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Transparency, Translucence of Opacity? A Field Investigation of The Mediating Role of Positive Emotions In Trustful Leader-Follower Relations

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TRANSPARENCY, TRANSLUCENCE OR OPACITY? A FIELD INVESTIGATION OF THE MEDIATING ROLE OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS IN TRUSTFUL LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONS

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In this study, the relationship between transparency and trust is hypothesized and investigated. Furthermore, the positive emotions variable was hypothesized to mediate the transparency → trust relationship. Participants' perceptions of a leader's transparency were more predictive of trust than experimenter designed manipulations. Study limitations, implications for management, and future research directions are discussed.

Instances exist in which the unadulterated expression of one's true self may … reflect a sensitivity to the fit (or lack of) between one's true self and the dictates of the environment and an awareness of the potential implications of one's behavioral choices. Authenticity is not reflected in a compulsion to be one's true self, but rather in the free and natural expression of core feelings, motives and inclinations (Kernis, 2003: 14).

…the so-called soft stuff is hard, measurable and impacts everything else in relationships, organizations, markets, and societies…the heart and soul of all of this is trust (Covey with Merrill, 2006: xxiv).

Leader transparency is a topic emerging in the post-millennium business literature. Authors of both popular and academic publications caution against the previously covert nature of managerial decision making in which leaders possess information and followers are excluded from this knowledge (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). In order to be transparent one must display openness, self-disclosure and trustworthiness in relevant relationships.

Leaders are expected to be genuine in their intent to serve others and to empower followers through their leadership (George, 2003). Because such leaders are more transparent they evoke higher levels of follower trust through personal identification with their followers (Gardner et al., 2005). This is an important assertion in that trust continues to be a fundamental and interesting construct in the study of organizational behavior. Since the mid-1990's, the study of trust has evolved both in terms of it conceptual development as well as its empirical measurement (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007).

In this paper, we offer empirical evidence that followers' perceptions of a leader's transparency significantly influence perceptions of trust. Furthermore, we investigate the role of positive affect as mediator of the transparency→trust relationship. A review of extant literature is followed by a discussion of our experimental study and its findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of transparency was introduced to the management sciences by Bartolomé (1972). He suggested that executives could attain more rewarding lives at work and at home by finding the courage to develop self-awareness of emotions, to learn how to deal with them, and to become free to choose how and when to express them. Bartolomé's qualitative research revealed that in order to accomplish this safely the environment must be conducive to attaining this level of openness. Kernis (2003) made a similar observation when he argued for one's understanding of the fit between self and environment in an authentic relationship with others.

Self-Disclosure Begets Transparency

The construct of transparency has its theoretical roots in the self-disclosure literature. Self-disclosure plays a central role in the development and maintenance of relationships. Because people disclose more to those close to them (Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984), self-disclosure is necessary to maintain or further develop one's relationships. However, the extent of self-disclosure to others is contingent on an existing relationship and antecedent disclosures. Initially, someone must make the first move in the leader-follower relationship and such initiation often falls to the leader.

There is a normative obligation to reciprocate openness. Making one's ideas and their origins clear to others implies something more than simple disclosure. Instead, it involves the interplay of social identities in transparent relationships. Harber and Cohen (2005) found that more psychologically arousing disclosures traveled faster and farther across social networks; thus the relevance of the disclosure to the discloser is important (i.e., degree to which the storyteller was affected by the event comprising the disclosure). This might explain why personal experience stories, or perhaps a

leader's vision, are powerful to secondary and tertiary listeners.

Transparency and Leadership

By introducing transparency into the leader-follower relationship a leader may decrease the traditional social distance between the two parties. However, there may be consequences for doing so. Individuals must use discretion in disclosure in order to minimize inappropriate behavior that could potentially damage one's relationships (Gardner et al., 2005). This is a caveat to leaders who need to maintain a distance in higher power distance relationships such as in military operations or other similar leadership situations. Authentic leaders will be "relatively transparent in expressing their true emotions and feelings to followers [when appropriate], while simultaneously regulating such emotions to minimize displays of inappropriate or potentially damaging emotions" (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 31). In other words, within transparency lies the commitment of a leader to help a follower to see the leader's true self through a genuine rather than deceptive self-presentation.

