

Chapter 3

Self-other agreement on a leader's communication styles: does it add value for predicting leader outcomes?³

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³ Based on Bakker-Pieper, A., De Vries, R.E., & Dekker, P.H. (2012). *Self-other agreement on a leader's communication styles: does it add value for predicting leader outcomes?* Manuscript submitted for publication.

Abstract

This study investigates the relation of self-subordinate agreement on a leader's communication styles with leader criteria. Given the centrality of communication for leadership, for communication styles that were positively (negatively) related to criteria, we expected that agreement at the highest (lowest) rating level would be associated with the best outcomes. We found weak to moderate self-other correlations for the communication styles with the exception of expressiveness, for which the self-other correlation was strong. Using polynomial analyses, we found that often both self- and subordinate-ratings were related to outcomes, but within-source relations were strongest and self-other discrepancies rarely had an impact. Possibly this is related to response shift or varying standards that are used by raters.

It is almost a truism to state that the way a leader communicates has an impact on his/her relations with subordinates. So far, however, no research has been done on the self-other agreement on a leader's communication styles and relations with leader criteria. Scholars agree that differences in self and subordinate judgments of a leader's behavior may be a useful source of feedback for a leader's further personal development (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Becker, Ayman, & Korabik, 2002; Fleenor, McCauley, & Brutus, 1996). However, even though self-other agreement –or the lack of it– on various leader behaviors and skills has frequently been associated with leadership outcomes, the actual relations are still debated (Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010). In view of the importance of communication for a leader, more insight in self-other rating agreement on a leader's communication styles and the effects of disagreement may contribute to our understanding of leader outcomes and may give direction to leader development efforts. This study aims to provide a start for understanding the relation of self-other agreement on a leader's communication styles with leader criteria.

Relevance of self-other agreement

The first reason why self-other agreement is considered relevant is related to its potential incremental validity for criteria. To predict work related outcomes, commonly self-ratings of individual differences are used rather than other-ratings. However, recently scholars have argued and demonstrated that other-ratings of individual differences may be more predictive of outcomes than self-ratings and should at least be used to complement self-ratings (Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011; Mount, Barrick, & Strauss, 1994; Zimmerman, Triana, & Barrick, 2010). Both self- and other-ratings on a variable may contribute uniquely to the explained variance in leadership outcomes (Hogan, 2005; Hough & Oswald, 2005) and differences in self- and other-ratings may add validity (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino, & Fleenor, 1998; Oh & Berry, 2009). The size of the absolute rating difference as well as the direction of the difference (i.e., the self over- or

underrates) may provide useful information (Edwards, 1993, 1994). If that is the case, both self- and other-ratings should be used in assessments (Fleenor et al., 2010; Shanock, Baran, Gentry, Pattison, & Heggstad, 2010). The underlying assumption is that the self and the other differ in how they rate the same behavior (Fleenor et al., 2010).

The second reason why self-other agreement is considered relevant is based on the assumed potential impact of self-other discrepancy awareness on behavior. Perceptual control theory holds that people regulate their behavior to reach some predetermined goal, the standard or reference value (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Powers, 1991; Vancouver, 2005). Presumably, people continuously compare their perceived current situation or behavior to the standard. According to the theory, if they detect a discrepancy, they will adjust their behavior in order to reduce it, thus increasing the possibility that they will reach their goal. Subordinate-rated behavior may be the goal or standard for leaders, with which they compare their self-rated behavior (Atwater, Waldman, Ostroff, Robie, & Johnson, 2005). They may be particularly prone to use subordinate-rated leader behavior as goal behavior, when they know or assume that it is related to leader outcomes.

Communication styles and leadership

Communication is essential for leaders and communication scholars have frequently investigated leader-subordinate communication (Jablin, 1979). Recently, the relations between leader communication styles and criteria were investigated, using De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Alting Siberg, Van Gameren, and Vlug's (2009, p.179) definition of communication style: *"the characteristic way a person sends verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal signals in social interactions denoting a) who s/he is or wants to (appear to) be, b) how s/he tends to relate to people with whom s/he interacts, and c) in what way his/her messages should usually be interpreted"*. Moderate to strong relations were found between leader communication styles and leader criteria (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, in press; De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010). In these studies, the Communication Styles Inventory (CSI, De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, & Schouten, in press) was used to measure communication styles.

