



Does CEO transformational leadership influence top executive normative commitment?



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ABSTRACT

Grounded in social exchange theory logic, this study proposes that CEO transformational leadership causes high normative commitment among top executives but this relationship is nonlinear. Specifically, top executives in Turkey express less normative commitment when their CEOs exhibits moderate levels of transformational leadership than low or high levels of transformational leadership. Additionally, CEO transformational leadership exhibits a similar nonlinear relationship to affective commitment which fully mediated the J-shaped relationship between CEO transformational leadership and normative commitment. The findings highlight the need to consider the nonlinear effects of leadership types as well as implications for further exploration of antecedents of normative commitment.

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1. Introduction

Do transformational Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)—those with leadership behaviors of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1990)—significantly impact their top executive's normative commitment (i.e., feeling of obligation to remain with the company)? Although CEOs serve a unique organizational role requiring them to effectively communicate a vision, establish collective goals, and manage their top executives (Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009), diminutive evidence exists as to how CEO leadership impacts normative commitment of the executive management team. Prior literature assumes that transformational leadership appears advantageous to all those exposed, such that employees with transformational leaderships express more favorable outcomes (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005). However, consider challenging past assertions positing that leadership effects on executive commitment exhibits a nonlinear relationship and not a positive linear one. In doing so, this study offers several contributions to the leadership literature.

This study proposes curvilinear effects of CEO transformational leadership on organizational commitment by suggesting that top executives show the least amount of normative commitment at

moderate levels. Transformational leadership has a significant impact on employee organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Dhawan & Mulla, 2011). The results establish the need for future research that focuses on the normative commitment construct at the executive management level. In addition, the results suggest that moderate levels of CEO transformational leadership produce higher levels of ambiguity and confusion for top executives ultimately impeding the quality of the social exchange relationship between the CEO and top executive. Such half-heartedness and lack of clarity in CEO leadership style results in more detrimental effects compared to if the CEO provides laissez-faire leadership, i.e., essentially no leadership at all (Humphreys, Weyant, & Sprague, 2003), or transactional leadership. Thus, this study offers primary research exploring the more complex curvilinear relationships that might exist between leadership types and follower outcomes.

A survey of the literature reveals a lack of studies investigating normative commitment in the executive ranks. The predictions are tested in the upper echelons employing a sample of top executives from major Fortune 500 companies in Turkey. Also, the sample of Turkish executives adds to the literature that has investigated leadership outside the West. Leadership research in Turkey has produced varied results. For example, Pasa (2000) states that employees in Turkey prefer transformational leadership however, Cerne, Jaklic, Skerlavaj, Aydinlik, and Polat (2012) suggest that an autocratic leadership style is more common in countries like Turkey with steep hierarchies and clan cultures.

Researchers examine organizational commitment in cultures such as Turkey with interesting results. For example, normative commitment relates more strongly with turnover intentions for countries

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with collectivist versus individualistic cultures (Watsi, 2003). As such, this research answers the call for additional research regarding both transformational leadership and normative commitment in non-Western countries (Bergman, 2006; Watsi, 2003).

2. Literature review

2.1. Normative commitment: a social exchange theory perspective

Organizational commitment is defined as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p. 27). In particular, organizational commitment has been identified as including three different dimensions, affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment is defined as a strong belief in and acceptance of an organization’s goals and values (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). This acceptance of the organizational goals results in a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Continuance commitment reflects the degree to which the employee stays with the organization due to the high costs of leaving (Allen & Meyer, 1990). This commitment involves a calculation of costs and benefits concerning time spent, monetary rewards, and organization specific skills (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993).

Normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Normative commitment is thought to develop when the “psychological contract” between an employee and organization is established (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Specifically, the top management team members consider commitment as either a moral imperative or indebted obligation based on their evaluation of relative individual versus organizational investments (Meyer, 2005; Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006). This perspective is particularly important given the level of individual investments of top management team members.

