

## **Leadership Styles and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour: Role Ambiguity as a Mediating Construct**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the intervening construct of role ambiguity on the causal association between leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in various industrial settings. The sample of this study involved 280 respondents from major industries i.e. services, manufacturing, mining and construction. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicate that a transformational leader has a positive relationship with OCB and that a transactional leader has a negative relationship with OCB. Role ambiguity was found to mediate the causal relationship between a transformational leader and OCB. Role ambiguity is not directly linked to OCB but rather serves as a mediating variable between transformational leadership style and OCB. From a managerial standpoint, this study recommends that transformational leadership style should be emphasised to encourage greater OCB. Cultivating transformationally-orientated organisation at all levels can be done through training and development, organisational design, job design and human capital decisions. The mediating effect of subordinates' role ambiguity has a direct and indirect effect on OCB. Role ambiguity functions to increase the strength of transformational leadership on OCB. These findings show that the effectiveness of leadership styles is mediated by subordinates' perception of their role ambiguity. This paper adds value to existing study in this field by testing the mediating effects of role ambiguity that directly or indirectly affect leadership styles related to OCB.

*Keywords:* Transformational leadership, role ambiguity, citizenship behaviour, organisational behaviour, transactional leadership

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine leadership styles on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) of subordinates. Role ambiguity is studied for its mediating effects on OCB when exposed to different leadership styles. Leadership style is an important predictor as a wide body of literature records that leadership styles have the biggest impact on subordinates' response to work situations. Although studies have been done on the relationship between leadership style and organisational citizenship behaviour (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Bass et al., 2003; Boerner et al., 2007), there has yet to be research investigating role ambiguity as a mediator. The study was initiated to see if there is truth in the perception that in a given leadership style, well-structured role identification will lead to greater OCB or OCB itself can thrive in a less structured situation in an environment of greater freedom. By integrating leadership styles with structural impression of role ambiguity and OCB, our research can broaden the perceptual approach to OCB by examining the mediating effects of the role ambiguity within the prevailing leadership styles.

This study was confined to the Malaysian context for three reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of empirical studies exploring role ambiguity as a mediator. Secondly, the study hopes to add to existing literature in the field of organisational behaviour. Lastly, as Malaysia is a diverse social and cultural country we believed it would be interesting to research its organisational culture. The Malaysian context was chosen for

purely practical reasons. There is no cogent reason why this study cannot be extended to other cultural contexts. In this study, theoretical exploration was initiated to find a relationship with work-related issues, if any. Hence, the study should provide an indication of how Malaysians in organisations react to different leadership styles and structural impression. The study took into consideration the interpersonal relationship that is founded by favourable leadership styles and employee impression; this is important to the success of an organisation and is consistent with the humanistic and co-operative work environment that is pursued by contemporary managers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The review was done based on the following model in Figure 1.

### Leadership Styles

Transactional leadership is established on exchange relationship where subordinates agree, accept or comply with their superior so as to receive rewards, resources or to avoid disciplinary action in return (Podsakoff et al., 1982; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Recently, there was extensive empirical work on transformational leadership, specifically on the degree to which transformational leadership expands the effect of transactional leadership where various outcomes were explained. Past researchers have helped shape existing literature by suggesting two outcomes. Firstly, transformational and transactional leaders use different leadership styles to

influence their subordinates to conform. Secondly, transformational and transactional leaders bring about different forms of subordinate conformity. However, emergent leadership style supports transformational leadership styles in motivating subordinates to perform above and beyond the ordinary call of duty (Howell, 1988).

**Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)**

Bateman and Organ (1983) first introduced the construct of OCB. They suggested Katz and Kahn’s concept (1966) of super role behaviour. Some of the examples of subordinate OCB are accepting additional responsibilities and duties at work, willing to work overtime when needed and assisting other subordinates with their tasks (Organ, 1988; Masterson et al., 1996). Research into organisational behaviour and social psychology has sought to determine why subordinates would engage in OCB (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Research into OCB is narrowed down to the effects of OCB on individuals, behaviour of leaders and the performance of the organisation (Bolino et al., 2002). Some predictors of the outcome of OCB have been identified, such as interpersonal trust

(Podsakoff et al., 1990), transformational leader behaviour (Greenberg, 1988), civic citizenship and covenantal relationship (van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994), job attitudes (Organ, 1988; Shore & Wayne, 1993), organisational justice (Moorman, 1991) and task characteristics (Farh, Podsakoff, & Organ, 1990). The outcomes of OCB studied include perceptions of fairness (Tepper & Taylor, 2003) and job commitment (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986)

**Role Ambiguity**

Kahn et al. (1964) suggested a definition of the term “role ambiguity” by stating that:

*Role ambiguity is a direct function of the discrepancy between the information available to the person and that which is required for adequate performance of his role. Subjectively, it is the difference between his actual state of knowledge and that which provides adequate satisfaction of his personal needs and values. (p. 73)*

In short, the elaboration of role ambiguity offered by Kahn et al. suggests that the concept is quite diverse. Perceived

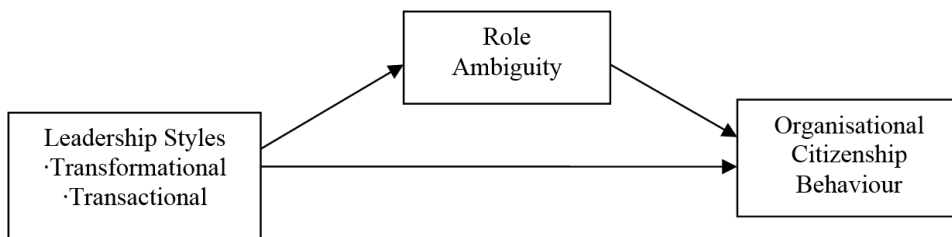


Figure 1. Interactions of variables

role ambiguity arises when a focal individual feels he or she is uncertain about the relevant information necessary to perform his or her role. Similarly, Kahn et al. associated role ambiguity with another concept, observing that certain organisational positions or jobs are characterised by greater role ambiguity and conflict – those in which the incumbents have to: (i) cross boundaries, (ii) produce solutions that are innovative to non-routine problems, and (iii) be responsible for the task of others. The relationship between experienced role ambiguity and affective outcomes is expected to be influenced by an individual's 'need for clarity'. In other words, subordinates who have a low need of clarity when experiencing role ambiguity will not sense the aversive consequences as forcefully as compared to subordinates who have greater need for clarity.

Rizzo et al. (1970) in support of the work of Kahn et al. went on to expand the definition of role ambiguity. Rizzo et al. (1970) defined role ambiguity as an individual who is in a position where he or she does not have clear directions on the expectations of the role given to him or her by the organisation. The lack of understanding of the behavioural expectations that are held for the role and predictability of the outcomes of role behaviour (House & Rizzo, 1972) is likely to lead to an individual's experiencing role ambiguity (Jackson & Schuler, 1985).

Besides behavioural outcomes being "unpredictable," Rizzo et al. (1970) added a second component to their definition: "a lack of the existence or clarity of behavioural

requirements, often in terms of inputs from the environment which would serve to guide behaviour and provide knowledge that the behaviour is appropriate" (pp. 155–156). This modification is significant because the scale they developed measures role ambiguity operationalisation in most empirical research. The two components comprise the scale 'unpredictability' and 'information deficiency'.

Pearce (1981) and Cooper et al. (2001) commented that role ambiguity arises due to insufficient information required to enact the role. Therefore, "certain information is required for adequate role performance in order for a person to conform to the role expectations held by members of this role set" (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 22). However, it has been proposed that role ambiguity is generated by one of several conditions i.e. a lack of required information, a lack of communication of existing information or the receipt of contradictory messages from different role senders (Kahn et al., 1964). In the past, there have been many correlational studies to examine role ambiguity in the context of a series of antecedents (i.e. propensity to leave, organisational commitment, tension or anxiety, job involvement, job satisfaction, job performance, boundary spanning, participation in decision-making, formalisation and individual characteristics) and consequences (i.e. job satisfaction, performance, tension and employee turnover).

