

Subordinates' Self- and Typical Leader Perceptions Moderate Leader Categorization Effects

Niels van Quaquebeke ^a & Daan van Knippenberg ^b

^a University of Hamburg, GER, ^b RSM Erasmus University, NL

BACKGROUND Leaders are considered effective when they succeed in influencing their subordinates. Ideally though, subordinates do not have to be forced to comply but rather they are open to the influence exerted by their leaders. 'Follower-centered' research (Lord & Maher, 1991; Schyns & Meindl, 2005) suggests that subordinates determine their openness to leadership in part by comparing their actual leaders to their cognitive image (prototype) of an ideal leader.

Hypothesis 1. The more subordinates perceive their leader to match their ideal leader prototype, the higher their (a) 'respect for the leader' and (b) 'identification with the leader' will be.

Surprisingly, respective research has largely overlooked subordinates' self-perceptions in this process although research suggests that people's self-conceptions automatically get activated to some degree when assessing someone else's qualities (Dunning and Hayes, 1996) - with a more or less chronic activation taking place in domains where the domain-schemata are central to people's self-definitions (Markus & Wurf, 1987). In these cases the underlying 'cognitive nodes' of the leader prototype are manifold, strongly affiliated, and have a comparably low threshold for activation (cf. Bechtel & Abrahamsen, 2002; Lord et al., 2001). Incoming information about leaders can thus be evaluated a lot quicker, more precise, and more extensively. For those people, the evaluation of someone else along the leader prototype consequently becomes more reliable and thus not only a better but also a more habitually used ground to base their responses towards leaders on.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between the degree to which subordinates' perceive their leader to match their ideal leader prototype and subordinates' (a) 'respect for the leader' and (b) 'identification with the leader' is stronger, the more subordinates think that they resemble the ideal leader prototype themselves.

We can moreover argue that it is not only the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to possess ideal leader attributes, but also the nature of the category itself that matters. Works in the field of social categorization have found that people find it easier to integrate more proximal constructs into their self-conceptions than distal ones (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000) - presumably due to the increased salience or 'psychological reality' of more concrete and proximal entities.

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between the degree to which subordinates' perceive their leader to match their ideal leader prototype and subordinates' (a) 'respect for the leader' and (b) 'identification with the leader' is stronger, the more subordinates think that ideal leader prototype is generally also resembled by typical leaders.

SAMPLE We used a multi-site-multi-entry strategy to recruit the sample online. Included were only participants who indicated that they currently work for a leader ($N = 297$, age $M = 35$ years ($SD = 9.4$), sex 43% female, work experience $M = 14$ years ($SD = 9.8$), average number of experienced leaders of 5.6 ($SD = 3.1$), 45% with higher education).

MEASURES To measure participants' own, their actual leader's, and typical leaders' perceived fit with the ideal leader prototype, we adopted a graphical measures usually used to assess self-other-overlaps (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Previous research yielded that this one-item measure was highly convergent valid with more extensive measures of leader categorizations (i.e., GLOBE: van Quaquebeke & Brodbeck, submitted).

Figure 1: Example Venn diagram to measure leader categorization (V-ILT): "In how far does your current leader represent your image of an ideal leader?"

Subordinates' responses towards leaders:

- **Respect for Leader (R)** was measured with a scale that encompasses how much subordinates are open towards a leader's influence, seek his/her advice, perceive him/her as a role model and respect his/her professional work.
- **Identification with Leader (ID)** was measured by the six item Mael and Ashforth identification questionnaire adapted to the current leader as the target focus of identification.

RESULTS Table 1: Descriptives, Correlations, & Reliabilities

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Current leader	3.44	1.69	—				
2. Self as leader	3.99	1.23	.18**	—			
3. Typical leaders	2.93	1.06	.07	.05	—		
4. Respect for leader	3.09	1.09	.69***	.04	-.01	(.92)	
5. Identification with leader	2.25	0.83	.37***	.09	.02	.49***	(.81)

Note. $N = 297$; Cronbach's α is in brackets where applicable; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

► H1 is supported

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Models

	Respect for Leader			Identification with Leader		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Step1: Main effects						
H1: Current Leader	0.77	0.05	.71***	0.30	0.05	.36***
Self as leader	-0.10	0.05	-.09*	0.02	0.05	.03
Typical Leaders	-0.07	0.05	-.06	-0.01	0.05	-.01
ΔR^2	0.48			.13		
ΔF	90.54***			15.14***		
Step2: 2-way interactions						
H2: Current Leader X Self as Leader	0.09	0.04	.10*	0.10	0.04	.14**
Current Leader X Typical Leaders	0.10	0.04	.10*	0.02	0.04	.03
Self as Leader X Typical Leaders	-0.01	0.04	-.02	0.04	0.04	.06
ΔR^2	.02			.03		
ΔF	3.66*			3.21*		
Step3: 3-way interaction						
H3: Current Leader X Self as Leader X Typical Leaders	0.05	0.03	.08*	0.07	0.03	.13*
ΔR^2	.01			.01		
ΔF	2.99*			4.63*		
R^2	.51			.18		
Adjusted R^2	.49			.16		

Note. $N = 297$; * $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

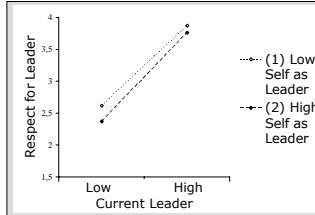


Figure 2: Low Typical Leaders (R)

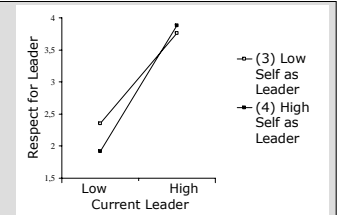


Figure 3: High Typical Leaders (R)

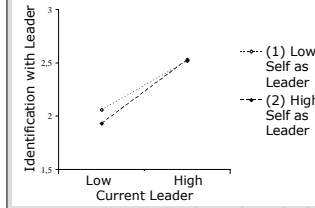


Figure 4: Low Typical Leaders (ID)

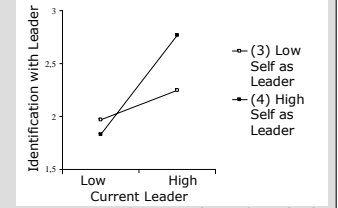


Figure 5: High Typical Leaders (ID)

Table 3: Slopes Differences (tested with Dawson & Richter, 2006)

Slope Pairs	Respect for Leader		Identification with Leader	
	t	p	t	p
Δ (1) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader low / (2) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader high	0.65	.519	0.66	.507
Δ (1) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader low / (3) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader low	0.72	.475	-0.86	.388
Δ (1) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader low / (4) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader high	3.13	.002	2.07	.037
Δ (2) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader high / (3) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader low	-0.09	.928	1.33	.181
Δ (2) Typical Leader low, Self as Leader high / (4) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader high	2.79	.006	1.62	.103
Δ (3) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader low / (4) Typical Leader high, Self as Leader high	2.86	.004	3.34	.001

► H2 and H3 are supported

DISCUSSION Our research offers two major extensions to the current body of literature on Implicit Leadership Theories and Leader Categorization.

First, building upon social categorization and social comparison research, we confirmed that the relationship between leader categorization and openness to leadership is stronger the more subordinates perceive themselves to possess ideal leader qualities. By defining the ideal leader category as a central part of oneself, its underlying attributes become more important in the evaluation of others.

Second, integrating the nature of the category as an additional determinant in our model, we corroborated that people's categorization of leaders but also of themselves is contingent upon if the ideal leader category is seen as a not too 'unrealistic' standard to apply as a benchmark.



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