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Examining the Unique Mediators That Underlie the Effects of Different Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

Although transformational leadership has been found to relate favorably to various work outcomes, past research has predominantly focused on overall transformational leadership rather than its dimensions. We addressed this shortcoming by examining how two dimensions of transformational leadership—providing support and emphasizing group goals—relate to follower organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions via leader–member exchange and employee commitment. Survey data were collected from 107 triads (employees, supervisors, and coworkers) employed in various organizations and industries. We supported our theoretical model in which the relation of providing support with organizational citizenship behavior is mediated by leader–member exchange and supervisor commitment, whereas the relationship of emphasizing group goals with turnover intentions is mediated by organizational commitment. These findings indicate that the dimensions of transformational leadership operate through unique channels. One implication for leadership development is that, depending on what outcome is desired (e.g., strengthening commitment to the leader vs. the organization), training can be tailored to target the most relevant dimension (e.g., providing support is more important for cultivating commitment to the leader vs. the organization). We discuss these and other implications of our findings.

Keywords

transformational leadership, organizational commitment, leader–member exchange, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intentions

Transformational leadership is characterized by behaviors that are aimed at inspiring followers and motivating them to achieve beyond minimum requirements (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Past research has demonstrated that transformational leadership is linked with important follower outcomes, including task performance (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983), commitment (T. A. Jackson, Meyer, & Wang, 2013; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), and turnover intentions (Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003). Transformational leadership is believed to influence followers by communicating inspiring visions to them, directing their attention to important group goals, fulfilling their needs, and stimulating and nurturing their intellect (Bass, 1985). Although transformational leadership is conceptualized as being multidimensional, most existing research has examined transformational leadership as a unidimensional or composite construct rather than individual dimensions that comprise it (e.g., providing support and emphasizing group goals). Part of the reason for this unidimensional operationalization owes to problems with the factor structure of the scales commonly used to measure it (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004; Tejeda, Scandura, & Rajnandini, 2001; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Despite these issues, theoretical and empirical evidence indicate that there may be value in considering specific dimensions of transformational leadership (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990).

In a recent review, van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) criticized transformational leadership research for ignoring the multidimensional nature of the construct and therefore called for more attention to the dimensions. Doing so is important because it enables researchers and practitioners to identify what the active ingredients of transformational leadership are that account for its relations with important

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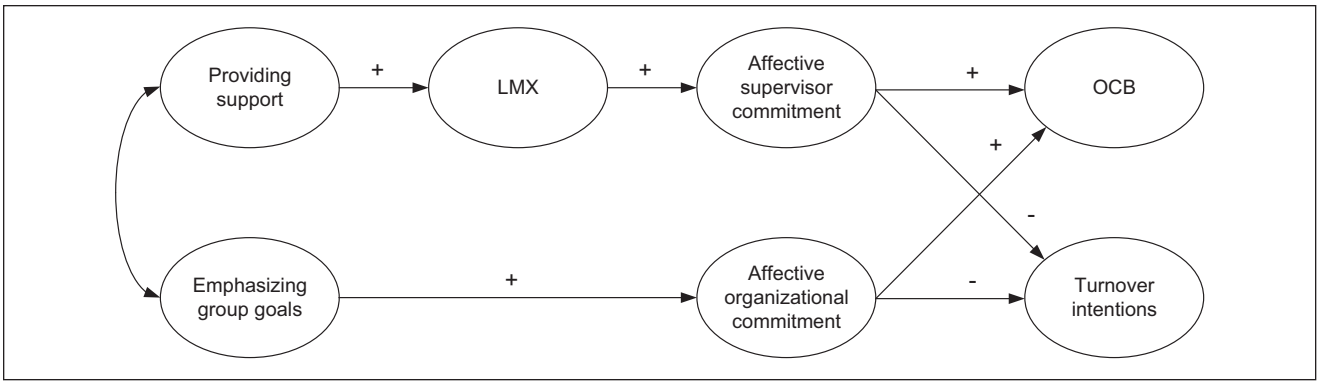

Figure 1. Hypothesized model.
Note. "+" indicates hypothesized positive relationship; "–" indicates hypothesized negative relationship. LMX = leader–member exchange; OCB = organizational citizenship behavior.

workplace outcomes. For example, if it is found that the providing support dimension is critical for cultivating commitment to the leader, then leadership training can explicitly target this dimension when the goal is for leaders to reengage uncommitted followers. In general, there is value in teasing apart effects that owe to higher order composite factors versus lower level dimensions (Johnson, Rosen, & Chang, 2011; Johnson, Rosen, Chang, Djurdjevic, & Taing, 2012).

