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2005

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Keywords

state goal orientation, work groups, motivation, leader behavior, leadership, leader-member exchange, LMX

Disciplines

Labor Relations | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Performance Management

Comments

Suggested Citation

Required Publisher Statement

Running Head: Emergence of State Goal Orientation

Understanding the Emergence of State Goal Orientation in Organizational Work Groups:

The Role of Leadership and Multilevel Climate Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper attends to a broad range of practically significant employee motivations and provides insight into how to enhance individual-level performance by examining individual-level state goal orientation emergence in organizational work groups. Leadership and multilevel climate processes are theorized to parallel each dimension of state goal orientation to cue and ultimately induce the corresponding achievement focus among individual work group members. It is argued that the patterns of leader behavior, which elucidate the leader's achievement priority, shape group members' psychological and work group climate to embody this priority. Resulting multilevel climate perceptions signal and compel group members to adopt the ascribed form of state goal orientation. The quality of the leader–member exchange (LMX) relationship is viewed as a means to clarify leader messages in the formation of group members' psychological climate and internalize these cues in the emergence of state goal orientation. Considerations for future research and practice are discussed.

Understanding the Emergence of State Goal Orientation in Organizational Work Groups:

The Role of Leadership and Multilevel Climate Perceptions

The implicit focus of much of the theory and research on motivation centers on the motivation to perform a specific task (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1996). While a valuable line of inquiry, current business and career trends necessitate exploration of a broader range of employee motivations. Understanding how to enhance employees' motivation to learn has become critical, given the increasingly dynamic nature of work (Howard, 1995). Similarly, individuals' motivation to demonstrate their competence is common in organizations, and has implications for one's career and leadership efficacy (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Lastly, recent corporate scandals involving cover-ups of questionable management practices illustrate the costly implications of being motivated to avoid failure. The pervasiveness and implications of these trends warrant increased attention on these alternative forms of motivation.

The concept of goal orientation provides a useful vehicle to study this broader range of employee motivations (i.e., learn, prove, avoid failure) and refers to an individual's goal preference in an achievement setting (Dweck, 1986). Even though many researchers treat goal orientation as a dispositional, stable individual difference factor (e.g., Fisher & Ford, 1998; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), experimental research demonstrates that individuals can be temporarily induced to prefer a specific achievement goal; that is, a state goal orientation (e.g., Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996). State goal orientation differs from its trait counterpart in its dynamic nature and responsiveness to situational influences (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This paper is the first to present a theoretical model predicting the emergence of individual-level state goal orientation in

organizational work groups.[1] Work group influences are focal in this discussion because of their salience to organizational members (Hackman, 1992).

This approach is valuable because it provides insight into how to enhance individual-level performance. The present model capitalizes on extant research, which shows goal orientation's potency in predicting individual-level outcomes, to guide scholars and practitioners on how to engineer work groups to facilitate the emergence of more productive forms of goal orientation. The implications of this approach complement those drawn from trait-based goal orientation research, which suggest selecting individuals who are predisposed to more productive forms of goal orientation (e.g., VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999), and provides an alternative means through which positive, goal orientation-based outcomes may be achieved.

The conceptualization of state goal orientation used in the present model builds on Dweck's initial research with children in classroom settings. This work suggested that individuals pursue two broad classes of goals: mastery and performance (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Individuals displaying a learning or mastery orientation focus on self development and building competence. Those favoring a performance orientation seek to demonstrate their competence by making normative comparisons of their ability with others either to obtain favorable competence appraisals (i.e., prove performance) or to avoid negative judgments of their abilities (i.e., avoid performance). Recent refinements to this initial dimensionality suggest further partitioning performance orientation into its prove and avoid components (e.g., VandeWalle, 1997), and so the present model focuses on these three primary dimensions of state goal orientation: learning, prove, and avoid.

Early goal orientation research suggests that leadership and climate perceptions are likely precursors to state goal orientation. Dweck and her colleagues assert that teachers influence student motivation through their expectancies of and rewards for student performance, and by shaping attributions of effort and failures (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Moreover, Ames and Archer (1988) showed that students' perceptions of the achievement focus inherent in their classroom climate are related to the adoption of a corresponding state goal orientation; they also acknowledged that these perceptions may be affected by the relationship between the teacher and individual student. This early research provides a clear, generalizeable framework to an organizational setting—in an analogous role to the teacher, work group leaders shape the climate of the group to emphasize a particular achievement focus, and individuals' relationships with their leader, similar in concept to leader–member exchange (LMX), may affect the conveyance of this emphasized achievement focus.

Building on this initial framework, the present cross-level model incorporates organizational literature on leadership and climate to explain the emergence of individual state goal orientation in organizational work groups. Climate scholars identify work group leaders as the primary architects of group member climate perceptions (e.g., Naumann & Bennett, 2000) and note three aspects of leader behavior that influence climate, two of which are particularly relevant here (Zohar & Luria, 2004).[2] *Pattern orientation* refers to the pattern of the leader's behavior that emphasizes to the group a specific priority relative to other competing goals. Here, leaders' pattern orientation regarding achievement is examined, and the patterns of leader behavior which emphasize different achievement goals (i.e., learning, demonstrating ability, and avoiding failure)

are considered. *Pattern variability* refers to the consistency of leaders' behavior in emphasizing a particular achievement goal over time and across group members. A leader's achievement pattern orientation and its variability are interpreted by group members in the form of climate perceptions (Zohar & Luria, 2004). In the present model, climate is considered at the individual level of analysis, also referred to as one's psychological climate, and the group level of analysis—namely, the work group climate. *Psychological climate* refers to individual group member perceptions of the work environment (James & Jones, 1974); when these perceptions of work routines and rewards become shared among group members, a work group climate is said to emerge (Schneider, 1990).