The CSI operationalizes six communication styles (De Vries et al., in press). Expressiveness refers to someone's tendency to be talkative and informal, use humor, and easily 'steer' a conversation. Preciseness refers to a tendency to communicate in a well structured, to-the-point, and thought-through way. Verbal aggressiveness refers to the tendency to overpower a communication partner by demonstrating anger and communicating authoritatively, unsupportively, and mercilessly. Questioningness refers to a tendency to be inquisitive and argumentative, and to communicate in philosophical and unconventional ways. Emotionality refers to the tendency to display worries and tension, to be defensive in communications and to show sentimentality. And last, impression manipulateness refers to the tendency to communicate in a manipulative way, for instance by charming others or otherwise ingratiate oneself, and by not always displaying

all of one's thoughts and feelings. Leader expressiveness, preciseness, and questioningness were found to be positively related to leader criteria, and leader verbal aggressiveness, emotionality, and impression manipulateness negatively (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, in press; De Vries et al., 2010).

The relation between self-other agreement and outcomes

In recent self-other agreement studies, a distinction has been made between in-agreement leaders, over-estimators, and under-estimators. For a predictor variable that was positively related to outcomes, the general assumption was that agreement at a high level was associated with the best outcomes, both over- and underestimation was associated with less favorable outcomes, and agreement at a low level with the worst outcomes. Surprisingly, in several studies both over- and under-estimation were found to be related to worse or better outcomes than at the extreme agreement levels (Fleenor et al., 2010). Explanations tend to focus on the mindset of the self-rater. Assuming that the predictor is positively related to the outcome, overestimation is associated with not seeing one's shortfalls, not working hard to improve, aiming for tasks and responsibilities that one is not capable of (Atwater et al., 1998), with exaggerating one's control (Taylor & Brown, 1988) or with arrogance (Fleenor et al., 1996). This would negatively impact outcomes that are 'other'-related such as satisfaction of subordinates and superior-perceived effectiveness and positively impact outcomes that are 'self'-related such as compensation level and self-perceived effectiveness. Alternatively, underestimation is associated with negative self-perceptions (Ostroff, Atwater, & Feinberg, 2004), with not easily being satisfied with one's own performance and working hard to improve (Atwater et al., 1998), or with modesty (Fleenor et al., 1996), which would have the opposite effect on outcomes.

The findings on the relations between leader self-ratings, other-ratings, self-other agreement, and outcomes are ambiguous and the proposed explanations seem incomplete. Low to modest self-other agreement has been found for various leadership variables. Sometimes both self- and other- ratings contributed to the explained variance in criteria, but sometimes only one of them (e.g., Atwater et al., 2005; Oh & Berry, 2009; Vecchio & Anderson, 2009). How over- or underestimation may lead to better or worse outcomes than perfect agreement remains unclear. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that it is important to investigate which ratings are related to outcomes in order to determine the starting point for further research. For leader communication styles the question is therefore whether both the self- and the other-rating contribute to outcomes and whether self-other agreement levels impact outcomes at all.

As communication is at the heart of leadership, the way a leader communicates is an important cue for subordinates for interpreting his/her message (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Gardner, 2003). As Penley and Hawkins (1985) state: "[...] *what is communicated between supervisor and subordinate is intimately tied to how it is communicated*" (p. 322). In the leader-subordinate relationship, agreement on the nature of interpersonal

communication seems a prerequisite for positive outcomes. Therefore, and notwithstanding the findings with other constructs in previous studies, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: For communication styles that are positively (negatively) related to outcomes, the pattern of relations between self-subordinate ratings and leader outcomes is such that agreement at higher (lower) rating levels is positively related to leader outcomes.

For disagreement we have no specific expectation. Given the results in previous studies, it may lead to either better or worse outcomes than agreement at the lowest (highest) rating level.

Method

Participants and procedure

Supervisors of a regional Dutch health care organization and of the Dutch and Belgian headquarters of a global IT company were invited to participate. In total 265 supervisors completed a questionnaire in which they assessed their own communicative behavior. Of all supervisors 200 (76%) were male, 162 (61%) had a university or high-level professional education degree, 78 (29%) had a mid-level professional or a general secondary degree, and the rest a lower education.

We approached subordinates of the participating supervisors with the request to complete a questionnaire on their supervisor's communicative behavior and his/her effectiveness. We emphasized that the information would be kept strictly confidential. In total 693 subordinates completed the questionnaire. Of these, 517 (75%) were male, 278 (40.4%) had a university or high-level professional degree, 285 (41%) a mid-level professional or general secondary degree, and the rest a lower education. Their average age was 45 years ($SD = 8.24$), ranging from 24 to 63. Subordinates had been working with their leader between six months and 22 years, with an average of two years and one month.

