

# Leader Approachability: Reduced Turnover and Other Business Outcomes

## Abstract

The current study aimed to measure the impact a new leadership construct (i.e., leader approachability) has on organizational outcomes (i.e., turnover, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational satisfaction). The study examined whether leader approachability impacts these organizational outcomes while controlling for constraints (i.e., pay satisfaction and workplace conditions satisfaction). There were 7,728 participants spread across 48 locations in 3 companies. The results indicated that ratings of leader approachability are related to organizational outcomes and can predict above and beyond the predictions made by the organizational constraints. Implications of these findings on the best-practices of management are discussed.

*Keywords: leader approachability, turnover, OCB, organization satisfaction, management!*

## Leadership

Leadership is a process where an individual influences a group of people toward a common goal (Northouse, 2019). Leaders can influence others by exerting power over followers (French & Raven, 1959). The types of power a leader might exert are referent power, expert power, legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, or information power (French & Raven, 1959). The methods a leader uses to exert power can either motivate or demoralize followers. An effective leader is one who uses power to influence followers to reach their potential.

Approachable Leadership is a consulting firm that teaches a model of leadership called Approachable Leadership. Approachable Leadership consists of three parts: availability, warmth, and receptiveness to feedback. Availability is the physical presence a leader has that influences how followers approach them. Warmth is the extent to which a leader is welcoming. Receptivity to feedback is how a leader responds to new ideas and critical feedback. Leaders who are more approachable create more opportunities for interactions with employees (Northouse, 2019). This can increase leader-follower relations and allow for greater knowledge sharing in the reciprocal leadership process. Approachability affects employee cognitions (i.e., turnover intention), behaviors (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviors), and attitudes (i.e., organization satisfaction).

The construct of Approachability and the resulting scale was derived from an unpublished doctoral dissertation (Brown, 2016). Brown (2016) detailed the item analysis, factor analysis, and validation tests the scale underwent. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the three-dimensional model was the best fit.

Evidence of construct validity was found for Approachability using consideration, trustworthiness, and participative decision making.

Approachability is functionally similar to other leadership styles such as LMX (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), authentic leadership (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). However, Approachability is different structurally. The rationale of why Approachability positively impacts subordinates is power distance. That is, the natural leader-subordinate relationship is often anxiety-inducing for the subordinate. The subordinate may be fearful of approaching the leader. Leaders who self-monitor how the power relationship impacts subordinates can work to reduce this distance, namely by being more receptive to feedback, being warm towards subordinates, and making themselves physically available to their subordinates. By working to reduce the power distance, the subordinate may become more satisfied with their job, is more willing to come to leader with suggestions (possibly enhancing future performance) and will be more committed and engaged in their work.

### **Turnover Intention**

Turnover intention is a strong indicator of actual turnover. Employees who intend to turnover are more likely to leave than employees who do not intend to turnover. This relationship is even stronger than the relationship between their job satisfaction, work satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). This is conceptually supported by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Employees who think about and decide to turnover, will likely follow through because of withdrawal cognitions (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

Additionally, Griffeth et al. (2000) found that employees satisfied with their supervisor were associated with reduced turnover, and the strength of their relationship with their supervisor was also linked to reduced turnover. Indeed, much research has found that the increase in consideration-type leadership behaviors decrease the likelihood of employees turning over (e.g., Bass, 1985; Fleishman & Harris, 1962; Gul, Ahmad, Rehman, Shabir, & Razzaq, 2012; Sun & Wang, 2016; Waldman, Carter, & Hom, 2015). Additionally, the strength of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates is predictive of the employee's turnover intention (Dansereau et al., 1975; Ferris, 1985; Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982). This is important because employees who are more closely related to their supervisors are likely more satisfied with their supervisors. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H1a: Approachability will be associated with reduced turnover intention.*

The components of approachable leadership are also important and may differentially be associated with outcomes. The testing of the components is important, because if they are found to be differentially important for different outcomes then there is further evidence of adequate distinctiveness between the Approachability subdimensions. Therefore, we also posit:

*H2a: Approachable leadership components will be associated with reduced turnover intention.*

