

New Directions in Leadership Research Conference

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Author:

Hannes Leroy, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University

Paper title:

How Follower and Leader Contingent Self-Esteem Moderates the Relationships between Leader Transparency and Followers' Psychological Safety and Voice

Abstract:

In this paper, we use theory on contingent self-esteem to explain why the relationships between leader transparency and follower psychological safety and voice are not as straightforward and positive as they might appear. Whereas higher levels of general self-esteem may be expected to increase leader transparency and follower voice, we theorize that contingent self-esteem founded on the need for approval from others can decrease both parties' openness to honest feedback. Leader and follower need for approval are thus predicted to hinder an open flow of communication and, more specifically, qualify the relationships between leader transparency, follower psychological safety and improvement-oriented voice. In Study 1, conducted at the individual level of analysis, we find that leader transparency positively predicts follower felt psychological safety when follower need for approval is low, and negatively when follower need for approval is high. Follower need for approval also moderates the indirect effect of leader transparency on follower self-rated voice one month later. In Study 2, at the team level of analysis, we find that leader transparency positively predicts the team climate of psychological safety when leader need for approval is low, and negatively when leader need for approval is high. Leader need for approval also moderates the indirect effect of leader transparency on team-rated voice six months later. Collectively, we show that by qualifying the effects of leader transparency on follower psychological safety and, in turn, voice, leader and follower need for approval complicate leaders' task of creating candor at work.