We checked for answering tendencies and removed cases that showed long rows (>20 times) of the same answer. We then checked for supervisor-subordinate matches and took out those cases that had no match. We combined all subordinate assessments. In total 45 supervisors were assessed by 1 subordinate and 188 supervisors were assessed by on average 3.4 subordinates, with a minimum of 2 subordinates per supervisor and a maximum of 9. To assess whether aggregation of subordinates on the supervisor level was acceptable for the supervisors that were assessed by more than 1 subordinate, we calculated r_{wg} 's and ICC's to assess inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliabilities (LeBreton & Senter, 2008, see Table 3.1). The mean r_{wg} ranged from .91 to .95. For expressiveness, ICC1 and ICC2 were .35 and .64 respectively, for preciseness .46 and .74, for verbal aggressiveness .41 and .70, for questioningness .22 and .48, for emotionality .36 and .65, for impression manipulativeness .20 and .46, for leader

performance .36 and .65, and for satisfaction with the leader .24 and .52. These ICCs are similar to those in previous studies (e.g. Atwater et al., 1998; Fleenor et al., 1996). We therefore decided that aggregation was acceptable, calculated the average subordinate scores per supervisor for our self-other comparison and added to this set the supervisors for whom only one subordinate-rating was available.

To assess differences between organizations, we contrasted the communication styles beta-profiles for performance of a leader as well as satisfaction with a leader of the three sets and found no significant differences. This meant that the beta-profiles of the communication styles for these three datasets on these criteria were similar and we felt comfortable in combining all data. The combined dataset consisted of 233 leader-subordinate groups, including the cases in which only one subordinate rated a supervisor.

Instruments

To measure leader communication styles we used the Communication Styles Inventory (CSI), which consists of 96 items measuring six communication style dimensions. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire are adequate; reported internal consistencies range from .82 to .88, intercorrelations \leq .42, and reported divergent and convergent validities are adequate (De Vries et al., in press). The supervisors completed the self-version of the CSI and the subordinates the other-version (see Appendix 2). Each CSI scale contains 16 items (which can be found in De Vries et al., in press); alpha reliabilities for the self-ratings ranged from .69 to .82 and for the subordinate-ratings from .77 to .91 (Table 3.1).

We used two subordinate-rated leader criteria. One was a leader performance scale of five items related to success, performance targets, peer comparison, role model, and overall effectiveness (based on the five item scale of Hooijberg, 1996). Example items are: "Compared to other leaders, my leader is not very efficient" (recoded) and "My leader is successful in the organization". The alpha reliability of this scale was .85. The other outcome measure was a four item employee satisfaction scale (slightly adjusted from De Vries et al., 2010). Example items are: "I enjoy working with this leader" and "I sometimes think: 'if only I had another leader'" (recoded). The alpha reliability of this scale was .89.

Results

As both a leader's gender and length of acquaintance (here: average years with the same leader) have been found to be related to various leadership criteria, we included them in our analyses. For two leaders, gender was not included in the dataset. Table 3.1 presents the intercorrelations for each source group, reliabilities, r_{wg} 's, and ICCs. Table 3.2 provides the correlations of the self- with other-ratings and the correlations with the criteria. Self- and other-rated expressiveness ($r = .42$), preciseness ($r = .24$), verbal aggressiveness ($r = .24$), and questioningness ($r = .28$, for all $p < .01$) were significantly

Table 3.1 *Correlations of self- and subordinate-rated leader communication style dimensions, internal consistencies on the diagonal*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Expressiveness	.84/.82	-.12	.11	.42**	-.13	.11
2 Preciseness	-.04	.91/.81	-.11	.07	-.43**	-.19**
3 Verbal Aggressiveness	-.01	-.44**	.91/.74	.20**	.13*	.09
4 Questioningness	.54**	.02	.06	.79/.78	-.01	.02
5 Emotionality	-.15*	-.49**	.24**	.05	.87/.81	.11
6 Impression Manipulativeness	-.17**	-.43**	.38**	-.07	.34**	.77/.69
Mean <i>Rwg</i>	.95	.94	.91	.93	.95	.94
ICC1/2	.34/.64	.46/.74	.42/.71	.22/.48	.35/.65	.20/.46

Note. $N = 233$. Left on the diagonal and below subordinate-ratings, right on the diagonal and above leader self-ratings; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$;

correlated and the self-other correlation of emotionality ($r = .12$) approached significance at $p = .08$. All discriminant correlations were lower for these communication styles. As can be seen in Table 3.2, gender of the leader correlated with leader performance and satisfaction with the leader ($r = .18, p < .01$ and $r = .14, p < .05$), suggesting that male leaders were perceived to perform better and subordinates were more satisfied with them than with female leaders. Years with the same leader correlated with satisfaction with the leader ($r = .14, p < .05$), suggesting that the longer subordinates worked with a leader, the more satisfied they were with him/her. Of the leader self-ratings, preciseness correlated with leader performance, $r = .19, p < .01$, as did questioningness ($r = .15, p < .05$), emotionality ($r = -.15, p < .05$), and impression manipulativenness ($r = -.23, p < .01$). Self-rated questioningness and impression manipulativenness correlated with satisfaction with the leader ($r = .16$ and $r = -.16$, respectively, p 's $< .05$). All subordinate-rated communication style dimensions correlated with the outcomes in the same direction as found in previous studies.

