

Leader Values and Employee Work Intentions

The Impact of “Self-Focused” versus “Other-Focused” Leaders

The best work relationships are partnerships. They require collaboration between both the leader and the direct report in regard to communication, working style, feedback, direction, and support. Given a choice, most of us would probably agree that we would prefer to work for a leader who has our best interests at heart, is invested in our growth and development, and is focused on meeting our needs as opposed to one who is focused on his or her own professional agenda. And we could probably also make the assumption that a self-serving leader would be less effective than one who was focused on helping his or her people grow. But what's the real impact a self- versus other-focused leader has on his or her people? And how does that impact play out in regard to employee work intentions like turnover, endorsement, discretionary effort, and organizational citizenship? New research from The Ken Blanchard Companies® answers these questions and reveals the true impact of self- and other-focused leader behaviors on the people they lead and the correlation to employee work intentions.

Employee Engagement or Employee Work Passion has become a popular topic of discussion and debate among human resource practitioners and organizational development consultants. Since 2006, The Ken Blanchard Companies has been studying various aspects of individuals' work passion and employee work intentions and the things that suppress and support these intentions. In this white paper we will share a recent study that explores what leaders can do to foster positive work affect and discuss the aspects of leadership that are most influential to the development of positive employee work intentions.



Methodology

Specifically, this study was designed to understand the connections between employee perceptions of their leaders' values orientation, their job-related affect (emotional evaluation of the job characteristics), and the impact of these two aspects to their work-related intentions.

Statistically validated subscales were used to measure each of the mentioned variables including portions of Work Cognition Inventory (WCI),¹ which measures a variety of organizational factors including connectedness with colleagues and connectedness with leader; the Work Intention Inventory (WII),² which measures discretionary effort, intent to perform, intent to remain with the organization, employee endorsement, and intent to be a good corporate citizen; the Affect Intensity Measure (AIM-J), which describes feelings about the job; and the Leader Self-Concern and Other-Orientation developed by De Dreu and Nauta.³

Subscale Definitions

To further explain the components of our study we offer the following definitions:

Connectedness with Leader—perceptions that leaders make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Connectedness with Colleagues—perceptions that colleagues make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Leader Other-Orientation—leader is concerned with the interests, needs, and desires of others over self

Leader Self-Concern—leader thinks and acts in a manner that is expected to lead to optimal results for oneself on the basis of one's values and risk preferences rather than on the needs of others

Positive Affect—positive mood or positive emotional frame of mind

Negative Affect—negative mood or negative emotional frame of mind

Discretionary Effort—the extent to which the individual intends to expend his or her discretionary effort above and beyond agreed-upon requirements on behalf of the organization

Intent to Perform—the extent to which the individual intends to do his or her job well and work effectively to help the organization succeed

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB)—the extent to which the individual is committed to supporting fellow workers and behaving in ways that are respectful, considerate, and sensitive to others

Employee Endorsement—the extent to which the individual readily endorses the organization to others as a good place to work and as a quality supplier of goods and services

Intent to Remain—the extent to which the individual plans to stay with the organization

The Work Cognition Inventory (WCI) utilized 2 of the 12 5-item scales from this inventory including Connectedness with Leader (e.g., “I trust my boss to act in my best interests.”) and Connectedness with Colleagues (e.g., “My colleagues take an interest in me professionally.”). Each of these two scales provided a 6-point Likert response scale, ranging from 1 (no extent) to 6 (the fullest extent). Respondents were asked to respond to each scale and to rate their managers in regard to each subscale, as well as to assess their own affective or emotional outlook. This research was published in the *Journal of Modern Economy and Management* in 2012.⁴

The Work Intention Inventory (WII) utilized all five scales measuring various types of employee work intentions. The scales were reported to have systematically displayed adequate factorial structure and internal consistency. Each item of the five scales was responded to on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (no extent) to 6 (the fullest extent). The five intention scales included five items each: intent to endorse the organization and its leadership (e.g., “I intend to speak out to protect the reputation of this organization.”), intent to perform at a higher-than-average level (e.g., “I intend to exert the energy it takes to do my job well.”), intention to use discretionary effort (e.g., “I intend to spend my discretionary time finding information that will help this organization.”), intent to stay in the organization (e.g., “I intend to continue to work here because I believe it is the best decision for me.”), and intention to be an organizational citizen (e.g., “I intend to respect this organization's assets.”).

