

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion and discussion



## Conclusion

The aim of the studies presented in this dissertation was to investigate the relations between leader communication styles and leader outcomes. Even though the importance of communication for leadership is widely acknowledged, so far research on leader interpersonal communication styles has been fragmented. This may have been due to the fact that for long, an integrated structure of communication styles was lacking (Daly & Bippus, 1998). Recently, using a lexical research approach, such structure was identified (De Vries, Bakker-Pieper et al., 2009). Subsequently a measure was developed, the Communication Styles Inventory (CSI, De Vries et al., in press). The instrument may be used to measure any individual's communication styles in any context. In this dissertation it was used to investigate the relations between leader communication styles and leader criteria.

After the introduction (Chapter 1), in which the theoretical background to the research model was presented, four chapters described the results of several empirical studies. In Chapter 2, the incremental predictive validity of communication styles over personality traits for leader outcomes was tested. In Chapter 3, the relations of leader self-ratings of communication styles, subordinate-ratings, and the level of self-subordinate agreement on leader communication styles with leader criteria were examined. Subsequently, in Chapter 4 two potential mediators of the relations between leader communication styles and criteria were examined and two pathways to leader criteria were distinguished. In the last empirical chapter (Chapter 5), a theoretical framework was proposed that may explain the underlying reason why leader communication styles are related to leader criteria. A preliminary study was reported that may provide a starting point for further research on the suggested mechanisms.

In this chapter, the key findings of the empirical studies will be presented, the theoretical and practical implications of these findings will be discussed, potential weaknesses of the empirical studies will be indicated, and outlines for further research will be suggested.

### Summary of main findings

In the next paragraphs, we will present the methodology and main findings of the empirical studies that were conducted to answer the four research questions that were raised in the introduction.

#### **The incremental predictive validity of communication styles over personality traits for leader outcomes**

Research question 1 aimed to identify the incremental predictive validity of leader communication styles over leader personality for leader criteria. In the leadership literature, the personality traits extraversion and conscientiousness have been found to be

related to leader criteria. In Chapter 2, we argued that communication styles are narrow personality constructs. As communication is central to leadership, we furthermore argued that communication styles are conceptually highly relevant in leadership situations. The communication styles expressiveness and preciseness were the strongest correlates of extraversion and conscientiousness respectively. We therefore predicted that leader expressiveness has incremental predictive validity over leader extraversion and that leader preciseness has incremental predictive validity over leader conscientiousness for leader criteria. We conducted two studies to test these hypotheses.

For both studies, a community sample was obtained. In the first study ( $N = 100$ ) participants completed a questionnaire in which they rated their current leader's personality using the HEXACO-PI-R, his/her communication styles using the CSI, and two leader criteria: leader performance and satisfaction with the leader. In the second study ( $N = 120$ ) the same scales were used as in Study 1, but three leader criteria were added. The participants completed a questionnaire at T1 in which they rated their current leader's communication styles. At T2 (about one week later), they completed a second questionnaire in which they rated their current leader's personality and five leader criteria: leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, intention to leave, LMX quality, and trust in the leader.

The two studies showed comparable results and we reported the results of the combined data. They revealed that expressiveness and preciseness have incremental predictive validity for four of the leader criteria – the exception being intention to leave – over personality traits. We measured subordinates' intention to leave the *organization*, which may be dependent upon many more aspects of someone's job or work environment than only his/her leader's personality or way of communicating. This may explain why we failed to find a relation with individual leader personality traits or communication styles. Overall, in line with previous findings, our results underscore the importance of communication styles for leaders, in particular expressiveness and preciseness.

### **Self-subordinate agreement on leader communication styles and relations with outcomes**

Research question 2 was addressed in Chapter 3. It concerned the relations of leader self-ratings and subordinate-ratings of leader communication styles with outcomes. In the literature, the added value of using both self- and relevant other-ratings on a predictor variable is increasingly acknowledged (e.g., Fleenor et al., 2010; Oh et al., 2011). It may improve predictive validities and it may lead to adjustments of the target's (i.e., the leader's) behavior. By using polynomial regression analyses and inspecting the surface plot of the regression results, both self- and subordinate-ratings can be included in the analysis while at the same time the impact of the difference (size as well as direction) can be assessed. Given the importance of communication for leadership, we hypothesized that for outcomes that were positively related to the predictor, rating agreement at the highest rating level is always associated with the best outcomes.

We performed three studies in three organizations: the Dutch and the Belgian headquarters of a global IT company and a Dutch healthcare provider. The leaders completed the self-version of the CSI on their own communication styles and the subordinates completed the 'other-version' of the CSI to rate their leader's communication styles. Inter-rater agreement and ICC's were adequate for aggregating the data. The two leader criteria were leader performance and satisfaction with the leader; for these variables the same scales were used as in the previous chapter. The results of the three individual datasets proved to be comparable, which is why we reported the findings of the combined data. In total, 233 leaders were assessed by 687 subordinates.

