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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Leading in a Highly Competitive Environment: Effects of CEO Confident Leadership on Follower Commitment in China

Abstract As a trait, leader confidence has been examined in major leadership theories, such as transformational/charismatic, Pygmalion, and empowering leadership. However, how confidence affects leadership effectiveness remains an empirical question. Conceptualizing leadership confidence in two behavioral approaches—demonstrating self-confidence (DC-self) and demonstrating confidence in followers (DC-follower)—this study tests the independent effects of the two DC behaviors as well as their interactive effects with firm environment on followers' commitment. Results of Hierarchal Linear Modeling analyses suggest that both DC behaviors have significant impact on follower commitment and their effects attenuate each other. Results also reveal that DC-self interacts with firm environment to influence follower commitment. The effect of DC-self on follower commitment is stronger in a more competitive environment. Those findings and their implications for leadership research and practice are discussed.

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1 Introduction

Confidence can be in oneself and in others. Confidence in self refers to one's appraisal of one's own competence, skills, and ability to succeed at a particular endeavor (Crocker and Major, 1989). Confidence in others is a judgment of other people's competence, skills, and willingness to engage in exemplary and symbolic behavior and role modeling (Howell and Shamir, 2005). For leadership effectiveness such as decision making and motivating followers, a leader's self-confidence has long been considered a key factor (e.g., Bass, 1985; Hart et al., 2014; Hollenbeck and Hall, 2004; Hu et al., 2012; Stark and Tamayo, 1995). However, according to Kanter (2004), self-confidence is not the real secret of leadership; "the more essential ingredient is confidence in other people" (p. 328). A fundamental task of the organizational leader is to create confidence that permits followers to achieve high performance. In fact, Kanter's book, "Confidence: How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin and End", offers many examples ranging from the simplest ball games to the most complicated business and political situations, showing that a fundamental truth about people is a common element in winning: people rise to the occasion when leaders help them gain the confidence to do so. However, empirically, confidence research has focused on leaders' self-confidence; leaders' confidence in followers has not been examined as a factor as important as leaders' self-confidence in leadership effectiveness.

The current study takes a behavioral approach to capturing CEO confident leadership at two levels, i.e., leaders demonstrating self-confidence (DC-self) as well as demonstrating confidence in their followers (DC-follower). We operationalize leadership effectiveness in terms of follower commitment to the organization and examine the direct and interactive effects of the behaviors on followers' commitment, treating firm environment as the contingent factor. This study not only offers the leadership literature new insights, but also offers business leaders implications that will help them in their endeavor to lead through increasingly intense competition and rapid changes.

2 Confidence, Leader Confidence, and Confident Leadership

In general, confidence refers to the trust state of mind, expectations for favorable outcomes, and reliance on one's power of judgment. It involves relatively stable, trait-like, generalized competence beliefs (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2004). Confidence relates not only to personal psychology, but also to the organization. When it comes to organizations, confidence could appear at four different levels (Kanter, 2004): individual, dyadic, system, and environmental. At the individual level, self-confidence generates an emotional climate for personal high expectations; at the dyadic level, confidence involves faith in one another and makes people feel more engaged with one another; confidence in the system refers to having beliefs in organizational structures that reinforce accountability, collaboration, and innovation; and finally, external confidence is at the environmental level and it refers to having confidence in a network for providing the necessary resources.

Confidence at all four levels is significant to an individual as well as to the organization's accomplishments. However, within the framework of leadership as addressed in the current paper, we focus only on the first two levels: the individual and the dyadic. Literally, leadership dynamics concern leader traits, behaviors, follower characteristics, and leader-follower interactions (Howell and Shamir, 2005; Yukl, 2002). A major purpose of leadership is to influence followers and arouse their motivation toward the organizational objective. Therefore, we adopt Kanter's (2004) concept of individual and dyadic confidence to anchor confident leadership: a confident leader should demonstrate confidence in both him/herself (DC-self) and his/her followers (DC-follower) to achieve effectiveness. A leader demonstrating self-confidence will appear optimistic, decisive in his/her own faith, and takes all opportunities to convey his/her beliefs to the followers. On the other hand, a leader displaying confidence in followers puts strong faith in followers' capabilities as well as their willingness to complete collective goals. A "follower-confident" leader will try his/her best to encourage followers to take responsibilities and to resolve problems by themselves.

