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Author(s): Katrina A. Graham, Jonathan C. Ziegert and Johnna Capitano

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The Effect of Leadership Style, Framing, and Promotion Regulatory Focus on Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

Katrina A. Graham · Jonathan C. Ziegert ·
Johnna Capitano

Abstract The goal of this paper is to examine the impact of leadership and promotion regulatory focus on employees' willingness to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB; Umphress and Bingham, J Appl. Psychol 95:769–780, 2011). Building from a person–situation interactionist perspective, we investigate the interaction of leadership style and how leaders frame messages, as well as test a three-way interaction with promotion focus. Using an experimental design, we found that inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders elicited higher levels of UPB than transactional leaders when the leaders used loss framing, but not gain framing. Furthermore, followers' promotion regulatory focus moderated this relationship such that the effect held for followers with low promotion focus, but not for individuals with high promotion focus. Our findings extend the understanding of UPB, offer theoretical mechanisms to explain when this behavior occurs, and contribute to leadership theory and research on ethical decision making.

Keywords Framing · Transactional leadership ·
Transformational leadership · Promotion regulatory
focus · Unethical pro-organizational behavior

Researchers have reported various influences which impact individuals' unethical behavior in organizations (Brown and Treviño 2006). Much of this work has focused on behaviors that have a self-serving advantage for the individual. For example, an employee may steal from the organization in order to "right" a previous wrong committed by a supervisor or the organization (e.g., Skarlicki and Folger 1997). However, recent research has demonstrated that employees can also engage in unethical behavior to protect or promote the organization and its leaders (Umphress and Bingham 2011; Vadera and Pratt 2013). An example of this type of behavior occurs when individuals engage in accounting fraud to protect the company (Amernic and Craig 2010; Ertugrul and Krishnan 2011). Unethical behavior does not need to be as extreme as concealing serious crimes, and could involve lying to clients, withholding information from the public, or giving a good recommendation on behalf of an incompetent employee to another company. All of these behaviors would be committed with the purpose of helping the organization achieve its goals (Umphress and Bingham 2011).

These activities fall under the umbrella of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), defined as "actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress and Bingham 2011, p. 622). Unethical behavior, more broadly defined, goes beyond organizational norms and concerns committing an action which is incompatible with larger societal norms (Donaldson and Dunfee 1994). UPB involves pro-organizational behaviors which fit this definition of unethical behavior. However, while UPB may not be in the best interest of the organization in the long term, the concept focuses on the employees' intentions. UPB is a type of pro-organizational workplace violation, where the behavior occurs with the purpose of advancing both organizational and personal interests (Vadera and Pratt 2013).

K. A. Graham (✉) · J. C. Ziegert · J. Capitano
Department of Management, LeBow College of Business,
Drexel University, 101 N. 33rd Street, Office 320, Philadelphia,
PA, USA
e-mail: kg473@drexel.edu

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From a practical perspective, UPB is important to understand due to its potentially devastating consequences on a variety of stakeholders. UPB has a great deal of ethical relevance on a societal level since these types of behaviors can greatly affect not only the organization, but also people outside of the organization (Vadera and Pratt 2013). For example, a high-profile case of UPB involved officials at Pennsylvania State University not properly reporting to the authorities a football coach's inappropriate actions with children (Palazzolo 2011). As a result of UPB, public trust can be comprised, organizational reputations can be ruined, and significant costs can be incurred by individuals outside the organization (Umphress and Bingham 2011). Therefore, due to the potential consequences of UPB, it is important to examine mechanisms which help explain when employees would engage in this type of unethical behavior.

Our findings make several contributions to the understanding of UPB. First, the results link to the leadership literature by illustrating that leadership style affects UPB by interacting with how leaders frame problems to followers. The role of leadership is prominent in the definition of UPB (Umphress and Bingham 2011) and leaders are central in shaping followers' unethical behavior (Brown and Treviño 2006). Our research builds from prior research examining the relationship of leadership and organizational identification on UPB. Umphress et al. (2010) found that those who had high organizational identification and high positive reciprocity beliefs were the most likely to engage in UPB. Additionally, Effelsberg et al. (2013) reported that in Germany, transformational leadership is positively related to subordinates' UPB, and organizational identification mediates this relationship. Miao et al. (2013) also found that in China, moderate amounts of ethical leadership may encourage UPB.

We extend upon these studies by incorporating an additional contextual leader influence; specifically, leader framing, and our findings help explain under what conditions "positive" leadership types may encourage UPB. While the influence of leaders on employees' UPB matters, as Effelsberg et al. (2013) suggest, it can be a nuanced process. We propose that UPB is affected by the combination of communication tactics utilized by supervisors and their leadership style, and, therefore, multiple leadership influences should be taken into account. Our research also suggests that even when leaders are not specific in how they would prefer the employees to behave, subordinates interpret situational cues. Subordinates observe leadership style and how leaders frame problems, and this ultimately has an important effect on their behavior. Finally, our findings highlight the importance of the individuals' characteristics in their likelihood to engage in UPB. In addition to positive reciprocity beliefs (Umphress et al. 2010) and

employees' personal disposition to engage in (un)ethical behavior (Effelsberg et al. 2013), individuals' promotion focus may also play a role, and we find that followers' personal congruence with the leaders' framed messages is relevant in predicting UPB. Individuals who are high in promotion regulatory focus tend to seek gains in their life, and we test whether this gain-seeking preference will affect the influential impact of leadership on subordinates' actions.

Taken together, the results of our study indicate that in order to understand employee UPB, an interactionist perspective is needed. Not only does the situational aspect involve multiple leader influences, but individual characteristics of the employee are also important. Our findings have theoretical implications for leadership theory and ethical decision making, as well as practical implications for how organizations can design interventions to prevent UPB from occurring in the workplace.

