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DUAL EMPLOYEE CONSEQUENCES OF AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: *The aim of this research is to shed light on employee dual (i.e., positive and negative) consequences of ambidextrous leadership, a leadership style that is highly relevant in today's business environment (Kafetzopoulos, 2022). Until now, research has regarded ambidextrous leadership as a purely positive phenomenon for employees and has predominantly examined its impact on their innovative behaviors. This study looks at both positive and negative employee consequences and incorporates essential behavioral employee variables. Employees (N = 148) from various industrial sectors completed an online survey. Data was analyzed thorough hierarchical regression analyses and PROCESS macro bootstrapping methods. Results partly provided support for the proposed hypotheses. There was evidence for several positive employee consequences (reduced role stress and subsequently reduced CWB, increased affective commitment, increased OCB). Against the initial reasoning, there was no indication that ambidextrous leadership is detrimental for employees and their work behaviors.*
Keywords: *Ambidextrous Leadership; Opening and Closing Leader Behaviors; Employee Consequences*

INTRODUCTION

Ambidextrous Leadership

Disruptive technological changes, market volatility, and the acceleration of global competition navigate today's business environment (Kraft, 2018; Wang et al., 2022; Zarb et al., 2017). To survive, organizations must operate in a way that fits this complex and rapidly changing business environment. They must foster innovation and flexibility while at the same time focusing on efficiency and stability (Kraft, 2018). In response to this new challenge, ambidextrous leadership was introduced (Rosing et al., 2011). It encompasses a leader's engagement in two distinctive, yet complementary leadership activities, namely opening and closing leader behaviors (Rosing et al., 2011; Zacher & Wilden, 2014).

Opening leader behaviors refer to leader behaviors that increase the variability of employees' behaviors and result in their exploration activities (e.g., experimentation, discovery, risk taking; Kraft, 2018; Rosing et al., 2011; Rosing & Zacher, 2023). In contrast, closing leader behaviors relate to leader behaviors that decrease the variability of employees' behaviors and initiate their exploitation activities (e.g., focus on control, standardization, corrective actions, routines; Kafetzopoulos, 2022; Rosing et al., 2011; Zacher & Rosing, 2015). An ambidextrous leader flexibly switches between both leader behaviors dependent on the situation (Rosing et al., 2011).

Research Gap and Aim

Research on ambidextrous leadership has mainly focused on innovation outcomes with the prevailing assumption that ambidextrous leadership is beneficial for employees' innovative performance (e.g., Zacher & Rosing, 2015; Zacher & Wilden, 2014). This perspective is insufficient. First, it implies that ambidextrous leadership is exclusively positive for employees. Second, the focus on employees' innovative performance as the predominant outcome variable of ambidextrous leadership has led to a neglect of other important employee performance dimensions. One study I conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation investigated employee dual (i.e., positive and negative) consequences resulting from ambidextrous leadership. In addition, two important performance variables (organizational citizenship behavior (OCB); counterproductive work behavior (CWB)) were considered. The study also integrated several moderator variables and supplementary insights. For this publication, only the main findings are presented. For a comprehensive theoretical and empirical view, refer to my dissertation.

Positive-Consequences Model

Self-determination theory proposed that all individuals have three universal psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The author suggests that opening leader behaviors fulfill employees' need for autonomy as the leader increases employees' behavioral variability (i.e., exploration; Rosing et al., 2011) and grants employees with ownership of their behaviors (Shao et al., 2019). Closing leader behaviors, on the other hand, fulfill employees' need for competence as they decrease employees' behavioral variability and allow employees to operate within routines and repetitive tasks, where they feel particularly efficient and competent (Shao et al., 2019; Zacher & Rosing, 2015). There is empirical support that psychological need fulfillment in turn increases employees' (affective) commitment (e.g., Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Stan and Vîrgă, 2021). Based on this, the author hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1. Ambidextrous leadership is positively related to employee affective commitment.