We take a traditional approach to constructing this particular leadership style and treat confidence as a trait-like disposition. However, in the leadership process, traits have to be demonstrated behaviorally or attributed by followers to

the leader (Kanoungo and Mendonca, 1996; Xu et al., 2013), thus we operationalize confidence as leader confidence-demonstrating behaviors. Our conceptualization is consistent with the approach constructing transformational leadership. First, we focus on leaders rather than followers. Although followership is indispensable for leadership effectiveness (Howell and Shamir, 2005) and confidence that followers have in their leader is equally important in the dyadic confidence as that held by the leader in his/her followers, we only consider the leader-to-follower perspective of the dyad. Particularly, this study focuses on the top leader of the organization since confident leadership at that level is more critical to follower outcomes than at other levels in the organization due to the multiple sources of power a top leader tends to possess. Second, leader confidence has been legitimated to be part of the transformational leadership dimensions. Especially, leader confidence is manifested via both visionary and inspirational processes. For instance, a visionary process involves envisioning a desirable future, articulating an achievement-oriented approach, showing determination, and setting roles of self-sacrifice (Hyatt, 2011). On the other hand, an inspirational process appears more emotional and adds affective qualities to leader influence. According to Yukl (1981, p. 121), "inspiration refers to the extent to which a leader stimulates enthusiasm among subordinates for the work of the group and says things to build subordinate confidence in the ability to perform assignments successfully and attain group objectives." In this sense, we argue that confident leadership can also be treated as an essential (sub-construct) component or a prerequisite of inspirational leadership, which is one of the dimensions of transformational leadership. We believe that singling out the key component or the prerequisite of a very widely recognized effective leadership style can enable us not only to enrich the transformational leadership literature but also help practitioners better understand what it takes to be inspirational and transformational. Also, by separating two distinctive behaviors of confident leadership, we believe the results of the current empirical study would encourage leaders to more conscientiously develop their self-confidence as well as confidence in their followers. In the following sections, we will examine the relationship between leaders' DC behaviors and followers' organizational commitment.

3 Confident Leadership and Follower Commitment

3.1 DC-self and Follower Commitment

Leaders' self-confidence generates an emotional climate of high expectations. In the literature, having self-confidence is a prominent quality of a leader (e.g., Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). Many research studies have provided reasons explaining why a high level of self-confidence is essential to a CEOs' success (e.g., Atwater, Penn, and Rucker, 1991; Bass, 1985; House, 1977; House and Howell, 1992; Zaccaro, 2001). First, a self-confident CEO usually has strong faith in his/her own competence, and therefore tends to set more challenging goals and is able to accomplish more in his career. Second, self-confidence brings a sense of personal worth. Having a high level of self-confidence makes leaders feel capable of getting the job done and self-efficacy pushes them to try harder and persist longer when facing obstacles. Leaders possessing high levels of self-confidence are more likely to be effective in fulfilling responsibilities; and once fulfilled, the sense of achievement will in turn enhance the level of confidence, thus creating a healthy cycle in leaders (Lindsley, Brass, and Thomas, 1995; Stark and Tamayo, 1995).

Possessing self-confidence enables a leader to not only promote his/her own faith, personal worth, and success in performance, but also to induce positive attitudes in followers such as organizational commitment, which we examine in this study. With a high level of self-confidence, a leader is able to incorporate available information to quickly form his/her own definite opinions, and is likely to have a strong sense of what is right and wrong, which makes top level decision-making processes much easier (Bass, 1999). Self-confident leaders are usually decisive and implement strategic decisions firmly. If things become rough, leaders with a high level of self-confidence will take on their responsibilities and try their best to deal with challenges. A high level of self-confidence allows the leader to create a psychological atmosphere that enables followers to develop their own internal sense of personal control (Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, and McNamara, 2005; Turner, Barling, and Zacharatos, 2002), and to perceive more confidence in both the organization and their own future. Such a sense will help enhance followers' locus of control and sense of autonomy in the organization (Spector, 1988), which in turn, will make

them trust their leaders more and be more likely to commit themselves to the organization.

According to findings from transformational/charismatic leadership studies (e.g., Kark, Shamir, and Chen, 2003; Sashkin and Sashkin, 2003), a leader's confidence is a crucial base for the leader to be able to successfully transform followers into leaders. Self-confident leaders are usually more persuasive and can encourage followers to adopt positive orientations (Chemers, Watson, and May, 2000). Without self-confidence, leaders would not be capable of convincing others of their convictions (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Tichy and Cardwell, 2002). In the transforming process, which is an important part of leadership development (Day, 2000), leaders serve as strong role models and empower followers to do what is best for the organization (Northouse, 2001). Imitating such leaders and being empowered by them, followers will experience fewer constraints from the leader and are more likely to perceive their own contribution to be important to the organization, which, in turn, will reinforce the psychological bond between these employees and the organization (Leiter and Harvie, 1997).

