

4th International Conference on Leadership, Technology, Innovation and Business Management

Empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness: the moderating roles of task interdependence and organizational politics

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness and the moderating effects of task interdependence and politics on that relationship. Data were collected from 3 GSM companies in Turkey. The sample included 913 employees along with their immediate managers. The obtained data from the questionnaires are analysed through the SPSS statistical packaged software. Moderated hierarchical regression was used to examine the moderating roles of task interdependence and politics on the empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness relationship. The results show that empowering leadership is positively and significantly correlated with employees' organizational job embeddedness. In addition, the result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis supports the moderating effects of task interdependence and politics with regard to the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness.

Keywords: Empowering leadership, Organizational job embeddedness, Task interdependence, Organizational politics

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Peer-review under responsibility of the International Conference on Leadership, Technology, Innovation and Business Management

1. Introduction

The supervisor–subordinate relationship influences a myriad of important organizational outcomes. This is the case because leaders are more than just managers of work-related information and behavior — they also guide, support, and inspire their subordinates (Cable & Judge, 2003; Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Indeed, subordinates perceive supervisors as their most immediate organizational representatives, and use exchange quality as an indicant of organizational acceptance (Collins, Mossholder, & Taylor, 2012). As such, quality relations with supervisors contribute to embedding employees into their jobs (Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2011; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004).

Job embeddedness is a construct that represents the degree to which employees are embedded in their job or organization (Harris, Wheeler and Kacmar, 2011). It affects important outcomes beyond the effects of general

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employee work attitudes (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006) like employee turnover intentions, actual turnover, and job performance (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Several studies have found that leaders' behavior affects employees' organizational job embeddedness. Mitchell et al. (2001) and Harris, Wheeler and Kacmar (2011) investigated the effect of leader-employee exchange on employee's organizational job embeddedness. Findings indicated that high quality of leader-employee exchange made a statistically significant contribution to employee organizational job embeddedness.

The independent variable of the study is empowering leadership. It can be defined as leader behaviors whereby authority, autonomy, and responsibility are shared with employees in order to enhance and encourage employees to be more receptive and adaptive to their work environment (e.g., Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Gao, Janssen and Shi, 2011). Empowering leadership occurs when leaders foster trust-based relationships with subordinates, communicate a compelling vision to their employees, facilitate participative decision-making, coach subordinates to be more self-reliant, and show concern for their employees' personal problems (Ahearne et al., 2005; Hon, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to examine how empowering leadership affects employees' organizational job embeddedness. Further, the study concentrated on identifying individual difference and contextual variables such as task interdependence and organizational politics by which empowering leadership is related to organizational job embeddedness. In this context, the study begins by a literature review of empowering leadership, organizational job embeddedness, task interdependence and organizational politics, and then will go on to development of hypotheses. Research methodology, analyses results and research model will take place at second section. The results of the analyses will be discussed and recommendation will be provided for managers and academician at the last section.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness

Since empowering leadership occurs when leaders foster trust based relationships with subordinates, communicate a compelling vision to their employees, facilitate participative decision-making, coach subordinates to be more self-reliant, and show concern for their employees' personal problems (Ahearne et al., 2005; Hon, 2011), empowering leaders can obtain more trust, loyalty, satisfaction and identification from their employees (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Hon, 2011). Furthermore, their actions in sharing power or giving more responsibility and autonomy to subordinates (Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006), help them develop reciprocal and long-term exchange relationships with employees. Such relationships are consistent with the characteristics of a high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship mentioned by LMX theory (Dienesch and Liden, 1986). That is, leaders and subordinates surpass their formal role requirements, treating each other as close partners.

Subordinates in high quality LMX relationships are provided with a number of resources, often viewed as benefits (e.g., increased support, communication and better roles), that their counterparts in low quality exchanges do not receive (Liden et al., 1997; Mueller & Lee, 2002). These benefits received from high quality exchanges might boost existing employee resources to the point that employees feel embedded (Harris, Wheeler and Kacmar, 2011).