Executive managers often experience personal sacrifice because of the pressures and responsibilities associated with upper management (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). In addition, organizations often make large investments in executive management development, compensation, and benefits. This reciprocity can result in increased organizational commitment. In fact, reciprocity serves as the basis of normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Social exchange refers to “actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (Blau, 1986, p. 91). According to social exchange theory, the exchange benefit includes not only tangible goods and services but also capacities to provide socially valued outcomes, such as prestige, approval, status, and recognition (Blau, 1986; Tekleab & Chiaburu, 2011). Based on social exchange theory logic, as a result of the enhanced experience of inclusion and supportiveness from their CEO, top executives’ normative commitment increases. These positive work outcomes result from the opportunity to have a voice in decision-making processes and strong perceived organizational support. Since executives play a pivotal role in decision-making processes they are likely to experience increased normative commitment as suggested by social exchange theory. Research indicates this facet of commitment also predicts turnover, citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction (e.g., see Bentein, Vandenberghe, Vandenberg, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnitsky, 2002). In addition, Moorman (1991) argues that employees’ interactions with supervisors provide them with information regarding whether the organization considers him/her important. According to Rego and Cunha (2010), supervisory action is an effective indicator of how the organization values its employees.

Differences in organizational commitment across national cultures are likely to exist (Hofstede, 1980). This idea however is questionable

in light of more current studies across different societal cultures. For example, Clercq and Rius (2007) state that sources of organizational commitment are not cultural specific but may act universally. The results of their study show that organizational commitment relates positively to collectivism. Watsi (2003) finds that normative commitment is less important for employees in individualistic cultures than previously believed. In particular, results indicate that in Turkey, where collectivistic culture prevails, normative commitment predicts turnover intentions more strongly than affective commitment. As such, this study seeks to extend research in this area by examining normative commitment in Turkey, a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980; Pasa, Kabasakal, & Bodur, 2001).

Normative commitment develops as the result of a moral obligation to repay the organization for benefits (e.g., tuition payments or skills training) received from the organization (Scholl, 1981) or socialization experiences that emphasize the appropriateness of remaining loyal to one’s employer (Wiener, 1982). This felt obligation resulting from the socialization experiences may begin with observation of role models and/or with the contingent use of rewards and punishment.

In addition to these socialization processes, a more specific reciprocity mechanism may also be operative in the development of normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). To the extent that the individual has internalized “exchange ideology” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) or a reciprocity norm, the receipt of special favors from the organization may constrain him or her to stay even in the face of other, more attractive, alternatives (Meyer & Allen, 1991). CEO leadership plays an integral part in triggering the social exchange process and the presence of executive normative commitment.

2.2. The role of CEO transformational leadership

Transformational leadership constitutes a set of behaviors that motivate followers to achieve performance beyond expectations by changing followers’ attitudes, beliefs, and values as opposed to simply gaining compliance (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1999). Transformational leaders produce a strategic vision, communicate that vision, model the vision by “walking the talk” and playing consistently, and develop commitment towards the vision (Avolio, 1999). Transformational leaders stimulate followers to achieve extraordinary results by providing both meaning and understanding (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). They align the objectives and goals of individual followers with the larger organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and provide the followers with support, mentoring, and coaching.

According to Bass (1985) transformational leadership includes four key concepts (charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation). According to Yukl (2006), results for component behaviors of transformational leadership are inconsistent from study to study. The components are so highly inter-correlated that is difficult to clearly determine their separate effects, even when factor analyses support the distinctiveness of transformational behaviors (Fu, Tsui, Liu, & Li, 2010). Consequently, many studies on transformational leadership have used only a composite score rather than the component behaviors (Yukl, 2006). In the current study, these scales are combined into one higher-order factor measuring transformational leadership as a unidimensional construct (see Hambley, O’Neill, & Kline, 2007). The lack of research exploring transformational leadership effects on normative commitment in top management provides a key motivation for this study.

Several studies establish a relationship between transformational leadership and follower’s normative commitment (Bučičūnienė & Škudienė, 2008; Dhawan & Mulla, 2011; Meyer et al., 2002). For example, Meyer et al. (2002) find that normative commitment correlates highly with transformational leadership. In addition, Bučičūnienė and Škudienė (2008) report that transformational leadership relates

positively to normative commitment. Ramachandran and Krishnan (2009) examine a sample of 98 employees working in the U.S., India, and China, finding that normative commitment relates positively to transformational leadership. Dhawan and Mulla (2011) examine transformational leadership and its impact on normative commitment in Indian organizations. Results once again support the relationship between the two variables. Additional research in the Turkish hospitality industry finds that transformational leadership improves normative commitment (Tuna, Ghazzawi, Tuna, & Catir, 2011). Erkutlu (2008) finds a relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in Turkish boutique hotels. These results however, are stronger in hotels that are either foreign owned or involve foreign investors.

