

Conceptualization of Ambidextrous Leadership Effect: Emotional And Cognitive Pathway

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Abstract

This study presents a conceptual framework examining the impact of ambidextrous leadership on employees' innovative work behavior through emotional and cognitive pathways. Through theoretical review and synthesis of existing literature, propositions were developed linking ambidextrous leadership, creativity, proactive goal generation, and innovative work behavior. The framework suggests that leaders' opening behaviors foster creativity by encouraging autonomous thinking while closing behaviors foster proactive goal generation. It is proposed that the interaction between opening and closing behaviors directly affects innovative work behavior, with creativity and proactive goal generation as mediators. These effects are posited to occur through distinct emotional and cognitive pathways. The conceptual model contributes to ambidextrous leadership and innovative behavior literature by elucidating the mechanisms linking leadership behaviors to employee innovation. This study offers new insights into the interplay between leadership and innovation in organizations, providing a foundation for future empirical research and practical implications in fostering workplace innovation.

Keywords: Ambidextrous Leadership, Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior

Çok Yönlü Liderlik Etkisinin Kavramsallaştırılması: Duygusal ve Bilişsel Perspektif

Öz

Bu çalışma, çok yönlü liderliğin çalışanların yenilikçi iş davranışları üzerindeki etkisini duygusal ve bilişsel yollar aracılığıyla inceleyen kavramsal bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Çalışma, mevcut literatürün teorik incelemesi ve sentezi yoluyla, çok yönlü liderlik, yaratıcılık, proaktif hedef oluşturma ve yenilikçi iş davranışı arasındaki bağlantıları ortaya koyan önermeler geliştirmektedir. Model, liderlerin serbest bırakma davranışlarının bağımsız düşünmeyi teşvik ederek bireyleri yaratıcılığa yönlendirdiğini, sınırlama davranışlarının ise proaktif hedef oluşturmaya teşvik ettiğini öne sürmektedir. Çalışmada, serbest bırakma ve sınırlama davranışları arasındaki etkileşimin, yaratıcılık ve proaktif hedef oluşturma aracılığıyla yenilikçi iş davranışını doğrudan etkilediği önerilmektedir. Kavramlar arasındaki bu etkileşimin ise duygusal ve bilişsel yollar aracılığıyla gerçekleştiği ileri sürülmektedir. Çalışma modeli, liderlik davranışlarını çalışan yeniliğine bağlayan mekanizmaları açıklığa kavuşturarak çok yönlü liderlik ve yenilikçi davranış literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, organizasyonlarda liderlik ve yenilik arasındaki etkileşime dair yeni bakış açıları sunarak, işyerinde yeniliği teşvik etmeye yönelik gelecekteki ampirik araştırmalar ve pratik uygulamalar için bir temel sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çok Yönlü Liderlik, Liderlik, Yenilikçi İş Davranışı

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1. Introduction

The competitive arena in the business environment has changed in many ways. More recently, the rapid change in technological development and the way of doing work, especially throughout the pandemic, made organizations to be more ambidextrous and use both their exploitation and exploration sides effectively. Especially today, organizations should use both hands professionally, like a jongleur. They need to be flexible, innovative, and risk-takers while also controlling productivity, efficiency, and optimization simultaneously. Thereby, organizations need leaders, who can generate both sides harmonically, to catch the rapid change and be more innovative. Depending on the ambidexterity perspective, Rosing et al. (2011) proposed the ambidextrous theory of leadership which involves opening and closing behaviors, triggers employee exploration, and enables the exploitation of ideas, respectively.

Even though it is well-stated that leaders' opening and closing behaviors foster innovation in organizations, far fewer studies focus on ambidexterity at the individual level. Hence, there is a lack of understanding of how exactly an ambidextrous leader can lead an employee to act innovatively. Thereby, this paper focuses on explaining how ambidextrous leaders can affect employees' innovative work behavior and presents a conceptual framework to show this relation through the emotional and cognitive pathways. As such, the study presents propositions rather than hypotheses. Propositions are appropriate for conceptual studies as they offer theoretical statements that logically connect concepts within a framework (Bacharach, 1989). Thereby, propositions in this conceptual paper serve to articulate relationships between constructs that can guide future empirical research.