Table 3.2. Leader self-ratings correlated with subordinate-ratings of leader communication styles and correlations with (subordinate-rated) outcome variables

	Communication styles leader self-rated									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender of the leader ^a										
2 Years worked with this leader										
3 Expressiveness	.02	.06	.42**	-.15*	.13*	.26**	-.05	-.00	.40**	.39**
4 Preciseness	.13*	.07	-.08	.24**	.01	.08	-.05	-.13	.64**	.55**
5 Verbal Aggressiveness	-.08	-.05	.05	-.04	.24**	.06	.03	.09	-.43**	-.62**
6 Questioningness	-.07	.08	.26**	.03	.08	.28**	.05	-.11	.24**	.29**
7 Emotionality	-.15*	-.08	-.04	-.10	-.04	-.11	.12	.05	-.48**	-.34**
8 Impression Manipulativeness	-.16*	-.07	-.01	-.01	-.06	-.11	-.04	.11	-.49**	-.48**
9 Leader performance	.18**	.12	.08	.19**	.01	.15*	-.15*	-.23**		
10 Satisfaction with leader	.14*	.14*	.07	.08	-.01	.16*	-.07	-.16*	.81**	

Note. N = 233. Self-other convergent correlations are boldfaced;^a Gender of the leader 0 = female, 1 = male; ** p < .01, * p < .05

Results of the regression of each of the outcome variables on self- and subordinate-rated communication styles are reported in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. Self-rated communication styles were related to leader performance. Gender of the leader and time with the same leader accounted for 6% of the variance (multiple $R = .24, p < .01$), and the communication styles for an additional 8% of the variance ($\Delta F(6, 222) = 3.63, p < .01$, overall multiple $R = .37, R^2 = .14, p < .01$). Of the communication styles only impression manipulativeness contributed significantly to explained variance ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$). For satisfaction with the leader, gender of the leader and time with the same leader accounted for 4% of the variance (multiple $R = .21, p < .01$) and, even though questioningness ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and impression manipulativeness ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$) contributed to the explained variance in satisfaction with the leader, the combined self-rated communication styles added a non-significant 5% of the variance ($\Delta F(6, 222) = 1.84, n.s.,$ overall multiple $R = .30, R^2 = .09, p < .01$). Subordinate-rated leader communication styles were strongly related to leader performance (multiple $R = .81, R^2 = .65, p < .01$, with all communication styles except questioningness contributing to the explained variance) and to satisfaction with a leader (multiple $R = .82, R^2 = .66, p < .01$, with all communication styles except emotionality contributing to the explained variance).

Table 3.3 *Standardized regression coefficients of regression of performance of leader and satisfaction with leader on self-rated communication style dimensions controlled for gender of leader and for average years worked with this leader*

	Leader performance		Satisfaction with leader	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Gender of the leader ^a	-.20**	-.16*	-.16*	-.13 [†]
Years worked with this leader	.15*	.13*	.16*	.15*
Self-rated expressiveness		.04		.01
Self-rated preciseness		.10		.01
Self-rated verbal aggressiveness		.01		-.03
Self-rated questioningness		.12		.16*
Self-rated emotionality		-.07		-.03
Self-rated impression manipulativeness		-.18**		-.13*
Multiple R	.24**	.37**	.21**	.30**
ΔR^2		.08**		.05
R^2	.06**	.14**	.04**	.09**

Note. $N = 231$; ^a Gender of the leader 0 = female, 1 = male; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$.

Table 3.4 Standardized regression coefficients of regression of performance of leader and satisfaction with leader on subordinate-rated communication style dimensions controlled for gender of leader for average years worked with this leader

	Leader performance		Satisfaction with the leader	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Gender of the leader ^a	-.20**	-.08 [†]	-.16*	-.06
Years worked with this leader	.15*	.05	.16*	.07
Subordinate-rated expressiveness		.35**		.31**
Subordinate-rated preciseness		.48**		.31**
Subordinate-rated verbal aggressiveness		-.14**		-.44**
Subordinate-rated questioningness		.05		.14**
Subordinate-rated emotionality		-.12*		.00
Subordinate-rated impression manipuliveness		-.11*		-.10*
Multiple R	.24**	.81**	.21**	.82**
ΔR^2		.59**		.62**
R^2	.06**	.65**	.04**	.66**

Note . $N = 231$; ^aGender of the leader 0 = female, 1 = male; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .06$.

Consequently, overall we found strong within-source relationships and weak to non-significant cross-source relationships between leader communication styles and outcomes. The only significant cross-source relations were self-rated questioningness with satisfaction with the leader and self-rated impression manipuliveness with both criteria.

