borrow the term "contextual" from the construct of "contextual performance" originally proposed by Borman and Motowidlo (1993). Contextual performance refers to behaviors that do not directly support the technical core activities, but rather support the organizational, social, psychological environment in which the technical core must function (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Although contextual leader behavior and contextual performance may share similar meanings (e. g., directed to the organizational, social, psychological environment), they are different constructs. Contextual leader behavior is oriented to a group as a whole rather than a part of the group environment and it is intended to regulate or control group members' attitudes and behaviors. Contextual performance does not include these characteristics. Also, contextual leader behavior does not necessarily assume citizenship behaviors such as conscientiousness, courtesy, and altruism (Organ, 1988) as contextual performance does.

CONTEXTUAL LEADER BEHAVIOR: WORKING DEFINITION AND RELATED THEORIES

In this paper, contextual leader behavior is defined as a leader's behavior that is not oriented to control group members directly and immediately, but is oriented for developing, maintaining, and changing the group context so that the context influences members' attitudes and behaviors for a long time. The group context in this definition refers to the psychological or social context that includes informational cues (e. g., expectations, beliefs, values) and social rewards and punishments (Mitchell, 1997). Because I focus on the leader behavior at the group level, group norms will be placed as a primary contextual variable that mediates the relationship between the leadership behavior and members' attitudes and behaviors. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual relationship between a leader's behavior and its effects on group members' attitudes and behaviors. Contextual leader behavior is classified as the leader behavior that is mediated by the group context, while there is also a direct influence of the leader behavior on group members' attitudes and behaviors.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of Direct and Indirect Influences of Leader Behavior



Some existing constructs and theoretical frameworks are useful in conceptualizing and theorizing contextual leader behavior. First, research on group norms can be applied to the discussion of how a leader tries to develop effective norms to influence group members. The behavior exerted by a leader in such a situation is closely related to contextual leader behavior. Second, research on socialization tactics also provides implications about a leader's behavior that socializes group members and enforces or changes the group context. There are conceptual similarities between socialization and group development, especially the norming stage (Wanous, 1984). Because the development of group norms is an important process for group development, a leader's behavior in the early stage of group development (e. g., norming) may include some of the socialization tactics. In the field of leadership, research on transformational and transactional leadership (e. g., Bass, 1990) is useful in conceptualizing contextual leader behavior. It is considered that some components of transformational leadership is closely related to contextual leader behavior. On the other hand, the major components of transactional leadership are not categorized as contextual leader behavior. Finally, substitutes for leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978) is also related to contextual leader behavior. Because contextual leader behavior is oriented to develop the group context that may continue to influence group members even after a leader is gone, such the group context can be interpreted as a substitute for leadership. Therefore, from this perspective, contextual leadership behavior contributes to developing some types of leadership substitutes.

In the following, literature on each theoretical framework is briefly reviewed and its relationship with contextual leadership behavior is discussed.

Group Norms

Group norms are the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate and re-regulate group members' behavior (Hackman, 1976). Group norms are a part of the social context that is considered to be external to the individual. Although group norms are infrequently written down or openly discussed, they often have a powerful, and consistent influence on group members' behavior. Also, once developed, group norms tend to last long and are relatively hard to change.

It is true even for self-managed teams that usually have no formal leaders or supervisors. That is, group norms can have a more powerful effect on motivation and performance than traditional supervision and lines of command (Barker, 1993). In spite of these powerful effects of group norms on group effectiveness, it is considered that implementing such norms is very difficult (Mitchell, 1997). Usually, some forms of group norms emerge in the process of group development. For example, Tuckman's model of group development (Tuckman, 1965) suggests that the norming stage follows after the forming stage in which a group is just coming together and the storming stage in which intragroup conflict takes place.

Feldman (1984) describes how and why group norms are developed and enforced. Group norms are developed by (1) explicit statements, (2) critical events in the group's history, (3) primacy, and (4) carry-over behaviors from past situations. Group norms are likely to be enforced if (1) they facilitate group survival, (2) they simplify or make predictable what behavior is expected of group members, (3) they help the group avoid embarrassing interpersonal problems, and (4) they express the central values of the group and clarify what is distinctive about the group's identity. Feldman's illustration of how group norms are developed and enforced provides implications in discussing the components of contextual leader behavior.

