When is an Authoritarian Leader Perceived as More Abusive: Investigations of the Effect of Subordinates’ Ideal and Typical Leadership Schema

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Abstract

Previous research on antecedents of abusive supervision has focused on supervisors’ stable characteristics but has not focused on subordinates’ dynamic cognitive leadership processes. Drawing from leadership categorization theory, we propose that authoritarian leadership activates subordinates’ anti-prototype of leaders and perceptions of more abusive supervision. Moreover, such a relationship is moderated by subordinates’ ideal and typical leadership schema, with the former representing individual preference and the latter representing the social norm. Using an experiment (N = 344) and a multi-wave field study (N = 249), we found that subordinates holding high ideal leadership prototypicality (e.g., my ideal leader is sensitive) and low typical leadership anti-prototypicality (e.g., other leaders are domineering) perceive more leadership anti-prototypicality and more abusive supervision when faced with authoritarian leadership. Our research enriches the existing literature on leadership by providing a cognitive perspective that explains how subordinates’ implicit leadership schemas play a role in the leadership perception process.

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