INVESTIGATION OF MOTIVE BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PRO-SOCIAL VOICE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN CHINA

Chenwei Li
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, USA

Keke Wu
Central Washington University, USA

Prosocial voice, as a form of citizenship behavior with a purpose of expressing constructive changes and improving the status quo, is desirable in both teams and organizations. Also, transformational leadership (TL) has been documented as a leadership style that prompts employees to engage in prosocial voice. Recently, whether or not the effects of transformational leadership on prosocial voice have boundaries becomes a topic of interest to organizational researchers. We presented two separate models for the moderating effects of perceived leader motive (altruistic vs. instrumental) on the relationship between transformational leadership and prosocial voice in the workplace. From an employee perspective, this study documents that one's perception towards his/her leader's motive (altruistic vs. instrumental) underpinning leadership behaviors is related to the boundaries of TL's effect on prosocial voice. Data with 167 employees at an auto maker in China were used and the analysis results provided support for the models.

Pro-social voice, as a change-oriented expression of ideas, information, and opinions intended to resolve workplace problems, has been documented as an employee behavior that is functional to team/organization effectiveness (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; McClean, Burris, & Detert, 2013). Empirical studies of employee voice behaviors have shown that higher levels of voice were positively associated with creativeness and negatively related to group think formation (Janis, 1982; Pyman, Brian, & Holland, 2006). Given the instrumental value of pro-social voice to team effectiveness, research has also been conducted to investigate the possibility of leadership's impact on pro-social voice. In theory, Bass and Avolio (1999) proposed that transformational leadership (TL) would prompt employees to engage in change-oriented behaviors such as voice, as transformational leaders would exhibit openness and enable effective communications with the purpose of driving organizational change and delivering desirable results. In empirical

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testing, Detert and Burris (2007) found evidence indicating that TL, with its nature of changing the status quo, could serve as a situational cue to voice by increasing employees' perceptions of psychological safety.

However, will TL actually encourage pro-social voice? If it does, then will its effect have boundaries? In other words, will employees always feel comfortable to engage in pro-social voice when they are exposed to TL? Very few studies have pursued these questions from the perspective of employees. According to Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002), TL's impact on employee behaviors, including pro-social voice, may be contingent on employees' attribution of TL. Specifically, employees would search for causal explanations of leaders' behaviors and would respond differently to the same leader, depending on whether they attribute the leader's behaviors to an altruistic or an instrumental motive. Bass et al. (1994) observed that transformational leaders whose behaviors were believed to be driven by an altruistic intent, as opposed to an instrumental intent, exerted more influence on employees. As such, perceived leader motive, one's perception towards his/her leader's intent underpinning leadership behaviors (Allen & Rush, 1998; Ferris et al., 1995), is a concept that needs to be examined as related to the boundaries of TL's effect on pro-social voice.

Since little empirical research has been conducted where perceptions of leadership, are examined as a moderator in the relationship between TL and its outcomes, the purpose of this study is to examine the moderating role of perceived leader motive and its impacts on the relationship between TL and employee pro-social voice. Specifically, we propose that the relationship between TL and voice is moderated by employees' perceived altruistic motive (AM) or instrumental motive (IM) underlying leaders' transformational actions.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Transformational Leadership (TL) and Pro-social Voice

According to theories of TL (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Podsakoff et al., 1990), transformational behaviors typically involve fostering the acceptance of group goals, providing individualized support and generating intellectual stimulation, all of which may stimulate verbal communication such as pro-social voice at work (Van Dyne et al., 1998). For example, by fostering the acceptance of group goals, transformational leaders can make their intention of promoting cooperation known to employees and get them to work together toward shared goals (Podsakoff et al., 1990). As the emphasis on cooperation may enhance employees' felt responsibility, it may also drive employees to engage in pro-social voice, which can improve the chance of each other's success in obtaining desired rewards. By providing individualized support, transformational leaders can create a safe and comfortable environment (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1987) where employees would feel respected by the leaders and consequently feel easier to speak up, to submit changes, and to express concerns about their team's functions, about one's and other's own issues, and about workplace matters that need to be done (Janssen, Vries, & Cozijnsen, 1998). Last but not least, by generating intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders can create an innovative atmosphere that encourages employees to question some of these taken-for-granted assumptions about their workplace problems and reconsider how these problems can be better addressed and solved (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Working in such an environment, employees may not only feel safe, but also motivated, to think outside the box and express new ideas and opinions, even if others may disagree with them.