Finally, DC-self is likely to induce a high quality leader-follower relationship, conceptualized as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (e.g., Graen and Cashman, 1975; Graen and Ulh-Bien, 1995). People with high self-confidence are generally optimistic. They look at mistakes as learning opportunities and use the experience to grow. Likewise, confident leaders usually welcome different opinions and feedback from followers and tend to incorporate what they can in order to make things better. In turn, the openness of the leaders will minimize the psychological distance and enhance the relationship between themselves and their followers. High quality LMX also fosters organizational commitment (Law, Wong, Wang, and Wang, 2000). On the contrary, a leader who lacks self-confidence tends to fear dealing with various types of feedback and criticism, regardless of whether they are constructive or destructive. Such a leader usually spends his/her time defending his/her own actions, shifting blame to others, making up excuses for why things have gone the way they did, and is significantly less willing to hold face-to-face discussions with subordinates (Kipnis and Lane, 1962). Under such a leader, followers are not likely to be committed to the supervisor and the organization. Based on the above reasoning, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. A leader's DC-self will positively relate to followers' organizational commitment.

3.2 DC-Follower and Follower Commitment

As stated previously, we conceptualize confident leadership into two orientations in terms of leadership behavioral style. DC-self focuses more on the leader him/herself, while DC-follower is more follower-orientated. Both types of leader behavior are likely to facilitate a favorable exchange between the leader and the follower (Blau, 1964). For example, the former induces followers' trust in the leader, thus inducing follower commitment; while the latter invokes followers' feeling of being trusted by the leader and therefore improve follower commitment. Specifically, we argue that DC-follower is positively related to follower commitment for the following reasons:

First, it has been found that organizational favorable attitudes (toward members, superiors, work, organization, and all other aspects of the job) actually "reflect a high level of mutual confidence and trust throughout the organization" (Likert, 1961, p. 98). In this sense, having confidence in followers is likely to increase followers' commitment, which can also be understood using Theory X and Theory Y (McGregor, 1960). McGregor describes the circular self-fulfilling process (SFP; Merton, 1948) by which leaders' assumptions (expectations) determine how they treat their followers. The way leaders treat their followers, in turn, affects how the followers respond to them. According to McGregor (1960), a leader holding "X" assumptions mistrusts employees, refrains from delegating authority to them, and supervises them closely. Such leader behavior lead to the fulfillment of the leader's prophecy as employees react by appearing very passive and minimizing their efforts whenever they can. In contrast, belief in Theory Y leads the leader to trusting people and seeking ways to achieve greater integration between the individual and organizational goals. Guided by the leader holding "Y" assumptions, followers live up to the trust placed in them and respond by doubling their commitment and motivation.

Second, DC-follower also tends to invoke followers' ego motives. Creating and maintaining a sense of personal worth and importance, such confidence helps fulfill followers' higher-order needs at work (Maslow, 1954; 1965). This is also been illustrated by the Pygmalion and Galatea effects (e.g., Dvir, Eden, and

Banjo, 1995). In his prestigious book "New Patterns of Management", Likert (1961) states that a leader who shows confidence in a follower actually improves his expectation toward the follower rather than reduces the expectation: "…his confidence in his subordinates leads him to having high expectations as to their level of performance. With confidence that he (the leader) will not be disappointed, he expects much (from the follower), not little" (p. 101). Eden and other researchers also argue that Pygmalion leadership behavior arouse strong motivation and intensification of effort by conveying high expectations (Chen and Klimoski, 2003; Eden, 1984; Eden, Geller, Gewirtz, Gordon-Terner, Inbar, Liberman, Pass, Salomon-Segev, and Shalit, 2000). When motivated, followers will view organizational objectives as being significant and their contributions to the organization as unique. They are also likely to see their job roles as difficult, but meaningful and important, thus increasing their commitment to the organization. Conversely, uncertainty regarding leaders' expectations is associated with increased exhaustion and depersonalization (Firth, Mckeown, McIntee, and Britton, 1987).

Third, a leader who expresses confidence in the integrity, ability, and motivation of subordinates will create a supportive supervisory climate in the organization (Darling, 1995). By showing confidence in followers, leaders can clearly convey support from top management, and build followers' self-confidence by enabling them to succeed through their own efforts (Sashkin and Sashkin, 2003; Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler, and Shi, 2004). Leaders' confidence in their followers also urges the leaders to delegate and empower their followers more, the process of which, in turn, develops the subordinates' capabilities and willingness to contribute. The process also helps them see the connection between their own accomplishments and that of the company's. As shown in leadership literature, empowering leadership behavior has been confirmed to have both direct and indirect effects on follower commitment (i.e., Avolio, Zhu, Koh, and Bhatia, 2004; Kark, Shamir, and Chen, 2003; Konczak, Stelly; and Trusty, 2000). In this sense, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. A leader's DC-follower will positively relate to followers' organizational commitment.