The results demonstrated that both self-ratings and subordinate-ratings contributed to the explained variance in the criteria, but that the level of self-other agreement (or discrepancy) was rarely – and inconsistently - related to the criteria. This implies that the use of both self- and subordinate-ratings on a leader's communication styles may improve predictive validities, however, agreement provides no incremental validity and disagreement provides no clear direction for behavioral adjustment. With these results, our study mainly adds further questions to the literature on self-other agreement.

### **Perceived expertise and liking as potential mediators of the relationship between leader communication styles and criteria**

Chapter 4 focused on the mediating role of two important personal influence bases: perceived expertise and liking. Research question 3 was divided in three sub-questions. The first was aimed at investigating the role of perceived expertise in the relations of leader expressiveness and preciseness with criteria. The second sub-question focused on the role of liking in the relations of leader expressiveness and verbal aggressiveness with criteria. The third sub-question concerned the difference in the relations of perceived expertise with the criteria compared to those of liking, whereby we argued that two pathways may exist from leader communication styles through the proposed mediators to the criteria; a cognitive pathway and an affective one. We referred to the literature, in which two different ways are distinguished for people to "know" things, i.e., perceive reality, make attributions, and evaluate situations or behavior. These two different ways in which information may be processed are rationally or emotionally. Our assumption was that constructs by their nature are more likely related to either cognitions or affect, however, in line with the idea that the information processing modes are interlinked, we did not expect that the use of one mode would completely sideline the other.

We performed three studies. In the first, the role of perceived expertise was examined with a community sample ( $N = 103$ ). In the second study, the role of liking was studied with a sample consisting of employees of various organizations ( $N = 97$ ). In the third, again a community sample was obtained ( $N = 146$ ) to investigate the role of both presumed mediators as well as the relations of each of them with each of the leader

criteria. In all three studies, subordinates rated their direct leader's communication styles using the CSI other-version. We used existing scales for measuring perceived expertise and liking. The leader criteria in this study were leader performance and satisfaction with the leader, measured with the same scales as in the previous chapters.

We found evidence for most of the expected indirect relations, implying that for leaders the three investigated communication styles may function as 'stage-setting' devices for effective use of perceived expertise and liking (Raven, 1992, 1999). The results furthermore revealed that perceived expertise was more strongly related to leader performance than to satisfaction with the leader, whereas for liking the opposite was true. These findings provide some support for the suggestion that two pathways to leader criteria exist: a cognitive (rational, knowledge-based) and an affective (emotional, liking-based) pathway. For preciseness and verbal aggressiveness, direct relations with leader criteria remained, for which a similar distinction in a cognitive route and an affective one may be discerned. A noteworthy finding was that liking was a relatively important predictor of the leader criteria also when all the other study (including the control) variables were included in the analysis.

### **Differential relations between leader communication styles and criteria**

In Chapter 5, a theoretical framework was proposed that may explain the underlying reason why leader communication styles are related to leader outcomes. The starting point was that communication is essential for leadership and that leader communication is particularly relevant for subordinates. We argued that the way a leader communicates may contribute to the fulfillment of two fundamental human needs of subordinates: the need to belong and the need to reduce uncertainty. We assumed that leader expressiveness is particularly related to the need to belong, whereas leader preciseness is related to the need to reduce uncertainty. We furthermore argued that ratings on individual leader criteria may be dependent upon the level of fulfillment of only one of these needs. Based on the literature, four criteria domains may be distinguished and we proposed that the need to belong is more strongly related to the attitude- and behavior-related criteria, whereas the need to reduce uncertainty is more strongly related to effectiveness- and cognition-related criteria. We argued that the two information processing modes that we distinguished earlier may align well with our proposed theoretical framework, as the need to belong may activate affective processing of information, whereas the need to reduce uncertainty may activate rational processing of information.

We conducted a preliminary study to investigate what the differences were in the relations of leader expressiveness with leader criteria and those of leader preciseness with the same criteria (research question 4). We used a scenario design, in which we manipulated leader expressiveness and leader preciseness. We obtained a community sample ( $N = 136$ ) and found most of the expected differences; leader expressiveness was more strongly related to liking, organizational commitment, knowledge sharing, and OCB,

whereas leader preciseness was more strongly related to leader performance and perceived expertise. Initially, we considered trust and satisfaction with the leader to be attitude-related criteria. Therefore we expected stronger relations with leader expressiveness than with leader preciseness for these criteria. However, we found that trust was more strongly related to leader preciseness than to leader expressiveness and satisfaction with the leader was similarly related to each of the two styles. We scrutinized the items of the outcome scales and concluded that the trust scale mostly measured cognitions and that several items in the satisfaction scale may be considered personal performance or future career oriented, thus to some extent representing an effectiveness criterion. Hence, our findings in the study did not necessarily disprove our basic framework and overall they warrant a further direct investigation of the framework.

