CHAPTER 4

STALLED AND STUCK IN THE MIDDLE: THE AGE-DEPENDENT ROLE OF JOB TENURE ON MIDDLE MANAGERS’ JOB SATISFACTION

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between middle managers’ prolonged job tenure, job satisfaction, and transformational leadership. It proposes a model in which middle managers’ increasing job tenure shapes transformational leadership through lowered job satisfaction. Based on social exchange theory, it is proposed that middle managers perceive job tenure as a violation of their expectations regarding career progress, which could result in lower job satisfaction. Next, middle managers’ job satisfaction is predicted to be a positive attitudinal antecedent for their transformational leadership. In addition, drawing on socio-emotional selectivity theory, age is examined as a contingency factor for this mechanism, implying that younger middle managers’ psychological contract will be more strongly violated by increasing job tenure. Overall, it is suggested that middle managers’ job tenure negatively relates to their transformational leadership due to lowered job satisfaction, but that this indirect relationship will be more pronounced for younger middle managers. The results obtained from a sample of 347 middle managers and 2,132 direct subordinates support this model. The study also shows that middle managers’ transformational leadership relates to business unit performance. This study extends the knowledge on the conjunct relationship of age and job tenure on middle managers’ attitudes and leadership behavior, and integrates social exchange and socio-emotional theoretical perspectives.

“Typical is the case of one productive and well respected middle manager in his late forties. He was sandwiched between obligations at the office and at home, and his work group was demoralized after two rounds of downsizing. The company’s structure had flattened, leaving fewer possibilities than ever for promotion, and he felt stalled. “This isn’t how my life and career were supposed to play out.”

(Morison et al., 2006, p. 1)

Employees can perceive being stalled in a position at work as a salient signal of career stagnation and, thus, as highly demotivating (Taylor et al., 1996). This issue appears to be particularly relevant for middle management positions. Such positions are located “between the operating core and the apex” of an organization (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 98), and they are frequently thought to represent an important stepping stone for a manager’s career progress (e.g., Osterman, 2008). Importantly, however, middle managers’ career perspectives have generally deteriorated over the last decades (Dopson & Neumann, 1998). For example, Western societies have witnessed a dramatic shift in demographics (Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006; Weigl et al., 2014), and increased retirement ages have caused many higher-level managers to stay in their position instead of leaving the company and paving the way for younger individuals (Zacher, Rosing, Henning, et al., 2011). In addition, under the influence of competitive pressures, cost reductions, routinization (DeMarco, 2002), and automatization (Millman & Hartwick, 1987; Stoker, 2006), career opportunities for middle managers have diminished as organizations have become increasingly “flatter” (Goffee & Scase, 1992; Newell & Dopson, 1996). Together, these external and internal developments have dramatically decreased middle managers’ opportunities for upward mobility (Evans, Gunz, & Jalland, 1997; Feldman, 1995; Lapalme, Tremblay, & Simard, 2009), a phenomenon also known as the “career bottleneck” (Morison et al., 2006, p. 2). Hence, middle managers are likely to experience increasing job tenure (i.e., more time spent in their specific organizational position; Ng & Feldman, 2013a; Simsek, 2007),
with their careers often being stalled on a fixed organizational plateau (Ference et al., 1977; Lapalme et al., 2009).

Research has illustrated that, in general, prolonged job tenure relates negatively to employees’ job attitudes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kass, Vodanovich, & Callender, 2001) and job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2013a). Similarly, long job tenure among leaders in upper echelons has been suggested to relate to executives’ negative job attitudes and consequently even firm performance (Hambrick, 2007). With regard to managers’ leadership behavior, Shamir (2011, p. 309) suggests that increasing job tenure and the associated attitudinal changes “are likely to be reflected in their leadership behavioral style.” Yet, to the authors’ knowledge, there is still an empirical void regarding the role of middle managers’ job tenure in their specific attitudes, leadership behaviors, and performance outcomes. This is a critical omission because middle managers are crucial for the performance of organizations (Mair, 2005; Yang et al., 2010). For example, middle managers’ key tasks include translating abstract strategies into concrete plans (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990), garnering support for change initiatives (Huy, 2002; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), and motivating employees to work towards common goals (Ren & Guo, 2011; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Therefore, it is pivotal to better understand if and how middle managers’ job tenure relates to their leadership behaviors and outcomes.

The present study addresses this issue. It builds on social exchange theory (SET) in particular to suggest that middle managers’ job tenure will negatively relate to their job satisfaction (Bierstedt & Blau, 1965; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). According to SET, employees perceive their relationship with the organization as one of exchanges. These exchanges and related expectations form part of a “psychological contract” (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 246) that can entail tangible (e.g., financial) as well as socio-emotional aspects, such as recognition and career development (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Parks, 1993). Imbalanced exchanges and violated expectations within this relationship can create negative job attitudes (Taylor et al., 1996). It is argued here that extended job tenure may represent
such a violated expectation because middle managers generally expect career progress (Newell & Dopson, 1996). Since job satisfaction is defined as a job attitude that resembles “a positive (or negative) evaluative judgment one makes about one’s job or job situation” (Weiss, 2002, p. 6), it is further postulated that middle managers’ job tenure will impair their overall feelings and assessments with regard to their job, thereby diminishing their job satisfaction (cf. Taylor et al., 1996).

