Not Even the Past: The Joint Influence Of Former Leader and New Leader During Leader Succession in the Midst of Organizational Change

By

Prof Cynthia Lee
Northeastern University, USA

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Abstract

Leader succession often occurs during organizational change processes, but the implications of leader succession, in terms of reactions to the change, rarely have been investigated. Employee attitudes and behaviors during organizational change may be influenced jointly by a former leader who recently has transitioned out of the team and the new leader who recently has transitioned into it. We predict an interaction between former and new leaders’ transformational leadership on employees’ behavioral resistance to and support for change. Based on contrast effect theory, a highly transformational former leader constrains the potential effectiveness of the new leader, but a former leader low in transformational leadership enhances this potential effectiveness. We also propose conditional indirect effects transmitted through commitment to the changing organization. Our research was conducted in a large Chinese hospitality organization that was implementing radical organizational change, during which virtually all aspects of processes and products are changed. We collected a 2-wave multisource data from employees who had recently experienced a leader succession and their newly assigned leaders. Based on a final sample of 203 employees from 22 teams, we find empirical support for the proposed interaction effects. The conditional indirect effects were also consistent with our expectations, but the effect on behavioral resistance to change was stronger than the effect on behavioral support for change.

Prof. Cynthia Lee is now Professor of Management and Organizational Development at D’Amore-Mckim School of Business, Northeastern University, USA. Professor Lee serves on the editorial boards of Journal of Applied Psychology and the Journal of Organizational Behavior. Recently, she was made a Fellow of Management and Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2013). Prof. Lee published widely in many top tier journals. Her research interests include leading change and innovation, performance management, understanding the changing nature of employment relationships including psychological contracts and of job insecurity.

All interested are welcome.