The Relationship Between Charismatic Leadership, Work Engagement, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

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Abstract. Researchers in organizational behavior have long been interested in exploring how employees’ perceptions of their leaders influence their work-related thoughts and behaviors. This study tested a mediation model linking leader charisma to organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) via work engagement. The authors administered 91 participants the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, the OCB Scale, and the Work Engagement Scale. The results indicated a significant positive relation between charismatic leadership and work engagement, between work engagement and OCB, and between charismatic leadership and OCB. Results also indicate a full mediation of leadership’s effects on OCB via work engagement. This mediation relation suggests some of the mechanisms of charismatic leadership, and it provides an interesting avenue for future research.

Keywords: extra-role behaviors, transformational leadership, work attitudes

Organizations have long been interested in the role of management on how employees think and feel about their jobs, as well as what employees are willing to dedicate to the organization. Previous research has shown that leadership, specifically charismatic leadership, can affect the meaningfulness of employees’ work as measured by work engagement (Strickland et al., 2007). When employees are engaged in their work, they increase the occurrence of behaviors that promote efficient and effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). These behaviors are also known as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), which can be defined as individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system (Organ). In the aggregate,
OCB promote the efficient and effective functioning of the organization as well as employee performance (Organ).

The purpose of this article is to replicate recent work that links charismatic leadership to OCBs and to extend the knowledge of this link by exploring the potential mediating mechanism of work engagement, which is a relatively new variable in the research literature. Previous research has investigated the link between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship performance via motivation; however, there has been no empirical work explicitly linking charismatic leadership, work engagement, and OCB.

Charismatic Leadership

Leadership is typically viewed as a process of social influence, in which one or more persons affect one or more followers by clarifying what needs to be done, and providing the tools and motivation to accomplish set goals. The topic of leadership has generated dozens of theoretical and empirical models over the past several decades (e.g., Jacobsen & House, 2001). Transformational leadership, which is one such model, has generated a significant amount of research over the past 2 decades. Transformational leaders are courageous, value driven, lifelong learners, believe in people, and have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). Transformational leadership is composed of charisma, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). The charisma component of transformational leadership consists of providing followers with a role model for ethical conduct and a clear sense of purpose that is energizing, and building identification with the leader and his or her articulated vision (Avolio et al.). Because there is theoretical and empirical overlap between transformational leadership and charismatic leadership, previous research has used the terms interchangeably (Howell & Shamir, 2005). The present study focuses on the charismatic component of transformational leadership because we are specifically interested in whether charisma can be transmitted between leader and follower and how this might relate to subsequent discretionary behavior.

Bass (1985) described charismatic leaders as having great referent power and influence. A charismatic leader serves as a beacon to subordinates, provides clarity when the situation is unclear, resolves shortcomings and motivates change by articulating a strategic vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Jacobsen & House, 2001). In addition, charismatic leaders will communicate high performance expectations, exhibit confidence, take risks that oppose the status quo, and emphasize a collective identity (Shamir, 1991; Ehrhart & Klein; Jacobsen & House). Other behaviors often exhibited by charismatic leaders include setting personal examples and making personal sacrifices (Yorges, Weiss, & Strickland, 1999; Jacobsen & House).
Because charismatic leaders exhibit confidence and take risks, followers of charismatic leaders want to identify with them and to emulate them. Charismatic leaders have the qualities of intellectual and individual stimulation (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Intellectual stimulation is a quality that can be characterized when a leader gets followers to question the tried-and-true ways of solving problems, and it encourages followers to question the methods they use to improve upon them (Avolio et al., 1999). Followers of charismatic leaders experience heightened motivation, positive affect toward leader and task, self-assurance, agreement and support for leader policies, and low role conflict and ambiguity (Jacobsen & House, 2001; Shamir, 1991). Followers also trust in charismatic leaders more and put forth extra effort for high performance (Jacobsen & House; Shamir).