In addition to leadership, pay and workplace satisfaction can influence turnover. Unlike pay and workplace satisfaction, however, leadership is easier and quicker to influence. An organization facing turnover problems will invest significant time and resources to markedly improve employees' perceptions of pay and workplace satisfaction, and those investments may not be appreciated over time. A more efficient, less

expensive, and more sustainable option is equipping leaders with skills to be more effective. It is important to test whether Approachable Leadership predicts outcomes like turnover intention when controlling for pay and workplace satisfaction. For this reason, we hypothesize:

*H3a: Approachability will predict reduced turnover intention beyond pay and workplace conditions satisfaction.*

*H4a: Approachable leadership components will predict reduced turnover beyond pay and workplace condition satisfaction.*

### **Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB)**

OCBs are discretionary behaviors that influence the effectiveness of the organization, although they may not be formally recognized as job performance (Motowidlo, 2003). OCBs represent an employee's behavior that goes above and beyond the expectations of them. OCBs can be directed toward other individuals (OCB-I) or the organization (OCB-O; Coleman & Borman, 2000). An example of an OCB directed toward a person is helping a coworker catch up with their work. An example of an OCB directed at the organization is positively representing the organization outside of work.

Leadership styles designed to influence employees to go above and beyond the formal expectations of the job have the potential to lead to employee OCB. Transformational leadership style is one such leadership style. For example, a meta-analysis examining the influence transformational leadership on OCB found it predicts OCB when controlling for transactional leadership (Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). Other research has found that authentic leadership (Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010), servant leadership (Harwiki, 2016; Ja'afaru Bambale,

2014), and charismatic leadership (Babcock-Roberson, & Strickland, 2010; Deluga, 1995) was associated with increased OCB.

Approachable Leadership is expected to work similarly, by influencing employees to go above and beyond for the organization, because the leaders are going above and beyond for them. We posit:

*H1b: Approachability will be associated with increased OCB.*

*H2b: Approachable leadership components will be associated with increased OCB.*

*H3b: Approachability will predict increased OCB beyond pay and workplace condition satisfaction.*

*H4b: Approachable leadership components will predict increased OCB beyond pay and workplace condition satisfaction.*

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is the most researched of all job attitudes (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006). Job satisfaction is an internal evaluation of an individual's job as favorable or unfavorable on a general or facet-specific level (Judge, Hulin, & Dalal, 2012). Examples of facet-level job satisfaction variables are pay satisfaction, workplace conditions satisfaction, organization satisfaction, and coworker satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a commonly used construct because it is easy to understand, and it relates to other variables as one would expect. Roznowski and Hulin (1992) stated that after an employee is hired into an organization, job satisfaction is the best predictor of performance. Job satisfaction is associated with performance, attendance, turnover intention and turnover, psychological withdrawal, and likelihood of organizational citizenship behaviors (Judge et al., 2012).

Researching perceived organizational support, Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro (1990) suggested that employees consider the behaviors of their close supervisors when making judgements about broader entities such as the organization. Similarly, employees likely consider their leader when making judgments about their satisfaction with the workplace, the organization, and their compensation. Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen (2006) found that transactional leadership and transformational leadership were both positively associated with job satisfaction, but transformational leadership was much more closely related. Further, previous research has found that transformational leadership is predictive of supervisor satisfaction and general work satisfaction, regardless of the country the sample is from, thus showing the prevalence of these effects (Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang, & Lawler, 2005). Other researchers have found that perceptions of authentic leadership are predictive of subordinate job satisfaction (Azanza, Moriano, & Molero, 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H1c: Approachability will be associated with increased organization satisfaction.*

*H2c: Approachable leadership components will be associated with increased organization satisfaction.*

*H3c: Approachability will predict increased organization satisfaction beyond pay and workplace condition satisfaction.*

*H4c: Approachable leadership components will predict increased organization satisfaction beyond pay and workplace condition satisfaction.*

## Methods

### Procedure and Participants

This paper uses data collected via Approachable Leadership's proprietary survey. Clients who work with Approachable Leadership complete this survey to assess how employees feel about their leaders and the organization; it also helps leaders identify potential growth areas. The dataset used for this paper includes 7,728 participants spread across 48 locations in 3 companies. Demographics are not reported due to confidentiality agreements with client organizations. The samples are representative of their location populations.