van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) also noted in their review that there is a lack of understanding of the mediators through which transformational leadership relates to its outcomes, especially mediators of the effects of specific dimensions. Transformational leadership theories have proposed a variety of plausible mediators, such as follower self-efficacy and self-concept (Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), but empirical research that actually tests mediated effects has lagged behind. There are, however, some exceptions. For example, Piccolo and Colquitt (2006) found that transformational leadership is positively related to task performance and OCB via followers' perceived job characteristics. Similarly, Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, and Chen (2005) found that leader–member exchange (LMX; i.e., the quality of the dyadic relationship between a leader and a follower; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) mediated relations of transformational leadership with task performance and OCB, and Pillai, Schriesheim, and Williams (1999) found that transformational leadership had indirect effects on OCB via justice and trust. While there are other examples as well (e.g., Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Göncü, Aycan, & Johnson, 2014; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Tremblay, 2010), in all these studies transformational leadership is operationalized as a unidimensional construct, that is, as an overall composite of its dimensions. Unfortunately, doing so precludes scholars from knowing whether distinct dimensions have distinct mediators (Johnson et al., 2011; Johnson, Rosen, et al., 2012). If it turns out that a single dimensions is the primary driving force behind the effects of transformational leadership, then researchers and practitioners ought to focus on the specific dimension rather than the higher order transformational leadership construct (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). There is no way to make this determination, though, without first examining individual dimensions as opposed to the overall composite.

To this end, in the current study we considered two key dimensions of transformational leadership, namely providing support and emphasizing group goals. We examined these two dimensions because, as discussed in the next section, they encapsulate some of the defining and consistent behaviors across different conceptualizations of transformational leadership. We also examined three potential mediators—LMX, commitment to the supervisor, and commitment to the organization—through which transformational leadership may relate to its outcomes. The outcomes we examined were OCB and turnover intentions. We suspect that providing support and emphasizing group goals have unique mediated effects on these outcomes. We tested our predictions using structural equation modeling with multisource data. Our proposed theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Dimensionality of Transformational Leadership

The dimensionality of transformational leadership has been an issue of debate among scholars. For example, according to Bass and Avolio (1995), transformational leadership is characterized by four dimensions: idealized influence (i.e., charismatic behaviors), inspirational motivation (i.e., articulating a vision), intellectual stimulation (i.e., challenging assumptions), and individualized consideration (i.e., attending to followers' needs). Conger and Kanungo (1994) identify six dimensions that include behaviors associated with articulating a group vision, personal risk, avoiding the

status quo, and sensitivity to follower needs. Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, and Popper (1998) describe four dimensions: ideological emphasis, emphasizing collective identity, exemplary actions, and supportive behaviors. Last, Podsakoff et al. (1990) identify six dimensions of transformational leadership: articulating a vision, role modeling appropriate behavior, fostering acceptance of group goals, setting high-performance expectations, intellectual stimulation, and providing individualized support.

Although these various conceptualizations of transformational leadership vary to some extent, they share a common core. Two important functions of leaders in general, and of transformational leaders in particular, are providing support to followers and aligning followers' goals and values with those of the group (Yukl, 2010). The first dimension (providing support) concerns the dyadic relationship between the leader and follower and involves showing respect and caring for the follower's needs. This dimension parallels Bass and Avolio's (1995) individualized consideration, Conger and Kanungo's (1994) sensitivity to follower needs, Shamir et al.'s (1998) supportive behaviors, and Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) individualized support. Providing support is important because it builds trust with one's followers and helps them cope with task and interpersonal stressors via social support from the leader.

The second dimension (emphasizing group goals) refers to leader actions that make group values and goals salient, promote cooperation within the team, and instill a desire in followers to work toward common goals. This dimension overlaps with Bass and Avolio's (1995) idealized influence, Conger and Kanungo's (1994) articulating a group vision, Shamir et al.'s (1998) emphasizing collective identity, and Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) fostering acceptance of group goals. Emphasizing group goals is important because it elevates followers' values and goals from self-interest to social interest and it cultivates group cohesion. Given the centrality of providing support and emphasizing group goals for leaders (Yukl, 2010) and their overlap with existing conceptualizations of transformational leadership, we selected these two as our focal dimensions in this study.

Differential Effects of Individualized Support and Acceptance of Group Goals

As van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) pointed out, although it has been established that transformational leadership predicts follower outcomes such as performance and turnover, it is unclear what dimensions are responsible for these relations and whether they operate through the same or different mediation channels. According to self-concept–based theories of leadership (Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir et al., 1993), two channels through which transformational leadership affects outcomes are via personal attachment to the leader (whereby followers identify with their leader and strive to act consistent with her or his expectations) and attachment to the organization (whereby followers view themselves as organizational members and strive to act consistent with company norms). In support of this idea, Kark et al. (2003) found that transformational leadership as a whole was positively related to followers' identification with their supervisor and identification with their workgroup. Other empirical studies have similarly found that transformational leader behaviors increase follower attachment to the leader as well as the organization (see van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004, for a review).