Based on role theory, role ambiguity is a result of subordinates who adopt coping

behaviour in an effort to resolve problems or use defense mechanisms to change real situations and as a result, subordinates avoid stress. As such, role ambiguity will cause a subordinate to be dissatisfied with his or her role in the organisation (Rizzo et al., 1970). It is clear that the consequences and effects of role ambiguity thus have potential cost implications to organisations. High employee turnover and low performance are evident, but also the true cost of attitudinal variables is also now understood (Mirvis & Lawler, 1977; Cascio, 1982).

This view has been reinforced by empirical findings where research has been centred on examining the effects of role ambiguity, and findings have started to reveal the cost of role ambiguity. Kahn et al. (1964) and other theorists (Rizzo et al., 1970; Miles, 1976, 1980; ) have proposed that when role ambiguity is high several unfavourable psychological effects will follow. Such effects are likely to influence the effectiveness of an organisation as role ambiguity occurs when subordinates are not sure of how to perform given tasks. Among these effects are tension, stress, hostility, dissatisfaction, low productivity, performance and turnover (Merton, 1957; Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Subsequently, a significant amount empirical research on role stress has revealed that when role ambiguity is high, both the individual and the organisation's results are unfavourable (Kahn et al., 1964; House & Rizzo, 1972; Miles, 1975, 1976; Miles & Perreault, 1976; Morris et al., 1979;

Hamilton, 2002; Slattery et al., 2008). Bedian and Armenakis (1981) have found "a causal relationship between role ambiguity and increased tension, frustration, anxiety and propensity to leave ." Role ambiguity has also been suggested to be correlated with low levels of motivation, quality of work life, individual and group productivity, organisational commitment and an increase in withdrawal behaviour (Blau, 1981; van Sell et al., 1981; Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Dougherty & Pritchard, 1985; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Luthans, 1989; Onyemah, 2008).

The study of role ambiguity is still important for organisations, especially when issues such as diversity, globalisation and competitive pressure are evident. Ultimately, in order to guarantee that the organisation is successful, superiors and subordinates need role clarity. Subordinates who are experiencing low levels of role ambiguity may be working on tasks that are not parallel to the organisation's missions and objective and are unaware they are doing so (van Sell et al., 1981). Singh and Bhandarker (1983) once stated that "managerial role clarity is viewed as one of the basic requirements for organisational effectiveness ." They further stated that "managers suffering from role ambiguity are invariably observed to be pre-occupied with trivial organisational chores ." As a result based on role theory, high levels of role ambiguity will unlikely reduce subordinates' satisfaction levels. In an even worse scenario, it increases work anxiety, distorts reality and produces less effective work outcomes (Rizzo et al., 1970).

This study specifically explored role ambiguity rather than role conflict to establish the causal relationship between the variable and its antecedents and consequences. There were several reasons for the choice of role ambiguity over role conflict, namely: (i) role ambiguity is an important concept in role theory and in the path-goal theory of leadership; (ii) of all role concepts, role ambiguity has received the most study; (iii) in contrast to role conflict, role ambiguity is more responsive to managerial intervention and thus the implementation of programmes aimed at diminishing role ambiguity is relatively less difficult, and (iv) studies involving role ambiguity have yielded inconsistent results, prompting greater research incentive.

## **HYPOTHESISED RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Leadership Styles and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour**

Literature is extensive on transformational leadership i.e. that it affects subordinates' OCB (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Lowe et al., 1996; Geyer & Steyrer, 1998). Graham (1988) has suggested that "the most important effect of transformational leadership behaviour is the ability to promote extra-role behaviours." Podsakoff et al. (1990) was in support of Graham's view and suggested further that "the most important effects of transformational leaders should be on extra-role performance, rather than in-role performance."

