

Empowering behaviour and leader fairness and integrity: Studying perceptions of ethical leader behaviour from a levels-of-analysis perspective

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Abstract

Ethical leadership is seen as important by many researchers and practitioners. However, empirical research on ethical leader behaviour is limited and to date multilevel research is hardly found in this area. This study examines the relationships of two forms of perceived ethical leader behaviour (fairness and integrity and empowering behaviour) with subordinates' trust and commitment from a levels-of-analysis perspective, using within and between analysis (WABA). In total, 503 employees in 79 work groups rated their leader's fairness and integrity and empowering behaviour. Trust in management and co-workers, and subordinates' affective, continuance, and normative organizational commitment were also measured. As expected, perceived ethical leader behaviour was positively related to trust as well as affective and normative commitment and negatively to continuance commitment. Perceived empowering behaviour was more strongly related to affective commitment than perceived fairness and integrity. Perceptions of empowering behaviour in relation to trust and commitment vary both within and between groups. This suggests an individual differences perspective in which subordinates' views of empowering behaviour develop independently. Fairness and integrity shows several between-groups effects with limited within-group variation, suggesting that people within groups tend to share perceptions of leader's fairness and integrity.