

HOW DOES LEADER–FOLLOWER FIT OR MISFIT IN COMMUNICATION STYLE MATTER FOR WORK OUTCOMES?

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We explored how leader–follower dyadic communication influences leader–member exchange (LMX) quality, and how LMX quality, in turn, influences followers' job satisfaction and task performance. Paired data were collected from 205 leader–follower dyads in China. We conducted polynomial regression and response surface analysis to test our hypotheses. Results showed that LMX quality was higher when the leader's communication style fitted that of the follower, and when each style fitted more closely. Furthermore, the effects of asymmetrical misfit were identified in situations where followers had higher LMX quality and better work outcomes, and when the followers' level of task orientation was higher and interaction orientation was lower than that of their leaders. These findings highlight the pivotal roles of both leaders and followers in promoting work relationship quality.

Keywords: communication style, dyadic communication, leader–member exchange, person–supervisor fit, job satisfaction, task performance, task orientation, interaction orientation, role theory.

Dyadic communication is at the heart of all relational dynamics (Bakar & McCann, 2016; Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002). Intraorganizational dyadic communication has been linked to various aspects of coworker relationship quality, such as degree of intimacy (Tesch & Whitbourne, 1982), self-disclosure (Prager, 1989), relational closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), relational expectations (Kelley & Burgoon, 1991), and interactional richness

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(Barry & Crant, 2000). However, although communication researchers and social psychologists have conducted numerous theoretical and empirical studies on organizational communication (e.g., Duck & Pittman, 1994; Millar & Rogers, 1987; Nelson & Quick, 2013), little attention has been paid to the dynamics of *dyadic communication* between leaders and followers (Bakar & McCann, 2016; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014).

As Graen (2013) explained, work performance is determined not only by leadership style, but also by the communication style between leaders and followers. An agreement or fit in this communication style can guide the group regulation process and promote interaction quality, which, in turn, nurtures a sense of belonging among the work-group members (Bakar & McCann, 2016). For example, in the context of organizational change, successful leaders may adopt subordinate-oriented communication and obtain subordinates' commitment to change (Luo, Song, Gebert, Zhang, & Feng, 2016). Therefore, as a unique component and a direct reflection of dyadic communication (Williams & Spiro, 1985), the communication style plays a pivotal role in explaining different work outcomes and in determining the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships.

Because each individual is different, leaders cannot usually establish the same quality of relationship with each follower (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Yrle et al., 2002). When their dyadic communication fits well, a leader and follower may achieve a high level of dyadic agreement (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson 2005), which can lead to high-quality LMX and enhanced work outcomes (Bakar & McCann, 2014). However, if the followers' communication style does not fit that of their leader, a range of difficulties may arise involving turbulent dyadic communication and low-quality LMX (Bakar & McCann, 2016). Although many researchers have conducted studies on LMX quality, the leader-follower relationship cannot be fully explained without the inclusion of the concept of agreement (Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015).

We thus addressed the following research question: How does the fit or misfit in leader-follower communication style influence affective and behavioral follower outcomes? To address this topic, we drew on the person-supervisor fit (PS fit; van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011) literature and on the theoretical roots of LMX, namely, role theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). We formed a set of hypotheses regarding the effects that fit or misfit in leader-follower communication style have on the followers' work outcomes, with LMX quality as a mediator.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Person-Supervisor Fit and Task/Interaction-Oriented Communication Styles

Person-supervisor fit refers to the perceived fit between employee and

supervisor characteristics (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). *Leader–member exchange* is highly relevant in the PS fit domain because the emphasis in LMX is on the nature of the relationship that develops between employees and supervisors (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). If employees feel that their personal characteristics match those of the supervisor, they are likely to foster a good relationship with the supervisor (van Vianen et al., 2011). Communication style represents a stable personal characteristic that reflects individuals' task and interaction orientation in their daily life (Cheung & To, 2015).