The Affect Intensity Measure (AIM-J) measures affect, which in a broad sense is an individual's state of feeling and usually describes emotional terms such as pleased, excited, sad, or happy using a semantic differential format. The AIM-J is a validated, but yet-to-be published, semantic differential comprised of 12 words describing positive or negative affect (e.g., absorbed, eager, aware, fearful, anxious, guarded). The respondents are asked to use these words to describe their feelings about their job at the present time, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Self-Concern and Other-Orientation as Moderators (SCOOM) was used in order to measure the employees' perceptions of their leaders' value systems. Blanchard[®] adapted three self-concern and three other-orientation items developed by De Dreu and Nauta such that item content referred to each respondent's manager. This enabled employees to rate their managers on each construct. Three leader self-concern items were used (e.g., “My manager is concerned about his or her own needs and interests.”). Three items used to measure leader other-orientation were used (e.g., “My manager is concerned about the needs and interests of others such as me and my colleagues.”). These six items asked respondents to rate their manager on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much).³

The analysis utilized structural equation modeling (SEM), which is an analytical combination of factor analysis, path analysis, and multiple regression. It was used in this case to describe the relationships among or between various researched concepts in which the dependent and independent variables cannot be directly observed.

Seven hundred and forty respondents from training, human resources, OD, and other business roles, and from a variety of industries participated in the study.

Hypothesis and Findings

Our initial hypothesis was that environmental factors (connectedness with leader, connectedness with colleagues, leader self-concern, and leader other-orientation) lead to job-specific affect or emotion (positive or negative), which in turn influence employee work intentions. We also hypothesized that the analysis might reveal direct positive and negative correlations between the environmental factors and the intentions that were not mediated by affect. *See figure 1.*

A review of the literature on affect reveals that cognition and affect are directly connected to an individual's appraisal of his or her environmental experience. Given some of the prevailing research cited above we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Perceived connectedness with leader and connectedness with colleagues are positively related to positive job-specific affect.

Hypothesis 1b: Perceived connectedness with leader and connectedness with colleagues are negatively related to negative job-specific affect.

Hypothesis 2a: Perceived leader other-orientation is positively related to positive job-specific affect.

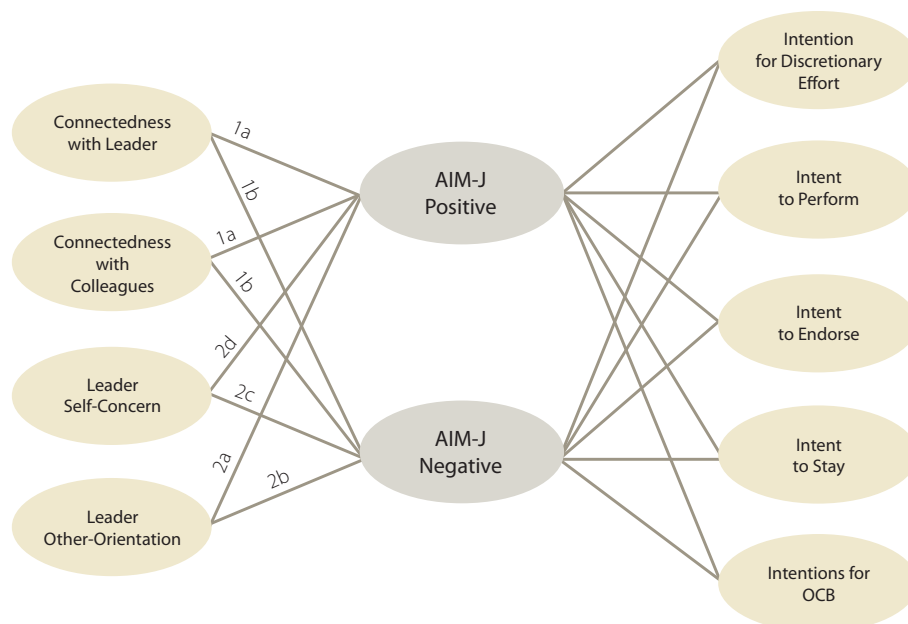
Hypothesis 2b: Perceived leader other-orientation is negatively related to negative job-specific affect.