Employees with high affective commitment feel emotionally attached to their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984; Meyer et al., 1993). Therefore, it lies in their sincerest interest to do what they possibly can to help their organization (Meyer et al., 1993; Yousef, 2000). Moreover, as employees with high affective commitment feel favorably treated by their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984), they want to reciprocate through their own positive behaviors (Morin et al., 2011; Organ, 1988), as underpinned by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Therefore, employees with high affective commitment are more likely to engage in OCB. There is evidence for a positive relationship between employee affective commitment and OCB (e.g., Bakhshi et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2002; Morin et al., 2011). A replication is expected:

Hypothesis 2. Employee affective commitment is positively related to employee OCB.

Linking hypothesis 1 and 2, affective commitment is proposed as the underlying mechanism (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 3. Ambidextrous leadership has a positive indirect effect on employee OCB via employee affective commitment.

Fig. 1. Positive-Consequences Model

Negative-Consequences Model

The leader's engagement in both opening leader behaviors (i.e., employee exploration) and closing leader behaviors (i.e., employee exploitation) imposes cognitive challenges on employees. Exploration and exploitation require employees to utilize different ways of thinking (divergent vs. convergent thinking; Good & Michel, 2013) and follow paradoxical cognitive agendas (Keller & Weibler, 2015; Laureiro–Martínez et al., 2010). Consequently, employees are likely to experience role stress (Wang et al., 2021). Wang et al. (2021) found that ambidextrous leadership is positively related to employees' role ambiguity, however in a purely Chinese context. This study proposes a positive effect of ambidextrous leadership on employee role stress in a context outside of China:

Hypothesis 4. Ambidextrous leadership is positively related to employee role stress.

When experiencing role stress, employees need to invest a greater number of resources (e.g., attention, focus, time, energy) to make sense of situations marked by complex information intake, cognitive confusion, contradictory expectations, and behavioral difficulties (Zhao et al., 2018). Based on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989), employees are thus more likely to engage in CWB to save and restore their resources. First, are no longer able to invest an adequate number of resources (e.g., time, self–discipline, energy) to control their behaviors. Second, CWB may maladaptively help employees to attain new resources (e.g., sense of control; Zhao et al., 2018). Research has found positive associations between

various job stressors and employees' CWB engagement (e.g., Fox et al., 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005). Thus, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 5. Employee role stress is positively related to employee CWB.

Linking hypothesis 4 and 5, role stress is regarded as the underlying mechanism (see Figure 2):

Hypothesis 6. Ambidextrous leadership has a positive indirect effect on employee CWB via employee role stress.

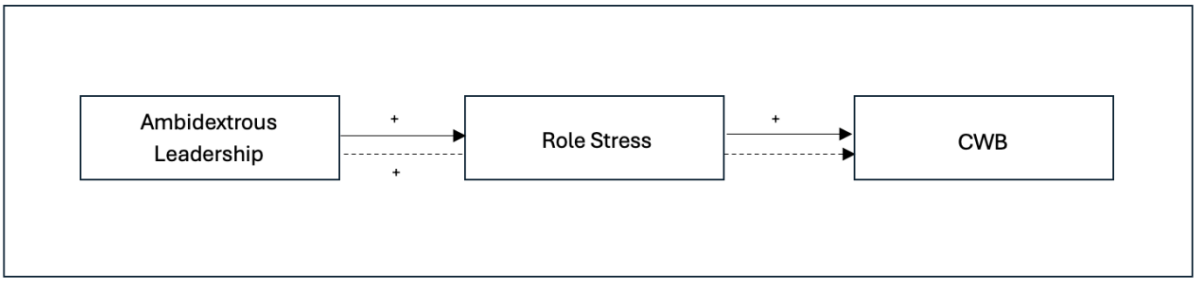

Fig. 2. Negative-Consequences Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Procedure and Sample

SoSci Survey was used to distribute the survey (Leiner, 2019). Participants were recruited from the researcher's professional and private networks (convenience sampling) and via SurveySwap. The participation requirements included a minimum age of 18, a good grasp of written English, not being self–employed and having a supervisor above them. The final sample comprised $N = 148$ participants. A prevailing part of participants (73.6%) was younger than 40 years and more than half of the participants (55.4%) were female, compared to 43.2% male participants (rest third gender/non–binary, or preferred not to say). Participants were employed in various industries, such as technology (16.9%), healthcare (16.9%), education (14.9%), finance (12.8%), and manufacturing (10.8%). Most participants have been employed in their current organization for up to four years (62.2%) and a quarter of participants (25.0%) was employed in organizations with more than 1,000 employees.