### Measures

**Approachability.** Approachability is measured using six items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. An example item of availability is "My supervisor is available to meet with employees." Availability has an  $\alpha = .821$ . An example item of warmth is "My supervisor creates a welcoming atmosphere", and the scale  $\alpha = .880$ . Receptivity has an  $\alpha = .887$ , and an example item is "My supervisor is open to ideas and suggestions provided by employees." Overall approachability had an internal consistency of  $.937$ .

**Turnover.** Turnover intention is measured using 3 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. An example item is "My plans are to remain here for many years." The scale has an alpha of  $.603$ .

**OCB.** OCB is measured using a 4-item scale rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. There are two OCB-I and two OCB-O items. An example item is "I willingly give my time to help others who have work-related problems." The scale alpha is  $.760$ .



**Satisfaction.** Organization satisfaction is measured using 3 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale. An example item is “When I tell others about where I work, my comments are always positive.” The scale alpha is .852.

Pay satisfaction is measured using 3 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale. An example item is “I am satisfied with my compensation.” The scale alpha is .848.

Workplace satisfaction is measured using 3 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale. An example item is “My work area is safe, and accidents are infrequent.”. The scale alpha is .635.

## Results

See Table 1 for the scale statistics and correlations between the variables. Hypothesis 1 was tested using bivariate correlations between Approachability and turnover intention (1a), OCB (1b), and organizational satisfaction (1c). All three hypothesis were supported with bivariate correlations being -.50, .55, and .56, respectively.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using multiple regression with the Approachable leadership components predicting turnover intention (2a), OCB (2b), and organizational satisfaction (2c). These three hypotheses were also supported with each component significantly predicting the three outcomes. Additionally, the Approachable leadership components were differentially related to the outcomes. Receptivity was the strongest predictor of turnover intention ( $\beta = -.21, p < .001$ ), Availability was the strongest predictor of OCB ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ), and Warmth was the strongest predictor of organization satisfaction ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). The regression model predicting turnover intention had an

$R = .50$ , the model predicting OCB had a  $R = .55$ , and the model for organization satisfaction had an  $R = .56$ . See Table 2 for the multiple regression results.

Hypothesis 3 was tested using hierarchical multiple regression with Approachability to predict turnover intention (3a), OCB (3b), and organizational satisfaction (3c), controlling for pay satisfaction and workplace conditions satisfaction. Pay satisfaction and workplace conditions satisfaction were entered in Step 1 of the regression equation. Workplace conditions satisfaction was a stronger predictor than pay satisfaction for turnover intention ( $\beta = -.40$  versus  $\beta = -.33$ ), OCB ( $\beta = .43$  versus  $\beta = .29$ ), and organization satisfaction ( $\beta = .43$  versus  $\beta = .37$ ). Together they had an  $R$  of .62, .62, and .68, respectively. Approachability was then entered into Step 2 to examine incremental prediction. Approachability significantly added to the prediction of turnover intention, OCB, and organization satisfaction, increasing the  $R$ s to .65, .67, and .71, respectively. Supporting hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c, Approachability significantly predicted turnover intention ( $\beta = -.22, p < .001$ ), OCB ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ), and organization satisfaction ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ) beyond workplace conditions satisfaction and pay satisfaction. See Table 3 for the hierarchical regression results.

Hypothesis 4 was tested using hierarchical regression with Approachable leadership components predicting turnover intention (4a), OCB (4b), and organizational satisfaction (4c), controlling for pay satisfaction and workplace conditions satisfaction. As for the hypothesis 3 analyses, workplace conditions satisfaction and pay satisfaction were entered into Step 1. The three Approachable leadership components were then entered into Step 2. Availability, Warmth, and Receptivity all significantly predicted turnover

intention ( $\beta = -.06, -.08, \text{ and } -.10$ ), OCB ( $\beta = .15, .08, \text{ and } .09$ ), and organization satisfaction ( $\beta = .08, .15, \text{ and } .06$ ) beyond workplace conditions satisfaction and pay satisfaction. Additionally, although to a lesser extent, the differential relationships between the components and the outcomes were maintained, namely, with Receptivity being the most important for turnover intention, Availability the most important for OCB, and Warmth the most important for organization satisfaction. The addition of the Approachable leadership components increased the R for turnover intention from .62 to .65, .62 to .67 for OCB, and .68 to .72 for organization satisfaction.