Korek, Felfe, and Zaepfner-Rothe (2010), surveying small business managers and their employees in Germany, find that transformational leadership is significantly related to affective commitment but not significantly related to normative commitment. However, transformational leadership may not have the same effect on employees in a country such as Germany. In particular, Germany is lower in power distance than Turkey (Hofstede, 1980) and higher in individualism (Hofstede, 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Differently, in Turkey, top executives will likely benefit greatly from transformational CEOs. Executives should be concerned about relations with their CEO (Brimeyer, Perrucci, & Wadsworth, 2010). Such individuals need coaching, teaching, a collective sense of vision, and individualized consideration from their CEOs (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). CEOs can offer, through transformational leadership, ways to increase situational certainty and reduce ambiguity around strategic goals (Harris & Kacmar, 2006). The main premise is that CEO transformational leadership will help meet top executive needs; in exchange, top executive normative commitment will meet the CEO needs creating a favorable social exchange. However, moderate levels of CEO transformational leadership might provide an unclear vision about what needs to be accomplished as well as the strategic direction the company will take.

Provided with a fuzzy CEO strategic vision and lack of coaching emerging from moderate levels of transformational leadership, executives will be unequipped to select a viable course of action to take. In fact, we predict it is better for a CEO to not offer any transformational leadership at all than to provide a moderate level. Transformational leadership should result in higher levels of organizational commitment than laissez-faire or transactional leadership (Emery & Barker, 2007). This perspective may not hold for moderate levels of transformational leadership. Either laissez-faire or transactional leadership may result in higher levels of organizational commitment than moderate levels of transformational leadership. Laissez-faire leadership, characterized as a passive style of leadership, is often described as a lack or absence of leadership (Barbuto, 2005). Bass (1985) describes transactional leadership on the other hand as an exchange between leader and follower. The CEO provides clear criteria and goals to followers along with what is expected in return.

A CEO providing moderate transformational leadership lacks clarity in leadership style and direction. Moderate levels may cause confusion for executives, not to mention role stress (Harris & Kacmar, 2006), resulting in more harm than good because it puts the social exchange relationship at the highest level of risk (Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005; Klein & House, 1995). Specifically, a moderate level of transformational leadership diminishes the quality of the social exchange between the CEO and top executive—resulting in a nonlinear relationship.

In sum, CEO transformational leadership decreases normative commitment for executives up to intermediate levels but additional leadership up to high levels results in substantial increases in normative commitment. Consistent with previous leadership research and social exchange theory logic, the highest level of commitment is likely

to occur at the highest levels of CEO transformational leadership; however, the relationship will be curvilinear.

Hypothesis 1. CEO transformational leadership has a curvilinear relationship to top executive normative commitment; top executives experience the lowest level of normative commitment when their CEOs provide moderate levels of transformational leadership.

2.3. Affective commitment as a mediator

Affective commitment represents an emotional attachment to and involvement with the organization. In addition, affective commitment is driven by an emotional attachment to and identification with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Previous research finds a direct relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment (Buchko, Weinzimmer, & Sergeev, 1998; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Social exchange theory serves as the basis for understanding the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment (Leroy, Palanski, & Simons, 2012). Transformational CEOs engage in positive social exchanges with the executive management team. Trust and identification with the CEO is built through continuous communication and sharing of values. Top management team members identify with the CEO and the values he/she instills in the organization. This identification and attachment to the CEO results in increased affective commitment in the top management team. According to Pillai and Williams (2004), the collectivistic focus of groups led by transformational leaders may be a catalyst in eliciting higher levels of commitment. This is particularly critical in top management groups led by a transformational CEO.

As predicted with normative commitment, moderate levels of CEO transformational leadership can result in emotional detachment and less identification with the organization (i.e., lower affective commitment). Thus, a nonlinear relationship between CEO transformational leadership and affective commitment is expected.

Hypothesis 2. CEO transformational leadership has a curvilinear relationship to top executive affective commitment; top executives experience the lowest level of affective commitment when their CEOs provide moderate levels of transformational leadership.

Affective commitment has relates strongly with normative commitment and shares many of the same antecedents and consequences (e.g., a corrected correlation of .63, based on 54 studies; Meyer et al., 2002). Perhaps positive experiences that contribute to strong affective commitment also contribute to felt obligation to reciprocate. This finding might also help to explain why most of the work experience variables that correlate with affective commitment also correlate positively, albeit less strongly, with normative commitment (Briggs, Jaramillo, & Weeks, 2011; Meyer et al., 2002; Rego, Ribeiro, Cunha, & Jesuino, 2011).