Followers of charismatic leaders tend have a high sense of meaningfulness associated with their role. Charismatic leaders appeal to that sense of meaningfulness by motivating their employees and connecting their goals or ideas to employee’s roles (Shamir, 1991). Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) investigated leaders’ influence on followers’ motivation and performance. They found that followers’ social identification mediated the relation between leadership and empowerment. In other words, leaders influence their follower’s social identification, which in turn influenced follower’s sense of empowerment. When employees are empowered, they believe they can influence outcomes at work and make a difference (as cited in Kark et al.). Because previous research found that charismatic leaders appeal to followers’ sense of meaningfulness and empowerment, Strickland et al. (2007) investigated the relation between meaningfulness (as measured by work engagement) and charismatic leadership. Results indicated that charisma was associated with higher work engagement (Strickland et al.).

Work Engagement

Employees differ greatly in terms of their dedication to their job and the amount of intensity and attention that they put forth at work. Work engagement is a construct that captures the variation across individuals and the amount of energy and dedication they contribute to their job (Kahn, 1990). It is defined as the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s preferred self during tasks that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence and active, full performances (Kahn). Although most researchers agree on the construct of work engagement, there are different views of its conceptualization (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008).

May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) also conceptualized work engagement and describe the three dimensions as components: a physical component, an emotional component, and a cognitive component. The physical component is described as energy used to perform the job; the emotional component is described as putting
one’s heart into one’s job; and the *cognitive* component is described as being absorbed in a job so much that everything else is forgotten.

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) also conceptualized work engagement. They identified *work engagement* as a motivational construct defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The vigor aspect of work engagement is categorized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of obstacles (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). The *dedication* aspect of work engagement is characterized as having a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge at work (Salanova et al.). *Absorption* refers to full concentration, happiness, and engrossment in one’s work whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulty detaching oneself from work (Salanova et al.).

As a relatively new construct, *work engagement* is becoming a frequent topic of research ranging from job performance and organizational commitment to job resources and burnout. Specifically, recent research has found that work engagement is related to increased job performance and organizational commitment (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Job resources have been identified as a predictor of work engagement, especially in the face of high job demands (Bakker et al., 2008). Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities, and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their job (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Burnout, as characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism, is negatively related to work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In addition, work engagement (more specifically vigor and dedication) has been hypothesized by these researchers as the opposite of *burnout*, which is defined as emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, and Bakker (2006) suggested that the burnout (emotional exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (vigor and dedication) are opposites along two distinct bipolar dimensions labeled *energy* and *identification*. In other words, employees who are cynical and exhausted are less likely to be dedicated to their job.

Previous research has investigated the motivational effects of leaders. Bono and Judge (2003) found that followers of transformational leaders reported more self-concept engagement in their work. These findings used the self-concordance model as defined by Sheldon and Elliot (1999), which is the extent a person’s activities such as work-related tasks or goals are a reflection of his or her authentic interests and values (Bono & Judge). Extending this research on the motivational effects of leaders, Strickland et al. (2007) empirically investigated the relations among work engagement, charismatic leadership, and turnover. Using a sample of 59 undergraduate college students, these researchers explored the mediation role of work engagement between charisma and turnover. Results indicated support for all hypotheses, including a positive correlation between charisma and work
engagement, a negative correlation between work engagement and turnover intentions, and the mediation of work engagement on charisma and turnover intentions (Strickland et al.).

As a replication of these findings, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Charismatic leadership will be positively related to employee’s work engagement.

**OCBs**

OCB is a construct that was introduced in the 1980s and has been defined as individual behavior that is discretionary, not recognized by the formal reward system and, in the aggregate, one that promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). Even further, OCB contribute indirectly to the organization through the maintenance of the organization’s social system that supports task performance (Organ, 1997). Since its inception, OCB has been the topic of more than 100 empirical works (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002); however, the taxonomy of OCB throughout the years has not been completely consistent. Constructs that have overlapped with OCB include prosocial organizational behavior (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986), contextual performance (Motowidlo, 2000), organizational spontaneity (George & Brief, 1992), and extrarole behavior (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). In addition to overlapping labels, scholars have been inconsistent in the behavioral dimensions that make up OCB.