The conceptualization of *communication style* originated in the realm of sociology when Norton (1978) established the foundation of a communicator style construct that reflects the way an individual “verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood” (p. 99). Williams and Spiro (1985) also introduced communication style into management studies, suggesting that individuals can be clustered on the basis of their task orientation, self-orientation, and interaction orientation. LMX comprises both work- and person-related interactions (Raabe & Beehr, 2003), and leaders and followers have their communication preferences for these interactions. Two communication styles are relevant to this study: *task orientation*, which refers to a person's tendency to focus on the current task and to emphasize the efficiency of LMX, and *interaction orientation*, which refers to a person's tendency to socialize with other parties during on-the-job conversations (McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006).

Role Theory

According to role theory, leaders test their followers with various work assignments through a series of role-establishing episodes (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), and the quality of the leader–follower relationship develops over the course of these episodes (Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). During the role-taking phase, a leader tests the relationship and evaluates the follower's responses by conveying role expectations or assigning trial tasks (i.e., sending roles). The relationship evolves to the role-making phase, which defines the nature of the dyadic exchange relationship, and where each party can send roles to each other and evaluate each other's responses. In the role-routinization phase, a set pattern of normative behavior is formed, and the dyadic relationship is formalized. The quality of this relationship can vary between high and low (Zhang et al., 2012).

Person–Supervisor Fit in Communication Styles

When both leader and follower are task-oriented, they tend to prioritize contributing to their organization by focusing on the task at hand (McFarland et al., 2006). Thus, a task-oriented follower usually responds well to the work roles and delegated tasks that are assigned during the role-taking phase (Liden &

Maslyn, 1998). A task-oriented leader who is impressed by a follower's efforts may then provide the follower with more valuable resources, such as physical resources, information, and attractive assignments during the role-making phase. Eventually, in the role-routinization phase, followers whose task orientation fits that of their leader tend to develop a higher quality relationship with the leader. Followers whose task orientation has less affinity with that of the leader typically have a lower quality relationship with him or her.

Similarly, when both leader and follower are interaction-oriented, they are more interested in forming friendships and fostering interpersonal connections (McFarland et al., 2006). Interaction-oriented followers believe that socializing is a critical aspect of work interactions, and they place great emphasis on personally catering to the leader's ideas and requirements. For interaction-oriented leaders, developing personally satisfying relationships is also paramount. Such leaders are willing for their subordinates to take the role of friend during the role-taking phase. In the subsequent role-making phase, the leader and follower may interact frequently simply because they enjoy each other's company (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), and they may establish a pattern of mutual friendship and liking. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The more closely aligned a leader's and a follower's task/interaction orientations are (i.e., the closer the fit), the higher the leader-member exchange quality will be.

The communication style of leaders and followers can fit with each other in terms of sharing either a high or low level of either task-orientation or interaction-orientation. Although fit is generally preferred to misfit in LMX situations, closer fit is positively associated with higher LMX quality (Matta et al., 2015). For example, when both leader and follower are highly focused on tasks, their common understanding of work goals may encourage them to make a greater effort to achieve goals and improve efficiency (Williams & Spiro, 1985). Such dyads may even become involved in tasks and duties that extend far beyond the requirements of their employment contract (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), and that can greatly improve the quality of LMX. Similarly, when both parties are highly involved with socializing, their common goals (e.g., strengthening their friendship) may inspire them to put greater effort into the relational elements of their work rather than the specifics of job-related tasks (McFarland et al., 2006). In that case, the degree of mutual liking that they establish may be the main predictor of the quality of LMX. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Leader-member exchange quality will be higher when the follower and leader are aligned at a high level of task/interaction orientation, and lower when they are aligned at a low level of task/interaction orientation.

Different Directions of Person-Supervisor Misfit in Communication Style

When there is a misfit in leader-follower communication style and the follower has a higher level of task orientation than the leader, the follower will care more about the efficiency of work interactions than will the leader, and will be more focused on achieving objectives (McFarland et al., 2006). Merely accomplishing the assigned tasks is not sufficient for such a follower, who may exhibit a more proactive personality than the leader (Zhang et al., 2012). In the bilateral interactions of the role-making phase, the initiatives of the more proactive follower can help the leader achieve faster and more effective task completion, and, therefore, have more time or flexibility for other tasks (Zhang et al., 2012). When confronting unfavorable situations resulting from a task-orientation misfit, task-oriented followers are likely to mitigate the negative influence of the misfit on LMX via deliberate efforts toward better work outcomes.