Studies using regression analyses to assess the independent contributions of affective and normative commitment in the prediction of organizational behavior yield mixed results; some studies demonstrate significant increments in predictions for normative commitment (e.g., Lee, Allen, Meyer, & Rhee, 2001), and others do not (e.g., Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997). Taken together these findings suggest that affective and normative commitment are not identical constructs, but more work is needed to understand what normative commitment is, how it develops, and whether it predicts behavior (Meyer et al., 2002). Affective commitment affects discretionary performance of employees because of the role of social exchanges and relational investments. Employees who have high level of affective commitment consider their relationship with the organization to be relational rather than transactional, and are thus more likely to engage in discretionary activities on the organization's behalf (Lam, 2012).

In addition to the direct relationship between transformational leadership and normative commitment variables, our model proposes affective commitment will mediate this relationship. The interaction between transformational leaders and affectively committed members might help these members to better identify the organizational goals and internalize the vision of the organization through such exchange processes (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Tse & Lam, 2008). Similarly, the interaction between transformational leaders and followers may make these followers feel more obligated to stay with the organization since transformational leaders act as a mentor and listen to the followers' needs. Once followers' needs are met, they are more likely to contribute back to the organization to balance the exchange process resulting in not only increased levels of normative commitment but also an emotional attachment to the organization. This emotional attachment (i.e., affective) likely serves as an antecedent to an obligation to remain with the company (i.e., normative).

Meyer et al. (2002) suggest that positive experiences that contribute to strong affective commitment also contribute to a felt obligation to reciprocate (normative commitment). The reverse (i.e., employees do not develop a sense of obligation to their organization prior to feeling an affective attachment to the company), does not seem theoretically plausible. San Martin (2008) finds that affective commitment positively affects normative commitment. Additionally, a number of relational variables, including employee trust in the firm, employee satisfaction, flexibility, solidarity, and participation in decision making, indirectly influence normative commitment through affective commitment.

Thus, affective commitment may mediate the leadership–normative commitment relationship. Hypothesis 3: Affective organizational commitment fully mediates the curvilinear relationship between CEO transformational leadership and top executive normative commitment.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The sample used in this study consists of top-level executives of 120 randomly chosen firms that are listed in Fortune 500 of Turkey. The original questionnaire was in English and was translated into Turkish by a bilingual speaker. The Turkish questionnaire was then back-translated into English by another bilingual speaker. In cases where the back-translation was not equivalent to the original version, the process of translation was repeated (Brislin, 1980). A panel of three CEOs and three management scholars reviewed the survey and provided feedback. Based on their feedback, the survey was modified and then pre-tested on participants in an executive MBA class.

In each organization, the CEO served as the contact for this research. Questionnaires were sent to the CEOs of each of company with a cover letter (seeking their cooperation and explaining the purpose of the study) and a self-addressed stamped envelope (for the completed surveys). An executive summary of the findings of this study was provided. The CEOs of each firm were then asked to distribute a questionnaire to each of their top-level five executives; therefore, a total of 600 questionnaires were mailed to CEOs of these 120 firms. To ensure privacy and confidentiality of responses, a return envelope was provided for each top-level executives of every firm, independent of the CEO.

Based on a two-wave mailing process, 228 questionnaires were returned. Eighteen of them were excluded because they were incomplete. All in all, the sample of this study consists of 210 questionnaires representing a 35% response rate, which is significantly higher than the 10–12% rate typical for mailed surveys to top executives (Hambrick, Geletkanycz, & Fredrickson, 1993). In order to test for non-response bias, responding and non-responding firms were compared based on their Fortune 500 size and age, obtained from the Istanbul Stock Exchange and Istanbul Chamber of Commerce. The

t-test results revealed that the two groups were not significantly different regarding these characteristics. The data used to test the hypotheses were representative of the sampling frame.

From the sample of 210 top-level executives, 72% of respondents were male and 28% were female. Approximately 31% of the sample reported their age as 29–39 years, while the second largest group of respondents reported being 51–61 years of age. Approximately 42% of the sample had worked for their organization for 4–10 years, while the next largest group of respondents (27.1%) had worked for their organization for 3–4 years.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent variable

3.2.1.1. Normative organizational commitment. A 6-item scale based on Allen and Meyer (1990, 1993) was used to measure normative commitment. All six items had high corrected-item total correlations and were all included in the analysis. A sample item from the normative commitment scale is “Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.” Scale coefficient alpha for the 6-item normative commitment measure was .87.

