Developing a charismatic leadership model for Chinese organizations: the mediating role of loyalty to supervisors

Min Wu & Jia Wang

School of Public Administration, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China
College of Education and Human Development, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

Version of record first published: 06 Aug 2012

To cite this article: Min Wu & Jia Wang (2012): Developing a charismatic leadership model for Chinese organizations: the mediating role of loyalty to supervisors, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 23:19, 4069-4084

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.703420

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
Developing a charismatic leadership model for Chinese organizations: the mediating role of loyalty to supervisors

Min Wu\textsuperscript{a,}\textsuperscript{*} and Jia Wang\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}School of Public Administration, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China; \textsuperscript{b}College of Education and Human Development, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

Charismatic leadership has become a popular topic in organizational research in the last few decades. However, to date there is still a very limited amount of empirical evidence that illuminates the underlying influencing processes of charismatic leadership and the effectiveness of this type of leadership in the Chinese context. Given its emphasis on leaders’ extraordinary abilities and roles, the authors argue that the charismatic leadership paradigm is likely to be effective in the China context, which has been heavily influenced by Confucian ideology that values respect for authority, character building and loyalty to the superior. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to develop a charismatic leadership model for Chinese organizations. Informed by motivational theory, social exchange theory and social identity theory, the authors hypothesized that supervisors’ charismatic leadership could influence subordinates’ work performance and turnover intention through the mediating role of loyalty to supervisors. The authors pointed researchers to a new direction for their future inquiry of understanding the underlying mechanism that charismatic leadership influences subordinates’ attitudinal and behavioural outcomes should be further explored.

**Keywords:** charismatic leadership; China; loyalty to supervisors; transformational; turnover; work performance

**Introduction**

Leadership research has received substantial attention over the last several decades. Among various leadership-related topics, the transformational leadership paradigm (Bass 1985) has generated the most research. Later, some scholars have turned their attention to charismatic leadership. The term ‘charisma’ was initially used to describe the characteristics of religious figures and political and military leaders (Weber 1947). Waldman and Javidan (2009) later defined charisma as a relationship between an individual (leader) and one or more followers based on leader behaviours that engender intense reactions and attributions on the part of followers. Conger and Kanungo (1994) proposed the well-researched models of charismatic leaders who focus on five behavioural factors. These factors include vision and articulation, environmental sensitivity, unconventional behaviour, personal risk and sensitivity to member needs. Charismatic leadership has been considered by some theorists as a sub-dimension of transformational leadership, while others made a clear distinction between these two types of leadership (Bryman 1993; Conger and Kanungo 1988, 1998). For example, Yukl (1999) identified unique and important aspects of the leadership process and posited some differences in the behaviour pattern associated with transformational and charismatic leadership. According to Yukl, a
transformational leader is more likely to take actions that will empower followers and make them partners in a quest to achieve important objectives, while a charismatic leader tends to put more emphasis on the need for radical change that can only be accomplished if followers put their trust in the leader’s unique expertise. In addition, unique to the charismatic leadership scale are the sub-scales of personal risk and uncertainty behaviour. Overall, transformational leadership focuses on empowering and motivating employees, whereas charismatic leadership treats employees as subordinate roles. Although there are some overlaps between transformational leadership and charismatic leadership, the focus of concern is different. In this study, we treat charismatic leadership as a concept different from transformational leadership considering the Chinese Confucian values, for example, supreme power and respect for authority (see Warner 2010). These cultural values may enable the application of charismatic leadership that highlights the leaders’ extraordinary abilities and roles.

Leaders are usually what people look up to for directions and sense making (Hamblin 1958). Charismatic leaders are those whom followers strongly admire and heavily depend on. Young people tend to follow stars, such as movie stars and sports stars, which might be perceived as immature by the older generation. However, most people, regardless of their age, have some idols to admire. This is the case in an organizational setting. A charismatic leader has his/her own followers or fans. Weber’s definition of charisma matches the meaning of the sublime in its emphasis on the exceptional or extraordinary. According to Weber (1922 [1963], [1922] 1968), a leader is charismatic when he or she is ‘considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities’ (p. 241). Therefore, a charismatic leader may enchant the subordinates; as a result, the subordinates are likely to follow a leader who is charismatic.

Charismatic leadership is a critical area of concern in organizational research. While the relationship between charismatic leadership behaviours and follower performance is well established in the extant literature, the processes through which charismatic leaders influence their followers’ performance still requires further exploration and testing (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman and Fetter 1990). Particularly, there is a lack of research on the underlying influence processes of charismatic leadership in the Chinese context. This study is an effort towards this direction by examining how charismatic leadership influences subordinates’ work performance and turnover intention in business organizations in China.