Trust

The definition of trust employed in this paper is that offered by Cummings and Bromiley (1996, p. 303), who said that trust is "an individual's [or individuals among a group] belief … that another individual or group (a) makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance with any commitments both explicit or implicit; (b) is honest in whatever negotiations preceded such commitments, and (c) does not take excessive advantage of another even when the opportunity is available." This definition is appropriate for the current research because of the socially embedded nature of interactions among organization members and the parallel discussion of leadership as a social influence process that is dependent upon trusting relationships for maximum effectiveness.

Scholars have also attempted to delineate the underlying dimensions of trust, with the two most typical dimensions being affective and cognitive. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) described trust that arises from the extent to which social identification underlies positive expectations as affect-based or relational trust; such trust is antithetical to calculus-based trust that identifies the cost-benefit attributes of achieving expected outcomes (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). While the conceptual distinction is apparent, the differences in practice are less clear.

As noted above, trust has been addressed on a dispositional level by considering individual psychology. However, Cummings and Bromiley (1996) raised the organizational level of analysis in their definition. Specifically, trust assumes the socially embedded nature of workplace interactions. Moreover, they advanced a parallel discussion of leadership as a social influence process

dependent upon the development of trusting relationships for maximum effectiveness. The rationale for this perspective rests on the socially embedded, subjective, and optimistic nature of most interactions between people. It considers why people trust and why trust changes.

Transparency and Trust

When people disclose positive information, others may view disclosure more favorably, thus resulting in attributions of transparency. The theoretical basis for this assertion rests on the notion that self-disclosure, including perceptions of another person's disclosure, is a form of behavioral interdependence, which should in turn impact cognitions about oneself, the other person, and an affective response about the relationship (Morry, 2005).

Transparent leaders are self-aware and act in accordance with their inner beliefs and values. Leaders who display greater transparency evoke higher levels of trust (Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010), perhaps through personal identification with their followers (Korsgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002). Transparency also reduces the uncertainty associated with risk, and creates a condition void of hidden motives and agendas. This allows one to form more positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another, and thereby become more willing to make oneself vulnerable to the risks associated with placing one's outcomes in the hands of another person. Additionally, leaders who act according to their values build relationships and social networks that enable followers to become vulnerable to them by offering diverse viewpoints (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). This results in a consistency of behavior that arises from integrity serving as an antecedent of trust (cf. Schoorman et al., 2007; Mayer & Gavin, 2005).

The transparency→trust linkage is well supported in the organizational literature. For example, Schoorman et al. (2007) reiterated three factors that comprise trust and are common to previous scholarly work: ability, benevolence, and integrity. They suggest that openness is an antecedent of trust that falls within the integrity factor (see also Butler & Cantrell, 1984).

Argyris (1962) proposed that increased trust could occur when openness is a group norm. In climates of openness, bankers were found to exhibit higher levels of trust, which was also related to involvement with work and social integration into work teams (Farris, Senner, & Butterfield, 1972). Butler (1991) found that while public relations efforts could decrease a customer's trust, consistent customer-oriented activities such as openness in communication generated relational trust. Evidence of this relationship has been found in the context of health care organizations (Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, & Bordia, 2004) as well as organizations experiencing a downsizing event (Norman et al., 2010). A leader's transparency communicates critical information to followers about their situation. This suggests

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that the more leaders behave transparently, the more their followers will trust them.

Appropriateness is also relevant to context in that transparency may be expected and acceptable when followers' doubt future outcomes in uncertain environments (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2001). Thus, it is essential for leader behavior to be consistently transparent across time and situation (Gardner et al, 2005).

Positive Emotions

The beneficial effects of positive emotions have been emphasized as a focal area of research within the emerging field of positive psychology (Fredrickson 1998, 2003; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Emotions are fundamental in the discussion of experienced trust. To understand the influence of emotions on trust, a move must be made from the pure calculative view toward trust's affective dimensions (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996). Not only do affective states pervade interpersonal trust, but emotions also "color one's experience of trust" (Jones & George, 1998, p. 534). Trust is also built upon expectations that are emotionally constructed. Therefore, in the evolution of the trust relationship, we might expect parties that experience positive emotions within the context of the relationship to be more trusting of their leaders.