Study propositions link ambidextrous leadership behaviors, creativity, proactive goal generation, and innovative work behavior grounded in existing literature and logical argumentation. These propositions form the basis of the conceptual model and provide a foundation for future empirical studies to develop and test specific hypotheses in various organizational contexts. The current study may bring an insight into both ambidextrous leadership and innovative behavior literature, by explaining the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between those two important constructs in management studies.

2. Theoretical Framework and The Conceptual Model

Organizational psychologists have a keen interest in exploring the link between leadership and employee innovation (Hunter et al., 2011). Seen as an extension of

innovation, Employees' Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) is highly valued within organizations due to its critical role in enhancing financial performance. IWB encompasses various behaviors across different stages (Janssen, 2000; Kafouros & Forsans, 2012; Javed et al., 2021). The process begins with the exploration and generation of ideas aimed at creating new opportunities, followed by a stage of idea championing, where employees advocate for their ideas to garner support from others. The process culminates in the implementation stage, where employees execute original ideas that practically benefit the organization (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010).

Rosing et al. (2011) highlight that the intricacies of the innovation process demand a leadership style of equal complexity. This perspective gave rise to the ambidexterity theory of leadership for innovation, suggesting that effective leadership involves a blend of opening and closing behaviors to foster innovation (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). Opening behaviors are those that promote employee exploration, including encouraging diverse methods for completing tasks, allowing the application of new ideas, and creating an environment conducive to independent thought. On the other hand, closing behaviors are centered on exploiting ideas by creating routines, setting objectives, and tracking progress toward these goals (Zacher & Wilden, 2014). The core concept of this theory posits that the interaction between opening and closing behaviors predicts innovative outcomes. The idea behind this is that strong closing behaviors amplify the effects of opening behaviors on employees' capacity for innovation, and the opposite relationship holds as well (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). Depending on this point of view, opening and closing behaviors may trigger each other towards innovativeness. Accordingly, the current model proposes that opening and closing behavior will affect each other and the interaction between them will directly lead employees to behave in an innovative way.

Proposition 1: Leader's opening and closing behavior will affect each other and the interaction between them will directly affect employees' innovative work behavior.

2.1 Opening Behavior and Creativity

Employee creativity is recognized as a pivotal factor in an organization's growth and success, serving as the foundation for the generation of new and useful ideas, which is a crucial precursor to the implementation of these ideas (Zhou & Shalley, 2011). Research indicates that certain organizational elements, such as innovation support, a climate fostering excellence, and supervisor empowerment, have a positive correlation with creativity.

Moreover, factors like intrinsic motivation, a divergent thinking style, and autonomy are essential precursors to creativity. Additionally, a key condition for fostering creativity is the promotion of variance, as diversity and various approaches contribute to the creative process (Anderson et al., 2014; Rosing et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the distinct traits of opening behavior facilitate various approaches to task completion, promote experimentation with diverse ideas, inspire risk-taking, offer opportunities for independent thought and action, allow space for personal ideas, and support learning from mistakes. From this perspective, it can be said that ambidextrous leaders who exhibit opening behaviors effectively grant their employees a 'mental space,' enabling them to generate innovative ideas. Thus, leaders who successfully exhibit opening behavior can guide their employees toward creativity.

Proposition 2: Leader's opening behavior will positively affect employees' creativity.

2.2 Closing Behavior and Proactive Goal Generation

Goal-regulation theory posits that individuals, through their autonomous participation in the process of creating goals, can transform their aspirations into concrete objectives and dedicate themselves to starting and carrying out actions aimed at these goals (Gollwitzer & Schaal, 2001). From this viewpoint, the proactive creation of goals involves both envisioning and planning stages. Envisioning refers to the process of establishing objectives that foresee desired future outcomes related to enhancing the work environment or the work itself, such as the improvement of work procedures or an individual's performance on work-related tasks. Planning, on the other hand, entails devising a strategic plan for action to accomplish these objectives, which might include preparing oneself emotionally for undertaking change-driven activities or considering various strategies for achieving goals linked to innovation (Montani et al., 2015).

Since closing behavior is considered as a set of leader behaviors that involves taking corrective action, specifying purposes, setting lucid guidelines, and monitoring goal achievement, leaders who engage with closing behaviors, actually lead their employees to be more planful, goal-oriented, self-perceiving, and disciplined. Depending on this point of view, it can be expected that employees will be oriented to envisioning and planning, be more goal-oriented, and try to be impeccable to achieve the best.