The variables in the study allowed us to replicate part of the mediation analyses that we had done in Study 3 in Chapter 4. Based on our framework and dual information processing, we expected that leader expressiveness is more strongly related to leader criteria through liking than through perceived expertise, whereas for leader preciseness the opposite holds. We found the expected indirect effects of leader expressiveness and preciseness with leader criteria through perceived expertise and liking. However, in this study other than in Study 3 from the previous chapter, perceived expertise was found to be a relatively important predictor of the leader criteria and not liking. We proposed that perhaps the design of the studies may explain these differences. In the study in Chapter 4, people had to rate real leaders. Personal emotions or feelings related to these leaders are bound to play a role in that assessment. In the study in Chapter 5, people had to rate an imaginary leader who was presented to them in a short written scenario. Conceivably, cognitions play a larger role when assessing a scenario-based leader. Thus, by using a different study design, we may have activated a different processing mode. These results provide some further evidence for the existence of two pathways to leader criteria and they suggest that it is indeed possible to influence which processing mode is more dominant.

## **General discussion**

In the following paragraphs, theoretical implications of our findings and their contribution to previous research will be discussed and suggestions for further research will be provided. Potential weaknesses of our empirical studies will be addressed and the practical implications of the studies in this dissertation will be discussed.

### **Theoretical implications and contributions to previous research**

#### ***Communication styles versus broad personality traits in (leadership) research***

The CSI paved the way for studying interpersonal communication styles in a comprehensive manner. It formed the basis for the studies in this dissertation, in which specifically *leader* communication styles are investigated in relation to a variety of leader

criteria. The definition of communication style that was used for developing the CSI and in this dissertation includes personality and interactional aspects of someone's way of communicating in addition to message interpretation aspects (De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, et al., 2009; De Vries et al., in press). Consequently, the communication styles have been operationalized in such a way that the dimensions may be considered narrow personality constructs. Support for this assumption was provided by the mostly strong convergent correlations with the relevant broad personality dimensions that were found in previous studies for self-ratings (De Vries et al., in press) and in the studies described in Chapter 2 for other-ratings. As ample research has been done on the relations of broad personality dimensions with leader criteria (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991, Judge et al., 2002), the question whether the concept of communication styles has added value for leader research remained to be answered.

Our studies build on to existing literature on leader communication by underscoring the relevance of communication styles for predicting leader outcomes (e.g., Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Jablin, 1979; Penley & Hawkins, 1985). Furthermore, our findings that leader expressiveness and preciseness have incremental predictive validity for various leader criteria over and above broad personality dimensions are in line with results from previous studies on the (incremental) predictive validity of narrow personality constructs in various contexts (e.g., Ashton, 1998; De Vries, De Vries, et al., 2009; Paunonen et al., 2003) and for leadership specifically (Bergner et al, 2010; Christiansen & Robie, 2011). Our research furthermore builds on to the existing literature on individual differences in leadership (e.g., Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2011; Hogan, 2005, 2009; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Judge et al., 2002, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007) by identifying leader expressiveness and preciseness as conceptually highly relevant narrow leader predictors.

The combined findings of our studies show that leader communication styles are strongly related to leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, trust in the leader, LMX quality, perceived expertise, and liking. They furthermore show that of the communication styles, leader expressiveness and preciseness are the most consistent and strongest predictors of those criteria, demonstrating incremental predictive validity for leader criteria over broad personality dimensions. Leader verbal aggressiveness was found to also play a role in relations with affect-related criteria. And last, the results of the study described in Chapter 5 provide some evidence that leader expressiveness and preciseness may predict subordinates' knowledge sharing, subordinates' OCB, and the affective organizational commitment of subordinates. By revealing strong relations of communication styles with criteria in a leadership setting, the results of the studies in this dissertation may encourage research on the relations of communication styles with outcomes in other settings or areas in which interpersonal communication is predominant. For instance, research with the CSI on the communication styles of doctors, nurses, teachers, sales people, or consultants, or on the use of communication styles in



situations such as close relations, conflicts, or negotiations may uncover relations that enhance our understanding of underlying processes and relevant outcomes.

### ***Important leader communication styles***

The relation of leader expressiveness with various leader criteria was as expected. Expressiveness pertains to talkativeness, conversational dominance, use of humor, and informality (De Vries et al., in press). Although we have not reported facet level correlations, the expressiveness facets use of humor and informality consistently were moderate to strong predictors of criteria. In previous empirical studies, even though findings on the use of humor by leaders indicate that in some situations or when used inappropriately, leader humor may negatively impact outcomes (Priest & Swain, 2002; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2009), generally humor has been found to be positively related to leader criteria either directly or as a moderating variable (Avolio, Howell, & Sosik, 1999; Hughes & Avey, 2009). Informal communicative behaviors will reduce social distance and encourage interpersonal interaction between leaders and subordinates. Reduced social distance has consistently been positively related to leader criteria as well (Chun, Yammarino, Dionne, Sosik, & Moon, 2009; Cole, Bruch, & Shamir, 2009). The expressiveness facets talkativeness and conversational dominance were inconsistently and only weakly to moderately related to leader criteria, which is also in line with the literature. Although talkativeness has been positively related to leadership, it has mainly been related to leader emergence (Riggio et al., 2003). And even though dominance, in terms of being assertive and energetic in social settings, has consistently been positively related to various leadership criteria (House & Howell, 1992; Hoffman et al., 2011; Stogdill; 1948), conversational dominance may easily be perceived as overpowering or somewhat pushy.