Moreover, SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) helps to explain the relationship between middle managers’ job satisfaction and their leadership behavior, as this line of research has shown that individuals can use their behavior to rebalance perceived exchanges with organizations (Lee & Taylor, 2014). Specifically, when middle managers perceive imbalanced exchanges or psychological contract breach (Jin et al., 2016), they are expected to be less likely to exhibit active leadership behaviors that can benefit the organization. In particular, this study focuses on leadership behavior that aims to inspire followers by acting as a charismatic role model and communicating a compelling vision, addresses followers’ individual needs, and intellectually stimulates followers; this is also known as transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). This form of leadership is known to require considerable enthusiasm, proactivity, and engagement from leaders (Byrne et al., 2014; Jin et al., 2016; Walter & Bruch, 2009). It is therefore proposed here that with prolonged job tenure and the associated decrease in job satisfaction, middle managers are more likely to withhold any work effort that is not immediately required, and thus to exhibit less transformational leadership behavior.

However, it is important to note that previous research has shown that individuals react differently to psychological contract breach, with individuals’ age acting as an important moderator (Bal et al., 2013). Therefore, this study proposes that psychological contract violations (as indicated by prolonged job tenure) will differentially affect older and younger middle managers’ job attitudes and behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST) holds that individuals’ goals and priorities shift with age, such that younger individuals prioritize future-oriented, instrumental
outcomes, while older individuals emphasize present-oriented, hedonistic outcomes (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Lockenhoff & Carstensen, 2004; Ng & Feldman, 2010). This reasoning implies that younger and older managers may differentially perceive and evaluate specific job characteristics. Specifically, the negative role of job tenure for job satisfaction is expected to be more pronounced for younger rather than older middle managers, as younger managers may be more concerned about their future career development (Chao, 1990). In summary, then, a conditional indirect relationship is proposed between middle managers’ job tenure and transformational leadership through job satisfaction, and middle managers’ age is posited to critically shape this linkage (see Figure 1).

This model is examined using multisource data from 347 middle managers and 2,198 of their direct reports. Moreover, to corroborate the relevance of middle managers’ transformational leadership (Yang et al., 2010), the relationship of this behavior with performance outcomes is also explored. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the leadership literature in three ways. First, it strives to integrate a social exchange perspective with insights from SST to suggest that middle managers’ job tenure and age interactively relate with their job satisfaction and leadership behaviors. By combining these theoretical lenses, this study enriches SET by showing that exchange appraisals are dependent on individuals’ age. Second, by relating middle managers’ job satisfaction to transformational leadership, the study further clarifies individual antecedents of such leadership behavior. It thereby contributes to a recent line of research that explores this relationship (Jin et al., 2016). Third, the work addresses calls to further explore the relationship between age and leadership (e.g., Walter & Scheibe, 2013). Although a considerable amount of research has examined the role of leaders’ age, recent reviews of this literature have argued that the existing results are ambiguous and inconsistent (Walter & Scheibe, 2013; Zacher, Clark, Anderson, & Oluremi, & Ayoko, 2015). The present study suggests that middle managers’ age and job tenure may be interrelated in complex ways, conjointly shaping their job attitudes and associated behaviors.
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Middle Managers’ Job Tenure and Job Satisfaction**

Although SET was initially developed to describe interactions between individuals (Bierstedt & Blau, 1965; Shore, Lynch, Tetrick, & Barksdale, 2006), management scholars have extended this theoretical perspective to exchanges between employees and the organization as a whole (Bal et al., 2013; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). Besides economic exchanges (e.g., wages or merit pay for working time), research has also examined forms of relational exchange. For example, employees can exchange trust and extra effort for job security and a healthy work-life balance (Conway & Briner, 2005; Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). Grounded in SET, the term “psychological contract” is oftentimes used to characterize the exchange relationship between an employee and his or her employing organization (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1990; Schaupp, 2012). Psychological contracts are defined as “individual beliefs… regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization” (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9).

Importantly, psychological contracts are subjective and involve an individual’s perceptions about mutual obligations (Bal et al., 2013; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).
If individuals perceive that their exchange relation with the organization is improperly balanced, they experience psychological contract breach, defined as “the cognition that one’s organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one’s psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one’s contributions” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Research suggests that employees’ job-related attitudes and associated behaviors are directly influenced by such perceptions of under-fulfillment of obligations (Ng & Feldman, 2009). In particular, imbalanced exchanges with the organization have been related to employees’ lowered job satisfaction (Antonaki & Trivellas, 2014; Bal et al., 2013; Dupré & Day, 2007; Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015).