Fredrickson (2003) cites evidence countering positive the traditional notion that emotions are associated with urges to act in particular ways, called specific action tendencies (i.e., a fight-or-flight response to fear). Instead, she asserts that distinct theories should be developed to account for different emotions or for different subsets of emotions (e.g., positive and negative emotions). Although appropriate for the discussion of negative emotions and responses, specific actions have not been linked to positive emotions such as joy and contentment, which tend to be more like feeling states than specific, physiological responses to stimuli (Fredrickson, 2003).

Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build theory describes the broadening of people's thought-action repertoires that enables them to explore novel approaches to thought and action, or the broadening of attention and cognition. The build component refers to the person's ability to develop or strengthen personal resources (e.g., intellectual, psychological, physical and social). Personal resources built through broadening are proposed to be both enduring and durable (Fredrickson, & Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Reciprocal relationships between positive emotions, broadened cognitions, and positive meaning trigger "upward spirals toward optimal individual and organizational functioning" (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 163).

Based on the above synthesis of extant literature on the topics of leadership, transparency, positivity, and trust, we advance the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a direct, positive relationship between ratings of leader transparency and followers' subsequent reports of trust in that leader.

Hypothesis 2: Positivity will mediate the relationship between transparency and trust.

METHOD

Study Design and Participants

In this study, the focus on follower perceptions of transparency arose from a serendipitous discovery. The original purpose was to explore through experimenter-manipulated conditions the effects of leader transparency on trust as mediated by positive emotions. However, a manipulation check indicated that the conditions did not operate as intended. Post hoc exploratory analyses revealed the findings presented below.

The hypotheses advanced and tested in this work were originally part of a larger study conducted by the first author. Participants logged onto a website and were randomly assigned to one of two transparency conditions – more versus less transparent – differentiated by the object attributes described in the literature review. Subjects were exposed to a leader discussing a topic important to public school leadership with the manipulation embedded in the discussion. The measures, described below, were collected after the intervention.

One hundred and forty-eight public school leaders participated in this study. More women (92) than men (56) logged onto the website. The average age was 33.56 years. All but seven were white/Caucasians, two were African-Americans, and five were Hispanic Americans. Sixty-four were single and 76 were married. Demographic variables were not correlated with the independent or dependent variables and were not used as controls.

Measures

As a manipulation check, transparency was measured with five-items comprising the high authenticity portion of the 13-item Smircich and Chesser (1981) Authentic Relationship Questionnaire. Sample items included: (1) "with me, this person is honestly himself/herself"; and (2) "my relationship with this person is open and direct." The scale was anchored by 0 (very strongly uncharacteristic of the relationship) and 6 (very strongly characteristic of the relationship). Inter-item consistency was high (α = .93).

To examine possible differences relative to trust in the leader, we utilized an adapted version of the Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI) (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996) short form focused specifically on trust in the leader. A sample item for affective trust is "I feel that the leader will keep his

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word". A sample item for cognitive trust is "I think that the leader will take advantage of his followers' problems" (reverse coded). Coefficient alphas of .94 were obtained for both the overall scale and affective trust. Inter-item consistency for the cognitive trust items was also high (α = .90).

In this study positivity was operationalized as the expression of positive emotions. Positive emotions were measured using an adaptation of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Crawford and Henry (2004) employed confirmatory factor analysis to validate that the PANAS contains two distinct factors, one reflecting positive affect and the second reflecting negative affect. The scale used in this study contained only the positive items, which answers the question "how positive are you" rather than categorizing participants as having either positive or negative emotions. Various timeframes have been used to establish the frame of reference for responding to each of the particular emotions. Because we were interested in state affectivity we asked participants about their current emotions. Using the stem "Please rate the extent to which you feel … at this point in time" participants rated their feelings on a scale anchored

from 1 (very slight, or not at all) to 5 (very much). Emotions measured included alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, and proud. Coefficient alpha for the positive emotions scale was .92.

RESULTS

The results for our original design revealed no statistically significant differences between the two transparency treatments. That is, the participants' responses to the trust or positive emotions scales did not differ across the two conditions. However, exploratory analyses revealed that using the manipulation check of participants' transparency perceptions produced statistically significant differences on the outcome variables. In other words, regardless of the experimental condition, participants who perceived the leader to be more transparent reported higher levels of trust and more positive emotions.