We situated this study in the China (specifically mainland China) context for three reasons. First, China’s large-scale transformations and economic success during the last three decades have attracted the world’s attention. However, the management literature has been constructed primarily in the Western context, and there is insufficient research on Chinese management theories and practices. The fast-changing Chinese context warrants focused research on leadership to understand the uniqueness of Chinese leadership. Second, China has a long history of worshipping sages and the Chinese are known for to be loyal to individuals rather than their organizations (Chen, Tsui and Farh 2002). This can be partially explained by dominant ideology – Confucianism, which emphasizes character building and respect for authority. In Chinese organizations characterized by hierarchical structure and large power distance, employees usually have high expectations from leaders and tend to worship leaders who demonstrate charisma. Generally speaking, Chinese charismatic leaders are likely to have more significant influences on their subordinates than Western charismatic leaders. Therefore, charismatic leadership might be popular and effective in Chinese organizations. This makes China a meaningful venue to study charismatic
leadership. Third, under the Confucian influences, Chinese organizations attach great importance to harmony, reciprocity, trust and loyalty. The mutual effect of trust and loyalty between supervisors and subordinates is highly emphasized even in contemporary China. Supervisors are supposed to trust their subordinates and subordinates are expected to be loyal to their supervisor. In Chinese organizations, the loyalty of the inferior to the superior is an important factor of being promoted. The concept of loyalty carries a special meaning in China and is worth systematic research. However, our review of the literature suggests that the relationship between charismatic leadership and loyalty and outcomes are not yet well understood. This study intends to fill these knowledge gaps by examining the mediating effect of loyalty to supervisors on the relationship between charismatic leadership and subordinates’ work performance and turnover intention in Chinese organizations.

Charismatic leadership: an overview

The attributes of charismatic leadership

Similar to transformational leadership, charismatic leadership examines the relationship between leaders and their followers, and focuses on issues related to vision, risk taking, enthusiasm and confidence (Hoyt and Ciulla 2004). Despite years of inquiry, there is no universally accepted definition of charisma. The word *charisma*, originated from the Greek word, *charismata*, means ‘the gift of grace’ or ‘gifts presented by the gods’ (Weber 1947; Conger 1989). It was initially used to describe an individual’s power or attributes that could not be described by ordinary means. This term was defined as being much more personal by researchers such as Conger (1989) who perceived charisma as internal to the leader, the power that the leader holds over another in the eye of the beholder. The amount of power or influence varies for different people. To define charismatic leadership, one must keep in mind that *charisma* does not describe just one type of personality. This type of leadership is complex and involves the leader, the followers and their shared environment (Conger 1989). In short, charisma is a leadership trait that sets one individual apart from others (Weber 1947). Some researches believed that charisma is mainly a leader–follower phenomenon (Seltzer and Bass 1990), while others argue that the reach of charismatic leadership does not stop at the leader–follower level; it has a significant impact on the life of an organization (Tejeda, Scandura and Pillai 2001).

In an attempt to define charismatic leadership, a number of scholars identified attributes or behaviours of a charismatic leader. For example, Trice and Beyer (1986, pp. 118–119) summarized Weber’s theory (1947) as including five elements: (1) an extraordinarily gifted person, (2) a social crisis or situation of desperation, (3) a set of ideas providing a radical solution to the crisis, (4) a set of followers who are attracted to the exceptional person and come to believe that he or she is directly linked to transcendent powers, and (5) the validation of that person’s extraordinary gifts and transcendence by repeated successes’. Hollander and Offermann (1990) divided the charisma attributes into three broad categories: (a) attitude and behaviour; (b) situation; and (c) observers’ characteristics, adding another level to the depth of charisma. From the behaviour perspective, Conger and Kanungo (1988, 1998) outlined five key behaviours of a charismatic leader, which include (a) articulating an innovative strategic vision; (b) showing sensitivity to member needs; (c) displaying unconventional behaviour; (d) taking personal risks; and (e) showing sensitivity to the environment (identifying constraints, threats and opportunities). In the same vein, Waldman, Ramirez, House and Puranam (2001) suggested three charismatic behaviours: (a) articulating a vision and sense of mission; (b) showing determination; and (c) communicating high performance expectations. Despite the variations of the scholarly
understanding, the following themes are commonly used to describe charismatic leadership: behaviour, presence in a crisis, determination, and communication of ideas and expectations. Groups judge the leadership based on how well an individual fits with the situation and task-specific schemas of the types of the leaders (Hogg 2001). Group members who are more prototypical of their groups tend to emerge as leaders and are perceived to be effective and charismatic (van Knippenberg and Hogg 2003; Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg and Spears 2006).