Transformational leadership is said to "lift ordinary people to extraordinary

heights" (Boal & Bryson, 1988) and to effect subordinates to "do more than they are expected to do" (Yukl, 1989) and "perform beyond the level of expectations" (Bass, 1985). House, Landis and Umberson (1988) responded that these leaders motivate their subordinates to "perform above and beyond the call of duty ." Thus, transformational leadership may have a crucial effect on extra-role behaviour of OCB that is discrete in nature, which does not altogether follow subordinates' formal role requirements.

Past researchers have asserted that the relationship between transformational leadership and OCB is positive. As a result, transformational leadership is directly linked to high levels of subordinates' OCB across various settings (Graham, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Whittington, 1997; Geyer & Steyrer, 1998; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Goodwin et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2005). For example, Podsakoff et al. (1990) and Podsakoff et al. (1996) concluded that the relationship between transformational leader behaviour (i.e. articulating a vision, role modelling, intellectually stimulating employees and communicating high performance expectations) and subordinates' OCB is positive.

In comparison, transactional leadership may not trigger extra-role behaviour because subordinates' behaviour is likely to be based on the reward received after a particular task is done (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Transactional leadership "is explicitly designed to clearly define and reward in-role performance instead of extra-role behavior" (Podsakoff et al., 1990). A transactional

leader is negatively related to subordinates' OCB. This is because a transactional leader is largely based on an economic exchange (Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999). If the relationship between superior and subordinate is primarily focussed on economic exchange, the superior will not appreciate when a subordinate performs more than what is required. Hence, the contributions of the subordinate towards the organisation will solely be in agreement with the compensation or reward system. As such, hypotheses for this study were based on theoretical and empirical background as stated below:

Hypothesis 1a: A transformational leader will have a positive effect with OCB.

Hypothesis 1b: A transactional leader will have a negative effect with OCB.

### **Role Ambiguity**

Transformational leadership behaviour influences subordinates by seeking clarification in their understanding of what the leader intends them to achieve, which is important because leaders who clarify the role expectation may reduce ambiguity. For instance, transformational leaders clarify the employees' roles by articulating a vision to inspire the subordinates to pursue goals (MacKenzi et al., 2001). Transformational leaders regard that clarification of the term 'vision' is important in the transformational leadership process. As a result, the following relationship was expected.

Hypothesis 2a: The relationship between transformational leadership and subordinates' role ambiguity is negatively correlated.

Transactional leaders may decrease role ambiguity. The plausible explanation for this is that transactional leader behaviour involves providing immediate feedback on subordinates' job performance, which should increase the subordinates' understanding of their roles in the organisation (Kohli, 1989). Sims and Szilagyi (1975) have commented that leader-contingent punishment behaviour "is related to satisfaction through his or her ability to reduce perceived role ambiguity .... ." Past research has sustained this expectation that relationship between contingent punishment of transactional leadership or task-orientated leadership is negatively related to role ambiguity (Bateman et al., 1983; Podsakoff et al., 1984; Luthans, 1989; MacKenzie et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2006). Thus, the following relationship was expected:

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between transactional leadership and subordinates' role ambiguity is negatively correlated.

### **Role Ambiguity and Outcome**

Theoretically, a high level of role ambiguity impedes the opportunity of a person to perform effectively and efficiently (Kahn et al., 1964). Unfortunately, the relationship between role ambiguity and

job performance is unclear. Although some studies have demonstrated a negative relationship between role ambiguity and job performance (Behrman et al., 1981; Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Lysonski, 1985; Fried et al., 1998; Beehr et al., 2000; Stordeur et al., 2001; Onyemah, 2008), other studies indicated weak or no relationship (Schriesheim & Murphy, 1976; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Although no definite conclusions can be drawn, the inconsistencies in previous results indicate that the “literature clearly lacks theoretical and empirical integration” (Fry et al., 1986).