In contrast, when the follower has a lower level of task orientation than the leader, the follower tends to regard him- or herself as a hired hand (Matta et al., 2015), and generally seeks to maintain the status quo by exerting limited work effort (Zhang et al., 2012). The leader who is more task-oriented than the follower may be mechanistic in allocating tasks during the role-taking phase, and may find it hard to get positive feedback from the follower. As a consequence, such leaders are likely to punish followers who are less task-oriented, for example, by withdrawing resources or opportunities, thus causing lower LMX quality. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Leader-member exchange quality will be lower when the leader's level of task orientation is higher than that of the follower compared to when the follower's level of task orientation is higher than that of the leader.

A mismatch in the level of interaction orientation is also harmful to the leader-follower relationship because the follower who is more interaction-oriented seeks to be regarded as a trusted friend of the leader, but the leader who is less interaction-oriented tends to expect the follower to behave as a hired hand (Matta et al., 2015). Therefore, it is probable that such a leader will perceive the follower's attempts to build a personal relationship to be a nuisance (Fournier, Dobscha, & Mick, 1998), or even a sign of insincerity. Such a response by the leader may trigger negative reactions from the follower.

A different issue arises if the leader has an interaction-oriented communication style. Such a leader perceives the follower as a trusted friend, and thus highly values follower behavior that corresponds to the role of friend (Homburg, Müller, & Klarmann, 2011). In this situation, the follower's occasional displays of interaction-oriented behavior tend to be rewarded and reciprocated by the leader. Such positive feedback engenders mutual benefits and renders mutual interests more salient, and the follower is motivated to take the leader's interest to heart

(Uhl-Bien, 2006). As a result, interaction-oriented leaders tend to support the formation of trustworthy, personal relationships with their followers, usually leading to an increase in LMX quality. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Leader-member exchange quality will be higher when the leader's level of interaction orientation is higher than that of the follower compared to when the follower's level of interaction orientation is higher than that of the leader.

Leader-Member Exchange as a Mediator of the Effects of Fit or Misfit on Work Outcomes

It is suggested in role theory that workplace roles may either contract or expand, as employees apply their personal resources to meet what they perceive to be the practical and social demands of their roles (Kahn et al., 1964). Therefore, when roles expand, a communication style fit may allow leader-follower dyads to develop similar goals for making mutual contributions, or to establish mutual liking. When roles contract, a communication style fit may also allow the leader-follower dyads to share mutual goals for maintaining the status quo. As a result, the dyad members' shared understanding can lead followers to establish better attitudes and improved task performance (Zhang et al., 2012). We expected that LMX quality would mediate the effects that a communication style fit has on a follower's job satisfaction and task performance. LMX not only positively contributes to subordinates' work engagement (Matta et al., 2015), but also serves as a filter through which supervisor support can influence an employee's behavior (Gkorezis, 2015). Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, and Ferris (2012) demonstrated in a recent meta-analysis that LMX may serve as an important mediator that explains the effects of a leader's behavior on numerous employee outcomes. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Leader-member exchange quality will mediate the effects that (mis)fit in leader-follower communication style has on followers' (a) job satisfaction and (b) task performance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from the staff members of the research and development, production, and sales departments of a listed manufacturing company located in Nantong, Jiangsu, China. The interviewer first assembled a sample of 138 group managers from throughout the three departments. The coded survey forms were then mailed to 65 managers, who were asked to identify all their subordinates. After we had sent three reminders via telephone calls, email, and remaining, 43 completed forms were returned (66.2% response rate).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Pearson's Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Employee self-efficacy	4.56	0.84													
2. Work group identification	5.28	1.13	.20**												
3. Gender similarity	0.27	0.52	-.04	.11											
4. Age dissimilarity	4.01	1.45	.06	-.11	.15*										
5. Education dissimilarity	2.05	1.23	-.05	.07	-.02	.06									
6. Dyadic tenure	1.54	1.45	.11	.05	.09	.18*	-.05								
7. Leader interaction orientation	4.80	1.54	.04	.03	-.01	-.02	.14*	.07	(.76)						
8. Follower interaction orientation	4.53	1.38	.11	.13	.02	.00	.00	.13	.39**	(.77)					
9. Leader task orientation	4.44	1.33	-.04	-.20**	.06	.06	.12	-.02	-.04	-.33**	(.82)				
10. Follower task orientation	4.46	1.32	.03	-.10	.04	.10	.11	.09	.27**	-.17*	.23**	(.81)			
11. LMX quality	4.53	0.70	.04	-.02	.04	.07	.16*	.09	.37**	.19*	.14*	.29**	(.91)		
12. Job satisfaction	4.49	0.78	.16*	.10	.03	-.01	.07	.13	.08	-.09	.30**	.37**	.23**	(.88)	
13. Task performance	4.54	0.76	.18**	-.08	-.01	.03	.03	-.02	-.02	-.08	.15*	.08	.26**	.13	(.91)

