eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

No Leader is an Island: Contextual Antecedents to Line Managers' Constructive and

Destructive Leadership during an Organizational Intervention

Accepted 17 February 2020

International Journal of Workplace Health Management

Lundmark, Robert[1,2], Karina Nielsen[3,] Hasson, Henna[1,4,] von Thiele Schwarz, Ulrica[1,5], & Tafvelin, Susanne[1,2]

[1] Medical Management Centre, Department of Learning, Informatics, Management and Ethics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

[2] Department of Psychology, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

[3] Institute of Work Psychology, Sheffield University Management School, Sheffield, U.K.

[4] Centre for Epidemiology and Community Medicine, Stockholm County Council, Stockholm, Sweden

[5] School of Health, Care and Social Welfare, Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden

*Robert Lundmark, Department of Psychology, Umeå University, 901 87 Umeå, Sweden, E-mail: robert.lundmark@umu.se, Phone: +46907866314

Karina Nielsen, Institute of Work Psychology, Sheffield University Management School, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN, U.K., E-mail: k.m.nielsen@sheffield.ac.uk, Phone: +441142220983

Henna Hasson, Medical Management Centre, Department of Learning, Informatics, Management and Ethics, Karolinska Institutet, 171 77 Stockholm, Sweden, E-mail: henna.hasson@ki.se, Phone: +46736340730

Ulrica von Thiele Schwarz, School of Health, Care and Social Welfare, Mälardalen University, Box 883, 721 23 Västerås, Sweden, E-mail: ulrica.schwarz@mdh.se, Phone: +46707553191

Susanne Tafvelin, Department of Psychology, Umeå University, 901 87 Umeå, Sweden E-mail: susanne.tafvelin@umu.se, Phone: +46907866629

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Purpose: Line managers can make or break organizational interventions, yet little is known about what makes them turn in either direction. As leadership does not occur in a vacuum it has been suggested that the organizational context plays an important role. Building on the intervention and leadership literature, we examine if span of control and employee readiness for change are related to line managers' leadership during an organizational intervention.

Design: Leadership is studied in terms of intervention-specific constructive, as well as passive and active forms of destructive, leadership behaviors. As a sample, we use employees (N = 172) from 37 groups working at a process industry plant. Multilevel analyses over two time points, with both survey and organizational register data were used to analyze the data.

Findings: The results revealed that span of control was negatively related to constructive leadership and positively related to passive destructive leadership during the intervention. Employee readiness for change was positively related to constructive leadership, and negatively related to both passive and active destructive leadership.

Practical implications: Our findings suggest that contextual factors need to be assessed and considered if we want line managers to engage in constructive rather than destructive leadership during interventions.

Originality/value: The present study is the first to address line managers' making or breaking of organizational interventions by examining the influence of context on both their destructive and constructive leadership.

Introduction

Line managers play a key role when it comes to managing organizational interventions (i.e., interventions that aim to change the way work is organized, designed and managed to improve employee health and well-being; Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010). They function as the communication link between senior management and employees and are therefore vital for sharing information about the intervention in both directions. They are also often responsible for translating the planned intervention into concrete changes to working practices and procedures. Furthermore, they manage employee expectations and questions about the intervention and make everyday decisions on the prioritization of intervention activities in relation to managing everyday operations (Nielsen, 2017). Consequently, line managers may either make or break organizational interventions (Nielsen, 2017; Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2000). The intervention literature includes several examples of line managers hindering or facilitating the implementation of interventions (Nielsen, 2013). However, what makes line managers turn in either direction has so far received little attention (Nielsen, 2017).

Reviewing the literature, Nielsen (2017) concluded that besides personal resources and attitudes towards change among line managers, contextual factors may play an important role for how leader enact leadership during interventions. Therefore, if we are to gain a better understanding of what conditions are needed for line managers to engage in making organizational interventions achieve their intended outcomes, researching contextual prerequisites to their behaviors is crucial.

Each organization has its specific setting and history, and the context in which the organizational intervention take place needs to be understood (Johns, 2006). In organizations, context provides constraints and opportunities that influence organizational members' behaviors (Johns, 2006). For organizational changes to occur, there needs to be an

enabling context that offers opportunities and support for the adaption of new behaviors (Johns, 2006). Thus, without understanding how contextual factors influence both line managers' and employees' behaviors, the impact of an intervention risks being minimal or even negative (Nytrø, et al., 2000). For example, the supportive behaviors of line managers during interventions have been suggested to depend on the level of support they received from both senior management and employees (Nielsen, Randall, & Christensen, 2010).

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the impact of two contextual antecedents, span of control (i.e., the number of employees organized directly under a manager and reporting to him/her, Schyns, Maslyn, & Weibler, 2010) and *employees'* readiness for change (i.e., the perceived benefit of-, ability to-, and need for executing the planned change, Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993), on line managers' constructive and destructive leadership behaviors during the implementation of an organizational intervention.

The contributions of our study are twofold. First, we examine the prospective relationship between two discrete contextual antecedents and leadership during the implementation of an organizational intervention. We use survey data from two time-points together with register data provided from the organization's HR-department. The two antecedents deal with different aspects of context, but have both been suggested to affect leadership during interventions (Ipsen, Gish, & Poulsen, 2015; Nielsen, 2017). We believe that these variables may be crucial for the creation of good conditions for organizational interventions. Successful implementation of organizational interventions is highly dependent on employees' active participation and supportive actions from line managers, which can only be created through continuous positive interaction (Nielsen, 2013). Span of control and employee readiness for change are both contextual factors that have the potential to affect the quality of the manager-employee relationship by regulating physical distance (span of control) and social acceptance for behaviors (employee readiness for change). Although context has

been used as a post-intervention explanation to why line managers facilitated or hindered implementation, studies that directly investigate the influence of context on line managers' behaviors are lacking (Nielsen, 2017). Since contextual antecedents to leadership in general have not received much attention in empirical studies (Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Walter & Bruch, 2010), the present study can also be viewed as a contribution to the literature on contextual antecedents to leadership in general.