In addition, role ambiguity has been found to negatively influence in-role performance in a number of studies (Jaworski & Kohli, 1991; Brown & Peterson, 1993). In fact, Churchill et al. (1985) stated that salesperson performances were more strongly related with role perceptions. This is because when salespeople are clear about what is expected they can better focus on the necessary objectives and as a result achieve higher performance. Higher performance can be inferred to extra-role behaviour (Borman & Motowild, 1997). Hence, unclear expectations due to role ambiguity may cause lower performance. Thus, the next relationship was expected:

Hypothesis 3a: Subordinates’ organisational citizenship behaviour is suspected to reduce as role ambiguity increases.

### **Role Ambiguity as Mediator of Transformational Leadership Style and Outcome**

In explaining the importance of role ambiguity as an intervening variable between various job conditions and job outcomes role theory provides a strong conceptual framework (Kahn et al., 1964). There is some evidence supporting the possibility of role ambiguity as a moderator or mediator variable on the relationship between leadership style and subordinates’ outcomes. A number of studies have suggested that role ambiguity does moderate the relationship such that under conditions of high role ambiguity, higher levels of initiating structure and consideration become more important (House, 1971; Weed et al., 1976). Yet, others have found that role ambiguity is not such a moderator (Schriesheim & Murphy, 1976).

The dispute is made that role ambiguity as an intervening variable occurs because role ambiguity represents a situational factor that is within a superior’s domain of influence. When role ambiguity increases there is a greater dependency on information and feedback that can clarify the appropriateness of one’s action (Dobbins et al., 1990). Hence, when role ambiguity is high, the superior is more important because the role clarifying information and feedback available from the superior becomes more significant (Kerr & Jermier, 1978; Howell et al., 1986; Abdullah & Kassim, 2011; Judeh, 2011; Madera et al., 2013; Salmon, 2013; Sahadev et al., 2015). On the other hand, when role ambiguity is low, role-clarifying



information from the superior becomes less important. Hence, the relationship between leadership and OCB is stronger when role ambiguity is high and weaker when role ambiguity is low. In addition, the transformational leader is able to decrease role ambiguity by clarifying a person's role (Churchill et al., 1985; Jaworski & Kohli, 1991). Based on this rationale, the following relationship was expected.

Hypothesis 4: There is a mediating effect of role ambiguity between transformational leader and OCB.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

### Sampling Design

The sample selection for this study comprises executives, managers and professional people in services, manufacturing, mining and construction companies located mainly in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. This sample was selected for two reasons. Firstly, major industries were selected in order to represent the major sphere of activities in Malaysia. These industries are among the more dominant industries in Malaysia that contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment. It is also believed that the power of the theoretical framework would be increased substantially if the predicted relationships between leadership styles, downward influence tactics and OCB were observed in a more diverse industrial setting. Secondly, samples were drawn only from companies who employed more than 35 employees, in order to include only organisations where

a more formalised structure and system of supervision and interactions were more likely to exist and function (Hall, 1977).

### Research Instruments

**Leadership styles.** Fourteen items of the Transformational Leadership Behaviour Inventory (TLI) and seven items of the Leader Reward and Punishment (LRP) by Podsakoff et al. (1990) was applied in this study.

**Role ambiguity.** The present study employed a six-item scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) to measure role ambiguity. In fact, 85% of previous studies have applied the role ambiguity tool developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) according to Jackson and Schuler (1985) and Tubre and Collins (2000). Secondly, it seems to have adequate construct reliability and validity, which all support the continuous use of this scale (House et al., 1983). The reported Cronbach Coefficient Alpha levels of the Rizzo et al. (1970) (RHL) scale range from 0.65 to 0.82, while Nicholson and Goh (1983) demonstrated  $\alpha=0.84$  for both role conflict and role ambiguity. In this study, the researcher made the decision to use the RHL scale that suit the purpose of this study, which demands less computing effort and analysis.

**Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).** In the present study, the researcher decided to adopt the OCB instrument developed by Smith et al. (1983) and measure it as a global construct. This instrument consisted of seven items on the altruism and compliance dimension.