Organ (1988) proposed a taxonomy of OCB consisting of altruism (e.g., behavior directly intended to help a specific person in face-to-face situations), conscientiousness (e.g., impersonal behaviors such as compliance with norms defining a good worker), sportsmanship (e.g., not complaining about trivial matters), courtesy (e.g., consulting with others before taking action), and civic virtue (e.g., keeping up with matters that affect the organization). Many researchers have operationalized this five-dimension taxonomy of OCB (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), which has served as the basis for OCB measurement in many studies.

The literature on OCB is diverse; however, Organ’s (1988) five-dimensional model has the greatest amount of empirical research (LePine et al., 2002). Podsakoff and colleagues have provided a reliable and valid measure of Organ’s five dimensions (Lepine et al.). OCB has been linked to job satisfaction, fairness, leader support, and burnout (Chiu & Tsai, 2006; Lepine et al.). Williams and Anderson (1991) investigated the role of job satisfaction as a predictor of OCB. Using a sample of 461 full-time employees in a Midwestern city, they found that the cognitive component of job satisfaction significantly predicted OCB, whereas the affective component did not.

Using a sample of 296 pairs of hotel staff members, Chiu and Tsai (2006) found that burnout was negatively related to OCB. Burnout has been suggested
to be the opposite of work engagement (González-Romá et al., 2006). Given this relation between burnout and work engagement and support for a negative relation between burnout and OCB, it is believed that work engagement will be positively related to OCB. More specifically, it is believed that when employees are more absorbed and dedicated to their work, they will be more likely to engage in behaviors that are altruistic, conscientious, and virtuous.

In addition to the logic related to burnout, OCBs also can be linked to work engagement through organizational commitment. With a sample of 2,038 teachers, Hakanen et al. (2006) used the Job Demand-Resources Model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) as a basis for exploring work-related well-being among teachers through an energetic process and a motivational process. The results of the study indicated that work engagement was positively correlated with organizational commitment. More specifically, work engagement mediated the relation between job resources and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is an antecedent to OCB, and because of this, it is predicted that work engagement will be positively related to OCB (Ehigie & Otukoya, 2005).

Therefore, on the basis of previous theoretical and empirical research, we developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Work engagement will be positively related to OCBs.

Previous research has also investigated the relation between transformational leadership and OCB. Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) investigated the effects of transformational leader behaviors on follower trust with leader, satisfaction, and OCB. Using Organ’s (1988) five-dimensional model, OCB was rated by the supervisor rather than by self-report (Podsakoff et al.). Results of the study showed that the link between transformational leadership and OCB was indirect and mediated by trust.

The present study aimed to extend this research by exploring the relation between charismatic leadership and OCB. A recent study has investigated the relation between charisma and two dimensions of OCB: helping and compliance (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007). Results indicated that employees show more helping and compliance when they perceive their leader as charismatic.

On the basis of this work and related logic, we proposed the following replication hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Charismatic leadership will be positively related to OCBs.

Previous research has investigated the relation between transformational leadership, job characteristics, and organization citizenship performance and found that employees’ perceptions of their jobs mediated the relation between transformational leadership and job performance (Purvanova, Bono, & Dziewczynski, 2006). To build on this work, it is believed that when employees are engaged in
their work, they are less likely to experience burnout or have emotional exhaustion and diminished personal accomplishment. Because previous research has found that increased burnout leads to decreased OCB, it is believed that work engagement, which González-Romá et al. (2006) suggested to be conceptually opposite from burnout, will be associated with increased OCB. Organizational commitment has been found to be an antecedent that is positively related to work engagement, and organizational commitment is an antecedent to OCB. Therefore, it is hypothesized that work engagement will lead to OCB (Ehigie & Otukoya, 2005; Hakanen et al., 2006).

In addition, because previous research has found that charismatic leadership is positively associated with work engagement (Strickland et al., 2007), it is believed that charismatic leadership will be positively associated with OCB. More specifically, charismatic leaders can spark an employee’s engagement in work, which can lead to participation in positive behaviors that promote the organization or OCB.

