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Michael K. Muchiri, Adela J. McMurray, Mathews Nkhoma, Hiep C. Pham

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NOTE

HOW TRANSFORMATIONAL AND EMPOWERING LEADER BEHAVIORS ENHANCE WORKPLACE SAFETY: A REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

Michael K. Muchiri

Adela J. McMurray

RMIT University - Melbourne, Australia

Mathews Nkhoma

Hiep C. Pham

RMIT Vietnam University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Background and statement of the problem: Recognizing that organizations are under pressure to increase workplace safety, this paper develops an integrative leadership model that informs new theory identifying how leader behaviours enhance workplace safety behaviour. The paper highlights direct and indirect relationships among transformational leadership, employees' trust in leaders, empowering leadership and employees' safety behaviours. Research methodology and data: The paper follows a rigorous, systematic review of published studies (1985-2017) representing the literature addressing transformational leadership and safety behaviours, and the moderation roles of empowering leadership and trust in leaders in the transformational leadership and safety behaviours relationship. The paper relied extensively on computerized keyword searches in the main business source databases of EBSCOhost, Emerald, ProQuest, ScienceDirect and SpringerLink. Research findings: The systematic review leads to a credible conceptual framework that elucidates the relationship between transformational leadership, empowering leadership, employees' trust in leadership and workplace safety behaviours. Consequently, the framework advances theories on effective leader behaviour, employees' trust in leaders and safety behaviours. Further, the framework assists with unpacking various underlying mechanisms through which leadership directly and indirectly influences employee safety behaviours within the manufacturing sector. In that regard, the paper argues that trust in leaders, and empowering leader behaviours, both moderate the relationship between leadership and employees' safety behaviours. Policy implications: The conceptual framework provides the impetus for a behaviour-oriented approach to workplace safety research, with the potential to generate actionable knowledge to manage accidents and injuries in the workplace. The framework can be utilized by organizations when executing organizational design interventions so as to engender and shape organizational climate and culture of trust. The framework advocates empowering leadership behaviours which could support employees to raise organization-related safety issues.

JEL Classifications: M10, M19

Keywords: Transformational leadership, empowering leadership, trust in leaders, workplace safety behaviour, safety compliance behaviour, safety participation behaviour.

Corresponding Author's Email Address: michael.muchiri@rmit.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

The global concern for workplace safety, particularly in the manufacturing sector of most countries, emanates from a real concern relating to the ergonomic and psychosocial risks confronting employees in their daily job activities (Aryee & Hsiung, 2016; Jiang & Probst, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2017; Pilbeam et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2017). Globally, workers have lost their lives in work-related accidents, with the manufacturing sector being amongst the top four sectors reporting high numbers of worker fatalities and being consistently among the top few industries with the highest number of serious claims (Safe Work Australia, 2015). As such, organizations are now focusing on the relevant human factors which contribute to workplace safety (Clarke, 2013; Jiang & Probst, 2016; Mullen et al., 2017; Nahrgang et al., 2011). So important is the issue of safety-related outcomes and safety behaviours that businesses and researchers seek to understand the role played by frontline employees in enhancing workplace safety (Mullen et al., 2017; Sheehan et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Given their status within teams and organizations, it is plausible that supervisors could promote and boost the uptake of safety related policies and programs within their workplaces. This is vital given that their message of safety is likely to enhance their followers' perception of more support available from organizational leadership. Notably, the relationship between effective forms of leadership and productive employee behaviour can be characterized as complex and requiring further clarification. For example, some studies have associated transformational leadership with employee trust (Burke et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). Other studies have associated empowering leadership (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014, 2015) with employee self-efficacy, job satisfaction, work effort, and creativity. Surprisingly, there is a lack of understanding of the combined effects of transformational and empowering leadership on safety behaviour, and it is vital that a thorough literature review is undertaken to reconcile and collate all findings from these disparate studies in a literature review which provides a clearer picture of how effective forms of leadership directly and indirectly influence safety behaviour at the workplace. Therefore, the overarching goal of this review is to develop a conceptual framework generated from a systematic analysis of the literature addressing transformational leadership, safety behaviours, and the moderating roles of trust in management and empowering leadership. Specifically, this review has three main objectives. First, it analyses previous studies to provide greater clarity in the potential link between leadership and safety behaviours within the manufacturing sector. This culminates in a new conceptual model (framework) utilizing the transformational leadership lens to assess how leadership is associated with safety behaviours. Second, the review examines the moderating roles of trust in leadership and empowering leadership in the transformational leadership – safety behaviours relationship. Lastly, the review puts forward feasible research propositions based on the conceptual model to help clarify leadership – safety behaviours relationship. In the next section, the review describes the research methodology, followed by a discussion of workplace safety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The systematic literature review followed a rigorous, in-depth analysis of the extant literature, focusing on published studies representing the literature on transformational leadership, trust in leaders, empowering leadership and safety behaviours. The literature reviewed comprised of publications published between 1985 and 2017. Further, the review relied on computerized keyword searches in the main business source databases of EBSCOhost, Emerald, ProQuest, ScienceDirect and SpringerLink.