Theoretical Rationale and Hypotheses

UPB and Person–Situation Interactionist Model

Previous research on UPB has found that an individual's level of organizational identification can play an important role in contributing to his or her willingness to engage in UPB (Effelsberg et al. 2013; Umphress et al. 2010). Additionally, transformational (Effelsberg et al. 2013) and ethical leaders (Miao et al. 2013) may inadvertently encourage employees to commit UPB. We build from this research to examine how leadership influences UPB from an interactionist perspective.

Umphress and Bingham (2011) drew on the person–situation interactionist model to suggest that UPB likely occurs as a combination of both personal and situational factors. Treviño (1986) first proposed this person–situation interactionist framework for understanding employees' ethical decision making, and she outlined how employees interpret cues in their environment when determining how to behave. Individuals look to cues in the work setting to develop cognitions and make decisions about ethical dilemmas. These cues can be understood as situations which affect decision making and ultimately individuals' behavior. However, ethical behavior is also determined by individual characteristics, which interact with a given situation. Therefore, ethical decision making must be understood as a combination of both situations and individual characteristics. Alzola (2012) posits that situations explain "aggregate" behavior, but within that aggregate, individual differences further predict variability. Researchers who take a "situationist" perspective suggest that a situation has an overriding influence on ethical decision making, but as

Treviño (1986) and Alzola (2012) argue, an individual's character and traits are also relevant in predicting ethical behavior.

Consistent with prior research on ethical decision making (Brown and Treviño 2006), Umphress and Bingham (2011) suggest that in terms of situational influences, relationships with leaders will have an important impact on employees' UPB. Empirical research has found that the interaction of situations with individual differences affects ethical decision making (e.g., Church et al. 2005). Additionally, the role of leaders is a situational aspect which predicts employees' ethical behavior, and has also been found to interact with personal characteristics, providing further support for the person–situation interactionist model (e.g., Ruiz-Palomino and Martinez-Cañas 2011).

We examine two aspects of the situational influence of leaders: First, their leadership style, and second, how they frame problems. Umphress and Bingham (2011) posit that employees engage in UPB due to social exchange relationships with leaders and the organization, and since transformational leaders have positive social exchange relationships with their followers, it is possible that employees may "repay" their transformational leaders by engaging in UPB. Additionally, leaders send signals to subordinates through their communication with them (Brown and Lord 2001). Therefore, we also incorporate leader framing. Framing relates to how messages are coded—for example, whether the communicator uses negative or positive language—and it has been suggested that different types of framing lead to different interpretations by message recipients (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). We propose that the interaction of these two leader influence variables will provide a situational context which predicts UPB. We then discuss the role of subordinates' promotion regulatory focus to examine a personal characteristic which interacts with leadership to predict UPB.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

One of the most studied influences is the role of the leader, and how the style of a leader can motivate his or her followers to engage in various behaviors (Bass and Bass 2008). The full range model of leadership (Bass 1985) highlights two leadership styles: transactional and transformational behaviors (Burns 1978; Bass and Bass 2008). Transactional and transformational leadership are distinct concepts (Bass and Bass 2008) with differing effects on followers' behaviors (Bass 1985; Judge and Piccolo 2004). Yet, it is important to note that transformational leaders also exhibit transactional behaviors (Judge and Piccolo 2004), and thus transformational leadership can be conceptualized as going "above and beyond" a transactional style.

Research on transformational leaders has found that transformational leadership affects the way followers think about their work and themselves (Brown and Lord 2001; Piccolo and Colquitt 2006). Through the use of inspirational motivation and idealized influence, transformational leaders divert followers' attention away from themselves and toward higher-level goals. These inspirational and charismatic elements couple together to provide followers with a clear vision and sense of purpose (Avolio and Bass 2004). Shamir et al. (1993) propose that the visionary and charismatic nature of transformational leaders motivates followers to focus their efforts on higher-level goals through social identification with the group, linking work values to follower values, and increasing follower self-efficacy. Additionally, a review of the literature on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) reported that visionary transformational leadership has a positive relationship with followers' OCBs, whereas mixed results exist for transactional leadership (Podsakoff et al. 2000). Therefore, transformational leaders, especially individuals emphasizing an inspirational and charismatic style, encourage pro-organizational behavior, and may inadvertently encourage pro-organizational behavior that is also unethical (Effelsberg et al. 2013). We focus on this inspirational and charismatic form of transformational leadership (in comparison to intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration) as a key antecedent of UPB.

In Bass' (1985) original conceptualization of transformational leadership theory, inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders can be either ethical or unethical depending on their intentions. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) further distinguished between two types of transformational leadership: pseudo-transformational leadership and authentic transformational leadership. Under authentic leadership, the leaders possess strong moral values and do not use their charismatic influence to manipulate followers (Walumbwa et al. 2008). Yet, under pseudo-transformational leadership, the presence of the leaders' ethical motivations is not necessarily present, and the leader focuses on the self at the expense of others. This difference between a self-focus and other focus is at the core of the distinction between authentic and pseudo-transformational leadership. Additional theory and research have also made a distinction between transformational leadership and ethical leadership, concluding that they are distinct concepts (Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Treviño 2006; Treviño et al. 2003).

However, the inspirational and charismatic elements of transformational leadership are often described as having an ethical component (Turner et al. 2002). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) propose that authentic inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders who focus on the organization (rather than the self) have an ethical influence

above and beyond their transactional relationships; specifically, followers will seek to role model ethical behavior after their transformational leaders. Thus, transformational leadership may discourage UPB due to UPB's unethical component.