Therefore, on the basis of previous research and logic, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 4: Work engagement will mediate the relation between charismatic leadership and OCBs.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at a large Western university. In all, 102 students (36 men, 65 women, 1 declined to state) received a 1/2 hr research credit in their courses for participating in this study. Participants were required to be currently employed and employed at the same location for 6 months or longer before participation. We excluded 12 participants from the study because they had not been currently employed for 6 months or longer, yielding a new total of 91 participants.

Employment length for the participants ranged from 6 months to 13 years (\(M = 1.84\) years, \(SD = 1.92\) years). The participants’ age ranged from 17 to 60 years (\(M = 22.09\) years, \(SD = 5.62\) years) and consisted of the following ethnicities: African American (9.89%), Asian (12.09%), Caucasian (50.55%), Hispanic (17.58%), and other (9.89%).

Materials

We measured charismatic leadership using items from Avolio et al.’s (1999) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The charismatic subscale of the MLQ measures the extent to which the participants perceive their supervisor/manager/boss as possessing charismatic characteristics or exhibiting charismatic behaviors (Avolio et al.). The measure is an 18-item 7-point Likert-type
We measured work engagement using the vigor, dedication, and absorption subscales of the Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002), which measures vigor, dedication, and absorption of the participants in their current job. The measure is a 17-item 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Schaufeli et al.). Examples of items include the following: for vigor, “At work, I persevere, even when things do not go well”; for dedication, “I am enthusiastic about my job”; and for absorption, “Time flies when I’m working.” The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the Work Engagement Scale was .90.

We measured OCB using the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983; Podsakoff et al., 1990), which is a 24-item seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Examples of items include “I help others who have been absent” and “I attend functions not required but that help my company image.” Farh, Zhong, and Organ (2004) supported OCB as an aggregate construct; therefore, the 24 items of the OCB scale were summed to form a composite score for the OCB construct. The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the OCB scale was .85.

Procedure

Participants registered to attend a research session through an online psychology research Web site. The participants were given a consent form upon entering the laboratory. The laboratory contained a table and approximately 10 chairs. The experimenter was present throughout the entire session. Each participant was administered a packet containing the same questionnaires and was treated in accordance with the American Psychological Association’s ethical treatment of participants. When the experimenter collected the surveys, they were inserted into a manila envelope to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was then thanked and debriefed.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for each of the variables in the study are presented in Table 1. We found a significant positive correlation between charismatic leadership and work engagement, \( r = .40, p < .01 \). We also found a significant positive correlation between charismatic leadership and OCB, \( r = .26, p < .05 \). Work engagement was also significantly positively correlated with OCB, \( r = .41, p < .01 \).

To further analyze the data, we used a series of regression equations as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, we tested regression path coefficients
TABLE 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation of Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment (years)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>22.09</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Work engagement</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational citizenship behaviors</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 91 except for the work engagement scale (n = 90). Participants with less than 6 months of employment history were excluded from the analysis.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

for independent links between study variables. Next, we tested a regression equation to ascertain the link between charisma and OCB once work engagement was entered into the equation. A reduction or nullification of the significance between charisma and OCB indicates full or partial mediation of work engagement. Table 2 presents these results.

To test the first hypothesis, we conducted a regression analysis for charismatic leadership and work engagement. The regression for charismatic leadership and work engagement was significant, $\beta = .40, p < .01, R^2 = .16$. Charismatic leadership accounted for 16% of the variance in work engagement.

To test the second hypothesis, we conducted a regression analysis for work engagement and OCB. Consistent with this hypothesis, work engagement was positively related to OCB, $\beta = .41, p < .01, R^2 = .16$. Work engagement accounted for 16% of the variance in OCB.

We tested the third hypothesis by conducting a regression analysis for charismatic leadership and OCB. As expected, the regression analysis for charismatic

TABLE 2. Results for the Regression Analyses for OCB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work engagement</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 91 except for the work engagement scale (n = 90). Participants with less than 6 months of employment history were excluded from the analysis.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.
leadership and OCB was significant, $\beta = .26, p < .05, R^2 = .07$. Charismatic leadership accounted for 7.0% of the variance in OCB.

In line with the procedures suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation can be inferred if both charismatic leadership and OCB have a significant relation with work engagement and if the relation between charismatic leadership and OCB is significantly lower (partial mediation) or no longer significant (full mediation) when work engagement is entered into the equation.