3.3 Interaction between DC-self and DC-follower on Follower Commitment

Having discussed the independent effect of the two types of leader behavior on follower commitment, we expect that these two behaviors would interact with each other when being connected to follower commitment. Indeed, we could gain a greater understanding of follower commitment if we consider the profile of a leader's confidence behaviors. If a leader shows both types of confidence, follower commitment to the organization will be even higher due to the perceived control and self-fulfillment prophecy processes. Contrarily, if the leader shows neither type of confidence, the organization will suffer from lack of expectations and trust from the top management; followers will likely perceive a high level of uncertainty with regards to the future of the organization as well as to their own career. Neither locus of control nor self-esteem can be derived in such an organization. The organizational commitment level is bound to be low. If the leader shows one type of confidence but lacks the other, the level of follower commitment is likely to be moderately higher than when leaders have neither of the two types of confidence. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. Self-confidence behavior and follower-confidence behavior are likely to interact with each other in influencing followers' organizational commitment.

3.4 Interaction between Confident Leadership and Firm Environment

Perceived environmental uncertainty plays an important role in the creation of charismatic leadership effects (Yukl, 2007). Such importance is in line with the sociological perspective that emphasizes the relevance of crisis situations in the manifestation of charisma and its effects (Beyer and Browning, 1999). Empirically, Waldman, Ramirez, House and Puranam (2001) have also found perceived environmental uncertainty strongly moderates the relationship between transactional/charismatic leadership and firm performance (measured in later years). They found that charismatic leader behaviors predict performance in uncertain environments, but not in certain environments.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in connecting internal integration and external adaptation (Yukl, 2007). Like charismatic leadership, confident leadership also appears more valuable under greater uncertainties because it takes a lot more

courage to remain confident and demonstrate confident behavior when the environment is tough, and doing so will have a much more significant impact on followers than when the environment is more certain. Leaders can reduce uncertainty by making the environment less ambiguous (Cohen and March, 1974) and by appearing confident publicly. The phrase "*Wei-Ji*" (crisis) in Chinese offers a unique perspective in explaining the reason behind this approach. The phrase consists of two characters: one stands for danger "*Wei* (危)" and the other, opportunity "*Ji* (机)". A leader with a high level of self-confidence is often optimistic, because, instead of focusing on the danger, such leaders see the opportunities, and avoid fatalism, self-blame, or escapism (Charles and Scheier, 2002). They are willing to take risks but not chances. Ample examples have shown that expressing strong follower-confidence in an intense environment, leaders will enhance the followers' feeling of "self-efficacy" (e.g., Chen and Klimoski, 2003; Eden, 1984; Eden et al., 2000), which will enable them to gain confidence in surviving through tough times (Avolio and Gibbons, 1988). For example, feeling encouraged and empowered, followers are more likely to focus on seizing opportunities amid the danger.

Generally speaking, employees facing high uncertainties will be more sensitive to leaders' behaviors (Bunker, 1997). When firm survival is threatened, the person that followers are most likely to look up to in the firm is the CEO since CEOs are the most authoritative representatives of the firm (Peng, Zhang and Li, 2007; Crossland and Hambrick, 2007). As competition among organizations becomes intense, the sense of control within the organization usually diminishes and accordingly, perceived uncertainty increases. Under such circumstances, emotional reactions from employees vary greatly from excitement to anxiety, depression, or even exhaustion (Sjoberg, 2007). Unable to fence off fear and stay optimistic, employees naturally seek reassurance or protection from leaders (Hart et al., 2014). Leaders with a high level of self-confidence are usually capable of living up to such expectations because they are usually able to incorporate available information to quickly form their own definite opinions and make necessary decisions (Bass, 1999). Such behavior demonstrated by the CEO in periods of great uncertainty can create a psychological atmosphere in the organization that would enable followers to develop their own internal sense of personal control (Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, and McNamara, 2005; Turner, Barling, and Zacharatos, 2002), and to feel more assurance about both

the organization and their own future. This sense of control will, in turn, help enhance followers' locus of control and feeling of autonomy in the organization (Spector, 1988), making them trust their leaders more and commit themselves more to the organization.

In a word, the high level of self-confidence displayed by the top leader during difficult times will greatly assure followers that things are under control and help facilitate the healing and revitalization process (Bunker, 1997), thus minimizing the psychological threat posed by turbulent surroundings (Miller, 1979). Compared to leaders who lack self-confidence, self-confident leaders also have an easier time encouraging followers to exhibit teamwork and confront uncertainty and stress in tough situations. Similarly, when leaders demonstrate confidence in their followers at difficult times, followers will feel more empowered to take necessary actions. In MacMillan's (1987) words, by expressing follower-confidence in difficult situations, CEOs can inspire follower engagement with work and rekindle a sense of pride in them, which, in turn, makes them more committed to the organization (e.g., Edmondson, 1999). Empirical evidence into such a relationship can provide valuable insight for managerial practices. Therefore, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 4. A leader's DC-self is likely to exert a stronger positive effect on followers' organizational commitment in a competitive environment than it does in a less competitive environment.