Proposition 3: Leader's closing behavior will positively affect employees' proactive goal generation.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Creativity and Proactive Goal Generation

Employees recognized as a vital component of the innovation process, serve as a dynamic force capable of driving and nurturing innovation across various levels (Foss et al., 2013). Additionally, innovative work behavior encompasses a range of activities that not only initiate but also intentionally introduce novel ideas and solutions for problem-solving (Shipton et al., 2016). Research has consistently shown that employee creativity and leadership are paramount factors with significant repercussions for a host of critical performance outcomes and innovation (Anderson et al., 2014). Leaders are noted for their ability to elevate employees to higher levels of achievement, inspire them to go beyond their interests for the greater good, encourage them to harness their capabilities for personal development and enhance their intellectual faculties to tackle problems from fresh perspectives (Tse et al., 2018). Moreover, ambidextrous leaders' explorative part, which in this case is an opening behavior, is considered to be an appropriate trigger to foster the employees to be creative by providing them free space. Considering the leaders' opening behavior, it is logical to expect that employees who receive behaviors from their leaders such as being allowed to think independently and freely, encouraged to take risks and break up rules, will be more creative or find a chance to set free their creativity. In the end, this process will lead employees to behave innovatively owing to their revealed creativity.

Proposition 4: Leader's opening behavior will positively affect employees' innovative work behavior via creativity.

In the realm of research, the process of generating goals has been theoretically pinpointed as a pivotal catalyst for employee innovation (Oldham & Baer, 2012). Aligning with the theory of goal regulation, individuals who set goals oriented toward change are more likely to engage in the development of targeted plans as part of their efforts to achieve those goals (Wood et al. 2012; Locke 2000). Indeed, the act of setting goals serves a guiding role, concentrating individuals' attention on activities relevant to their goals and diverting it from tasks without set objectives (Locke & Latham, 2002). The literature describes proactive goal generation as comprising two main elements: envisioning, which is the cognitive process of looking ahead to foresee future outcomes that could enhance the current state, and planning, which involves creating a strategy that connects the envisioned goal with specific actions aimed at achieving it (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Montani et al., 2015; Van Hooft et al. 2005). Specifically, through proactive envisioning, individuals are more adept at preserving

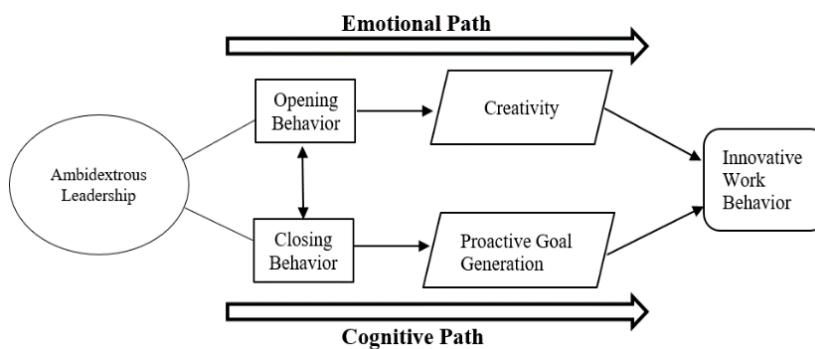
their resources and utilizing them to generate and actualize new ideas (Montani et al., 2014). Together with the literature, envisioning and planning are considered together on behalf of the proactive goal generation. Depending on the leaders' closing behavior and goal-generation perspective, it is logical to expect that employees who receive behaviors from their leaders such as taking corrective actions, goal attainment, sanctioning errors, and task accomplishment, will be more goal-oriented, focus on new goal setting to accomplish the task and having anticipation of what's appropriate for the situation. In the end, this process will lead employees to be innovative because they have been envisioning and planning with the guidance of their leader.

Proposition 5: Leader's closing behavior will positively affect employees' innovative work behavior via proactive goal generation.