Developmental opportunities within the organization, such as career progress and upward mobility, are typically considered to be an important part of the social exchange relationship (and thus the psychological contract) between employees and their organization (Bal et al., 2013; Rousseau, 1990; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefooghe, 2005). Research suggests that prolonged job tenure can lead to disillusion and disappointment, because it signals an imbalanced exchange relationship between the employee and his or her organization (Bal et al., 2013; Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 1996; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). Similarly, empirical studies have linked job tenure to decreased organizational commitment and increasing turnover intentions (Taylor et al., 1996). Thus, both theoretical arguments and empirical results suggest that middle managers’ prolonged job tenure could conflict with their expected developmental opportunities or career ambitions. As these expectations are part of the psychological contract with the organization, increasing job tenure is likely to be perceived as a breach of this contract, resulting in middle managers’ dissatisfaction.

It is therefore expected that long tenure in their job will relate to lower job satisfaction among middle managers. Accordingly, the following is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Middle managers’ job tenure is negatively related to their job satisfaction.
Middle Managers’ Transformational Leadership as Exchange Currency

According to SET, being satisfied with a job may initiate the desire to reciprocate towards the organization by contributing more than is expected (e.g. Guest, 2004; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). In a similar vein, employees with low job satisfaction might engage in behaviors that can be used to retaliate towards the organization (i.e., negative reciprocity), such as withholding work effort or even exhibiting counterproductive work behavior. Thus, like a “tit-for-tat” strategy, an employee’s assessment of the psychological contract with the organization may motivate him or her to reciprocate with specific (positive or negative) behavior to (re-)balance the exchange equation (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood, & Bolino, 2002). Research has indeed shown that job satisfaction is linked to a wide array of work behaviors and performance outcomes, including the exhibition of more discretionary effort at work (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and lowered absence and turnover (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006; Locke, 1970; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Given that an important part of middle managers’ role is to lead others (Osterman, 2008; Yang et al., 2010), their job satisfaction is expected to shape their leadership behavior in general, and their transformational leadership behavior in particular. It is evident that transformational leadership is a highly beneficial leadership style with many positive effects for teams, business units, and organizations (e.g. Bass et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Koene, Vogelaar, & Soeters, 2002; Yang et al., 2010); hence, it equips middle managers with an extremely effective behavioral mean to reciprocate towards the organization when satisfied. Indeed, Jin et al. (2015) suggest that leaders with positive job attitudes reciprocate through their transformational leadership. This closely aligns with scholars’ suggestion that leaders who feel their needs are being met are more likely to demonstrate more transformational leadership (Guay, 2013). In particular, middle managers’ job satisfaction may, for example, motivate them to develop and communicate a captivating vision and to act as role models who inspire their followers in an effort to contribute to the organization’s success (Bass, 1999; Jin et
al., 2016; Shamir, 2011). Similarly, satisfied middle managers may be more accepting of changes and initiatives stemming from the top of the organization, translating them into concrete plans and behaviors for their own teams (Rubin et al., 2005). In contrast, when middle managers are dissatisfied with their jobs, they should be less motivated to exhibit these transformational leadership behaviors that drive employees to go “the extra mile” for the benefit of the organization as a whole (Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 2003).

In sum, taking a social exchange perspective, middle managers’ job satisfaction is expected to influence their motivation to reciprocate towards the organization by showing transformational leadership behaviors. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**Hypothesis 2:** Middle managers’ job satisfaction is positively related to their transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that prolonged job tenure is negatively related to middle managers’ job satisfaction. Moreover, Hypothesis 2 proposes that middle managers’ job satisfaction and transformational leadership are positively associated. Following Shamir (2011), it is therefore argued here that extended job tenure will indirectly shape a middle manager’s behavior by influencing his or her job attitudes. More specifically, the following mediation model is proposed:

**Hypothesis 3:** Middle managers’ job tenure and transformational leadership behavior are negatively and indirectly related through their decreased job satisfaction.
The Moderating Role of Middle Managers’ Age

The above reasoning notwithstanding, it seems plausible that being stalled in their position might be more impactful for some middle managers than for others. Namely, perceptions of psychological contract violations in the workplace have been found to differ with workers’ age (Bal et al., 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2009, 2010). This study draws from socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST) to explain the role of age as a moderator of the relationship between middle managers’ job tenure and job satisfaction. This theory posits that age impacts individuals’ expectations for the future as well as their ability to deal with emotional experiences. According to SST, with age comes the increasing realization of one’s finiteness, which underlies a stronger focus on, for example, relationships and enjoyment rather than utilitarian goals (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999; Kunzmann, Kappes, & Wrosch, 2014). In particular, younger individuals are generally more oriented towards the future, whereas older individuals have been argued to put greater value on more proximal goals (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003; Reed & Carstensen, 2012). Moreover, SST holds that people become more strongly focused on maintaining positivity and avoiding negative feelings as they age (Carstensen et al., 2003; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005), thereby displaying emotional selectivity. Accordingly, SST has frequently been used to explain differences in workplace motivation and behavior between younger and older employees (e.g., Bal et al., 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Zacher, 2012). For example, Ng and Feldman (2009) use SST to propose that age and work experience shape how individuals differ in evaluating the severity of contract breaches, which could subsequently relate to job behaviors such as exit and voice (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

Building on this theoretical framework, it is anticipated that younger middle managers’ job satisfaction is particularly vulnerable to sustained job tenure. SST suggests that younger middle managers are more strongly focused on future achievements, such as career advancement. Consequently, these managers should be highly sensitive to negative career mobility signals, such as prolonged job tenure (Taylor et al., 1996). Following SET again, with increasing job tenure violating younger middle managers’ salient longer-
term career goals, it seems logical that they should interpret this tenure as a more severe psychological contract breach (Ng & Feldman, 2009), with negative consequences for their job attitudes in general, and their job satisfaction in particular.