Charismatic leadership in China

Many of recent literature pointed out that charismatic leadership is the common applicable leadership style across cultures (Bass 1985; House et al. 1999). In the China context, Farh and Cheng (2000) contended that the western leadership theory related to Chinese culture could be easily transplanted into Chinese leadership study. However, our search of various databases generated a very limited number of studies in this regard, even fewer empirical studies on charismatic leadership in China.

Nevertheless, the existing leadership studies in/on China offered some valuable insights. For example, Cheng (1991) found that owners of Chinese family businesses possess some charismatic leadership properties and their children more willingly obey and believe in their father’s decisions and execute his instructions unconditionally. Researchers also found that moral character is a significant dimension of Chinese leadership embodied in the Chinese cultural context (Smith Peter and Wang 1996). In fact, moral character, embedded in Confucianism, is one of the most important leadership dimensions in paternalistic headship (Westwood 1997).

In this regard, unselfish virtuous leadership behaviour was identified as a unique Chinese indigenous leadership behaviour (Cheng and Zhuang 1981). By the same token, Redding (1990) contended that role exemplary is one of the four components (role exemplary, prejudiced supporting, attentive listening and benevolent autocratic leadership) of the Chinese capitalism leadership behaviours and helps win followers. The personal virtue characteristic was highlighted by Ling, Fang and Khanna (1991) as a unique Chinese leadership behaviour. Such emphasis on virtues and characters of a leader is rooted in Confucian’s philosophy that symbolized a leader as authentic idealized influence, a virtuous person who transforms others. Hence, a socialized charismatic leader is treated as a transforming person with virtuous and authentic idealized influence. Leaders who demonstrate ethical, moral and altruistic behaviours likely enhance and develop follower’s trust in them, which then can undergird the charismatic effects to followers and theoretically increase the group level performance (Antonakis and Atwater 2002). Through case studies of eight small-to-medium-sized manufacturing Chinese enterprises (four private-owned enterprises and four state-owned enterprises), Zhang (2011) confirmed that Chinese charismatic leaders with the appropriate virtues, devoid of any supernatural elements, were perceived as an integrated aesthetic example of human potential and an exemplar of successful practice.

Theoretical perspectives and hypothesis development

This study examined the relationships of the four theoretical constructs: charismatic leadership, loyalty to supervisors, work performance and turnover intention. Motivational theory, social exchange theory (Blau 1964) and social identity theory (Ashforth and Mael 1989) provided good theoretical lens to understand the relationships among these
constructs. Briefly speaking, Maslow’s *needs hierarchical theory* (1943) illustrates individuals’ needs at different levels. Since charismatic leaders are sensitive to subordinates’ needs, they are likely to enchant and motivate the subordinates by satisfying their needs. Social exchange theory describes how social relationships are based on the exchange of benefits between parties. Charismatic leadership is considered as a perceived benefit for employees. Social exchange norm suggests that employees will be motivated to reciprocate the benefit (Gouldner 1960). Hence, subordinates are likely to reciprocate, for instance, through loyalty and more work efforts. Because of the positive social exchange, charismatic leaders will likely elicit loyalty from their subordinates. Subsequently, employees’ work performance will be enhanced and turnover intention will be reduced. Finally, social identity theory (Ashforth and Mael 1989) can be applied to understand the psychological process in which charismatic leaders influence subordinates’ loyalty and work outcomes. By clearly communicating their visions and changing subordinates’ self-concepts, charismatic leaders make the subordinates identify with their values and be inspired by the visions. In other words, charismatic leaders are highly identified, admired and faithfully followed by subordinates; hence, they may increase subordinates’ loyalty that in turn leads to subordinates’ enhanced work performance and reduced turnover intention.

Previous research has provided some evidence that charismatic leadership has a positive effect on subordinates’ work performance and negative effect on subordinates’ turnover intention. From the conceptual analysis, we developed following hypotheses to guide this research effort. We further propose that loyalty to supervisors might serve as a mediator linking charismatic leadership to performance outcomes. Figure 1 represents the conceptual model that guided the development of our hypotheses.