Accordingly, the conceptual model of the study can be shown as below:

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Ambidextrous Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior



2.4 Emotional and Cognitive Pathways

Based on existing research, it's clear that emotions significantly impact the leadership dynamic, affecting the feelings leaders have and show, as well as how followers feel about their leaders (George, 2000). Leaders have the responsibility to manage their own emotions in the context of their relationship with followers and to handle their followers' emotions effectively. For instance, leaders who grasp and sympathize with their employees' sentiments regarding change can lead to a more seamless adoption of new policies or changes (Huy, 2002).

When considering the characteristics of opening behavior, it is seen that ambidextrous leaders, by displaying opening behavior, actually give their employees a chance to be more relaxed to produce new ideas by providing them a free space to think

independently whereas, at the same time, allow them to be more audacious to implement those ideas by encouraging them to take risks and error learning. Besides, there is strong support related to positive affect and creativity that when people are in a positive mood, they are more creative (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). In our case, even if the employee does not hold any positive affect, the ambidextrous leader with opening behavior provides positivity for the employee by motivating, encouraging, permitting freedom, and allowing independent thinking. Meanwhile, to provide this kind of environment to employees, initially, ambidextrous leaders might have a positive effect. Viewed through this lens, it can be argued that there exists an emotional contagion between ambidextrous leaders and their employees.

Emotional contagion is described as the process through which emotions are shared or transferred from one individual to other members of a group, accompanied by a propensity to mimic the nonverbal behaviors of others, leading to a convergence of emotional states (Hatfield et al., 1994). This contagion forms the beginning of the emotional path and after having or enhancing their positivity, employees carry this path to innovative behavior via creativity. For example, research has discovered that an individual's propensity to feel positive emotions and moods correlates with improvements in numerous aspects of work performance, enhanced negotiating skills, and the inclination to perform voluntary actions that benefit the organization (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Depending on this perspective, the current model proposes that the opening behavior side of the ambidextrous leader affects employees' innovative behavior through an emotional path.

On the cognitive aspect of the model, it's important to recognize that leadership scenarios involve both leaders and followers, where cognition plays a role for both parties (Drazin et al., 1999). Cognition, which necessitates knowledge or information, has been found to significantly impact leader performance. Moreover, the focus is not solely on the knowledge itself but on how individuals organize, store, and retrieve this knowledge (Connelly et al., 2000; Vessey et al., 2011). The critical aspect here involves the application of cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, decision-making, and effective thinking, as how people utilize their cognitive capacities influences the behaviors observed by others in leaders (Mumford et al., 2015). Indeed, the cognitive processes at play significantly shape the visions crafted by leaders and how these visions are conveyed to both key stakeholders and followers (Strange & Mumford, 2005). Additionally, the application of cognitive abilities impacts the dynamics of interaction between leaders and their followers, fostering more effective patterns of leader-member exchanges and guidance (Mumford et al., 2015).

Depending on these perspectives, it can be inferred that ambidextrous leaders form a cognitive path by displaying closing behavior and leading employees to behave proactively in goal generation. More specifically, leaders make their employees more goal-oriented, disciplined, aim focused by specifying the purposes, setting tangible guidelines, monitoring the goal achievement, and forming a cognitive path. Afterward, employees carry this path to innovative work behavior via proactive goal generation. In this way, the current model proposes that ambidextrous leaders form emotional and cognitive paths in the way of affecting employees' innovative work behavior. Indeed, these paths involve employees' creativity and proactive goal generation within the context of predicting innovative work behavior.

3. Conclusion and Discussion

This study presents a conceptual framework examining the impact of ambidextrous leadership on employees' innovative work behavior through emotional and cognitive pathways. By integrating theories of ambidextrous leadership, innovative work behavior, creativity, and goal generation, this model offers several important contributions to the field.

First of all, the proposed framework advances our understanding of ambidextrous leadership by elucidating the mechanisms through which opening and closing behaviors influence employee innovation. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on organizational-level outcomes, this model explicates the individual-level processes involved. The incorporation of both emotional and cognitive pathways provides a more nuanced understanding of how leadership behaviors lead to innovative outcomes. Moreover, this framework extends existing theories by proposing that the interaction between opening and closing behaviors not only directly affects innovative work behavior but also functions through the mediating processes of creativity and proactive goal generation. This multi-path model offers a more comprehensive explanation of the leadership-innovation relationship than previous linear models.