This study specifically examines the inspirational motivation and idealized influence dimensions of transformational leadership that together make up charismatic forms of vision, purpose, and mission (Avolio and Bass 2004; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1996). We focus on the authentic forms of idealized influence and inspirational motivation in terms of how the leader focuses on a vision of creating a better organization and product (rather than a better position for him/herself). Since authentic forms of charismatic and inspirational transformational leadership have two forces of inspiring pro-organizational behavior and ethical influence, we do not hypothesize a main effect difference of leadership style on subordinates' willingness to commit UPB. Instead, we propose that an additional leadership influence variable—in this case, how leaders frame problems to followers—will interact with leadership style to create a situational environment which will ultimately predict UPB.

The Role of Framing

How leaders or policy-makers frame messages to individuals can have important implications for individual behavior (Grant and Hoffman 2011), and how problems are framed—and interpreted—can affect ethical decision making (Bastons 2008). The "goal framing effect," coined by Levin et al. (1998) involves the idea that differences in framing can influence the implicit goals of the individual depending on whether the message is positive or negative. Here, "...the issue may be framed to focus attention on its potential to provide a benefit or gain (positive frame) or on its potential to prevent or avoid a loss (negative frame)" (Levin et al. 1998, p. 167).

An example from health research involves a study on women's intentions of having a mammogram. When the women viewed a negatively worded message (e.g., the negative impact of not getting a mammogram) versus a positively worded message (e.g., the benefits of getting a mammogram), they were more likely to have the medical procedure conducted when the negatively worded message was presented (Banks et al. 1995). Yet, under the "goal framing" effect, the speaker may or may not tell the listener what the "good" or "bad" behavior should be, and may just frame a message in negative or positive terms. For example, in our study, the leader uses phrases such as "if we don't accomplish this [task], we will lose market share," or conversely, "if we accomplish this [task], we will gain market share." Individuals can vary on whether

they use positive or negative language depending on the situation at hand (Pennebaker and King 1999). While charismatic and inspirational leaders frame problems in a way to direct followers' attention to important aspects of the vision and purpose, and, therefore, can help followers make meaning of events through the language they use (Shamir et al. 1993, 1994), they can also take either a positive or negative position on these issues (Den Hartog and Verburg 1997).

Gain Framing

Research has found that decision makers most often describe options in positive terms (Wang 2004), and using gain language is consistently preferred by speakers over loss language (van Buiten and Keren 2009). When leaders use a positive frame, or gain language, they highlight the likelihood of success and place emphasis on favorable outcomes (Erez and Isen 2002; van Schie and van der Pligt 1995). While inspirational motivation encourages positive expectations from followers (Erez and Isen 2002), in the case of positive framing, the resulting inspirational motivation is due to the gain language being used, not necessarily characteristics of the leader (Howell et al. 1986; Kerr and Jermier 1978). In terms of transformational leadership, this suggests that the effects of transformational leader behaviors are less important in the presence of other conditions which substitute for the transformational behavior.

Therefore, by emphasizing the likelihood of successful organizational outcomes, a transactional leader can substitute for aspects of transformational leadership. Framing has motivational consequences on followers (Levin et al. 1998), and because of this, gain language can act as a substitute for inspirational motivation (Piccolo 2005). Inspirational motivation occurs when positive expectancies are elicited from followers (Erez and Isen 2002), and utilizing a positive frame may inspire followers to promote organizational goals through their behaviors (Piccolo 2005). Hence, when a transactional leader uses gain language, he or she may inspire followers to engage in behaviors to help the organization. However, this effect is due to the type of framing being used, not the style of the leader. Therefore, it is unlikely that leadership style will predict UPB when leaders use gain language.

Loss Framing

Research in psychology has concluded that across many psychological phenomena, the effects of "bad" things on people are stronger than the impact of "good" things (Baumeister et al. 2001; Taylor 1991). Even when controlling for the salience of negative events, the power of "bad" things still holds true (Baumeister et al. 2001). Negative

events signal to individuals that action should be taken (Schwarz 1990), negative stimuli lead to more complex cognitive processing than positive stimuli (Peeters and Czapinski 1990), and negative events provoke more social activity than positive events (Taylor 1991). Yet, in the context of leadership, followers' UPB will not be solely dependent on whether something positive or negative occurs because the impact of negative events on behavior can be minimized depending on a variety of factors (Taylor 1991).

Leadership plays an important role when an organization has something to lose because potential losses are often seen as threats to the organization (Highhouse and Yuce 1996). When uncertainty or threats are present, these are situations where the effects of inspirational and charismatic transformational leadership on follower behavior are likely to be more pronounced (Bass 1985; Shamir and Howell 1999). While transformational leaders have been found to be effective across a variety of organizational situations (Judge and Piccolo 2004; Lowe et al. 1996), the role of charismatic leaders is especially important during periods of change (Eisenbach et al. 1999; Shamir and Howell 1999) or in situations of distress (Bass 1985). Transformational leaders have the ability to influence followers' thought patterns by directing their attention to crucial bits of information, and transformational leaders are skilled in arousing emotions in subordinates and making certain aspects of a work situation salient (Brown and Lord 2001; Flynn and Staw 2004).