Hypothesis 5. A leader's DC-follower is likely to exert a stronger positive effect on followers' organizational commitment in a competitive environment than it does in a less competitive environment.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected using a survey questionnaire from 95 firms located in five major cities in mainland China over a period of four months. CEOs provided information on the firm, including the firm demographics and environment whereas followers evaluated leader behavior and their own commitment. To collect the data, we first approached the CEO of each firm in person, explained the purpose of the study and also assured them of the confidentiality of the

information provided. After the executive completed the questionnaire, we asked him/her to recommend six direct subordinates to fill out the follower questionnaire, which was distributed to the six persons together with self-addressed and stamped return envelopes.

We approached 100 CEOs. Collaborators from each city were responsible for collecting data from 20 companies. In total, 100 CEO questionnaires and 600 follower questionnaires were distributed in 100 firms. We finally received responses from 95 CEOs and 530 of their followers, with each CEO matched with three to six followers. At the firm level, the 95 units covered various industries, including manufacturing (47%) and trade (25%). The majority of the firms (60%) were entrepreneurial. In terms of size, 47% of them are small (50 to 100 employees), 32% are medium-sized (101 to 500), and 21% are large with more than 500 people. Almost 90 percent of the leaders were male. Their age ranged from 23 to 70, with an average of 39. The profile of subordinates was similar to that of leaders, with 66% of respondents being male with an average age of 37, ranging from 19 to 62. The average education level of subordinates (14 years) was also similar to that of leaders (15 years). Most followers were management team members and 46% held administrative or sales positions.

4.2 Measures

Confident leadership. Sashkin, Rosenbach, and Sashkin (1997) have developed a scale of confident leadership, which includes five items. However, their scale is developed as one dimension of The Leadership Profile (*ibid*) and does not differentiate the two types of leader confidence demonstration behaviors. In this study, we adopt the scales developed by the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) Project team (see Hanges and Dickson, 2004 for details on the leadership scale development). The dimension *DC-self* was measured by a five-item Likert scale. The specific GLOBE items of DC-self asked followers if the leader "shows a high degree of self-confidence", "views obstacles as challenges rather than threats", "talks to me about his/her important values and beliefs", "is generally optimistic and confident", and "has strong convictions about the correctness of his or her actions", using a seven-point Likert scale with "1" standing for "strongly disagree" and "7" for "strongly agree." Cronbach's reliability coefficient (Cronbach, 1971) for the scale is 0.61.

Six items formed the scale of *DC-follower*. The items asked if the leader "shows confidence in my ability to work without supervision", "encourages me

to solve problems on my own", "encourages me to be an independent thinker", "allows me to use my own judgment when solving problems", "shows confidence in my ability to contribute to the goals of this organization", and "encourages me to set my own performance goals." The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.72.

Firm environment was measured by the extent to which the executive perceives the competition among firms within the industry to be intense. We measured competition in five aspects: manpower, inputs (e.g., raw material parts), marketing, product/service quality, variety, and price. The executive was asked to answer the question "how intense is the competition in (one of the above mentioned aspects)?" on a seven-point scale. The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale is 0.74.

Follower's organizational commitment. Followers provided the self-reported organizational commitment measure, which also consisted of five items (e.g., "I am willing to make serious personal sacrifices to contribute to the success of this organization") adopted from Marsden, Kalleberg, and Cook (1993). Those items were evaluated as able to capture the major aspects of Mowday et al.'s (1982) measurement of commitment. The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale is 0.77.

4.3 Control Variables

Visionary leadership and *empowering leadership*, which conceptually overlapped with confident leadership, were also measured and controlled for in the current study. Specifically, visionary leadership is somewhat close to DC-self whereas empowering leadership may be similar to DC-follower. Five items measuring visionary leadership asked if the leader "has a vision and imagination of the future", "has a clear sense of where he/she wants this organization to be in five years", "clearly articulates his/her vision of the future", "anticipates and prepares in advance", and "makes plans and takes actions based on future goals." The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.81.

GLOBE items measuring empowering leadership read as "gives subordinates a high degree of discretion to perform their work", "seeks advice concerning organizational strategy from subordinates", "consults with us before making plans or taking action", "reconsiders decisions on the basis of recommendations by those who report to him/her", and "does not allow others to participate in decision making (reverse scored)." The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.71.

Demographic variables including follower age, sex, and education level were

also controlled. Follower age and education level were measured by actual numbers of years. Follower sex was measured as a dummy variable ("0" stands for male and "1" for female). Industry and firm size were also controlled for in this study.

4.4 Construct Discriminant Validity

Using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to test discriminant validity of DC-self and DC-follower. In doing so, we performed a series of CFAs in which 21 items measured confident leadership, visionary leadership, and empowering leadership. Contrasting four-factor, three-factor, two-factor, and one-factor models, the discriminant validity was examined. Results indicate that the four-factor model fit well ($\chi^2_{(183)} = 325.70$, RMSEA = 0.06, $p < 0.05$; CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91), and was superior to three three-factor models and the two-factor model as well (see Table 1 for detail). In addition, the one-factor model did not fit our data well ($\chi^2_{(189)} = 525.88$, RMSEA = 0.15, $p < 0.05$; CFI = 0.66, TLI = 0.53), thus confirming acceptable discriminant validity: components of confident leadership were distinct from visionary and empowerment leadership.