Moreover, the communication style expressiveness may be considered a facet of the personality trait extraversion, which has consistently been related to leadership (Barrick & Mount, 1991, Judge et al., 2002). Measures of extraversion tend to contain a relatively high proportion of items that represent some form of communicative behavior. Nevertheless, in our studies in Chapter 2, we found that the communication style expressiveness had incremental predictive validity for a number of leader criteria over extraversion.

Riggio and colleagues have proposed a framework to define and measure individual differences in social abilities and interpersonal skills. The skills of the framework are presumed to be crucial for effective leadership (Riggio & Lee, 2007; Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Riggio et al., 2003). One of these skills is social expressiveness, which they defined as "*Skill in verbal expression and the ability to engage others in social discourse*" (Riggio & Reichard, 2008, p. 172). As such it resembles the expressive communication style. However, In a study on the relation between social expressiveness, personality traits, and two leader criteria (emergence and effectiveness), Riggio et al. (2003) found no differences for the relations of social expressiveness with the criteria compared to those

of extraversion with the criteria. The social expressiveness scale contains only three items (Riggio, 1986). Although we have not tested this, CSI expressiveness seems to capture the social expressiveness construct more completely. As such, it may have more predictive power than existing scales in situations where communication styles are important.

Although we expected positive relations between leader preciseness and outcomes, the strength of those relations was surprising. The CSI dimension preciseness pertains to a tendency to communicate in a well-structured, substantive, concise, and thoughtful way (De Vries et al., in press). Although not reported, in our studies all four preciseness facets consistently correlated moderately to strongly with criteria. In our studies, preciseness may be considered a facet of the personality trait conscientiousness, which is defined in terms of organization, perfectionism, diligence, and prudence (Lee & Ashton, 2004). In the leadership literature, conscientiousness has frequently been related to leader criteria, but the strength of the relation has been weak to modest (Barrick et al., 2001; Judge et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2011). We assume that subordinates generally rely on their leader for determining their daily tasks, future career, and income level. Arguably, a leader is a highly relevant source of information for his/her subordinates. Whether or not their leader is conscientious, subordinates require him/her to communicate very clearly what is expected of them and how their performance will be assessed. Preciseness seems to capture clarity related behaviors in a more complete way than other constructs. The importance of preciseness for leadership is an indication that our conceptualization of the construct is meaningful and that it may be fruitfully used for further research.

By definition, leader preciseness should generate more clarity for subordinates. Message content is not a central element in our definition of communication styles. However, content may play a role for preciseness. A sensible and logical message may be communicated in a highly imprecise way, thus creating confusion and unclarity. Whereas theoretically it may be possible to communicate a nonsensical or illogical message in a highly precise way, in practice that would undoubtedly also create a lot of confusion and unclarity. Consequently, it may be rated as having been communicated in a less precise way. Ratings on preciseness may therefore be more related to the content of the communication than ratings on the other communication style dimensions. In this way, leader preciseness may impact role, process, and goal clarity, which have all been associated with organizational and leader outcomes directly or as moderators (Cicero, Pierro, & Van Knippenberg, 2010; House & Rizzo, 1972; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Sawyer, 1992). There is not a lot of research on the antecedents of such clarity, although some have been identified, e.g., supervisory support was found to be related to role clarity (Babin & Boles, 1996), mentoring to role conflict and ambiguity (Lankau, Carlson, & Nielson, 2006), and autonomy and feedback to goal and process clarity (Sawyer, 1992). Ample literature confirms that a lack of clarity is directly and/or indirectly related to outcomes such as employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to

leave (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Further research may find that leader preciseness predicts role, process, and goal clarity and that (part of) the relation of leader preciseness with leader outcomes may be explained by these variables.

### **Leadership styles**

A general definition of leadership style is hard to find and any leadership style tends to be described as a combination of traits, skills, and behaviors (Van Wart, 2003). Frequently, a leadership style describes what it is that a leader should achieve, e.g., inspire or motivate, but the theories are not always clear on the concrete leader behavior that is associated with those goals (Yukl, 1999). Nevertheless, as cited in the introduction: “[...] *what is communicated between supervisor and subordinate is intimately tied to how it is communicated*” (Penley & Hawkins, 1985, p. 322). Although we have not investigated the relations between leader communication styles and leadership styles, at face value this is where the concepts overlap. Communicative behaviors as reflected in the CSI communication style dimensions are undoubtedly included in leadership style measures. Nevertheless, some leadership styles will be more communicative than others, as was demonstrated in a study using an earlier version of the CSI (De Vries et al., 2010). In that study task-oriented leadership was found to be the least communicative of three leadership styles (the others were charismatic and human-oriented leadership). A distinction may be made between styles that are more ‘managerial’ (short term efficiency and predictability focused) and those that are more ‘leader-like’ (long term innovation and change focused), where the latter are expected to be more communicative than the former.