In contrast, with older middle managers generally focusing more strongly on proximal and relationship-oriented goals than on long-term and instrumental goals (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000; Ng & Feldman, 2009, 2010, 2013b), it is argued here that they will be less focused on career advancement. As such, job tenure’s negative consequences may be mitigated within this group of managers. Empirical evidence corroborates this reasoning, illustrating that age ameliorates the role of psychological contract violations for individuals’ job attitudes (Bal et al., 2013).

All in all, this study integrates arguments from SST and SET (Bal et al., 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2009; Zacher, Clark, et al., 2015) to suggest that middle managers’ age will shape how strongly they experience prolonged job tenure as a violation of their psychological contract with the organization, and thus as an imbalanced exchange, relating to lower job satisfaction. In particular, younger middle managers with long job tenure are expected to be less satisfied with their jobs than older managers with long job tenure.

**Hypothesis 4:** Age moderates the relationship between middle managers’ job tenure and job satisfaction, such that this negative relationship is more pronounced among younger rather than older middle managers.

In sum, Hypotheses 1-3 posit that middle managers’ job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between job tenure and transformational leadership. Moreover, Hypothesis 4 suggests that middle managers’ age will moderate the link between job tenure and satisfaction. Taken together, this reasoning suggests a pattern of mediated moderation, such that the indirect, negative relationship between job tenure and transformational leadership will depend on middle managers’ age. Given that the role of job tenure for job satisfaction is proposed to be more pronounced among younger rather than older leaders, the following is posited:
Hypothesis 5: Age will moderate the indirect, negative relationship between middle managers’ job tenure and transformational leadership through job satisfaction. This indirect relationship will be more pronounced among younger rather than older middle managers.

Middle Managers’ Transformational Leadership and Performance Outcomes

The link between transformational leadership and numerous performance indicators is well established (Bass et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). For example, transformational leadership has been related to employee satisfaction (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013; Podsakoff et al., 1996; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011), lower employee turnover (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2013; T.-Y. Park & Shaw, 2013), a stronger focus on customers’ needs and satisfaction (Chuang, Judge, & Liaw, 2012; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005), and business unit performance (Koene et al., 2002). Given that this study’s dataset comprised a number of important performance outcomes, the aim is to constructively replicate the role of transformational leadership for these outcomes.

Hypothesis 6: Transformational leadership will be positively related to a) employee satisfaction, b) customer satisfaction, and c) sales target achievement, and will be negatively related to d) employee turnover.

METHOD

Participants

This study used a survey design to address the above hypotheses. Targeted participants were middle managers (i.e., store managers) working for a major food retailing company in Western Europe. Each middle manager was responsible for operating his or her independent store, with core responsibilities including assortment decisions, local promotions and sponsorships, and human resource tasks such as recruitment, training,
and retention. Store managers at the host company are mostly employed full-time, and they are in frequent (typically daily) face-to-face contact with their direct reports. These direct reports are generally first-line supervisors who lead different store departments.

**Procedure**

Data for this study were gathered at the end of 2013. Targeted middle managers (N = 578) were informed about the study in multiple ways, including direct emails from their higher-level managers and information on the host company’s intranet. The middle managers then received an additional email containing further information and survey instructions as well as a link to an electronic online survey. In this survey, the managers rated their job satisfaction and indicated their job tenure and age. Next, a randomly selected group of first-line supervisors (i.e., middle managers’ direct reports) within each store received another email containing general information, survey instructions, and a link to a second survey. In this survey, first-line supervisors rated their middle managers’ transformational leadership behavior.

Following prior research (e.g. Bommer, Rubin, & Baldwin, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005), individual middle managers had to meet specific criteria for inclusion in the study. Namely, a middle manager was included in the sample if (a) he or she had completed the store manager survey, (b) at least two direct reports had rated his or her transformational leadership, and (c) he or she had been in his or her current position for 6 months or longer. Supplementary analyses were conducted, relaxing some of the above criteria to examine the findings’ robustness. Substantive study results remained unchanged when including all middle managers irrespective of how long they had held their current position, and when including only those who had been in their current position for 3 months or longer.

