

Development and Test of a Model Linking Safety-Specific Transformational Leadership and Occupational Safety

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The authors developed, tested, and replicated a model in which safety-specific transformational leadership predicted occupational injuries in 2 separate studies. Data from 174 restaurant workers (M age = 26.75 years, range = 15–64) were analyzed using structural equation modeling (LISREL 8; K. G. Jöreskog & D. Sörbom, 1993) and provided strong support for a model whereby safety-specific transformational leadership predicted occupational injuries through the effects of perceived safety climate, safety consciousness, and safety-related events. Study 2 replicated and extended this model with data from 164 young workers from diverse jobs (M age = 19.54 years, range = 14–24). Safety-specific transformational leadership and role overload were related to occupational injuries through the effects of perceived safety climate, safety consciousness, and safety-related events.

The vast majority of workers in developed countries take for granted that going to work on a daily basis is an activity that does not compromise their physical safety. The data, however, may tell a different story. For example, although there has been a decline in the annual number of occupational fatalities in the United States, there are still more than 6,000 fatal work injuries per year, with approximately 3.6 million disabling injuries (Conway & Svenson, 1998). The costs in human suffering alone should be sufficient to engage researchers in this issue, but there are other severe economic and social costs. In terms of productivity, the number of days of work lost because of occupational injuries in Canada between 1993 and 1996 exceeded the number of workdays lost because of labor unrest (Barling & Zacharatos, 2000). Estimates from the European Union suggest that an average of 30 days of

work are lost for each workplace accident (Dupre, 2000). Moreover, it is estimated that the total cost of each workplace injury in Ontario, Canada, is \$6,000 (Canadian), with the cost of each workplace fatality being \$492,000 (Marshall, 1996).

The most frequent attempts to account for occupational safety have traditionally emphasized the so-called “accident prone” individual, ergonomic design of equipment, and/or external regulatory systems (i.e., legislation and collective bargaining; see Sheehy & Chapman, 1987). The modal response by organizational researchers has been one of neglect. Less than 1% of organizational research published in top journals has focused on occupational safety, a situation that has not changed for more than 2 decades (Barling & Zacharatos, 2000; Campbell, Daft, & Hulin, 1982), and the present research forms part of an endeavor to redress this situation.

In this study, we develop, test, and replicate a model linking safety-specific transformational leadership and occupational injuries. Transformational leadership has received considerable empirical scrutiny in the literature (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998), more than have all other leadership theories from 1990 to 2000 (Judge & Bono, 2000), and it is composed of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leadership affects critical subordinate attitudes and work-related outcomes. These include trust in management (Jung & Avolio, 2000; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999), organizational commitment (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996), satisfaction with leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988), work performance (Barling et al., 1996; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Judge & Bono, 2000), consolidated business unit performance (Howell & Avolio, 1993), and the effectiveness of shop stewards (Kelloway & Barling, 1993). Transformational leadership predicts performance even when personality characteristics are controlled statistically (Judge & Bono, 2000).

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