Spich and Keleman (1985) propose a normative model of explicit norm structuring process including four steps toward the development of effective norms. The four phases are (1) codification of critical individual behaviors as they related to group effectiveness, (2) reduction of statement pool by eliminating less important items, (3) estimation of frequency of each behavior that determine the best and worst performers, and (4) the confirmation of behavior items that discriminate the best and worst group performers. Spich and Keleman also propose the applications of norm structuring in group management that may also be applicable in theorizing the components of contextual leader behavior. They include an unstructured application in which group members are given general task of developing the list of behavioral norms and are required to review the list several times over the course of the group life, and a more structured application in which group members are assigned to develop a peer performance rating method in which items of group norms are created, and the peer ratings are conducted in order to adjust group members' behaviors or behavioral norms themselves to improve group effectiveness.

Socialization Tactics

The socialization of newcomers to organizations and groups has been a topic of great interest to organizational scholars (e. g., Jones, 1986; Louis, Posner & Powell, 1983; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Van Maanen and Schein are among the first scholars who offer a typology of tactics used in organizational socialization processes. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggest six bipolar tactics: (a) collective versus individual socialization processes, (b) formal versus informal socialization processes, (c) sequential versus random socialization processes, (d) fixed versus variable socialization processes, (e) serial versus disjunctive socialization processes, and (f) investiture versus divestiture socialization processes.

Based on Van Maanen and Schein's typology, Jones (1986) classified socialization tactics into two opposite ones: institutionalized socialization tactics and individualized socialization tactics. Institutionalized socialization tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics) reflect structured program of socialization that reduces ambiguities and encourages newcomers to passably accept preset roles and maintain the status quo. On the other hand, individualized socialization tactics (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics) reflect a relative absence of structure that creates ambiguity and encourages newcomers to question the status quo and develop their own approach to their roles.

With respect to a leader's behavior, a leader may prefer institutionalized socialization tactics because such tactics are more controllable for the leader. Given this, contextual leader behavior would be more related to institutionalized socialization tactics rather than individualized socialization tactics.

Transformational Leadership

A growing number of researchers have become interested in how leaders influence followers to make self-sacrifices and put the needs of the mission or organization above their materialistic self-interests. The theory of transformational leadership, as well as other relevant leadership theories such as charismatic and visionary leadership (House, 1977; Conger 1991), focuses on the process in which leaders appeal to followers' values and emotions. Researchers who focus on this area usually contrast transformational leadership with transactional leadership (e. g., Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1990). Transformational leaders are change agents who energize employees and direct them to a new set of values and behaviors while transactional leaders guide or motivate employees by linking job performance to valued rewards and ensuring that employees have the resources needed to get the job done. It is considered that transformational leadership is built on top of transactional leadership.

Bass (1985) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership. They include (1) idealized influence or "charisma" as serving as a charismatic role model to followers, (2) inspirational motivation as articulating clear, appealing, and inspiring vision to followers, (3) intellectual stimulation as simulating follower creativity by questioning assumptions and challenging the status quo, and (4) individual consideration as attending to and supporting the individual needs of followers. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) further developed six dimensions of transformational leadership behavior. They include (1) identifying and articulating a vision, (2) providing an appropriate model, (3) fostering the acceptance of group goals, (4) high performance expectation, (5) providing individualized support, and (6) intellectual stimulation.

Using the above behavioral scales, Podsakoff et al. (1990) studied the effect of transformational leader behaviors on group members' extra-role behavior or organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB's) (Organ, 1988). They found that transformational leadership influenced OCB's indirectly through group members' trust in their leaders. An alternative explanation may be that group members' OCB's might also be affected by certain group norms such as cooperative norms. Thus, it is possible that some components of transformational leader behavior indirectly

influence group members' OCB's through contributing to the development of such group norms.