**Charismatic leadership and loyalty to supervisors**

Since a charismatic supervisor articulates an innovative strategic vision, the subordinates will have a strong identification with the supervisor, and become devoted to him or her. A charismatic supervisor shows sensitivity to member needs that not only satisfies subordinates’ lower- and higher-level needs but also triggers social exchange between him/her and the subordinates. Consequently, the subordinates are likely to develop psychological attachment to the supervisor and are indebted to reciprocate with loyalty and work effort. Additionally, since a charismatic supervisor is also sensitive to the environment, the subordinates can be assured that the supervisor would identify

![Figure 1. Theoretical model.](image-url)
constraints, threats and opportunities. As a result, the subordinates could depend on their charismatic supervisor for directions and make efforts to help achieve the organizational goal. Furthermore, a charismatic supervisor displays unconventional behaviours and takes personal risks, which indicates that the supervisor has an exceptional ability to find solutions to important problems within the organization. Because a charismatic supervisor has character ethic, the subordinates will internalize his or her values, imitate the leader’s behaviour, accept the leader’s task objectives, comply with the leader’s requests, and make self-sacrifices and an extra effort in work assignments. Those who are attracted to the charismatic leader, trust the leader’s vision, are emotionally involved with the leader, and believe in the leader’s ability to accomplish the mission (Weber 1947). Shamir (1995) found that leaders who were deemed to be charismatic were thought to exhibit high energy, high intelligence and a high level of interpersonal communication skills. Strong personal identification, trust and internalization create loyal, obedient and hardworking followers. Charismatic leaders tend to polarize people into loyal followers and dedicated opponents (Bass 1985). Hence, charismatic leaders build strong emotional bonds with their followers. In this sense, it is reasonable to assume that charismatic leadership is associated with loyalty to supervisors. Compared with other types of leadership styles, charismatic leadership, with its strong emphasis on emotions and values, has more potential to attract followers. In the Chinese society where people are known for to be more loyal to individuals than to a system (Chen et al. 2002) and organization management is based more on relationship than on legal systems (Wang, Wang, Ruona and Rojewski 2005), it is even more likely that employees become loyal to leaders with charisma. The above analysis led to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Charismatic leadership is positively associated with loyalty to supervisors.

Charismatic leadership and work performance/turnover intention

In studies of organizations, charismatic leadership, in addition to be related to loyalty to supervisors, is also found to be directly and positively linked to work performance (see meta-analyses by Gasper 1992; Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasubramanian 1996; Tsai, Chen and Cheng 2009). Work performance refers to the performance directed towards formal tasks, duties and responsibilities such as those included in a job description (Williams and Anderson 1991). Turnover intention is the cognitive process of intent to leave. Turnover intention is defined as a type of withdrawal behaviour and negative work attitude, whereas turnover is considered to be the actual separation from the organization (Aydogdu and Asikgil 2011). Subordinates who faithfully follow and who are loyal to the charismatic leader will not have high turnover intention. Charismatic leaders who play exemplary roles can usually produce highly motivated followers. Charismatic leaders are seen as visionary leaders who, through a combination of personal characteristics, behaviours and the relationships they foster with followers, motivate the latter to achieve exceptional performance directed towards the vision (Hayibor, Agle, Sears, Sonnenfeld and Ward 2011). Employees who perceive themselves in a positive exchange relationship may feel obligated to reciprocate the charismatic leaders’ influence with high work performance and low turnover intention. Hence, we further hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2: Charismatic leadership is positively associated with work performance.

Hypothesis 3: Charismatic leadership is negatively associated with turnover intention.
Loyalty to supervisors and work performance/turnover intention

Loyalty to supervisors is referred to as the relative strength of a subordinate’s identification with attachment and dedication to a particular supervisor (Chen et al. 2002). In the Chinese context, the idea of loyalty is ingrained in Confucianism and well reflected by a well-known Chinese proverb, ‘A loyal minister never serves two kings’. Guan Yu, a famous general in the Period of Three Kingdoms in ancient China, is regarded as a righteous and loyal warrior. He is respected as an epitome of loyalty and righteousness. In the Confucianism-dominated ancient Chinese society, five cardinal relationships (emperor–ministered, father–son, husband–wife, elder–younger brothers and friend–friend) were emphasized and guided individuals’ daily behaviours (Wang et al. 2005). In these dyadic relationships, individuals who are in the inferior roles (minister, wife, son and younger brother) are obliged to be obedient and loyal to their respective superiors. On the other hand, individuals who are superior (emperor, husband, father and older brother) are supposed to be benevolent and kind to the inferior (Chen et al. 2002). Under the influence of the Confucian ideology, the inferior offers their faithful support for their superior unconditionally. In contemporary China, some of these sacred ties have weakened (for example, the wife to the husband) or have been replaced (for example from the minister–ruler to the subordinate–leader relationship). Nevertheless, sensitivity to the social status and associated obligations remains a strong characteristic in China today (Chen et al. 2002). In many organizations, loyalty is still used as a key criterion to classify subordinates into in-group versus out-group members; many Chinese subordinates still feel obliged to be loyal to their supervisors.