In this section, the post hoc results and exploratory analyses are presented. Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and scale reliabilities, are presented in Table 1. All coefficient alphas exceeded the recommended minimum value of .70 (Nunnally, 1970).

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Reliabilities

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Transparency	110	3.77	0.58	*0.93*				
Trust, overall	120	4.67	0.86	.50**	*0.94*			
Trust, affective	120	4.53	0.95	.44**	.50**	*0.94*		
Trust, cognitive	120	4.81	0.86	.52**	.52**	.78**	*0.90*	
Positive emotions	122	3.53	0.86	.27**	.26**	.31**	.19*	*0.92*

*Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; numbers on main diagonal are alpha reliabilities*

Discriminant validity was assessed by computing the average variance extracted. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest a criterion of .50 or greater to indicate the amount of variance extracted. If average variance extracted is less than the cutoff the variance due to measurement error is greater than variance due to the construct. Additionally, adequate discriminant validity is indicated if the square root of the average variance extracted (√AVE) is greater than those values in its corresponding rows and columns (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Here, leadership (√AVE = .78) and transparency (√AVE = .82) met this criterion in relation to all dimensions of trust (√AVE = .81). Cognitive (√AVE = .81) and affective trust (√AVE = .86) were also shown to be distinct from the other constructs.

Although the experimenter manipulations did not yield significant results, the manipulation check was used in post hoc analyses to determine whether participants' perceptions

of transparency revealed an effect on trust, its two dimensions, and positive emotions. Perceptions of transparency and the aggregate trust measure were significantly correlated (r=.38, p<.01). Significant correlations, of similar value, were also found for the affective and cognitive elements of the OTI. In other words, trust ratings were higher for those participants who perceived the leader to be more transparent.

Additionally, trust was regressed on follower perceptions of transparency (Table 2). We found a significant relationship between transparency perceptions and trust (β = .50, p < .001) as well as for the affective (β = .44, p < .001), and cognitive (β = .52, p < .001), dimensions of the Cummings and Bromiley (1996) scale. Therefore, leader→trust relationships were positive for perceptions of transparency.

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TABLE 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis
for Variables Predicting Overall Trust (N = 110)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Trust, overall scale			
Step 1			
Transparency	0.71	0.12	.50***
Step 2			
Transparency	0.66	0.12	.47***
Positive emotions	0.10	0.08	0.11
Trust, affective factor			
Step 1			
Transparency	0.68	0.13	.44***
Step 2			
Transparency	0.62	0.14	.41***
Positive emotions	0.14	0.09	0.14
Trust, cognitive factor			
Step 1			
Transparency	0.74	0.12	.52***
Step 2			
Transparency	0.7	0.12	.49***
Positive emotions	0.07	0.08	0.07

*Note. *$p < .05$*; **$p < .01$*; ***$p < .001$

Overall trust, $R^2 = .25$*** for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2

Affective trust, $R^2 = .20$*** for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2

Cognitive trust, $R^2 = .27$*** for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2

Positive Affect as Mediator

The mediator analyses were conducted based upon the method recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). Specifically, we computed the beta weights and zero-order and partial correlations among the variables in the study. As described by Baron and Kenny (1986), complete mediation occurs when the relationship between two variables is mitigated by the introduction of a third, mediating variable.

Tests of the relationship between transparency and trust revealed that while a significant direct effect was identified, these relationships were not mediated by positive emotions (see Table 2). Positive emotions were significantly related to transparency ($r = .27$, $p < .01$), overall trust ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), and the affective ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) and cognitive ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) trust dimensions. However, when the positive emotions scale was introduced to the regression of trust on

transparency, its effect was non-significant for overall ($\beta = .11$, n.s.) and both trust dimensions (Affective: $\beta = .14$, n.s.; Cognitive: $\beta = .07$, n.s.). Therefore, while Hypothesis 1 was supported (transparency→trust), the mediating effect of positive emotions (Hypothesis 2) was not.

DISCUSSION

Overall, our findings are promising for the study of leader transparency and its relationship to follower trust. Additionally, the mediating effects of positivity are also promising. There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

First, trust appeared to make a critical contribution to the discoveries made in this research. In this study, a positive and statistically significant relationship was discovered between participants' ratings of trust and perceptions of transparency. This supports the Gardner and

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colleagues (2005) assertion that today's leaders must be more transparent in order to elicit their followers' trust.