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE SAFETY

Organizations take great precautions to eradicate workplace accidents and injuries as they undermine workplace safety, and could lead to individual, team, and organizational consequences impacting on work performance outcomes (Battaglia et al., 2015; Sheehan et al., 2016). This is necessitated by the need for organizations to proactively detect unsafe behaviours and then initiate processes that prevent workplace accidents, while engendering safety behaviours. Griffin and Neal (2000) describe employee safety behaviour in terms of safety compliance and safety participation. Safety compliance behaviour is demonstrated by the act of adhering to the established safety procedures and policies, while safety participation behaviour contains those behaviours related to the contribution to a safer and better work environment (Griffin & Neal, 2000). Other research on safety issues within organizations has employed two approaches (DeJoy, 2005). The first approach, the behaviour-based safety approach, focuses on the identification and modification of critical safety behaviors that relate to workplace injuries and losses. Thus, tracking safety behaviour leads to appropriate interventions and consequently influencing job performance. The second approach, safety culture approach, focuses on molding a safety culture within organizations, and how that impacts safety behaviours and safety program effectiveness (DeJoy, 2005). Recently, the two approaches have been merged, as it they both denote a strategic role of organizational leaders as they promote an ongoing, systematic approach to managing safety (DeJoy, 2005). Consequently, transformational leadership has been related to safety behaviour, safety culture and safety climate (Mullen et al., 2017; Sheehan et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Zohar, 2010).

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AS AN EFFECTIVE FORM OF LEADERSHIP

Bass (1985) describes transformational leaders as those motivating their followers to move beyond their individual self-interests for the good of the group, organization, and society. They do this by exhibiting the following characteristics: *idealized influence*; *inspirational motivation*; *intellectual stimulation*; and, *individualized consideration*. Through *idealized influence leadership*, leaders behave in ways that make them role models for their followers, putting the followers' needs above their own personal needs and sharing risks with followers. Through *inspirational motivation*, leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire their followers by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Through *intellectual stimulation*, leaders encourage their followers

to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways. Finally, *individually considerate* leaders pay special attention to each individual's need for achievement and growth by acting as coach or mentor. Previously, transformational leadership has been related to outcomes such as profitability, business unit performance, employee satisfaction with leadership, employee performance, and organizational commitment (Afsar et al., 2014). Due to its ability to empower employees, transformational leadership has also been likened to another form of effective leadership, that of empowering leadership (Spreitzer, 1995, 2008).

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES THROUGH LEADERSHIP

Spreitzer (1995, p. 1443) describes empowerment in terms of 'increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence...self-determination, and impact'. Further, empowerment relates to management practices geared towards the delegation of power from supervisors to highly skilled and knowledgeable subordinates (Spreitzer, 1995, 2008). Thus, empowering leadership underscores the development of follower self-management or self-leadership skills (Manz & Sims, 1987), and influences employees' job satisfaction, work effort, and creativity (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014, 2015). In a workplace safety situation, leaders encourage employee empowerment and employee involvement in decision making about occupational health and safety, while also emboldening employees to be responsible for their own safety (Nahrgang et al., 2011; Zohar, 2010).