In this paper, I showcase leaders' achievement pattern orientations in shaping individual and work group climate perceptions to embody the leaders' achievement priorities, and I use the concept of leader pattern variability to determine the level of analysis at which leadership and climate processes primarily operate. I theorize that leadership and climate processes parallel each dimension of state goal orientation to cue and ultimately induce the corresponding achievement focus among individual group members (see Figure 1). Building on existing theory (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Schneider, 1975), I argue that psychological and work group climate signal the preferred achievement orientation and compel group members to adopt a commensurate state goal orientation. I incorporate the concept of LMX—that is, the quality of exchange relationship between the work group leader and a particular employee (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999)—as an individual-level moderating process that provides a

means to clarify leader cues in creating group members' psychological climate and internalize these cues in state goal orientation emergence.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

This model extends the initial framework suggested by early goal orientation researchers (e.g., Dweck, 1986) in two important ways. First, the social, cognitive, and psychological processes through which state goal orientation emerges are explicated, providing greater clarification on *how* and *why* leadership impacts employee state goal orientation. Second, in generalizing this initial framework to an organizational setting, explicit attention is given to multilevel issues. The result is a more thoughtful and comprehensive treatment of the multilevel precursors to state goal orientation and a useful theoretical foundation to guide future organizational research.

Before discussing each of the theoretical linkages depicted in Figure 1, one important boundary condition of the present model is noteworthy. Group members are often faced with a variety of tasks, not all of which are relevant here. Because the current model focuses on state goal orientation, which is an aspect of achievement motivation, the present model is only intended to apply when group members are working on tasks during which achievement motivation may be aroused; that is, achievement tasks. *Achievement tasks* are tasks perceived by group members to involve some level of problem solving and the evaluation of performance against explicit or implicit standards (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). When group members are working on other types of tasks, the antecedent processes described here are not expected to emerge.

Theory Development and Propositions

In this section, I present the core antecedent processes (i.e., leadership, and psychological and work group climate) and key mechanisms that induce group member state goal orientation. Next, I present some process level contingencies, referred to here as *key process level determinants*, to clarify when state goal orientation is induced primarily through: (1) individual level antecedent processes, (2) group level processes, and (3) processes operating simultaneously at both of these levels of analysis. Lastly, to showcase the behavioral implications of the present model, I develop theoretical linkages between state goal orientation and a sampling of individual level outcomes.

Relation between Leader's Achievement Pattern Orientation and Psychological Climate

Organizational scholars have long acknowledged the key role of leadership in establishing climate perceptions. In their classic works, Likert (1967) and McGregor (1960) suggest that leaders transmit their beliefs through the climate they create. More recently, research demonstrates leadership's impact on climate (e.g., Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Scott & Bruce, 1994), and casts organizational leaders as "meaning managers" (Rentsch, 1990) and "climate engineers" (Naumann & Bennett, 2000).

Leaders affect individual climate perceptions through a social learning process during which group members repeatedly observe and interact with their leader to meaningfully interpret work group practices (Bandura, 1986). Leaders transmit their achievement priority by engaging in behaviors and practices that support, reinforce, and imply their favored achievement orientation, and in turn, these behaviors send signals to group members about what is expected and valued (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Schein, 1992). When leaders are relatively consistent in their practices over time, a pattern of

behavior emerges—that is, an achievement pattern orientation, which directs group members' attention to the leader's preferred achievement priority, thereby encouraging the formation of individual climate perceptions that embody this priority.

In addition to signaling expectations, work group practices provide leaders with opportunities to continuously interact with group members to shape their psychological climate. Leaders model the behavior they deem appropriate, provide direct and indirect feedback on whether group members have met expectations, and reward individuals who exhibit expected behaviors (Bandura, 1986). During these ongoing interactions, leaders transmit their achievement priority to individual group members through role modeling, continual guidance, and reinforcement for adopting a psychological climate that embodies the leader's favored achievement orientation.

Leaders who prioritize *employee development* implement various management practices to convey their commitment to learning. For example, they provide time off to engage in developmental activities (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993) and encourage employees to apply newly learned skills on the job (Ford, Quinones, Sego, & Sorra, 1992). In their interactions with work group members, they model the importance of learning from mistakes, encourage experimentation with new work approaches, and provide constructive feedback on how to improve (Edmondson, 1996; Cannon & Edmondson, 2001). Research shows that these management practices help group members come to perceive a climate that values and expects learning (e.g., Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Kozlowski & Hults, 1987).