Evidently, promotion of loyalty is in line with the interests of the rulers or leaders in Chinese history; however, not every superior can elicit loyalty from the inferior. Only those who have great charisma can attract followers and gain their long-term support and loyalty. Therefore, a meaningful question that is worth exploring from the subordinates’ perspective is: what kind of leadership may trigger subordinates’ loyalty to their supervisors? More than three decades ago, Zhou (1983) explored the meaning of loyalty to the boss by interviewing subordinates. He found out that being loyal to the supervisor involved identifying with the supervisor’s goals and values and doing one’s job conscientiously. Similarly, Lee (1992) found that employees who were loyal to their superior tended to be conscientious, enthusiastic about their work, and were willing to support their supervisor’s decision. These findings suggest that being loyal to supervisors is more than just identifying with the supervisor’s character, vision, and values; it involves full commitment and strong faith in the supervisor demonstrated by a willingness to make self-sacrifice and extra work effort. Such effort on the subordinates’ part likely leads to more desirable performance at work and less turnover intention within the organization. Therefore, two additional hypotheses were derived as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Loyalty to supervisors is positively associated with work performance.

Hypothesis 5: Loyalty to supervisors is positively associated with turnover intention.

On the basis of the literature analysis and the five hypotheses we developed so far, it is clear that one common variable that influences the effectiveness of charismatic leaders is loyalty to supervisors. Attracted by charismatic leaders, the subordinates will have strong dedication to the mission and loyalty to the leaders, which in turn encourages them to take initiatives in accomplishing work tasks assigned to them. Besides, loyal subordinates will not leave or have the intention to leave their charismatic supervisors and their organizations. Therefore, this study would focus on investigating the mediating role of loyalty to supervisors in the relationship between charismatic leadership style and work...
performance/turnover intention. Doing so extends the Western-based literature on charismatic leadership. Together, the previously mentioned hypotheses produce a mediation model shown by Figure 1, in which the relationships between charismatic leadership and work performance/turnover intention are mediated by loyalty to supervisors. Charismatic leadership should positively relate to subordinates’ loyalty to supervisors, which should, in turn, contribute to their work performance and lead to reduced turnover intention. As such, we propose:

**Hypothesis 6:** Loyalty to supervisors partially mediates the relationship between charismatic leadership and work performance.

**Hypothesis 7:** Loyalty to supervisors partially mediates the relationship between charismatic leadership and turnover intention.

**Method**

**Sample**

To test the above-mentioned hypothesis, we adopted a non-experimental longitudinal survey design. The survey design was well suited for this study because the goal was to explore the relationships among four variables: charismatic leadership, loyalty to supervisors, work performance and turnover intention. The target population was employees working in a private firm in food manufacturing industry in Mainland China. Convenience sampling strategy was adopted. The sample included 260 supervisor–subordinate dyads within this company. Among the responding subordinates, 54% are female; 80% have college or above education; 65% are 30 years old or above; and 43% have at least three years organizational tenure.

**Measures**

Four instruments were used to measure the four theoretical constructs: charismatic leadership, loyalty to supervisor, work performance and turnover intention. The subsequent paragraphs provide a brief introduction to each one of them.

**Charismatic leadership:** We measured the dimensions of charismatic leadership: vision and articulation, environmental sensitivity, unconventional behaviour, personal risk, sensitivity to member needs using the 25 items from C–K questionnaire by Conger and Kanungo (1994). We asked the subordinates to rate the leadership style of their immediate supervisors (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). A sample item for charismatic leadership is: ‘Takes high personal risk for the sake of the organization’. The Cronbach’s α coefficient of this scale was 0.88.