Overall, 347 middle managers met these criteria and were included in the present study (a 60% usable response rate). A majority of these middle managers were male (86.2%). On average, managers had been employed for 18.68 (SD = 11.67) years at the company, were 43.86 (SD = 9.14) years old, and had worked for 3.16 (SD = 3.19) years in their current position. Moreover, of the 4,656 direct reports invited to rate
their middle manager’s transformational leadership, 2,198 provided usable, matched
responses (47%). On average, each middle manager was rated by 6.32 direct reports, of
which a majority were female (61%). These direct reports were on average 31.05 ($SD = 5.40$) years old, and had worked for 11.55 ($SD = 4.29$) years at the organization and 2.35 ($SD = 1.24$) years with their current middle manager.

Measures

All items were translated from English to Dutch following a double-blind back-
translation method.

**Job tenure.** Middle managers were asked to report how long they had worked
in their current position in their current store, rounded to half years.

**Age.** Middle managers self-reported their chronological age in years, rounded
to half years.

**Middle managers’ job satisfaction.** Brayfield and Rothe’s (1951) five-item
measure was used to capture job satisfaction (see also Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger,
1998). Cronbach’s alpha was .81. Sample items are, “I feel fairly well satisfied with
my present job” and “I consider my job rather unpleasant” (recoded). Middle managers
rated these items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Middle managers’ transformational leadership.** Direct reports (i.e., first-line
supervisors) assessed their middle manager’s transformational leadership behavior
using Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Bommer’s (1996) 23-item measure. Following prior
research (e.g., Bommer et al., 2004; Rubin et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2010), all items were
collapsed into an overall transformational leadership score. Answers could be given
on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample
items are, “Inspires others with plans for the future” and “Has a clear understanding of
where we are going.” Again following previous research (e.g., Bommer et al., 2004;
Peterson, Walumbwa, Byron, & Myrowitz, 2008), responses of direct reports referring
to the same middle managers were averaged based on acceptable aggregation statistics
$(\text{median } r_{wg(j)} = .96$ using a rectangular reference distribution; $\text{ICC1} = .24$, $p < .01$;
ICC2 = .57). Cronbach’s alpha was .95.

**Performance outcomes.** The same measure was used to assess direct reports’ job satisfaction as the one used for middle managers’ job satisfaction (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). Cronbach’s alpha was .79. Employee turnover was measured using data provided by the organization’s financial department, reflecting the average percentage of employees leaving within each store (as a percentage of the total number of employees) in the 12 weeks after first distributing the survey. Further, data on customer satisfaction were retrieved from the organization’s quarterly online customer survey. Customers included in a customer panel rated each store on a 10-point scale from 1 (extremely poor) to 10 (outstanding). Responses were collected as part of the host company’s regular customer panel survey during one month with a time lag of three months after the launch of the present survey. In total, 10,477 customers participated in this wave of data gathering. Finally, the host company’s financial department provided data on the financial store performance. In particular, a sales goal achievement score was obtained for each store, indicating the difference between actual and targeted sales volume over a period of 4 weeks (cf. Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). These financial performance indicators were retrieved with a time lag of 4 periods (16 weeks) after the launch of the present survey.

**Control variables.** To decrease the likelihood of alternative explanations and spurious relationships, the study controlled for middle managers’ gender and organizational tenure as well as store size. Since prior research has reported small yet significant differences in transformational leadership between males and females, gender was added as covariate (Eagly et al., 2003). Moreover, since the aim was to isolate the effects of middle managers’ job tenure, organizational tenure was controlled for.  

Lastly, the number of employees per store was used as proxy to control for store size and complexity (Koene et al., 2002).

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1 Following suggestions (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991), the study tested whether there were effects of career stages based on job tenure. According to this stream of research, individuals are nested into a specific phase or stage in their career based on their tenure. Several categories were tested, but no such relationships between different tenure categories were present. Hence, the study moved forward using a linear approach to job tenure.
Data Analyses

OLS regression analysis at the middle managers’ level (i.e., the store level) was used to test the proposed hypotheses. Moreover, to further examine the (conditional) indirect relationships suggested in Hypotheses 3 and 5, Hayes’s (2012) bootstrap procedure was utilized (see also Preacher et al., 2007). This method uses a bootstrap re-sampling strategy to obtain parameter estimates of a (conditional) indirect relationship as well as 95% confidence intervals around the respective association. It is considered to be superior to more traditional approaches to (moderated) mediation analysis because it does not rely on normality assumptions (Preacher et al., 2007). All variables were standardized prior to the analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all study variables. As expected, middle managers’ job tenure correlated negatively with their job satisfaction ($r = -.13, p < .01$), whereas the latter was positively correlated with their transformational leadership ($r = .14, p < .01$). Table 4.1 further shows correlations of transformational leadership with employee satisfaction, ($r = .39, p < .01$), employee turnover, ($r = -.11, p < .01$), customer satisfaction ($r = .15, p < .01$), and sales target achievement ($r = .14, p < .01$). Finally, middle managers’ age was negatively related to transformational leadership ($r = -.21, p < .01$).