3.2.2. Mediator

3.2.2.1. Affective organizational commitment. A 6-item scale was used to measure affective commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990, 1993). Participants responded to all items on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). Two items (with corrected-item total correlation <.40) were excluded from the analysis (Lounsbury, Gibson, & Saudargas, 2006). The remaining four items were included: “I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization,” “I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (reversed coded),” “I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to this organization (reverse coded),” and “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.” Scale coefficient alpha for the 4-item affective commitment measure was .93.

3.2.3. Independent variable

3.2.3.1. Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was measured by using the Turkish translation of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire-Form 5X (MLQ-Form 5X Short; Bass & Avolio, 1997, 2000). Twenty items taken from the MLQ-Form 5X were used to measure transformational leadership, including idealized influence (i.e., charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1997, 2000). However, because there was not any a priori expectation that individual components of transformational leadership would differentially affect levels of commitment and the four single components of transformational leadership usually show high inter-correlations (Fu et al., 2010; Yukl, 2006), these scales were combined into one higher-order factor (Hambley et al., 2007). A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from “not at all” to “frequently, if not always”) was used. Coefficient alpha was .96.

3.2.4. Control variables

Demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, dyad tenure, company tenure) which are potential predictors of normative commitment were included (Ang, Dyne, & Begley, 2003; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Gender was a dichotomous variable (0 = male, 1 = female). Executive age was a continuous measure. Finally, executive's dyad tenure with their CEO and company tenure were measured with the following categories: “less than one year,” “one to two years,” “two to four years,” “four to ten years,” and “more than ten years.”

3.3. Construct validation

A dimensional level confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) including all the variables in the study (e.g., transformational leadership, affective commitment, and normative commitment) and latent variables was examined first. Multiple indicators were used to represent the latent variable transformational leadership by averaging items for each of the four subscales (charisma, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation). An initial test of the one-factor model found that the data fit was poor ($X^2 = 3205.80, p < .001$, goodness of fit index (GFI) = .404, comparative fit index (CFI) = .614, incremental fit index (IFI) = .616, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .135). Then the proposed three-factor measurement model with an alternative two-factor model was tested. The three-factor model consists of transformational leadership, affective commitment, and normative commitment. The two-factor model is composed of transformational leadership and organizational commitment (affective and normative combined).

Absolute fit indexes for the proposed three-factor model ranged from adequate to excellent ($X^2 = 87.349, p < .001$, GFI = .945, CFI = .995, IFI = .995, RMSEA = .029). Against this model, an alternative two-factor model, with transformational leadership and a merged affective and normative commitment factor, was tested ($X^2 = 95.730, p < .001$, GFI = .940, CFI = .992, IFI = .992, RMSEA = .035). The results indicate that the three-factor model fit the data best. The difference in chi-square between the three- and two-factor model is 8.381, which is distributed as chi-square with ($76 - 74 = 2$) degrees of freedom. The fact that this value is statistically significant further suggests that the three-factor model is significantly better than the second-order model. Thus, the results provide empirical evidence of the distinctiveness of the three constructs.

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables. Regression results for the test of hypotheses appear in Table 2. Table 3 shows a more robust result for the mediation test based on the recommendations of Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007).

4. Results

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test all hypotheses. First, organizational commitment (affective or normative) was regressed on the control variables (see Models 1 and 4 in Table 2). Next, transformational leadership was entered to determine the incremental variance attributable to that variable (see Models 2 and 5 in Table 2). Then, the transformational leadership squared term was entered to investigate the nonlinear effect (see Models 3 and 6 in Table 2) to test H1 and H2. Next, H3 (Baron & Kenny, 1986) was examined to determine whether the nonlinear CEO transformational leadership effect on normative commitment loses significance when accounting for affective commitment (Model 7 in Table 2).