Hypothesis 2c: Perceived leader self-concern is negatively related to positive job-specific affect.

Hypothesis 2d: Perceived leader self-concern is positively related to negative job-specific affect.

Our hypothesis further assumed that Connectedness with Leader, Connectedness with Colleagues, and Leader Other-Orientation would lead to positive and healthy affect and would therefore have a higher correlation with the five intentions and that Leader Self-Orientation would correlate to negative affect at work and would therefore have a lower correlation with the five intentions. Using a structural equation modeling technique, we ran five competing, but partially mediated models. Each model included all paths estimated in our hypothesized model but with different combinations and pathways to test the validity of our hypothesis and arrive at the final model. *See figure 2 and Table 1.*

Figure 1—Hypothesized Model



Final Model Interpretation

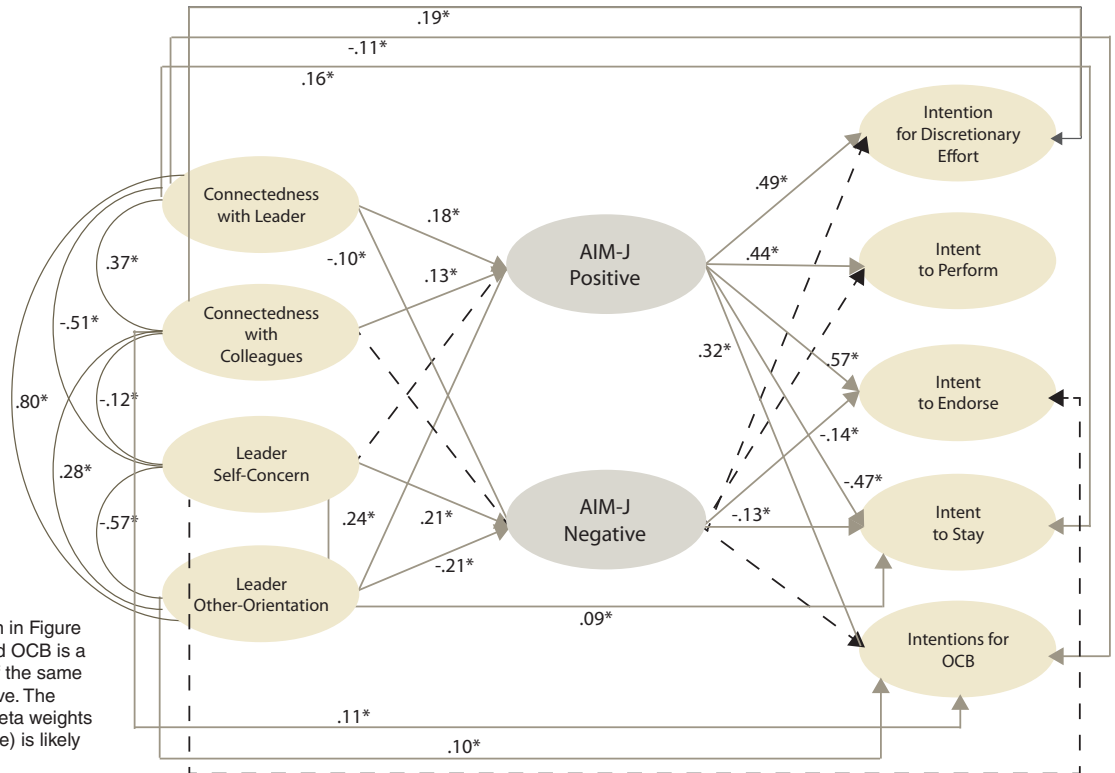
Positive Correlations

Connectedness with Leader correlates strongly to Leader-Other Orientation. Healthy connection with one's leader correlates strongly to leaders with an "other" focus. The most significant correlation in the model was between these two variables (.80). This indicates that individuals who feel connected with their leader have leaders who are interested in them personally and professionally and indicates that "servant leaders" have better relationships with their people than self-focused leaders.

Legend

- Black lines indicate correlations between the two variables
- Dotted lines indicate no correlation between the two variables
- When considering the value of the beta weight (numbers shown on model) anything over .25 is considered a moderate to large correlation
- Any beta weight with an * is considered to be significant at .05 or less

Figure 2—Final Model



*Note: The -.11 that denotes the correlation in Figure 2 between Connectedness with Leader and OCB is a negative correlation while the correlation of the same variables in the correlation table was positive. The change from a negative correlation using beta weights versus a positive correlation (correlation table) is likely due to multi colinearity.

Table 1. Scale Score Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
(1) Connectedness with Leader	3.51	1.15	(.92)										