Considering possible covariates, organizational tenure was not significantly related to transformational leadership, and was therefore excluded from further analyses in Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 to avoid biased parameter estimates (cf. Becker, 2005). Both number of employees ($r = .18, p < .01$) and gender ($r = .14, p < .01$) were significantly correlated with transformational leadership, with this leadership style being somewhat more pronounced in larger stores and among female managers. Hence, store size and gender were retained as control variables in testing the hypotheses.
### TABLE 4.1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

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<th>Variables</th>
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<td>1. Gender</td>
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<td>2. Number of Employees</td>
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<td>3. Organizational Tenure</td>
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<td>11.67</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
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<td>4. Job Tenure</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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<td>5. Age</td>
<td>3.89</td>
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<td>6. Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.30</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>7. Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>3.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Employee Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Employee Turnover</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Predicted Sales</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.94**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Actual Sales (euro)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>.94**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.99**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Sales Goal Achievement</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.68*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 347. Due to sensitivity for the organization, means and standard deviations for performance criteria are not disclosed and are marked “ND”. Please contact the author for more information.*

* p < .05, ** p < .01.
### TABLE 4.2

**Results of Hierarchical Regression for Middle Manager Job Satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>-.02 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
<td>-.01 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.00 (.05)</td>
<td>.02 (.06)</td>
<td>.02 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure</td>
<td>-.16 (.06)**</td>
<td>-.29 (.08)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.09 (.06)</td>
<td>.13 (.06)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure x Age</td>
<td>.14 (.06)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| R² (Adjusted R²)       | .00 (-.01) | .03 (.01)  | .04 (.03)  |
| ΔR²                    | .00        | .02*       | .02*       |

*Note: N = 347. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown; standard errors are noted within parentheses.  
* p < .05, ** p < .01.*
Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 proposed that middle managers’ job tenure would be negatively related to their job satisfaction. Indeed, as shown in Table 4.2, a significant negative relationship was found between the two (β = -.16, p < .01), even after controlling for gender and number of employees. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Moreover, in line with Hypothesis 2, Table 4.3 shows that job satisfaction was positively related to transformational leadership (β = .15, p < .01), even after considering controls. Bootstrap results corroborated the indirect relationship indicated by this pattern of linkages, with middle managers’ job satisfaction mediating the association between job tenure and transformational leadership behavior (indirect relationship = -.02). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the bootstrap 95% confidence interval around this indirect relationship did not contain zero (CI = -.061, -.002).

Hypothesis 4 suggested that age would moderate the relationship between middle managers’ job tenure and job satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, the interaction term of job tenure and age was entered in the regression equation predicting middle managers’ job satisfaction, in addition to control variables and main effects. This interaction term was significant (β = .14, p < .05; see Table 4.2). As shown in Figure 4.2 (cf. Hayes, 2008), the negative relationship between job tenure and job satisfaction was more pronounced under conditions of lower age (-1 SD, standardized bootstrapped effect = -.43; CI = -.685, -.178) than of higher age (+1 SD, standardized bootstrapped effect = -.158; CI= -.267, -.049). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that age would moderate the indirect relationship between job tenure and transformational leadership through middle managers’ job satisfaction.

As shown in Table 4.4, the findings indicated a significant conditional indirect relationship between job tenure and middle managers’ transformational leadership through job satisfaction at lower values of age (i.e., 1 SD below the mean; conditional indirect effect = -.060), as illustrated by a bootstrap 95% confidence interval that did
not include zero (CI = -.142, -.011). In contrast, for older middle managers, the effect was less pronounced (i.e., 1 SD above the mean of age, conditional indirect effect = -.022; CI= -.063, -.002). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

**TABLE 4.3**

Results of Hierarchical Regression for Transformational Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>.21 (.05)**</td>
<td>.24 (.05)**</td>
<td>.24 (.05)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.16 (.05)**</td>
<td>.11 (.05)*</td>
<td>.11 (.05)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure</td>
<td>-.11 (.08)</td>
<td>-.06 (.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.19 (.06)**</td>
<td>-.21 (.06)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure x Age</td>
<td>.03 (.04)</td>
<td>.06 (.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15 (.05)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² (Adjusted R²)         | .06 (.06)    | .11 (.10)    | .13 (.11)    |

ΔR²                     | .06**        | .05**        | .02**        |

Note: N = 347. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown; standard errors are noted within parentheses.
* p < .05, **p < .01.
TABLE 4.4

Conditional Indirect Relationship of Job Tenure with Transformational Leadership Through Job Satisfaction by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Indirect Relationship</th>
<th>Boot LLCI</th>
<th>Boot ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-1SD</td>
<td>-.060 (.032)</td>
<td>-.142</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>-.041 (.021)</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>-.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1SD</td>
<td>-.022 (.014)</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>-.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 347. Standardized coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. SE = standard error. LL = lower limit. CI = 95% confidence interval. UL = upper limit.