Second, we include measures of both constructive and destructive intervention-specific leadership in our analysis (Larsson, Fors Brandebo, & Nilsson, 2012; Skogstad et al., 2014). Quantitative studies of leadership during interventions have, to the best of our knowledge, solely researched line managers' constructive behaviors (e.g. Lundmark, von Thiele Schwarz, Hasson, Stenling, & Tafvelin, 2018). In the leadership literature, it has recently been suggested that destructive leadership may have a greater effect on outcomes than constructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013) and that constructive leadership therefore should be measured concurrently with destructive leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014). Although the present study focuses on antecedents and not outcomes, we believe that it is equally important to study the impact of antecedents on a range of leadership styles. Researching the influence of contextual factors on both constructive and destructive leadership concurrently can help answer what leads line managers to either make or break organizational interventions.

Intervention-specific Constructive and Destructive Leadership

There is a growing number of studies that link line managers' leadership to intervention outcomes (Havermans et al., 2016; Nielsen, 2013).

For example, Higgs and Rowland (2011) found that line managers building an appealing case for the intervention was effective in engaging employees and evoking a sense

of need for change that motivated them to implement the intervention. They also observed that challenging and supporting employees to find their own way to manage change and attracting employees to change by inspirational actions were significant for successful implementation. In the present study, we use the term constructive leadership (Skogstad et al., 2014) to describe leadership behaviors that support both the organization (i.e., its goals, tasks and strategy), and the employees (i.e., enhancing their motivation, well-being and job attitudes).

Besides constructive leadership behaviors during interventions, the opposite (i.e.., ineffective, invisible and "dark side" change leadership behaviors) has been observed (Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Nielsen, 2017). Line managers have, for example, been found to withhold information (Randall, Griffiths, & Cox, 2005) or restrict employees from participating in intervention activities (Dahl-Jorgensen & Saksvik, 2005). Mellor et al. (2011) observed line managers resisting to implement an intervention. Similarly, Ipsen et al. (2015) found that some line managers were unsupportive, unengaged, and did not prioritize the intervention. In sum, these findings indicate that besides a constructive leadership, destructive forms of leadership behaviors can be at play during interventions.

Somewhat different definitions and operationalizations of destructive leadership have been used (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Still, most authors seem to agree that managers' volitional behaviors that can harm both the organization (e.g., by undermining goals, tasks and effectiveness) and employees, e.g., by negatively affecting motivation, wellbeing or job-satisfaction, are to be considered as a destructive leadership (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013).

Although different in appearance, passive leadership behaviors (i.e., a laissez-faire leadership, avoidance or absence of leadership) can also be considered as a form of destructive leadership (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005). As with active

destructive leadership, passive destructive leadership behaviors may also undermine organizational objectives and employee motivation (Einarsen et al., 2007; Skogstad et al., 2014). In line with suggestions from Skogstad et al. (2014), we therefore explore the impact of context on both active and passive forms of destructive leadership.

Additionally, it has been argued that leadership behaviors should be addressed specifically with regard to the implementation of an organizational intervention (Lewis, Yarker, & Donaldson-Fielder, 2012). A line manager who is generally perceived as enacting constructive or destructive may be directing his or her efforts toward a different cause (such as reaching production targets) rather than implementation of the intervention (Lundmark, von Thiele Schwarz, Hasson, Stenling, & Tafvelin, 2018). We therefore assess leadership, both constructive and destructive, specifically in relation to implementing an intervention (i.e., intervention-specific; Lundmark et al., 2018).

Span of Control as a Contextual Antecedent to Leadership during Interventions

Different managerial roles imply different demands on the interaction with employees during interventions, depending on the tasks and features of the specific role (Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009). During organizational interventions, line managers (as concluded above) hold a particularly important role in which their constructive interaction with employees are crucial for achieving intended changes (Higgs & Roland, 2011; Nielsen, 2017). Contextual boundary conditions in terms of the organizational structure can limit the possibilities for such interaction (Walter & Bruch, 2010). Among the conditions affecting the relationship, span of control has been suggested as a vital component since it can affect the establishment of high-quality relationships between line managers and employees (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Line managers often have limited resources in terms of time and energy, which, combined with a large span of control create a physical and functional (e.g., frequent and duration of contact with employees) distance from employees (Schyns et al., 2010).

Additionally, interventions often lead to an increase and diversity of work tasks, with intervention activities often being added upon daily duties (Tvedt, Saksvik & Nytrø, 2009). They often also bring about a destabilization of the organization when novel work practices and procedures are introduced (Nielsen et al., 2010). Interventions often add (sometimes conflicting) goals, which need organizing around in a different manner than the general organizational goals (Ipsen et al., 2015).

Thus, as the role of line managers becomes more salient during organizational interventions (Higgs & Roland, 2011), having a smaller span of control can enable more opportunities for high-quality interactions with employees and time to plan for activities and follow-up of intervention goals. Line managers with a smaller span of control may therefore be more likely to be able to perform constructive leadership behaviors than those with a larger span of control. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1a—Span of control (at baseline, T1) will be negatively related to a constructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

Line managers with a larger span of control may have less time to engage in constructive leadership behaviors with employees, such as providing support or challenging them to adopt new ways of performing their jobs (Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005). Subsequently, we suggest that line managers with a large span of control may enact more passive (destructive) leadership behaviors in relation to the intervention. When they lack time and opportunity to lead both daily operations and intervention activities, the intervention may not be prioritized. As a result of line managers directing their attention elsewhere, employees may perceive them as avoiding matters related to the intervention, such as not being there to answer questions. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1b—Span of control (at baseline, T1) will be positively related to a passive destructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