(2) Connectedness with Colleagues	3.62	.92	.36**	(.91)									
(3) Leader Self-Concern	3.75	.87	-.38**	-.07	(.78)								
(4) Leader Other-Oriented	3.39	.90	.70**	.25**	-.41**	(.82)							
(5) AIM-J Positive	3.66	.70	.39**	.27**	-.20**	.36**	(.83)						
(6) AIM-J Negative	2.07	.81	-.23**	-.14**	.27**	-.33**	-.25**	(.82)					
(7) Intention for Discretionary Effort	4.24	.95	.31**	.35**	-.07*	.23*	.46**	-.10**	(.83)				
(8) Intent to Perform	5.25	.74	.25**	.27**	-.07*	.21**	.43**	-.13**	.55**	(.93)			
(9) Intent to Endorse	4.69	1.09	.43**	.28**	-.20**	.42**	.54**	-.28**	.46**	.55**	(.94)		
(10) Intent to Stay	3.30	1.17	.44**	.20**	-.29*	.43**	.43**	-.28**	.27**	.31**	.62**	(.83)	
(11) Intention for OCB	5.15	.78	.24**	.30**	-.03	.24**	.36**	-.15**	.47**	.69**	.57**	.31**	(.93)

Note. Cronbach's Alpha estimates are in parentheses on the diagonal. N = 747.

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level

Connectedness with Leader correlates strongly with employee work intentions—intent to Stay (.16) and Intent for Organizational Citizenship (.11). This means that individuals who feel connected with their leader will also have a higher intention to stay and act in ways that support the organization.

Healthy connections to others at work correlates highly to positive job affect or mood. Leader Other-Orientation (.24), Connectedness with Leader (.18), and Connectedness with Colleagues (.13) are all highly related to positive work affect (measured by the AIM-J). Connectedness with Colleagues and Connectedness with Leader also correlate at .37. This means that people with “other-oriented” leaders and a sense of connection with their colleagues and leader will have higher positive associations about their job.

Positive Work Affect correlates highly to all five employee work intentions. AIM-J correlates to Intent to Endorse (.57), Discretionary Effort (.49), Intent to Stay (.47), Intent to Perform (.44), and Organizational Citizenship (.32), which means that people with a more positive outlook about their job will also have higher intentions in regard to all five employee work intentions.

Negative Correlations

Leader Self-Concern does not correlate with positive job affect (Positive AIM-J) but is significantly correlated to negative job affect (Negative AIM-J). Leader Self-Concern correlates to negative work affect at .21.