All the aforementioned research linking transformational leadership to follower identification and attachment, however, examined unidimensional or overall transformational leadership as opposed to its dimensions. As van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) explained, such an approach is problematic because it obscures the specific leader behaviors that are responsible for the effects. We therefore set out to examine the specific effects of providing support and emphasizing group goals on follower attachment to the leader and organization, as well as their indirect effects on OCB and turnover intentions. In particular, we suspect that providing support is critical for strengthening the dyadic connection between a leader and follower. Examples of providing support include recognizing and acknowledging followers' feelings, acting in ways that satisfy followers' need for relatedness (e.g., expressing appreciation), and giving them voice and autonomy (e.g., seeking their input before making decisions; Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012). All these actions strengthen the relational ties that followers have with their leader, which cultivates high-quality LMX and affective supervisor commitment (e.g., Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000; Chang & Johnson, 2010; E. M. Jackson & Johnson, 2012; Lee, 2005). High-quality LMX is characterized by high levels of trust, respect, liking, and obligation that a follower feels toward her or his leader (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and affective supervisor commitment is a strong emotional attachment to and sense of identification with one's supervisor that develops over time (Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002).

Understanding why providing support relates to higher LMX and levels of affective supervisor commitment can be understood in terms of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). When leaders provide support, followers identify with their leader and thus feel greater affinity for and trust in the leader, as captured by high-quality LMX (E. M. Jackson & Johnson, 2012). In line with the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964), one way that followers pay back this support and high-quality exchange is by showing greater commitment to their leader (Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2010). In other words, individualized support results in perceptions of a high-quality LMX relationship, as characterized by trust, empathy, and respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), which in

turn relates to increased commitment to the supervisor. Indeed, past research suggests that affective supervisor commitment is an outcome of high-quality LMX (Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004) and that LMX mediates relations of transformational leadership with affective commitment (Lee, 2005; Wang et al., 2005). Although past research has examined overall transformational leadership, we predict that providing support is the active ingredient that is responsible for the effects of transformational leadership on LMX and affective supervisor commitment:

Hypothesis 1: Providing support is positively related to LMX.
Hypothesis 2: Providing support has a positive relationship with affective supervisor commitment that is mediated by LMX.

Whereas providing support strengthens followers' attachment to their leader, we expect that emphasizing group goals is a dimension of transformational leadership that strengthens their attachment to the organization. When leaders emphasize company goals and values, it brings followers' group orientation to the forefront (Lord & Brown, 2004). When such an orientation is salient, employees develop a sense of oneness with social groups such as work teams and organizations and they define themselves in terms of their membership in these groups (Johnson & Saboe, 2011). Affective organizational commitment is a manifestation of having a group orientation because this type of commitment reflects attachment that is based on identification with and involvement in one's company (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). This reasoning is consistent with identity-based models of commitment, which propose that employees with group-based orientations tend to have strong affective commitment to their organization (Johnson & Chang, 2006, 2008; Johnson et al., 2010). Empirical research also suggests that leaders who emphasize group goals and values have followers who are more strongly attached to their organization, exhibit greater social cohesion, and report fewer turnover intentions (T. A. Jackson et al., 2013; Kark et al., 2003; Whiteoak, 2007). Thus, emphasizing group goals is expected to increase followers' emotional attachment to and identification with their organization, as captured by their affective organizational commitment:

Hypothesis 3: Emphasizing group goals is positively related to affective organizational commitment.

Two established outcomes of transformational leadership are performing above and beyond the formal requirements of one's job and remaining with the organization (Bass, 1985; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Podsakoff et al., 1990). As shown in Figure 1, we propose that the relations of transformational leadership behaviors with these outcomes are mediated by followers' affective commitment to their supervisor and organization. OCB refers to extrarole behaviors that improve organizational functioning owing to their favorable contributions to the social and psychological contexts in which formal work tasks are performed (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Organ, 1997). Both affective commitment to the supervisor and to the organization are expected to have positive relations with OCB because of the motivational mind-sets that underlie each commitment. According to Meyer et al. (2004) those with high levels of affective commitment to a target (e.g., a supervisor) view the goals of the target as their own. As such, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the targets to which they are affectively committed. Also, being affectively committed to a target is associated with the desire to reciprocate the target's initial support by subsequently acting in ways that benefit the target. Thus, through a social exchange process, the support from supervisors that lend to high levels of commitment is paid back by followers via OCB (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, and Taylor, 2000).