Note. *N* = 205. LMX = leader-member exchange. Reliability coefficients are reported on the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 2. Polynomial Regression Results

Variables	LMX					Job satisfaction					Task performance				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10					
Constant	4.37**	4.10**	3.68**	3.73**	3.82**	2.30**	3.97**	4.13**	4.20**	2.40**					
Employee self-efficacy	-.01	.30	.08	.08	.13*	.12*	.04	.04	.08	.08					
Work group identification	-.02	.01	.08	.08	.04	.04	.07	.06	.04	.05					
Gender similarity	.02	.02	.01	.01	.00	.00	.01	.01	-.01	-.01					
Age dissimilarity	.01	.02	-.05	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.03	-.04					
Education dissimilarity	.06*	.03	.02	.02	.04	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02					
Dyadic tenure	.00	.01	.01	.01	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02					
Leader task orientation	-.18**	.01	-.17**	-.19**	.01	.03	-.25**	-.21**	.02	.02					
Follower task orientation	.36**	.37**	.37**	.34**	.34**	.37**	.37**	.34**	.34**	.34**					
LT ²	-.11**	-.12**	-.13**	-.13**	-.11**	-.11**	-.11**	-.06	-.06	-.06					
LT × FT	.08	.08	.08	.08	.08	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03					
FT ²	.00	.00	.00	.01	.10	.01	-.05	-.11**	-.11**	-.06					
Leader interaction orientation		.25**				.01		.03							
Follower interaction orientation		-.06				-.08		-.07							
LJ ²		-.01				-.13**		-.11**							
LI × FI		.08*				.33**		.36**							
FI ²		-.08**				-.20**		-.25**							
LMX quality					.38**	.37**	.40**	.41**							
R ²	.41	.40	.35	.39	.33	.39	.29	.36	.32	.39					
ΔR ²				.04	.06		.07		.07						
<i>Fit line</i>															
Slope	.18**	.19**	.20**	.15*	-.01	-.07*	.12*	.13*	-.04	-.10*					
Curvature	-.03	-.01	-.04	-.04	.00	.00	-.13	-.14	.00	.01					
<i>Misfit line</i>															
Slope	-.54**	.31**	-.54**	-.53**	.21	.09	-.62**	-.55**	.10	-.02					
Curvature	-.19*	-.17*	-.20*	-.20*	-.71**	-.65**	-.19*	-.20*	-.72**	-.65**					

Note. N = 205. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. LMX = leader-member exchange, LT = leader task orientation, FT = follower task orientation, LI = leader interaction orientation, FI = follower interaction orientation.
 * p < .05, two-tailed. ** p < .01, two tailed.

A second set of paired survey forms were then sent to the 226 subordinates who had been designated by the managers. The final sample consisted of 43 group leaders and 205 followers (90.7% response rate).

Measures

We used multi-item scales from previous studies, which we adapted as necessary to suit the context of this study. Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Communication styles. We measured followers' and leaders' task- and interaction-oriented communication styles at Time 1, using Homburg et al.'s (2011) four-item (task orientation) and three-item (interaction orientation) scales. A sample item for task orientation is "I make leader-member interactions as efficient as possible." A sample item for interaction orientation is "I am interested in the personal situation of this leader/follower."