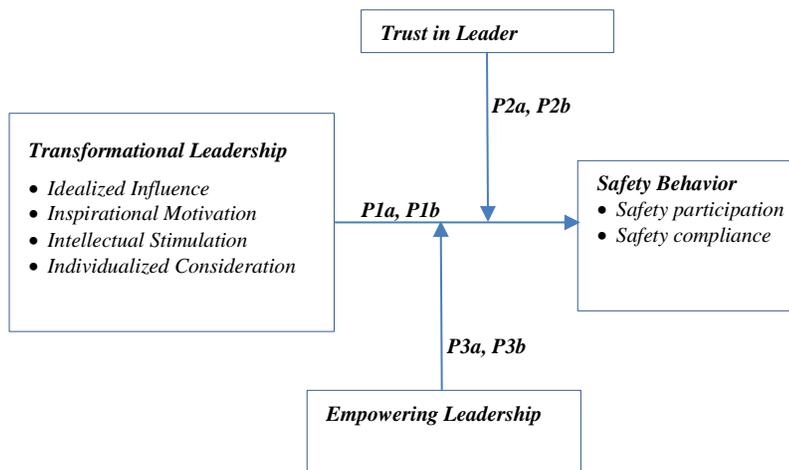
RELATING LEADERSHIP TO EMPLOYEES' SAFETY BEHAVIOR

Leader behavior that is characterized by trust, confidence, recognition, and feedback could enhance workplace safety, and the well-being of employees (Clarke, 2013; Mullen et al., 2017; Sheehan et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Indeed, leaders with a commitment to safety and those that encourage the involvement of their subordinate on safety related issues are likely to achieve more open communication and engagement from their subordinates regarding safety behaviors (Nahrgang et al., 2011). Further, transformational leadership put in place necessary standards that amplify the importance of safety to their employees' jobs (Christian et al., 2009). Within the manufacturing sector, transformational leaders utilize manufacturing strategy as a tool to enhance operational performance (Birasnav, 2014). They also focus on employees' future growth and development, through inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence. Transformational leaders effectively communicate their safety priorities, which in turn positively influence employee perception of priority of safety, and employee perceptions of safety climate and employee safety behavior (Clarke, 2013; Mullen et al., 2017). Therefore, in our proposed model shown on Figure 1 below, we envisage a direct relationship between transformational leadership and safety behaviors (both safety compliance behavior and safety participation behavior). Thus,

Proposition 1a: Transformational leadership is positively associated with safety compliance behavior.

Proposition 1b: Transformational leadership is positively associated with safety participation behavior.

FIGURE 1: PROPOSED MODEL LINKING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP, TRUST IN LEADER AND WORKPLACE SAFETY



TRUST AND ITS IMPACT ON LEADER EFFECTIVENESS AND SAFETY BEHAVIOR

Trust has been conceptualized as ‘a psychological state comprising of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another’ (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). Research findings link trust to leader effectiveness and indicate that trust impacts organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to quit, organizational justice, psychological contracts, effective communication, conflict management, and goal commitment (Burke et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004). Burke et al., (2007, p.610) propose that organizational, relational, and individual characteristics are the main antecedents for trust in leader, and that the relational aspect encompasses ‘behavioral consistency, behavioral integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication, and demonstration of concern’.