The distance created by a large span of control suggests that relationships between line managers and employees are of less high-quality (Howell & Shamir, 2005). During interventions, time for increased interaction is often needed to support new employee behaviors and handle difficulties as they arise. The already high demands put on line managers with large span of control may thus increase even further when intervention activities are added to daily operations (Tvedt et al., 2009). A large span of control increases the risk of manager–employee relationships becoming distrustful (Schyns et al., 2010). Even though a large span of control suggests less time spent with employees, adding the extra strain that an intervention provides could enhance the risk for distrustful low-quality interactions when interactions do occur with employees. As a consequence of employees experiencing that their line manager does not trust them, line managers may be perceived as acting actively destructive. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1c—Span of control (at baseline, T1) will be positively related to an active destructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

Employee Readiness for Change as a Contextual Antecedent to Leadership during Interventions

An organizational intervention does not only need to fit the structural context of the organization but also the needs and experiences of those affected (Lundmark et al., 2018). Employees are more likely to accept and support activities initiated by their leader when they perceive that these originate from shared norms, values and beliefs (Hogg, 2001). Besides possibilities to interact, employees' acceptance, support and willingness to cooperate are

resources that may empower line managers' constructive leadership behaviors (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Thus, when employees want the changes introduced by the intervention and perceive the changes as in line with their norms, values and beliefs, they will more readily accept and empower line managers' efforts to implement interventions (Nielsen, 2013).

It has also been argued that the acceptance of, as well as the pressure to perform, specific behaviors in a specific social context is contingent upon perceived social norms. In other words, when a person (e.g., a line manager) believes that other people in their context want him or her to perform a certain behavior, they are more likely to enact this behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The importance of employee attitudes as a social contextual antecedent to leadership has been highlighted by several authors (e.g., Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005; Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Walter & Bruch, 2010). Still, most studies focusing on employee attitudes have viewed it as an outcome of leadership behaviors, rather than a possible antecedent (Howell & Shamir, 2005).

The concept of readiness for change is, in essence, trying to capture the participants' attitudes toward planned interventions. On an individual level, readiness for change reflects the sum of perceived benefit of-, ability to-, and need for executing the planned change. (Armenakis et al., 1993). Readiness for change has been incorporated into intervention process evaluation models as a central component of participants' attitudes towards the intervention (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013; von Thiele Schwarz, Lundmark, & Hasson, 2016). It has also been extensively used as a process measure in empirical evaluations of organizational-level interventions (Havermans et al., 2016).

Line managers do not lead organizational interventions in a vacuum. Their leadership behaviors occur in a social context of enthusiastic or less enthusiastic others (Nytrø et al., 2000). When employees' express attitudes related to the intervention (i.e., in terms of readiness for change), line managers may adjust their behaviors to meet employees'

expectations (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). If these displays of attitudes are positive, line managers may feel empowered and supported in their efforts to achieve the objectives of the intervention. Thus, they will be more motivated to enact a constructive leadership in support of the change. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2a—Employee readiness for change (at baseline, T1) will be positively related to a constructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

If employees instead question the intervention, line managers may feel less inclined to respond enthusiastically to questions concerning the planned changes (Nielsen, 2017). Line managers who perceive limited support for the intervention among their employees may thus withdraw from interaction in matters concerning the intervention. In doing so, line managers avoid the risk of confrontation and having to deal with the discomfort that facing the less enthusiastic employees may bring. In turn, line managers' avoidance and passivity may lead to employee perceptions of line managers' behaviors as passive destructive. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2b - Employee readiness for change (at baseline, T1) will be negatively related to a passive destructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

Alternatively, line managers may perceive that employees, by the display of low readiness for change, are blocking their pursuit of implementing the intervention (Krasikova et al., 2013). As a result, they may feel frustrated and pressured. Instead of initiating dialogue and trying to reach a shared attractive vision of what the intervention will bring about, line managers may use their position to force change, or actively hinder employees from participating in intervention activities (Einarsen et al., 2007). By, for example, act in a

menacing manner, line managers will be perceived as being actively destructive in their efforts to introduce the changes. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2c—Employee readiness for change (at baseline, T1) will be negatively related to an active destructive leadership during implementation of the intervention (14 months after baseline, T2).

Method

Design and Procedure

This prospective multi-level study uses organizational register data and employee questionnaire data from an organizational intervention. The intervention was conducted in a process industry setting over the course of two years (2016–2017). The register data involved number of employees per group at the lowest group level (i.e., groups with no managerial level beneath) and was obtained from the organization's HR department register. The register data was used as a measure of line managers' span of control. Data on employee readiness for change was collected shortly before employees were involved in the intervention (T1). The leadership measures were collected 14 months after baseline (at T2), when the intervention was ongoing and employees were considered to have sufficient experience of their line managers' leadership during the intervention to be able to evaluate it.

Participants

The sample of the present study was derived from employees in the 37 work groups of the organization. The groups consisted of 686 employees (according to organizational data) who were all invited to participate at both T1 and T2. Some employees were absent due to sick leave or parental leave, and others were only employed part-time. Due to organizational absence records being confidential, we were unable to identify these employees. A total of 538 employees (78 % of the N = 686 listed employees) accessed the

web-based questionnaire, which could be seen as an indication of the number of people present.

A total of 292 employees (43 % of the listed employees) responded to the questionnaire at T1 providing ratings of employee readiness for change. A total of 375 employees (55 % of the listed employees) responded to the questionnaire at T2 and provided ratings of leadership. Answering the questionnaires was voluntary, and the respondents could choose not to answer questions within the questionnaires. The respondents could also choose to complete the questionnaire but not allow the data to be used in research, further reducing the available sample. A total of 228 employees (33 % of the listed employees) who answered the questionnaires also agreed to have their answers used for research purposes. Of these, 225 employees responded to the questions on readiness for change at T1, and $N = 172$ also responded to the questions concerning leadership (76 % of the agreeing respondents from T1, and 25 % of the listed employees, according to the organizational scheme). These 172 employees constitute the panel sample used for the analysis in this study.