### Discussion

This study sought to use a large survey sample to examine the relationship between the Approachable Leadership style and various business-relevant outcomes. The results indicate Approachability and its three components (i.e., Availability, Receptivity, and Warmth) are important predictors of turnover intention, OCBs, and organization satisfaction. This link is important because turnover can be extremely costly to an organization. Additionally, OCBs can help the organization or its employees, and positive organization satisfaction can be a strong determinant of promotability, engagement, performance, and more.

These results replicate the findings of Griffeth et al. (2000) who found that employees who were satisfied with their leaders were less likely to turnover. The meta-analysis of transformational leadership by Wang et al. (2011) found that transformational leadership predicted OCB over transactional leadership. In this study, Approachable leadership, expected to act similar to transformational leadership, was also associated

with increased OCB, even when controlling for workplace conditions satisfaction and pay satisfaction.

A more practical way to understand the impact Approachability has on these important workplace outcomes is using a bivariate effect calculation. For example, the correlation of  $-.50$  between Approachability and turnover intention means that this study suggests that 75% of leaders will be either high Approachability-low turnover or low Approachability-high turnover. The  $.55$  correlation between Approachability and OCB means that 77.5% of leaders will be either high Approachability-high OCB or low Approachability-low OCB. The correlation of  $.56$  between Approachability and organization satisfaction means that 78% of leaders will be either high Approachability-high organization satisfaction or low Approachability-low organization satisfaction. Thinking about correlations this way highlights the practical significance of Approachability.

### **Strengths**

One of the strengths of this study is its large sample size. A sample of 7,728 subjects means our approximations of these relationships is very close to the actual relationships between the constructs. According to the central limit theorem, addition of independent observations creates a 'more normal' curve, which not only better estimates the population means, but may reduce within-variable variance. By having a large sample, error is reduced. Further, regression-based inferential statistics are based on the least squares, and by increasing observations you decrease the standard error of the estimate (because you have decreased within-variable normality issues), which increases the statistical robustness of the model.

Another strength is that this is the first study to empirically examine the relationships between Approachability and turnover intention, OCB, and organization satisfaction. This is important because it is the first step in showing the importance of Approachability. This study found that there is evidence of concurrent validity of the perceptions of Approachable leadership as it relates to turnover intentions, OCB, and organization satisfaction. The results indicate Approachability is an important leadership topic that would benefit from further examination.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is it uses all self-report data at one timepoint. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with cross-sectional studies (Spector, 2019), any fluctuations of these outcomes with Approachability was not captured. In addition to being from one timepoint, the data was all self-report which could induce a common method bias if the process of responding to the scales primed a common cognitive bias (Spector, 2006; Spector, Rosen, Richardson, Williams, & Johnson, 2019) Additionally, self-reported OCB was likely subject to biases, and may be a variable that would benefit from other ratings. Given the scale of this project, this was impractical, but the self-reported OCB must be noted.

Another limitation of this study is that everything was examined at the individual-level. This was done to examine the individual-level perceptions of these constructs, but future studies should consider aggregating data to the unit-level, such as grouping by leaders, departments, or locations.

### **Implications**

The results for hypothesis 3 are very important. They indicate that Approachability predicts turnover intention, OCB, and organization satisfaction beyond workplace conditions satisfaction and pay satisfaction. Additionally, Approachability was as important in predicting these outcomes as improving satisfaction with workplace conditions or pay. While providing solid pay and working conditions is clearly effective, it is not without downsides. Improving work conditions and increasing pay often require significant investments that can be dismissed by employees over time (i.e., “what have you done for me lately?”) It is uncertain if the short-term improvements would outweigh the cost. Additionally, satisfaction with pay and workplace conditions may not rise linearly with changes to pay or workplace conditions, further reducing potential return on these investments.

On the other hand, training leaders to improve their approachability requires a smaller investment that continues to reap benefits with each daily interaction between leaders and their teams. It is also possible that increasing leader approachability also increases employees’ satisfaction with their pay or workplace conditions, since the three constructs are moderately related. Additionally, training a leader can help the leader fulfill psychological needs of their employees, whereas pay satisfaction and workplace satisfaction are merely contextual factors. This could be a distinction of more internalized motivators as compared with external motivators (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Therefore, targeting leaders with Approachable Leadership training is less expensive than improving the work environment or increasing pay and yields similar if not better results. Our results suggest an organization struggling with high turnover, low

OCB, or low organization satisfaction (or all three), should strongly consider targeting leader approachability as a viable and effective method to remedy these issues.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined leader Approachability and its three components: warmth, availability, and receptivity. The results indicated that Approachability is an important leadership construct as it predicted three business-relevant outcomes beyond pay satisfaction and workplace satisfaction (i.e., turnover, OCB, and organizational satisfaction). The components of Approachability were also differentially related to these outcomes, suggesting that the positive impact of Approachability may be different in a variety of situations for different reasons. Approachability is a leadership construct that merits further research.