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Direct and indirect support for the positive relationship between TL and pro-social voice also exists in the empirical literature. Direct evidence is found in the study by Detert and Burris (2007), who observed that TL was positively related to voice. Specifically, transformational leaders displayed openness and support that are needed to stimulate pro-social voice from employees. Indirect evidence comes from studies on empowerment, creativity, and identity. Conger and Kanungo (1998) noted that TL behaviors have strong empowering effects on employees in terms of enhancement of their self-efficacy, i.e., belief about one's control over oneself. As employees' self-efficacy improves, their propensity to voice increased (Walumbwa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2008). Shin and Zhou (2003) also examined the relationship between TL and individual creativity, and suggested that TL would be positively related to individual creativity, which should facilitate more open-minded and constructive voice from employees. Moreover, Shamir et al. (1993) emphasized in their research that transformational leaders would be more likely to cultivate a collective identity within teams, which would cue for citizenship behaviors such as pro-social voice. Given the theoretical support and empirical evidence we found in the literature, we hypothesize:

H1: Transformational leadership behaviors are positively related to employees' pro-social voice.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Leader Motive

If TL does have a positive impact on pro-social voice, then the question becomes whether this impact has boundaries. In other words, will all employees engage in pro-social voice when they perceive their leaders as transformational leaders? Research has indicated that employees' perceived leader motive, the intent to which employee attributes leader behaviors, matters when it comes to leadership effectiveness (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). Extant literature suggests that there are two possibilities of perceived motive in the case of TL: one altruistic, which often leads to the perception of authentic TL, the other instrumental, which typically creates the impression of pseudo TL. According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), authentic TL has a strong ethical and moral foundation, involves having an employee orientation, and truly emphasizes employee's growth and welfare. Contrarily, pseudo TL is driven by leaders' self-interests and hence has an instrumental orientation, focusing on objectives on the leaders' own agendas that may conflict with employee welfare.

In other words, the difference between authentic and pseudo TL lies in leader motive. However, unless leader motive can be revealed with reliable measures, TL is "all in the eyes of the beholders," i.e., employees. As such, we argue that TL's effect on pro-social voice will be contingent on perceived motive. Specifically, we find reasons to believe that when employees attribute TL to an altruistic motive (AM), i.e., perceive authentic TL, they are more likely to engage in pro-social voice. First and foremost, when employees attribute TL to an AM, they will believe that their leaders' TL behaviors are truly intended to cultivate an open and safe working environment where there would be no harsh criticism or punishment due to voice that challenges the status quo, even when these ideas or concerns are inaccurate (Ferris et al., 1995). In addition, the more employees believe in the altruistic motive behind TL, the more they will think that what their leaders do is directed by a collective goal, and that constructive ideas or suggestions are truly welcomed in order to achieve the goal. Moreover, beliefs of an altruistic motive facilitate intellectual stimulation through which pro-social voice is encouraged. Specifically, beliefs of an

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altruistic motive may reduce the fear to speak up expressing concerns and to try new ways doing jobs, because employees know that their leaders truly care about their needs and growth. As such, as a perceptual cue to employees, perceived altruistic motive may interact with TL in influencing employees' engagement in pro-social voice.

H2: Perceived altruistic motive (AM) will moderate the relationship between TL and pro-social voice such that higher levels of AM will strengthen the positive relationship between TL and pro-social voice.