**Loyalty to supervisors:** To measure employees’ loyalty to their immediate supervisors, we adopted the 17 items from the loyalty to supervisor scale (LS) suggested by Chen (2001) and Chen et al. (2002). The LS scale can be classified into five general dimensions: dedication to supervisor, extra effort for supervisor, attachment to supervisor, identification with supervisor and internalization of supervisor’s values. These five dimensions can also be divided into two broad categories: Western dimensions (LSw) and Chinese dimensions (LSc). For LSw, the two Western dimensions, identification (three items) and internalization (three items), were developed by Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert (1996). For LSc, there are three Chinese indigenous dimensions, namely dedication (four items), effort (three items) and following supervisor (four items). All items used a seven-point response format ranging from 1 (strongly
disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A Sample item is: ‘I would support my supervisor in almost any emergency’. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for this scale was 0.86.

Work performance: To measure work performance, we used a five-item seven-point scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991, $1 = \text{never}; 7 = \text{always}$). The supervisors were asked to assess their subordinates’ performance using this scale. A sample item addresses ‘whether the subordinate exceeds, meets, or does not meet standards for job performance’. The $\alpha$ coefficient for this scale was 0.82.

Turnover intention: Turnover intention was measured by the three-item scale (Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis and Cammann 1982). The items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is: ‘I will probably look for a new job in the near future’. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficient of turnover intention was 0.81.

Control variables: We included five control variables in this study: gender, education level, age, organization tenure and supervisor–subordinate dyad tenure because these variables were found to be directly associated with subordinates’ performance (Chen et al. 2002). Measures of these demographic variables were obtained from the subordinates. Gender was dummy coded (1 = female; 2 = male). Seven-item variables were used to measure the education levels of the respondents (1 = primary school or below; 2 = secondary school or above). Age, organization tenure and supervisor–subordinate dyad tenure were measured by number of years as self-reported by respondents.

Translation of questionnaire items: Since the survey was conducted in mainland China, the instruments were translated from English to Mandarin Chinese using the forward–back translation method. Two bilingual speakers/researchers (speaking Mandarin Chinese and English) performed the translations independently then together to ensure that both English and Chinese versions of items were comparable with high accuracy.

Data collection and analysis

Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect data: one for subordinates and the other for their immediate supervisors. Questionnaires were administered to the groups of subordinates and supervisors separately. The subordinates completed the questionnaire first, and three months later the supervisor rated the subordinates’ work performance. The human resource management (HRM) department of the company assisted in administering the survey. Each questionnaire was coded with a researcher-assigned identification number to match employees’ responses with their immediate supervisors’ evaluations. The first author and a few assistants visited all the respondents in person, briefed them about the purpose of the study and explained the procedures of implementing the survey. Prior to the survey, each respondent was provided with the questionnaire and a cover letter of survey introduction prepared by the researchers. To ensure confidentiality, the respondents were instructed to seal the completed questionnaires in the return envelopes and returned them directly to the researcher on site. The matching surveys were initially distributed to 300 dyads, and 260 complete and usable responses were returned to the researchers from the matching pairs, indicating an overall response rate of 87%.

Data analysis consisted of factor analysis, reliability and correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis. SPSS 17.0 and Amos 6.0 were applied to perform the analysis.
Results

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of all the three variables in the study were reported in Table 1.

As depicted in Table 1, charismatic leadership was significantly correlated with loyalty to supervisors, work performance and turnover intention ($r = 0.46, p < 0.001$, $r = 0.32, p < 0.001$ and $r = -0.26, p < 0.001$, respectively). Loyalty to supervisors was also significantly correlated with work performance and turnover intention ($r = 0.48, p < 0.001$, $r = -0.45, p < 0.001$).

We tested the dimensionalities of charismatic leadership by using confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). The results confirmed that charismatic leadership in China consisted of five dimensions: vision and articulation, environmental sensitivity, unconventional behaviour, personal risk and sensitivity to member needs ($\chi^2 = 82.63$, $df = 26$, $CFI = 0.99$, $TLI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.05$). The results suggested that the hypothesized five-factor model of charismatic leadership yielded a better fit than the single-factor model ($\chi^2 = 380.38$, $df = 35$, $CFI = 0.96$, $TLI = 0.94$, $RMSEA = 0.20$).

We tested the dimensionalities of loyalty to supervisors by using CFAs. The results confirmed that loyalty to supervisors consisted of five dimensions: dedication, extra effort, attachment, identification and value internalization ($\chi^2 = 44.85$, $df = 20$, $CFI = 0.99$, $TLI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.06$). The results suggested that the hypothesized five-factor model of loyalty to supervisors yielded a better fit than the single-factor model ($\chi^2 = 441.80$, $df = 36$, $CFI = 0.95$, $TLI = 0.93$, $RMSEA = 0.21$).