We hypothesized that for communication styles that were positively (negatively) related to an outcome, agreement at the highest (lowest) rating level is always associated with the best outcomes. In order to analyze the relations of self-ratings, other-ratings, and self-other agreement with outcomes, we used polynomial regressions (Edwards 1993, 1994; Shanock et al., 2010). In this approach the dependent variable is regressed on both self- and other-ratings of the independent variable in step 1 (the linear model) and then on squared self- and squared other-ratings and the product of the self- with other-ratings in step 2 (the full quadratic model) in order to assess the added value of higher order effects. In this procedure, a significant increase in R^2 from the first model to the second indicates a nonlinear relationship. To aid interpretation of the regression results, a three dimensional representation of the relation may be graphed using the regression coefficients. Self- and other-ratings are plotted on two horizontal axes and the outcome on the vertical axis (Edwards & Parry, 1993). By using this approach, the absolute level of each of the scores, absolute differences between self- and other-scores, and the direction

Table 3.5 *Polynomial regression results of leader performance on self and other ratings for each communication style dimension, controlled for gender of the leader and time with the leader, coefficients are standardized*

	Leader performance					
	Expressive- ness	Preciseness	Verbal	Questio-	Emotionality	Impression
			Aggressive- ness	ningness		Manipula- tiveness
Gender of the leader ^a	.24**	.14*	.19**	.28**	.15*	.11
Time with same leader	.13*	.09 [†]	.12*	.13*	.09 [†]	.11 [†]
Self-rating	-.13 [†]	.03	.11 [†]	.06	-.08	-.17**
Subordinate-rating	.42**	.61**	-.44**	.23**	-.43**	-.45**
Self squared	.09 [†]			-.10*	-.03	
Subordinate squared	-.09*			-.06	-.02	
Self*subordinate	-.08			.09	-.20**	
<i>F</i> for linear model	15.79**	43.03**	17.02**	7.98**	20.58**	22.82**
Linear model <i>R</i> ²	.22**	.43**	.23**	.12**	.27**	.29**
Incr. <i>F</i> for quadratic model	8.54**	.43	.89	2.39 [†]	5.68**	1.08
Quadratic model <i>R</i> ²	.26**			.15**	.32**	

Note. *N* = 231; ^a Gender of the leader 0 = female, 1 = male; ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05, [†] *p* < .10.

of the differences are included in the analyses, whereas difference scores and profile correlation discard some of this information.

We used standardized scores and controlled for gender of the leader and years with the same leader. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present the *F*-values, the standardized regression coefficients, and *R*² resulting from the hierarchical regressions of the two criteria on each of the communication styles (significant results only). For preciseness, verbal aggressiveness, and impression manipulativeness, the linear model was significant, but the incremental *F* for the higher order model was not. For preciseness, only subordinate-ratings predicted the outcomes and no higher order effects were found. For verbal aggressiveness and impression manipulativeness the subordinate-rating was the strongest predictor, but the self-rating had significant incremental validity. For satisfaction with the leader, subordinate-ratings of emotionality were the only significant predictor and no higher order effects were found. For expressiveness and questioningness, both the linear model and the incremental *F* for the quadratic model were significant and both self- and subordinate-ratings contributed to explained variance, implying a more complex relation

Table 3.6 Polynomial regression results of satisfaction with the leader on self and other ratings for each communication style dimension, controlled for gender of the leader and time with the leader, coefficients are standardized

	Satisfaction with the leader					
	Expressive-		Verbal	Questioning-		Impression
	ness	Preciseness	Aggressive-ness	ness	Emotionality	Manipulativeness
Gender of the leader ^a	.18*	.10	.11 [†]	.23**	.12	.07
Time with same leader	.14*	.12*	.12*	.14*	.13*	.12*
Self-rating	-.13*	-.06	.14**	.06	-.02	-.11 [†]
Subordinate-rating	.41**	.55**	-.63**	.27**	-.33**	-.45**
Self squared	.06			-.08 [†]		
Subordinate squared	-.05			-.10*		
Self*subordinate	-.14 [†]			.07		
<i>F</i> for linear model	14.32**	26.59**	40.54**	8.83**	9.38**	19.31**
Linear model <i>R</i> ²	.20**	.32**	.42**	.14**	.14**	.25**
Incr. <i>F</i> for quadratic model	3.18*	1.47	1.51	2.64 [†]	1.76	.45
Quadratic model <i>R</i> ²	.24**			.17**		

Note. *N* = 231; ^a Gender of the leader 0 = female, 1 = male; ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05, [†] *p* < .10.

between the predictors and outcomes. The same was found for the relation of emotionality with leader performance.