Previous researchers have found that the benefits associated with high quality exchanges are able to supplement or even compensate for low levels of person-organization fit (e.g., Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden, 2004), as the LMX relationship provides valuable resources for subordinates in high quality exchanges. With respect to links, the LMX relationship is a linkage in the organization, and those subordinates in high quality exchanges would be expected to be more connected to their supervisor and organization than their low quality counterparts (Sparrowe and Liden, 2005). Hence, the supervisor-subordinate relationship is a key driver of employee organizational job embeddedness. Finally, subordinates in high quality exchanges are less likely to leave an employer as they would have to forego the advantages associated with their relationships with their supervisors (Liden et al., 1997). Thus, we suggest that high quality LMX exchanges provide subordinates with numerous benefits and resources that are associated with organizational job embeddedness. Based on all of these theoretical arguments, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Empowering leadership is positively related to organizational job embeddedness.

2.2. Moderating effects of task interdependence and organizational politics

Task interdependence is defined as the degree to which goal accomplishment entails completing related or dependent subtasks (Bligh, Pearce and Kohles, 2006). Because leaders tend to have access to more resources and critical information than are followers (e.g., Erdogan and Liden, 2002), the degree of task interdependence partly reflects employees' dependence on their leaders. This also occurs because interdependent tasks require leaders' assistance, extensive interaction, and information sharing to produce integrated output (e.g., Crawford and Haaland, 1972).

Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, and Sparrowe (2006) argued that the demand for leader–employee interface is higher in workgroups characterized by high degree of task interdependence because “... there is a greater need for the leader's assistance in coordinating interaction ... and ... leaders play a more active role in distributing assignments” (p. 728). Likewise, Uhl-Bien and Graen (1998) found a greater effect of leadership on employees in task-interdependent cross-functional work groups compared to functional groups that entailed low need for coordination among employees. Furthermore, Burke et al. (2006) asserted that increasing task interdependence “... imply the need for escalating levels of leadership” (p. 294) and their meta-analytic study showed that leadership was more important for group performance when task interdependence was higher rather than lower (Vidarthi, Anand and Liden, 2013).

Based on these previous studies, we propose that task interdependence may play an important moderating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and employee organizational job embeddedness. Specifically, the higher the interdependence involved, the more important empowering leadership becomes (Raub and Robert, 2010). Because employees need a leadership style, which are more participative in decision-making, cooperative, collaborative and shares knowledge to complete their tasks when tasks are interconnected and integrated. In other words, empowering leadership becomes more beneficial for employees in interdependent tasks. First, by encouraging employees' participation in decision making and delegating authority to them, empowering leaders foster a sense of feeling that they can make a difference in work outcomes. Second, empowering leader behaviors signal to employees that the leader trusts their competence (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Finally, based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), when employees believe that they are being treated well, they should feel a need to reciprocate this favorable treatment and should contribute to the organization above and beyond the call of duty. By showing concern and personal attention to subordinates, empowering leaders develop high quality leader-subordinate relationship and trust, which in turn lead to high level of organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job embeddedness. Accordingly, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2: Task interdependence moderates the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employees' organizational job embeddedness in such a way that the relationship is stronger when task interdependence is high than it is low.

Organizational politics is an elusive type of power relationship in the workplace. It represents a unique domain of interpersonal relations, characterized by the direct or indirect (active or passive) engagement of people in influence tactics and power struggles. These activities are frequently aimed at securing or maximizing personal interests or, alternatively, avoiding negative outcomes within the organization (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud, 2010).

Often, negative outcomes are associated with organizational politics and empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of perceived politics leads to such outcomes as: negative psychological states; anxiety and job stress (Poon, 2003; Valle & Perrewe, 2000); withdrawal behaviors (Poon, 2003; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot, 2000); negligent and aggressive behaviors (Vigoda-Gadot, 2000); reduced organizational citizenship behaviors (Randall et al., 1999; Vigoda-Gadot, 2000); and reduced individual and organizational performance (Vigoda-Gadot, 2000).

In case of high perception of organization politics, employees are more likely to see politics as a threat. In this situation, employees often respond with defensive, reactive and protective behavior to avoid action, blame or change. Employees who consistently rely on defensiveness find that they lose the trust and support (Judge, 2007).