FIGURE 4.2

Middle Manager Job Satisfaction Predicted by Job Tenure, Moderated by Age
### TABLE 4.5

Results of Hierarchical Regression for Performance Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employee Satisfaction</th>
<th>Employee Turnover</th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
<th>Sales Target Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
<td>-.09 (.05)</td>
<td>-.08 (.06)</td>
<td>-.07 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>.08 (.06)</td>
<td>-.02 (.05)</td>
<td>.00 (.06)</td>
<td>.03 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Tenure</td>
<td>.07 (.07)</td>
<td>.03 (.06)</td>
<td>.00 (.07)</td>
<td>.01 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure</td>
<td>-.08 (.06)</td>
<td>-.08 (.05)</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04 (.07)</td>
<td>.15 (.07)**</td>
<td>-.09 (.07)</td>
<td>-.12 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>.04 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
<td>-.01 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td></td>
<td>.43 (.05)**</td>
<td>-.13 (.06)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² (Adjusted R²)      | .03 (.01)                    | .19 (.17)               | .02 (.00)               | .03 (.01)               | .03 (.01)              | .06 (.05)              | .34 (.33)              | .34 (.33)              |

ΔR²                  | .03                          | .16**                   | .02                     | .02*                    | -.01 (.06)             | -.03 (.06)             | .03 (.05)              | .03 (.05)              |

Note: N = 347. Unstandardized parameter estimates are reported, standard errors in brackets.  
* p < .05, ** p < .01.
Finally, Table 4.5 shows the results of testing Hypotheses 6a-d. As can be seen, the hypothesis on the positive relationship between middle managers’ transformational leadership and direct reports’ job satisfaction (Hypothesis 6a, $\beta = .39, p < .01$), and the hypothesis on employee turnover (Hypothesis 6d, $\beta = -.12, p < .05$) were both confirmed, thereby corroborating previous empirical studies on these relationships (e.g. Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013). Moreover, as shown in Table 4.5, transformational leadership was positively related to customer satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 6b ($\beta = .15, p < .01$). Lastly, as can be seen in Table 4.6, the hypothesis on the positive relationship between transformational leadership and sales target achievement was not supported (Hypothesis 6c, $\beta = .02, p = ns$).

**DISCUSSION**

This study illustrated that prolonged job tenure can have detrimental consequences for middle managers’ transformational leadership behavior by diminishing their job satisfaction. Moreover, this relationship was found to be age-dependent. The negative, indirect relationship between job tenure and transformational leadership through decreased job satisfaction was more pronounced among younger rather than older middle managers. Finally, the study showed that transformational leadership is related to a number of important outcome variables, namely employee satisfaction, employee turnover, and customer satisfaction.

**Theoretical Implications**

These findings make a number of important contributions. In particular, this study is among the first to examine the important role of job tenure for middle managers’ job satisfaction and subsequent leadership behaviors, thereby addressing scholars’ calls for empirical research on this issue (e.g., Shamir, 2011). Previous theorizing on the role of job tenure for leadership has largely focused on top managers’ tenure (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991; Hambrick 2007) and generally proposed specific life-cycle or career-stage mechanisms to explain tenure’s effects (e.g., Bown-Wilson, 2008; Giri &
Santra, 2010; Morrow & McElroy, 1987). The present study, in contrast, focused on job tenure among middle managers as a critical yet frequently neglected group within organizations (Osterman, 2008). Using SET, the role of these managers’ job tenure (rather than career stage) was explored as an important aspect of exchanges between organizational members, in this case middle managers and the organization (cf. Taylor et al., 1996). The findings illustrate that prolonged job tenure is of crucial importance for middle managers’ transformational leadership behavior, thereby extending earlier findings on top management and providing new theoretical perspectives to examine tenure-leadership linkages.

Furthermore, job satisfaction was identified as a relevant job attitude that acts as a strong antecedent of transformational leadership. The present study thereby contributes not only to the relatively limited literature on the antecedents of such leadership (Bommer et al., 2004; Cavazotte, Moreno, & Hickmann, 2012), but also to the even smaller body of research on specific job attitudes as predictors of this leadership behavior (Bommer et al., 2004; Jin et al., 2016). Extending previous work that has focused on personality traits (Judge & Bono, 2000), affective factors (Walter & Bruch, 2009), or contextual features (Byrne et al., 2014; Menges, Walter, Vogel, & Bruch, 2011), the present study illustrates that transformational leadership also rests on an attitudinal basis. As such, it contributes to a better understanding of the development of this important type of leadership (Eagly et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Finally, by combining SET (Bal et al., 2008; Bierstedt & Blau, 1965) with a socio-emotional selectivity perspective (Carstensen et al., 2003), the study demonstrates that the consequences of leaders’ job tenure are interlinked with their age. Previous research has similarly associated employees’ job satisfaction with their tenure and age (e.g. Bedeian et al., 1992; Riza et al., 2016), but the present study is among the first to highlight the conjoint consequences of these demographic factors for managers, illustrating that a full understanding of these factors requires consideration of their interactive roles.
In this way, this study also addresses recent calls for a closer examination of leaders’ age (Zacher, Clark, et al., 2015; Zacher, Rosing, & Frese, 2011). For example, based on their review of the age-leadership literature, Walter and Scheibe (2013) concluded that, “studies have produced diverse and sometimes contradictory findings” (p. 897). The present results indicate a potential explanation for this state of the literature, suggesting that the implications of middle managers’ age for their attitudes and leadership behaviors are contingent on their tenure in their current position.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite several methodological strengths (e.g. independent data sources, a large field sample), this study has a number of limitations. First, its cross-sectional study design does not warrant causal claims. Moreover, the data were collected within a single organization in a single country, the Netherlands. In particular, the data indicated that the middle managers in the sample had an average tenure around three years. Although alternative studies in a similar context have found comparable patterns of tenure (i.e. 3.54 years, Koene, Vogelaar, & Soeters, 2002), constructive replication using longitudinal study designs and different cultural and organizational contexts appears important to enable conclusions about causality and generalizability.

