


# Chapter 7

## First-Time Leaders and Implicit Leadership Theory: Effects of Stress

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### ABSTRACT

*First-time leaders may find themselves thrust into very stressful situations for their teams and organizations at large. First-time leaders in corporations, the classroom, sports, the military, and politics should understand how stress changes the way followers perceive their leader and the ideal traits for a leader through changing leadership prototype schemas. Implicit leadership theories, social information processing, and cognitive psychology suggest that stress can influence the activation of schema. Changing leadership prototype schemas of followers may affect subsequent productivity and efficiency. This chapter examines if leadership prototype schemas change under stress and recommends ways first-time leaders can respond to these changing schemas, including how female first-time leaders who are often initially perceived as more sensitive leaders can utilize changing perceptions and ideal leader prototypes under stressful conditions.*

### INTRODUCTION

First-time leaders, who are defined in this chapter as any individual in a new job or role or industry that they have not previously performed, are faced with a large number of uncertainties pertaining to their new position. Many of these uncertainties are concerned with or affected by leader-follower dynamics (Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012). Primarily, two theories define these leader-follower dynamics: social exchange theory (Cook et al., 2013; Emerson, 1976) which accounts for social interactions and communications between a leader and follower called exchanges, and implicit leadership theory (ILT) (Rush, Thomas & Lord, 1977) and its converse implicit followership theory (IFT) (Shondrick & Lord,

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2010) which account for the psychological impression and implicit cognitive contracts in the dyadic relationship between a leader and a follower.

While social exchanges and communications have been shown to directly affect follower motivation and productivity (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005), the beliefs held by individuals about what qualities make up an effective leader and whether or not their current leader is perceived as having any of those qualities precedes any of these social interactions. These beliefs impact the effectiveness of communication and interactions between the leader and follower, promoting trust between the individuals when leader or follower actions are consistent with the currently held ILT or IFT prototype (Khorakian & Sharifirad, 2019).

Employees hold an implicit cognitive model of what makes a good leader and subsequent anticipated behaviors of their leaders. Multiple different prototypes or schema are possible, dependent on various situational factors, including prior experience, current job role, gender, and culture (Holzinger, Medcof, & Dunham, 2006; Liang, Sendjaya, & Abeysekera, 2019; Souba & Souba, 2018). Prior research has indicated that when a leader's behaviors are more congruent with the currently held ILT schema, then employee trust, performance, longevity, and ethical behaviors are improved (Epitropaki et al., 2013; Khorakian & Sharifirad, 2019). Likewise, leaders, including first-time leaders, have IFT schema of what their follower's ideas and behaviors should be and when follower behaviors are more congruent with the leader's followership schema, this also increases trust, improves the work dynamic, and leads to employee success (e.g., promotion).

First-time leaders should be aware of likely employee ILT schemas as well as their own IFT schemas to better interpret manager employee exchanges and maximize their employee's productivity and job satisfaction. Another factor first-time leaders need to be aware of is how employees' ILT schemas are subject to change.

As just mentioned, employees can hold multiple ILT schema and various factors can cause a new schema to become dominant. This chapter will focus on examining if stress can cause changes in ILT schemas. First-time leaders are commonly hired when a new project is started or corporate cultural change is desired (Tan, 2003). New projects have been shown to create stress, both for managers (Fujigaki et al. 1994) and staff members (Ivancevich et al. 1983). Stress has additionally been shown to impact job performance on projects for many different types of businesses (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986; Seddon et al. 1999).

Historically, stress is an important factor to consider, regarding how ILT schema change. Early hunter-gatherers exalted the best warriors when the tribe was under attack, but deposed them when the threat subsided (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). In ancient Rome, a dictator was elected if the territory were under threat, whereas the Republic was reinstated during times of peace (Keaveney, 2009). In fact, most political dictators throughout history came into power as a result of an apparent threat or crisis (Hertzler, 1940). In response to terrorist threats, which may be seen as a cause of increased stress, the United States enacted the Patriot Act that greatly extends the powers of the President and law enforcement agencies to deal with these threats. Prior research has provided evidence that U. S. Presidents with more masculine facial features are preferentially elected during times of increased stress, such as war times (Little et al., 2007). The preceding examples, which are consistent with prior research (Hoyt, Simon, & Innella, 2011; Nevicka et al., 2013; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser 2007), demonstrate that the type or schema of a preferred leader changes during times of stress, such as any perceived threat to the group. Early models of leadership suggest that stressful situations create a need for more authoritative (dictatorial, tyrannical, strong, task-oriented, directive) styles of leadership to provide direction and reduce uncertainty (Fiedler,

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