Transformational leaders can also increase feelings of loyalty toward the organization and leader (Bass 1998; Kark et al. 2003), and inspirational and charismatic leaders can inspire UPB through employees' identifying with the organization (Effelsberg et al. 2013; Umphress et al. 2010). Therefore, loyalty to the organization, and the desire to protect the organization, becomes especially relevant in loss situations when the organization is threatened. An inspirational leader can play an important role in motivating these loyal behaviors when the organization is faced with losses. As Conger (1989, p. 173) explained, "...in a crisis situation, [followers] are more willing to submit to a strong individual—enter the charismatic leader with his clear vision and strength of conviction." Thus, through their inspirational motivation and charisma, transformational leaders should be able to influence subordinates to commit pro-organizational behaviors at higher rates than transactional leaders in negative situations. While transformational leadership may contain an ethical component, unethical decisions can be made without conscious evaluation (Palazzo et al. 2012), and negative moods, which can result from experiencing negative events (Taylor 1991), can inhibit individuals' ethical decision making (Cianci and Bierstaker 2009; Curtis 2006). Therefore, the salience of negative situations not only mobilizes individuals to action when a leader is transformational, but

may override any potential ethical influence of the transformational leader. Hence, we propose that an inspirational and charismatic transformational leader who uses loss language and emphasizes the negative aspects of a situation will inspire employees to commit UPB at higher rates than a transactional leader who uses loss language.

Hypothesis 1 The effect of leadership style on UPB is moderated by the leaders' framing, such that leadership style is unrelated to UPB when gain framing is used and is related to UPB when loss framing is used. When loss framing is used, followers of inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders will be more willing to engage in unethical pro-organizational behavior than followers of transactional leaders.

The Role of Followers' Promotion Regulatory Focus

While the combined situational effect of leadership style and framing is important in predicting employee UPB, individual characteristics are also relevant under the person–situation interactionist model. In terms of the impact of leadership style on behavior, research has found that individual characteristics can have important moderating effects on how leaders influence employee outcomes (Howell et al. 1986). Here, due to its relevance with gain and loss framing, we examine the role of followers' promotion regulatory focus and test a three-way interaction with leadership and framing on UPB.

Individuals with high promotion goals "scrutinize their social world for information that bears on the pursuit of success" (Lockwood et al. 2002, p. 854) and are concerned about accomplishment, growth, and advancement. Trait relevance is "the degree to which a trait is consequential in influencing an individual's thought, affect, and behavior" (Britt and Shepperd 1999, p. 109), and promotion focus is a relevant trait to framing because it is a personality construct which relates to individuals' gain-seeking inclinations. Under regulatory fit theory, individuals are more likely to engage in a behavior when they feel that the situation "fits" with their regulatory mode (Higgins 2000). Previous research has found that promotion-focused individuals are the most motivated by positive role models as opposed to negative role models (Lockwood et al. 2002). Additionally, when individuals experience promotion regulatory fit with nonverbal cues (Cesario and Higgins 2008) and framing in messages (Kim 2006), they are more persuaded by those messages than when fit is not experienced. The research suggests that gain language and promotion focus are congruent due to the positive, accomplishment aspect of promotion focus. Thus, people with high promotion focus will be more likely to feel that they "fit" with

gain-seeking situations and be less attracted to loss situations since these negative aspects are not highly salient to them.

Therefore, we suggest inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders who use loss language will not inspire high promotion-focused individuals to commit UPB at greater rates than transactional leaders because high promotion individuals do not feel they "fit" with negative or loss situations. In high promotion-focused individuals, under loss situations, the inspirational and visionary elements of transformational leadership will not inspire key reactions such as organizational identification, which can drive an individual's willingness to engage in UPB (Effelsberg et al. 2013). These individuals will not be as willing to engage in UPB on behalf of the transformational leader because negative situations do not appeal to their gain-seeking nature, and the persuasive nature of transformational leadership behaviors will be less effective.

The threat of loss situations will still be relevant, however, to individuals with low promotion focus. Flynn and Staw (2004) found that charismatic leaders have a particularly pronounced effect on investment in companies in times of crisis, but the effects were more pronounced for individuals who had a prior acceptance and openness to the leader's influence. We propose that individuals with a low promotion focus are more likely to be susceptible to the influence of these inspirational and charismatic leaders in loss situations because they will be more likely to experience regulatory fit congruence with loss conditions. Therefore, for employees with a low promotion focus, a charismatic leader will still elicit feelings of loyalty toward the organization in times of crisis, which will increase the likelihood of UPB. Hence, we expect that there will be no difference between leadership style's impact on UPB in the loss or gain conditions for individuals with high promotion focus, but low promotion-focused individuals will still be influenced more persuasively by inspirational and charismatic leaders who use loss language than transactional leaders who use loss language.

Hypothesis 2 Followers' promotion regulatory focus will moderate the relationship between the interactive effects of leadership style and leaders' framing on followers' unethical pro-organizational behavior, such that the relationships will be weaker when promotion focus is high. For individuals with high promotion focus, there will be no difference on UPB between leadership styles when loss framing is used or when gain framing is used. For individuals with low promotion focus, charismatic and inspirational transformational leaders will inspire higher levels of UPB than transactional leaders when loss framing is used, but there will be no difference between leadership styles when gain framing is used.

Method

Data and Sample

We collected data utilizing Amazon Mechanical Turk. This method of data collection has been found to be as reliable as traditional methods, and often results in a diverse sample (Buhrmester et al. 2011). Since participants who use Mechanical Turk can have an incentive to "rush through" the survey quickly to earn payment (Barger et al. 2011), there is the possibility that not all the surveys will be correctly completed. Therefore, we analyzed the data to ensure that individuals who did not read the manipulation, understand it, and/or randomly answered the questions were excluded. After implementing these criteria, we eliminated 26 cases indicative of random responding for a final sample of 74 respondents. This exclusion rate is typical of other Mechanical Turk studies which have eliminated participants due to attentiveness checks (e.g., Amit et al. 2012). The average age was 32.4 years, and 53.4 % of the participants were female. The average respondent had been in the workforce for 12.9 years and 40.5 % of the sample had work experience as a manager. Our final sample size of 74 individuals was similar to other studies which have used vignettes to test the effects of transformational leadership (e.g., Nubold et al. 2013, 76 participants) and elicit participants' ethical decision making (e.g., Mencl and May 2009, 93 participants; O'Leary and Pangemanan 2007, 60 participants).