While the model aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of ambidextrous leadership for innovation (e.g., Rosing et al., 2011; Zacher & Wilden, 2014), it extends these findings by proposing specific mechanisms at the individual level. For instance, where Zacher and Rosing (2015) focused on team innovation, our model explains how these leadership behaviors affect individual innovative work behavior. Further, the framework also builds upon goal-regulation theory (Gollwitzer & Schaal, 2001) by

suggesting that leaders' closing behaviors can stimulate proactive goal generation, which in turn fosters innovation. This integration of leadership and goal-setting literature offers a novel perspective on how leaders can guide employees toward innovative outcomes.

Apart from that, the study extends the role of ambidextrous leadership in leading employee creativity. While the existing research focused primarily on creativity as an outcome (Kang et al., 2015), this framework proposes that creativity serves as a mediator between opening behaviors and innovative work behavior, thus providing a more comprehensive view of the innovation process. Meanwhile, the current study aligns with the narrative review of Kafetzopoulos (2022), which suggests examining the mediating mechanisms for ambidextrous leadership outcomes and extending the ambidextrous leadership theory within the organization studies.

Lastly, the study contributes to the ongoing discussion about the role of leadership in fostering organizational ambidexterity (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). While much of the existing literature focuses on structural solutions, the model highlights the importance of leadership behaviors in promoting individual-level ambidexterity through innovative work behaviors.

3.1 Implications

For leaders and managers, this study highlights the importance of developing ambidextrous leadership skills. Leaders should pursue to balance opening behaviors that encourage creativity and autonomous thinking with closing behaviors that promote goal-oriented action. Human resource managers could use this framework to design leadership development programs that cultivate both sets of behaviors. Moreover, the recognition of emotional and cognitive pathways suggests that leaders should be mindful of both the affective climate they create and the cognitive processes they stimulate in their teams. This dual focus could lead to more effective strategies for fostering innovation in the workplace.

For researchers, this framework provides a foundation for developing more nuanced studies of leadership and innovation. In this sense, exploring the interplay between emotional and cognitive factors in the innovation process, as well as investigating how different organizational contexts might affect the proposed relationships. Practitioners and leaders may focus on developing both opening and closing leadership behaviors. This might involve targeted training programs, mentoring, or coaching initiatives. Organizations may also

consider how their performance management and reward systems can support ambidextrous leadership practices.

To conclude, this conceptual framework offers a novel perspective on how ambidextrous leadership influences innovative work behavior. By highlighting the role of both emotional and cognitive pathways, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership-innovation relationship. As organizations continue to prioritize innovation in an increasingly competitive field, the insights from this model can guide both future research and practical leadership development efforts.

3.2 Limitations and Future Directions

In the current study, both the direct and indirect effect of ambidextrous leadership was elaborated. Indeed, by integrating the ambidextrous theory of leadership and goal generation it is possible to go one step further in the way of explaining employees' innovative work behavior. However, as a conceptual paper, there are several limitations regarding the study.

The primary limitation of this study is the lack of empirical validation. The propositions presented here, while grounded in existing theory, require testing in real-world organizational settings. Additionally, the model may not account for all possible variables that could influence the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and innovative work behavior.

Future studies may test the propositions outlined in this framework. Longitudinal studies could be particularly valuable in understanding how the balance of opening and closing behaviors affects innovation over time. Researchers might also explore potential moderating variables, such as organizational culture, support, or individual personality traits, that could influence the effectiveness of ambidextrous leadership. Apart from that, the question about the triggers of being an ambidextrous leader still retains its importance. Thereby, further research may focus on the antecedents and motivators of ambidextrous leadership, specifically psychological and personal abilities, and factors may be considered related to this issue. Moreover, future studies could explore the potential cross-cultural variations in the effectiveness of ambidextrous leadership, examining how different cultural contexts might influence the relationship between leadership behaviors and innovative outcomes.

Lastly, another promising area for further research would be to examine how technology and remote work environments affect the dynamics of ambidextrous leadership and innovation. As work practices continue to evolve, understanding how these leadership behaviors translate in virtual settings could be crucial.

Funding Information: No financial support has been obtained for this study from any entities, be they public, commercial, or non-profit.

Conflict of Interest: I, the corresponding author, affirm that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this paper.

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