We inspected the surface plots of the regression results for the communication styles that showed higher order effects. For both criteria, we found that for expressiveness (see Figures 3.1 and 3.4), agreement at low ratings was associated with worse outcomes than at high ratings and outcomes improved as ratings increased, flattening at the high rating end. When leaders rated themselves very low on expressiveness but subordinates rated them very high (i.e., leaders underestimated themselves), outcomes were best of all. They gradually worsened as ratings came closer to each other and slightly improved again as overestimation began. For questioningness (see Figures 3.2 and 3.5), agreement at a low level was also associated with worse outcomes than at high levels, improving as the ratings increased, flattening at the high rating end. Disagreement on questioningness was related to worse outcomes than agreement; both for over- and for under-estimators performance worsened as the rating discrepancy on questioningness increased. This corresponds to the expected typical pattern.

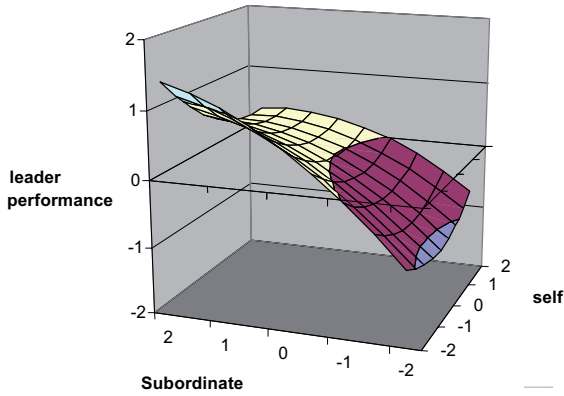


Figure 3.1. Relationship between self-rated Expressiveness, subordinate-rated Expressiveness, and leader performance

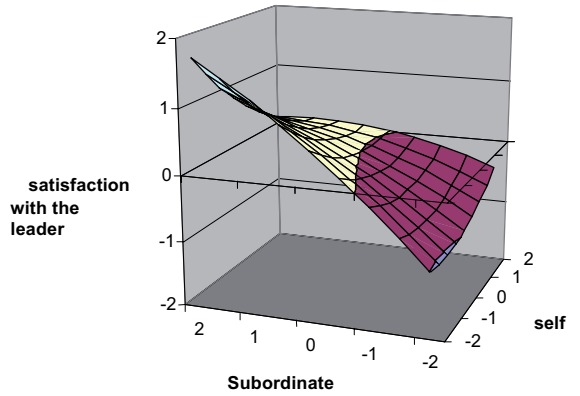


Figure 3.4. Relationship between self-rated Expressiveness, subordinate-rated Expressiveness, and satisfaction with the leader

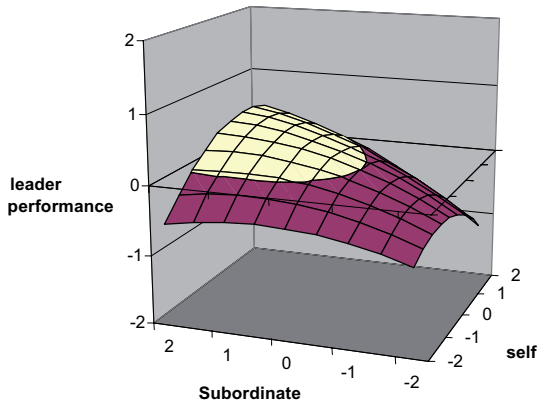


Figure 3.2. Relationship between self-rated Questioningness, subordinate-rated Questioningness, and leader performance

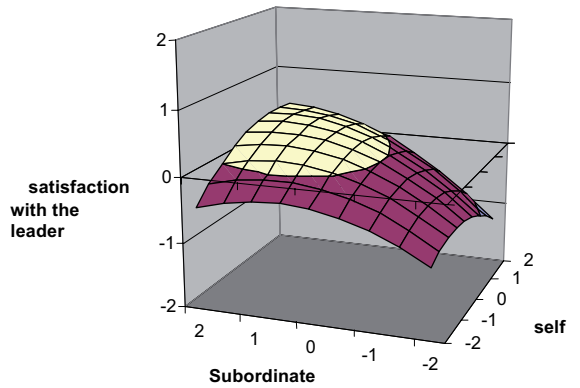


Figure 3.5. Relationship between self-rated Questioningness, subordinate-rated Questioningness, and satisfaction with the leader