Measures

For ambidextrous leadership, the researcher used two 7-item scales (opening and closing leader behaviors) based on Rosing et al.'s (2011) classical conceptualization of ambidextrous leadership. Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*"not at all"*) to 5 (*"frequently, if not always"*). Sample times were "My leader allows different ways of accomplishing a task" (opening leader behavior) and "My leader controls adherence to rules" (closing leader behavior). Cronbach's alpha for the scales was .89 and .85. When testing the hypotheses, the multiplication term of both scales was used (Rosing & Zacher, 2023; Wang et al., 2021).

For affective commitment, the 6-item scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993) was adopted. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*"strongly disagree"*) to 7 (*"strongly agree"*). A sample items was "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." Cronbach's alpha was .85. For role stress, the 14-item scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) was used. Participants rated their agreement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*"strongly disagree"*) to 6 (*"strongly agree"*). A sample items was "At work, I know exactly what is expected of me (R)." Cronbach's alpha was .83.

For OCB, the 13-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was used. A sample item was "I adhere to informal rules devised to maintain order." Cronbach's alpha was .70. For CWB, the 19-item scale from Bennett and Robinson (2000) was utilized. A sample items was "I acted rudely toward someone at work." Cronbach's alpha was .92. For both OCB and CWB, participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*"never"*) to 7 (*"daily"*). Control variables were age, gender, and industry.

RESULTS

All statistical analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 30.0) and both models were

tested subsequently. To test the direct effects (Hypothesis 1, 2, 4, 5), hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In step one, the control variables were entered in the model. Then, in step two, the variable of interest was added and examined whether significantly more variance of the dependent variable was explained. Further, the indirect effects (Hypothesis 3, 6) were tested by employing PROCESS macro bootstrapping methods (10,000 samples) for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of all study variables are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. AL		4.13	-		
2. AC		1.36	.30***	-	
3. OCB		0.45	.21**	.21**	-
1. AL		4.13	-		
2. RS		0.70	-.36***	-	
3. CWB		0.94	-.14	.25**	-

Note. $N = 148$. AL = ambidextrous leadership. AC = affective commitment. RS = role stress.
The upper section depicts the positive, the lower the negative consequence model.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. (two-tailed).

Positive-Consequences Model

For Hypothesis 1, the final model (step 2) was significant with $F(4, 143) = 7.67$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .18$. Table 2 yields the results. Ambidextrous leadership significantly predicted employee affective commitment, $B = 0.11$, $p < .001$. Hence, Hypothesis 1 could be supported.

Table 2. Results from Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Affective Commitment

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	95% CI	*t*	*B*	95% CI	*t*
Constant	3.75***	[2.78; 4.72]	7.67	2.12***	[0.97; 3.28]	
Age	0.33**	[0.09; 0.57]	2.68	0.42***	[0.19; 0.65]	3.62
Gender	0.10	[-0.31; 0.52]	0.50	0.12	[-0.27; 0.51]	0.62
Industry		[-0.19; 0.05]	-1.15	-0.07	[-0.19; 0.05]	
AL				0.11***	[0.06; 0.17]	4.51
R^2			.06			.18

ΔR^2	.06	.12
F	3.04*	7.67***

Note. N = 148. AL = ambidextrous leadership; *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval around *B*; ΔR^2 = change in R^2. Standard errors (*B*) in parentheses.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. (two-tailed).

For Hypothesis 2, the final model (step 2) was significant with $F(4, 143) = 3.87$, $p = .005$, $R^2 = .10$. Table 3 displays the results. Employee affective commitment significantly predicted employee OCB, $B = 0.08$, $p = .007$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 could be supported.