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Table 1

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Availability	5.25	1.63								
2. Warmth	5.01	1.71	.77							
3. Receptivity	5.06	1.67	.78	.82						
4. Approachability	5.11	1.55	.91	.93	.93					
5. Turnover Intention	2.87	1.36	-.45	-.46	-.47	-.50				
6. OCB	5.44	1.20	.52	.51	.51	.55	-.64			
7. Workplace Satisfaction	4.92	1.37	.50	.50	.50	.54	-.55	.57		
8. Organization Satisfaction	5.11	1.57	.51	.53	.52	.56	-.76	.72	.59	
9. Pay Satisfaction	4.57	1.65	.36	.38	.39	.41	-.51	.49	.45	.56

Note: N=7,658. All correlations were significant at  $p < .001$ .

Table 2

*Approachable leadership components predicting outcomes*

	Turnover					OCB					Organization Satisfaction				
	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R
Intercept	2.87	.01		<.001		5.44	.01		<.001		5.11	.02		<.001	
Availability	-.13	.01	-.15	<.001		.18	.01	.24	<.001		.17	.02	.17	<.001	
Warmth	-.14	.02	-.18	<.001		.12	.01	.17	<.001		.23	.02	.25	<.001	
Receptivity	-.17	.02	-.21	<.001		.14	.01	.19	<.001		.17	.02	.18	<.001	
Model					.50					.55					.56

Note: N=7,659

Table 3

*Approachability incrementally predicting outcomes*

	Turnover					OCB					Organization Satisfaction				
	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R
Intercept	2.87	.01		<.001		5.44	.01		<.001		5.11	.01		<.001	
Workplace Satisfaction	-.40	.01	-.40	<.001		.38	.01	.43	<.001		.49	.01	.43	<.001	
Pay Satisfaction	-.27	.01	-.33	<.001		.21	.01	.29	<.001		.35	.01	.37	<.001	
Model					.62					.62					.68
Intercept	2.87	.01		<.001		5.44	.01		<.001		5.11	.01		<.001	
Workplace Satisfaction	-.30	.01	-.31	<.001		.26	.01	.30	<.001		.35	.01	.31	<.001	
Pay Satisfaction	-.24	.01	-.29	<.001		.17	.01	.23	<.001		.30	.01	.32	<.001	
Approachability	-.19	.01	-.22	<.001		.23	.01	.30	<.001		.27	.01	.27	<.001	
Model					.65					.67					.71

Note: N=7,658

Table 4

*Approachable leadership components incrementally predicting outcomes*

	Turnover					OCB					Organization Satisfaction				
	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R	B	SE	$\beta$	p	R
Intercept	2.87	.01		<.001		5.44	.01		<.001		5.11	.01		<.001	
Workplace Satisfaction	-.40	.01	-.40	<.001		.38	.01	.43	<.001		.49	.01	.43	<.001	
Pay Satisfaction	-.27	.01	-.33	<.001		.21	.01	.29	<.001		.35	.01	.37	<.001	
Model					.62					.62					.68
Intercept	2.87	.01		<.001		5.44	.01		<.001		5.11	.01		<.001	
Workplace Satisfaction	-.30	.01	-.30	<.001		.26	.01	.30	<.001		.35	.01	.31	<.001	
Pay Satisfaction	-.24	.01	-.29	<.001		.17	.01	.23	<.001		.30	.01	.32	<.001	
Availability	-.05	.01	-.06	<.001		.11	.01	.15	<.001		.07	.01	.08	<.001	
Warmth	-.06	.01	-.08	<.001		.05	.01	.08	<.001		.14	.01	.15	<.001	
Receptivity	-.08	.01	-.10	<.001		.07	.01	.09	<.001		.06	.01	.06	<.001	
Model					.65					.67					.72

Note: N=7,658