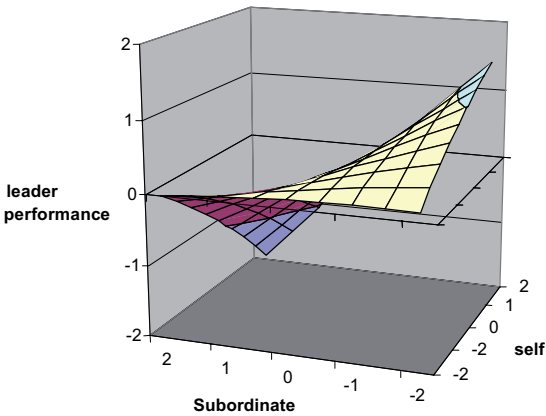


Figure 3.3. Relationship between self-rated Emotionality, subordinate-rated Emotionality, and leader performance

For emotionality (see Figure 3.3), along the line of agreement the relation with leader performance was opposite to that of expressiveness and questioningness: agreement at a low level was associated with better performance ratings than at a high level. Initially performance slightly improved with agreement at increasing levels, which indicates that some emotional communicative behavior may be good, but around midpoint it started to curve more steeply downwards again. Disagreement on emotionality was always related to better outcomes: both for over- and for under-estimators performance improved as the rating discrepancy increased.⁴

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to examine leader-subordinate agreement on leader communication styles and its relations with outcomes. Given the importance of communication for leadership, we hypothesized that for positively (negatively) related criteria, agreement at the highest (lowest) rating level is always associated with the best outcomes. In order to test our hypothesis, we obtained self- and subordinate-ratings of communication styles of 233 leaders in three organizations.

The most important finding of this study was that both leader self-ratings and subordinate-ratings of most of the communication styles contributed to the explained variance in the criteria. This supports the suggestion that other-ratings should at least be used to complement self-ratings on individual differences (Hogan, 2005; Hough & Oswald, 2005). However, we found that the differences in self- and subordinate-ratings on leader communication styles impacted leader criteria only to a limited extent. Agreement was always better than disagreement for questioningness, but for emotionality overestimation (when predicting leader performance) and for expressiveness underestimation led to better results than agreement. For the other communication styles, agreement had no

⁴ We examined the surface of the plots of the regression equation results by looking at the slope of the line where self-ratings equal other-ratings ($S = 0$) and the slope of the line where $S = -O$. We used the following guidelines (Edwards, 1993; Edwards & Parry, 1993): We calculated $a1 = b1 + b2$ and $a2 = b3 + b4 + b5$, where $b1$ was the standardized regression coefficient for self-ratings, $b2$ for other-ratings, $b3$ for self-squared, $b4$ for other-squared, and $b5$ for the product of self- and other-ratings. A significant increase in R^2 from Model 1 to Model 2 indicates a nonlinear relationship; when $a1$ is significantly different from zero and $a2$ not, there is a linear slope along the line of perfect agreement (self-rating = other-rating, $S=O$). When $a2$ is positive, there is a convex curvature along $S=O$, when it is negative the curve is concave. The impact of over- and underestimation can similarly be examined along the $S=-O$ line (i.e. when self-rating is highest, other-rating is lowest). Then we used $a3 = b1 - b2$ and $a4 = b3 + b4 - b5$ and similar interpretations apply. We report only the F -values, standardized regression coefficients, and R^2 's (as in Glomb & Welsh, 2005); details on the relevant values of $a1$, $a2$, $a3$, and $a4$ can be obtained from the first author.

significant impact. Our expectation on the impact of agreement was therefore not supported.

This raises the question whether self-awareness of the leader by being informed of differences in self- and subordinate-ratings on his/her communication style is indeed something to strive for, as it was rarely associated with criteria and then in a rather confusing way. The effect was mainly seen at extreme levels of disagreement. Although it seems unlikely that on the work floor extreme disagreement occurs very often, the suggestion that it may lead to better outcomes than agreement warrants further investigation. Explanations have concentrated mostly on the mindset of the leader and its impact on his/her behavior, but perhaps the mindset of the subordinate should be considered as well, as it seems that his/her standards for outcomes shift in certain situations .

Schwartz and Sprangers (1999) mention three reasons why people's responses may shift; a change in internal standards, a change in values, or a reconceptualization of the construct that is measured. Although they focus on the response of one individual that shifts over time, these effects may also occur when one person assesses different targets on their standing on the same variable. In a similar vein, Biernat (2005) describes how we may use different standards when rating a target person (the shifting standards model). She describes how it may depend on our categorization of that person, specifically when subjective rating scales are used. When we associate people that are high on expressiveness with strong performance, we probably associate people low on expressiveness with less strong performance. For the group of not-expressive people, the qualifications "very expressive" and "very strong performance" then mean something else than for the group of highly expressive people, because we already expected less of them. If the leader is indeed, as he/she perceives him-/herself, low on expressiveness, possibly subordinates use different (lower) standards to assess both that leader's expressiveness and his/her performance. Based on the comparison with these lower standards, the leader may then be rated as highly expressive and strong performing.