Model 6 in Table 2, assesses H1. The test examines the curvilinear effect of CEO transformational leadership on executive normative

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations. ^a

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.281	.451	–					
2. Executive age	2.752	1.325	–.051	–				
3. CEO dyad tenure	3.629	.946	–.080	.613	–			
4. Company tenure	2.576	.828	–.013	.301	.439	–		
5. Transformational	3.334	1.081	.039	–.204	–.212	.043	–	
6. Affective	3.290	1.217	.062	–.035	–.052	.056	.791	–
7. Normative	3.164	.578	.061	.075	.013	.060	.655	.830

^a n = 210. Every value above |.203| are significant at the 1% level.

commitment. Model 6 reveals a positive squared transformational leadership coefficient for normative ($p < .05$) commitment resulting in a 1% increase in R-squared.

Fig. 1 provides a graph of the nonlinear effect. As Fig. 1 demonstrates, the relationship of CEO transformational leadership with executive commitment exhibits a J-shaped relationship with moderate transformational leadership resulting in the lowest level of normative commitment. In sum, H1 receives support.

Model 3 in Table 2 assesses H2. The test examines the nonlinear effect of transformational leadership on affective commitment. Model 3 reveals a positive squared transformational leadership coefficient for affective ($p < .05$) commitment.

Table 2 assesses H2 which essentially follows Baron and Kenny (1986). The test examines the mediating effect of affective commitment on the nonlinear CEO transformational leadership to executive normative commitment relationship. Model 3 in Table 2 reveals that transformational leadership exhibits a nonlinear relationship to affective commitment ($p < .05$). For the normative commitment regression, Model 7 indicates affective commitment has a significant and positive mediating effect ($\beta = .374, p < .01$) as evidenced by the nonlinear transformational leadership effect on normative commitment loss of significance ($\beta = .034, p > .05$).

The Sobel (1982) test also provides additional evidence of an affective commitment mediating effect (H3). In order to conduct the Sobel (1982) test for mediation, the raw regression coefficient and the standard error was used for the association between the transformational leadership squared and the mediator, and the association between the mediator and the normative commitment (adjusting for transformational leadership squared). Sobel's (1982) z statistic for the mediator (test statistic = 1.97; standard error = .03; $p < .05$), suggests that this mediating effect is statistically different from zero. A robustness test across 2000 bootstrap resamples provides additional support of significant mediation findings (see Table 3).

The Sobel (1982) test was also used to explore the alternative explanation that normative commitment might act as a mediator of the transformational leadership to affective commitment relationship. Sobel's (1982) z statistic for the mediator (test statistic = .08; standard error = .42; $p > .05$), suggests that this mediating effect is not statistically different from zero. Consistent with the earlier theoretical explanation, normative commitment does not act as a significant mediator. Table 3 supports the non-mediating role of normative commitment. In summary, affective commitment emerges as a key mediator of the nonlinear (i.e., J-shaped) leadership to normative commitment relationship.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The findings represent an advance over previous leadership research, which has predicted a linear relationship between transformational leadership and organizational outcomes. This approach to studying leadership departs from previous assumptions prevalent in the literature. First, some evidence supports a direct curvilinear relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment—specifically, a J-shaped relationship between CEO transformational leadership and both affective and normative commitment. Top executives are more susceptible to feel emotionally attached, identify the organization's problems as their own, and express the desire to spend the rest of their career at the organization when their CEOs provide low or high levels of transformational leadership but not moderate levels. It appears that moderate levels of transformational leadership are worse than none at all in that it promotes ambiguous goals and a piecemealed vision. These results support the previous hypothesis that moderate levels of CEO transformational leadership provide an unclear vision about what needs to be accomplished as well as the strategic direction the company will take. In addition, moderate levels of transformational leadership can cause

Table 2
Results of ordinary least squared regression.

	Affective Commitment			Normative Commitment			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender	.145 (.191)	.102 (.114)	.113 (.113)	.084 (.090)	.067 (.066)	.073 (.065)	.031 (.050)
Executive age	-.007 (.081)	.088 † (.049)	.093 † (.049)	.048 (.039)	.086** (.028)	.089** (.028)	.054* (.022)
CEO dyad tenure	-.119 (.124)	.115 (.075)	.127 † (.075)	-.053 (.059)	.042 (.043)	.050 (.043)	.002 (.033)
Company tenure	.153 (.117)	-.070 (.071)	-.081 (.071)	.050 (.055)	-.040 (.041)	-.047 (.041)	-.016 (.031)
Transformational Leadership ²		.941*** (.049)	-.064 (.506)		.382*** (.028)	-.204 (.292)	-.180 (.223)
Affective Transformational ²			.162* (.081)			.095* (.047)	.034 (.036)
R ²	.014	.648	.655	.016	.481	.491	.706
R ² change	.014	.634***	.007*	.016	.465***	.010*	.214***
F	.735	74.158***	63.374***	.834	37.223***	32.169***	68.129***