Leader-member exchange. LMX was measured at Time 1 when each follower assessed the quality of his or her relationship with the leader. We used the eight-item scale validated by Zhang et al. (2012). A sample item is "I would characterize the working relationship I have with my leader as extremely effective."

Job satisfaction. Each follower's attitudinal work outcomes were measured at Time 2. We used Johnson and Sohi's (2014) five-item scale. A sample item is "I feel that I am really doing something worthwhile in my job."

Task performance. The leaders' ratings of each follower's task performance was measured at Time 2 with a four-item scale (Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez, 1998). A sample item is "Compared to other employees in this work group, X's quality of work output is good."

Control variables. In line with previous researchers' findings on PS fit and a meta-analysis on LMX and performance (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012; Matta et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2012), we included control variables at two levels: individual and dyad. The individual-level controls were employee self-efficacy and work-group identification. The dyad-level controls were gender and age similarity, years of education, and dyad tenure.

Validity Testing

We conducted several tests to assess the measurement validity of the variables. First, interitem consistency was validated by high Cronbach alpha values for all variables ($> .76$, see Table 1). Second, we conducted separate confirmatory factor analyses for leader and follower data. The fit indices showed a good fit for both the leader data, $\chi^2 = 62.61$, $df = 41$, $p = .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .03, comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .96; and the follower data, $\chi^2 = 377.60$, $df = 164$, $p = .001$;

RMSEA = .08, CFI = .95, TLI = .93. These results confirmed that each construct in the separate datasets was unidimensional. Third, we checked the convergent validity of the measurement scales and found that the factor loadings for each item were greater than .70, and the average variance extracted for each scale was greater than the squared correlations across items. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlation coefficients for each variable based on the matched dyadic data are reported in Table 1.

Analysis Strategy

Edwards and Parry (1993) introduced polynomial regression and response surface analysis to calculate (mis)fit. For example, in polynomial modeling of a task-oriented communication style, the mediator variable (LMX quality) was regressed on the control variables, leader task orientation (LT) and follower task orientation (FT), and on three higher order effects (i.e., LT^2 , FT^2 , and $LT \times FT$), after scale-centering both LT and FT (see Table 2). However, the estimated coefficient for each polynomial term is not used directly to test a hypothesis, but, instead, is used to compute the slope and curvature along the fit and misfit lines in response surface analysis. We computed the slopes and curvatures along the fit ($LT = FT$) and misfit ($LT = -FT$) lines as the fit slope ($LT + FT$), the fit curvature ($LT^2 + LT \times FT + FT^2$), the misfit slope ($LT - FT$), and the misfit curvature ($LT^2 - LT \times FT + FT^2$).

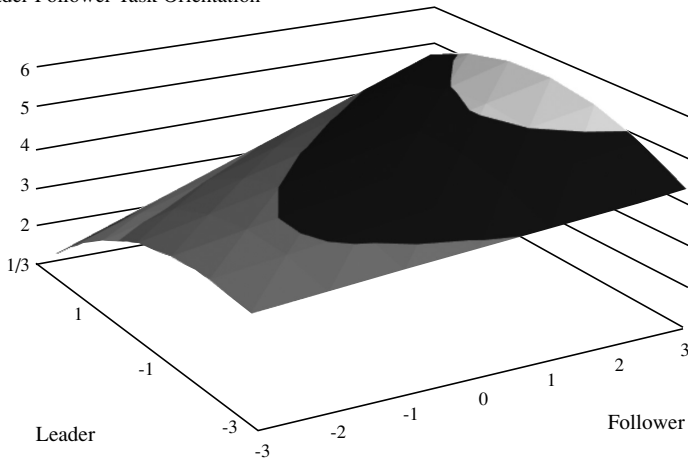
To test the mediating effects of LMX quality (Hypothesis 5), we used the block variable approach recommended by Edwards and Cable (2009). We multiplied the polynomial coefficients by the raw data to compute the block variable as a weighted composite score. After forming the block variable, we reran the polynomial model to estimate the standardized regression coefficient for the block variable as the path coefficient, which we used for mediation analysis. We computed the indirect effects by multiplying the path from the block variable to LMX quality by each path from LMX quality to job satisfaction and task performance. As the indirect effect is not normally distributed, we used the bootstrap method (2,000 samples) to compute the bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) and to test the significance of the indirect effects (e.g., Matta et al., 2015).