If a leadership style is only moderately communicative, possibly one or more of the unrelated communication styles interact with these leadership styles. For instance, in their study on personality and ethical leadership, Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011) included extraversion as a control variable. There was no reason to expect a relation between leader extraversion and ethical leadership and their results showed that indeed no relation between the two variables existed. It is therefore also unlikely that the communication style expressiveness is related to ethical leadership, however, it is well possible that a highly ethical leader who communicates in a highly expressive way is more successful than one who communicates in a highly inexpressive way. Further research on the interaction of leadership styles and communication styles may improve our understanding of relations between leadership styles and outcomes.

### **Pathways and explanations**

Our proposed underlying framework to explain why communication styles may be related to leader outcomes builds on to the literature regarding two fundamental human needs: the need to reduce uncertainty (Brashers, 2001; Inglis, 2000) and the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In our preliminary study described in Chapter 5, we found the differences in relations that could be expected based on the framework, thus warranting further research on it. This proposed explanatory framework may align well

with our suggestion that a cognitive and an affective pathway to leader criteria exist. In the literature, uncertainty is generally considered a cognitive construct (e.g., Nabi, 2002; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). Gudykunst and Hammer (1988, in Gao & Gudykunst, 1990) proposed the anxiety/uncertainty reduction theory (later known as anxiety/uncertainty management, AUM) as an extended theory from Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (URT). Although AUM was focused on the role of interpersonal communication in cross-cultural adaptation, it may be applicable in other settings as well.

In AUM, uncertainty is related to predictability of the behavior of others and of the self, which may be reduced via cognitive information processing. Conversely, anxiety is related to feelings of insecurity, which may be reduced via affective information processing (Gao & Gudykunst, 1990). In AUM, the reduction of uncertainty and the reduction of anxiety are considered to be two independent processes, however, effective communication is assumed to be related to both of them. Witte (1993) suggested that cognitive processing will dominate as long as people feel that they may be able to reduce uncertainty on the predictability of behavior. If that is not the case, affective processing will dominate. Returning to the subject of this dissertation; in general, leader communication is important for subordinates as it is a highly relevant source of information on how to act. However, leader communication may either increase or reduce uncertainty. High leader preciseness may make subordinates feel that they are able to predict quite well what is expected of them and what their leader's response to their behavior will be. Thus leader preciseness may provide 'input' for the cognitive information process which is triggered by the need to reduce uncertainty.

The need to belong may underlie the affective pathway from leader expressiveness to leader criteria, but in a slightly different way. Frequent positive interactions and the existence of positive bonds between people are considered a prerequisite in order to experience belongingness or to feel accepted (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, a host of negative emotions has been related to social rejection ('not belonging') and positive ones to social acceptance (DeWall & Bushman, 2011). A leader is an important member of someone's work group. As such, he/she may play a crucial role in including or excluding people from that group. As people spend a lot of time at work and important life outcomes depend upon performing well at work, subordinates may have a specific need to belong to the work group. Leader expressiveness may provide the cues subordinates need to determine whether they are in- or excluded from the work group. Feeling included leads to positive emotions, thus triggering affective information processing. Moreover, if someone feels excluded his/her performances on complex cognitive tasks will be impeded (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002). Rational, systematic processing of information may become impossible if someone feels that they have been rejected, making it more likely that affective information processing will take place.

The level of fulfillment of the need to reduce uncertainty and the need to belong may therefore impact which information process will be dominant. In this dissertation it was argued that cognitions are more likely to play a role than affect in the direct and indirect relations of leader preciseness with criteria, whereas affect is more likely to play a role than cognitions in the direct and indirect relations of leader expressiveness with criteria. The difference that we found in relative importance of liking (more dominant in Chapter 4) and perceived expertise (more dominant in Chapter 5) actually provided support for our suggestion that two information processing routes may exist, as the difference in the design of the studies may also explain why different processing modes may have been prominent. Hence, our findings seem to confirm the interplay of affect and cognitions, but they also show that underlying concepts as well as study design may impact which route is followed. Relations between variables may be dependent upon which processing mode is dominant at the moment of assessment (Van Gelder, De Vries, & Van der Pligt, 2009). The notion that fulfillment of needs as well as study design may influence which processing mode is dominant may be used in further research. By identifying which route is most strongly activated at the moment of assessment we may be better able to interpret and integrate research findings.

#### ***Appointed or informal leader***

In this dissertation, the communication styles of proximal appointed leaders have been investigated and the relations of these leaders' communication styles with leader criteria. A substantial body of literature is devoted to identifying predictors of informal leadership or leader emergence. Recently, Zaccaro (2007, p.8) posited: *"The question of whether the leader attributes predicting leader emergence differ significantly from those predicting leader effectiveness represents an important issue for future research"*. Informal leaders have to gain the leader position (Pescosolido, 2002; Raven et al., 1998) and whether or not someone is elected as leader may depend at least in part upon the way he/she communicates. Furthermore, informal leaders may rely more on personal influence bases such as perceived expertise and liking than appointed leaders. In Chapters 4 and 5 we found indirect relations of leader communication styles with criteria through perceived expertise and liking. We can envisage that such indirect relations are even stronger for informal leaders. Further research with the CSI on the communication styles of informal leaders and relations with leader criteria may enhance our understanding of leader election processes and informal leader success. By comparing the communication styles of appointed leaders with those of informal leaders our understanding of leader outcomes may be further enhanced.