Among several components of charismatic and transformational leadership behaviors, leader's visionary behaviors may be oriented to developing effective group norms. This is consistent with Feldman (1984)'s statement that norms are developed by a leader's frequent expression of the central values of the group. A leader either makes an explicit vision statement or emphasizes values or brief in daily communication (Conger, 1991). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) suggest that there are three charismatic or visionary behaviors, (a) communicating a vision, (b) implementing the vision through task cues, and (c) demonstrating charismatic communication style. These behaviors are supposed to contribute to the norm development as well as the direct effect on followers' attitudes and behaviors. However, not all components of transformational leadership are oriented to contextual leader behavior. For example, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation may focus directly on individual members' needs and cognitions, thus may not be strongly related to developing the group context. What is important in conceptualizing contextual leader behavior is that the effect of such leader behavior would continue even after the leader is gone. If Collins and Pollas's (1994) metaphors are used again, transformational leadership behavior may contain both time telling and clock building, but only the latter should be the component of contextual leader behavior.

In contrast to transformational leadership, transactional leadership emphasizes implicit social exchange or transaction over time that exists between the leader and members (Hollander & Offermann, 1990). That is, transactional leadership such as contingent reward and management by exceptions (Bass, 1990) may primarily be oriented to the direct effects on group members' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, it seems that not many of transactional leadership behaviors are related to contextual leader behavior.

Substitutes for Leadership

Kerr and Jermier (1978) developed the substitutes for leadership model to identify aspects of the situation that reduce the importance of leadership by managers and other formal leaders. According to this approach, the key to improving leadership effectiveness is to identify the situational variables that can either substitute for, neutralize, or enhance the effects of a leader's behavior. Substitutes make leader behavior unnecessary and redundant. They include any characteristics of the subordinates, task, or organization that ensure subordinates will clearly understand their roles, know how to do the work, be highly motivated, and be satisfied with their jobs (Yukl, 2002). Neutralizers are any characteristics of the task or organization that prevent a leader from acting in a specified way or that nullify the effects of the leader's actions.

Researchers point out that leaders influence subordinate attitudes, perceptions, and performance, either directly through their own actions or indirectly by shaping the environment in which the subordinates work (i. e., shaping task and organizational characteristics and perhaps even subordinate characteristics by changing selection criteria) (Kerr, 1977; Howell, Dorfman & Kerr, 1986). This view suggests that some substitutes for leadership may mediate the

influence of leader behavior on subordinate criterion outcomes. If group norms developed as a result of contextual leader behavior is considered to be a substitute for leadership, it can be theorized that such a substitute in fact mediates the relationship between contextual leader behavior and outcome variables such as individual and group performance (See Figure 1).

ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONTEXTUAL LEADER BEHAVIOR

Antecedents of Contextual Leader Behavior

The degree to which leaders use contextual leader behavior to control group members may be affected by both situational and individual difference factors.

With regards to the situational factors, group development and environmental change may be relevant viewpoints to hypothesize the frequency of contextual leader behavior.

In the early stages of group development, a leader may conduct behaviors that are similar to the explicit norm structuring as a means of enhancing group effectiveness (Spich & Keleman, 1985). Also, in the early stages of group development, a leader may engage in various types of contextual leader behavior that are similar to visionary behavior and socialization tactics. Therefore, it is expected that the frequency of contextual leader behavior used by a leader will be high in the early stage of group development. The frequency of contextual leader behavior may decrease when the group goes into the later stages of group development. In the group maintenance stage (e. g., performing stage), the group still needs contextual leader behavior in order to maintain group norms but the frequency of such behavior may continue to be low.

With regard to environmental change, the frequency of contextual leader behavior will increase if a leader perceives that environment surrounding his or her group is changing. According to Feldman (1984), groups try to operate in such a way that they maximize their chances for task success and minimize their chances of task failure. Also, critical events in the group history provide a chance to develop group norms. The change of the environment may be the critical event for group survival, and groups may have to change their norms if current norms no longer contribute to the task success and the protection from failure. Therefore, it is expected that if environment changes, a leader will increase the frequency of contextual behavior to reconstruct group norms for re-regulating member attitudes and behaviors.

Individual difference factors such as personality traits may also affect how frequently a leader use contextual leader behavior. However, little existing literature is available which provides insightful information in theorizing what kind of personality or other individual difference variables are related to contextual leader behavior. One possible approach is to use Five-Factor Model of personality traits or "Big Five." Consensus is emerging that a Five-Factor Model of personality (often termed the Big Five) can be used to describe the most salient aspects of personality (Goldberg, 1990). The dimensions comprising the Big Five are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Adjustment, and Openness to Experience. Extraversion represents the tendency to be outgoing, assertive, active, and excitement seeking. Individuals scoring high on Extraversion are strongly predisposed to the experience of positive emotions. Agreeableness consists of tendency of kind, gentle, trusting and

trustworthy, and warm. Conscientiousness is indicated by two major facets: achievement and dependability. Emotional Adjustment or Emotional Stability is often labeled by its opposite, Neuroticism, which is the tendency to be anxious, fearful, depressed, and moody. Openness to Experience represents the tendency to be creative, imaginative, perceptive, and thoughtful.