Leaders who prioritize the *demonstration of ability* conform to a tournament model of career progression (Rosenbaum, 1989) in which employees are encouraged to

engage in ongoing implicit competitions with one another to "win" extrinsic rewards. These leaders explicitly and continuously evaluate employee performance relative to other group members and reward those who outperform others. To gain more favorable competence appraisals, group members are encouraged by their leader to promote their abilities (i.e., engage in impression management). While no organizational literature to my knowledge has examined the relationship between competitive management practices and a climate for performance, the attentional and interactional mechanisms described here have been proven effective in other contexts (e.g., Scott & Bruce, 1994) and are expected to facilitate group members' interpretation of their leader's continual emphasis on competition as reflective of a climate that endorses the demonstration of ability.

Leaders who prioritize the *avoidance of failure* focus on events that challenge their appearance of competence, such as group member mistakes, errors, and sub-par performance. To minimize these threats, these leaders liberally use punishment to deter group members from making future mistakes or errors and engage in defensive tactics—such as accounts, disclaimers, and restitution—to protect or repair their image and the image of their work group (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). When leaders interact with group members in this fashion, research documents that a climate emerges in which group members perceive the avoidance of committing and admitting errors as valued behaviors (Edmondson, 1996; Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998).

Given this existing theory and research, which suggests that leaders shape their group members' psychological climate through the patterns of their behavior and the conceptual mapping between specific leader behaviors and corresponding achievement-

focused psychological climates, I offer the following proposition, accompanied by more specific hypotheses:

Proposition 1: The leader's achievement pattern orientation directly impacts the psychological climate of individual group members.

Hypothesis 1a. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses employee development is positively related to group members' psychological climate for learning.

Hypothesis 1b. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the demonstration of ability is positively related to group members' psychological climate for performance.

Hypothesis 1c. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the avoidance of failure is positively related to group members' psychological climate for avoiding failure.

Relation between Leader's Achievement Pattern Orientation and Work Group Climate

When the idiosyncrasies of group members' psychological climate are minimized, a work group climate emerges. Leaders use their unique, influential role in the work group to facilitate the convergence of group member climate perceptions (e.g., Ashforth, 1985; Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003). They provide a common and unique comparison point in the work group, which helps to narrow the range of variation in group members' interpretations (Ashforth, 1985) and embed the leader's favored achievement priority in emerging shared perceptions. Furthermore, and critical to climate's emergent process, group members interact with one another to produce a shared interpretation of work group routines and rewards (Schneider & Reichers, 1983). When

interacting with their coworkers, group members test out their interpretations of key events in the work group, negotiate the meaning of these events, and adapt their perceptions accordingly. As a result of these ongoing social interactions, a negotiated and shared understanding of work group routines and rewards emerges that often does not reflect any one group member's perception. Empirical research has established the potency of leadership (e.g., Zohar & Luria, 2004) and these interactional processes (e.g., Gonzalez-Roma, Peiro, & Tordera, 2002; Rentch, 1990) in producing a shared-unit climate.

Research supports the notion that the patterns of leader behavior may shape a shared-unit climate to center on the leader's preferred achievement orientation (see Table 1 for a fuller description of key leader behaviors). Leaders supportive of learning facilitate a shared-unit climate for learning (e.g., Smith-Jentsch, Salas, & Brannick, 2001; Tracey, Tannebaum, & Kavanagh, 1995). Leaders who avoid failure contribute to a shared-unit climate in which group members perceive the avoidance of committing and admitting errors as valued behaviors (Edmondson, 1996; Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998). This research provides justification for the following proposition and hypotheses:

Proposition 2: The leader's achievement pattern orientation directly impacts work group climate.

Hypothesis 2a. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses employee development is positively related to a work group climate for learning.

Hypothesis 2b. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the demonstration of ability is positively related to a work group climate for performance.

Hypothesis 2c. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the avoidance of failure is positively related to a work group climate for avoiding failure.

<u>Relation between Psychological Climate and Group Member State Goal Orientation</u>

Returning to the individual level of analysis, social learning theory posits that individuals model learned responses on their interpretations of salient and rewarded work approaches and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Psychological climate signals the desired, emphasized, and expected achievement orientation and motivates individuals to adopt the ascribed achievement goal by clarifying behavior–outcome contingencies and the valued approach to securing rewards (Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990). In this way, psychological climate affords an informational benefit to group members, which in turn motivates group members to adapt accordingly.

Goal orientation scholars contend that state goal orientations are cued by perceptions central to group members' psychological climate—perceptions of task characteristics, the nature of social support, and the process of evaluation and rewards (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984). Individuals holding a *psychological climate for learning* perceive their work as challenging because they are encouraged to take on developmental job assignments (McCauley, 2001; VanVelsor, McCauley, & Moxley, 1998). They view their coworkers as sources of social support, challenge, and feedback (VanVelsor et al., 1998), and perceive satisfaction gained from continuous improvement as particularly salient (McCauley, 2001). According to theory and research, these characteristics of a psychological climate for learning—perceived task challenge, supportive relationships,

rewards for effort and improvement—effectively cue and induce a state learning goal orientation (e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988; Papaioannou, Marsh, & Theodorakis, 2004).