Table 1 Comparison of Measurement Models

	χ^2	*df*	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	AIC
Null model	1992.07	231				
Four-factor model	325.70	183	0.06	0.93	0.91	421.70
Three-factor model I	470.51	186	0.12	0.83	0.76	560.51
Three-factor model II	397.35	186	0.09	0.87	0.83	487.35
Three-factor model III	428.13	186	0.10	0.85	0.81	518.13
Two-factor model	508.75	188	0.14	0.68	0.57	594.75
One-factor model	525.88	189	0.15	0.66	0.53	609.88

Notes. (1) Three-factor model I: DC-self and DC-follower were combined into one latent construct. (2) Three-factor model II: visionary leadership and DC-self were combined into one latent construct. (3) Three-factor model III: empowering leadership and DC-follower were combined into one latent construct. (4) Two-factor model: visionary leadership and DC-self were combined into one construct and empowering leadership and DC-follower were combined into another construct. (5) One-factor model: all items were assigned to subject to one latent construct.

4.5 Data Analysis

Hierarchical Linear Modeling was employed to test the hypotheses that specified cross-level relations. At the individual level, follower organizational commitment was the outcome and we first controlled follower age, sex, and education. At the organizational level, we controlled industry, firm size, visionary leadership, and empowering leadership behaviors. We then regressed the outcome, follower commitment, onto DC-self, DC-follower, and firm environment, to examine the direct effects including our first two hypotheses. Through entering the interaction terms, we examined the interactive effect of two leader behaviors (Hypothesis 3) and the interactive effect of confident leadership and firm environment (Hypotheses 4 and 5).

5 Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables used in the study are listed in Table 2.

Running the HLM analyses, a total of five models were tested. We list beta coefficients, sigma square indicating the individual level variance of random error, tau indicating organization level variance of random error in Table 3 for assessing the variance of outcome variables and model change. HLM models allocated the total variance of outcome variables into the follower/individual level (level 1) and the CEO/organization level (level 2). Individual-level variables accounted for the former part of the variance whereas organization-level variables accounted for the rest, which is at the organization level. For example, evaluating Sigma square change from Model 1 to Model 2, we knew that individual-level controls explained 10.8% of level-1 variance; assessing tau square change from Model 2 to Model 3, we found that level-2 control variables explained 10.2% of organization-level variance. Among multiple control variables, followers' education (in Models 2 and 3), industry, and visionary leadership had a significant effect on the outcomes.

In Model 4, we examine the effect of confident leadership on follower commitment as predicted in Hypotheses 1 and 2. Results listed in Table 3 support these hypothesized relationships ($\beta_{\text{DC-self}} = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta_{\text{DC-follower}} = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). In total, two dimensions of confident leadership accounted for 21.3% of

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Variables (at the Follower Level)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age									
2. Sex[a]	−0.20**								
3. Education	−0.18**	−0.03							
4. Visionary leadership	0.12*	−0.05	0.17**	(0.81)					
5. Empowering leadership	−0.06	−0.11*	0.04	0.55**	(0.71)				
6. DC-self	−0.04	−0.01	0.19**	0.52**	0.32**	(0.61)			
7. DC-follower	0.04	−0.03	0.08	0.38**	0.43**	0.44**	(0.72)		
8. Environment	−0.07	0.04	0.02	0.06	0.00	−0.01	−0.01	(0.74)	
9. Follower commitment	−0.06	−0.08	0.14**	0.18**	0.09	0.21**	0.17**	−0.06	(0.77)
Mean	36.63	0.34	14.28	5.24	5.38	5.63	5.68	5.30	5.61
SD	8.06	0.48	2.54	0.91	0.86	0.88	0.76	0.92	0.82

Notes. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). [a]: male is coded as "0" and female is coded as "1".

Table 3 Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analyses

	Variables	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Intercept		5.68**	5.57**	5.56**	5.56**	5.57**
Level 1 Controls	Age		−0.01	0.00	−0.01	0.00
	Gender		0.12	0.11	0.10	0.13
	Education		0.05*	0.04	0.04	0.01
Level 2 Controls	Manufacturing			0.09*	0.07	0.09*
	Trade			−0.02	−0.02	−0.01
	Firm size			0.03	0.04	0.02
	Visionary leadership			0.15**	0.14**	0.13**
	Empowering leadership			0.06	0.04	0.05
Direct effects	DC-self				0.16**	0.12*
	DC-follower				0.11*	0.11*
	Firm environment				−0.07	−0.05
Interactions	DC-self×DC-follower					−0.11*
	DC-self×Firm environment					0.13*
	DC-follower×Firm environment					0.06
Sigma-square		0.50	0.44			
Sigma-square change (%)		—	10.8%			
Tau		0.19	0.20	0.18	0.14	0.11
Tau change (%)		—	—	10.2%	21.3%	21.5%
Chi-square change (Δdf)		—	—	12.32* (5)	14.11* (3)	16.16*(3)
Explained total variance (%)		—	7.8%	2.9%	6.4%	5.2%