#### ***Training***

In the literature, the 'trainability' of communication skills or competence has been extensively investigated, particularly in healthcare situations (e.g., Chan et al., 2003; Fukui et al., 2008; Visser & Wymans, 2010), but also in other settings (e.g., DeChurch & Marks, 2006; Kuntze, Van der Molen, & Born, 2009; Rautalinko & Lisper, 2004; Towler,

2003). Overall, scholars conclude that it is possible to teach people to communicate more effectively. However, there is debate about whether the effect of such communication trainings last over time (e.g., Kelloway & Barling, 2000; Malhotra et al., 2009). Furthermore, these trainings tend to consist of sequences of behavior for particular communication acts, for which content and/or non-verbal behavior are clearly defined for each step in the process. In the professional literature, such communication steps can be found for instance for 'breaking bad news', for empathic or reflective listening, for open interviewing, and for giving presentations. Atwater and Waldman (2008) provide among other "*an optimal sequence for negative feedback delivery*" (p.67), as well as 'do's and don'ts' for giving feedback, depending on cultural differences (p.35). Hancock (2002) refers to guidelines for effective praise and Hargie and Dickson (2004) provide guidelines for performing a number of communication skills, such as listening, questioning, reflecting, and explaining.

Many people will be able to learn such sequence of events if they are taught properly. Presumably, the communication effectiveness of most people will improve if they use a well thought-through 'script' for a specific communication event correctly. However, this implies two things. First, in an everyday work environment, the situation must be "recognized" adequately. For instance, if you are not aware that your message is bad news for your counterpart or if your counterpart expects directions rather than an open ear for his/her thoughts, the communicative behavior that you have learned, may be ineffective or even counterproductive. Second, even when you use the "right" communicative behaviors, they may be more or less convincing depending on the way you execute them. Research on the relations between communication styles and communication skills as well as on the interaction between the two may further our understanding of the impact of communication trainings. We can envisage that skills training may be successful for (potential) leaders who communicate in a highly expressive and/or precise way (and/or verbally unaggressive way) but not so much for those that score low on expressiveness and/or preciseness (and/or high on verbal aggressiveness).

Although further research is necessary, possibly some communication styles may be more 'trainable' than others. Longitudinal research on the lasting impact of training leaders to use specific (i.e., expressive, precise, and verbally unaggressive) communication styles may provide clarity about the extent to which someone can learn to consistently communicate in a more effective way.

## **Limitations and implications**

### ***Method related***

A limitation of some of the studies described in this dissertation is that the same source is used to rate predictors and criteria, which is assumed to generate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). There is debate in the literature on the direction and size of this common method effect on observed relations. Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach, and Hoffman (2010) demonstrate that the common method effect sizes are relatively limited

and almost fully offset by attenuation due to measurement error. Antonakis, Bendahan, Jaquart, and Lalive (2010) show that relations may be either inflated or deflated, as did Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010), who also find that in multivariate linear relationships the addition of multiple variables suffering from potential common method variance may reduce the common method effect sizes. Richardson, Simmering, and Sturman (2009) demonstrate that the existing approaches to detect common method variance are mostly unreliable and that each of them may provide equally distorted relations when used to correct for common method variance. And, adding to the confusion, Kammeyer-Mueller, Steel, and Rubinstein (2010) explain how the use of different sources to rate predictors and criteria may produce relations that are just as distorted as those from same source data. Nevertheless, the use of same source data is clearly a topic that requires attention.

Most of the multiple correlations of subordinate-rated leader communication styles with subordinate-rated leader criteria in our studies were moderate to strong, whereas in Chapter 3 we found weak relations of leader self-rated communication styles with subordinate-rated criteria. Although this seems to point to inflation, we like to note four things. First, in Study 2 of Chapter 2, ratings on the communication styles were obtained at a different point in time than the ratings on the criteria, whereas ratings on personality were obtained at the same time as the criteria ratings. Temporal separation of measurements is assumed to reduce the bias effect (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In that Study, we nevertheless found similar relations of leader communication styles with criteria and incremental validity for leader expressiveness and preciseness over personality traits as in Study 1 of that Chapter. Second, in Chapter 5, we manipulated the two most predictive leader communication styles and found comparable strong relations to those from our field studies. Third, we found differential relations of the individual communication styles with each of the leader outcomes, even when outcomes were strongly positively correlated. If common method bias was pervasive throughout the data, presumably relations of individual communication styles with strongly positively correlated criteria should have been more similar. Given these three points, we feel that the relations that we have revealed between leader communication styles and criteria are meaningful.