Theory suggests that a performance orientation will be adopted when individuals perceive a high degree of competition and visibility associated with specific tasks and feel that their work is continuously monitored and evaluated (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984). When group members hold a *psychological climate for performance*, they view their work as involving ongoing implicit competitions with their coworkers to "win" extrinsic rewards. They perceive their performance as being continuously evaluated in comparison to others in the determination of these rewards; ranking group members' performance causes task performance to be highly visible.

When group members hold a *psychological climate to avoid failure*, they also perceive task performance as highly visible and being continuously evaluated. Because the avoidance of failure is highly valued, performance is continuously monitored to detect mistakes (Edmondson, 1996; Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998). The consequence of committing errors carries significant punishment, such as constant reminders of one's mistake, and may entail brutal, demeaning confrontations in front of others (Edmondson, 1996). This continuous evaluation of performance and public punishment for errors heightens the visibility of substandard performance.

It is important to note that the nature of the mechanisms to induce a state performance orientation may differ slightly, depending on the work group context. For example, individuals who hold a proving or avoiding psychological climate perceive performance as continuously evaluated. However, the rationale underlying this continuous evaluation is fundamentally different. In contexts where a psychological

climate for performance emerges, ongoing assessments of performance are designed to motivate group members to outperform one another, whereas in contexts in which individuals view avoiding failure as valued, performance is consistently monitored to detect errors and minimize their consequences. Experimental research shows that these subtle nuances in perception effectively cue the expected form of state performance orientation (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1993).

Given this theoretical and empirical basis, I propose the following:

Proposition 3: Group members' psychological climate is directly related to their state goal orientation.

Hypothesis 3a. Group members' psychological climate for learning is positively related to their state learning orientation.

Hypothesis 3b. Group members' psychological climate for performance is positively related to their state prove performance orientation.

Hypothesis 3c. Group members' psychological climate for avoiding failure is positively related to their state avoid performance orientation.

Relation between Work Group Climate and Group Member State Goal Orientation

It has been argued that psychological climate represents informational cues to group members regarding the path to achieve valued rewards in their work group (Kopelman et al., 1990). Work group climate also provides an important source of information (Hackman, 1992), yet it is distinct from one's psychological climate in that it represents a gestalt social context (e.g., Schneider, 1975). As such, work group climate offers additional and distinct influences on group member state goal orientation beyond one's own psychological climate. This general notion that shared perceptions among

coworkers may have effects independent of one's personal perception of the work

environment has been supported by previous research (e.g., Kozlowski & Klein, 2000;

Mathieu & Kohler, 1990). Two theoretically derived explanations exist to describe how

and why specific achievement-oriented work group climates uniquely influence group

member state goal orientation, both of which center on the basic premise that individuals

satisfy their own needs when they adhere to the work group's expectations.

Sociologists argue that group members conform to the expectations of the group

to satisfy their need for social approval (e.g., Blau, 1960; Merton & Kitt, 1950). This

social approval may be thought of as one result of a series of social exchanges between

individual group members and their work group, during which a norm of reciprocating

social benefits is developed and reinforced (Blau, 1964). For example, work group

climate results from meaningful interactions among group members and their leader,

during which interpretations of work routines and rewards are negotiated and become

shared (Schneider & Reichers, 1983). Because of this social process, group members

become more invested in their work group and offer higher levels of commitment to and

identification with the group. In exchange, the work group provides a coherent set of

social cues in the form of work group climate, which benefits group members by

providing clues on how to act appropriately and a basis for justifying their behavior

(Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In return, group members conform to these expectations by

adopting the ascribed state goal orientation to receive social approval from their peers.

This need to conform is intensified because limited organizational sources can provide

the same type of social approval as one's own work group (Blau, 1964).

A more psychologically derived explanation posits that work group members align their state goal orientation with the achievement focus inherent in the work group climate, because doing so satisfies their need to achieve and maintain harmony with their environment (Schneider, 1975). Work group climate provides an organized, interpretable set of work group cues that creates order for employees (Schneider, 1975). Individuals are driven to achieve and maintain a homeostatic balance with their environment, and as a result adapt their perceptual, motivational, and behavior responses to complement the shared-unit climate (Schneider, 1975). Consequently, group members may satisfy their own need to achieve a comfortable equilibrium with their work group by adopting the corresponding state goal orientation endorsed by the work group climate. Research on work group climate demonstrates its potency in aligning individual motivation and behavior with the expectations conveyed by a shared-unit climate (Hofmann & Stetzer, 1998; Neal, Griffin, & Hart, 2000; Zohar, 2000).

While limited attention has been devoted to examining the relationship of shared-unit climates and state goal orientation, recent educational research provides evidence that classroom climates that promote a particular achievement goal (i.e., learning, performance) induce a consistent goal orientation among students (Papaioannou et al., 2004). Particularly because of the strength of the methodology, this evidence provides compelling empirical support for the link between achievement-focused work group climates and individual state goal orientation (see Table 2 for a description of achievement-focused climate perceptions). This research, along with the theory presented above, justifies the following proposition and hypotheses:

Proposition 4: Work group climate is directly related to group member state goal orientation.

Hypothesis 4a. A work group climate for learning is positively related to group member state learning orientation.

Hypothesis 4b. A work group climate for performance is positively related to group member state prove performance orientation.

Hypothesis 4c. A work group climate for avoiding failure is positively related to group member state avoid performance orientation.