Results

Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 provide the estimated coefficients and slopes and curvatures of the fit and misfit lines for the polynomial regressions in predicting LMX. On the basis of these coefficients, Figures 1-A and 1-B represent the response surfaces of fit or misfit for leader-follower task and interaction orientation, respectively. As shown in Table 2, the surfaces along the misfit

line curve down for both leader-follower task and interaction orientation. The concave curvature along the $L = -F$ line indicates that LMX quality is higher when the leader's and follower's task/interaction orientations are aligned, thus supporting Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 2, the slopes along the fit line are significantly positive for both task and interaction orientation. This indicates that LMX quality is higher in the high-high fit situation than in the low-low fit situation, thus supporting Hypothesis 2.

1-A: Leader Follower Task Orientation



1-B: Leader Follower Interaction Orientation

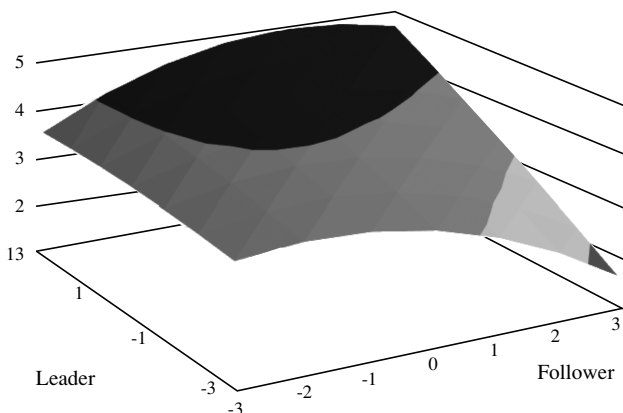


Figure 1. Fit effect and asymmetrical misfit effect of communication style on leader-member exchange.