The two-dimensional view of OCB was chosen over the broad categories of OCB due to its popularity in earlier studies conducted by Smith et al. (1983). In a test of the scale produced by Smith et al. (1983), Alpha Coefficients of 0.88 and 0.85 were reported, respectively. Jones and Schaubroeck (2004) reported the reliabilities of the two measures as being 0.79 (altruism) and 0.80 (compliance) for the employee-rated measures.

The OCB scales were completed by the respondents themselves, who were asked to rate on a seven-point scale with anchors ranging from “never” (1) to “always” (7) where they have engaged in these citizenship behaviours. Examples of sample items for the OCB are “I help others with their work when they have been absent even when I am not required to do so”; “I volunteer to do things not formally required by the job”; “I take the initiative to orient new employees to the department even though it is not part of my job description”; “I willingly attend functions not required by the company management, but which help its overall image.”

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Path Analysis was the primary statistical technique used. The secondary technique used was correlational analysis.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Respondents' Characteristics**

From the total of 1,500 questionnaires sent, a total of 293 responses were received,

with data from 280 of those completed questionnaire being usable. The response rate was 19.5%. The sample selection for this study comprised executives, managers and professionals in services, manufacturing, mining and construction companies located mainly in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

### **Scales Validation**

The internal consistency reliability coefficients for all the scales were satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978). All the scales had coefficient Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.78.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

**H1a & H1b: Leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour.** Hypothesis H1a expected a transformational leader to have a positive effect with OCB. The positive relationship between transformational leadership and OCB is in the hypothesised direction. Table 1 shows there was a relationship between transformational leadership and OCB ( $r=0.64$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The path analysis result in Table 2 ( $\beta=0.343$ ,  $p<0.005$ ) also confirms this relationship. These results are similar to past research studies (Ferres et al., 2002; Schlechter & Engelbrecht, 2006) that definitely show that relationship between transformational leadership and OCB is positive. The relationships between leadership and OCB were empirically studied and it was concluded that transformational leadership was consistently associated to subordinates' higher level of OCB (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Lowe et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2005).

With this strong conceptual support, it can be said that transformational leaders do motivate their followers to exhibit extra-role behaviours. This is in line with a study conducted by MacKenzie et al. (2001), who commented that the transformational leadership style influences salesperson to perform “above and beyond the call of duty.”

Hypothesis H1b expected that a transactional leader would have a negative effect with OCB. Correlation results in Table 2 showed that the relationship between a transactional leader and OCB ( $r=-0.52$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) is in fact negatively associated. Although it seems logical, this relationship was not confirmed by the path analysis results in Table 3. Paradoxically, transactional leadership style did not seem to influence OCB in a negative way. The direct effect of transactional leadership on OCB was too weak and insignificant to lend support for hypothesis H1b. A transactional leader adopts a hard approach, which is expected to be ineffective in increasing subordinates' OCB. However, the inconclusive findings point to the fact that the relationship between transactional leadership and OCB is possibly more of an indirect relationship. This result is somewhat different from the work of Yammarino and Bass (1990), who commented that transactional leadership is favourable when subordinates have attitudinal and behavioural responses; however, it fails to evoke subordinates' voluntaristic initiative to go beyond the normal call of duty.

**H2a & H2b: Leadership styles and role ambiguity.** Hypothesis 2a predicted that the relationship between transformational leadership and subordinates' role ambiguity would be negatively correlated. Both the correlational result (Table 2;  $r=-0.60$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The path analysis result (Table 3;  $\beta=-0.660$ ,  $p<0.005$ ) lends support to Hypothesis H2a. The negative relationship between transformational leadership and subordinates' role ambiguity is in the hypothesised direction. Stating it in another way, transformational leadership promotes role clarity. This is a more likely outcome as the transformational leader tends to clarify the employees' role by articulating a vision to inspire them to achieve the organisation's common goals. This result supports the previous finding by Teas (1983), whose results indicated that leader consideration is statistically significant to salespeople's perception of role ambiguity. However, a study by MacKenzie et al. (2001) reported that only the core transformational leader behaviours were negatively related to role ambiguity and that there was no relationship between high performance expectations and individualised support on role ambiguity.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that the relationship between transactional leadership and subordinates' role ambiguity would be negatively correlated. The correlational result in Table 2 and path analysis result in Table 3 showed that transactional leadership was not related to subordinates' role ambiguity. This result seems to support the findings of a study