<u>Possible Levels Scenarios and their Key Determinants</u>

Implicit in the arguments presented above are a number of contingencies that affect the level of analysis at which focal leadership and climate processes primarily operate. In the following discussion, I present three possible levels scenarios (i.e., individual, group, individual and group) and describe some key conditions which cause antecedent effects to reside at a particular level (or levels) of analysis.

<u>State goal orientation induced primarily through individual level processes</u>. Focal leadership and climate processes most likely occur at the individual level of analysis when the work group leader exhibits different patterns of behavior upon interacting with different group members. For example, a leader who prioritizes employee development may be more supportive of certain group members engaging in developmental activities than others. As a result of this variability in the leader's pattern of behavior—that is, pattern variability—idiosyncratic climate perceptions of the routines and rewards in the work group are likely to occur (Zohar & Luria, 2004). In cases of high leader pattern variability, group members do not share the same experiences, and therefore, no shared

interpretation of the work group is expected to emerge.[3] Under these circumstances,

leadership and climate processes operate at the individual level of analysis to induce

group member state goal orientation.

The notion that work group leaders vary their behavior depending on the

particular group member has been theoretically and empirically examined by researchers

in the area of leader–member exchange (LMX). According to LMX researchers, leaders

and group members engage in a role development process, during which differentiated

role definitions develop between a leader and each of his/her members, resulting in varied

leader–member exchange relationships within a particular work group (Graen &

Cashman, 1975). When the leader–subordinate interactions are confined to formal

expectations prescribed by the organization, a more impersonal, low LMX relationship

results. High-quality LMX relationships are characterized by a reciprocal exchange of

resources between the leader and individual group members, such as access,

communication, and loyalty (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

Members exhibiting a better quality exchange relationship with their leader have an

advantage in deciphering the leader's implicit behavioral messages over members who do

not have this same level of access, because they have greater opportunity to clarify leader

messages and observe the leader. In fact, research shows that members with high LMX

relationships are more likely to be in perceptual agreement with their leader (e.g.,

Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). For this reason, I propose the following:

Proposition 5: A leader's achievement pattern orientation and the exchange relationship between leader and individual group members interact to affect group members' psychological climate.

> *Hypothesis 5a. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses employee development is more strongly related to group members' psychological climate for learning for members who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for members who have a low-quality LMX relationship.*
>
> *Hypothesis 5b. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the demonstration of ability is more strongly related to group members' psychological climate for performance for members who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for members who have a low-quality LMX relationship.*
>
> *Hypothesis 5c. A leader's achievement pattern orientation that endorses the avoidance of failure is more strongly related to group members' psychological climate for avoiding failure for members who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for members who have a low-quality LMX relationship.*

In addition, LMX researchers have argued that the exchange of valuable resources between a leader and member engenders a sense of obligation to reciprocate (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Group members who frequently exchange resources with their leader—that is, members with high quality LMX relationships—have a heightened sense of obligation to meet expectations conveyed by their psychological climate. In this way, the LMX relationship distinguishes group members by the level of obligation they experience, while the psychological climate of group members who enjoy high-quality exchange relationships directs members on how to satisfy this obligation.

This logic is consistent with previous research, has received empirical support, and justifies the following proposition and hypotheses (Hofmann, Morgeson, & Gerras, 2003):

Proposition 6: Group members' psychological climate and the exchange relationship between the leader and group member interact to affect group member state goal orientation.

Hypothesis 6a. Group members' psychological climate for learning is more strongly related to their state learning orientation for those who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for those who have a low-quality LMX relationship.

Hypothesis 6b. Group members' psychological climate for performance is more strongly related to their state proving orientation for those who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for those who have a low-quality LMX relationship.

Hypothesis 6c. Group members' psychological climate for avoiding failure is more strongly related to their state avoid orientation for those who enjoy a high-quality LMX relationship than for those who have a low-quality LMX relationship.

State goal orientation induced primarily through group level processes. This case situation is facilitated by factors that produce high levels of perceptual convergence among group members. Work group leaders who have a particularly compelling presence in the work group are more adept at reducing the variability in individual perceptions (e.g., Naumann & Bennett, 2000). Moreover, research suggests that high levels of group

member interaction and cohesiveness and strong group identification can minimize

individual variation in shared-unit climate perceptions (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2002;

Rentsch, 1990). In this case, gaining social approval and achieving a balance between

one's response and the demands of the work group is particularly attractive to group

members, and motivates them to adapt their state goal orientation accordingly. It is

important to note that under these conditions the work group climate may empirically

demonstrate redundancy with individual level perceptions because of the high level of

perceptual agreement across group members. In such cases, psychological climate is

superfluous, and the cross-level mechanisms theorized to induce state goal orientation are

believed to be operating.

State goal orientation induced through individual and group level processes. With

this case, there is significant agreement among group members regarding the work group

climate, yet individuals retain their own, slightly unique view of the work group, which

may be predictive of individual level outcomes. This situation arises when social

interactions among group members and their leader are relatively compelling in creating

a work group climate, yet individuals vary in their psychological climate, which may

result from individual factors (e.g., tenure in the work group), group factors (e.g., level of

group member interaction) and/or differences in the quality of the leader–member

exchange relationship. In this case, work group climate is expected to have influence

above and beyond psychological climate in affecting group member state goal

orientation, because work group climate has distinct influences (i.e., satisfaction of

individual needs) beyond those of group members' psychological climate (i.e.,

informational). The notion that psychological and work group climate have unique

influences could explain why climate researchers have found shared-unit climate effects over and above individual perceptions (e.g., Mathieu & Kohler, 1990; Naumann & Bennett, 2000).