Procedure

We utilized a 2 × 2 scenario-based experimental design. To develop the manipulations of transformational leadership, we adapted a script created by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996), which examined the inspirational and charismatic elements of transformational leadership. For the transactional leadership scenario, we used a shortened scenario developed by Felfe and Schyns (2006), which had been adapted from Kirkpatrick and Locke's (1996) transformational leadership script. Both scenarios involved a CEO of a paper company, called BKC, speaking to employees, though for the purposes of our manipulation, participants read the CEO's statements in written form after we introduced the setup. In the transformational leadership condition, the CEO displayed inspirational and charismatic behaviors such as focusing on vision, goals, and purpose. The transformational CEO began the statement with:

> "At BKC, we make a pledge that our customers will receive high-quality printing and binding. Let me explain our vision for BKC. This vision describes our long-term and ideal goals for BKC–it is the direction we will be heading for many years."

In the transactional leadership condition, the CEO displayed transactional behavior such as contingent rewards. This scenario manipulation began with:

> "At BKC, we expect employees to be ready to go, and flexible, as far as your working hours are concerned. Of course, we will pay for any overtime you may need to work. If there are any questions or problems, ask me directly and I will take care of them."

For the framing manipulation, involving gain or loss framing, three statements were interspersed in the CEO's speech. The manipulation of language, which focused attention on the potential of an issue to provide a benefit (gain frame) or avoid a loss (loss frame) in multiple parts of the message, was consistent with other studies that have used goal framing (Levin et al. 1998). The locations of the loss or gain language were the same for all four manipulations. For the gain conditions, the CEO discussed that if certain actions were taken, then the company would gain market share, gain business, and gain customers. For the loss conditions, the CEO said that the company would lose market share, lose business, and lose customers if certain actions were not taken. Each of the four CEO statements consisted of approximately 400 words and appear in Appendix.

Participants were randomly assigned one of the four scenarios. Participants were first asked to read the statement by the CEO and then answer a series of questions. The survey questions were identical for all respondents. In addition to conducting manipulation checks, we measured the participants' ratings of promotion regulatory focus and UPB.

Measures

All measures utilized a 7-point Likert scale. The means, standard deviations, correlations, and alpha reliabilities are displayed in Table 1.

Manipulation Checks

Individuals' ratings of transformational and transactional leadership were measured with a shortened version of the MLQ (Bass and Avolio 1995). The items from the MLQ assess behaviors such as having a compelling vision for the future. For transformational leadership, we examined the dimensions of inspirational motivation and idealized influence. The alpha reliability of the 8-item scale for inspirational and charismatic transformational leadership was 0.85. For transactional leadership, the alpha reliability for the 4-item scale was 0.77.

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

We measured UPB using the 6-item scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010), with small adjustments made to indicate BKC as the target organization. The items included "If it would help BKC, I would misrepresent the truth to make BKC look good" and "If needed, I would conceal information from the public that could be damaging to BKC." The alpha reliability was 0.86.

Promotion Regulatory Focus

We used a shortened 3-item scale from Lockwood et al.'s (2002) promotion/prevention regulatory focus scale. Items included "In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in our life" and "I often think about how I will achieve success." The reliability for this scale was 0.83.

Results

We mean centered the variables to assist with interpreting the interactive results (Cohen et al. 2003). To check the experimental manipulations, we examined the leadership

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Unethical pro-organizational behavior	2.42	1.11	(0.86)					
2	Leadership condition	1.55	0.50	0.06	–				
3	Transactional leadership (MLQ)	4.44	1.27	0.31**	−0.11	(0.77)			
4	Transformational leadership (MLQ)	5.12	0.96	0.20	0.41**	0.38**	(0.85)		
5	Framing condition	1.46	0.50	−0.12	0.06	0.08	−0.18	–	
6	Promotion regulatory focus	5.60	0.87	−0.04	−0.01	0.09	0.21	0.01	(0.83)

$N = 74$

In "leadership condition," *1* = transactional leadership, *2* = transformational leadership; In "framing condition," *1* = gain condition, *2* = loss condition; reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

and framing conditions. The manipulation of the transformational leadership condition resulted in higher ratings on the transformational MLQ scale than the transactional leadership conditions $(F_{(1,73)} = 14.40, p < 0.001)$. However, there were no differences between the transformational and transactional leadership conditions on the MLQ ratings for transactional leadership $(F_{(1,73)} = 0.94, ns)$. This is likely because transformational leaders are seen as exhibiting transactional leadership behaviors in addition to transformational ones (Bass et al. 1987) and transformational leaders are often rated highly on transactional leadership dimensions (Judge and Piccolo 2004). Therefore, our manipulation and findings likely apply to "hands on" contingent reward styles of leadership rather than the lower ends of the transformational and transactional leadership continuums. Results also indicated that as expected, the framing manipulations had non-significant effects on perceptions of inspirational and charismatic transformational leadership $(F_{(1,73)} = 2.28, ns)$ and transactional leadership $(F_{(1,73)} = 0.49, ns)$.