Turnover intentions refer to employees' desires to exit a specific organization or work-group. Lower turnover and turnover intentions are focal outcomes that are, by definition, behavioral and cognitive manifestations of high-commitment levels (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that affective organizational commitment is negatively related to turnover and intentions to turnover (Meyer et al., 2002). We also expect that turnover intentions are negatively related to affective supervisor commitment because, for many employees, their supervisor is the face of the organization, and followers' thoughts and feelings regarding their supervisor often spill over to those of the company (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Indeed, it has been found that affective supervisor commitment is negatively related to employees' intention to leave their company (Bentein, Stinglhamber, & Vandenberghe, 2002; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009). Based on the discussion above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: Affective supervisor commitment is (a) positively related to OCB and (b) negatively related to turnover intentions.
Hypothesis 5: Affective organizational commitment is (a) positively related to OCB and (b) negatively related to turnover intentions.
Hypothesis 6: Providing support has (a) a positive relationship with OCB and (b) a negative relationship with turnover intentions that are mediated by LMX and affective supervisor support.
Hypothesis 7: Emphasizing group goals has (a) a positive relationship with OCB and (b) a negative relationship with turnover intentions that are mediated by affective organizational commitment.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from three separate sources. Subordinate employees who were enrolled in psychology and management courses at a large commuter university in the Southeast United States were recruited to participate in the current study. These target participants reported their levels of LMX, affective supervisor commitment, affective organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Participants received extra credit in exchange for completing the survey. These participants also distributed surveys to their work supervisor and a coworker to complete. Supervisors reported on the levels of the target participants' OCB. Coworkers were asked whether they shared the same supervisor as the target participant. If so, the coworker was asked to report on the extent to which the supervisor provided individualized support and fostered acceptance of group goals.

Of the 269 subordinate participants who were initially recruited for this study, we received 138 coworker surveys and 135 supervisor surveys. Of the 138 coworkers, 122 indicated that they shared the same supervisor as the original participant. Of these 122 cases, supervisor-reported data were available for 107. Thus, our final sample was composed of data collected from 107 matched employees, supervisors, and coworkers.

The average age of focal employees was 22.98 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 4.87) and 81.2% were female. They had been employed at their current position for an average of 26.41 months (*SD* = 25.46) and worked an average of 30.03 hours per week (*SD* = 9.15). Supervisors' average age was 38.23 years (*SD* = 11.62), 56.6% were female and they worked an average of 42.31 hours per week (*SD* = 8.06). Supervisors reported knowing the target employee for which they rated OCB an average of 29.07 months (*SD* = 45.41). The majority of supervisors were Caucasian (59.8%), African American (17.1%), or Hispanic (12.2%) and were employed predominantly in retail/service (40.8%) and professional industries (e.g., accounting; 22.3%). The average age of coworkers was 28.33 years (*SD* = 10.70). They worked an average of 33.02 hours per week (*SD* = 10.87) and 71.2% were female.

Measures

All survey items were measured via a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Employees provided data on commitment, LMX, and turnover intentions, whereas coworkers and supervisors provided data on transformational leadership and OCB, respectively.

Transformational Leadership. Coworkers rated the extent to which supervisors provided support using Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) four-item scale of individualized support (α = .88). An example item is "Behaves in a manner that is thoughtful of individuals' personal needs." Coworkers also rated the extent to which supervisors emphasized group goals using Podsakoff et al.'s (1990) four-item scale of fostering group goal acceptance (α = .86). An example item is "Gets the group to work to work together toward the same goal."

Commitment. Employees rated their affective organizational commitment using Meyer and Allen's (1997) six-item scale (α = .83). An example item is "My organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." Employees rated their affective supervisor commitment using Stinglhamber et al.'s (2002) six-item scale (α = .87). A sample item is "I feel proud to work with my supervisor."

Leader–Member Exchange. Employees rated the quality of their LMX using Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, and Walker's (2007) eight-item Leader–Member Social Exchange Scale (α = .93). An example item is "When I give effort at work, my manager will return it."

Turnover Intentions. Employees reported their intentions to leave the organization using a hybrid scale (α = .84) consisting of three items developed by Mowday, Koberg, and McArthur (1984) and three items developed by Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978). A sample item is "I will probably look for a job in the near future."

Organizational Citizenship Behavior. The extent to which employees engaged in OCB was reported by supervisors using Williams and Anderson's (1991) 14-item OCB scale (α = .82). The scale measures OCB directed toward both the organization and individuals. An example item is "Helps others who have been absent."

Results

Means, SDs, and correlations among study variables are reported in Table 1. Prior to testing hypotheses, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) with Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2002) using maximum likelihood estimation. First we ran a CFA that included the item-level indicators for the three leadership variables (providing support, emphasizing group goals, and LMX) to verify that they represent separate factors. The fit of the three-factor model was acceptable based on commonly used fit indices (see, Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2004): $\chi^2(df = 101) = 133.33$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .05. We compared the fit of this three-factor model with that of a one-factor model (all items loading on a single leadership factor) and a two-factor model (the providing support and emphasizing group goals items load on one factor and the

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among the Focal Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Providing support	(.88)						
2. Emphasizing group goals	.72*	(.86)					
3. Leader–member exchange	.25*	.30*	(.93)				
4. Supervisor commitment	.14	.18	.58*	(.87)			
5. Organizational commitment	.21	.22	.36*	.39*	(.83)		
6. OCB	.18	.21	.29*	.28*	.33*	(.82)	
7. Turnover intention	–.14	–.14	–.34*	–.41*	–.57*	–.24*	(.84)
Mean	3.82	3.96	3.74	4.09	3.06	4.27	2.75
SD	1.10	.93	.90	.77	.91	.54	.98

Note. N = 107 matched triads. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior. Coworkers rated providing support and emphasizing group goals; employees rated leader–member exchange, supervisor commitment, organizational commitment, and turnover intention; and supervisors rated OCB.
*$p < .05$.