Relation of group member state goal orientation to individual level outcomes. While additional outcomes worthy of study exist, I highlight only a sampling of possible relevant outcomes, and have selected these outcomes because of their logical parallel to state goal orientation dimensions. *Learning strategies*, such as feedback seeking, refer to "an internal process by which learners select and modify their ways of attending, learning, remembering, and thinking" (Gagne, Briggs, & Wager, 1992: 66) and become apparent through behavior. *Task performance* refers to the quality, accuracy, and quantity of performance associated with the execution of a particular task. *Defensive behaviors* refer to "reactive and protective actions intended to reduce a perceived threat to or avoid an unwanted demand of an individual or group" (Ashforth & Lee, 1990: 622) and may include avoidance of delivering "bad news," of blame, and of taking action that might implicate oneself.

The underlying mechanism of goal orientation believed to explain behavioral differences is one's implicit belief regarding ability (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Individuals subscribing to an incremental view of ability believe that competence can be developed through effort and experience and tend to hold a learning goal orientation. In contrast, individuals who hold an entity view believe that ability is immutable, measure success in terms of effort expended, and generally hold a prove or avoid performance orientation. These unique belief systems produce different interpretations of and responses to challenging task situations. When a state goal

orientation is induced, these cognitions emerge in a form parallel to their trait goal orientation counterpart (Ames & Archer, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988), and therefore, trends found in trait research are expected to hold when examining the outcomes of state goal orientation.

Learning-oriented individuals view achievement settings as opportunities to develop their competence (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988), employ *learning strategies* to develop their skills and knowledge (e.g., VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), and exhibit higher levels of *task performance* (e.g., Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Because a learning orientation regulates cognitive functioning by focusing individual attention on the task, rather than on preserving one's ego (e.g., Dweck, 1986), it is unlikely that learning oriented individuals would shift their attention from the task to reducing the threat of an external stimulus (i.e., engaging in *defensive behaviors*). Therefore, state learning goal orientation is hypothesized to be positively related to the use of learning strategies and task performance and negatively related to the use of defensive behaviors.

An emphasis on gaining positive judgments of one's competence (i.e., a *prove orientation*) may be adaptive in certain circumstances (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Heyman & Dweck, 1992), and researchers have shown a positive relation between a prove orientation and *task performance* (e.g., Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Theory and evidence are less clear with regard to prove orientation's relation to *learning strategies* and *defensive behaviors*. Consequently, only a positive relationship between state proving orientation and task performance is proposed.

Individuals with an avoid orientation believe that their abilities cannot be improved, and therefore, do not engage in learning strategies (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). These individuals interpret challenging situations as potential threats to their confidence and withdraw mentally or physically, thereby negatively impacting their task performance (Elliot & McGregor, 1999; VandeWalle et al., 1999). It seems reasonable to expect that these individuals would engage in more defensive behaviors to avoid negative characterizations of their ability and preserve the façade of being competent. Taken together, this research and logic suggests that a state avoid orientation will be negatively related to the use of learning strategies and task performance and positively related to the use of defensive behaviors.

Proposition 7: Group members' state goal orientation is directly related to individual level outcomes.

Hypothesis 7a. Group members' state learning goal orientation will be positively related to their use of learning strategies and task performance, and negatively related to their use of defensive behaviors.

Hypothesis 7b. Group members' state prove performance goal orientation will be positively related to their task performance.

Hypothesis 7c. Group members' state avoid goal performance orientation will be negatively related to their use of learning strategies and task performance, and positively related to their use of defensive behaviors.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

The predictive ability of goal orientation of numerous performance-based outcomes makes it an important topic for future research. The primary objective of this

paper was to develop a model that articulates the underlying mechanisms that induce

individual state goal orientations in organizational settings. Yet, a number of issues

deserve additional attention, and this section highlights key considerations for future

research and practice that involve: (1) research design, measurement, and analysis; (2)

suggestions for theoretical extensions; and (3) managerial implications.

<u>Research Design, Measurement, and Analysis</u>

Design. Because of the complexity of the present model, I recommend using

multiple methods to understand the proposed social, cognitive, and psychological

processes. Experimental research methods best control for potential threats to internal

validity, such as group members' trait goal orientation and the complex nature of work in

organizational settings. Researchers can better control for effects on state goal orientation

emanating from the objective task characteristics, such as the level, variety, and/or nature

of the task, and their potential relation to a particular achievement-oriented climate. The

challenge in designing such a test is to simulate the interpersonal, dynamic processes

theorized here; therefore, incorporation of adequate interaction opportunities among

study participants and the hypothetical leader would be critical.