Previous research shows that perceptions of organizational politics are related to negative attitudes towards the organization such as lower levels of trust, satisfaction, or commitment (Vigoda-Gadot, 2002). Relationships have been found between perceptions of organizational politics and various negative employee behaviors such as the withholding of information, neglect of one's work, tardiness, absenteeism, or turnover intentions (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003). Furthermore, strong perceptions of organizational politics may damage the organization by reducing social cohesion

and enhancing the tendency to act in one's personal interests, even if they are at odds with those of the organization (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; MacKenzie et al., 2001). Therefore, it is expected that perceptions of organizational politics will lower employees' organizational job embeddedness and neutralize the benefits of empowering leadership. Accordingly, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational politics moderates the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employees' organizational job embeddedness in such a way that the relationship is weaker when organizational politics is high than it is low.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Goal

In this study, we aim to identify the moderating effects of task interdependence and organizational politics on the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness. To test the hypotheses, a field survey using questionnaires was conducted.

Sample and Data Collection

This study was conducted in 3 GSM companies in Turkey. A research team consisting of 3 doctoral students visited the headquarters of those companies in the study. In their first visit, they gave information about the aim of this study to the employees in their offices. Employees wishing to participate in this study were requested to send their names and branches by e-mail to the research team members. In the second visit (a week later), all respondents were invited to a meeting room in their departments. A randomly selected group of employees completed the empowering leadership, organizational job embeddedness and organizational politics scales totaling 913 out of 1200 employees). Those employees' superiors (their immediate managers) completed the task interdependence scale (totaling 23 managers) in their offices. Managers' reports of task interdependence instead of employee reports were used in order to avoid same-source bias.

Participants comprising the final sample worked in one of three types of jobs: R&D (13%), marketing (39%), and functional professions (48%). Sixty-three percent of the employees were male with an average age of 30.90 years. Moreover, 73 percent of the managers were male with an average age of 43.13 years. The response rate of the study was 76.08 percent.

3.2. Analyses and Results

We assessed empowering leadership by 15-item scale developed by Arnold et al. (2000). Sample items include, "Sets a good example by the way he/she behaves" and "Gives all followers a chance to voice their opinions. The average score of responses from respondents was used to compute this measure. Coefficient alpha for this scale in the study was .86. Twenty-three items taken from the Mitchell et al. (2001) organizational job embeddedness scale were used to measure organizational job embeddedness. Sample items include "I feel like I am a good match for this company." and "I fit with the company's culture." Coefficient alpha for this scale in the study was .89. The 12-item scale of perception of organizational politics by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) was used to assess the employees' perception of organizational politics. Sample item for political behavior is "one group always gets their way" for go along to get ahead are "Favoritism not merit gets people ahead" sample items for pay and promotion policies "Pay and promotion decisions are consistent with policies". All responses were taken on 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The Alpha Reliability of this scale is .83. Finally, perceived task interdependence was measured via the 5-item task interdependence scale developed by Van der Vegt et al. (2001). Sample item includes "I depend on my teammates for the completion of my work." The respondents rated each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Cronbach alpha for this scale in the study was .91.

Based on the proposition that employees' personal and employment characteristics are likely to influence their work outcomes (Li, Sanders and Frenkel, 2012), the following characteristics were included as control variables: age, gender and workplace tenure.

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations for the study variables.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations *

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	30.90	2.19						
2. Gender	0.63	0.37	.09					
3. Job tenure	4.93	1.19	.23**	.03				
4. Empowering leadership	3.66	0.72	.11	.06	.09			
5. Job embeddedness	3.29	0.96	.13*	.06	.16*	.36***		
6. Task interdependence	3.91	1.23	.09	.09	.09	.29**	.26**	
7. Organizational politics	3.71	0.99	.14*	.07	.19*	-.33***	-.32**	-.06

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 1 was tested with hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2). In step 1, the control variables were entered and in step 2, empowering leadership. As can be seen in the section of the table showing the values yielded by step 2, empowering leadership was significantly, positively related to organizational job embeddedness ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$), a finding that supports Hypothesis 1.