LMX items on a separate factor). Results revealed that both the one-factor model—$\chi^2(df = 104) = 658.70$, CFI = .56, RMSEA = .21, and SRMR = .22—and the two-factor model—$\chi^2(df = 103) = 269.46$, CFI = .78, RMSEA = .09, and SRMR = .10—had poor fit. These results suggest that the three leadership variables are distinct from one another.

Next, we assessed a measurement model that included all seven variables. Because of our relatively small sample, which creates an unfavorable parameter-to-participant ratio, we aggregated our item-level indicators into parcels (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Variables were modeled as latent factors using three item parcels as indicators (parcels were created using the isolated uniqueness strategy; Hall, Snell, & Foust, 1999). In the case of providing support and emphasizing group goals, which were measured with four items each, we created two parcels for these factors. All model tests reported below were run using the parceled data. We specified a seven-factor model (composed of factors for providing support, emphasizing group goals, LMX, affective supervisor commitment, affective organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and OCB) where each factor loaded on its respective indicators. The fit of the measurement model was good: $\chi^2(df = 131) = 180.49$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .03; and SRMR = .03, and every factor loading was significant.

One potential cause for concern with our data is common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Although we collected data from three different sources (employees, supervisors, and coworkers), two of these sources provided data for multiple variables (affective supervisor and organizational commitment, LMX, and turnover intentions were provided by employees, and providing support and emphasizing group goals were provided by coworkers). We therefore assessed the fit of a three-factor model in which all data provided by each source loaded on a separate factor. If this model has good fit, then it suggests that the data primarily reflect different sources rather than different constructs. This test is equivalent to running a Harman's single-factor test for each source, which is "a diagnostic technique for assessing the extent to which common method variance may be a problem" (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p. 889). Results revealed, however, that the three-factor common source model had poor fit: $\chi^2(df = 149) = 1214.57$; CFI = .82; RMSEA = .17; and SRMR = .14. This finding suggests that method variance is not responsible for the observed relations in our multisource data set.

Having determined that our seven-factor measurement model is acceptable, we proceeded to test our hypothesized structural model. As shown in Figure 1, we specified paths from providing support to LMX and from LMX to supervisor commitment, and a path from emphasizing group goals to organizational commitment. Supervisor commitment and organizational commitment each had paths to OCB and turnover intentions. The hypothesized structural model showed good fit: $\chi^2(df = 141) = 215.01$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05; and SRMR = .04, and all loadings and paths were significant and in the expected direction. As a set, the leadership and commitment variables explained a total of 16% of the variance in supervisor-rated OCB and 44% of the variance in turnover intentions. The model is illustrated in Figure 2.[1]

In support of Hypothesis 1, providing support shared a positive relationship with LMX ($\lambda = .35$, $p < .01$). The data are also consistent with Hypothesis 2 because LMX was, in turn, positively related to affective supervisor commitment ($\lambda = .58$, $p < .01$). To determine whether the relationship of individualized support with affective supervisor commitment is fully mediated or partially mediated, we ran another structural model, with a direct path specified from individualized support to affective supervisor commitment. However, this direct path was not significant ($\lambda = .09$, $p = .18$), which indicates that LMX fully mediated the relationship between individualized support and affective supervisor commitment. Hypothesis 3 was also supported because emphasizing group goals was positively related to affective organizational commitment ($\lambda = .39$, $p < .01$).