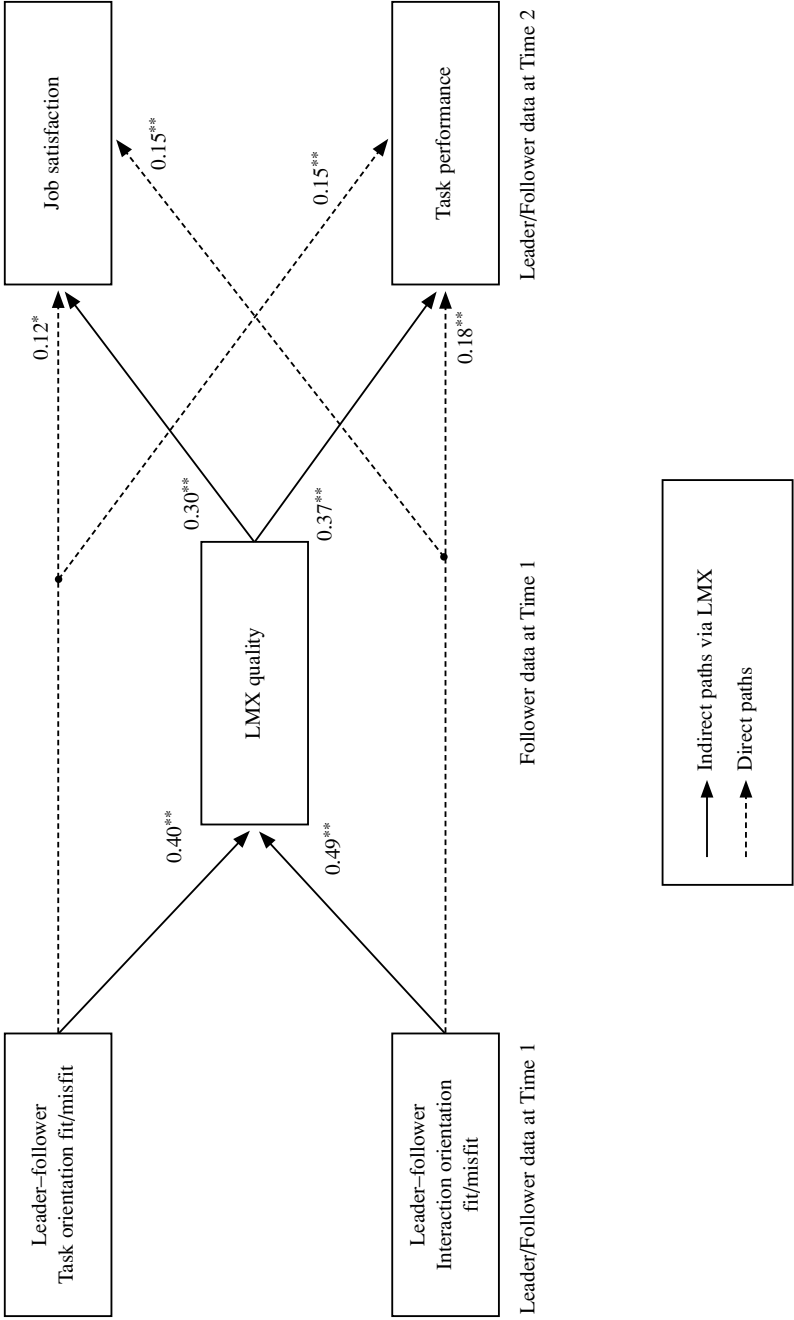


Figure 2. Hypothesized model for the study variables.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The slope along the misfit line for leader-follower task orientation is significantly negative. Therefore, when a follower's level of task orientation is higher than the leader's, LMX quality increases more sharply than when the follower's level of task orientation is lower than the leader's. The response surface in Figure 1-A also shows the asymmetrical effect (LMX is higher at the right corner than at the left corner), thus supporting Hypothesis 3. The opposite effect applies, however, for the situation of a misfit in leader-follower interaction orientation. In that case, the slope is significantly positive. In addition, the response surface in Figure 1-B shows that LMX is asymmetrical, thus supporting Hypothesis 4.

To test the mediating effect of LMX (Hypothesis 5), we ran two models for each outcome variable and communication style (i.e., eight models). For example, in Model 3, we used the five polynomial items relevant to task orientation to predict job satisfaction, and we added LMX as an independent variable in Model 4. In regard to the first path linking the fit of task orientation and LMX (see Figure 2), we applied the block variable approach to obtain a single coefficient representing the combined effect of leader-follower task orientation on LMX (see Table 3). We then calculated the indirect effects transmitted via LMX by multiplying the coefficient and the coefficient of LMX for predicting job satisfaction. Bootstrapped bias-corrected CI of the indirect effect of task-orientation fit on job satisfaction and task performance excluded zero, thereby supporting Hypothesis 5a. As shown in Table 3, the two other bootstrapped CI also excluded zero, which supported Hypothesis 5b.

Table 3. Results of Tests of Direct and Indirect Effects of Communication Style Fit and Misfit on Work Outcomes

Variables	LMX	Job satisfaction	Task performance
Coefficient of LMX (β)		.30**	.37**
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of TO fit)	.40**		
Indirect effect of TO fit via LMX (= $.40 \times \beta$)		.12*	.15**
Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect		[0.02, 0.21]	[0.07, 0.27]
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of IO fit)	.49**		
Indirect effect of IO fit via LMX (= $.49 \times \beta$)		.15**	.18**
Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect		[0.04, 0.23]	[0.09, 0.31]

Note. $N = 205$. Standardized coefficients are reported. LMX = leader-member exchange, TO = task orientation, IO = interaction orientation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

Despite the importance and benefits of communication style (see e.g., Bakar & McCann, 2016), previous researchers have not investigated the effects of leaders' and followers' communication styles on follower work outcomes. In this study we have advanced understanding of the PS fit in dyadic leader-follower communication. We tested and elucidated two communication styles and two fit and misfit situations that are pervasive in daily leader-follower interactions. We have made three important contributions to the literature. First, we contributed to PS fit theory by conceptualizing and interpreting the need for a leader-follower match in communication-style to enhance work outcomes. Second, we extended the communication style literature by explicitly illuminating the directions of leader-follower misfits that affect work outcomes in various ways. Third, we contributed to LMX theory by examining the degree of fit in leaders' and followers' communication styles as an antecedent of LMX quality.