Leader Self-Concern correlates negatively with Connectedness with Leader and Colleagues as well as Leader Other-Orientation. (-.57 to Connectedness with Leader, -.57 to Leader Other-Orientation, and -.12 to Connectedness with Colleagues.)

Healthy connections to others at work do not correlate to negative job affect. Connectedness with Colleagues, Connectedness with Leader, and Leader Other-Orientation all negatively correlate with Negative Job Affect.

Negative Work Affect (AIM-J Negative) either does not correlate to the employee work intentions or correlates negatively to employee work intentions. AIM-J Negative correlates negatively to two of the five employee work intentions, Intent to Endorse (.14) and Intent to Stay (.13), and does not correlate at all to the remaining three employee work intentions.

Positive and Negative Affect do not always play the role of mediator. Several direct correlations were found between the Healthy and Unhealthy Work Connections and the employee work intentions. Connectedness with Colleagues has a direct positive correlation to Organizational Citizenship (OCB .11); Leader Self-Concern has a direct negative correlation with Intent to Stay (-.09); Leader Other-Orientation has a direct positive correlation with Organizational Citizenship (.10); and finally, Connectedness with Leader has a direct positive correlation with Intent to Stay (.16).

Further exploration into the data indicates that employees with a greater connection with their colleagues are more likely to voluntarily give more effort to their jobs and to help others at work. Additionally, employees with a greater connection with their leaders had increased intentions to continue working for their organizations.

Employees with managers demonstrating high other-orientation had higher intentions to help at work while employees with highly self-concerned managers were less likely to intend to remain with their organization in the future. Most importantly, individuals who perceived that they were more connected with their leaders and colleagues and who had leaders who demonstrated other-oriented behavior were more likely to have higher levels of positive job affect, which in turn was related to other increased employee work intentions.

And individuals who perceived their leaders as having high amounts of self-concern were more likely to report higher levels of negative job-related affect. Finally, employees who reported higher levels of negative job-related affect during their workday reported lower intentions to actively endorse and remain with their current organization.

Implications

Leaders and organizations must begin to acknowledge that how people feel about the way they are treated and managed is a key component in Employee Work Passion. Employee job-specific affect is not only closely connected to the quality of interpersonal working relationships, but affect also has broader implications for employee intentions and subsequent performance.

This article highlights some of the unintended consequences of hiring and developing self-serving individuals and allowing them to manage others. When employees perceive a manager is more concerned with his or her own agenda than with the welfare of others, negative affect is often the result. This is coupled by the employees' reluctance to endorse the organization and its leadership, to stay with the organization, and to feel connected with their leader or colleagues.

Positive affect serves as an impetus to continue with a set course of action. Negative affect only serves as a yellow light of caution or a red light to discontinue on a specific course for fear of further loss of well-being.⁶

While not every work experience can or will be positive, managers must continually be watchful as negative shifts in affect occur, and they should work to provide perspective for themselves and others. There are data to suggest that the dynamic interplay between positive and negative affect is natural and occurs frequently in an employee's workday. If negative emotions are acknowledged and shifted, this self-regulation can result in higher proportions of positive affect over time and is indicative of adaptive human functioning.⁷

Given the impact that emotions have on intentions, leaders must allow for management practices that take into account how external, environmental events impact the internal mood states of those employees they wish to keep passionately involved in their work. Intentions to perform at a higher-than-average level, stay with the organization over time, endorse the organization and its leaders, use discretionary effort, and be an altruistic organizational citizen are predicated, in part, on the positive affect generated by their interactions with their leaders and colleagues.

Another implication for practice is for HR personnel and strategic leaders to create and sponsor leadership training programs and company values that stress and support servant leaders. Consistent, overt, self-concerned managers should be counseled and invited to become more aware of their behavior. If the self-concerned behavior persists, the leader and his or her sponsors should reconsider whether a leadership position is a good fit for all people concerned.

About the Researchers

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Endnotes

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