As a fourth and last remark on the common method issue we refer to the recent debate in the literature on the use of other-ratings rather than self-ratings for variables such as someone's communication styles. Self-ratings of personality constructs may be considered reflections of someone's identity, whereas other-ratings may be considered reflections of someone's reputation (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Holland, 2005). As Oh, Wang, and Mount (2011, p. 764) state: "*[...] observer ratings of personality are not so much a foresight as a hindsight, in which personality is inferred from a person's behavior rather than vice versa*". Such reputation may be a more accurate predictor of future behavior than identity based self-ratings and other-ratings may therefore also be better predictors of criteria, as demonstrated by Oh et al.'s (2011) findings that other-rated personality dimensions had incremental validity for overall job performance over self-

ratings. If using other reports on personality constructs such as communication styles is thus warranted, the question *who* should provide the ratings remains. As Podsakoff et al. (2003) also note; it may sometimes be hard or even impossible to avoid using the same source for predictors and criteria. Here we would argue that there are only two potential sources for rating leader communication styles: subordinates and trained observers. Any other person would not rate the target in his/her role as a leader, but in another capacity, e.g., a peer, client, subordinate, close relative, friend, or acquaintance. As far as the criteria are concerned, most of the ones used in our studies reflect constructs that can only be assessed by the subordinates themselves such as satisfaction with the leader, trust in the leader, their view on the LMX quality, their intention to leave, etc. Nevertheless, using trained observers or a more objective performance outcome may further enhance our understanding of the relation of leader communication styles with criteria.

### ***Design related***

A second limitation is that causality has not been firmly tested. The study in Chapter 5 provides some evidence that leader communication styles precede criteria, however, the design of that study does not reflect real life leader-subordinate interaction and may have activated leader stereotypes, which consequently impacted assessments. As we consider communication styles to be (narrow) personality constructs, we assume that the direction of relations is as we described. The way a leader communicates is an important element in creating a first impression (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). First impressions count and tend to last (Rabin & Schrag, 1999). We would therefore argue that at least in the initial interaction phase of the leader-subordinate relationship leader communication styles precede outcomes. However, leader-subordinate relationships are often described as evolving over time (Greene, 1975; Shamir, 2011; Sims & Manz, 1984). It is conceivable that the variables that we assume to be outcomes may influence subordinate-ratings on predictors over time. In the field studies, outcomes may have impacted ratings of the predictor variables. The relations thus found are sometimes called illusory correlations (Podsakoff et al., 2003) even though these perceived behaviors are real for the raters. Furthermore, the impact of behavior in leader-subordinate relationships may be reciprocal (Greene, 1975; Sims & Manz, 1984). In the leader-member exchange theory, over time reciprocal influence is assumed to deepen and expand the high quality dyadic relationship of a leader with a subordinate (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Individual differences in subordinates may impact the behavior of the leader vis-à-vis them, thus (indirectly) impacting outcomes. Nevertheless, in our field studies, we found similar relations between leader communication styles and criteria as in the scenario study in Chapter 5. So even though further research on the relation between leader communication styles and criteria over time may enhance our understanding of leader outcomes, our findings seem to suggest that relations remain strong.

In our study in Chapter 5 we found that the relations of leader preciseness with cognition- and effectiveness-related criteria were stronger than those with attitude- and



behavior-related criteria and that for leader expressiveness the opposite was true. However, the design of our study was not geared for testing our proposed explanatory framework of the underlying two fundamental human needs. People differ in how much they need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and how much they need to reduce uncertainty (Hogg & Grieve, 1999). Moreover, even though we assume that leaders are important contributors to the fulfillment of these needs for subordinates, others may also contribute; e.g., interacting with colleagues may be equally or more important to create a feeling of belongingness or to reduce uncertainty in the work environment. Hence, a more comprehensive assessment of a subordinate's work relationships may provide a better insight in the relative importance of leader communicative behavior for fulfilling fundamental human needs.

### ***Sample related***

The studies in this dissertation were all but one conducted in The Netherlands. Given the strong predictive validity of the precise communication style for leadership in our studies, research on leader preciseness in other cultures and in cross-cultural leader-subordinate relationships may help us better understand differences in leader outcomes between cultures and for intercultural dyads. As the communication style preciseness entails rather direct behaviors, i.e., to the point and substantive, possibly relations of leader preciseness with leader criteria may not be equally strong in every culture. Findings on outcomes of communication directness are inconsistent with regard to differences between cultures (e.g., Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, Korac-Kakabadse, & Savery, 2001; Nelson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002). Moreover, several studies have investigated URT or AUM in inter- and intra-cultural contexts. They have found some evidence that interpersonal communication serves to manage anxiety/uncertainty within and across different cultures (Berger, 2011; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985). The question is whether leader preciseness is similarly related to outcomes in other cultures or whether other communication style dimensions are more important to reduce uncertainty. As the preciseness construct seems to capture very specific communication behavior and played such an important role in predicting leader outcomes in our studies, research on cultural differences in the importance of preciseness for leadership may enhance our understanding of how culture may influence communication effectiveness.

### ***Practical implications***

Despite the abovementioned limitations, the results of our empirical studies have some important practical implications. First and foremost, for leadership selection assessments, the use of the CSI may be preferable over the use of a measure of broad personality dimensions. As subordinates' satisfaction with the leader, their trust in the leader, and the quality of LMX is rated more favorable for leaders that score high on expressiveness and preciseness (and low on verbal aggressiveness), including these communication styles in the selection criteria may increase the overall selection process effectiveness. If the choice is between otherwise equally good candidates, their score on

expressiveness and preciseness may tip the scale. Obviously, if someone is not a leader yet, he/she cannot be rated by subordinates. However, the use of peer-ratings of close colleagues may provide some indication of the target's communication styles and perhaps trained observers may be used to rate the target's communication styles in a leader role play.

