When Leaders Sacrifice: The Effects of Sense of Power and Belongingness on Leader’s Self-Sacrifice

The present research examines what motivates leaders to engage in self-sacrificial behavior. We propose that leader’s self-sacrifice is positively influenced by a leader’s sense of belongingness to his or her group. Furthermore, leader’s subjective sense of power is proposed to moderate the effect of sense of belongingness on leader’s self-sacrifice. As initial evidence for our argument, we present the results of two studies supporting the prediction that a higher subjective sense of power decreases belongingness needs, suggesting that when power is high, leaders pay less attention to social information related to their sense of belongingness. Subsequently, one laboratory experiment and two organizational field studies showed that leaders who feel a sense of belongingness in their group or team tended to self-sacrifice more than leaders who did not feel a sense of belongingness, but particularly so when they are low in subjective sense of power.