Furthermore, this study did not directly examine some of the theoretical mechanisms that it postulated. Although the results illustrated the mediating role of middle managers’ job satisfaction in the linkage between job tenure and transformational leadership, they did not capture the specific social exchange and socio-emotional selectivity processes purported to underlie these associations. Therefore, future research might enable a finer-grained depiction of the current model by considering these micro-mediating mechanisms. In particular, Ng and Feldman (2009) suggest an interesting area to explore: the specific roles of psychological contract malleability (tolerance of contract violation) and replicability (the belief that one’s current contract can be obtained elsewhere). Considering the present study’s findings on the interplay of job tenure and age, this perspective might now further knowledge by addressing the
specific appreciations of career-related psychological contract violations, and as such their underlying processes.

Another focus area of future research related to the current model could be the investigation of other job-related attitudes. As the present study explored job satisfaction—a general and evaluative job attitude—the relationship between tenure, more specific attitudes relating to career progress or career commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1993; Lapalme et al., 2009; Morrow & McElroy, 1987), and leadership might be an interesting direction for future research. In particular, career-related attitudinal antecedents of leadership behavior would be worth exploring (cf. Shamir, 2011).

In addition, the relationship between age and leadership could be further examined. Along with the present study’s insight, current research on age and leadership (Walter & Scheibe, 2013; Zacher, Ambiel, et al., 2015; Zacher, Clark, et al., 2015), tenure and performance (Ng & Feldman, 2013a), and age and performance (Ng & Feldman, 2013a, 2013b) shows that the relationships between these constructs are complex but, more importantly, that they should be studied in conjunction. In particular, the lack of a coherent, overarching theoretical framework to interpret the effects of time (i.e. of both age and tenure) on leadership and leaders’ performance offers a great opportunity for further research.

**Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, the gained insights into the role of middle managers’ job tenure offer actionable recommendations for organizations’ career management efforts (Chao, 1990; Tremblay & Roger, 2004). With increasing job tenure potentially diminishing middle managers’ job satisfaction and, by consequence, their transformational leadership behavior, it seems important to take measures that prevent managers from becoming stalled in their position. To the extent that relatively flat hierarchies limit middle managers’ upward mobility, job rotation programs and/or lateral career paths (Ference et al., 1977; Omar, Anuar, & Salleh, 2014; Rotondo & Perrewé, 2000) may provide viable alternatives in this regard.
At the same time, the findings call for a targeted implementation of such measures. Organizations are well advised to consider middle managers’ age, in particular, when utilizing these instruments (Bown-Wilson, 2008; Stout et al., 1988). Compared to their younger counterparts, for older managers increasing job tenure was found to be largely unrelated to their job satisfaction and subsequent behavior. Hence, complex career management programs may not be necessary or beneficial for this group. It is important to note, however, that the present author does not advocate a clear-cut differentiation in human resource practices on the basis of individuals’ age. Naturally, even within specific age groups, individual managers are likely to differ substantially in their preferences and needs. Consequently, it seems crucial for organizations to account for such individual differences and to tailor their career management efforts, for example by offering individualized career paths that best meet a manager’s specific requirements and utilize his or her leadership potential (Evans & Gilbert, 1984; Guest, 2004; Lee, Bachrach, & Rousseau, 2015; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015). Thus, a manager’s age may offer an initial indication when considering individualized steps and discussing options in this regard, but many other characteristics are worth considering as well.

Lastly, by replicating earlier findings on the relationship between transformational leadership and performance outcomes (e.g., Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Koene, Vogelaar, & Soeters, 2002; Peterson, Walumbwa, Byron, & Myrowitz, 2008; Zhang, Cao, & Tjosvold, 2011) using a large sample with multiscource outcome variables (i.e., financial performance and employee and customer satisfaction), this study’s results reiterate the practical relevance of transformational leadership, illustrating why it is important for organizations to invest in the development of this leadership behavior by implementing appropriate career policies for middle managers.

In sum, it appears that some fundamental career (job tenure) and individual (age) characteristics may critically shape middle managers’ transformational leadership. It is believed that these findings can guide organizational career
management policies designed to promote managers’ respective behavior. At same time, these results open up new avenues for future research on this important type of leadership.