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

level 2 variance after the above-mentioned organization-level variables were controlled and for 6.4% of the total variance of the outcome variable. In the next model (Model 4), we examine the effects of three interactions, DC-self×DC-follower, DC-self×Firm environment, and DC-follower×Firm environment, to test Hypotheses 3 to 5. Results suggest DC-self interacts with DC-follower to influence follower commitment ($\beta_{\text{DC-self×DC-follower}} = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, DC-self but not DC-follower significantly interacts with firm environment ($\beta_{\text{DC-self×firm environment}} = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta_{\text{DC-follower×firm environment}} = 0.06$, *n.s.*). Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the influence pattern of such two significant interactions. Figure 1 shows that a leader's DC-self exerts a stronger positive effect on follower commitment when the level of DC-follower is lower rather than higher. Figure 2 shows that a leader's DC-self exerts a stronger positive effect on follower commitment in a highly competitive environment rather than in a less competitive environment.

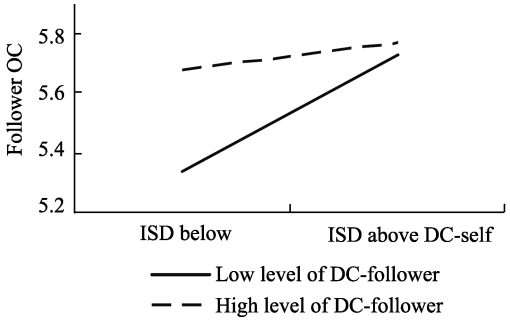

Figure 1 Interaction between DC-self and DC-follower on Follower OC

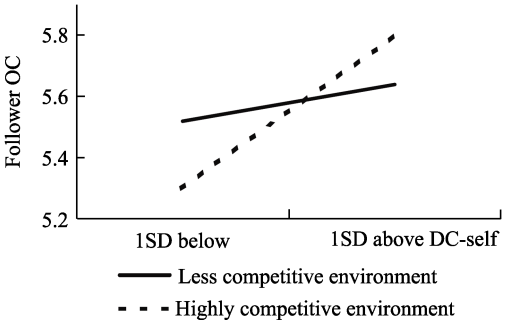

Figure 2 Interaction between DC-self and Firm Environment on Follower Commitment

6 Discussion

Confidence is a frequently used term in leadership literature. However, this study is the first of its kind to systematically explore the effects of confident leadership on follower outcomes and also the first one to operationalize this leadership style as having two components: self and follower orientated DC behaviors. The results clearly show that the two behaviors have independent as well as interactive effects on follower commitment. What is more, the interactive pattern between the two DC behaviors on follower commitment turns out to be quite interesting and meaningful.

6.1 Interaction between DC-Self and DC-Follower on Follower Commitment

From Figure 1, we can see a leader's DC-self exerts a stronger effect on followers' organizational commitment (OC) when the leader shows low follower-confidence. If we re-plot the interaction by exchanging the positions of DC-self and DC-follower, the pattern of interaction is the same as presented in Figure 1, demonstrating that DC-follower exerts a stronger effect on follower OC when the leader shows low self-confidence. The results suggest that one of the two DC behaviors attenuates the other's effect on follower OC. In other words, when one type of leader confidence is not available from the leader, followers have to count on the other type and the available one will appear extremely important in maintaining follower commitment.

One of the prominent explanations for this interaction is that the two types of confidence serve different functions in inspiring follower commitment. For example, the self-confidence demonstrated by a leader generates followers' decisive beliefs in organizational success, while his/her displaying confidence in followers affects followers' own self-confidence and levels of motivation. In case one of the two becomes dysfunctional, the other may become even more critical.

Another reason for this interaction is that, by definition, either one of the two confident leader behaviors is sufficient to produce follower commitment. When one type of behavior is strong, follower commitment will occur even when the other is weak, thereby attenuating the correlation between the leader behavior of interest and follower commitment.

6.2 Interactions between DC Behaviors and Firm Environment on Follower Commitment

The interaction between DC-self and firm environment suggests that it is important for leaders to express self-confidence in order to win followers' commitment in a more competitive environment than in a less competitive environment. Nevertheless, such an effect is not so obvious with DC-follower due to the non-significant interaction between CE-follower and firm environment.