In the panel sample, 81 % were men and 19 % were women. Average age was 49 years, and average tenure was 24 years. In the provided employee records from the organization, 71% of the employees were men, and 29% were women. Average age was 47 years, and average tenure was 20 years. The panel sample was compared with data provided on all employees by the organization. Independent sample T-tests revealed that for gender, t (171) = -3.40, p = .001; there was a difference in that relatively more men were included in the panel sample. For age, t (172) = 2.08, p = .038, and for tenure, t (169) = 4.02, p = .000; differences were also found. The panel sample consisted of a slightly older population which had worked at the plant for a longer time.

The Intervention

In conjunction with a decision to make hardware investments and structural changes (i.e. streamlining positions and reorganize), senior management decided to initiate an organizational intervention. The objective of the intervention was to enhance managers' and employees' skills and abilities to redesign their work to fit within the new structure. Emphasis was put on redesigning work, not only to become more productive, but also to improve employee health and safety. The intervention thereby integrated efforts to improve employee health and safety with the redesign of work to fit the structural changes. The consultant-led intervention was planned and outlined by the top management in cooperation with the company's occupational health service.

A core part of the structural changes was to streamline positions and create possibilities for better horizontal and vertical alignment. Specialist representation (e.g., HR representatives and engineers) was included in the lowest level (section) management groups to enable more effective decision making. Changes were in some parts of the organization also made in terms of job enlargement, reduction of the work force through natural turnover and implementation of a management-by-objective follow-up system.

Simultaneously with the implementation of the structural changes the intervention, targeting line managers' and employees' redesign of work, was initiated. The intervention consisted of coaching of the section management groups (i.e. the lowest management groups which included line managers). The coaching focused on clarifying roles and expectations for the teams, improving the internal management team work, collaboration with other management teams and developing effective communication with employees. Thus, the aim was to align the work with-in and between the section management groups to facilitate the redesign efforts at the floor level (i.e., among employees).

The coaching also focused on line managers' employee-directed leader activities (e.g., their involvement of employees during meetings and engagement of employees in redesign

efforts during everyday operations). The coaching of the section management groups

consisted of eight days spread out over the initial two years of the intervention. Additional

coaching was available if requested by any team. Moreover, workshops were held during

regular meeting forums. The workshops targeted shared alignment and cooperation between

different sections of the plant (e.g., maintenance and production) as well as improvement of

meeting quality. All managers, employees and health and safety officers were also given

training in health and safety issues (e.g., how to perform health and safety inspections

effectively and how to include health and safety discussions in everyday operations).

Measures

Span of control was measured by creating a group size variable based on

information from organizational charts for each of the 37 groups. The organizational charts

were provided by the organization. Employees' reports on organizational group (and thus line

manager) belonging in the survey made it possible to identify span of control when matching

these variables. Group sizes ranged from n = 3 to n = 51, with an average of n = 19 members

per group.

Readiness for change was measured using the four-item scale in the

Intervention Process Measure (Randall et al., 2009). The four items reflect participants'

individual confidence in-, and expectations of, the intervention leading to positive outcomes,

as well as their individual motivation towards-, and acceptance of, the changes that the

intervention will bring about. For example: "I look forward to the changes that [name of the

intervention] will bring about." Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from

1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, internal consistency (omega

coefficient [ω]; McDonald, 1999) of the four-item scale was .86.

Line managers' leadership was measured with scales reflecting constructive and destructive (both passive and active forms), leadership behaviors' during the intervention. In line with previous research (e.g., Lewis et al., 2012; Lundmark et al., 2018) arguing for the importance to measure leadership in relation to a specific cause, we measured leadership as intervention specific, thus reflecting the context of the study. For example: "Behaves in a way that displays a commitment toward implementing [name of intervention]" (constructive), "Delays responding to urgent questions that concerns [name of the intervention]" (destructive-passive), "Treats people differently when we are working with the implementation of [name of the intervention]" (destructive-active).

The constructive leadership measure was composed of four items taken from the 10-item Intervention-specific transformational leadership (IsTL) scale (Lundmark et al., 2018). As the different dimensions of transformational leadership load high on a single "transformational" factor (e.g., Tracey & Hinkin, 1998), composite measures of this constructive leadership style have previously been suggested as a valid alternative (Carless, Wearing, & Mann, 2000). Following methods for scale reduction (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006), we chose four items based on theoretical and psychometric properties, reflecting the repeatedly empirically found dimensions of charisma, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Each item on the scale were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = frequently or always). In the present study, internal consistency (ω) of the constructive leadership four-item scale was .89.

Following the example of Skogstad et al. (2014), laissez-faire leadership was used as an indicator of destructive leadership in passive form. It was measured by adapting the four-item scale from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass, 2004) to become intervention-specific (as presented above). Each item on the scale were rated on a 5-

point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = frequently or always). Internal consistency (ω) of the four-item passive destructive leadership scale in the present study was .90.

Destructive leadership in active form was measured by adapting the four items of the Arrogant/Unfair sub-scale and four items from the Ego-oriented/False sub-scale in the Destrudo-L questionnaire (Larsson et al., 2012). In relation to the Einarsen et al. (2007) model of destructive leadership, the Arrogant/Unfair scale corresponds to tyrannical leadership behaviors (i.e., leaders being destructive toward employees but constructive in relation to reaching organizational outcomes), and the Ego-oriented/False scale corresponds to derailed leadership behaviors (i.e., leaders acting in a destructive manner toward both employees and the organization; Larsson et al., 2012). Together, they thus cover the spectrum of active destructive leadership directed toward followers. Given their high relatedness in our sample (r = .77, p = .000), and the tested hypotheses in this study, we use them as a composite measure of active destructive leadership. Each item on the scale was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = frequently or always). Internal consistency (ω) of the active destructive leadership scale in the present study was .93.

Analysis

Since employees were clustered in work groups, we used multilevel modelling for the analysis. The analyses were made using Mplus software version 8 with robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimation (Muthén & Muthén, 2015). One of the independent variables, line managers' span of control, has no individual-level variance and was therefore only modelled on a between (group) level. The other independent variable, employee readiness for change, is mainly considered to be an individual-level variable (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013).Computation of intraclass correlations (ICCs; see for example Muthén, 1991) confirmed this assumption with only 3.5 % of the variance explained

by the clustering structure (i.e., work group). Employee readiness for change was thus modelled at the within level only.