Unstandardized coefficients and standard error (in parenthesis). † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed). N = 210.

confusion, not to mention role stress (Harris & Kacmar, 2006) for executives resulting in more harm than good. Specifically, a moderate level of transformational leadership diminishes the quality of the social exchange between the CEO and top executive. In addition, the results support the idea that affective commitment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and normative commitment. This reinforces prior findings that affective and normative commitment covary. The reverse however does not hold up. Normative commitment is not a mediator for transformational leadership and affective commitment.

The Turkish setting provides supports for the generalizability of the transformational leadership construct in a collectivistic culture in contrast to most leadership research conducted in individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995). This study supports previous research which suggests a positive relationship between transformational leadership and desired attitudes in employees from collectivistic cultures. For example, Joo, Yoon, and Jeung (2012) find that transformational leadership is significantly related to affective commitment in a large Korean firm. Similar to Turkey, Korea is both high power distance and a collectivistic culture.

Understanding the context within which this study was conducted is important. For example, Turkish culture is high on collectivism and power distance (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Hofstede, 1980). Triandis (1995) refers to this as “vertical collectivism.” Organizations are hierarchical and focused on centralized decision making (Ronen, 1986). Both hierarchy and clan relationships characterize organizational cultures in Turkish firms (Oney-Yazici, Giritli, Topcu-Oraz, & Acar, 2007). These cultural values distinguish Turkey from other Western cultures such as the United States. Future research should investigate whether these relationships emerge as a universal phenomenon across all cultural contexts or appear context specific (Pasa, 2000).

Table 3
Mediation test.

Mediation test with 2000 bootstrap resamples of transformational leadership squared as IV				
	Coefficient	se	t	p value
IV to mediator (a path)	.1621	.0813	1.993	.0476
Direct effect of mediator on DV (b path)	.3744	.0311	12.0399	.0000
Total effects of IV on DV (c path)	.0946	.0469	2.0157	.0452
Direct effects of IV on DV with mediator (c' path)	.0339	.0361	.9372	.3497
Bias corrected confidence intervals	Lower	Upper	Supported	
	.0024	.1244		
Alternative model test with affective commitment as DV and normative commitment as mediator				
Bias corrected confidence intervals	Lower	Upper	Not supported	
	-.0108	.2286		

This study offers an informative as well as an interesting contrast to the individualistic, industrialized context of North America, where most organizational commitment models have been developed and validated (Watsi, 2003). In summary, the Turkish sample provides some initial support that transformational leadership effects can be generalized across cultures. Comparative research would be the next appropriate step in testing this framework as it is critical to specify the boundary conditions of theories (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

5.1. Managerial implications

Several managerial implications follow from the findings. First, CEOs can encourage higher levels of organizational commitment by adopting a transformational leadership approach with the top management team. Such an approach needs to be consistent and fully adopted. On the other hand, top management team members can also experience higher levels of organizational commitment when CEOs implement no transformational leadership at all. In this case, the CEO may adopt a transactional leadership style and instill higher levels of affective and normative commitment in the executive team. Moderate levels of transformational leadership result in lower levels of commitment in the executive team. This can be detrimental for an organization because low levels of commitment result in increased turnover and lower levels of performance.

The relationship between affective and normative commitment is another significant managerial implication. The more affective

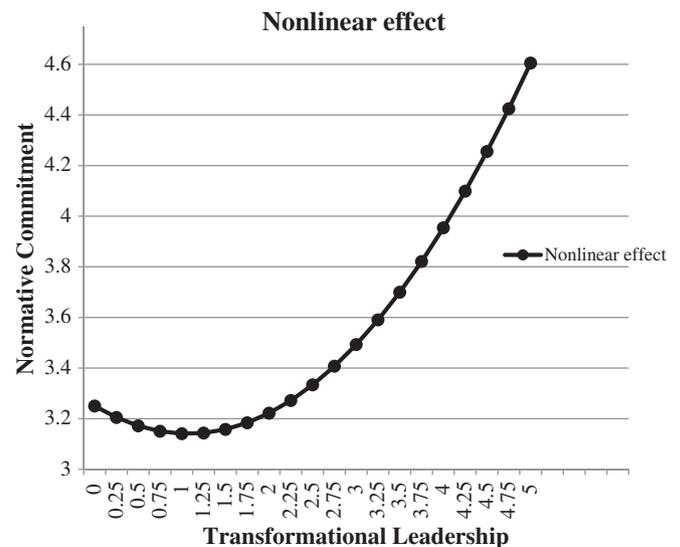


Fig. 1. J-shaped relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and normative commitment.