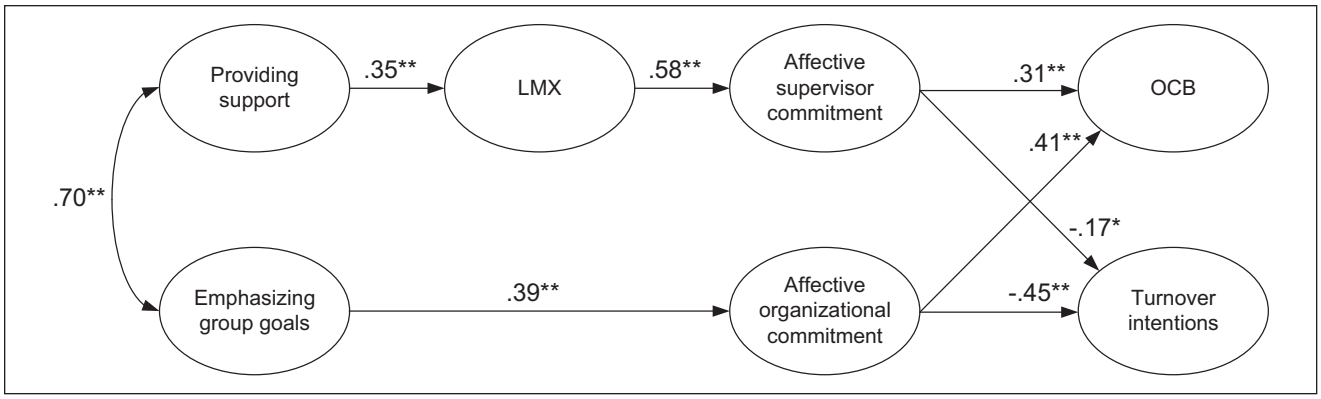

Figure 2. Structural model with standardized path coefficients.
Note. $N = 107$. $\chi^2(df = 141) = 215.01$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05; and SRMR = .04. Standardized path estimates are reported in the figure. LMX = leader–member exchange; OCB = organizational citizenship behavior.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Turning our attention to the outcomes, both Hypotheses 4 and 5 received support. Affective supervisor commitment was positively related to OCB ($\lambda = .31$, $p < .01$) and negatively related to turnover intentions ($\lambda = –.17$, $p < .05$). Likewise, affective organizational commitment was positively related to OCB ($\lambda = .41$, $p < .01$) and negatively related to turnover intentions ($\lambda = –.45$, $p < .01$). To verify whether the relations of transformational leader behaviors with the outcomes are fully or partially mediated by commitment (and LMX in the case of individualized support), we ran an alternative structural model in which we specified direct paths from providing support and emphasizing group goals to both OCB and turnover intentions. However, none of the additional direct paths were significant: providing support to OCB ($\lambda = .12$, $p = .54$), providing support to turnover intentions ($\lambda = –.31$, $p = .32$), emphasizing group goals to OCB ($\lambda = .17$, $p = .37$), and emphasizing group goals to turnover intentions ($\lambda = –.36$, $p = .25$). Taken together, and in line with Hypotheses 6 and 7, these results indicate that commitment (and LMX in the case of providing support) fully mediate the relationships of transformational leader behaviors with OCB and turnover intentions.

In addition to the aforementioned models, we tested four alternative models that included nonhypothesized paths between the leadership and commitment variables to see whether they demonstrated better fit than the hypothesized model. The first model we tested included a path from providing support to affective organizational commitment. This path was not significant ($\lambda = .04$, $p = .66$) nor was the change in model fit ($\Delta\chi = 0.39$, *ns*). The second model included a path from emphasizing group goals to affective supervisor commitment. Again, both the path ($\lambda = .13$, $p = .49$) and change in model fit ($\Delta\chi = 0.08$, *ns*) were not significant. The third model included a path from emphasizing group goals to LMX, but this path was not significant ($\lambda = .14$, $p = .33$) nor was the change in model fit ($\Delta\chi = 0.06$, *ns*). The final model we tested included a path from LMX to affective organizational commitment, which was also not significant ($\lambda = .22$, $p = .51$) nor did it improve overall model fit ($\Delta\chi = 0.39$, *ns*). The results of these additional tests provide further support for our hypothesized model by ruling out plausible alternative models.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine two specific behavioral dimensions of transformational leadership—namely providing support and emphasizing group goals—and the relations they have with OCB and turnover intentions. As predicted, the relationships of transformational leader behaviors with these outcomes were not direct, but rather they were mediated by affective supervisor and organizational commitment. Specifically, we found that providing support was positively related to affective supervisor commitment via LMX. In turn, affective supervisor commitment was associated with higher OCB and lower turnover intentions. Emphasizing group goals, in contrast, was positively related to affective organizational commitment, which in turn was associated with higher OCB and lower turnover intentions. In support of van Knippenberg and Sitkin's (2013) recommendation to examine behavioral dimensions of transformational leadership, we found that providing support and emphasizing group goals operated through unique mediating mechanisms. Knowing this is important because it enables leaders to tailor their behaviors to achieve specific outcomes. For example, if their goal is to increase follower commitment to the organization, then leaders ought to emphasize group goals instead of providing support. In fact, our supplementary analyses indicated that providing support is not associated with organizational commitment, thus focusing on this dimension would not bring about the desired effect.