Hypothesis 1 predicted an interaction between leadership style and framing. The results of a two-way ANOVA supported this hypothesis $(F_{(1,73)} = 4.10, p < 0.05)$. The distribution of the means across the four conditions is displayed in Table 2 and the plotted means are displayed in Fig. 1. In the gain condition, the levels of UPB for followers of transformational leaders $(m = 2.39)$ and followers of transactional leaders $(m = 2.71)$ were not significantly different $(F = 1.19, ns)$. In the loss condition, the level of UPB by followers of transformational leaders $(m = 2.58)$ was higher than followers of transactional leaders $(m = 1.86)$, $(F = 3.53, p < 0.05$, one-tailed directional test). Therefore, we found support for the predicted interaction where the difference between transformational leaders and transactional leaders would occur in the loss condition. A difference also occurred between the two different transactional leadership conditions. Here, the gain condition levels of UPB $(m = 2.71)$ were significantly higher than the loss condition $(m = 1.86)$ for transactional leaders $(F = 5.87, p < 0.05)$.
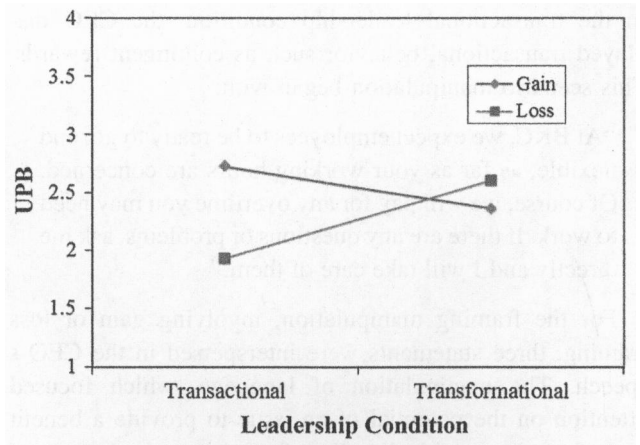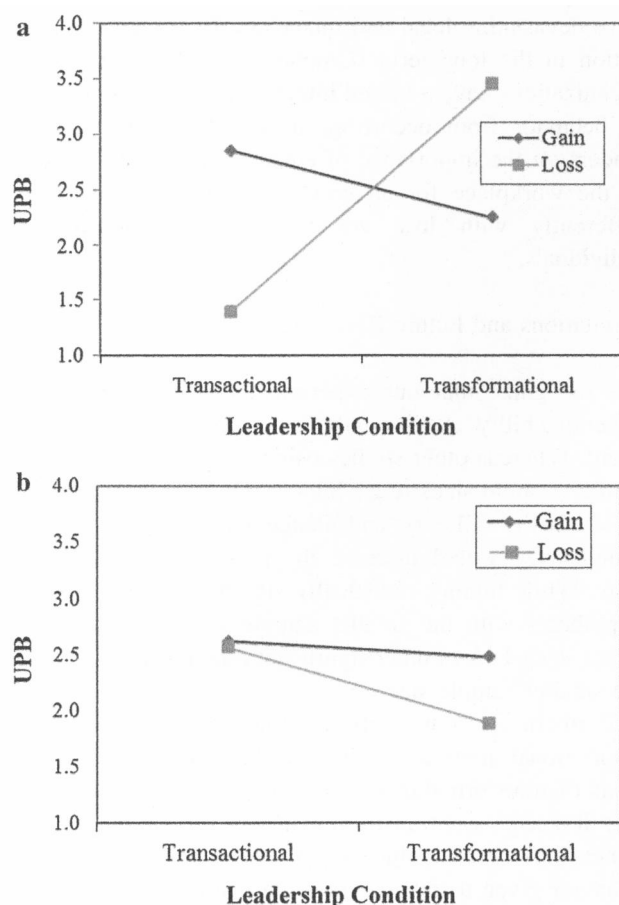

Fig. 1 Interactive effects of leadership condition and framing condition on UPB

For Hypothesis 2, which predicted a 3-way interaction among leadership styles, framing, and individuals' promotion focus, hierarchical regression was used. The results were significant $(\beta = -1.84, \Delta R^2 = 0.10, p < 0.01$; see Table 3). Figure 2 displays the interactions, and, as expected, the interactive effects of leadership style and framing on UPB were less pronounced for individuals with high promotion focus, supporting Hypothesis 2. Simple slopes analyses were non-significant for high promotion individuals. Therefore, the predicted interaction was

Table 3 Hierarchical regression results: effects of leadership condition, framing condition, and individuals' promotion regulatory focus on UPB

	1	2	3
Leadership condition	0.15	0.18	0.16
Framing condition	−0.27	−0.25	−0.22
Promotion focus	−0.05	−0.09	−0.06
Two-way interactions			
Leadership condition × framing condition		1.06*	1.06*
Leadership condition × promotion focus		−0.41	−0.66
Framing condition × promotion focus		−0.27	−0.12
Three-way interaction			
Leadership condition × framing condition × promotion focus			−1.84**
ΔR^2	0.02	0.09	0.10**
ΔF	0.47	2.22	8.64**
df	3, 70	3, 67	1, 66

$N = 74$

In "leadership condition," 1 = transactional leadership, 2 = transformational leadership; In "framing condition," 1 = gain condition, 2 = loss condition; standardized beta coefficients are reported

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 Mean levels of UPB for leadership and framing

Leadership condition	Framing condition		
	Gain Mean (SD)	Loss Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
Transactional	2.71 (1.09)	1.86 (0.92)	2.35 (1.10)
	$N = 19$	$N = 14$	$N = 33$
Transformational	2.39 (1.08)	2.58 (1.20)	2.48 (1.13)
	$N = 21$	$N = 20$	$N = 41$
Total	2.54 (1.09)	2.28 (1.14)	2.42 (1.11)
	$N = 40$	$N = 34$	$N = 74$