commitment a top management team member experiences, the higher his/her level of normative commitment. This increase in both affective and normative commitment serves to strengthen the organizational commitment of management team members. Increased organizational commitment is of particular importance in the top management team because of the costs related to their turnover. CEOs should find ways to increase both affective and normative commitment in executive members.

The same benefits that transformational leadership affords at lower levels of the organization are observable at the top levels. In fact, leadership behavior has a greater impact because top executives are involved in strategy formulation and their level of commitment should directly impact firm outcomes (Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin, & Veiga, 2008). Additionally, the turnover costs associating with top management are much higher than at lower levels of the organization. Given organizational commitment's impact on turnover, it is important that CEOs find ways to influence this relationship.

5.2. Limitations and future extensions

The present study has limitations that may also serve as future extensions. First, individual follower's assessment of their CEO's transformational leadership was used. Even though studies recommend our approach and suggest that collecting descriptions of leader behavior from the same leaders are suspect (Hershey, 1985; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009), future studies examine whether or not there is some level of convergence between the CEO's perception of transformational leadership provided to a particular executive and that executive's viewpoint. Although a CEO's leadership style is applicable generically to all his or her executives (Ling et al., 2008), future research should not sway from also studying CEO leadership at the dyad level of analysis.

Relating to the first limitation, the data were collected at a single point in time from a single source. Also, a test for common variance bias and multicollinearity was performed. As for future research, a time series design would be ideal for testing our framework so executive commitment can be examined as they move through development stages.

In addition, future studies should adopt a multilevel approach. Hierarchical linear modeling would be suitable for understanding the effects of transformational leadership on individual executives as well as the executive team. Such knowledge would be beneficial by allowing a comparison of leadership effects at both the individual and team levels of analysis. If effects converge at both levels of analysis we would be safe in generalizing findings from the individual level of analysis to the team level and vice versa. Until such research is conducted scholars should not assume results from our study are generalizable to the executive team level of analysis.

Also, several characteristics may moderate the transformational leadership to commitment relationship. For example, one might expect an executive with high self-efficacy to prefer moderate levels of transformational leadership resulting in some gain in organizational commitment from low to moderate levels but a sharp decline at high levels—an inverted J-shaped relationship.

Transformational leadership might be the key to increasing levels of commitment in collectivistic cultures. This is of particular interest because in a review of 27 studies, Randall (1993) finds that organizational commitment is lower in collectivistic cultures than individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures the protection of social associations may be stronger than to organizational interests. On the other hand, the mediating relationship of affective commitment reinforces previous studies which suggest affective commitment may be stronger in collectivistic cultures because of the potential to view the organization as a social entity. In addition, the sample was taken from one country, Turkey, that is both clan and hierarchical. Future research should exam other clan and hierarchy cultures around

the world in order to determine if the results can be replicated. Future studies should compare the results we found here in different cultural settings to explore the potential variation in how executives respond across various cultural contexts.

Finally, it would be ideal to collect data directly from the CEO (e.g., values, personality, attitudes) to see how those might interact with their leadership style to affect follower outcomes (Colbert, Kristof-Broiatt, Bradley, & Barrick, 2008). In fact, such exploration should go beyond transformational leadership to include other leadership styles. Specifically, future research could learn from testing our model with other leadership types (e.g., transactional leadership). Could it be that transactional leadership—simply clarifying role and task clarity—also exhibit a nonlinear relationship to commitment? Such areas of research await investigation.

5.3. Conclusion

This study contributes to the transformational leadership and organizational commitment research by showing that the relationship is actually J-shaped. The findings reveal that leadership effects can emerge in a nonlinear fashion. Results also support the argument that transformational leadership and organizational commitment are not only beneficial in Western countries but also in non-Western contexts such as Turkey. For CEO transformational leadership, executives may prefer “All over none but prefer none to just some.” Future research should consider this curvilinear relationship when examining transformational leadership and organizational commitment.

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