A logical extension of this is that the CSI may be used in other settings where communication is central. Although doctor-patient relations and teacher-student relations are not the same as leader-subordinate ones, the dependency of a patient or a student on the knowledge, experience, professional skills, and personal support of their doctor, etc., for their future well-being and success may be compared to the dependency of a subordinate on his/her leader for daily work, pay, and future career. In these relationships, insight in the communication styles of the person 'in charge' of the situation may therefore help us understand outcomes as well. In a sales environment, a sales person's persuasiveness may depend to a large extent on his/her communication style and a counselor may be more or less successful, based on how he/she interacts with his/her clients. In these settings communication styles may therefore also be a useful tool in selection assessments.

A second practical implication is that leader communication trainings may be redesigned to include elements of someone's basic interpersonal communication styles. Companies spend substantial amounts of money on training their (potential) leaders to improve their effectiveness. Communication trainings feature on most, if not all leader development curricula. These trainings tend to focus on a selected package of communication skills, mostly ignoring someone's natural way of communicating. However, the lasting success of these skills trainings in everyday practice is debated. Even though we cannot yet tell whether communication styles can be learned and causality is not yet clear, our studies show that high ratings on leader expressiveness and preciseness predict various outcomes. If in the communication training practice a (potential) leader's standing on each of the communication styles (but specifically expressiveness and preciseness) is assessed before he/she takes part in communication skills trainings, we may be able to determine whether this makes a difference for the impact of such skills trainings immediately and over time.

A third practical implication, as an extension of the first, is that internal promotion procedures and career lines within organizations may be reconsidered to include communication styles as one of the selection bases specifically for leader roles. In many corporations, people that are very good at their job tend to be promoted to a supervisory position in their department or discipline. In larger companies, there tend to be barriers (expressed or unspoken) for career progression in terms of compensation package and/or status if you do not aspire a supervisory role. Due to these organizational practices, people that perform well in their daily work may decide to opt for or accept a leadership role regardless of their suitability for that particular role. One reason why

people are not or less suitable to become a leader may be that they do not naturally communicate in a leader-like (i.e., expressive and precise) way. It may be advisable for companies to appoint people in leadership positions partly based on their communicative behavior. In some environments, such as academia or high tech innovation, relatively high job-related knowledge and expertise may be required to be *accepted* as a leader, but strong interpersonal skills and certain communication styles may be equally important in order to be *successful* as a leader. In other settings, such as commerce, factory lines, and administrative departments, interpersonal qualities may be most important in order to be accepted as well as to be successful as a leader. Although the emphasis may differ, we would advise practitioners to include communication styles in internal promotion selection processes for leadership positions. Moreover, for some companies it may be advisable to create two different career lines within the organization, with equal or at least clearly defined compensation growth opportunities and status position. In one career line leadership qualities can then be the focal point, in the other job related expertise.

A potential fourth practical implication is related to the suggestion that leader expressiveness and leader preciseness may each serve to fulfill a different fundamental human need. Although not yet tested, human resource practitioners may find it beneficial to apply this idea in specific situations. In times of change or crisis, it may be helpful to identify whether subordinates mostly feel rejected by the organization or whether they mostly are uncertain about their position, tasks, and outlook. Depending on the outcome and assuming that a choice of potentially qualified leaders is available, of those either highly expressively communicating leaders or highly precisely communicating leaders may be put in charge of change projects or crisis management.

## **Conclusion**

Leadership has been investigated for more than 100 years. It started by looking at individual differences that may explain why some people are successful leaders and some are not. After a period where individual differences were renounced in favor of situational or contingency theories of leadership, since the 1980's when the five factor models of personality were developed, leadership research on individual differences has resurged. People differ in many ways and broad personality traits have been used to explain differences in leader behavior and in leader success. Recently, the debate on broad versus narrow predictors and the importance of conceptual relevance has inspired research to identify narrow predictors that are conceptually relevant for the criteria used.

The studies in this dissertation investigated whether leader communication styles are relevant narrow predictors for leader outcomes. Leader expressiveness and preciseness, but also leader verbal aggressiveness, were found to be strongly related to various leader criteria. The level of self-other agreement was rarely related to outcomes, but using self- and other-ratings of leader communication styles improved predictive validities. Perceived expertise and liking mediated relations between leader

communication styles and criteria; preciseness was related to leader performance and satisfaction with the leader through perceived expertise and expressiveness was related to those criteria through liking. In line with the literature, an affective and a cognitive pathway to leader criteria was distinguished. Finally, an underlying explanation for the relations of leader communication styles with leader criteria was proposed. The findings reported in this dissertation suggest that our conceptualization of communication styles may be fruitfully employed for further research on leadership, for research in other settings where communication is central, in the leader selection assessment practice, and possibly also in the communication training practice.