In contrast, we also find reasons to believe that when employees attribute TL to an instrumental motive (IM), i.e., perceive pseudo TL, they are less likely to engage in pro-social voice. Specifically, when employees think that their leaders' TL behaviors are driven by self-interests, they may conclude that their leaders engage in transformational behaviors only because they want to create a favorable image so as to obtain rewards from the organization (Allen & Rush, 1998). Moreover, in these situations, employees who suspect high levels of instrumental motive may feel unsafe and risky to speak up for work purposes because they are afraid that their leaders may retaliate against their voice (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). Last but not least, the more employees suspect an IM behind their leaders' TL, the more they will feel that the goals set by their leaders are unattainable and that their leaders only want to exert their personal influence/power within organizations. Consequently, when employees attribute their leaders' TL behaviors to an instrumental motive, they are more likely to keep silence and stay disengaged in pro-social voice. As a result, perceived instrumental motive may weaken the positive effects of TL actions on driving employees' engagement of pro-social voice.

H3: Perceived instrumental motive (IM) moderates the relationship between TL and pro-social voice such that high levels of IM will weaken the positive relationship between TL and pro-social voice.

Method

Sample and Procedure

A self-report questionnaire was administered to employees from four different manufacturing departments in an auto maker in Northern China. Letters were attached to the surveys, written by the director of the company requesting employees' participation. Both the employer and employees were assured anonymity. To protect confidentiality, no identification information was collected from any of the employees. One of our researchers collected the completed survey immediately after the respondents finished doing the survey.

All responses in our sample were collected from 167 employees of the auto maker, 77.8 percent of whom were male, with an average age of 25 ranging from 20 to 37. A dominant part (92.2%) of the respondents have an associate degree or above. Tenure with the organization ranged from 1 to 8 years with a mean of 2 years, and tenure with the current supervisor ranged from 0.5 to 5 years with a mean of 1.8 years. For position level, almost all of the respondents (99%) were employees who did not supervise others.

ISSN 1554-3145

Measures

As all measures used in this study were originally composed in English, they were first translated into Chinese, then back translated to English by a panel of bilingual experts, following the translation and back translation procedures advocated by Brislin (1980). Any resulting discrepancies were then discussed and resolved. All measures employed here use the 5-point Liker-type scale, with the anchor 1 for "strongly disagree" and 5 for "strongly agree."

Transformation leadership (TL) was measured with the 23 items developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). A sample item was "My supervisor is always seeking new opportunities for the organization." The average of the scores on all 23 items was used as a measure of the overall degree of TL a leader practiced over his/her subordinates. Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was 0.928.

Perceived leader intent was measured with a 12-item scale developed by Allen and Rush (1998). The scale consists of two dimensions (altruistic motive vs. instrumental motive) composed to measure one's general attribution of motive toward leader behaviors. Sample items were "due to personal values of right and wrong" and "desire to enhance his or her image" for each dimension, respectively. Cronbach's Alpha was .792 for the altruistic subscale and .770 for the instrumental subscale.

Pro-social voice was measured with Van Dyne and LePine's (1998) 6-item voice scale. This scale measured employees' other-oriented speaking up behavior in the organizations. A sample item was "I develop and make recommendation concerning issues that affect the organization." The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was 0.826.

Demographic control variables were measured by asking employees to report their age, gender, education level, tenure with organization, tenure with their supervisor, and job position level.

Analysis

First, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using LISREL 8.54 with maximum likelihood estimation on our data to determine whether the data fit the measurement model well (Bollen 1989; Joreskog & Sorbom, 1999). Second, we ran two regression analyses to test the role of perceived altruistic motive (AM) and perceived instrumental motive (IM) in the relationship between TL and pro-social voice following Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedures in testing for moderators.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables are presented in Table 1. Transformational leadership and pro-social voice is significantly correlated with each other. The significant correlations between TL and AM, TL and IM suggest multicollinearity may exist between the predicting variables in the moderation model. As such, we mean centered TL, AM and IM in order to reduce the interrelatedness in the following analyses.