We conducted hierarchical regression analyses using SPSS 17.0 to examine the predictive power of charismatic leadership on both loyalty to supervisors and work performance/turnover intention, and the predictive power of loyalty to supervisors on work performance/turnover intention. We entered the control variables in step 1, independent variable in step 2 and mediating variable in step 3. The results were reported in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, charismatic leadership made a significant contribution to loyalty to supervisors ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$). Results in step 2 of Table 2 indicated that charismatic leadership also made a significant contribution to work performance ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$). As indicated in Step 3 of Table 2, loyalty to supervisors significantly predicted work performance ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$). The significant coefficient for charismatic leadership ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$) in Table 2 (step 3) indicated that loyalty to supervisors partially mediates the relationship between the charismatic leadership and work performance.

As shown in Table 2, charismatic leadership made a significant contribution to loyalty to supervisors ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$). Results in step 2 of Table 2 indicated that charismatic leadership made a significant contribution to turnover intention ($\beta = -0.29, p < 0.001$). As indicated in step 3 of Table 2, loyalty to supervisors significantly predicted turnover intention ($\beta = -0.36, p < 0.001$). The insignificant coefficient for charismatic leadership was not significant.

### Table 1. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Charismatic leadership</th>
<th>Loyalty to supervisors</th>
<th>Work performance</th>
<th>Turnover intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty to supervisors</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work performance</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intention</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>-0.26***</td>
<td>-0.45***</td>
<td>-0.82***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 260, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001$. 

M. Wu and J. Wang
Table 2. Tests of mediation for charismatic leadership (N = 260).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Loyalty to supervisors</th>
<th>Work performance</th>
<th>Turnover intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization tenure</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory tenure</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>0.36***</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediating variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty to supervisors</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>df</strong>^2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R^2</strong></td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ΔR^2</strong></td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
leadership ($\beta = -0.14, p > 0.05$) in Table 2 (step 3) indicated that loyalty to supervisors completely mediates the relationship between the charismatic leadership and turnover intention.

Thus, these results fully support Hypotheses 1 to 6 and partially support Hypothesis 7.

Discussion

As revealed by results of this study, charismatic leadership could be effective in Chinese organizations. It not only arouses loyalty from the subordinates, but also has direct effect on subordinates’ work performance and turnover intention. The more charismatic a supervisor is, the more attractive he or she is perceived by the subordinates. The results from the current study show that loyalty to supervisors partially mediates the relationship between charismatic leadership and work performance, and fully mediates the relationship between charismatic leadership and turnover intention.

As discussed earlier, China is a society where interpersonal harmony, social bonds and social relations are highly emphasized. Individuals seek to build trust and loyalty through developing personal relationships (Child and Mollering 2003). In this context, to win and to elicit loyalty from subordinates, a supervisor needs to display charismatic leadership. If the subordinates are loyal to a supervisor, they will have faith in the supervisor, follow him or her without any hesitation, identify with him or her and support him or her by making effort at work. This could lead to enhanced work performance and reduced turnover intention of the subordinates. In a relationship-based society such as China, the supervisor may be a more important factor in influencing employee behaviour and attitudes at work than the organization itself (Chen et al. 2002). This has significant implications for organizational leaders, managers, supervisors, management educators, trainers and human resource development (HRD) practitioners.

Although there is rich literature on the leadership paradigm, countries such as China has received little research attention until recent years. Further, even with the existing literature on leadership in Chinese organizations, few researches have focused on charismatic leadership style and its effectiveness in the mainland Chinese context. This empirical study contributes to international management literature, expanded the current knowledge base and advanced our understanding of charismatic leadership behaviours by examining the underlying mechanism that charismatic leadership influences work performance and turnover intention in Chinese organizations.

Results from this study have major implications for organizational leaders and managers in China. First of all, since charismatic leadership is associated with loyalty, to elicit loyalty from subordinates, a supervisor must strive to demonstrate charismatic leadership behaviours through persistent character-building efforts. Chinese employees prefer a supervisor who has charisma rather than a supervisor who is ‘ordinary’ or ‘average’. The charisma might be casted by character, ability, insight and determination. Hence, charismatic leaders win long-term support from the employees. With charisma, a leader is more than likely to win followers who are willing to share setbacks (not only success) with the leader. Subordinates desire to be attached to their charismatic supervisor, and are willing to work under the supervisor even if there are better alternatives available. Therefore, supervisors should strive to cultivate themselves, build their charismatic characters, become sensitive to subordinates’ needs, pay attention to the environment, communicate their visions to the subordinates, be innovative and enhance their managerial capability through continuing education and learning opportunities. For human resource developers and management educators, this is an area in which they can and should play a
leading role. In fact, it is their responsibility to help organizational leaders and managers to identify areas they can improve, and to design learning-based interventions to help them move towards being charismatic leaders.

