SUMMARY

Determinants of Leaders' Success:

Toward an Integrated Model of Personality, Beliefs, Behavior, and Diversity

Leaders are important organizational members. The impact of leaders' actions in companies is probably greater than actions from any other member in organizations, since they are able to affect attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of individuals, and processes and performance of teams and organizations. Due to the high impact of leaders, many researchers tried to investigate the following question: What determines a leader's success? The answers are diverse and include leaders' personality (e.g., Guion & Gottier, 1965), behavior (e.g., Fleischman, 1953), and beliefs (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) as well as contingency factors such as diversity (e.g., Fiedler, 1967; Kaiser et al., 2008).

Interestingly, although it is highly likely that these factors (leaders' personality, behavior, and beliefs as well as diversity) indeed all affect a leader's success, they have rarely been studied in combination (e.g., Avolio, 2007). In the pursuit to better understand leaders' success and its influencing factors, this dissertation used an integrated approach to investigate the role of leaders' personality, leaders' beliefs, leaders' behaviors, and diversity, and their links to each other in predicting leaders' success (see the Figure on the next page). Thereby, I proposed that personality and behavior should be investigated in combination, that certain behaviors are more or less effective in different situations, and that leaders' beliefs might affect their behavior. These predictions were examined in three papers in which different parts of the model have been tested.
First, I present a meta-analysis, in which I studied the role of the Big 5 personality traits and the sub-dimensions of the transformational leadership theory on leaders' success. Predicting that the Big Five traits would be related to transformational leadership behavior and leader success, the findings supported the mediating role of transformational leadership and its sub-dimensions in the personality-leader performance relationship. However, the overall transformational leadership measure and the sub-dimensions of transformational leadership were influenced by different combinations of the Big 5 personality traits. For instance, whereas inspirational motivation was positively related to extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and negatively related to neuroticism, individualized consideration was positively correlated with openness to experience and agreeableness. These findings imply that a simple combination of the transformational leadership sub-dimensions into one overall construct seems to be inappropriate and reveal that organizations can use personnel selection and leadership training to produce effective leaders.
Moreover, this thesis focused on leader-member exchange – a theory that focuses on the one-to-one relationships between leaders and followers (Cogliser & Schriesheim, 2000; Schyns et al., 2010) – as one process via which transformational leaders influence critical organizational outcomes. Findings of a meta-analysis supported the prediction that leader-member exchange mediates the relationships between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and leader performance. Furthermore, the meta-analysis showed that transformational leadership and leader-member exchange contribute to different extents to the outcomes, depending on the type of the outcome. These findings emphasize that it is highly important to distinguish between outcome variables when studying the leadership processes.

Finally, I investigated the role of transformational leadership and leaders' diversity beliefs in predicting anticipated affective, relational, and task-related outcomes in nationality diverse teams. I proposed that transformational leaders in diverse teams influence not only task-related outcomes by promoting information sharing processes (e.g., Kearney & Gebert, 2009), but also affective and relational outcomes by creating a social identity within the team (e.g., Kunze & Bruch, 2010; Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999). A vignette and an experimental study supported this prediction. Additionally, I predicted that the content of the vision of the leader, in this study the leader's diversity beliefs, determines whether a (transformational) leader has a positive or negative effect in diverse teams. In this respect, the data supported a three-way interaction between nationality diversity, transformational leadership, and diversity beliefs on sub-group perceptions. Participants in homogenous teams perceived less subgroups than did those in diverse teams. Furthermore, participants in diverse teams led by a highly transformational leader with positive diversity beliefs
perceived less subgroups than did those in diverse teams with a high transformational leadership - negative diversity beliefs leader, as well as with in a low transformational leadership - positive diversity leader. Interestingly, we found that members of a diverse team led by a high transformational leader with positive diversity beliefs had similar subgroups perceptions as members of a diverse team led by a low transformational leader with negative diversity beliefs. However, no other three-way interactions were found, which is in contrast with my own and others' predictions (Beyer, 1999; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2009; House & Howell, 1992).

Concluding, this dissertation provides an integrative picture pertaining to the different factors that might influence leaders' success. It illustrates that leaders' personality, leadership behavior, diversity, and partially leaders' beliefs influence the success of leaders together rather than in isolation. This research suggests that personality affects leadership success directly and indirectly via transformational leadership behavior; that transformational leadership behavior influences leadership success directly and indirectly via leader-member exchange; that transformational leadership has a positive influence on the link between nationality diversity and leadership success; and that the promising role of leader's beliefs about diversity in the relationship between nationality diversity, transformational leadership, and leadership success needs further research. These findings have important implications for research and organizations in the area of leadership and diversity management.