Table 3. Results from Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting OCB

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	95% CI	*t*	*B*	95% CI	*t*
Constant	3.25***	[2.93; 3.58]	19.88	2.97***	[2.60; 3.35]	
Age	0.06	[-0.03; 0.14]	1.35	0.03	[-0.05; 0.11]	0.75
Gender	0.02	[-0.11; 0.16]	0.35	0.02	[-0.12; 0.15]	0.24
Industry	0.05*	[0.01; 0.09]	2.39	0.06**	[0.02; 0.10]	2.69
AC				0.08**	[0.02; 0.13]	2.76
R^2			.05			.10
ΔR^2			.05			.05
F			2.51			3.87**

Note. N = 148. AC = affective commitment; *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient;
CI = confidence interval around *B*; ΔR^2 = change in R^2. Standard errors (*B*) in parentheses.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. (two-tailed).

For Hypothesis 3, the first part of the model was significant with $F(4, 143) = 7.67$ and $p < .001$, $R^2 = .18$. Ambidextrous leadership significantly predicted employee affective commitment, $B = 0.11$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, the second part of the model was also significant with $F(5, 142) = 4.09$ and $p = .002$, $R^2 = .13$. However, employee affective commitment did not significantly predict employee OCB, $B = 0.05$, $p = .066$. Results did not reveal an indirect effect of ambidextrous leadership on employee OCB via employee affective commitment, $B = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01; 0.01]. Hypothesis 3 could not be supported. Notably, the direct effect of ambidextrous leadership on employee OCB was significant, $B = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.01; 0.04].

Positive-Consequences Model

For Hypothesis 4, the final model (step 2) was significant with $F(4, 143) = 5.53$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$. Table 4 shows the results. Ambidextrous leadership significantly predicted employee role stress, $B = -0.06$,

$p < .001$. However, ambidextrous leadership turned out to *negatively* predict employee role stress. Hence, hypothesis 4 could not be supported.

Table 4. Results from Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Role Stress

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	95% CI	*t*	*B*	95% CI	*t*
Constant		[2.61; 3.62]	12.12		[3.37; 4.58]	
Age	0.02	[-0.10; 0.15]	0.38	-0.03	[-0.15; 0.10]	
Gender		[-0.33; 0.11]	-0.98	-0.12	[-0.32; 0.09]	
Industry	0.01	[-0.06; 0.07]	0.19	0.01	[-0.06; 0.07]	0.16
AL					[-0.09; -0.03]	
R^2			.01			.13
ΔR^2			.01			.12
F			0.42			

Note. N = 148. AL = ambidextrous leadership; *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval around *B*; ΔR^2 = change in R^2. Standard errors (*B*) in parentheses.

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. (two-tailed).

For Hypothesis 5, the final model (step 2) was significant with $F(4, 143) = 4.09$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .10$. Table 5 yields the results. Employee role stress significantly predicted employee CWB, $B = 0.31$, $p = .005$. Thus, Hypothesis 5 could be supported.

Table 5. Results from Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting CWB

	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	95% CI	*t*	*B*	95% CI	*t*
Constant		[1.88; 3.22]	7.51		[0.65; 2.51]	
Age		[-0.20; 0.14]	-0.31	-0.03	[-0.20; 0.13]	
Gender		[-0.67; -0.10]	-2.63		[-0.63; -0.07]	
Industry		[-0.10; 0.08]	-0.23	-0.01	[-0.10; 0.07]	
Role stress				0.31**	[0.10; 0.52]	2.88
R^2			.05			.10
ΔR^2			.05			.05
F			2.56			4.09**

Note. N = 148. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval around *B*; ΔR^2 = change in R^2. Standard errors (*B*) in parentheses.

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. (two-tailed).

For Hypothesis 6, the first part of the model was significant with F (4, 143) = 5.53 and $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$. Ambidextrous leadership significantly predicted employee role stress, $B = -0.06$, $p < .001$. The second part of the model was also significant with F (5, 142) = 3.39 and $p = .006$, $R^2 = .11$. Employee role stress significantly predicted employee CWB, $B = 0.28$, $p = .017$. Results supported a significant indirect effect of ambidextrous leadership on employee CWB via employee role stress, $B = -0.02$, 95% CI [-0.03; -0.01]. The indirect effect turned out to be *negative*, thus not supporting hypothesis 6. Notably, the direct effect of ambidextrous leadership on employee CWM was not significant, $B = -0.02$, 95% CI [-0.05; 0.02].