Theoretical Implications

By examining leader and follower characteristics simultaneously within the framework of PS fit, we showed that follower communication style may influence the effect of leader communication style on work outcomes. A finding that we found interesting was that the leader's interaction-oriented communication style was not always appreciated by the follower, and the leader's task-oriented communication style was not necessarily related to a less positive follower attitude and worse performance. For example, our results demonstrated that when followers exhibited a task-oriented communication style (i.e., rating it 7 on a 7-point scale), the best outcomes for their job satisfaction and task performance were when their leader also rated task-oriented communication style as a 7. Thus, researchers should be urged to incorporate the characteristics of followers in the theoretical framework to understand the outcomes of leader communication style.

Our second contribution was to highlight the importance of dyadic communication style fit in LMX research. Our results suggested that no matter which style a follower adopts, a communication style misfit is always detrimental to LMX quality. By demonstrating that dyadic fit at high versus low levels of task or interaction orientation led to differences in LMX quality, our findings verified those of Bakar and McCann (2016), that leader-member dyadic communication style agreement is beneficial to workplace relationships. The establishment of a fit mechanism would allow researchers to gain a better understanding of how LMX quality and work outcomes are influenced by personal communication styles.

Third, we extended the role of LMX quality as a mediator by depicting two conduits through which the PS fit operates. The results show that the fit of

leader–follower communication style may facilitate the dyad’s relationship via either work-related or social currencies of exchange. This integration of PS fit and LMX literature provides additional insight into why different types of fit (i.e., task orientation and interaction orientation) can both result in positive employee job satisfaction and efficient task performance.

Practical Implications

Our results have practical implications for both leaders and organizations by suggesting that if leaders are not interaction-oriented, they may hinder the development of the leader–follower relationship. Because communication style agreement is based on both parties’ perceptions of the communication exchange and favorable performance is thus a form of reciprocation (Bakar & McCann, 2016), leaders’ feedback on employees’ interaction-related actions can facilitate the process of reciprocation and, ultimately, produce a high-quality dyadic relationship.

However, our findings suggest that LMX quality is not directly associated with the leaders’ communication style. As long as leaders and subordinates communicate via a similar style, they can establish a satisfying relationship. Therefore, although there may be a variety of communication styles among employees, leaders can mirror followers’ behavior to change LMX from misfit to fit when they “recognize that they have an enduring, lower quality relationship with a given subordinate” (Matta et al., 2015, p. 1704). In addition, internal work climates in organizations can be improved by senior managers undergoing training to identify specific follower communication styles, and to become more closely aligned with followers in their own communication style. Leaders can then ameliorate LMX quality, and organizations may achieve increased benefits over time (Gkorezis, 2015).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study is the first in which the fit between leader–follower communication styles has been examined in organizational dyadic communication research, and in which the effects of both fit and misfit on work outcomes have been investigated, we concede that the relationship between dyadic communication and work effectiveness remains insufficiently clarified. First, our choice to investigate preexisting work groups may prompt concerns about restrictions in the research range, as the followers whose communication style did not fit that of the group leader might have already quit their job. However, the dyadic tenure of our sample was relatively short ($M = 1.54$ years), indicating that the subordinate participants, in general, had spent just over one year with their leader. This period is long enough for both parties to fully realize each other’s communication style, and also short enough that those whose style did not fit that

of their leader might not yet have quit (Zhang et al., 2012). Future researchers can track leader–follower dyadic communication and investigate how followers react to fit or misfit with their leader’s communication style.

Second, we focused on task- and interaction-oriented communication styles of both leaders and followers and not on a self-oriented style. As leaders or followers who are self-oriented are concerned almost entirely with their own welfare (McFarland et al., 2006), this inevitably may jeopardize a dyadic relationship. However, it may be worthwhile for future researchers to examine this communication style.

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