Results

Table 1 displays summary statistics and correlations for all variables. As expected, at the within level, employee readiness for change at T1 was positively correlated to a constructive leadership and negatively correlated to a destructive leadership (both in passive and active form) at T2. At the group level, span of control was negatively correlated with constructive leadership and positively associated with passive destructive leadership. However, no significant relationship with an active destructive leadership was found.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Next, the results of the multilevel analysis showed that on the group level, as hypothesized (Hypothesis 1a), span of control was negatively related to a constructive leadership at T2 (β = -.51, p = .016). In line with Hypothesis 1b, span of control was positively related to a passive destructive leadership at T2 (β = .66, p = .006). However, span of control was not related to an active destructive leadership at T2 (β = .13, p = .746), and thus Hypothesis 1c was not supported by the data.

At the individual level of analysis, employee readiness for change at T1 was positively associated with a constructive leadership at T2 (β = .30, p < .001), thus supporting Hypothesis 2a. Support was also found for Hypotheses 2b and 2c, as employee readiness for change was negatively related to a passive destructive leadership at T2 (β = -.22, p = .015) as well as to an active destructive leadership at T2 (β = -.20, p = .016). The multilevel model is presented in Figure 1, with the upper part describing the between (group)-level model and the lower part the within (individual)-level model.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

In summary, the results lend support to the hypothesis that contextual antecedents in terms of span of control and employee readiness for change are associated with both a constructive and a passive destructive leadership in expected directions. The results also indicate that low employee readiness for change could be a prerequisite for active destructive leadership. However, based on the results of the present study, span of control does not seem to be related to active destructive leadership.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated whether two contextual antecedents, span of control and employee readiness for change prior to the intervention implementation, were related to line managers' leadership during an organizational intervention. Leadership was studied in terms of both constructive, passive and active destructive leadership behaviors. Our study thus contributes to the emerging area of research that aims to understand why line managers may make or break organizational interventions (Nielsen, 2017).

The results lend support to Hypothesis 1a by showing that span of control negatively predicts constructive leadership behaviors during the intervention. A relatively small span of control was hence preferable if line managers were to display constructive leadership behaviors during the intervention. These results are in line with findings in the wider leadership literature (Rubin et al., 2005; Schyns et al., 2010) and show that span of control is also an aspect to consider for the effective leading of organizational interventions. In line with Hypothesis 1b, span of control was positively related to a passive destructive leadership during the intervention. The larger the distance between line managers and employees, the more likely line managers are to be perceived as being absent and unhelpful in efforts to implement the intervention. A large span of control may thus imply a leadership that is concluded to be ineffective and in the long run may represent a hindrance for intervention success.

No support was found for Hypothesis 1c, which suggested that span of control would be related to an active destructive leadership during the intervention. Based on previous suggestions (Schyns et al., 2010), we argued that a large span of control may increase the risk of relationships becoming more distrustful and interactions aversive, leading to employee perceptions of line managers as acting actively destructive. The low level of association between these factors indicate that for a leadership to be perceived as active destructive, there needs to be a certain level of interaction between managers and employees. A large span of control lessens the possibility for interaction and thereby also the likelihood for active forms of leadership to occur. Since neither a positive or negative association was found, it may be that the lack of opportunity to interact, combined with increased potential for aversive interactions, leads to a zero-sum result.

Furthermore, the results support all three Hypotheses (2 a-c) stating that employee readiness for change is positively related to constructive leadership and negatively to passive and active destructive leadership during the intervention. These results are in line with theoretical arguments saying that employees' positive attitudes play an important role for the emergence of constructive leadership both in general (e.g., Howell & Shamir, 2005) and during organizational interventions specifically (Nielsen, 2017). The results expand existing research showing that in this interactive process, low employee readiness for change is related to both passive and active destructive leadership behaviors. Taken together, the results of the present study show that contextual factors need to be considered if we are to understand line managers' hindering or facilitating of organizational interventions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Repeated calls have been made to consider organizational context in research on leadership in general (e.g., Oc, 2018; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Walter & Bruch, 2010) and specifically during organizational interventions (Nielsen, 2017). The results of our study adds

to the emerging research that lends empirical support to the importance of considering context. Recently, Oc (2018) presented an integrative framework for contextual leadership based on Johns' (2006) categorization of contextual factors as omnibus (the broader macro-level environment) and discrete (situational variables with-in the organization). These categories are also present in frameworks for process evaluation of organizational interventions (e.g., Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013). According to these frameworks, both span of control and employee readiness for change represent contextual variables. The context influences leadership behaviors, which in turn influence outcomes (Oc, 2018, Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013).

None of these frameworks deal specifically with leadership during interventions. Oc's (2018) framework focuses on the leadership process in general, and process evaluation frameworks only briefly mention leadership, as they include several variables that may influence intervention outcomes (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013). We suggest that the results of the present study and of other studies on contextual influence on leadership during interventions can be used to create an integrated framework. A framework that specifically considers contextual antecedents to line managers' behaviors during interventions, and thus combines the leadership and intervention perspectives. Such a combined framework could also be seen as a continuation and expansion of the suggested model of leader's role in organizational interventions (Nielsen, 2017). By making such an integration, we consider the specific conditions that organizational interventions contains and focus upon relevant contextual categories and elements that have been found to influence the leadership process.

From a practical perspective, our results indicate that it is important to recognize line managers' context when planning and implementing organizational interventions. If line managers do not have the possibility of communicating and working together with employees on implementing organizational interventions, they may instead behave destructively. This

could imply that we will also be stuck with the negative consequences that a destructive leadership can bring about, which often seem to be the case, judging from the results of prior evaluations (Egan, Bambra, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2009).