The difference between the two interactions can be explained by the accountability of the firm. Employee commitment to the organization has been found to significantly relate to "organizational dependability", or the extent to which the organization could be counted on (e.g., Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak, 1974; Riggs and Knight, 1994; Steers, 1977). When the external environment of the organization becomes highly competitive, people will depend more on an organization's confidence, which usually refers to the top leader of the organization. Employees need an internal sense of control to resist uncontrollable external uncertainty and therefore they are more susceptible to the influence of a leader who personally appears uniquely qualified to lead them out of distress (Howell and Shamir, 2005; Martin et al., 2005). In that sense, it is more likely for a leader with self-confidence rather than a leader with follower-confidence to help make the organization appear more accountable because at times like that, employees tend to look up to their top leaders as the symbol of the organization. In countries with high levels of power distance like China, such an effect is likely to be more obvious, because people intuitively look to their superiors for directions and assurance when facing uncertainties (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh, 2004).

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Taking the behavioral approach to conceptualize confident leadership might appear to be a theoretical concern since it is hard to decide whether the impact on followers comes from confidence as a trait, or through the behavior-attribution process, and traditionally, self-confidence has been regarded as a prominent quality of an effective leader. However, when demonstrating "having faith" in followers, a leader has to engage in a series of behaviors such as trusting,

encouraging, delegating, etc., in order to convey that kind of feeling to followers and make them feel that they are trusted. In addition, the evolution of leadership theories accepts that a leader's dispositional traits are expressed behaviorally (Yukl and Van Fleet, 1992; Xu et al., 2013). Therefore, our attempt is consistent with the mainstream of leadership research. We believe we have contributed incrementally to the leadership literature because our results help us better understand the underlying mechanism of the leadership process.

Another possible argument is that a leader's confidence generally affects his/her immediate followers. The chance of a leader's confidence affecting followers in general is even slimmer in large organizations. However, we are studying the CEO of the firm, who is usually equated with the firm. Lower level employees tend to judge the fate of their organizations based on their opinions of the top leaders and we are examining the level of followers' commitment to the organization as a result of the extent to which the CEO of the firm openly demonstrates self confidence. The connection between the top leader and the organization becomes stronger when the organization is perceived to be dealing with great uncertainties and when followers' anxiety levels are high. Under those circumstances, the way top leaders present themselves and the effect of the level of confidence they demonstrate on their followers is a major source of assurance and comfort to their followers, thus making it legitimate to relate confident leadership and follower commitment. This case is particularly true in societies like China where people are more loyal to individuals than to a system (Redding, 1993; Hui, Lee, and Rousseau, 2004).

Methodologically, our measure of the firm environment could be a limitation because it is derived from leaders' personal perceptions and not from an integration of objective indicators. It is, nevertheless, an assured way to obtain firm level data particularly with the Chinese sample we used to test the hypotheses. It might not be the case in other societies, but in China, CEOs are usually the ones who have access to various types of information and are the most legitimate person to judge the level of competition the firm faces in the industry. However, we agree that it would be more desirable to include some objective measures on top of the subjective assessment, and would suggest that future studies avoid relying only on perceptions when evaluating firm environment.

The final concern relates to both theoretical and methodological issues. In the

study, we tried to construct a causal relationship from confident leadership to follower commitment. Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, the reverse relationship (committed followers see their leaders as being more self-confident or more confident in them) should seem equally plausible. Although those problems cannot be eliminated entirely, there are reasons to believe that our finding is not completely an artifact of common methods. For example, the key findings in the study are interaction effects: the relationship between DC-self and follower commitment is positively stronger in a highly competitive environment than that in a less competitive one.

6.4 Implications

Despite the above limitations, the results of the study still provide useful insights for both academicians as well as practitioners. For academicians, our results show the subtle and strong effects of the two types of confidence demonstration behaviors on followers' commitment in different environments. Such knowledge helps us better understand the leadership process. For practitioners, the study tells us that to be effective, leaders need not only gain and maintain self-confidence, but also strive to develop a high level of confidence in their followers. Such effort is particularly important in organizations that face severe competition. A highly competitive environment produces higher levels of uncertainty, under which followers who are otherwise independent would likely need the assurance of self-control from their leaders, while those who are more dependent will need a stronger sense of security. Leaders' confidence makes a difference because it provides the independent followers with assurance for self-control and the dependent ones a sense of protection and safety.

While we hope our research adds to the leadership literature by providing empirical evidence of the importance of confidence and provides insights to practitioners, we would also like to offer a word of caution to practitioners to guard against excessive self-confidence. Like everything else in the world, too much of anything could change the quality from good to bad. According to Kanter (2004) and Yukl (2007), leaders' over-confidence can result in ignoring advice or evidence that decisions or strategies involve too much risk. Excessive DC-self and highly positive, unrealistic self-evaluation could also estrange followers, making them reluctant to offer opinions different from the leaders' and

the results could be potentially detrimental to leadership (see Judge, Piccola, and Kosalka, 2009; Shipman and Mumford, 2011). Those who can balance and work with the team will succeed.

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