The convergent self-other correlations of the communication styles were modest to weak, with the notable exception of expressiveness, for which it was relatively strong. Leung and Bond (2001) reported similar findings for self- and other-ratings on interpersonal communication styles using Norton's (1983) Communicator Styles Measure. They note that a lack of shared information or differences in available information may have impacted individual judgments. Leaders and subordinates may base their ratings on different behavioral events and different situation. Subordinates will rate the behavior of their leader only in the work situation, whereas their leader interacts with others in numerous situations and the self-rating may reflect behaviors in various settings. Such differences in available or used information may explain low self-other agreement (Funder, 1995; Kenny, 2004). Furthermore, a leader may consider his/her intentions or facts that are not (yet) known to subordinates when rating his/her behavior. It is highly

conceivable that a leader will generally have more information on important work-related issues than his/her subordinates, as the leader is often the medium through which organizational information is disseminated. Even though communication styles pertain to the way someone communicates, they are inextricably related to the content of communication and information asymmetries may lead to perception differences (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003).

Limitations

Multiple correlations between communication styles and outcomes were strong within-source and weak to non-significant between-sources. As convergent self-other correlations for one and the same variable were mostly weak to modest, it is not surprising that relations between two different variables each rated by a different source were weak. In the literature, the relatively strong relations that are found when the same source is used for rating predictors and criteria are often attributed to common method variance (CMV, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, although the use of different sources for predictors and criteria may be advisable, it may sometimes be impossible due to the nature of the variables involved (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Indisputably subordinates and their leaders are the only “true” sources for rating leader communicative behavior -and possibly trained observers-. Any other source group rates the behavior of this person in a different capacity or relationship, i.e., an equal (for peers), or a dependent (for superiors or for clients), or a friend/family member (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). Some important organizational outcomes can only be rated by subordinates, such as satisfaction with the leader. Furthermore, Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010) investigated the impact of CMV in several regression models. They concluded that in multivariate linear regression, adding independent variables will partial out CMV bias and may even lead to deflation of relations. For quadratic relationships and for interaction terms they concluded that CMV tended to reduce the reliability of measures and thus attenuated estimated effect sizes rather than inflated them. In this light, the results of our multivariate and polynomial regression analyses can be considered substantial.

All variables used in this study were perception based. More objective outcome measures may be preferable, although the use of criteria such as output or profit may be criticized for the lack of direct relation, as numerous factors other than a leader’s behavior may influence production levels and team or corporate profit. Furthermore, given the modest cross-source relations that we found, it seems unlikely that strong relations with objective measures will be found.

Implications

The weak to moderate self-other correlations that we found for five of the CSI dimensions (expressiveness being the exception) were notable. The self-other agreement level of these communication style dimensions is comparable to those found for other

constructs. Possible explanations may be found in the processes of interpersonal perception and rating (Fleenor et al., 2010). Useful additional information on the communication styles of leaders may be obtained by gathering data from trained professional observers in a field setting or by contextualizing. In our study subordinates had to rate their leader and leaders their own behavior towards their subordinates, but this context was provided only in the general instruction. By specifically contextualizing every item, for instance by including the words 'as a leader', the potential behavioral information to be used may be better delineated, which may lead assessors to use more similar information thus resulting in higher agreement (Lievens, De Corte, & Schollaert, 2008). Moreover, standards for judging behavior are influenced by contextualization which may make the standards used by the leaders themselves and those used by subordinates more similar (Biernat, 2005). If self-other agreement is higher, interpretation of relations with criteria may be more obvious. Moreover, results may be easier to apply in practice, if only because the leader may be more likely to agree with how his/her behavior is perceived.

Our findings confirm that a leader's communication styles are related to leader outcomes. In general, it is important to determine very precisely which outcome is of interest when leadership is studied and when leader selection and development processes are under scrutiny. If organizations value positive employee attitudes and other subordinate-related outcomes, subordinate judgments about their leaders' communicative behavior are important. Using both self- and other-ratings may help to provide a better focus, however, how this information may lead to better outcomes remains to be investigated more in depth. More research is necessary to understand how rating discrepancies arise and how it relates to outcomes, to confirm causality, and then to determine if communication styles can be 'learned'.

Conclusion

Leader communication styles play a central role in everyday leader-subordinate interactions. In the literature, awareness of self-other rating differences on a construct is considered to be a valuable source of feedback for leader development purposes. In our study, several strong relations between leader communication styles and outcomes were found, that may well provide a development focus. However, self-other discrepancies on a leader's communication styles had limited impact on outcomes. Consequently, awareness of discrepancies between leader self- and subordinate-ratings seems to provide only limited guidance for the development of a leader's behavior. Nevertheless, given the centrality of the communication styles concept for leadership, further research on self-other discrepancies and possible mechanisms through which communication styles explain outcomes is both scientifically and practically relevant.