Quantitative field research complements experimental designs by providing

higher levels of external validity. Finding evidence of the proposed linkages in a natural

setting would enhance the credibility of the types of leaders and climates described here,

as well as heighten the practical significance of this domain of research. Demonstrating

these relationships is contingent, in part, on ensuring adequate variability of the

independent measures. Because variability is often constrained when collecting data from

one organization (e.g., Schneider, Smith, Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998), researchers need to

ensure that work group leaders have significant latitude in managing their work groups,

and/or consider collecting data from multiple organizations. Another challenge in testing

the present model in a field setting involves issues of control.[4] One obvious rival

hypothesis is that the similarity found in group members' state goal orientation results

from attraction-similarity processes, by which group members are attracted to and

selected by work group leaders who hold the same trait goal orientation, which

presumably has a high correlation with its state counterpart. To determine the effects of

the processes described here independent from those involving attraction and selection,

researchers would need to capture trait and state goal orientation assessments and partial

out trait effects during statistical analyses. It would be advantageous to assess trait and

state goal orientation at different points in time, in order to maximize differentiation

between these two measures and enhance the psychometric quality of both measures.

Measurement and analysis. In a field setting, the multi-focal nature of work,

coupled with the possibility that more objective task characteristics may induce state goal

orientations, introduces an additional level of complexity to measuring state goal

orientation. One way to manage these challenges is through the use of a scenario-based

approach. Respondents would be presented with a variety of work situations, each

featuring a unique task demand that is relevant to their work, and then asked to answer a

series of questions designed to capture respondents' state goal orientation in each

situation. This approach incorporates a richer representation of the variety of tasks facing

organizational members, allows researchers to test for possible task effects on state goal

orientation, and minimizes measurement error by providing respondents with a common

frame (i.e., the task situation). In experimental settings, many of these task complexities

can be simplified, and therefore, measuring state goal orientation would simply involve assessing participants' goal orientation on the given experimental task(s).

Zohar and Luria (2004) measured leaders' pattern orientation, pattern variability, and pattern simplicity through leader reports of how they would respond in a series of highly relevant work situations. Given the conceptual proximity of leader achievement priority and climate (i.e., psychological, work group), their approach provides an innovative way to validly capture the complexity associated with leadership through an independent source of measurement, as psychological and work group climate are most appropriately assessed by work group members. The psychological and work group climate measures differ, in that work group climate is an aggregation of group members' psychological climate assessments (see Bliese, 2000; Schneider, Bowen, Ehrhart, & Holcombe, 2000). With regard to the quality of the leader–member exchange relationship, it is recommended that individual group members and/or work group leaders provide assessments to be consistent with prior research. The hypothesized relationships between these measures are best analyzed using some form of random coefficient modeling (e.g., hierarchical linear modeling) to properly address the multilevel nature of the data (see Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000 for greater detail).

Regardless of the design employed, it is likely that many of the core constructs could be captured from a single source; therefore, managing response bias becomes critical. One approach to minimizing response bias would be to capture outcome assessments from a separate source (e.g., work group leader, objective measure). To manage the same source bias potentially inherent in the psychological climate and state goal orientation measures, researchers could model common variance across these

constructs, presumably attributable to the source of measurement, and partial out same-source variance effects through confirmatory factor analysis (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990 for an example).

Suggestions for Theoretical Extensions

One assumption of the present model is that leaders are relatively consistent in their achievement priority over time and across situations. Relaxing this assumption would allow scholars to explore a broader range of contingencies that produce more complex patterns of leader behavior. Leaders who are highly adaptive to the needs of the individual employee, task demands, and deadlines may be able to seamlessly shift in their emphasis of different priorities, in order to induce the appropriate form of state goal orientation. Moreover, leaders vary in their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, perhaps due to differences in leadership experience or in individual characteristics such as emotional intelligence. The consequence of this variation in leader versatility is that processes underlying the model presented here may differ across work groups in their temporal dynamics and level of analysis. Additional theoretical guidance to more completely describe the drivers and consequences of leader versatility (i.e., leader pattern simplicity) would extend our understanding of how situational leadership affects group member state goal orientation in organizational settings.

In addition, the present model builds on the notion that leaders, in part, shape how group member perceive the nature of the task and the evaluation of task performance to induce state goal orientation. Ample conceptual space exists to articulate how and why objective task characteristics (e.g., number of tasks, change in task demands, diversity of tasks) impact state goal orientation. Moreover, theoretical integration of how perceived

task characteristics, as shaped by the leader, and objective task characteristics would enable scholars to understand the fuller set of drivers, and their interrelation, that facilitate state goal orientation emergence. This type of scholarship could inform researchers and practitioners on how to better manage group members on specific tasks to help ensure that desired motivational and performance outcomes are attained.

<u>Managerial Implications</u>

The three dimensions of goal orientation provide a vehicle by which to explore a range of practically significant employee motivations. Because of the emergence of the knowledge economy and the increasingly dynamic and complex nature of work (Howard, 1995), understanding how to enhance employees' motivation to learn is critical. In regard to a motivation to prove one's ability, research demonstrates its pervasiveness in work contexts, such as in the recruitment and selection process (e.g., Stevens & Kristof, 1995), and in situations involving leadership (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998). Lastly, recent corporate scandals involving cover-ups of questionable management practices to promote a more favorable corporate image illustrate the costly implications of being motivated to avoid failure. The present model elucidates the specific leadership behaviors that are instrumental in constructing unique forms of climate perceptions, and in turn, affecting employee motivation. Articulation of these behaviors and their implications provides a means through which leadership may be evaluated, and provides one necessary component for developing effective leadership in organizations.

