Supportive leadership: A conditional process model linking leadership, climate, and horizontal relationships between subordinates

ABSTRACT

Although much research has investigated the effects of supportive leadership on supervisor-subordinate relationships, little attention has been paid on the ways in which supportive leadership affects horizontal relationships between subordinates. Using psychological climate theory, we develop a conditional process model by which supportive leadership influences team-member exchange (TMX) via supportive climate, and the relationship between TMX and individual employee's job performance is moderated by group-mean TMX. To test our proposed model, we conduct a total of four studies. Study 1 examines the effect of supportive leadership on TMX and the moderating role of group-mean TMX for the relationship between TMX and job performance. Study 2 is a constructive replication of Study 1 with supportive climate introduced as a mediator for the relationship between supportive leadership and TMX. Study 2 also encompasses a scale validation study for our supportive climate measure. Study 3 adopting a repeated measure design investigates the causal ordering among the major study variables. Our results provide compelling evidence that supportive leadership via supportive climate enhances TMX, which in turn, improves individual employee's job performance especially in a group with low group-mean TMX. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.