Due to the way our data were collected, common method variance (CMV) was checked to ensure that it was not a severe problem here. Following Williams, Cote, and Buckley's (1989) suggestion, we estimated a full measurement model and an alternative model with an uncorrelated method factor added. The fit statistics for the four-factor full measurement model

ISSN 1554-3145

(χ^2 =479.87, p<.001, CFI = .93, NNFI = .92, IFI =.93, RMSEA = .078) indicate that the model fit the data well. The fit statistics for the alternative model (χ^2 =384.86, p<.001, CFI = .95, NNFI = .93, IFI =.95, RMSEA = .069) improved slightly and there is a significant chi-square difference test between the two models (χ^2_{diff} (24) = 95.01, p<.001). As a result, CMV does exist. For our data, however, CMV accounted for only 5% of the total variance, which is way less than the average of 25% found by Williams et al (1989), which alleviates our common method variance concerns.

We also checked for discriminant validity by comparing the original four-factor measurement model in which the correlations were estimated, with a series of models that each had constrained the correlation of one pair of constructs to be 1.00. All chi-square differences were significant at the .05 level, indicating discriminant validity between the four study variables.

Then, the relationship between TL and pro-social voice with AM and IM as the moderators was examined with hierarchical moderated regression analyses. Demographic control variables were entered in the first step, the independent variable, TL, was enter in the second step, the moderators, AM or IM, in the third step, and the interaction terms (TL*AM or TL*IM) in the final step. When AM served as the moderator, as shown in Table 2, the model in step 1 with demographic control variables alone did not explain a significant portion of the total variance in pro-social voice (ΔR^2 = 0.028, *ns*). With TL added, the model in step 2 explained a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (B = .315, p<0.01; ΔR^2 = 0.044, p<0.01). Therefore Hypothesis 1 was supported. In step 3, with AM added, the model did not explain a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (ΔR^2 = 0.007, *ns*) over TL. Finally, the addition of the interaction term (TL*AM) in the fourth model explained a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (B = .329, p<0.001; ΔR^2 = 0.102, p<0.001). Hypothesis 2 thus was fully supported. Figure 3 illustrates the significant interaction effect.

Similarly, when IM is the moderator, as shown in Table 3, the model in step 1 with demographic control variables alone did not explain a significant portion of the total variance in pro-social voice (ΔR^2 = 0.028, ns). However, with TL added, the model in step 2 explained a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (B = .325, p<0.001; ΔR^2 = 0.044, p<0.001). In step 3, with IM added, the model failed to explain a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (ΔR^2 = 0.009, *ns*) over TL. Finally, the addition of the interaction term (TL*IM) in the fourth model, again, explained a significant incremental portion of the variance in pro-social voice (B = -0.352, p<0.01; ΔR^2 = 0.05, p<0.01). Therefore Hypothesis 3 was fully supported. Figure 4 illustrates the significant interaction effect for IM.

Discussion

This study was designed to explore the relationships among transformational leadership (TL), perceived altruistic motive (AM), perceived instrumental motive (IM), and pro-social voice behaviors in the work place. Specifically, this study was undertaken to answer the research question whether TL would always encourage employees to voice their opinions, by examining whether AM/IM has a boundary effect on TL when it comes to pro-social voice. Toward this end, two separate models were proposed and tested for the moderating effects of AM and IM on the relationship between TL and pro-social voice.

ISSN 1554-3145

Consistent with Detert and Burris's (2007) study, our study found a significant and positive relationship between TL and pro-social voice, thus adding to the evidence supporting the positive impact that TL has on employee pro-social behaviors. More importantly, the results of our analyses support both of the hypothesized moderation models, suggesting that higher AM strengthens the positive relationship between TL and voice, whereas higher IM weakens the positive relationship between the two. The moderation effects are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. With both moderation models supported, this study adds to our understanding of TL's impact on employee pro-social voice behaviors, by discovering the boundary effect of AM/IM on TL's impact. Specifically, our findings suggest that when employees perceive an AM behind their supervisors' TL behaviors, the positive impact of TL on pro-social voice will strengthen (see Figure 3); and that when employees perceive an IM behind their supervisors' TL behaviors, however, the positive impact of TL on pro-social voice will diminish.

