The Role of Leader-Follower Defensive Pessimism (In)Congruence in Fostering Perceptions of Followers’ Isolation

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Abstract

The field study examined the joint effect of leaders’ and followers’ different cognitive characteristics (i.e. defensive pessimism) on followers’ isolation. Data from 291 working professionals were first analyzed following a series of hierarchical regression analyses. We examined the interplay between leaders’ defensive pessimism and follower’s defensive pessimism in predicting perceptions of followers’ isolation. The findings from this study indicated that leader’s low defensive pessimism in combination with followers’ high defensive pessimism resulted in high followers’ isolation. Polynomial regression analysis (i.e., response surface modeling) further supported the fact that when both leaders and followers were low in defensive pessimism, therefore in agreement at low levels of defensive pessimism, the levels of followers’ isolation were lower than in the areas when leaders’ and followers’ defensive pessimism deviated from each other, i.e., in the cases of high-low and low-high leader-follower mismatch in defensive pessimism. Similarly, when both leaders and followers were high in defensive pessimism, isolation was higher than in the negative (low-low) condition. However, in the condition when leaders’ and followers’ defensive pessimism was matched at similar levels (regardless low, medium or high) the isolation felt by the followers was lower, thus balanced. The study limitations, warranted future research, and the practical implications of these findings conclude the article.

Keywords: defensive pessimism, leader, follower, perceived isolation