This finding is intriguing because it implies that how transparently leaders behave may be less important than how transparent followers perceive leaders to be. This raises an interesting corollary to Erickson's (1995) assertion that authenticity, of which transparency is a theoretical component (Kernis, 2003), has less to do whether or not a person is authentic, than do the conditions and context within which it occurs. In this study, perhaps the conditions and contexts within which the participants undertook the investigation allowed some of the participants to see more transparency in the leader's conduct than others.

Another conclusion is that regardless of how trust is operationalized in terms of factors and dimensions, perceptions of a leader's transparency are an important consideration. Importantly, participants rated a leader significantly higher in terms of trust and positivity when the leader was rated as more leader like and transparent. While our cross-sectional analysis does not allow us to infer causality, the relationships between transparency, positivity and the trust dimensions were largely significant.

Additionally, the impact of positivity on trust relationships is interesting. While positive emotional appeals and relationships did not appear to mediate the transparency→trust relationship, further research should be conducted on these relationships given the positive correlations discovered between positive emotions and both cognitive and affect trust dimensions. Such findings are particularly important given that trust has been shown to have further "downstream" impacts on such variables as job satisfaction, employee retention, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance (Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003; Corbitt & Martz, 2003; Costa, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Clearly, the relationship between positivity and trust levels is important and should continue to be examined in future studies.

A leader's transparency was hypothesized to have a positive relationship with followers' positive emotions, which was found to be the case in this sample. Open and honest communications (Ekvall, 1996) and transparency (Gardner et al., 2005) have been suggested as positive influences on affect. The issues involved with the operationalization of transparency, and the short-term nature of the study, may explain why the experimenter designed manipulations did not operate to reveal the originally hypothesized relationships. This is offered with the knowledge that Fredrickson (2003) asserted that emotions can be influenced in the short-term. However, it is important to emphasize that when perceptions of transparency were entered into the model, the relationship between transparency and trust was manifest.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. First, the sample was drawn from a narrow population (public school leaders) who self-selected into the study. Although participants who self-select (e.g., volunteer) may be more motivated to participate (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), selection was nonetheless a threat also to internal validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

Another limitation was the web-based nature of this study. Although web-based interventions have been found to be effective for learning and development (Hill, Douglas, Gordon, & Pighin, 2003), a brief and virtual interaction with a leader may not be adequate to elicit a reaction of trust and emotion in a participant. Sosik, Avolio, and Kahai (1998) noted that in computer mediated discussion there is a loss of nonverbal behaviors and status and position cues. These cues are not only important to leadership, but also to communicating transparency, which may have affected how transparent the manipulations occurred to the participants.

The final limitation involved single source bias. The data consisted of followers' self-reported observations and perceptions. While the study did not collect data from multiple sources, the effort to collect the various data at two different time points may have mitigating the potential effects of common source bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, given the limitations of non-experimental research (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2008), the use of cross sectional data suggests that inferences cannot be made without caution.

Implications for Management

The work context "serves as a catalyst for both leadership and development" (Day & O'Connor, 2003, p. 12). With regard to authenticity, Erickson (1995) argued that the primary question is under what conditions and context does authenticity occur? This study and its results have offered some insights and suggested directions for the further exploration of transparency. Although trust is an important organizational outcome in its own right, it is related to other important outcomes such as affect (Schoorman et al., 2007); creativity in organizational relationships (Ekvall, 1996); and customer satisfaction (Butler, 1991).

Transparency allows a leader to explore opportunities to set an example for others in the organization to behave similarly. This occurs through valuing and achieving openness in leader-follower relationships by acting appropriately and displaying one's true self to relevant others.

One implication of the findings is that when leaders elicit positive responses in their followers through transparency, positive effects on participants' trust in the leader may accrue. Moreover, by engendering higher trust in

the leader, followers may experience higher levels of positive emotions (Jones & George, 1998).

Future Research

This study has sparked additional research questions related to the study of leader transparency and its effects on trust as well as the mediating role of positivity. These consist of ideas relevant to the construct itself, as well as to its operationalization in scientific research. Given our results, it is necessary to step back and explore how transparency can be effectively operationalized in order to capture its subtle differences in experimental research.