Fig. 2 Interactive effects of leadership condition, framing condition, and individuals' promotion regulatory focus on UPB for **a** low promotion focus and **b** high promotion focus

supported; high promotion focus individuals were not influenced by inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders at greater rates than transactional leaders under loss conditions, nor were there differences between leadership styles under gain conditions. Furthermore, for individuals with low promotion focus, a simple slopes analysis revealed a significant difference between levels of UPB for individuals with low promotion focus under the loss conditions ($t = 3.76, p < 0.001$). When the leader was transformational and used loss language, higher levels of UPB occurred, and the lowest levels occurred when the transactional leader used loss language. The simple slopes analyses were non-significant for low promotion individuals under gain conditions.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to explore antecedents of UPB from a person–situation interactionist perspective. We examined the role of leadership, specifically the interplay of leadership style and leadership framing choices, on employees' willingness to engage in UPB. The results supported Hypothesis 1, which predicted that inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders would inspire higher levels of UPB than transactional leaders when loss language was used, but that there would be no difference between leadership style on UPB under gain conditions. We also integrated the role of a personal characteristic, promotion regulatory focus, and found that individuals with high promotion focus were less susceptible to the influence of inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders when loss framing was used, and thus there were no differences in leadership style effectiveness on UPB in the loss or gain conditions. However, individuals with low promotion focus were more willing to commit UPB under a loss-oriented transformational leader than a loss-oriented transactional leader, which supported the predicted interaction in Hypothesis 2. This effect most strongly explains under what context inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders influence higher levels of UPB than transactional leaders.

These findings make a contribution to leadership theory and research on ethical decision making. Leadership theory emphasizes the influence of transformational and transactional leadership's effect on employee behavior, and the results of this study have implications for the influence mechanisms. In practice, transformational and transactional leaders will have different methods of interacting with followers, including the manner in which they communicate with them. By integrating negative and positive framing, we contribute to our understanding of the differences between the leadership styles' impact on employee behavior. Specifically, we find that when transformational and transactional leaders use gain language, there are no differences in terms of UPB behavior among subordinates. When transactional leaders use gain language, they can substitute for the inspirational effects of transformational leadership. The large difference in UPB between transactional leaders who use gain language versus transactional leaders who use loss language has implications for this leadership style's effect on employee behavior. Subordinates are not necessarily motivated by transactional leaders in loss situations, but transactional leaders who use gain language may be able to encourage subordinates to help the organization through positively worded inspiration.

Additionally, the findings that inspirational and charismatic transformational leaders inspire higher levels of UPB than transactional leaders when loss language is used have implications for leadership theory. While transformational leadership's influence on subordinates through inspirational motivation is typically viewed as a positive aspect, this influence has potential downsides. The previous findings that transformational leadership can lead to

UPB through organizational identification highlights how transformational leaders may inadvertently be encouraging UPB (Effelsberg et al. 2013). In the context of framing, transformational leaders may unintentionally inspire followers to engage in unethical behavior to help the organization by emphasizing the negative aspects of situations. This has important implications for an organization in a time of crisis; for example, employees of a transformational leader may be willing to commit UPB when the organization is facing a financial loss. While more research would be needed to understand the potential downside of transformational leaders in loss situations, the findings suggest that transformational leaders may need to be especially cautious in how they frame problems to followers in bad times, and they also need to emphasize the importance of behaving ethically to their subordinates.

Regulatory fit theory (Higgins 2000) posits that individuals are more likely to be motivated in situations which are congruent with their promotion regulatory focus, and we found that in support of this theory, gain-seeking individuals were not motivated by transformational leaders to commit UPB in loss conditions. Since these individuals are more likely to see themselves as incongruent with negatively salient situations, leaders' influence matters less under loss conditions. However, while UPB is an unethical behavior that ideally should be avoided, and, therefore, it appears to be a "positive" thing that individuals with high promotion focus should be buffered from the leadership effects in negative situations, it may be the case that these individuals are also less inspired by transformational leaders who use negative language to commit ethical pro-organizational behaviors, such as OCBs. Future research could explore this possibility.

Additionally, the results indicated that individuals with a low promotion focus were susceptible to the influence of leadership style under loss conditions. In the study, the highest levels of UPB occurred for individuals with a low promotion focus when an inspirational and charismatic transformational leader used negative language. Therefore, these individuals are the ones who will be inspired to commit unethical behavior on behalf of the organization when transformational leaders communicate negatively; even though leaders do not tell their subordinates to commit UPB, the subordinates will still be influenced to do so. The findings further highlight the potential downside of the inspirational effects of transformational leaders, and the subtle influence that leaders can have on certain individuals. Transformational leaders may need to take a different approach in communicating with low promotion focus individuals versus high promotion focus individuals under loss conditions.

Our study also has practical implications for organizations seeking to decrease levels of UPB. Since UPB can

have devastating legal and financial effects on the organization in the long term (Umphress and Bingham 2011), organizations have a vested interest in preventing this type of behavior from occurring. It would be wise to train leaders on the importance of emphasizing ethical conduct in the workplace for all employees and communicating differently with low versus high promotion-focused individuals.

Limitations and Future Research

We recognize that our experimental design has limited generalizability. Additionally, our sample size was fairly small. Whereas other studies using vignettes have utilized similar sample sizes (e.g., Mencl and May 2009; Nubold et al. 2013; O'Leary and Pangemanan 2007), a larger sample size would increase the power of the statistical tests. While finding statistically significant results for our hypotheses with the smaller sample size suggests strong effect sizes, lack of other significant findings may be due to the smaller sample size.

Furthermore, our study examined the effects of the inspirational motivation and idealized influence dimensions of transformational leadership on UPB. While these two dimensions of transformational leadership may be key dimensions which influence followers' pro-organizational behavior given their joint focus on vision, goals, and purpose, other transformational leadership dimensions, such as individualized consideration or intellectual stimulation, may also have an effect on followers' willingness to engage in UPB. Therefore, our findings can only be applied in the context of inspirational motivation and idealized influence, and future research would be needed to capture the full range of behaviors utilized by transformational leaders. Generally speaking, our manipulations and measures simplify constructs which are complex in nature, and we recognize that we cannot draw overly generalized conclusions to a broad range of leadership behaviors from our findings.