Implications for Theory and Research

The results of this study not only highlight that specific transformational leadership behaviors have favorable relationships with work outcomes, but they also indicate that these relations are perhaps more complex than previously thought. As discussed earlier, previous research has tended to operationalize transformational leadership as a unidimensional construct, despite the fact that it is frequently conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Our study demonstrates that there may be value in considering the specific dimensions of transformational leadership because, at least with respect to our findings, they had unique relations with follower variables. Providing support is primarily a dyadic phenomenon that involves strengthening the ties between a leader and his or her individual followers. As such, we observed that providing support had unique relations with dyadic outcomes such as LMX and affective commitment to the supervisor. Thus, providing support may help explain why certain outcomes of transformational leadership are relational in nature, such that followers identify with and show greater commitment toward their leader (Kark et al., 2003; Lord & Brown, 2004). The mediating relations of LMX and supervisor affective commitment reflect this relational path.

Emphasizing group goals, on the other hand, had a unique association with affective organizational commitment but not supervisor commitment. An important outcome of transformational leadership is that it activates a collective mindset in followers that aligns their motivations with the values and goals of work teams and organizations rather than personal interests and welfare (Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir et al., 1993). When followers are focused on their membership in larger social groups, they show more commitment to those groups (e.g., affective organizational commitment) and engage in behaviors that promote the group's welfare (e.g., OCB). Our results suggest that emphasizing group goals is one way that leaders strengthen the ties between followers and their organization.

Implications for Practice

In addition to theoretical implications, our findings also have practical implications because they identify two active ingredients of transformational leadership that are associated with followers' attachment to their supervisor and organization. There may be times when followers' commitment to their organization is waning and leaders must therefore take steps to address this problem. Based on our findings, leaders who emphasize group goals would likely be more successful in increasing organizational commitment than leaders who provide more support, which is more relevant for supervisor commitment than organizational commitment. Likewise, individualized support behaviors offer a more direct channel for influencing followers' attachment to their leader than to their company. Thus, a practical implication to keep in mind is that not all transformational leader behaviors share uniform relationships with follower commitment and other outcomes. Leaders have finite time and energy to devote to each follower, so they must therefore pick and choose the most appropriate transformational behaviors to perform. Unfortunately, the research on transformational leadership to date makes choosing the appropriate behavior a difficult task because although numerous dimensions have been identified (e.g., intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, articulating a group vision, ideological emphasis, and setting high performance expectations), empirical research has tended to examine transformational leadership broadly defined rather than its specific dimensions. Thus, it is unclear what effects each dimension has. Our study is a first step in resolving this problem.

When training transformational leadership (see Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002), participants must not only be trained on what transformational behaviors are and how to exhibit them but also why and when those behaviors are effective. Transformational leadership training must therefore link specific behaviors to desired personal, relational, and group-based outcomes. For example, fostering group goal acceptance is most relevant when desired outcomes involve group functioning, such as team coordination and cooperation. To be effective, we would argue that transformational leadership training ought to include individualized support and emphasizing group goals. Training these behaviors would involve helping supervisors recognize that each follower has a unique set of needs and concerns and must be made to think that their personal strengths are valued, in the case of individualized support. As for emphasizing group goals, leaders could be trained to explain how followers' current tasks tie into the higher order goals and value of the company and to use inclusive, group-oriented language (e.g., "we" and "us").

Another practical implication of our findings is that we identified specific transformational leader behaviors that are associated with followers' commitment to their supervisor and organization, and are therefore associated with lower turnover intentions. This is important because organizations spend a tremendous amount of money to recruit, hire, and train job applicants when incumbent employees voluntarily quit (Cascio & Boudreau, 2008). The financial and personnel resources that are spent on these avoidable staffing functions could instead be invested in training and development opportunities that benefit employees or corporate social responsibility plans that benefit the community if voluntary turnover is lessened. Transformational leadership training may therefore help save organizations money that could be invested in more worthwhile causes.

Effective leadership within organizations not only benefits companies but its positive effects can also extend to constituents outside company boundaries. For example, showing individualized consideration to followers is one way to satisfy their basic human need for belonging. When basic needs are satisfied, people report greater well-being and are more engaged with others (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These effects can spill over and promote well-being and positive interactions in social and familial domains outside work as well. Although our findings were limited to citizenship behaviors performed at work, exposure to transformational leadership may encourage citizenship behaviors directed at, for example, customers and family members. These implications are of course speculative, given that we did not examine nonwork outcomes, but work events do spill over and affect nonwork domains (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Effective leadership also contributes to a stable workforce (Yukl, 2010), as suggested by its negative relationship with turnover intentions in the current study, which helps strengthen the economy. Having a stable workforce builds enthusiasm for investment and helps spur progress. This ensures that corporate resources are directed toward research, technology development, and global positioning, rather than stabilizing, backfilling, and maintaining functions. For example, lower turnover reduces companies' staffing costs, allowing them to invest resources in activities that have broader ramifications (e.g., offering community grants and sponsorships, funding corporate social responsibility initiatives). Outcomes like these, which have societal benefits, are more likely when effective leadership is exhibited in organizations.