conducted by MacKenzie et al. (2001) that the contingent reward characteristic of transactional leadership is not related to role ambiguity, and only the contingent punishment aspect of transactional leadership is negatively related to role ambiguity ( $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, Kohli's (1985) study on the effects of supervisory reward and punishment behaviour commented that "punishment may have a negative impact on role ambiguity primarily when a leader is indiscriminately punitive." The different effect of supervisory reward and punishment behaviour has nullified its effect on subordinates' role ambiguity. Hence, Hypothesis H2b, which predicted that transactional leadership and role ambiguity was negatively correlated, was not confirmed. Again, the result showed the potential benefit of conceptualising transactional leadership as a multi-dimensional construct.

**H3: Role ambiguity and OCB.** Hypothesis 3 posited that subordinates' organisational citizenship behaviour would be reduced as role ambiguity increased. Both the correlational result (Table 2;  $r = -0.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the path analysis result (Table 3;  $\beta = -0.342$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) lend support for Hypothesis H3. Thus, the result seems to agree with the conventional reasoning that role ambiguity impedes the opportunity of a person to perform effectively and efficiently (Kahn et al., 1964). Other research findings (Walker et al., 1977; Behrman et al., 1981; Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Lysonski, 1985) have also demonstrated a negative relationship between role ambiguity and

performance. Although the conclusion here is not entirely equivocal (as in the contradicting result of Brief and Aldag (1976) and Jackson and Schuler (1985), there is clearly more empirical evidence to suggest the simple conclusion that the lack of role ambiguity ensures better performance (including extra-role) as one is more certain about what is expected to be accomplished. Hopefully, the decrease in role ambiguity will lead to an increase in organisational commitment and task performance and ultimately, increase the employees' OCB level (MacKenzie et al., 1998; Tubre & Collins, 2000; MacKenzie et al., 2001).

**H4: Role ambiguity as mediator between transformational leadership and outcome.**

Hypothesis 4 predicted the mediating effect of role ambiguity between transformational leader and OCB. The direct relationships between transformational leadership and role ambiguity ( $\beta = -0.660$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) and between role ambiguity and OCB ( $\beta = -0.342$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) were both in a negative direction and significant. In Table 4 and Figure 2, the mediation effects of role ambiguity can be seen as significant at the 0.001 level for path X1 (Transformational leadership)  $\rightarrow$  X2 (role ambiguity)  $\rightarrow$  X3 (OCB). The indirect effect of role ambiguity, which is the product of  $-0.660 \times -0.342 = 0.225$  makes a positive contribution. This finding asserts that transformational leadership has a direct relationship with subordinates' OCB and that this relationship is mediated by role ambiguity. In relation to the direction of effect, it would appear

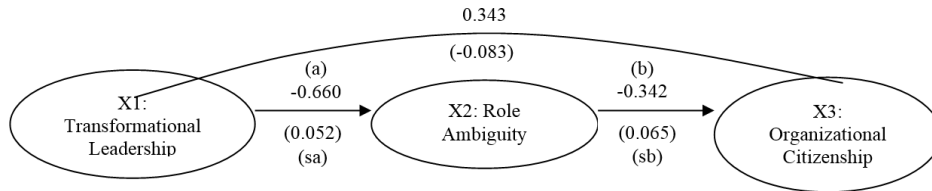


Figure 2. Indirect effects through a mediator.