Along these lines, while our methodological approach provides a necessary first step, future research should examine the interaction of leadership style, framing, and promotion regulatory focus in an organizational setting, and this would also take into account the rich social exchange relationships that often exist between leaders and their employees. In spite of this limitation, the current research helps us to begin to understand the interplay between leadership style and framing, and by using an experimental design, we are better able to make casual references between the effects of leadership on UPB, in addition to manipulating an objective-independent variable as the leadership style construct. Furthermore, we eliminate the possibility of confounding constructs, such ethical

climate, which may have high overlap with the study variables in an organizational setting.

The written scenario format is also a limitation of our study. The effects of how leaders communicate with followers may be more pronounced when individuals hear the leaders speaking, as they would in the organization, rather than reading a statement. Future research could utilize a live actor, which has been found to produce salient leadership effects in experimental conditions and, therefore, could further enhance the strength of the findings (e.g., Kirkpatrick and Locke 1996). Additionally, rather than examining transactional versus transformational leadership, leadership styles which arguably are both on the upper end of the leadership continuum in terms of effective leadership, future study could also examine transformational leadership as a continuous variable and compare high levels of transformational leadership to low levels, such as laissez-faire leadership, and how framing interacts with these various styles.

Our results point to the importance of context in determining how UPB is affected by leaders. The language that the leader uses and the traits of the followers can make a difference in determining follower behaviors. While Effelsberg et al. (2013) found that organizational identification mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and UPB, future research can build from this to examine other mediating mechanisms at work, such as employees' reactions to framing. For example, the cognitive processing of employees, followers' perceptions of ambiguity, their confidence in UPB outcomes, and how they are making sense of the leaders' cues could be studied. While research on the salience of negative events suggests that individuals internalize negative situations more than positive situations (Taylor 1991), and we suggest some mechanisms for why loss conditions would be more relevant to the effects of leadership style, there may be other cognitive and emotional processes occurring. For example, followers of transformational leaders may experience higher levels of fear when their leaders use loss language, and this may also affect their willingness to engage in UPB. Additionally, future studies could examine how followers perceive the ethical influence of their leaders and whether this is relevant in determining levels of UPB.

It is important to note we are not implying that UPB is something which leaders would intentionally be promoting. Rather, it may be an unintended consequence of leaders who are attempting to encourage pro-organizational behavior and who want to inspire their employees to act in the best interests of the organization. It also points to the importance of how leaders frame problems to followers and highlights how language can make a difference in affecting subordinates' actions.

Conclusion

Due to the potential harmful consequences of UPB, it is important to understand its antecedents. In our paper, using a person–situation interactionist perspective, we examined the role of leadership style, framing, and followers' promotion focus on the willingness of employees to engage in UPB. We found that the interaction of these contextual variables offers a dynamic perspective on when the inspirational and charismatic elements of transformational leaders inspire followers to commit UPB. These findings make contributions to leadership theory, and also expand on our knowledge of how and when unethical behavior occurs in the workplace.

Appendix

Manipulation Scripts

1. Transformational leadership condition

   a. Gain condition (manipulations bolded for emphasis):

      You hold a position in a company that produces paper (BKC). The CEO holds a short speech to describe the company to you and other employees. Here is what the CEO says:

      "At BKC, we make a pledge that our customers will receive high-quality printing and binding. Let me explain our vision for BKC. This vision describes our long-term and ideal goals for BKC–it is the direction we will be heading for many years. **If we accomplish this, we will gain market share.***

      From the first day of business, we have prided ourselves on the fact that BKC strives to give the customer a quality product. For example, one time we had completed an entire order when the customer called and told us that they had rewritten a set of pages. They needed us to insert the new pages right away. We were under a lot of pressure with other orders, so we explained to employees that **if we inserted the new pages, then we would gain business.****

      Overall, here is the vision for BKC: "BKC Printing Company is in the business of providing both national and international binding and printing services. We pledge that every binding and printing job will be perfect. **If it is perfect, we will gain customers.*****"

   b. Loss condition (exchange bolded phrases for):

      * **"If we don't accomplish this, we will lose market share."**

** "if we didn't insert the new pages, then we would lose business."

*** "If it is not perfect, we will lose customers."

2. Transactional leadership condition

a. Gain condition (manipulations bolded for emphasis):

You hold a position in a company that produces paper (BKC). The CEO holds a short speech to describe the company to you and other employees. Here is what the CEO says:

"At BKC, we expect employees to be ready to go, and flexible, as far as your working hours are concerned. Of course, we will pay for any overtime you may need to work.

If there are any questions or problems, ask me directly and I will take care of them. I am going to check regularly whether we are meeting our quality standards. I have worked out a plan of what needs to be done, what the deadlines are, and who is responsible for what. **If we accomplish this, we will gain market share.***

Now, before we start, let me give you some technical background that will be important for the project. About 80 % of our jobs are printed on high-grade, machine coated paper while the remainder are printed on high-grade, long-grain paper that is similar to what most people use in copy machines. **If we do this, we will gain business.**** It is then ready to be cut to size and finished for shipment. The rolls are trimmed, sorted, counted, and packaged. The paper is then transported to the customer. **If it is perfect, we will gain customers.*****"

b. Loss condition (exchange bolded phrases for):

* If we don't accomplish this, we will lose market share.

** If we didn't do this, we would lose business.

*** If it is not perfect, we will lose customers.

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