Judge and his colleagues are among the researchers who focus on the Big Five personality traits in examining the trait perspective of leadership (Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002). For example, Judge and Bono (2000) examined the Big Five personality traits and transformational leadership behaviors. They found that Extraversion and Agreeableness positively predicted transformational leadership. If contextual leader behavior is somewhat related to transformational leadership, it is also probable that specific personality traits that are related to transformational leadership behaviors are also related to contextual leader behavior.

Consequences of Contextual Leader Behavior

By definition, contextual leader behavior is supposed to create the effective group context such as group norms, which in turn regulates group members' attitudes and behaviors. However, contextual leader behavior does not have to link exclusively to the indirect effects on member behavior through the group context. Rather, it is "oriented" to indirect effects of leadership. Behaviors may not always work as they are intended. For example, when a leader uses punishment in order to correct a group members' behavior, it sometimes has negative impact not only on the targeted person but also on other members (Arvey & Jones, 1984). This can also apply to contextual and other leader behaviors. Some behaviors or tactics are used in order to influence members' attitudes and behaviors directly and immediately, but it can have unintended indirect effects on their attitudes and behaviors. However, I disregard this phenomenon in conceptualizing contextual leader behavior because the original behaviors are not intended to develop the effective group context.

Although a leader has an important role and a strong influence in developing, enforcing, maintaining, and changing group norms, he or she is not an only one who contributes to group norms. Rather, group norms are the product of mutual influence including downward, upward, and lateral influences. Also, the processes of the development and enforcement of group norms are complex and reciprocal. Therefore, group members' reaction to the leader behavior and active influence tactics toward making group norms should also be examined in order to understand the relationship between contextual leader behavior and group norms.

It is also important to understand how different types or sub-dimensions of contextual leader behavior are combined and what are the typical patterns in the sequencing of such behaviors in influencing the group context. This is a similar question raised by Yukl, Falbe and Youn (1993) when they studied influence tactics. For example, it is discussed in the earlier section that charismatic or visionary leader behavior might be the components of contextual leader behavior. However, charismatic or visionary leadership behavior alone might end up with only the short-term effect on group members or such behaviors would turn out to be "time telling". Combination of charismatic and visionary behavior and other dimensions of contextual leader

behavior would be necessary for a long-term influence on group members through the group context or “clock building.”

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to conduct any empirical research on contextual leader behavior that is proposed in this paper, appropriate measures that capture the domain of the construct should be developed. Although the construct of contextual leader behavior is newly proposed, its measures can be developed by combining some items used in other streams of research as well as developing new items. It appears that some behaviors that are included in other leadership theories (e. g., behavioral approach, contingency theories, and transformational leadership) overlap with the domain of contextual leader behavior. For example, Leader Behavior Description Questionnaires (LBDQ) Form XII (Stogdill, 1965) include initiation of structure and production emphasis, part of which can be included into the component of contextual leader behavior. Feldman (1984)'s implications for leaders' role in developing group norms, Spich and Keleman (1985)'s model of explicit norm structuring, items from Leader Behavior Description Questionnaires (LBDQ) Form XII (Stogdill, 1965), Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1990), and items used in socialization tactics research can also be included in developing the measure of contextual leadership behavior.

Contextual leader behavior may not be unidimensional. For example, behaviors for the development, enforcement, maintenance, and changing the group context may be somewhat different from one another. In addition to the items for contextual leader behavior, items that measure non-contextual leader behavior can also be developed based on the similar procedure. These items can be used for assessing discriminant validity.

Finally, attention should be paid in examining the process in which contextual leader behavior influences group effectiveness. Because contextual leader behavior is thought to affect member behavior indirectly and slowly, it is possible that traditional research design cannot capture the effects of this kind of behavior. Longitudinal research design with time series statistical techniques may be one of the alternatives to examine this issue.

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