In spite of the support we found for established theories and for our hypotheses, this study is subject to limitations set by the methodology we could use. These limitations warrants further research endeavor in subjects related to the relationships among TL, AM/IM, and employee voice behaviors.

The first method issue of concern to us is one related to the data being cross-sectional in nature. As presented earlier, our hypotheses imply a causal relationship between TL and pro-social voice, which may be best examined with longitudinal data. What alleviates our concern are, first, our check for CMV showed that CMV was not a major issue that would impact our findings with our data; and second, the finding that TL did motivate employees' pro-social voice coincides with those of Detert and Burris (2007) who conducted a longitudinal study. Nonetheless, additional longitudinal research is desirable, to allow for more sophisticated tests on the causal paths from the interaction of TL and AM/IM to pro-social voice. Furthermore, given the limitations of single source data, future research should collect data on pro-social voice from the sources of both supervisors and employees in order to prevent the influence of social desirability. In addition, as suggested by other related voice studies (Janssen, Cozijnsen, 1998; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Nikolaou & Bourantas, 2008), besides demographic variables, personality variables should also be included as control variables to exclude other explanations for our results.

The second method issue, which is also related to theories of voice, is one related to the measure of voice. According to Van Dyne et al. (2003), there are in fact three distinct types of voice, pro-social voice, defensive voice, and acquiescent voice. We were only able to capture one type of voice, pro-social voice in this study, partly because there were no existing validated measures for defensive voice and acquiescent voice. If permitted by time and other resources, future research effort should be invested in developing and validating a scale for all three types of voice. Only when proper scales are developed and validated can research move forward in exploring the causes and effects of voice.

Despite its limitations, this study challenges the traditional approach to first investigating the roles of AM/IM in the relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and employee pro-social voice. The results of this study strongly support our assumption that motive does matter to the effectiveness of TL. Consistent with previous research propositions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002), this study indicates that subordinates do not passively react to external stimulations such as leadership. Instead, perceived motive would interact with leadership (i.e. TL) in influencing subordinate behavioral outcomes (i.e. pro-social voice). Concluded from our findings is that subordinates' perceived motive behind TL set the boundaries for the effect of TL:

ISSN 1554-3145

TL will be more effective in encouraging pro-social voice when subordinates believe that TL has more of an altruistic motive and less of an instrumental motive.

ISSN 1554-3145

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Age	24.93	2.34	--									
2	Gender	0.22	0.42	0	--								
3	Education	3.27	0.61	0.23**	0.15	--							
4	Tenure with Organization	2.14	1.09	0.44**	0.03	-0.1	--						
5	Tenure with Supervisor	1.78	0.8	0.36**	0.04	-0.16**	0.68**	--					
6	Position Level	2.99	0.11	-0.07	-0.07	-0.04	-0.29**	-0.31**	--				
7	Pro-social Voice	3.43	0.61	-0.03	0.07	0.02	0.01	0.08	-0.12	--			
8	Transformational Leadership (TL)	3.22	0.63	0.01	-0.14	0.16*	-0.08	-0.04	-0.05	0.28**	--		
9	Perceived Altruistic Motive (AM)	3.4	0.6	-0.11	-0.18**	0.07	-0.05	-0.02	-0.05	0.08	0.68**	--	
10	Perceived Instrumental Motive (IM)	3.2	0.58	0.08	0.09	-0.05	0.02	0.09	-0.13	-0.01	-0.45**	-0.31**	--

Note: N=167, * p<0.05, **p<0.01, DV = Pro-social Voice

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Table 2: Hierarchical Moderated Regression Results for Pro-social Voice (AM as a moderator)