Table 1  
Correlations Among Key Variables

	Variables	Means	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1	Transformational Leader	4.57	1.17	1.00			
2	Transactional Leader	3.56	1.52	-0.76**	1.00		
3	Role Ambiguity	2.97	1.07	-0.60**	0.41**	1.00	
4	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour	4.67	1.30	0.64**	-0.52**	-0.60**	1.00

Table 2  
Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent and independent variables	Regression coefficients	Path coefficients
OCB		
Transformational	0.0380(0.83)	0.343***
Transactional	-0.100(0.057)	-0.177
Role Ambiguity	-0.413(0.065)	-0.342***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.476	
F	85.554***	
Df	3,279	
Role Ambiguity		
Transformational	0.604(0.067)	-0.660***
Transactional	-0.060(0.052)	-0.085
R <sup>2</sup>	0.353	
F	77.137***	
Df	2,279	

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.005

Table 3  
Path Analysis Result

Measurement path	Before mediator		After mediator		t-statistic $t=(ab)/\sqrt{(b^2sa^2+a^2sb^2)}$
	Regression coefficient A	Standard errors sa	Regression coefficient b	Standard errors sb	
X1 → X2 → X3	-0.660	0.052	-0.342	0.065	4.860***

Degrees of freedom=N-1=280

\* p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

that role ambiguity serves to reduce the strength of the relationship between transformational leaders and OCB. In other words, transformational leadership will generally reduce role ambiguity, and this will lead to an increase in OCB (MacKenzie et al., 2001). Transformational leaders by their attempt to provide followers with a clearer perspective on their work may actually reduce employees' role ambiguity. Nonetheless, role ambiguity will always be present in any organisational setting as it represents a complex interplay of contradicting thoughts in the minds of individuals. The present result seems to acknowledge the contention made by several researchers that leadership style effectiveness is very much dependent on the role situation (Fiedler, 1967; House & Dessler, 1974; Weed et al., 1976).

### MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study provides a number of clear managerial implications. The findings show that a leader would practise transformational leadership. The transformational leadership style seems to invoke a superior-subordinate

power difference in the influence network. Transformational leadership can be nurtured by recognising the development needs of the subordinate mainly through training in mentoring. The transformational leader should also promote integrative problem-solving superior-subordinate relationship and not win-lose relationships, which lead to detrimental results. By adapting such practices coupled with an open feedback system, an increase in subordinates' work productivity will be seen in the organisation. The transformational leadership style, being flexible, can be adapted by organisations that are facing rapid environmental change. The mediating effect of role ambiguity has shed light on how the variable provides indirect effects on leadership styles and its outcome. This indicates that a transformational leader deals with role ambiguity to induce higher OCB – the more reason why this style must be emphasised.

### FUTURE DIRECTION

By appealing to the leadership of management, this model offers the theoretical foundation for future researchers

to make comparisons on the effectiveness of different leadership styles with OCB (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2000; Walumbwa et al., 2008). This study concludes that the tendency of subordinates to have high levels of OCB comes from the transformational leader's request, which is more interesting and encouraging as compared to that of the transactional leader. Future studies should consider other constructs like motivation and commitment that are more indicative of organisational performance.

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the effectiveness of leadership styles when dealing with role ambiguity and its consequences on OCB. It has been suggested that in order for subordinates to perform beyond their call of duty, a superior must adopt an appropriate leadership style. The findings support those of past researchers, who commented that in order to achieve greater subordinate OCB, superiors should be more inclined to adopt transformational leadership rather than transactional leadership. When investigating role ambiguity, this study found that role ambiguity was able to mediate the relationships between leadership styles and OCB. The presence of correlation shows the relevance of leadership style in promoting subordinates' OCB in organisation. Such behaviour should have great practical significance and thus, should be promoted in an organisation. The finding also supports the contention that subordinates' role ambiguity has a direct and indirect effect on

the outcome, serving to increase the strength of transformational leadership on OCB. This result seems to support a widely held assertion that the effectiveness of leadership depends very much on the situation at hand (Fiedler, 1967; House & Dessler, 1974; Weed et al., 1976).

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