CONCLUSION

The aim was to investigate employee consequences, both positive and negative, resulting from ambidextrous leadership. The empirical results strengthened the established view that ambidextrous leadership is beneficial for employees. First, the positive-consequence model revealed affective commitment and OCB (although direct, not indirect) as positive employee consequences of ambidextrous leadership. Second, against the initial assumption, ambidextrous leadership was found to *reduce* employee role stress and subsequently also result in *less* CWB. That way, the proposed negative-consequence model unexpectedly turned out as positive-consequence model. The findings contribute to the literature on ambidextrous leadership by adding several positive employee outcomes (see Figure 3). Practitioners such as consultants, human resources managers, and leadership development trainers can utilize these findings to underpin the importance of ambidextrous leadership.

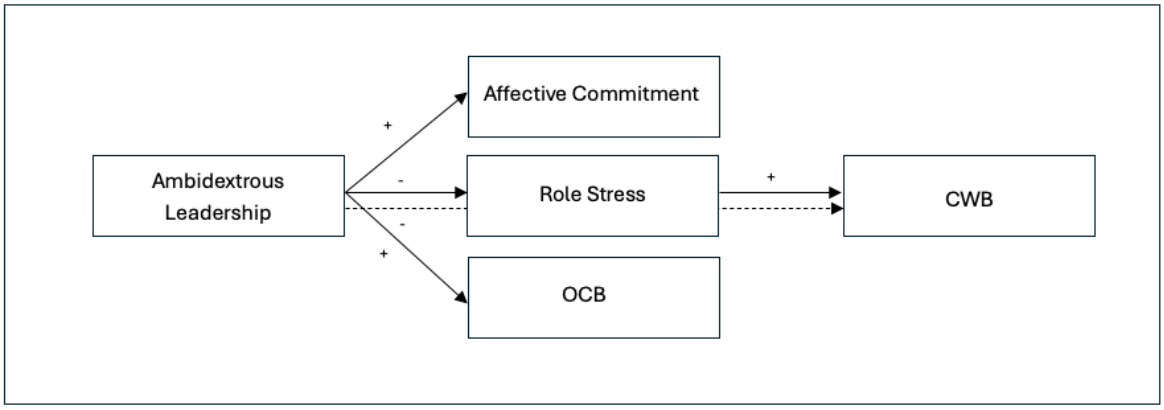

Fig. 3. Positives Employee Consequences of Ambidextrous Leadership

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ДВОЙНИ ПОСЛЕДИЦИ ЗА СЛУЖИТЕЛИТЕ ОТ АМБИДЕКСТРАЛНОТО ЛИДЕРСТВО

Резюме: *Целта на това проучване е да се хвърли светлина върху двойните (т.е. положителни и отрицателни) последици за служителите от амбидекстралното лидерство – лидерски стил, който*

е изключително актуален в днешната бизнес среда (Kafetzopoulos, 2022). Досега изследванията разглеждаха амбидекстралното лидерство като чисто положително явление за служителите и предимно се фокусираха върху въздействието му върху тяхното иновативно поведение. Настоящото изследване разглежда както положителните, така и отрицателните последици за служителите и включва съществени поведенчески променливи на служителите. Служители (N = 148) от различни индустриални сектори попълниха онлайн проучване. Данните бяха анализирани чрез задълбочени йерархични регресионни анализи и макрометоди на PROCESS bootstrapping. Резултатите частично подкрепиха предложените хипотези. Налице са доказателства за няколко положителни последици за служителите (намаляване на ролевия стрес и впоследствие намаляване на CWB, увеличаване на афективната ангажираност, увеличаване на OCB). Противно на първоначалните разсъждения, нямаше индикации, че амбидекстралното лидерство е вредно за служителите и тяхното трудово поведение.

Ключови думи: *амбидекстрално лидерство; отварящо и затварящо лидерско поведение; последствия за служителите*

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