Variables		*b*	*t*	*p*	R^2	*Adj.* R^2	ΔR^2
Step1: Control Variables	$F(6, 160) = 0.773$, *ns*				0.028	-0.008	0.028
Age		-0.023	-0.994	0.322			
Gender		0.075	0.685	0.495			
Education		0.004	0.049	0.961			
Tenure with Organization		-0.022	-0.383	0.702			
Tenure with Supervisor		0.086	1.114	0.267			
Position Level		-0.492	-1.138	0.257			
Step2: Transformational Leadership (TL)	$F(1,159) = 7.474$**	0.315**	3.211	0.002	0.072	0.031	0.044**
Step3: Perceived Altruistic Motive (AM)	$F(1, 158) = 1.172$, *ns*	-0.016	-0.150	0.881	0.079	0.032	0.007
Step4: Transformational Leadership X Perceived Altruistic Motive (TL*AM)	$F(1,157)) = 19.488$***	0.329***	4.415	0.000	0.180	0.133	0.102***

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported from the final step. $N = 167$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

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Table 3: Hierarchical Moderated Regression Results for Pro-social Voice (IM as a moderator)

Variables		*b*	*t*	*p*	R^2	*Adj.* R^2	ΔR^2
Step1: Control Variables	$F(6, 160) = 0.773$, *ns*				0.028	-0.008	0.028
Age		-0.028	-1.205	0.230			
Gender		0.082	0.772	0.472			
Education		-0.011	-0.139	0.890			
Tenure with Organization		0.012	0.201	0.841			
Tenure with Supervisor		0.083	1.031	0.304			
Position Level		-0.522	-1.16	0.248			
Step2: Transformational Leadership(TL)	$F(1,159) = 7.474$**	0.325***	3.784	0.000	0.072	0.031	0.044**
Step3: Perceived Instrumental Motive (IM)	$F(1, 158) = 1.613$, *ns*	0.172	1.878	0.062	0.081	0.035	0.009
Step4: Transformational Leadership X Perceived Instrumental Motive (TL*IM)	$F(1,157)) = 8.988$***	-0.352***	-2.998	0.003	0.131	0.081	0.050**

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported from the final step. $N = 167$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

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Figure 1

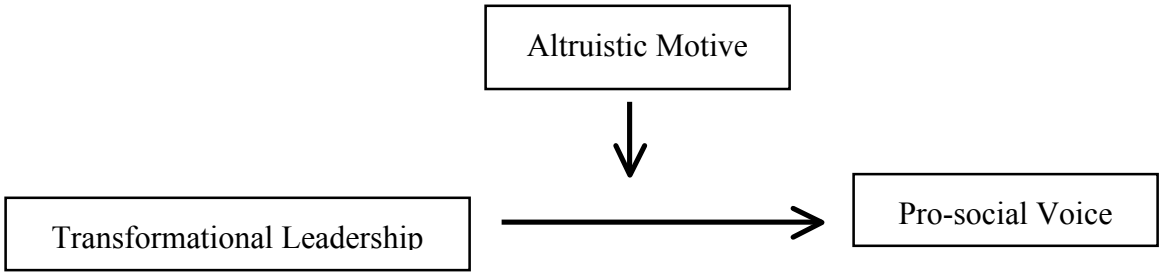

Figure 2

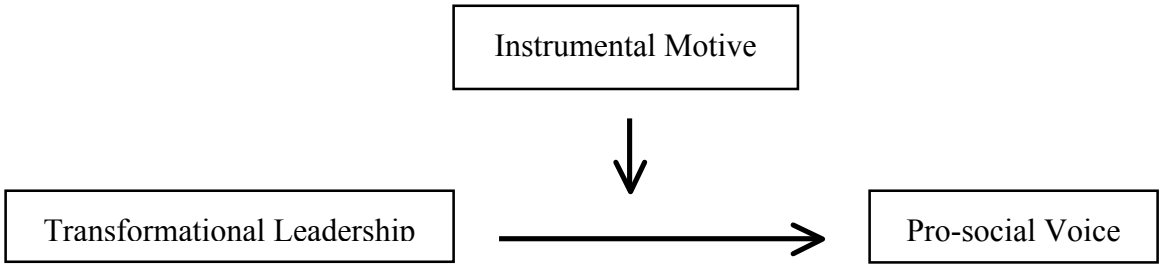

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Figure 3: Interaction effect of AM