Studies on trust in leaders indicate that employees choose to trust their leader if they have positive expectations of the leaders’ safety intentions and behaviour (Conchie & Donald, 2009). Consequently, trust in leadership could strengthen the followers’ willingness to follow their leader’s guidance on safety issues and programs within the organization, and the followers’ perceptions of the leader behaviour towards safety

(Conchie & Donald, 2009). Further, the leaders' commitment to safety influences safety-specific trust, which in turn moderates the leader-member exchange and subordinate's safety behaviour (Conchie & Donald, 2009; Hofmann et al., 2003). Thus, trust in leadership plays an indirect role in the leadership-safety behaviour relationship. It is expected that high trust environments will increase the employee's cooperation and commitment to the organization, and that employees who operate in high trust conditions will more likely engage in safety behaviour. As shown in Figure 1, we envisage a situation where the more the followers trust their leaders, the more likely they will engage in safety behaviours. Hence,

Proposition 2a: Trust in leaders moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and safety compliance behavior.

Proposition 2b: Trust in leaders moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and safety participation behavior.

THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

According to Amundsen and Martinsen (2014, 2015), empowering leadership encompasses five different empowering leader behaviors: leading by example, participative decision making, informing, coaching and showing concern. Leading by example encompasses leader commitment to his / her own work as well as to the work of their followers. Additionally, participative decision-making manifests in leaders who genuinely explore and recognize vital input and suggestions arising from their followers. Leader informing behaviors enables followers to be fully aware of the state of affairs at the workplace and organizational working environment. This is critical since leaders who consistently inform their followers about safety initiatives and programs lead to superior safety records (Cohen, 1977). Leaders who coach their subordinates enhance the physical communication and the dyadic interactions between leader and followers, whereas showing concern for followers relates to the time spent by leaders deliberating on followers' problems. Empowering leadership positively affects employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014, 2015).

While transformational leaders encourage their followers to engage in safety behavior, it is plausible that on its own, transformational leadership may not be adequate to enhance employees' safety behaviour. Therefore, it is plausible that empowering their subordinates on matters relating to safety would augment the positive role played by transformational leaders, consequently influencing their followers to achieve high performance expectations. As such, empowering leadership acts as an enhancer of the positive relationship between transformational leadership and employees' safety behaviour. We envisage a situation where followers who feel empowered in relation to safety initiatives and programs at the workplace will be more likely to perceive effective leadership as having more influence on safety behaviours. Specifically, we propose that empowering leadership will positively enhance the impact of transformational leadership on employees' safety behaviours, and that empowered followers' will be more likely to engage in safety behaviours. In our proposed model described in Figure 1, we envisage

an indirect relationship between transformational leadership and safety behaviours which is moderated by empowering leadership. Hence,

Proposition 3a: Empowering leadership moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and safety compliance behavior.

Proposition 3b: Empowering leadership moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and safety participation behavior.

DISCUSSIONS

This systematic literature review examined a variety of the extant studies and culminated in a conceptual framework elucidating the relationship between transformational leadership, empowering leadership, employees' trust in leadership, and workplace safety behaviors. The framework provides impetus for a behavior-oriented approach to workplace safety research in order to generate actionable knowledge to manage accidents and injuries in the workplace. Notably, the framework can be utilized by organizations when executing organizational design interventions (Clarke, 2013; von Thiele Schwarz et al., 2016; Willis et al., 2017) so as to engender and shape organizational climate and culture of trust (Sheehan et al., 2016). In addition, the framework elicits credible research questions which should hopefully attract more researchers trying to unpack how various leadership styles and organizational context variables affect employees' safety behavior (Aryee & Hsiung, 2016; Jiang & Probost, 2016; Mullen et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2017).

To advance organizational and safety theory regarding leadership and safety behaviors, we propose several opportunities. First, future research should determine which factors employees might rely on to develop trust in their workplace leader. Second, researchers can examine the extent to which leadership empowerment behavior may determine the impact of the four dimensions of transformational leadership. Third, there is a need for future research to include interpersonal concepts such as leader-member exchange as a mediator in future research model to help unpack psychological processes through which effective leadership influences safety behavior. Finally, and in order to enhance the generalizability of the proposed research model, we encourage more research on leadership and safety from developing countries, specifically examining the impact of national culture on leadership (Hofstede, 2001), and the role of the leader's gender in the leadership-safety research model (Eagley et al., 1995).

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