Assessing line managers' discrete context as part of intervention planning can be a first step to make sure that they have the possibility to inspire and engage employees in the change efforts. A second step would be to adjust aspects of the discrete context based on the assessment, that is, adding a so-called supporting intervention directed at increasing opportunities for managers to act constructively (von Thiele Schwarz et al., 2016). With the result of the present study as a case, improving line managers' access to social support by involving employees at an early stage in the planning of the intervention can be one way of doing this. Reducing line managers' physical distance to employees by decreasing their span of control could also be helpful. As a result, possibilities to interact more frequently may help increase the likelihood for a constructive leadership process. Alternatively, the intervention can be adapted, for example by introducing other change agents (e.g., employees) to support line managers with large groups, or the expectations of results adjusted to fit with the present context.

Directions for Future Research

Although this study provides support for focusing more on contextual antecedents to leadership during organizational intervention, more research is needed on which factors are influential. Information from qualitative studies and from the categories suggested in the frameworks discussed above offers suggestions for which additional factors to study (e.g., time pressure). Future studies should also consider ways of addressing how employees' previous experiences with the line manager, and line managers' convenience with the intervention influence employee perceptions of line managers' behaviors.

Research on interventions that aim to improve line managers' resources and opportunities for leading organizational interventions effectively are also needed. Additionally, although destructive leadership behaviors can be discerned from qualitative studies on line managers' behaviors, their influence on intervention outcomes have not been studied directly. Given the findings from the present study and the repeated argument that line managers may break interventions, studies that relates their breaking behaviors to outcomes would be warranted.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of our study is its design with multiple-data sources to prospectively test the hypothesis of contextual antecedents' impact on leadership during interventions. By using an objective measure as a group-level variable, we reduce the risk of common-method and common-source bias on that level of analysis (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We also concurrently measure outcomes in terms of three kinds of leadership styles: constructive as well as passive and active destructive leadership, which enables us to evaluate the relative influence of the contextual antecedents on suggested intervention making and breaking leadership behaviors (Nielsen, 2017).

Nevertheless, there are also limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of the study. First, response rates were relatively low, with the panel sample of n = 172 representing 25 % of the employees in studied groups, risking a biased sample. Additionally, the panel sample, relative to the total workforce, consisted of older men who had worked at the plant for a longer period of time compared to the total workforce at the plant.

Even though the sample may be somewhat biased in representation of the organization, we believe that the study design makes this less of an issue since the focus here is on the relative influence of contextual variables on different leadership styles during an intervention and not an evaluation of intervention effects. The distributions of answers (see

table 1), with constructive leadership and employee readiness for change being normally distributed, and the measures of destructive leadership being somewhat positively skewed is also in line with findings in studies with higher response rates (e.g., Larsson et al., 2012). The differences in age, gender and tenure between the panel sample and the total workforce could perhaps also be seen as a reflection of the societal context, in which younger women are more frequently absent due to parental leave and sick leave (Statistic Sweden, 2017).

Second, as has been concluded by, for example, Walter and Bruch (2010), distinguishing employees' attitudinal attributions of leadership qualities and actual observed leadership behaviors may be problematic when studying employees' attitudes as an antecedent to leadership. Employees' ratings of their line manager's leadership style during the intervention may have been colored more by their own readiness for change than reflecting actual leadership behaviors. It is also possible that employees' previous experiences of the relationship with their line manager affected their view on their behaviors during the intervention. Although we cannot rule out attitudinal attribution as an explanation for some of the results, the separation in time between the measures (i.e., 14 months), the use of intervention-specific leadership questions, and the fact that we also found a relationship between span of control and leadership makes it a less feasible explanation for the findings.

Furthermore, it could be argued that leadership also could be viewed as an antecedent to employee readiness for change, and that the relationship therefore should be studied reciprocally. Current process evaluation models (e.g., Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013) suggests that readiness for change should be measured at the onset of organizational interventions as it influences implementation. Similarly, line managers' (intervention-specific) leadership can only be measured during implementation (or retrospectively after) as it asks for behaviors related to implementation. Thus, the present study design did not allow us to examine a reciprocal relationship. This does not mean that we suggest that a pre-intervention general

constructive or destructive leadership was non-influential on employees' readiness for change. On the contrary, leadership is likely to have a reciprocal relationship with most social contextual variables as leadership by most definitions requires two way interactions.

Third, the data were collected from an organizational intervention in the process industry. Due to the lack of similar studies, we suggest replication and extension of the findings by testing the influence of discrete contextual factors (e.g., guided by the frameworks discussed above) on leadership in other interventions and settings. Until more studies have been conducted, generalization of the results from this study should be made with caution by testing the relationship with other interventions (e.g., individual interventions or more focused interventions) as well as in other industries and settings.

Conclusions

The present study is the first to explore line managers making or breaking of an organizational intervention by examining the influence of context on both their destructive and constructive leadership. Two contextual antecedents, which have not previously been linked to leadership styles during interventions were studied, and both were shown to be prospectively associated employees' perceptions of line managers' leadership. Increasing knowledge on contextual antecedents to leadership can help organizations secure the resources needed for line managers to facilitate implementation, and ultimately to achieve desired intervention outcomes.

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 179-211.

Armenakis, A. A., Harris, S. G., & Mossholder, K. W. (1993). Creating Readiness for Organizational Change. Human Relations, 46(6), 681-703.

Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2004). MLQ: Multifactor leadership questionnaire: Mind Garden.

Bommer, W. H., Rich, G. A., & Rubin, R. S. (2005). Changing attitudes about change: longitudinal effects of transformational leader behavior on employee cynicism about organizational change. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26(7), 733-753.

Carless, S. A., Wearing, A. J., & Mann, L. (2000). A Short Measure of Transformational Leadership. Journal of Business and Psychology, 14(3), 389-405.

Dahl-Jorgensen, C., & Saksvik, P. O. (2005). The impact of two organizational interventions on the health of service sector workers. International Journal of Health Services, 35(3), 529-549.