Transparency may rely greatly on a person's implicit theory of openness and transparency (Gardner et al., 2005). Therefore, it is possible that expressed transparency may be confused with similar constructs such as message content and volume of information shared. Future research findings may be influenced by the level of leader transparency that the participants typically experience in the course of their lives.

Another necessary approach is to control for confounding variables. For example, Collins and Miller (1994), in a meta-analysis, found relationships between self-disclosure and liking. People disclose more to people they like; people like others after having disclosed to them, and those who disclose more intimately are liked more than those who disclose less intimately. Taken together, these results suggest that various disclosure-liking effects can be integrated and viewed as operating together within a dynamic interpersonal system. The implication for organizational research is that if participants like the leader represented in an experiment then positive attributions may be made on a variety of dimensions whether representative or not (e.g., management halo effect may arise).

The influence of time on transparent relationships is also an important area for future research. Longitudinal studies are necessary to explore time effects. In a short term interaction with little face-to-face contact, such as those employed in this study, follower perceptions of transparency may offer more explanation than genuine leader transparency. A longer intervention whereby participants become more familiar with the leader and the experimental manipulations are designed to more convincingly demonstrate transparent behavior over a longer time period may yield useful results.

Avolio and colleagues (Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2003; Sosik, Avolio, & Kahai, 1998) cited common limitations in their studies of leadership in electronic meeting systems, similar to those of this study. Primarily, the manipulations were somewhat weak in that their leaders were not members of the groups, but were simply facilitators who had no prior interaction with the group nor had credibility with research participants.

While the technological context is relevant to the study of transparency in leader-follower relationships, so too is the global context. Currently, organizations such as Transparency International have developed indices by which national corruption is rated. However, there is no global measure of how transparency operates across national culture or what moderating variables might be in operation (i.e., cultural intelligence, etc.). A useful area of research in an increasingly global marketplace is the study of cultural dimensions and how transparency operates across them. For example, Hofestede (2001) posited "power distance" as one of five dimensions on which national cultures differ. Might there be less transparency in a culture with a higher level of power distance than in a nation with closer personal working relationships between leaders and followers? Similarly, in Trompenaar's (2000) work the notion of specific vs. diffuse cultures is addressed. This dimension represents how far people are willing to get involved, display emotions in dealing with other people, and engage others in areas of life and personality. For example, a specific orientation would require the segregation of work tasks from personal dealings which might be rife for a less than transparent interaction.

As mentioned previously, context is an important element in the study of leadership and transparency. Disclosures vary across situations and one's past disclosures cannot be assumed to predict disclosure in a different situation or to different targets (Crozby, 1973). The discussion of context must also impact the levels of transparency and trust achieved during online interactions. The experiments described above utilized web-based interventions, which may have impacted participants' perceptions of leadership and trust, as well as their reported trust in the virtual leader. Although participants found the experimental tasks to be relevant we do not know if the perceptions changed as a result of the online experience. Deitz-Uhler, Bishop-Clarke and Howard (2005) suggested that there are different rules for online disclosures that may actually result in higher levels of disclosure due to deindividualization.

CONCLUSION

Today's leaders are expected to demonstrate, through their words and deeds, the importance of transparency (Gardner et al., 2005). Trust is an important proximal outcome of the leader-follower relationship and is evoked through a leader's transparency, which is proposed to result in greater trust in interpersonal relationships (Kernis, 2003). Followers trust their leaders based largely on their perceptions of said leaders' behaviors. It is important that leaders' behaviors are consistent and aligned with their espoused values or followers will not see them as transparent. In keeping with our previous discussion and findings, leaders who are more transparent are expected to elicit higher levels of trust from their followers (Gardner et al., 2005).

Although transparency is an emerging research topic in the organization sciences, it is somewhat difficult to

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operationalize, as evidenced by the research reported here. It is ephemeral, highly context-driven and the effects often reside in the eyes of the beholders. A variety of challenges and obstacles to the study of transparency exist. Nevertheless, given the attention this construct is receiving from management practitioners and scholars, and the purported benefits of transparency, it is important that the quest to understand its origins and effects be continued.

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