To test for mediation, the fourth hypothesis, we entered both charismatic leadership and work engagement into the regression analysis for OCB. As hypothesized, when work engagement was entered into the equation, charismatic leadership was no longer significant $\beta = .10, p = .33$, indicating a full mediation relationship for work engagement, $\beta = .36, p < .01$ (see Table 2). This model accounted for 17% of the variance in OCB ($R^2 = .17$).

**Discussion**

The present study adds to the charismatic leadership literature by documenting empirical support of mediation relations among charismatic leadership, work engagement, and OCB. All hypothesized relations were supported by the data. As expected, charismatic leadership was significantly positively related to work engagement. This finding was consistent with Strickland et al. (2007), who found a mediating relationship for work engagement on charismatic leadership and turnover intentions.

We found work engagement to be significantly positively related to OCB. This finding is in line with previous research. For instance, Hakanen et al. (2006) found that work engagement was positively correlated with organizational commitment in a study theoretically based on the Job Demand-Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001). Ehigie and Otukoya (2005) found that organizational commitment acted as an antecedent to OCB. Future research could expand this relation by exploring the links among work engagement, organizational commitment, and OCB.

The results also showed a mediating role for work engagement in the relation between charismatic leadership and OCB. As expected, work engagement explained the relation between charismatic leadership and OCB. This finding lends support to the notion that when a charismatic supervisor is present, an employee is more engaged in his or her work, which in turn promotes organizational citizenship.

There are several potential limitations to the present study, which are often associated with the use of convenience samples and self-reported data. The participants recruited for this study were not selected randomly from a global population of employees; they were recruited using an undergraduate research pool coordinated by the university. Most of the participants were between 18 and 25 years of
age \((M = 22.09\) years, \(SD = 5.62\) years) and had at least 6 months of recent and continuous employment. In addition, all participants were psychology students at a major state university. Because the participants of this study do not necessarily reflect the global population of employees, the applicability of the results to the workplace is unknown and needs to be replicated in future studies.

Another potential limitation to this study is that all of the measures in this study were self-reported, which can introduce problems with validity including self-report biases. In addition, the cross-sectional design of this study combined with self-reports means that it is not certain that there are any cause-and-effect relations among charismatic leadership, work engagement, and OCB. Also, the personality of participants could have affected how much they are influenced by their supervisors’ leadership style, and this should be addressed in future research.

Expanding on the findings of this study, future research could address the role of individual differences and emotional contagion in understanding charismatic leadership processes. Recent research conducted by Johnson (2008) investigated the role of emotional contagion and affect at work on the relation between charismatic leadership and follower’s OCBs. Johnson found that leader and follower affect at work are related through emotional contagion, suggesting that a primary function of a leader may be the management of emotions at work. These findings suggest additional avenues for research incorporating affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which specifies that emotional reactions are often the immediate precursors for job withdrawal.

Another avenue for future research would be to investigate the moderating role of personal and situational variables. More specifically, it would be interesting to examine the current findings in relation to occupational type and stage of employment (i.e., newly hired, close to retirement). The sample used in this study consisted of students who were somewhat new to their working career; thus, it is possible that they were more influenced by the charisma of the management than others would be. Additional research in the area could document the role of both the career and organizational lifecycle in identifying the importance of charismatic leadership. This would provide organizations with useful information to keep employees at various levels of their employment engaged in their job and participating in behaviors that will ultimately lead to a more productive employee and a well-functioning organization.

This study adds to the understanding of employee extra-role behavior and workplace energy within the framework of charismatic leadership theory. Not only are these findings important to the literature, but they also contribute to the field of organizational psychology by adding more evidence that suggests leadership is associated with improving employee performance through citizenship behaviors. The findings of this study can provide more insight into the possible effects of management; more specifically, managers that exhibit charismatic leadership qualities. In addition, the present research can be a foundation
for future interventions that foster charismatic leadership and work engagement to increase OCB at organizations. Combined with future research, this study could have significant implications for the hiring and training of leaders within organizations.

**AUTHOR NOTES**

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