Dierdorff, E. C., Rubin, R. S., & Morgeson, F. P. (2009). The milieu of managerial work: An integrative framework linking work context to role requirements. Journal of Applied Psychology, 94(4), 972-988.

Egan, M., Bambra, C., Petticrew, M., & Whitehead, M. (2009). Reviewing evidence on complex social interventions: appraising implementation in systematic reviews of the health effects of organisational-level workplace interventions. J Epidemiol Community Health, 63.

Ehrhart, M. G., & Klein, K. J. (2001). Predicting followers' preferences for charismatic leadership: the influence of follower values and personality. The Leadership Quarterly, 12(2), 153-179.

Einarsen, S., Aasland, M. S., & Skogstad, A. (2007). Destructive leadership behaviour: A

    definition and conceptual model. The Leadership Quarterly, 18(3), 207-216.

Havermans, B. M., Schelvis, R. M. C., Boot, C. R., Brouwers, E. P., Anema, J. R., & Beek,

    A. J. (2016). Process variables in organizational stress management intervention

    evaluation research: a systematic review. Scand J Work Environ Health, 42.

Higgs, M., & Rowland, D. (2011). What Does It Take to Implement Change Successfully? A

    Study of the Behaviors of Successful Change Leaders. The Journal of Applied

    Behavioral Science.

Hogg, M. A. (2001). A Social Identity Theory of Leadership. Personality and Social

    Psychology Review, 5(3), 184-200.

Howell, J. M., & Shamir, B. (2005). The Role of Followers in the Charismatic Leadership

    Process: Relationships and Their Consequences. The Academy of Management

    Review, 30(1), 96-112.

Ipsen, C., Gish, L., & Poulsen, S. (2015). Organizational-level interventions in small and

    medium-sized enterprises: Enabling and inhibiting factors in the PoWRS program.

    Safety Science, 71, Part C, 264-274.

Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. Academy of

    Management Review, 31(2), 386-408.

Kelloway, K., Sivanathan, N., Francis, L., & Barling, J. (2005). Poor leadership. In E. K. K. J.

    Barling, & M. R. Frone (Ed.), Handbook of work stress (pp. 89-112). Thousand Oaks,

    CA: Sage.

Krasikova, D. V., Green, S. G., & LeBreton, J. M. (2013). Destructive Leadership:A

    Theoretical Review, Integration, and Future Research Agenda. Journal of

    Management, 39(5), 1308-1338.

Larsson, G., Fors Brandebo, M., & Nilsson, S. (2012). Destrudo-L: Development of a short

    scale designed to measure destructive leadership behaviours in a military context.

    Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 33(4), 383-400.

Lewis, R., Yarker, J., & Donaldson-Fielder, E. (2012). The vital role of line managers in

    managing psychosocial risks. In C. Biron, M. Karanika-Murray, & C. Cooper (Eds.),

    Improving organizational interventions for stress and well-being: Addressing process

    and context.: Routledge.

Lundmark, R., von Thiele Schwarz, U., Hasson, H., Stenling, A., & Tafvelin, S. (2018).

    Making it fit: Associations of line managers' behaviours with the outcomes of an

    organizational-level intervention. Stress and Health, 34(1), 163-174.

McDonald, R. P. (1999). Test theory: A unified treatment. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Mellor, N., Mackay, C., Packham, C., Jones, R., Palferman, D., Webster, S., & Kelly, P.

    (2011). 'Management Standards' and work-related stress in Great Britain: Progress on

    their implementation. Safety Science, 49(7), 1040-1046.

Muthén, B. (1991). Multilevel Factor Analysis of Class and Student Achievement

    Components. Journal of Educational Measurement, 28(4), 338-354.

Muthén, L., & Muthén, B. (2015). Mplus. The comprehensive modelling program for applied

    researchers: user's guide, 5.

Nielsen, K. (2013). Review Article: How can we make organizational interventions work?

    Employees and line managers as actively crafting interventions. Human Relations,

    66(8), 1029-1050.

Nielsen, K. (2017). Leaders can make or break an intervention–but are they the villains of the

    piece. In E. K. Kelloway, Nielsen, K., & Dimoff, J. K. (Ed.), Leading to Occupational

    Health and Safety: How Leadership Behaviours Impact Organizational Safety and

    Well-Being (pp. 197-209). Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Nielsen, K., & Abildgaard, J. S. (2013). Organizational interventions: A research-based framework for the evaluation of both process and effects. Work Stress, 27.

Nielsen, K., Taris, T. W., & Cox, T. (2010). The future of organizational interventions: Addressing the challenges of today's organizations. Work & Stress, 24(3), 219-233.

Nytrø, K., Saksvik, P. Ø., Mikkelsen, A., Bohle, P., & Quinlan, M. (2000). An appraisal of key factors in the implementation of occupational stress interventions. Work Stress, 14.

Oc, B. (2018). Contextual leadership: A systematic review of how contextual factors shape leadership and its outcomes. The Leadership Quarterly, 29(1), 218-235.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88(5), 879-903.

Porter, L. W., & McLaughlin, G. B. (2006). Leadership and the organizational context: Like the weather? The Leadership Quarterly, 17(6), 559-576.

Rafferty, A. E., Jimmieson, N. L., & Armenakis, A. A. (2013). Change Readiness:A Multilevel Review. Journal of Management, 39(1), 110-135.

Randall, R., Griffiths, A., & Cox, T. (2005). Evaluating organizational stress-management interventions using adapted study designs. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 14(1), 23-41.

Randall, R., Nielsen, K., & Tvedt, S. D. (2009). The development of five scales to measure employees' appraisals of organizational-level stress management interventions. Work and Stress, 23(1), 1-23.

Rubin, R. S., Munz, D. C., & Bommer, W. H. (2005). Leading from within: The Effects of Emotion Recognition and Personality on Transformational Leadership Behavior. The Academy of Management Journal, 48(5), 845-858.

Schyns, B., Maslyn, J. M., & Weibler, J. (2010). Understanding the relationship between span of control and subordinate consensus in leader–member exchange. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 19(3), 388-406.