Directions for Future Research

We now highlight some possible directions for future research. First, while we found that different transformational leader behaviors have unique relations with follower commitment, the set of leader behaviors we examined was not exhaustive. In addition to providing support and emphasizing group goals, there are several other critical behaviors such as communicating a vision, role modeling appropriate behaviors, and challenging followers' current ways of thinking (e.g., Venus, Stam, & van Knippenberg, 2013). These other dimensions may also have unique relations with various follower attitudes and behaviors, and therefore merit attention as well.

Second, although the leadership behaviors we examined had unique relations with different mediator variables (commitment to one's supervisor vs. organization), they had comparable relationships with the two outcome variables (OCB and turnover intentions). The fact that providing support and emphasizing group goals have differential relations with supervisor commitment and organizational commitment is useful to know because these commitment variables themselves relate to outcomes in unique ways (e.g., Askew, Taing, & Johnson, 2013; Vandenberghe et al., 2004), yet it would be interesting if future research identified other unique outcomes of transformational leader behaviors. Doing so would further highlight the importance of distinguishing between specific transformational behaviors. For example, perhaps a unique outcome of individualized support is intrinsic motivation because such support recognizes and nourishes followers' autonomy and relatedness needs, which is not necessarily true of emphasizing group goals. In contrast, a unique outcome of emphasizing group goals may be whistle-blowing in response to violations of organizational norms and policies. Employees who care deeply about their organization and feel attached to it will be more likely to act in ways that benefit the company, even if it comes at some risk to themselves (e.g., reporting unethical acts committed by a supervisor). The target of follower behavior may also vary across the different transformational leadership dimensions. For example, providing individualized support, which strengthens leader–follower relations, may trigger prosocial behavior that benefits the leader. Emphasizing group goals, on the other hand, may instead prompt prosocial behavior that aids the organization.

A final direction for future research is to identify the types of employees who are especially responsive to particular leadership behaviors. As we argued in this article, some leader behaviors operate through a relational channel that strengthens dyadic ties (e.g., providing support) whereas other behaviors operate through a collective channel that strengthens intragroup relations (e.g., emphasizing group goals). If so, then certain employees who are especially attuned to relational or collective information, whether it is because of the strength of their self-identity levels or needs (e.g., Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006), may respond more favorably to relational or collective behaviors, respectively. It might be found, for example, that employees with a strong relational identity or a strong need for belonging will show greater supervisor commitment in response to individualized support compared with employees with a weak relational identity or need for belonging. These are but a few directions for research that are possible when researchers distinguish between different dimensions of transformational leader behaviors.

Limitations and Conclusion

Although we believe the findings of this research are noteworthy, two limitations deserve mentioning. Structural equation modeling generally requires relatively large sample sizes (e.g., N of 200+; see, Kline, 2004), which is double our sample size in this study ($N = 107$). Although a strength of our sample was that we collected data from three different sources (employees, supervisors, and coworkers), an unfortunate by-product was the large amount of unusable data from incomplete triads (e.g. obtaining responses from

only one or two of the three sources). A small *N* also limits the generalizability of the findings based on our sample.[2] Despite this limitation, there was sufficient power to detect significant relations among variables, the pattern of which corresponded to the hypothesized model.

A second limitation is the cross-sectional nature of this study. Although our hypothesized model implies a particular pattern of causal relationships among the leadership, commitment, and outcome variables, we cannot infer causality based on this study's design. Causality could be inferred if future research used experimental methodology to test the links in our model. For example, participants could be randomly assigned to leadership training designed to bolster individualized support or fostering acceptance of group goals. Differences in followers' LMX, affective commitment, and OCB could then be compared across groups whose leaders were assigned to different training and control condition.

In conclusion, although much research has established the favorable relations that transformational leadership has with follower attitudes and performance (e.g., T. A. Jackson et al., 2013; Judge & Piccolo, 2004), less is known about the specific behaviors that are responsible for these and the mediators through which specific transformational leadership behaviors relate to specific outcomes. In this study we found that two dimensions of transformational leadership—providing support and emphasizing group goals—relate to follower OCB and turnover intentions via different mediators. Providing support had indirect relations with outcomes via the relational variables of LMX and affective supervisor commitment, whereas emphasizing group goals had indirect relations via the collective variable of affective organizational commitment. These unique mediators suggest that important insights may be uncovered if leadership researchers tease apart the different behaviors that comprise transformational leadership (cf. van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). We therefore encourage future research that further examines providing support, emphasizing group goals, and other behavioral dimensions of transformational leadership.

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Notes

1. The gender of employees, supervisors, and coworkers were weakly related to the predictor, mediator, and outcome variables. Controlling for gender does not alter the pattern of observed results.
2. As a way of increasing the *N* size and examining the generalizability of the findings, we replaced coworker reports of individualized support and fostering group goal acceptance with employee reports of the same variables. By limiting our sample to data from only employees and supervisors, the *N* increased from 107 to 133. The same pattern of results emerged and the fit of the hypothesized model was acceptable in the larger sample.

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