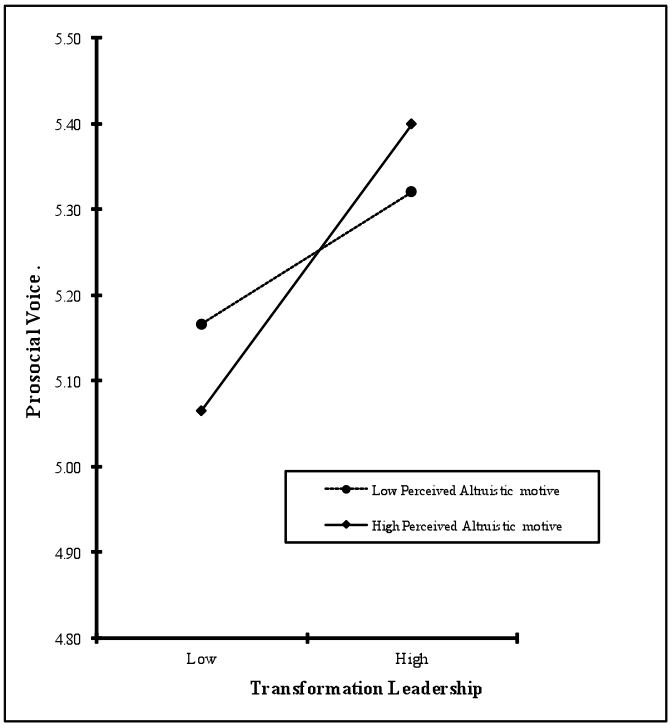
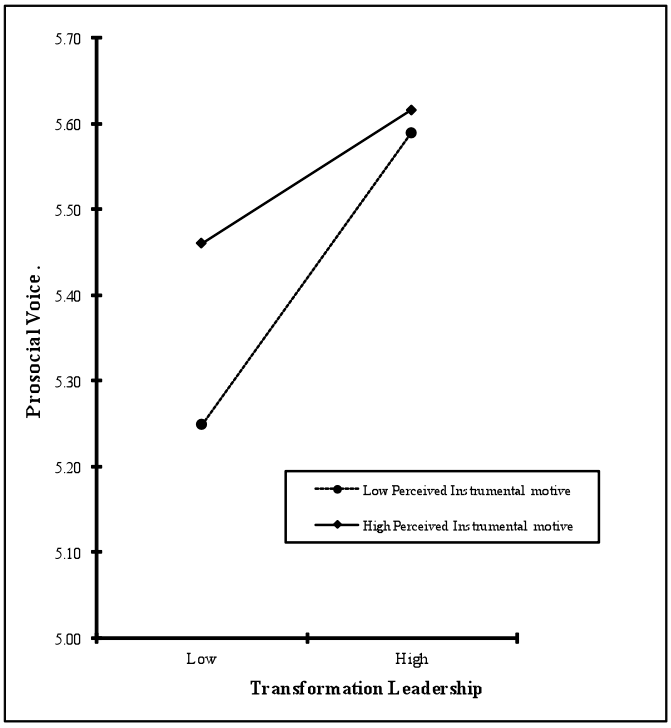


Figure 4: Interaction effect of IM



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About the Authors

Chenwei Li has a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Alabama. Dr. Li is an assistant professor of management at Indiana University – Purdue University Fort Wayne. Her research interests include leadership, creativity, voice behavior, and work-family balance. She has published in *Journal of Managerial Psychology, Management and Organization Review,* and *Psychological Reports* among others. Her teaching interests include leadership, principle of management, and human resource management.

Email: lic@ipfw.edu

Keke ('Coco') Wu has a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Alabama. Dr. Wu is an assistant professor of Management at Central Washington University. Her research has been focused on leadership, politics, and careers. She has published in *Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Managerial Psychology,* and *Psychological Reports* among others. Her teaching interests include leadership, principle of management, and strategic management.

Email: cocowu@cwu.edu

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