Second, the premise that leaders can impact employee motivation and performance through their own priorities and behaviors provides an empowering philosophical orientation to leadership development. Organizations may design

leadership programs to assist leaders in developing their capabilities of identifying their implicit priorities; reflecting, evaluating, and modifying how they communicate these priorities to their employees; and evaluating and improving the effectiveness of the type of climate they create within their work group. Programs such as these can provide leaders with the necessary tools and support, as they attempt to enhance their effectiveness and lead their employees to achieve better performance results.

Conclusion

As a potent predictor of individual level outcomes and a vehicle through which a range of practically significant employee motivations may be examined, goal orientation is well deserving of study. The proposed model extends previous theorizing by explicating how and why leadership and resulting multilevel climate processes impact group member state goal orientation, and by clarifying the multilevel complexities related to these key antecedent processes. In doing so, it guides practitioners and scholars in how to engineer the work group context to facilitate more productive forms of employee motivation, and provides an alternative means for achieving positive goal orientation-based outcomes to what has been offered in the goal orientation literature to date. I offer this theoretical foundation, along with suggestions for future research, in the hopes of stimulating empirical study of state goal orientation and expanding our theoretical and practical treatment of this domain of research.

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Table 1

Key Leader Behaviors and Practices that Convey Each Achievement Priority

Employee Development	Demonstrating Ability	Avoiding Failure
• Pays close attention to employee development	• Pays close attention to who has demonstrated high levels of ability	• Pays close attention to mistakes and sub-par performance
• May use specific learning goals to motivate and measure progress	• Explicitly measures employee performance relative to others	• Uses punishment for mistakes as primary source of feedback
• Encourages experimentation with new work approaches and learning from failure	• Provides feedback on performance by comparing work to others	• Role models and encourages use of impression management to protect image when competence is threatened
• Provides encouragement and constructive feedback on how to improve	• Role models and encourages use of impression management to enhance image	• Spends time actively managing impressions
• Makes resources that facilitate learning available	• Spends time actively managing impressions	• Rarely rewards—when done, rewards for "not screwing up"
• Rewards high levels of effort and improvement	• Rewards those who outperform others	• Assigns jobs to those who will not fail
• Assigns jobs to stretch and develop employees	• Assigns jobs to those who have proven themselves	

Table 2

Key Perceptions of Each Achievement-Oriented Climate

Learning	Performance	Avoiding Failure
• Continuous development is valued, expected, and rewarded	• Demonstration of one's ability and outperforming others is valued, expected, and rewarded	• Avoiding the appearance of incompetence is valued, expected, and rewarded
• Opportunities exist to develop competence*	• Assignments provide opportunities to compete with coworkers to demonstrate abilities*	• Evidence of incompetence carries significant penalty*
• Intrinsic rewards are salient*	• Evaluation of task performance is salient and performed normatively*	• Continuous evaluation of task performance occurs to detect error and deter future mistakes*
• Improvement, effort, and employee development are rewarded*	• Impression management is necessary to bolster one's image of being competent	• Impression management is necessary to protect/repair one's image
• Coworkers provide encouragement and challenge to develop*	• Coworkers are viewed as the "competition"	• Coworkers "cover up" for one another

* Perceptions theorized to induce a state goal orientation (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984).

Figure 1

Mixed Determinant Cross-Level Model of the Emergence of State Goal Orientation

Author Note

Footnotes

[1] Cohen and Bailey (1997) define a work team as "a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems" (p. 241). Further, they note that work groups may differ from teams in the level of member interdependence. Here, I use the term "work group" exclusively to convey that member interdependence is not a necessary condition of the present model.

[2] Pattern simplicity is the third aspect of leadership discussed by Zohar and Luria (2004), and refers to the number of contingencies or situational attributes that determine a particular pattern of behavior for a leader. For the purposes of theory building, leaders are assumed in the present model to rely on relatively few contingencies (e.g., task requirements, deadlines) in determining their patterns of behavior. Relaxing this assumption provides provocative extensions to the present model which are discussed in the final section of this paper.

[3] It is important to note that there are two sources of leader pattern variability: within-group member (i.e., acting differently with the same group member) and between-group member (i.e., acting in a relatively consistent manner but varying this treatment across group members). In cases of high within-member leader variability, no psychological climate is expected to emerge, given the various, presumably conflicting messages about work group routines and rewards. In these cases, trait goal orientation is expected to

dominate. The above discussion is only intended to apply to situations involving high between-member leader variability.

[4] Researchers seeking to test this model need to carefully specify all relevant causes of each endogenous variable, as full specification is limited here, given numerous methodological contingencies and page constraints. Other possible alternative correlates of work group climate, which may pose a threat to internal validity, include, but are not limited to, technology, work group size, resource support, and organizational climate. Possible correlates of the outcomes discussed here include, but are not limited to, individual ability, perceived task difficulty, and the supportiveness of the task environment. Control of these factors may be achieved through sampling and/or measuring relevant characteristics, and statistically controlling for their effects during analyses.