Schyns, B., & Schilling, J. (2013). How bad are the effects of bad leaders? A meta-analysis of destructive leadership and its outcomes. The Leadership Quarterly, 24(1), 138-158.

Skogstad, A., Aasland, M. S., Nielsen, M. B., Hetland, J., Matthiesen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2014). The Relative Effects of Constructive, Laissez-Faire, and Tyrannical Leadership on Subordinate Job Satisfaction. Zeitschrift für Psychologie, 222(4), 221-232.

Statistic Sweden (2017). Labor force surveys – Theme: hours worked 2006-2016. Statistical Annonncement, AM 110 SM 1703. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from: https://www.scb.se/contentassets/dc173f4277ef4521a07531f9c15b5fd4/am0401_2017k02_sm_am110sm1703.pdf

Tracey, J. B., & Hinkin, T. R. (1998). Transformational leadership or effective managerial practices? Group & Organization Management, 23(3), 220-236.

Tvedt, S. D., Saksvik, P. Ø., Nytrø, K. (2009). Healthy organizational change processes as a prerequisite for a good psychological work environment. Work & Stress, 23, 80-98.

Walter, F., & Bruch, H. (2010). Structural impacts on the occurrence and effectiveness of transformational leadership: An empirical study at the organizational level of analysis. The Leadership Quarterly, 21(5), 765-782.

Worthington, R. L., & Whittaker, T. A. (2006). Scale development research: A content analysis and recommendations for best practices. The Counseling Psychologist, 34(6), 806-838.

von Thiele Schwarz, U., Lundmark, R., & Hasson, H. (2016). The Dynamic Integrated

    Evaluation Model (DIEM): Achieving Sustainability in Organizational Intervention

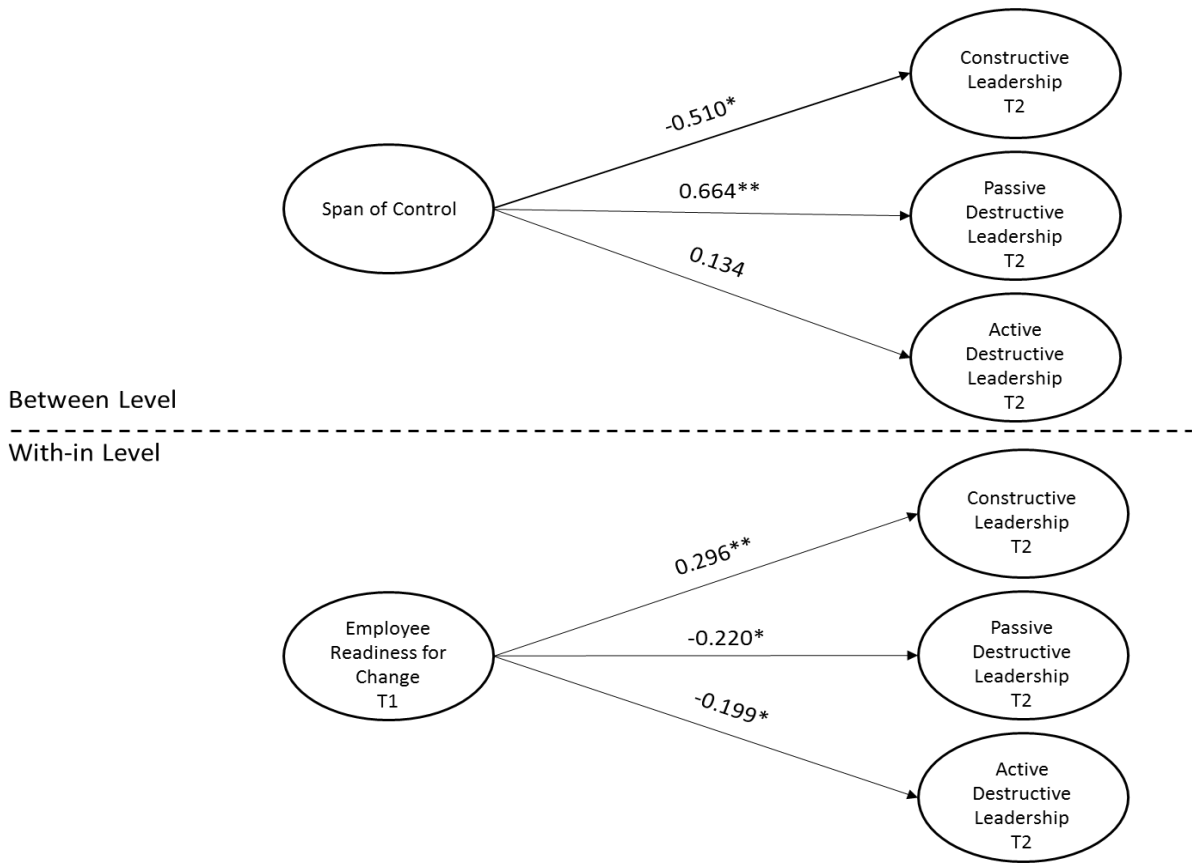   through a Participatory Evaluation Approach. Stress and Health, n/a-n/a.

Figure 1. The tested multilevel model with span of control and employee readiness for change as antecedents to leadership behaviors. *p < .05; **p < .01

Table 1.

Descriptives and Bivariate Between- (above the diagonal) and Within-Level (below the diagonal) Correlations

	M	SD	CL	P-DL	A-DL
SOC	18.76	12.88	-.50*	.62**	.13
CL	3.01	0.83	-	-.94**	-.62**
P-DL	2.12	0.95	-.38**	-	.70**
A-DL	1.54	0.76	-.28**	.65**	-
RFC	2.92	0.86	.31**	-.20*	-.20*

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, SOC = span of control, CL = constructive leadership at T2, P-DL = passive destructive leadership at T2, A-DL = active destructive leadership at T2, RFC = employee readiness for change at T1. Within-level N = 172, between-level N = 37,

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01