Table 2 Results of hierarchical regression analysis for organizational job embeddedness *

Steps and Predictor	Models	
	1	2
Step 1		
Age	.13***	.10
Gender	.06	.03
Job tenure	.16*	.13*
Step 2		
Empowering leadership		.35***
<i>F(df)</i>	2.69**	3.63***
<i>R</i> ²	.23**	.26**
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.20**	.24**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The hypotheses 2 and 3 in the study were tested by using moderated hierarchical regression, according to the procedure delineated in Cohen and Cohen (1983). The significance of interaction effects was assessed after controlling for all main effects. In the models, gender, age and job tenure were entered first as control variables; empowering leadership, predictor variable, was entered in the second step; the moderator variables, task interdependence and organizational politics, were entered in the third step; and the interaction terms, in the fourth step. In order to avoid multicollinearity problems, the predictor and moderator variables were centered and the standardized scores were used in the regression analysis (Aiken and West, 1991).

Table 3 Results of hierarchical moderated regression analysis for task interdependence and organizational politics on organizational job embeddedness *

Steps and Predictor	Models			
	1	2	3	4
Step 1				
Age	.13*	.10	.12*	.09
Gender	.06	.03	.03	.02
Job tenure	.16*	.13*	.09	.07
Step 2				
Empowering leadership (EI)		.35***	.33***	.32***
Step3				
Task interdependence (TI)			.24**	.21**
Organizational politics (OP)			-.06	-.03
Step4				
EI x TI				.37***
EI x OP				.26**
<i>R</i> ²	.23**	.26**	.29**	.33***
<i>Change in R</i> ²	.00	.03	.03	.04
<i>F</i>	2.69**	3.63***	4.16***	4.69***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

As can be seen in step 4 results from Table 3, the interaction effect for empowering leadership and task interdependence was significant for organizational job embeddedness, supporting Hypothesis 2 ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 3, which states that organizational politics moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness, received strong support (see Table 4). The interaction effect for empowering leadership and organizational politics was significant for organizational job embeddedness ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$).

As predicted, when employees perceived high levels of organizational politics, the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job embeddedness was weaker. On the contrary, it was found that task interdependence strengthened the positive relationship between empowering leadership and job embeddedness. The positive relationship between empowering leadership and job embeddedness was more pronounced when an employee's perception of task interdependence was high.

4. Conclusion

This study highlighted the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness. The results revealed that empowering leadership was positively related to employees' organizational job embeddedness, which supported hypothesis 1. The most remarkable result to emerge from data is that employees' perceptions of organizational politics and task interdependence affected the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job embeddedness. So, hypotheses 2 and 3 (task interdependence and organizational politics moderate the empowering leadership and employees' job embeddedness relationship) are fully supported. These findings are consistent with the literature on empowering leadership in organizational contexts (Ahearne et al., 2005; Hon, 2011; Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Hon, 2011; Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006). Although there are so many studies examining the empowering leadership-trust (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2005; Hon, 2011); empowering leadership-organizational commitment, satisfaction and identification with the leader (e.g., Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Hon, 2011) and empowering leadership-leader-member exchange (e.g. Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006) in literature; empowering leadership- organizational job embeddedness relationship and the moderator effects of task interdependence and organizational politics on the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' job

embeddedness are examined and revealed for the first time through that study, which differentiates this study from others.

However, this study was conducted on the GSM companies in Turkey; findings might not be transferable to all types of organizations. Thus, it is recommended that further researches can be conducted on organizations in sectors other than higher education sector and in different countries for the generalizability of findings. Another limitation of this study is that the current study uses a cross-sectional analysis whereby it gives a snapshot scenario on the approaches and intended approaches of measuring psychological well-being. A longitudinal study would be useful to identify and supplement the usage, relevance and flaws of the measures, in particular the long-term measures.

As employees with low organizational job embeddedness may be less productive, make lower-quality decisions, exhibit high absenteeism rates at work and finally leave their organizations (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, and Holtom, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001), it seems important for organizations to focus on enhancing employee job embeddedness. Our study showed that employees' perception of organizational politics lessened their job embeddedness while task interdependence and their managers' empowering leadership behaviors enhanced it. This study has number of implications. Firstly, the manager and/or the leader should try to maximize his/her empowering leadership behaviors by using leading by example, coaching, informing, showing concern, and participative decision-making. In order to increase employees' organizational job embeddedness. Secondly, the manager and/or the leader should build a productive and supportive organization culture and working system (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2006) to improve leader-employee exchange quality, which relate to their job embeddedness and lower the detrimental effects of organizational politics.

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