Employeeship: An interactive leader-follower perspective  
in modern leadership research

Johan Bertlett

Lund University, Department of Psychology

P.O. Box 213, 221 00 Lund, Sweden

Introduction

Leadership is not an isolated but an interactive function. Employeeship is a suggested concept that in addition to leadership behavior also emphasizes the horizontal peer employee and bottom-up follower employee perspectives. It comprises an interactive perspective of leader and follower behaviors which acknowledges the importance of productive relationships facilitated by congruent behavior and consensus. The purpose of the presentation is to present the Employeeship-Leadership-Relationship Model (ELR) that visualizes vertical leadership, horizontal peer employee, and reciprocal congruent leader-follower behaviors, two questionnaires by which the ELR Model is operationalized, and results from two empirical studies about the behavioral factors of the ELR Model relative to psychological climate.

Material and methods

Four organizations operating at an airport participated. The quantitative approach involved data gathered from expected leadership and employee behaviors and psychological climate attitude questionnaires. The leadership and peer employee variables are separately based on the leadership and employeeship questionnaires, whereas the leader-follower variable is based on the results of both questionnaires. All analyses were made on the variable level.

Results

The first study tested the ELR Model relative to the psychological climate on a general level whereas the second study replicated the analyses with an amended design that divided the factors of the ELR Model based on four situational dimensions: individual-success, individual-hardship, group-success, and group-hardship. The most important finding was that congruent leader-follower behavior correlates with psychological climate with some variations between the situational dimensions. Hierarchical regression analyses also showed that congruent leader-follower behavior augments the importance of leadership behavior and its relationship to psychological climate.

Conclusions

The main conclusions were that congruent leader-follower behavior expands leadership beyond the traditional conceptions of formal leadership and subordin­ation in organizational hierarchies, that organizations should use this finding in their training programs and include followers in leadership development, and that the ELR Model can facilitate the understanding of how employeeship works in different work situations where leaders and follower can learn how to support each other to reach congruent behavior.