In addition, the results of this study show that charismatic leadership is related to subordinates’ work performance and turnover intention. This finding points to training implications. Organizations must commit to training programs that will educate supervisors and managers on how to develop charismatic leadership characters and behaviours. Doing so will increase the likelihood to gain employee support and become effective leaders.

Next, since the study results also show that loyalty to supervisors can mediate the relationship between charismatic leadership and work performance/turnover intention, a supervisor who desires to gain subordinates’ loyalty, motivates and retains subordinates, should always put himself or herself in others’ shoes and learn to empathize. If the subordinates have feelings of awe, they might be obedient but not loyal to the supervisor. If the subordinates really admire and respect the supervisor, they are likely to be loyal to the supervisor and make extra effort at work as a means to show their loyalty. Therefore, a supervisor should not ask for loyalty; instead, when he or she displays charismatic leadership, they win followers’ hearts. Only doing so can result in sustained loyalty and work commitment from subordinates. Therefore, it is important that supervisors learn how to improve their skills of demonstrating charismatic leadership to their subordinates. Leadership and management development programs that target on charismatic leadership style would be helpful.

Limitations and future research
There are a few limitations in this study. On the positive side, each limitation points to some opportunities for future research.

First, this study has limited samples. In other words, this study focused exclusively on employees in one private company in one type of industry (food manufacturing) in Mainland China. Organization ownerships and industry types may make a difference on the four theoretical constructs under study. Hence, it is impossible or inappropriate to generalize the findings from the sample of this study to all business organizations in mainland China. Future research is needed to examine how unique characteristics of the private companies (vs. state-owned enterprises or joint ventures in China, for example) and the food manufacturing industry (vs. IT industry, for example) may influence the supervisors’ leadership behaviours, employees’ attitude towards their supervisors, employees’ work behaviours and the relationships among them. Comparative studies in this area will likely generate meaningful additional insights.

Second, this study focused on loyalty to supervisors as the mediator in the relationship between charismatic leadership and work performance/turnover intention. We are highly aware of the existence of other possible mediators and moderators that we have not included in this study, for example, trust or justice, organizational culture or situational variables. Future research is needed to identify and examine the mediating and moderating effects of additional influencing factors.

Last, in this study, three of the four constructs (charismatic leadership, work performance and turnover intention) were measured by the Western-based instruments. It is beyond the scope of this article to determine if there are some distinctive differences in factor structures, which can be partially explained by the different cultural contexts (Chinese vs. Western). Future studies in this direction are needed to enable the
development of context-sensitive, indigenous instruments that may help more accurately capture the organizational reality in China.

Despite the limitations, the current study expanded the domain of charismatic leadership and pointed researchers to some new directions for their future inquiry. By providing one example of how charismatic leadership in China could be examined, we hope this study will stimulate more research interest in understanding the underlying mechanism through which charismatic leadership influences subordinates’ attitudinal and behavioural outcomes.

**Conclusion**

Despite a few limitations, this study may help fill some of the gaps in the analysis of charismatic leadership in Chinese context. While effectiveness of leadership styles may vary among countries because of cultural disparities, the compatibility between leadership and culture needs to be concerned. From the cultural perspective of Confucianism, the current research addresses the issues of charismatic leadership and loyalty in Chinese organizations that have been largely ignored in academic and practical circles in the past. The research contributes to the leadership paradigm by analysing the attributes and connotations of charismatic leadership in Chinese culture and establishing a model of charismatic leadership for Chinese organizations. It also advances our knowledge of leading and managing Chinese human resource in workplace by adhering to the principles of Confucianism. Along with the rapid economic development of China, HRM in Chinese business organizations are facing many challenges. The findings of the research offer insights for supervisors and HRM practitioners who aim to establish effective management systems in Chinese business organizations. Further research on charismatic leadership effectiveness and organization practices needs to be conducted from Chinese cultural and philosophical views.

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Professor Malcolm Warner and the reviewers of the paper for their constructive and insightful comments. This research (Project 70,701024) is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC).

**References**


M. Wu and J. Wang


